

QUESTION 78

Malice as a Cause of Sin

Next we have to consider the cause of sin on the part of the will, and this is called ‘malice’ (*malitia*).

On this topic there are four questions: (1) Can someone sin from fixed malice or purposefully (*ex certa malitia seu industria*)? (2) Does everyone who sins from a habit sin from fixed malice? (3) Does everyone who sins from fixed malice sin from a habit? (4) Does someone who sins from fixed malice sin more gravely than someone who sins from passion?

Article 1

Does anyone sin purposefully or from fixed malice?

It seems that no one sins purposefully or from fixed malice (*nullus peccet ex industria sive ex certa malitia*):

Objection 1: Ignorance is opposed to purposefulness or fixed malice. But according to the Philosopher, everyone who is bad is ignorant. And Proverbs 14:22 says, “They are mistaken who do what is bad.” Therefore, no one sins from fixed malice.

Objection 2: In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, Dionysius says, “No one acts intending what is bad.” But intending what is bad in sinning seems to be the same as sinning from fixed malice. For what lies outside of one’s intention is, as it were, *per accidens*, and it does not give an act its name. Therefore, no one sins from malice.

Objection 3: Malice is itself a sin. Therefore, if malice is a cause of sin, it will follow that a sin is a cause of a sin *ad infinitum*—which is absurd. Therefore, no one sins from malice.

But contrary to this: Job 34:27 says, “They have purposefully withdrawn from God and wanted not to understand His ways.” But to withdraw from God is to sin. Therefore, some individuals sin purposefully or from fixed malice.

I respond: Just like every other entity, man naturally has an appetite for the good. Hence, the fact that his appetite falls into evil stems from a certain corruption or disorder in one of man’s principles, since this is how sins or mistakes occur in the actions of natural things.

Now the principles of human acts are the intellect and the appetites, both the rational appetite, which is called ‘the will’, and the sentient appetite. Therefore, just as, in human acts, sin sometimes occurs because of a defect in the *intellect*, as when someone sins out of ignorance, and sometimes occurs because of a defect in the *sentient appetite*, as when someone sins from passion, so too sin sometimes occurs because of a defect in the will, i.e., because of a disorder of the will.

Now the will is disordered when it loves a lesser good more. The result is that someone chooses to suffer a loss in a good that is loved less in order to enjoy the good that is loved more, as when someone wills to suffer—even knowingly—the amputation of a limb in order to conserve his life, which he loves more. And in this same way, when a disordered will loves some temporal good—say, riches or sensual pleasure—more than the order of reason or the order of divine law or the order of charity with respect to God or something else of this sort, it follows that he wills to suffer a loss in certain spiritual goods in order to enjoy some temporal good.

Now something bad is nothing other than the privation of something good. Accordingly, someone knowingly wills a bad spiritual thing, which is evil absolutely speaking and by which he is deprived of some spiritual good, in order to enjoy a temporal good. Hence, he is said to sin ‘from fixed malice’ or ‘purposefully’ in the sense that he knowingly chooses what is bad.

Reply to objection 1: Ignorance sometimes excludes the knowledge by which someone knows *absolutely speaking* that *this act* that he is doing is bad (*simpliciter scit hoc esse malum quod agitur*), and

in such a case he is said to sin out of *ignorance*.

On the other hand, the ignorance sometimes excludes that knowledge by which a man knows that *this act is here and now bad* (*scit hoc nunc esse malum*), as when he sins from *passion*.

By contrast, sometimes the ignorance excludes the knowledge by which someone knows that *this bad act* is not to be endured for the sake of pursuing *that good*, and yet he knows *absolutely speaking* that *this act* is bad (*scit tamen simpliciter hoc esse malum*). This is the sense in which someone who sins from fixed malice is said to be ignorant.

Reply to objection 2: What is bad cannot be intended by someone as such (*secundum se*), but, as has been explained, it can be intended in order to avoid something bad or in order to pursue some good. And in such a case the individual chooses to pursue a good that is intended *per se* and to do it without suffering the loss of the other good (*eligeret consequi bonum per se intentum absque hoc quod pateretur detrimentum alterius boni*). For instance, a lascivious individual might will to enjoy pleasure and to do it without offending God (*lascivus vellet frui delectatione absque offensa Dei*), but of these two intended things, he wills to incur an offense against God more than he wills to be deprived of the pleasure.

Reply to objection 3: The malice from which someone is said to sin can be understood as *habitual malice* (*malitia habitualis*) insofar as the Philosopher calls a bad habit ‘malice’ (*malitia*) in the same way that he calls a good habit ‘virtue’. Accordingly, someone is said to sin from malice by reason of the fact that he sins because of the inclination of a habit.

