

QUESTION 73

The Relation of Sins to One Another

Next we have to consider the relation of sins to one another (*de comparatione peccatorum ad invicem*). On this topic there are ten questions: (1) Are all sins and vices connected? (2) Are all sins and vices equal? (3) Does the gravity of sins have to do with their objects? (4) Does the gravity of sins have to do with the dignity of the virtues that the sins are opposed to? (5) Are carnal sins more grave than spiritual sins? (6) Does the gravity of sins have to do with the causes of the sins? (7) Does the gravity of sins have to do with their circumstances? (8) Does the gravity of sins have to do with the amount of harm they inflict? (9) Does the gravity of sins have to do with the status of the person who is sinned against? (10) Is a sin aggravated by the greatness of the person (*magnitudo personae*) who commits the sin?

Article 1

Are all sins connected?

It seems that all sins are connected:

Objection 1: James 2:10 says, “Whoever has kept the whole law, but offends in one point, becomes guilty of all.” But being guilty of breaking all the commandments of the law is the same thing as having all sins, since, as Ambrose puts it, “A sin is a transgression against God’s law and disobedience with respect to the heavenly commandments.” Therefore, whoever sins by one sin is the subject of all sins.

Objection 2: Every sin excludes the virtue that is opposed to it. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 65, a. 1), whoever lacks one virtue lacks them all. Therefore, whoever sins by one sin is deprived of all the virtues. But whoever lacks a virtue has the vice that is opposed to it. Therefore, whoever has one sin has all sins.

Objection 3: As was established above (q. 65, aa. 1-2), all the virtues that agree in a single source are connected. But just as virtues agree in a single source, so too do sins; for as is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 14, just as “the love of God, which builds up the City of God,” is the source and root of all virtues, so too “the love of self, which builds up the City of Babylon,” is the root of all sins. Therefore, all vices and sins are likewise connected in such a way that whoever has one of them has all of them.

But contrary to this: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, certain vices are contrary to one another. But it is impossible for contraries to exist in the same thing at the same time. Therefore, it is impossible for all sins and vices to be connected with one another.

I respond: A agent’s intention in acting virtuously (*intentio agentis secundum virtutem*) is related to his following reason differently from the way in which a sinner’s intention is related to his deviating from reason.

For an agent’s intention in acting virtuously is to follow the rule of reason, and so in the case of all virtues the intention is directed toward the same thing. Because of this, as was explained above (q. 65, a. 1), all the virtues have a connection with one another in right reason with respect to actions, i.e., in prudence (*in ratione recta agibilium quae est prudentia*).

By contrast, a sinner’s intention is not directed toward receding from what is in accord with reason, but tends instead toward some desirable good, and it is from this good that the intention takes its species. Now goods of this sort, toward which the sinner’s intention is directed as it departs from reason, are diverse and have no connection with one another; in fact, sometimes they are even contraries. Therefore, since sins and vices get their species from what they are turned toward, it is clear that sins have no connection with one another as regards what brings their species to completion. For unlike what occurs

in the case of virtues that are connected, in sinning one does not pass from multiplicity to unity, but instead recedes from unity into multiplicity (*non peccatum committitur in accedendo a multitudine ad unitatem, sed potius in recedendo ab unitate ad multitudinem*).

Reply to objection 1: James is not talking about sin insofar as it involves a turning-toward (*loquitur de peccato non ex parte conversionis*), in accord with which, as has been explained (q. 72, a. 1), sins are distinguished from one another; instead, he is talking about sin insofar as it is a turning-away, viz., insofar as in sinning a man departs from the commandment of the law. Now as he himself says in the same place, all the commandments of the law come from one and the same source, and so God hates the same thing in every sin. And it is in light of this that he says that “whoever offends in one point becomes guilty of all,” viz., since in sinning by one sin a man incurs guilt deserving of punishment because he holds God in contempt, and it is in the contempt of God that the guilt of all sins has its source.

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (q. 71, a. 4), it is not the case that the opposed virtue is removed by each sinful act. For a venial sin does not remove a virtue; and while a mortal sin removes *infused* virtue insofar as the sinner turns away from God, even an act of mortal sin does not remove the habit of an *acquired* virtue.

However, if the acts are multiplied to the point that a contrary habit is generated, then the habit of an acquired virtue is excluded. And once it is excluded, prudence is excluded, since when a man acts contrary to any virtue, he acts contrary to prudence. But as was explained above (q. 58, a. 4 and q. 65, a. 1), without prudence no moral virtue can exist. And so, as a result, all the moral virtues are excluded as regards the complete and formal *esse* of a virtue that the virtues have insofar as they participate in prudence—though inclinations toward acts of those virtues remain without having the character of a virtue.

But it does not follow that because of this a man incurs all vices or sins. First of all, more than one vice is opposed to a given virtue, so that a virtue can be eliminated by one of them even if none of the others is present. Second, as has been explained (q. 71, a. 1), a sin is directly opposed to a virtue as regards the virtue’s inclination toward an act, and so as long as some virtuous inclinations remain, one cannot claim that the man has the opposed vices or sins.

