

QUESTION 63

The Cause of Virtue

Next we have to consider the cause of virtue. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Does virtue exist in us by nature? (2) Is any virtue caused in us by the habituation of actions (*ex assuetudine operum*)? (3) Do any moral virtues exist in us through infusion? (4) Is a virtue that we acquire by the habituation of actions the same in species as an infused virtue?

Article 1

Does virtue exist in us by nature?

It seems that virtue exists in us by nature:

Objection 1: In *De Fide Orthodoxa* 3 Damascene says, “The virtues are natural and exist equally in everyone.” And in a sermon to the monks Anthony says, “If the will were to change its nature, there would be perversity; let its condition be preserved, and it is virtue.” And a Gloss on Matthew 4:23 (“Jesus went about . . .”) says, “He teaches natural virtues (*naturales iustitias*), viz., chastity, justice and humility, which a man has naturally.”

Objection 2: As is clear from what has been said (q. 55, a. 4), the good of virtue is to be in accord with reason. But what accords with reason is natural to a man, since reason is a man’s nature. Therefore, virtue exists in a man by nature.

Objection 3: What is said to be natural to us is what exists in us from birth. But virtues exist in some of us from birth; for Job 31:18 says, “From my infancy mercy grew up with me; and it came out with me from my mother's womb.” Therefore, virtue exists in a man by nature.

But contrary to this: What exists in a man by nature is common to all men and is not destroyed by sin; for as Dionysius points out in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, natural goods remain even in the demons. But virtue does not exist in all men, and it is driven out by sin. Therefore, virtue does not exist in a man by nature.

I respond: As regards corporeal forms, some have claimed that they are totally from within (*totaliter ab intrinseco*), e.g., those who posit that the forms are latent (*ponentes latitationem formarum*). By contrast, others hold that corporeal forms are totally from without (*ab extrinseco*), e.g., those who posit that corporeal forms come from a separated cause. And still others claim that these forms are partly from within, viz., insofar as they preexist in potentiality in the matter, and partly from without, viz., insofar as they are rendered actual by an agent (*inquantum reducuntur ad actum per agens*).

So, too, as regards the virtues and types of scientific knowledge (*circa scientias et virtutes*), some have claimed that they are totally from within, viz., in such a way that all virtues and types of scientific knowledge preexist naturally within the soul, and that impediments to virtue and scientific knowledge, which affect the soul because it is weighed down by the body (*ex corporis gravitate*), are removed through learning and acting (*per disciplinam et exercitium*), in the way that iron is made brighter by being filed down (*sicut ferrum clarificatur per limationem*). This was the opinion of the Platonists.

By contrast, others have claimed that virtue and scientific knowledge are totally from without, i.e., from the influence of the Agent Intellect, as Avicenna held.

Still others have claimed, as the Philosopher does in *Ethics* 2, that the virtues and types of scientific knowledge exist in us by nature with respect to our aptitude for them, but not with respect to their perfection. And this is closer to the truth (*est verius*).

To see this clearly, we must take into account that there are two ways in which something is said to be *natural* to a man: (a) in one way, *by the nature of the species*, and (b) in the second way, *by the nature of the individual*.

Since each thing has its species because of its form (*secundum suam formam*) and is individuated because of its matter (*secundum materiam*), where a man’s form is his rational soul and the matter is his

body, it follows that what belongs to a man because of his rational soul is natural to him by the nature of his species, whereas what is natural to him because of the determinate makeup of his body (*secundum determinatam corporis complexionem*) is natural to him by the nature of the individual. (For what is natural to a man on the part of his body because of his *species* is in some sense referred back to the soul, viz., insofar as this sort of body is proportionate to this sort of soul.)

