

## QUESTION 61

### The Cardinal Virtues

Next we have to consider the cardinal virtues. And on this topic there are five questions: (1) Is it moral virtues that should be called cardinal, i.e., principal, virtues? (2) How many cardinal virtues are there? (3) Which moral virtues are cardinal virtues? (4) Do the cardinal virtues differ from one another? (5) Are the cardinal virtues appropriately classified as political virtues, purifying virtues, virtues of a purified mind, and exemplary virtues (*dividuntur convenienter in virtutes politicas et purgatorias et purgati animi et exempla*)?

#### Article 1

##### Is it moral virtues that should be called cardinal, i.e., principal, virtues?

It seems that moral virtues should not be called cardinal, i.e., principal, virtues:

**Objection 1:** According to the *Categories*, “Things that are divided by opposites are simultaneous in nature,” and so one is not more principal than the other. But all the virtues divide the genus *virtue* as opposites. Therefore, none of them should be called ‘principal’.

**Objection 2:** The end is more principal than the means to that end. But the theological virtues have to do with the end, whereas the moral virtues have to do with the means to that end. Therefore, it is the theological virtues, rather than the moral virtues, that should be called principal or cardinal virtues.

**Objection 3:** What is such-and-such through its essence is more principal than what is such-and-such through participation. But as was explained above (q. 58, a. 3), the intellectual virtues belong to the rational part of the soul through their essence, whereas the moral virtues belong to the rational part through participation. Therefore, it is the intellectual virtues, rather than the moral virtues, that are the principal virtues.

**But contrary to this:** In *Super Lucam* Ambrose, while expounding the passage, “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Luke 6:20), says, “We know that there are four cardinal virtues, viz., temperance, justice, prudence, and fortitude.” But these are moral virtues. Therefore, it is moral virtues that are cardinal virtues.

**I respond:** When we speak simply of virtue, we are understood to be speaking of human virtue. But as was explained above (q. 56, a. 3), a human virtue, in the most perfect sense of *virtue*, is a virtue that requires rectitude of appetite, since a virtue not only bestows a facility for acting well but is also a cause of the very execution of a good work (*usum boni operis causat*). Still, in a less perfect sense of *virtue*, a virtue does not require rectitude of appetite, since it only bestows a facility for acting well but is not a cause of the execution of a good work.

Now it is clear that what is perfect is more principal than what is imperfect. And so the virtues that include rectitude of appetite are called the principal ones. Now moral virtues are of this sort and, among the intellectual virtues, the only one of this sort is prudence, which, as was explained above (q. 57, a. 4), is also in some sense a moral virtue with respect to its subject matter. Hence, prudence is appropriately placed among the moral virtues which are called principal virtues, i.e., cardinal virtues.

**Reply to objection 1:** When a univocal genus is divided into its species, the parts of the division are related as equals (*ex aequo*) with respect to the nature of the genus—even if, in reality (*secundum naturam rei*), one species is more principal and more perfect than another, in the way that *man* is more perfect than the other animals.

However, when the division is of an analogue that is said of many things in accord with what is prior and what is posterior (*dicitur de pluribus secundum prius et posterius*), then nothing prevents one from being more principal than another even with respect to the common nature, in the way that *substance* is called *being* in a more principal way than *accident* is. And the division of the virtues into

the diverse genera of virtues is like this, because the good of reason is not found in all things according to the same ordering.

**Reply to objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 58, a. 3), the theological virtues lie beyond man. Hence, they are properly called super-human virtues or divine virtues rather than human virtues.

**Reply to objection 3:** Even if the intellectual virtues other than prudence are more principal than the moral virtues as regards the subject they belong to (*quantum ad subiectum*), they are not more principal as far as the nature of virtue is concerned, since virtue has to do with the good, which is the object of the appetite.

## Article 2

### Are there four cardinal virtues?

It seems that there are not four cardinal virtues:

**Objection 1:** As is clear from what was said above (q. 58, a. 4), prudence directs the other moral virtues. But that which directs others is more principal. Therefore, prudence alone is a principal virtue.

**Objection 2:** The principal virtues are in some sense moral virtues. But as *Ethics* 6 says, we are ordered toward moral actions or operations (*ad operationes morales*) by practical reason and by upright appetite. Therefore, there are just two cardinal virtues.