Reply to objection 3: Love for God is integrative (*congregativus*) insofar as it leads a man’s affections from many things to one thing, and this is why the virtues, which are caused by loving God, have a connection with one another.

By contrast, love of self scatters (*disgregat*) man’s affections in diverse directions, viz., insofar as a man loves himself by desiring for himself temporal goods that are varied and diverse, and this is why sins and vices, which are caused by loving oneself, are not connected with one another.

Article 2

Are all sins equal?

It seems that all sins are equal:

Objection 1: To sin is to do what is not permitted. But to do what is not permitted is blamed in one and the same way in all cases (*uno et eodem modo in omnibus reprehenditur*). Therefore, to sin is blamed in the one and the same way. Therefore, it is not the case that one sin is more grave than another.

Objection 2: Every sin consists in a man’s transgressing the rule of reason, which is related to human acts in the way that a linear ruler is related to corporeal things. Therefore, to sin is like crossing a line. But crossing a line happens in a single way and equally, regardless of whether one departs farther from the line or stays close by, since privations do not admit of *more* and *less*. Therefore, all sins are equal.

Objection 3: Sins are opposed to virtues. But as Tully claims in *Paradoxa*, all virtues are equal. Therefore, all sins are equal.

But contrary to this: At John 19:11 our Lord says, “He who handed me over to you has the greater sin.” And yet it is clear that Pilate had some sin. Therefore, one sin is greater than another.

I respond: The Stoics held the position, adopted by Tully in *Paradoxa*, that all sins are equal. And this position is the source of the error of certain heretics who, claiming that all sins are equal, assert that all the punishments of hell are likewise equal.

As far as one can tell from what Tully says, the Stoics were moved to make this claim because they were thinking of a sin only as a privation, i.e. only insofar as it involves a departure from reason (*recessus a ratione*). Hence, believing that absolutely no privation is susceptible to *more* and *less*, they claimed that all sins are equal.

But if one considers the matter carefully, he will find that there are two kinds of privation:

Some privations are *simple* and *pure* privations, and they consist, as it were, in something’s *having been corrupted* (*consistit quasi in corruptum esse*), in the way that death is the privation of life and in the way that darkness is the privation of light. Privations of this sort do not admit of *more* and *less*, since nothing is left of the opposed disposition. Hence, someone is no less dead on the first day of death or the third day or the fourth day than he is after a year, when his corpse has decayed. And, similarly, a house is no darker if the lamp is covered with several shades than it would be if it were covered with only one shade that shut out all the light.

However, there are other privations that are *not simple* but retain something of the opposed disposition. This sort of privation consists in something’s *being in the process of being corrupted* rather than in its *having been corrupted* (*consistit in corrumpi quam in corruptum esse*). An example is a sickness, which undermines the appropriate balance of the humors (*privat debitam commensurationem humorum*) but in such a way that something of that balance remains; otherwise, the animal would not remain alive. The same holds for deformity (*turpitude*) and other conditions of this sort. Now privations of this latter sort admit of *more* and *less* on the part of what remains of the contrary disposition (*ex parte eius quod remanet de habitu contrario*). For with a sickness or deformity, it matters a great deal whether the departure from the appropriate balance of the humors or the bodily members is greater or smaller.

Something similar should be said of vices and sins. For in their case the appropriate measure of reason is absent in such a way that the order of reason is not entirely destroyed; otherwise, as *Ethics* 4 puts it, “If the badness is complete, it destroys itself.” For the substance of the act, or the agent’s affections, would not be able to remain unless something of the order of reason remained. And so it is greatly relevant to the gravity of a sin whether it departs to a greater or a lesser degree from the rectitude of reason. And accordingly one should claim that it is not the case that all sins are equal.

Reply to objection 1: It is because of the disorderedness (*deordinatio*) had by sins that it is not permitted to commit them. Hence, sins that contain a greater disorderedness are more impermissible (*magis illicita*) and, as a result, they are more grave.

Reply to objection 2: This argument proceeds on the assumption that a sin is a pure privation.

Reply to objection 3: The virtues are proportionately equal in one and the same way. However, one virtue exceeds another in dignity according to its species, and, as was explained above (q. 66, aa. 1-2), one man is likewise more virtuous than another within the same species of virtue.

Yet even if all the virtues were equal, it would not follow that the vices are all equal. For the virtues have a connection with one another, whereas vices or sins do not.

Article 3

Does the gravity of sins vary according to their objects?

It seems that the gravity of sins does not vary according to their objects.:

Objection 1: The gravity of a sin has to do with a *mode* or *quality* of the sin itself. But the object is the *matter* of the sin itself. Therefore, the gravity of sins does not vary according to their diverse objects.

Objection 2: The gravity of a sin is the intensity of its badness. But a sin has the character of badness not because it turns toward its proper object, which is a certain desirable good, but rather because it turns away [from reason and from God]. Therefore, the gravity of sins does not vary according to their objects.