Now virtue is natural to a man in both senses as far as its beginnings are concerned (*secundum quandam inchoationem*): (a) with respect to the *nature of the species*, insofar as (i) a man has by nature in his reason certain naturally known principles with respect to both things to be known and things to be done (*principia tam scibilium et agendorum*), and these principles are, as it were, the seeds of the intellectual and moral virtues (*sunt quaedam seminalia intellectualium virtutum et moralium*), and insofar as (ii) a man has in his will a sort of natural desire for that good which accords with reason; and (b) with respect to the *nature of the individual*, insofar as, because of their bodily disposition, individuals are more or less disposed toward certain virtues. More specifically, this is because the sentient powers are acts that belong to certain parts of the body, and these powers are either aided or impeded in their acts by the dispositions of those parts of the body—and, as a result, the rational powers, which those sentient powers serve, are likewise aided or impeded in their acts. Accordingly, one man has a natural aptitude for scientific knowledge, another for fortitude, another for temperance. And it is in these ways that both the intellectual virtues and the moral virtues exist in us by nature because of a certain initial aptitude (*secundum quandam aptitudinis inchoationem*). However, the consummation of the virtues does not exist in us by nature. For nature is determined to a single effect, whereas the consummation of these virtues involves not just a single mode of action, but a diversity of modes of action corresponding to the diverse subject-matters and diverse circumstances in which the virtues operate.

So, then, it is clear that the virtues exist in us by nature as regards our aptitude for them and as regards their beginnings, but not as regards their perfected states (*secundum aptitudinem et inchoationem, non autem secundum perfectionem*)—except for the theological virtues, which are totally from the outside.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: This makes clear the replies to the objections. For the first two arguments go through in the sense that the seeds of the virtues exist in us by nature insofar as we are rational. On the other hand, the third argument goes through in the sense that because of the body's natural disposition, which it has from birth, one individual has an aptitude for being merciful, another for living temperately, and others for other virtues.

Article 2

Can virtues be caused in us by the habituation of actions?

It seems that virtues cannot be caused in us by the habituation of actions (*virtutes in nobis causari non possint ex assuetudine operum*):

Objection 1: Augustine's gloss on Romans 14:23 ("All that is not from faith is sin") says, "The whole life of non-believers is a sin, and nothing is good without the highest good. Where cognition of the truth is missing, the virtue is false even in the best behavior." But faith cannot be acquired by works; instead, it is caused in us by God—this according to Ephesians 2:8 ("By grace you are saved through faith"). Therefore, no virtue can be acquired in our case by the habituation of actions.

Objection 2: Since sin is contrary to virtue, it is incompatible with virtue (*non compatitur secum virtutem*). But a man is unable to avoid sin except through God's grace—this according to Wisdom 8:21 ("I have learned that I could not otherwise be continent, except God granted it"). Therefore, no virtues can be caused in us by the habituation of actions; instead, they can be caused only by God's gift.

Objection 3: Acts that lead to a virtue (*actus qui sunt ad virtutem*) fall short of the perfection of virtue. But an effect cannot be more perfect than its cause. Therefore, a virtue cannot be caused by acts that precede the virtue.

But contrary to this: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, Dionysius says that the good is more virtuous than the bad. But the habits of the vices are caused by bad acts. Therefore, *a fortiori*, the habits of the virtues can be caused by good acts.

I respond: The generation of habits from acts was explained above in general (q. 51, a. 2). But as regards virtue in particular, one should note that, as was explained above (q. 55, aa. 3-4), a man's virtue perfects him with respect to his good. But since, as Augustine says in *De Natura Boni*, the nature of the good consists in "mode, species, and order"—or, as Wisdom 11:21 puts it, in "number, weight, and measure"—a man's good has to be thought of in relation to some rule (*secundum aliquam regulam*). And, as was explained above (q. 19, aa. 3-4), this rule is twofold, viz., (a) human reason and (b) God's law (*ratio humana et lex divina*).

Now since God's law is the higher rule, it extends to more things, so that whatever is regulated by human reason is likewise regulated by God's law, but not vice versa. Therefore, a human virtue that is ordered toward a good that is regulated by the rule of human reason can be caused by human acts insofar as those acts proceed from reason, since this sort of good lies within the power and rule of reason.