**Objection 3:** Among the other sorts of virtues, it is likewise the case that one is more principal than another. But in order for a virtue to be called a principal virtue, it is not required that it be principal with respect to all the virtues; rather, it is required only that it be principal with respect to some virtues. Therefore, it seems that there are many more [than four] principal virtues.

**But contrary to this:** In *Moralia* 2 Gregory says, "The whole structure of good works arises from a foundation of four virtues."

**I respond:** The number of any given things can be taken either (a) from their *formal principles* or (b) from their *subjects*, and on both counts there are four cardinal virtues.

The *formal principle* of virtue about which we are now talking is *the good of reason*, which can be thought of in two ways. In one way, insofar as it consists in *reason's consideration itself*. And on this score there is one principal virtue, which is called *prudence*. In the second way, insofar as the order of reason is posited *with respect to something*. And this something will be either (a) *operations*, in which case there is *justice*, or (b) *the passions*, and here it is necessary for there to be two virtues. For one must posit the order of reason with respect to the passions by considering how the passions conflict with reason. And there are two ways in which this can occur. First, insofar as a passion *impels one toward something contrary to reason*, in which case the passion has to be curbed; and it is from this that *temperance* takes its name. Second, insofar as the passion *holds one back from what reason dictates*, in the way that fear of dangers or of hard work does, in which case a man has to be firmed up in what accords with reason, in order not to recede from it; and it is from this that *fortitude* takes its name.

Similarly, the same number is found with respect to the *subjects*. For there are four subjects of the sort of virtue of which we are now speaking, viz., (a) what is *rational through its essence*, and this is perfected by *prudence*, and (b) what is *rational through participation*. The latter is divided into three, viz., *the will*, which is the subject of *justice*; *the concupiscible power*, which is the subject of *temperance*; and *the irascible power*, which is the subject of *fortitude*.

**Reply to objection 1:** Prudence is, absolutely speaking, more principal than all the others. But each of the others is posited as principal within its own genus.

**Reply to objection 2:** As has been explained, what is rational through participation is divided into three.

**Reply to objection 3:** All other virtues which are such that one is more principal than another are traced back to the four under discussion, both with respect to their *subject* and with respect to their *formal principles*.

### Article 3

#### Should any other virtues be called more principal than these?

It seems that there are other virtues that should be called more principal than these:

**Objection 1:** What is maximal in any given genus seems to be more principal. But as *Ethics 4* says, “Magnanimity does something great in all the virtues.” Therefore, *magnanimity* should especially be called a principal virtue.

**Objection 2:** That through which other virtues are strengthened seems especially to be a principal virtue. But humility is like this; for Gregory says, “He who brings together the other virtues without humility is like someone who carries straw against the wind.” Therefore, *humility* seems especially to be a principal virtue.

**Objection 3:** What is most perfect seems to be principal. But this is true of patience—this according to James 1:4 (“Patience has a perfect work”). Therefore, *patience* should be posited as a principal virtue.

**But contrary to this:** In his *Rhetorica* Tully traces all the other virtues back to the four under discussion.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 2), the four cardinal virtues under discussion are taken from the four formal notions of virtue as we are now speaking of it. These four formal notions are found principally in certain acts or passions. For instance, the good consisting in *reason’s own consideration* is found principally in reason’s *command* itself and not, as was explained above (q. 57, a. 6), in either its deliberation or its judgment. Similarly, the good of reason as it is posited in *operations* in accord with the upright and the fitting (*secundum rationem recti et debiti*) is found principally in exchanges or distributions *which involve others as equals (quae sunt ad alterum cum aequalitate)*. On the other hand, the good of *curbing the passions* is found principally in the case of the passions that are especially difficult to curb, viz., *the pleasures of touch*. And the good of *being firm in persevering* in the good of reason in the face of the contrary impulse of the passions is found principally in the case of *the danger of death*, in the face of which it is most difficult to persevere.