Objection 3: Sins that have diverse objects belong to diverse genera. But as *Physics 7* proves, things that belong to diverse genera are not comparable with one another. Therefore, it is not because of the diversity of their objects that one sin is more grave than another.

But contrary to this: As is clear from what was said above (q. 72, a. 1), sins take their species from their objects. But one sin is more grave than another because of its species, in the way that homicide is more grave than theft. Therefore, the gravity of sins differs according to their objects.

I respond: As is clear from what was said above (q. 71, a. 5), the gravity of sins differs in the way in which one sickness is more grave than another. For just as the good of health consists in a certain measure in the humors that is appropriate to an animal's nature, so the good of virtue consists in a certain measure in a human act that is appropriate to the rule of reason.

Now it is clear that a sickness is more grave to the extent that the disorder which undermines the appropriate measure of the humors belongs to a more general principle (*prioris principii*); for instance, a sickness in the human body that comes from the heart, which is the source of life, or from somewhere close to the heart, is more dangerous. Hence, it must likewise be the case that a sin is more grave to the extent that the disorder has to do with a principle which is prior in the order of reason. But reason orders all matters of action in light of the end (*ratio ordinat omnia in agibilibus ex fine*). And so, among human acts, the higher the end that a given sin has to do with, the graver the sin.

Now as is clear from what was said above (q. 72, a. 3), the objects of acts are their ends. And so the diversity in degrees of gravity among sins stems from the diversity of their objects. For instance, it is clear that exterior things are ordered to man as their end, whereas a man is further ordered toward God as his own end. Hence a sin that has to do with a man's substance itself, e.g., homicide, is more grave than a sin that has to do with exterior goods, e.g., theft. And still more grave is a sin that is committed directly against God, e.g., infidelity or blasphemy or something else of this sort. And in an ordering of all these sins, one sin is more [or less] grave than another insofar as it has to do with something more important or less important. And since sins have their species from their objects, the differences in degrees of gravity that stem from the objects are the first and principal differences, since they follow upon the species.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 72, a. 3), even if the object is the matter with respect to which the act is terminated, it nonetheless has the character of a form to the extent that the agent's intention is directed toward it. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 18, a. 6 and q. 72, a. 6), the form of a moral act depends on its end.

Reply to objection 2: Turning away from an unchangeable good, in which the character of badness is brought to completion, follows from inappropriately turning toward some changeable good. And this is why the diverse degrees of gravity of badness in the sins must have to do with the diversity of those things that one turns toward (*secundum diversitatem eorum quae pertinent ad conversionem*).

Reply to objection 3: All the objects of human acts have an ordering with respect to one another, and so in a sense all human acts belong to a single genus insofar as they are ordered to the

ultimate end. And so nothing prevents all sins from being comparable to one another.

Article 4

Does the gravity of sins differ according to the dignity of the virtues to which the sins are opposed, in the sense that a graver sin is opposed to a greater virtue?

It seems that the gravity of sins does not differ according to the dignity of the virtues to which the sins are opposed, in the sense that a graver sin is opposed to a greater virtue:

Objection 1: As Proverbs 15:5 says, “In abundant justice there is the greatest virtue.” But as our Lord points out at Matthew 5:20, an “abundant” justice hinders anger, which is a lesser sin than homicide, whereas homicide is hindered by a less abundant justice. Therefore, it is a lesser sin that is opposed to a greater virtue.

Objection 2: *Ethics 2* says, “Virtue has to do with the difficult and the good.” From this it appears that a greater virtue has to do with what is more difficult. But if a man falls short in a more difficult matter, then his sin is a lesser one than if he falls short in a less difficult matter. Therefore, it is a lesser sin that is opposed to the greater virtue.

Objection 3: As 1 Corinthians 13:13 explains, charity is a greater virtue than faith and hope. But hatred, which is opposed to charity, is a lesser sin than infidelity or despair, which are opposed to faith and hope. Therefore, it is a lesser sin that is opposed to a greater virtue.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 8* the Philosopher says, “The worst is contrary to the best.” But the best in moral matters is the greatest virtue, whereas the worst is the most grave sin. Therefore, the most grave sin is opposed to the greatest virtue.

I respond: In one sense, a sin is opposed to a virtue *principally and directly* when they have to do with the same object; for contraries have to do with the same thing. And in this sense it has to be the case that a graver sin is opposed to a greater virtue. For just as a greater degree of gravity in a sin stems from the object, so too does the greater dignity of a virtue. For as is clear from what has already been said (q. 60, a. 5 and q. 72, a. 1), in both cases the species is taken from the object. Hence, it must be the case that the greatest sin is contrary to the greatest virtue in the sense that it is maximally distant from that virtue within the same genus.

In a second sense, the opposition of a virtue to a sin can be thought of as a certain extension of the virtue insofar as it hinders the sin (*secundum quandam extensionem virtutis cohibentis peccatum*), since the greater a virtue is, the more it distances a man from a sin that is contrary to it, so that it hinders not only the sin itself but also the things that induce one toward that sin. And in this sense it is clear that a virtue is greater to the extent that it hinders lesser sins—just as, to the extent that one’s health is greater, it hinders even minor ailments. And in this sense a lesser sin is opposed to a greater virtue as far as the virtue’s effect is concerned (*ex parte effectus*).