By contrast, a virtue that orders a man toward the good insofar as it is regulated by God's law and not by human reason cannot be caused by human acts, whose principle is reason, but is instead caused in us solely by God's action. And this is why, in defining a virtue of this sort, Augustine put the phrase "that God works in us without us" into his definition of virtue.

Reply to objection 1: The first argument goes through for virtues of this last sort.

Reply to objection 2: Divinely infused virtue, especially if it is considered in its perfection, is not compatible with any mortal sin. But humanly acquired virtue can be compatible with a sinful act, even a mortal sin, since, as was explained above (q. 49, a. 3), the use of a habit in our case is subject to our will, and the habit of an acquired virtue is not corrupted by just a single sinful act. For it is not an act, but a habit, that is directly contrary to a habit.

And so even though a man cannot without grace avoid mortal sin in the sense of never committing a mortal sin, this does not prevent him from being able to acquire the habit of a virtue through which he might abstain from bad actions in most cases (*ut in pluribus*) and especially from actions that are strongly opposed to reason (*ab his operibus quae sunt valde rationi contraria*). There are also some mortal sins that a man cannot in any way avoid without grace, viz., those that are directly opposed to the theological virtues, which exist in us by a gift of grace. But this will become clearer below (q. 109, a. 4).

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1 and q. 51, a. 1), certain seeds or principles of the acquired virtues preexist in us by nature. These principles are more noble than the virtues acquired by their power, just as the intellectual understanding of theoretical principles is more noble than the scientific knowledge of conclusions, and just as the natural rectitude of reason is more noble than rectification of the appetite, which comes about through its participation in reason and which pertains to moral virtue. So, then, insofar as human acts proceed from higher principles, they are able to be a cause of the acquired human virtues.

Article 3

Are there other virtues infused in us by God besides the theological virtues?

It seems that there are no other virtues infused in us by God besides the theological virtues:

Objection 1: What is able to be done by secondary causes is not done directly (*immediate*) by

God, except perhaps sometimes miraculously; for as Dionysius says, “It is God’s rule (*lex divinitatis est*) to bring about the last things through the middle things.” But as has been explained (a. 2), the intellectual and moral virtues can be caused in us through our own acts. Therefore, it is inappropriate for them to be caused in us by infusion.

Objection 2: In God’s works there is much less that is superfluous than in the works of nature. But the theological virtues are sufficient to order us toward our supernatural good. Therefore, there are no other supernatural virtues that have to be caused in us by God.

Objection 3: Nature does not do through two things what it can do through one, and, *a fortiori*, this holds for God. But as a Gloss on Hebrews 1 says, God placed the seeds of the virtues in our soul. Therefore, it is unnecessary for Him to cause any other virtues in us through infusion.

But contrary to this: Wisdom 8:7 says, “She teaches us sobriety and justice, prudence and virtue.”

I respond: An effect has to be proportioned to its causes and principles. But as has been explained (a. 1 and q. 51, a. 1), all the virtues, both intellectual and moral, that are acquired by our own acts proceed from natural principles that preexist in us. In place of these natural principles God confers on us the theological virtues, by which, as was explained above (q. 62, a. 1), we are ordered toward our supernatural end. Hence, corresponding proportionately to these theological virtues there have to be other habits which are caused in us by God and which are related to the theological virtues in the same way that the moral and intellectual virtues are related to the natural principles of the virtues.

Reply to objection 1: Certain moral and intellectual virtues can be caused in us by our own acts, but these virtues are not proportionate to the theological virtues. And so it is necessary for other virtues that are proportionate to the theological virtues to be caused directly by God.

Reply to objection 2: The theological virtues are sufficient to order us toward our supernatural end, as a sort of beginning (*secundum quandam inchoationem*), viz., with respect to God Himself. But the soul has to be perfected by other infused virtues with respect to other things, though in relation to God.