So, then, there are two ways in which we can think of the four virtues under discussion:

The first way is in accord with their *common* formal notions. And on this score, they are called ‘principal’ in the sense that they are *general* with respect to all the virtues—so that, namely, (a) every virtue that contributes to the good in reason’s consideration is called *prudence*, and (b) every virtue that contributes to what is due and upright in operations is called *justice*, and (c) every virtue that restrains and represses the passions is called *temperance (temperantia)*, and (d) every virtue that contributes to the mind’s firmness in the face of any given passion is called *fortitude*. And it is in this sense that many writers, both sacred doctors and also philosophers, speak of these virtues. And in this sense the other virtues *are contained under them* in such a way that all the objections are answered.

In the second way, these virtues can be taken insofar as they are denominated *from what is most important in a given subject matter*. And in this sense they are *special* or *specific* virtues (*speciales virtutes*), divided off from the other virtues. Yet they are still called *principal* in relation to the other virtues, because of the importance of their subject matter, so that what is preceptive is called *prudence*, and what has to do with fitting actions among equals is called *justice*, and what represses sentient desires for the pleasures of touch is called *temperance*, and what firms one up in the face of the danger of death

is called *fortitude*.

**Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3:** The objections are answered on this second reading as well, since other virtues can have other sorts of importance, but the virtues under discussion are called ‘principal’ by reason of their subject matter.

#### Article 4

##### Are the four virtues under discussion diverse virtues and distinct from one another?

It seems that the four virtues under discussion are not diverse virtues and are not distinct from one another:

**Objection 1:** In *Moralia* 22 Gregory says, “There is no true prudence that is not just, temperate, and brave; there is no perfect temperance that is not brave, just, and prudent; there is no complete fortitude that is not prudent, temperate, and just; and there is no true justice that is not prudent, brave, and temperate.” But this would not be possible if the four virtues under discussion were distinct from one another, since diverse species of the same genus do not denominate one another. Therefore, the virtues under discussion are not distinct from one another.

**Objection 2:** When things are distinct from one another, what is attributed to the one is not attributed to the other. But what is attributed to temperance is attributed to fortitude; for in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, “It is correctly called fortitude when an individual conquers himself and is not weakened or bent by any enticements.” Again, he says of temperance that it “preserves the manner or order of all the things that we decide to do or to say.” Therefore, it seems that these virtues are not distinct from one another.

**Objection 3:** In *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says that what is required for virtue is “first, that one should *act knowingly*; second, that he should *choose*, and choose *for its own sake (propter hoc)*; third, that he should have the virtue and *act from it firmly and unchangeably*.” But the first of these conditions seems to pertain to *prudence*, which is right reason with respect to things that can be done; the second, viz., to choose, seems to belong to *temperance*, so that one acts not out of passion but by choice, with the passions under control; the third, viz., that one act for the sake of a due end, demands a certain rectitude that seems to pertain to *justice*; the other, viz., firmness and unchangeableness, pertains to *fortitude*. Therefore each of these virtues is general and applies to all virtues (*est generalis ad omnes virtutes*). Therefore, they are not distinguished from one another.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Moribus Ecclesiae* Augustine says, “Virtue is fourfold because of the varying affects of love itself,” and he applies this to the four virtues under discussion. Therefore, the four virtues are distinct from one another.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 3), there are two ways in which the four virtues under discussion have been taken by different authors.

Some authors take them as signifying certain *general conditions* of the human mind that are found in all the virtues—so that, more specifically, *prudence* is nothing other than a certain rectitude of discrimination (*quaedam rectitudo discretionis*) in any act or in any subject matter; and *justice* is a certain rectitude of mind through which a man does what he ought to do in any subject matter; *temperance* is a certain disposition of the mind which imposes moderation on any passion or operation, lest it be carried beyond its due limit; and *fortitude* is a certain disposition of the soul through which it is firmed up in what accords with reason against any impetus of the passions or any laboriousness in the actions. These four conditions are distinct in such a way that they do not imply a *diversity* of virtuous habits as regards justice, temperance, and fortitude. For (a) by the fact that each moral virtue is a *habit*, it is such that a certain firmness belongs to it, so that it is not moved by a contrary—something that was

said to pertain to *fortitude*; moreover, (b) by the fact that it is a *virtue*, it is such as to be ordered toward the good, which implies the nature of the upright and fitting—something that was said to pertain to *justice*; and (c) by the fact that it is a *moral virtue* participating in reason, it is such that it preserves the measure of reason (*modum rationis servet*) in all things and does not extend beyond it—something that was said to pertain to *temperance*. On the other hand, the having of discrimination, which was attributed to *prudence*, is the only thing that seems to be distinguished from the other three, since it belongs to reason itself *through its essence*, whereas the other three imply a *participation* in reason in the sense of a sort of application of reason to the passions or to operations. So, then, given what has just been explained, prudence would be a virtue distinct from the other three, but the other three would not themselves be virtues distinct from one another, since it is clear that one and the same virtue is (a) a *habit* and (b) a *virtue* and (c) a *moral virtue*.