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through with respect to the opposition that has to do with hindering sin. For in this sense an abundant justice hinders even lesser sins.

Reply to objection 2: It is a sin that has to do with a more difficult evil that is directly contrary to a greater virtue, which has to do with a more difficult good. For in both cases one finds a certain preeminence by which the will is shown to be more strongly inclined toward good or toward evil by the fact that it is not conquered by difficulty.

Reply to objection 3: Charity is not just any sort of love, but is instead the love of God. Hence, what is directly opposed to it is not hatred, but rather hatred of God, which is gravest of sins.

Article 5

Are carnal sins lesser faults than spiritual sins?

It seems that carnal sins are not lesser faults (*non minoris culpae*) than spiritual sins:

Objection 1: Adultery is a graver sin than theft; for Proverbs 6:30-32 says, “The fault is not so great when a man has stolen, but he who is an adulterer destroys his own soul by the folly of his heart.” But theft involves avarice, which is a spiritual sin, whereas adultery involves lust, which is a carnal sin. Therefore, carnal sins are greater faults.

Objection 2: In *Super Leviticum* Augustine says, “The devil rejoices most over the sins of lust and idolatry (*de peccato luxuriae et idololatriae*).” But he rejoices more over a greater fault. Therefore, since lust is a carnal sin, it seems that carnal sins are the greatest faults.

Objection 3: In *Ethics* 7 the Philosopher proves that being incontinent with respect to concupiscence is worse than being incontinent with respect to anger. But anger is a spiritual sin according to Gregory in *Moralia* 31, whereas concupiscence has to do with carnal sins. Therefore, a carnal sin is more grave than a spiritual sin.

But contrary to this: Gregory says that carnal sins involve less guilt and more shame (*sunt minoris culpae et maioris infamiae*).

I respond: Spiritual sins are greater faults than carnal sins. This should not be understood to mean that every spiritual sin is a greater fault than every carnal sin. Rather, it should be understood to mean that if one thinks just of the difference between *being spiritual* and *being carnal*, spiritual sins are, all other things being equal, graver than the other sins.

Three reasons can be given for this:

First, on the part of the *subject*. Spiritual sins belong to the spirit, which is either turned toward God or turned away from Him, whereas carnal sins are consummated in the pleasure of the carnal appetite, which is mainly turned toward the corporeal good. And so a carnal sin as such involves more of a turning-toward (*plus habet de conversione*) and because of this involves a greater adherence, whereas a spiritual sin involves more of a turning-away, which is the source of the character of sinfulness (*ex qua procedit ratio culpae*). And so a spiritual sin is, as such, a greater fault.

A second line of reasoning can be taken from *what is sinned against*. For a carnal sin as such is directed toward one’s own body, which, according to the order of charity, is to be loved less than God or one’s neighbor, against whom one sins through spiritual sins. And so spiritual sins as such are greater faults.

A third line of argument can be taken from the *motive*. As will be explained below (a. 6), the greater the impulse toward sin, the less a man sins. But carnal sins have a stronger impulse, viz., the very concupiscence of the flesh that is innate in us. And so spiritual sins are as such greater faults.

Reply to objection 1: Adultery involves not only a sin of lust but also a sin of injustice. And in this respect, it can be traced back to avarice, according to a Gloss on Ephesians 5:5 (“No fornicator, or unclean or covetous person”). And thus adultery is more grave than theft, since a man’s wife is more dear to him than his possessions.

Reply to objection 2: The devil is said to rejoice most over the sin of lust because it involves the most adherence and it is only with difficulty that a man can be torn away from it. For as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 3, “The desire for pleasure is insatiable.”

Reply to objection 3: The reason why the Philosopher claims that being incontinent with respect to concupiscence is more shameful than being incontinent with respect to anger is that concupiscence has less participation in reason. And on this score he also claims in *Ethics* 3 that “sins of intemperance are especially worthy of reproach, because they have to do with pleasures that are common to us and the brute animals.” Hence, in a certain sense a man becomes like a brute animal through such

sins. And this is why Gregory says that carnal sins are more shameful.

Article 6

Does the gravity of a sin have to do with the cause of the sin?

It seems that the gravity of a sin does not have to do with the cause of the sin:

Objection 1: The greater the cause of a sin is, the more strongly it moves one toward sinning, and so the more difficult it is to resist. But a sin is diminished by the fact that it is more difficult to resist; for it pertains to a sinner's weakness that he does not easily resist a sin, and a sin that stems from weakness is judged more leniently. Therefore, it is not the case that a sin has gravity from its cause.

Objection 2: Concupiscence is a sort of general cause of sin; hence, a Gloss on Romans 7:7 ("For I had not known concupiscence") says, "The law is good, because in prohibiting concupiscence it prohibits everything that is bad." But the greater the concupiscence by which a man is overcome, the lesser is his sin. Therefore, a sin's gravity is diminished by the greatness of its cause.