It can also be understood as an *act of malice* (*malitia actualis*), regardless of whether (a) it is the very choosing of something bad that is being called ‘malice’, in which case someone is said to sin from malice insofar as he sins by choosing what is bad, or (b) what is being called ‘malice’ is some previous sin from which a subsequent sin arises, as when someone impugns his brother’s kindness out of envy. And in this latter instance it is not the case that the same thing that is a cause of itself; instead, the interior act is a cause of the exterior act. And one sin is a cause of the other, but not *ad infinitum*, since, as is clear from what was said above (q. 75, a. 4), it is possible to go back to some first sin that is not caused by any previous sin.

Article 2

Does everyone who sins from a habit sin from fixed malice?

It seems that not everyone who sins from a habit sins from fixed malice:

Objection 1: A sin of fixed malice seems to be especially grave. But sometimes a man commits some minor sin (*leve peccatum*) from habit, as when he engages in an idle conversation (*cum dicit verbum otiosum*). Therefore, not every sin that stems from a habit is a sin of fixed malice.

Objection 2: As *Ethics 2* says, “The acts that proceed from a habit are similar to the acts by which the habit is generated.” But the acts that precede a habit are not vicious because of fixed malice. Therefore, the sins that stem from a habit are likewise not from fixed malice.

Objection 3: In those acts that someone commits from fixed malice, he takes delight after having committed them—this according to Proverbs 2:14 (“They are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things”). This is because it is pleasurable to any given individual when what he intended is attained and when he acts in accord with a habit that is in some sense connatural to him. But those who sin from habit are sorrowful after the sin has been committed; for as *Ethics 9* says, “Bad men,” i.e., those who have a vicious habit, “are filled with remorse.” Therefore, sins that stem from a habit are not sins of fixed malice.

But contrary to this: A sin of fixed malice is said to be a sin from the choice of what is bad. But each individual is such that what can be chosen by him is what he is inclined to by a proper habit, as

Ethics 6 says of a virtuous habit. Therefore, a sin that stems from a habit is a sin of fixed malice.

I respond: Sinning *while having* a habit is not the same as sinning *from* a habit. For it is not necessary to make use of a habit; instead, this is subject to the will of the one who has the habit. Hence, a habit is by definition “that which someone makes use of when he wills to.” And so just as it can happen that someone who has a vicious habit erupts into an act of virtue, given that reason is not totally corrupted by a bad habit and that something of it remains intact, with the result that the sinner does some things that are good in genus, so too it can likewise happen that someone who has a habit sometimes acts not from the habit but from an aroused passion or even from ignorance. However, whenever he makes use of the vicious habit, it has to be the case that he sins from fixed malice. For what is *per se* lovable to one who has a habit is what is fitting for him according to his own habit; for this has become in a certain way connatural to him, in the sense that custom and habit are converted into his nature. But what is fitting to someone according to a vicious habit is what excludes a spiritual good. From this it follows that the man chooses something spiritually bad in order to acquire a good that is fitting for him according to the habit. And this is to sin from fixed malice. Hence, it is clear that if anyone sins from a habit, then he sins from fixed malice.

Reply to objection 1: Venial sins do not exclude the spiritual good, i.e., God’s grace or charity. Hence, they are called bad in a certain respect and not absolutely speaking. Because of this, a habit with respect to venial sins can be called bad only in a certain respect and not bad absolutely speaking.

Reply to objection 2: The acts that proceed from habits are similar in species to the acts by which the habits are generated, and yet they differ from them in the way what is complete differs from what is incomplete. And this is how a sin that is committed from fixed malice differs from a sin that is committed from a passion.

Reply to objection 3: It is always the case that someone who sins from a habit takes delight, for as long as he is making use of the habit, in the fact that he is acting from the habit. But because (a) he is able not to make use of the habit and because (b) he is able through his reason, which has not been totally corrupted, to think about something else, it can happen that when he is not making use of the habit, he is sorrowful about what he has done through the habit. Yet most of the time such individuals repent of the sin not because the sin displeases them in its own right, but because of some other disadvantage that they incur because of the sin.

Article 3

Does everyone who sins from fixed malice sin from a habit?

It seems that everyone who sins from fixed malice sins from a habit:

Objection 1: In *Ethics* 5 the Philosopher says that it is not just anyone who does unjust deeds in the way that the unjust man does them, viz., by an act of choosing, but only someone who has the habit. But as has been explained (a. 1) to sin from fixed malice is to sin by an act of choosing what is bad. Therefore, it is only someone who has a habit that sins from fixed malice.

Objection 2: In *Peri Archon* 1 Origen says, “It is not all at once that one is ruined or falls away, but instead he has to fall away gradually little by little (*paulatim per partes*).” But the greatest fall seems to be that one should sin from fixed malice. Therefore, it is not immediately at the beginning, but instead through much habituation, from which a habit can be generated, that someone devolves to the point of sinning from fixed malice.