By contrast, other authors—and more correctly (*melius*)—take these four virtues insofar as they are *determined by a specific subject matter*—each of them by a singular subject matter because of which, as was explained above (a. 3), the corresponding general condition from which the name of the virtue is taken is mainly praised. And on this interpretation it is clear that the virtues under discussion are diverse habits that are distinct from one another because of the diversity of their objects.

**Reply to objection 1:** Gregory is talking about the four virtues under discussion in accord with the first interpretation.

An alternative reply is that these four virtues are denominated by one another through a certain sort of overflowing (*per redundantiam quandam*). For what belongs to prudence overflows into the other virtues insofar as they are directed by prudence. On the other hand, each of the other virtues overflows into the others because one who is capable of what is more difficult is likewise capable of what is less difficult. Hence, someone who is able to restrain sentient desires for the pleasures of touch from exceeding their measure—something that is very difficult—is by that very fact rendered more able to restrain his audacity, when he is in danger of death, from proceeding beyond its own measure—something that is far easier; and in this sense fortitude is said to be ‘tempered’. Temperance is likewise called brave from the fact that fortitude overflows into temperance, viz., insofar as someone who through fortitude has a firm mind in the face of the danger of death—something that is very difficult—is more able to preserve his firmness of mind in the face of the impulse of pleasures. For as Tully says in *De Officiis* 1, “It would be incongruous for someone who is not broken by fear to be broken by desire, or for someone who has shown himself to be unconquered by hard work to be conquered by lust.”

**Reply to objection 2:** This also makes clear the reply to the second objection. For it is in this way that temperance preserves the mean in all cases and that fortitude preserves the mind unbent in the face of the enticement of pleasure—viz., either insofar as these virtues name certain general conditions of virtue or through an overflowing of the sort just explained.

**Reply to objection 3:** The four general conditions of a virtue that the Philosopher posits are not proper to the virtues under discussion. But they can be appropriated to them in the way already explained.

## Article 5

### Are the four virtues under discussion appropriately classified as exemplary virtues, virtues of a purified mind, purifying virtues, and political virtues?

It seems that the four virtues under discussion are not appropriately classified as exemplary virtues (*virtutes exemplares*), virtues of a purified mind (*virtutes purgati animi*), purifying virtues (*virtutes purgatoriae*), and political virtues (*virtutes politicas*):

**Objection 1:** As Macrobius says in *Super Somnium Scipionis* 1, “The exemplary virtues are those which abide in God’s mind itself.” But in *Ethics* 10 the Philosopher says, “It is ridiculous to attribute justice, fortitude, temperance, and prudence to God.” Therefore, the virtues in question cannot be exemplary virtues.

**Objection 2:** The virtues called the virtues of a purified mind exist without the passions (*sunt absque passionibus*); for in the same place Macrobius says, “The temperance of a purified mind does not repress earthly desires, but is completely oblivious to them, while its fortitude does not conquer the passions, but instead does not know them.” But it was explained above (q. 59, a. 5) that these virtues cannot exist without the passions. Therefore, these virtues cannot be virtues of a purified mind.

**Objection 3:** Macrobius says that the purifying virtues belong to those who “by fleeing what is human have devoted themselves solely to what is divine.” But this seems to be depraved (*vitiosum*); for in *De Officiis* 1 Tully says, “I regard not only as not praiseworthy, but even as depraved, those who claim that they despise what most men admire, viz., the power of rule and political office.” Therefore, there are no purifying virtues.

**Objection 4:** Macrobius says that the political virtues are those “by which good men work for the good of the republic and guard their cities.” But as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 5, it is legal justice alone that is ordered toward the common good. Therefore, the other virtues should not be called political virtues.