Objection 3: Just as the rectitude of reason is a cause of a virtuous act, so a defect in reason seems to be a cause of sin. But the greater the defect of reason is, the lesser is the sin—to the extent that someone who lacks the use of reason is completely excused from sin, and someone who sins out of ignorance sins less gravely (*levius peccat*). Therefore, the gravity of a sin is not increased by the greatness of its cause.

But contrary to this: When the cause is increased (*multiplicata causa*), its effect is increased. Therefore, if there is a greater cause of a sin, then the sin will be more grave.

I respond: In the genus of sin, just as in every other genus, there are two possible sorts of causes:

The one is a *proper and per se cause* of a sin, viz., the very act of willing to sin (*ipsa voluntas peccandi*). For as a Gloss on Matthew 7:18 ("A good tree cannot bear bad fruit") points out, the act of willing to sin is related to the sinful act as a tree is related to its fruit. And the greater a cause of this sort is, the more grave the sin will be, since the greater the will to sin is, the more gravely the man sins.

The other causes of sins are understood as *extrinsic and remote causes*, viz., causes by which the will is inclined toward sinning. And one must distinguish among causes of this sort:

Some of them induce the will to sin in accord with its very nature—an example is the *end*, which is the will's proper object. And a sin is increased by this sort of end, since someone sins more gravely when his will is inclined himself toward sinning by intending a worse end.

On the other hand, there are some causes that incline the will to sin in a way that goes beyond the nature and order of the will itself, which is apt by its nature to be moved freely by itself in accord with the judgment of reason. Hence, a cause which (a) diminishes reason's judgment, e.g., *ignorance*, or which (b) diminishes the free movement of the will, e.g., *weakness* or *violence* or *fear* or something of this sort, diminishes the sin in the same way that it diminishes voluntariness, to the extent that if an act is completely involuntary, then it does not have the character of a sin.

Reply to objection 1: This objection goes through for the case of an extrinsic moving cause, which diminishes voluntariness, since, as has been explained, an increase in this sort of cause diminishes the sin.

Reply to objection 2: If even the very movement of the will is included under 'concupiscence', then where there is a greater concupiscence, there is a greater sin.

On the other hand, if 'concupiscence' names a certain passion that is a movement of the concupiscible power [of the soul], then a greater concupiscence that *precedes* reason's judgment and the will's movement diminishes the sin, since someone who sins after being stimulated by a greater

concupiscence falls to a greater temptation, and so less is imputed to him.

However, if ‘concupiscence’ is taken in such a way that the concupiscence *follows upon* reason’s judgment and the will’s movement, then where there is a greater concupiscence in this sense, there is a greater sin. For a greater movement of concupiscence sometimes floods forth (*insurgit*) because the will is tending in an unrestrained way toward its object.

Reply to objection 3: This argument goes through for the case of a cause that causes involuntariness, and, as has been explained, this sort of cause lessens the sin.

Article 7

Do the circumstances aggravate a sin?

It seems that the circumstances do not aggravate a sin:

Objection 1: A sin has its gravity from its species. But circumstances do not give a sin its species, since they are its accidents. Therefore, a sin’s gravity is not determined by its circumstances.

Objection 2: The circumstance in question is either bad or not bad. If the circumstance is bad, then it itself is a *per se* cause of a certain species of badness, whereas if it is not bad, then it does not have what it takes to augment the act’s badness. Therefore, there is no way in which a circumstance increases the sin.

Objection 3: A sin’s badness comes from its being a turning-away [from reason and God] (*ex parte aversione*). But the circumstances follow upon the sin by reason of its being a turning-toward [some good] (*ex parte conversione*). Therefore, they do not increase a sin’s badness.

But contrary to this: Ignorance of circumstances lessens the sin; for as *Ethics* 3 says, someone who sins out of ignorance of a circumstance deserves leniency. But this would not be the case if the circumstance in question did not aggravate the sin. Therefore, the circumstance aggravates the sin.

I respond: As the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 2 about the habit of a virtue, each thing is apt to be increased by the same thing that it is caused by. But it is clear that a sin is caused by a defect in some circumstance, since one departs from the order of reason by virtue of his not observing the required circumstances in his acting. This happens in three ways:

First, insofar as a circumstance *transfers the act into a different genus of sin*. For instance, the sin of fornication consists in a man having sexual intercourse with someone who is not his wife (*accedit ad non suam*), but if one adds the circumstance that the woman with whom he has sexual intercourse is someone else’s wife, then the act is now transferred to another genus of sin, viz., injustice, insofar as the man has usurped what belongs to someone else (*inquantum homo usurpat rem alterius*). Accordingly, adultery is a more grave sin than fornication.

On the other hand, sometimes a circumstance aggravates a sin not by turning it into another kind of sin, but only *by increasing its character as a sin* (*quia multiplicat rationem peccati*). For instance, if someone who is prodigal gives something away *when* he ought not to and *to someone* to whom he ought not give it, he sins in more ways (*multiplicius*) in the same genus of sin than if he only gave it to *someone* to whom he ought not give it. And because of this his sin is more grave, just as a sickness is likewise more grave if it afflicts more parts of the body. Hence, in *Paradoxa* Tully says, “In violating the life of his father, a man commits many sins. For the one who is violated is the one who procreated him, who fed him, who taught him, who set him up in his land, in his house, and in the republic.”