Reply to objection 3: The power of the principles that we are naturally endowed with (*virtus illorum principiorum naturaliter inditorum*) does not extend beyond a proportion to our nature. And so in relation to his supernatural end, a man needs to be perfected through other additional principles.

Article 4

Do the infused virtues differ in species from the acquired virtues?

It seems that the infused virtues do not differ in species (*non sint alterius speciei*) from the acquired virtues:

Objection 1: According to what has been said (a. 3), an acquired virtue and an infused virtue seem to differ only in their ordering toward the ultimate end. But human habits and acts acquire their species from their proximate ends and not from their ultimate end. Therefore, the infused intellectual and moral virtues do not differ in species from the acquired intellectual and moral virtues.

Objection 2: Habits are known through their acts. But the act that belongs to infused temperance is the same as the act that belongs to acquired temperance, viz., to moderate the sentient desires associated with the sense of touch (*moderari concupiscentias tactus*). Therefore, the habits do not differ in species.

Objection 3: An acquired virtue and an infused virtue differ insofar as the one is effected directly by God and the other is effected directly by a creature. But the man whom God formed (Genesis 2:7) is the same in species as a man whom nature generates, and the eye that God gave to the man born blind

(John 9:6-7) is the same in species as an eye that the formative power causes. Therefore, it seems that an acquired virtue is the same in species as an infused virtue.

But contrary to this: When the specific difference posited in a definition is changed (*differentia in definitione posita mutata*), it diversifies the species. But as was noted above (q. 55, a. 4), the phrase ‘that God works in us without us’ is posited in the definition of an infused virtue. Therefore, an acquired virtue, which this phrase does not fit in with, is not the same in species as an infused virtue.

I respond: There are two ways in which habits are distinguished from one another in species:

In one way, as was explained above (q. 54, a. 2 and q. 56, a. 2 and q. 60, a. 1), because of the *specific and formal characters of their objects*. Now the object of any given virtue is the good considered in some proper subject matter, in the way that the object of temperance is the good of what is pleasurable in the sentient desires associated with the sense of touch (*bonum delectabilium in concupiscentiis tactus*). The formal character of this object comes from reason, which establishes a measure (*modum*) in the relevant sentient desires, whereas the material aspect of the object is what comes from the sentient desires. Now it is clear that the measure (*modus*) imposed on these desires by the rule of human reason is different in character (*est alterius rationis*) from the measure imposed by God’s rule. For instance, in the case of the consumption of food, the measure established by human reason is that the consumption of food should not harm the health of the body or impede the act of reason, whereas according to the rule of God’s law it is required that a man “castigate his body and bring it into subjection” (1 Corinthians 9:27) through fasting from food and drink and other things of this sort. Hence, it is clear that infused temperance and acquired temperance differ from one another in species. And this same line of reasoning holds for the other virtues.

The second way in which habits are distinguished from one another in species is according to *what they are ordered toward*; for a man’s health is not the same in species as a horse’s health, and this is because of the diverse natures toward which they are ordered. In this same sense, the Philosopher says in *Politics* 3 that the virtues of citizens are diverse, depending on what it is for citizens to be related in the right way to diverse types of political regime. And in this same sense the infused moral virtues, through which men are related in the right way to being “citizens with the saints of the household of God” (Ephesians 2:19) differ in species from the other, acquired, virtues, by which a man is related in the right way to human affairs.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained, infused virtue and acquired virtue differ not only with respect to their ordering toward the ultimate end, but also with respect to their ordering toward their proper objects.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, acquired temperance measures sentient desires for the pleasures of touch in a way different from the way in which the infused virtue does. Hence, the two virtues do not have the same act.

Reply to objection 3: God made the eye of the man born blind for the same act for which other eyes are formed by nature, and this is why the eyes were the same in species. And the same line of reasoning would hold if God willed to cause in men virtues of the sort that are acquired from acts. But this is not so in the case under discussion, as has been explained.