**But contrary to this:** Macrobius says, “Plotinus, the prince, along with Plato, of the teachers of philosophy, says, ‘There are four genera of the four virtues. Of these, the first are called political virtues, the second are called purifying virtues, the third are called virtues of a purified mind, and the fourth are called exemplary virtues.’”

**I respond:** As Augustine says in *De Moribus Ecclesiae*, “The soul must follow something in order for virtue to be able to be born in it, and this something is God; for if we follow God, we live well.” Therefore, the exemplar of human virtue must preexist in God, just as the conceptions of all things exist in Him. So, then, virtue can be thought of insofar as it exists in an exemplary way in God (*prout est exemplariter in Deo*), and in this sense [the virtues in question] are called *exemplary virtues*—so that, namely, the divine mind itself is called *prudence* in God, whereas *temperance* is the turning of God’s intention toward Himself, just as in us what is called temperance is that through which the concupiscible power is conformed to reason, and God’s *fortitude* is His immutability, while God’s *justice* is the observance of the eternal law in all His works, as Plotinus said.

And since man is by his nature a political animal, these virtues are called *political virtues* insofar as by these virtues a man behaves uprightly in conducting human affairs. This is the way in which we have been speaking of these virtues up to now.

On the other hand, since a man must also draw closer to divine things as much as he can—something that even the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 10 and that is commended to us many times in Sacred Scripture, as, for instance in Matthew 5:48 (“Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect”)—one must posit certain virtues that fall between the political virtues, which are *human* virtues, and the exemplary virtues, which are *divine* virtues. These virtues are distinguished by a diversity of movements and endpoints. More specifically, there are some virtues that belong to those who are ‘passing through’ and who are tending toward a likeness of God, and these are called the *purifying virtues*. More specifically, by the contemplation of divine things *prudence* looks down upon all worldly matters and directs all the soul’s thinking toward divine things alone, whereas *temperance* leaves behind, as far as nature allows, what having a body requires; and what belongs to *fortitude* is that the soul should not be afraid of drawing away from the body and approaching the things above, while *justice* ensures that the soul consents wholeheartedly to the way dictated by this resolve.

By contrast, there are the virtues that belong to those who have already attained the likeness of God, and these are called *the virtues of a now purified mind*. More specifically, *prudence* thinks about

divine things alone, *temperance* is oblivious to earthly desires, *fortitude* does not know the passions, and, by imitating God's mind, justice is united with it by an everlasting covenant. We claim that these are the virtues of the blessed in heaven or of those who are the most perfect in this present life.

**Reply to objection 1:** The Philosopher is talking about the virtues insofar as they have to do with human affairs, i.e., *justice* with respect to selling and buying, *fortitude* with respect to fears, and *temperance* with respect to sentient desires. For in this sense it is indeed ridiculous to attribute these virtues to God.

**Reply to objection 2:** The human virtues, i.e., the virtues of men who live together in this world, have to do with the passions. But the virtues of those who attain full beatitude exist without the passions. Hence, Plotinus says: "The political virtues soften the passions," i.e., they reduce them to a mean; "the second sort," i.e., the purifying virtues, "eliminate them; the third sort," i.e., the virtues of a purified mind, "are oblivious to them; and it is impious to even name them in connection with the fourth sort," i.e., the exemplary virtues.

However, one could [alternatively] reply that he is speaking here of the passions insofar as 'passion' signifies certain disordered movements.

**Reply to objection 3:** To neglect human affairs when necessity imposes them upon us is depraved; otherwise, it is virtuous. Hence, a little before the quoted passage Tully says, "Perhaps one should make a concession for not engaging in public life to those who by reason of their exceptional talents have devoted themselves to learning, and also to those who, impeded by failing health or by some other more serious cause, have withdrawn from public life, when they yielded the power and glory of public administration to others." This is consonant with what Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 19: "The love of truth demands a holy leisure; the necessity of charity undertakes just works. If no one imposes this latter burden on us, we should take time for the discovery and contemplation of truth; but if the burden is imposed on us, it must be taken up because of the necessity of charity."

**Reply to objection 4:** Legal justice alone is directly related to the common good, but, as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 5, by its command it draws the other virtues toward the common good. For one should notice that what pertains to the political virtues, as they are being called here, is not only to act well with respect to the common good, but also to act well with respect to the *parts* of the common good, i.e., with respect to the household or with respect to the individual person.