The third way in which a circumstance aggravates a sin is that it *augments the deformity that arises from some other circumstance*. For instance, taking what belongs to another constitutes the sin of stealing, but if one adds the circumstance that someone takes a large amount from the other, then the sin is more grave—even though *taking much* and *taking little* do not of themselves imply the character of

goodness or badness.

Reply to objection 1: As was established above (q. 18, a. 10), some circumstances do indeed confer a species on a moral act. And yet a circumstance that does not confer a species is able to aggravate a sin. For just as a thing's goodness comes not only from its species, but also from certain accidents, so too an act's badness comes not only from the species of the act, but also from its circumstances.

Reply to objection 2: A circumstance can aggravate a sin in either of the two ways in question. For if the circumstance is bad, it nonetheless does not thereby always have to constitute the sin's species; for as has been explained, it can add to the character of badness within the same species. On the other hand, if the circumstance is not bad, it is able to aggravate the sin in relation to the badness of some other circumstance.

Reply to objection 3: Reason has to order an act not only with respect to its object, but also with respect to all its circumstances. And so some instances of turning away from the rule of reason involve the corruption of a circumstance—as, for instance, when someone does something *when* he ought not to or *where* he ought not to. And this sort of turning away is sufficient for the character of badness. Moreover, turning away from God, to whom a man should be joined through right reason, follows upon turning away from the rule of reason.

Article 8

Is a sin's gravity increased by its doing greater harm?

It seems that a sin's gravity is not increased by its doing greater harm (*secundum maius nocumentum*):

Objection 1: Harm is a certain outcome (*eventus*) that is consequent upon a sinful act. But as was explained above (q. 20, a. 5), a consequent outcome (*eventus consequens*) does not add to an act's goodness or badness. Therefore, a sin is not aggravated by a greater harm.

Objection 2: Harm is found especially in sins against one's neighbor, since no one wills to harm himself and no one is able to harm God—this according to Job 35:6-8 (“If your iniquities be multiplied, what shall you do against Him? Your wickedness will hurt a man who is like you”). Therefore, if a sin were aggravated by its doing greater harm, then it would follow that a sin by which one sins against his neighbor is more grave than a sin by which one sins against God or against oneself.

Objection 3: More harm is inflicted on someone when he is deprived of the life of grace than when he is deprived of his natural life; for the life of grace is better than natural life to such an extent that a man ought to hate his natural life in order not to lose the life of grace. But someone who induces a woman to fornicate, given just the action in its own right (*quantum est de se*), deprives her of the life of grace by leading her into a mortal sin. Therefore, if a sin were more grave because of its doing greater harm, then it would follow that a simple fornicator would sin more gravely than a murderer—which is manifestly false. Therefore, it is not the case that a sin is more grave because it does more harm.

But contrary to this: In *De Libero Arbitrio* 3 Augustine says, “Because a vice is contrary to nature, badness is added to the vices to the same degree to which the nature's integrity is diminished.” But the diminishment of a nature's integrity is harm. Therefore, a sin is more grave to the extent that there is more harm.

I respond: There are three possible ways for harm to be related to a sin:

(a) Sometimes the harm that stems from a sin is *foreseen and intended*—for instance, when someone does something with the intention of harming another, as with homicide or theft. And in such a case the amount of harm directly increases the gravity of the sin. For in a case like this the harm is a *per*

se object of the sin.

(b) Sometimes, however, the harm is *foreseen but not intended*—for instance, when someone who is taking a short cut through a planted field on his way to committing fornication knowingly inflicts damage on what is planted in the field, though without intending the damage. In such a case the amount of harm aggravates the sin but does so indirectly, viz., to the extent that because of a will that is intensely inclined toward sinning, it happens that someone does not avoid doing the sort of damage, to himself or to another, which he would not will absolutely speaking.

(c) On the other hand, sometimes the harm is *neither foreseen nor intended*.

In that case, if the harm is related *incidentally* to the sin, then it does not aggravate the sin directly. However, because the man neglected to consider the sorts of harm that could ensue, he is thought of as punishable for the bad things that happen outside his intention, given that he was performing an illicit deed (*si dabit operam rei illicitae*).

By contrast, if the harm follows *per se* from the sinful act, then even if it was neither intended nor foreseen, it directly aggravates the sin, since whatever follows *per se* upon a sin belongs in some way or other to the very species of the sin. For instance, if someone fornicates openly, many people are scandalized as a result; and even if he himself did not intend the scandal and perhaps did not even foresee it, the sin is directly aggravated by it.

However, it seems to be otherwise with the sort of penal harm that the sinner himself incurs. If harm of this sort is related incidentally to the sinful act and was neither foreseen nor intended, then it does not aggravate the sin or follow upon a greater gravity on the part of the sin—as when someone who is running in order to commit murder strikes his foot and hurts it. On the other hand, if this sort of harm follows *per se* upon the sinful act, then even if it is neither foreseen nor intended, the greater harm does not make the sin more grave; to the contrary, it is the graver sin that induces the graver harm. For instance, a non-believer who has heard nothing about the punishments of hell suffers a graver punishment in hell for a sin of homicide than he does for a sin of theft. For since he neither intends nor foresees this punishment, his sin is not aggravated by it (as does happen in the case of a believer, who seems to sin more gravely by the very fact that he holds greater punishments in contempt in order to fulfill his will to sin), but instead the gravity of the harm is caused only by the gravity of the sin.

Reply to objection 1: As was also explained above (q. 20, a. 5) when we were discussing the goodness and badness of exterior acts, a consequent outcome adds to the goodness or badness of an act if it is foreseen and intended.

Reply to objection 2: Even though the harm aggravates the sin, it does not follow that the sin is aggravated *only* by the harm without its being the case that, as was explained above (aa. 2-3), the sin is *per se* more grave because of its disorderedness. Hence, the harm itself aggravates the sin insofar as it makes the act to be more disordered. Hence, it does not follow that if harm has a place especially in sins that are directed against one's neighbor, then those sins are the most grave. For a much greater disorder is found in sins that are directed against God, as well as in certain sins that are directed against oneself.

Yet one can also claim that even if no one can harm God as far as His substance is concerned, it is nonetheless possible to attack Him in what belongs to Him, e.g., by eradicating the Faith or violating sacred things, where these are extremely grave sins (*peccata gravissima*). Likewise, one sometimes knowingly and willingly inflicts harm on himself, as is clear in the case of those who kill themselves, even though this act is referred to an apparent good as an end, e.g., that they might be freed from their troubles.

Reply to objection 3: This argument does not follow, and for two reasons:

First, because a murderer directly intends harm to his neighbor, whereas a fornicator who seduces a woman intends pleasure and not harm.

Second, because homicide is a *per se* and sufficient cause of corporeal death, whereas no one can

be a *per se* and sufficient cause of someone else's spiritual death, since no one dies spiritually except by sinning through his own will.

Article 9

Is a sin aggravated by the status of the person who is sinned against?

It seems that a sin is not aggravated by the status of the person who is sinned against (*propter conditionem personae in quam peccatur*):

Objection 1: If this were so, then a sin would be maximally aggravated when someone sinned against a just and holy man. But a sin is not aggravated in such a case, since a virtuous man, who tolerates the sin with equanimity, is harmed less by the inflicted injury than other people who are harmed interiorly by being scandalized. Therefore, the status of the person who is sinned against does not aggravate the sin.

Objection 2: If the status of the person aggravated the sin, then a sin would be especially aggravated by close kinship (*ex propinquitate*), since as Tully says in *Paradoxa*, "Someone who slays a servant commits just one sin; someone who violates the life of his father commits many sins." But the close kinship of the person who is sinned against does not seem to aggravate the sin, since each person has a maximally close kinship with himself, and yet someone who inflicts damage on himself sins to a lesser degree than does someone who inflicts damage on another. For instance, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 5, someone sins to a lesser degree if he kills his own horse than if he kills someone else's horse. Therefore, close kinship with the person does not aggravate the sin.

Objection 3: The status of the person who sins aggravates his sin mainly by reason of his dignity or knowledge—this according to Wisdom 6:7 ("The mighty shall suffer mighty torments") and Luke 12:47 ("The servant who knew the will of his master and did not do it will be beaten with many stripes"). Therefore, by parity of reasoning, as regards the person who is sinned against, the dignity or knowledge of the person who is sinned against would aggravate the sin to a greater degree. But it does not seem that someone sins more gravely by inflicting injury on a more wealthy or powerful person than by inflicting injury on a poor person, since "there is no respecting of persons with God," by whose judgment the gravity of a sin is assessed. Therefore, the status of the person who is sinned against does not aggravate the sin.

But contrary to this: In Sacred Scripture sins that are committed against the servants of God are especially vituperated—as, for example, in 3 Kings 19:14 ("They have destroyed your altars, and they have slain your prophets with the sword"). Likewise, sins are especially vituperated that are committed against persons who are close relatives—this according to Micah 7:6 ("The son dishonors his father, and the daughter rises up against her mother"). Again, sins committed against persons who have been set up in dignified positions are also especially vituperated, as is clear from Job 34:18 ("He said to the king, 'You apostate', he called the leaders impious"). Therefore, the status of the person who is sinned against aggravates the sin.

I respond: A person who is sinned against is in some sense an object of the sin. Now it was explained above (a. 3) that the gravity of a sin stems from the object. Indeed, to the extent that a given object is a more principal end, a greater gravity in the sin stems from it.

Now the principal ends of human acts are God, the man himself, and his neighbors, since whatever he does, he does for the sake of one or another of these three, even though the one of these three is subordinated to another. Therefore, it is in regard to these three that one can think of the greater or lesser gravity of a sin according to the status of the one who is sinned against.

First, then, as regards God, the more virtuous or more sacred to God someone is, the more he is

joined to God. And so an injury inflicted on such a person redounds more upon God—this according to Zachariah 2:8 (“He who touches you, touches the apple of my eye”). Hence, a sin becomes more grave by reason of the fact that it is committed against a person who is more joined to God, either by reason of his virtue or by reason of his office.

As regards oneself, it is clear that someone sins more gravely to the extent that he sins against someone who is more closely conjoined to himself, whether by natural affinity or by benefits received or in some other way. For he seems to be sinning against himself and because of this he sins more gravely—this according to Ecclesiasticus 14:5 “He who does evil to himself, whom will he be good to?”).

As regards one’s neighbor, someone sins more gravely to the extent that his sin affects more people. And so a sin that is committed against a public person who bears the personage of the whole multitude, e.g., a king or a prince, is more grave than a sin committed against an individual private person; hence, Exodus 22:28 says specifically, “You shall not curse the prince of your people.” Similarly, an injury done to any famous person seems to be more grave because it scandalizes and disturbs more people.

Reply to objection 1: Someone who inflicts injury on a virtuous man is, as far as he himself knows (*quantum est in se*), disturbing the man both interiorly and exteriorly. On the other hand, the fact that the man is not interiorly disturbed stems from his own goodness, and this does not diminish the sin of the one who injures him.

Reply to objection 2: The harm that someone inflicts on himself with respect to those things that are subject to the dominion of his own will, e.g., his own possessions, has less of the character of a sin than if it were inflicted on someone else. For he acts by his own will. But in the case of those things that are not subject to the dominion of his will, e.g., natural and spiritual goods, it is a graver sin to inflict harm on himself. For instance, someone who kills himself sins more gravely than someone who kills another. By contrast, since what belongs to those who are close to us is not subject to the dominion of our will, the argument that the sin is lesser with respect to harms inflicted on their goods does not go through—unless perhaps they will it or give their agreement.

Reply to objection 3: There is no respecting of persons if God punishes someone more gravely for sinning against more excellent persons. For this happens because such a sin redounds to the harm of more people.

Article 10

Does the greatness of the person who commits a sin aggravate the sin?

It seems that the greatness of the person who commits a sin (*magnitudo personae peccantis*) does not aggravate the sin:

Objection 1: A man is rendered great especially by the fact that he adheres to God—this according to Ecclesiasticus 25:13 (“How great is he who finds wisdom and knowledge! But there is none above the one who fears the Lord”). But the more someone adheres to God, the less something is imputed to him as a sin; for 2 Paralipomenon 30:10-19 says, “The Lord who is good will show mercy to all those who with their whole heart seek the Lord the God of their fathers, and He will not impute it to them that they are not sanctified”). Therefore, a sin is not aggravated by the greatness of the person who sins.

Objection 2: As Romans 2:11 says, “There is no respecting of persons with God.” Therefore, He does not punish one man more than another for one and the same sin. Therefore, a sin is not aggravated by the greatness of the person who sins.

Objection 3: No one should reap disadvantage from the good he has (*ex bono*). But someone would so reap if what he did were imputed to him in a higher degree as a sin. Therefore, a sin is not aggravated because of the greatness of the person who sins.

But contrary to this: In *De Summo Bono* 2 Isidore says, “The greater the one who sins is, the greater is his sin known to be.”

I respond: There are two kinds of sin:

Some sins arise suddenly (*ex subreptione*) because of the weakness of human nature. And sins of this sort are imputed as lesser sins to someone who is greater in virtue, because he is less neglectful in repressing such sins—even though the weakness of human nature does not allow him to escape them altogether.

However, the other sort of sin proceed from deliberation (*ex deliberatione*). And the greater someone is, the greater the degree to which these sins are imputed to him. There are four reasons that can be given for this:

First, because greater men, e.g., those who excel in knowledge and virtue, are more easily able to resist these sins. Hence, in Luke 12:47 our Lord says, “The servant who knew the will of his master and did not do it will be beaten with many stripes.”

Second, because of ingratitude. For every good by which someone is made great is a gift from God, whom a man becomes ungrateful to by sinning. And in this respect, any sort of greatness, even greatness in temporal goods, aggravates the sin—this according to Wisdom 6:7 (“The mighty shall suffer mighty torments”).

Third, because of the special repugnance an act of sinning bears to the greatness of a person—as when a prince, who is the guardian of justice, violates justice, or as when a priest, who has taken a vow of chastity, commits fornication.

Fourth, because of the example or scandal given. For as Gregory says in *Pastoralis*, “Sin is extended much more forcefully by example when the sinner is honored out of reverence for his status.” The sins of great people also come to be known by many, and men treat them more severely (*magis homines indigne ferunt*).

Reply to objection 1: These passages are talking about things that are done carelessly with the suddenness of human weakness.

Reply to objection 2: God is not respecting persons if He punishes great men more, since, as has been explained, their greatness makes for gravity in their sins.

Reply to objection 3: A great man reaps disadvantage not from the good that he has, but from the bad use that he makes of that good.