Objection 3: Whenever an individual sins from fixed malice, his will must of itself (*de se*) be inclined toward the bad thing that it chooses. But by the nature of the power [of will] a man is inclined toward what is good rather than toward what is bad. Therefore, if he chooses what is bad, it must be the

case that this comes from something that is added [to the will], viz., a passion or a habit. But as was explained above (q. 77, a. 3), when someone sins from passion, he sins from weakness and not from fixed malice. Therefore, whenever someone sins from fixed malice, he must sin from a habit.

But contrary to this: A bad habit is related to the act of choosing what is bad in the same way that a good habit is related to an act of choosing what is good. But sometimes an individual who does not have the habit of a virtue chooses what is good in keeping with that virtue. Therefore, it can likewise be the case that sometimes an individual who does not have a vicious habit chooses what is bad—which is what it is to sin from fixed malice.

I respond: The will is related in one way to what is good and in another way to what is bad. For by the nature of its power it is inclined toward the good of reason as its proper object; this is why every sin is said to be “contrary to nature” (cf. q. 71, a. 2). Therefore, the fact that the will is inclined toward something bad in its act of choosing stems from elsewhere. Sometimes it happens because of a defect in reason, as when someone sins from ignorance, and sometimes it happens because of an impulse on the part of the sentient appetite, as when someone sins from passion.

However, neither of these is the same as sinning from fixed malice; rather, someone sins from fixed malice only when the will on its own (*ex seipsa*) is moved toward something bad. There are two ways in which this can happen:

In the first way, it happens through a man’s having a corrupt disposition that inclines him toward what is bad, so that because of this disposition something bad becomes, as it were, ‘agreeable’ to him and ‘similar’ to him; and in this way, the will tends toward it, by reason of its agreeableness, as if it were something good. For each thing tends on its own toward what is agreeable to it. Now this sort of corrupt disposition is either (a) a habit that is acquired by habituation and turns into part of one’s nature or else (b) a diseased condition on the part of the body, as in the case of someone who has certain natural inclinations toward given sorts of sins because of the corruption of nature within him.

In the second way, it happens that the will tends *per se* toward something bad because of the removal of some obstacle. For instance, suppose that someone is prevented from sinning not because the sin displeases him in its own right but because of his hope for eternal life or because of his fear of hell; then if his hope is removed by despair or his fear is removed by presumption, the result is that he sins from fixed malice without, as it were, any resistance.

So, then, it is clear that a sin of fixed malice always presupposes some disorderedness in a man and yet this disorderedness is not always a habit. Hence, it does not have to be the case that everyone who sins from fixed malice sins from a habit.

Reply to objection 1: To act in the way in which the unjust man acts is not only to do unjust deeds from fixed malice but also to do them with delight and without serious resistance on the part of reason. This belongs only to someone who has the habit.

Reply to objection 2: One does not immediately fall into sinning from fixed malice; rather, something is presupposed. However, as has been explained, this something is not always a habit.

Reply to objection 3: That in virtue of which the will is inclined toward what is bad is not always a habit or a passion, but is sometimes certain other things, as has been explained.

Reply to argument for the contrary: The line of reasoning that applies to choosing what is good is not parallel to the line of reasoning that applies to choosing what is bad. For what is bad never exists without some goodness of nature, whereas what is good can exist perfectly without any fault.

Article 4

Does one who sins from fixed malice sin more gravely than one who sins from passion?

It seems that one who sins from fixed malice does not sin more gravely than one who sins from passion:

Objection 1: Ignorance excuses a sin either in whole or in part. But there is greater ignorance in someone who sins by fixed malice than there is in someone who sins from passion. For one who sins from fixed malice suffers from ignorance with respect to a *principle*—which, as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics 7*, is the greatest sort of ignorance. For he has bad judgment about the end, which is the principle in matters of action. Therefore, someone who sins from fixed malice is excused to a greater degree than is someone who sins from passion.

Objection 2: The greater the impulse one has with respect to sinning, the lesser the degree to which he sins; this is clear in the case of someone who falls into sin with a greater impulse of passion. But one who sins from fixed malice is impelled by a habit, the impulse of which is greater than that of a passion. Therefore, one who sins from a habit sins to a lesser degree than does one who sins from passion.

Objection 3: To sin from fixed malice is to sin from an act of choosing what is bad. But someone who sins from passion likewise chooses what is bad. Therefore, the latter sins to no less a degree than the one who sins from fixed malice.

But contrary to this: A sin that is committed purposefully (*ex industria*) merits by that very fact a graver punishment—this according to Job 34:26-27 (“He has struck them as being wicked, in open sight, who, as it were, have revolted from Him on purpose”). But the punishment is increased only because of the gravity of the sin. Therefore, a sin is aggravated by being purposeful, i.e., by being a sin of fixed malice.

I respond: A sin of fixed malice is more grave than a sin of passion, and this for three reasons:

First, since a sin consists mainly in an act of willing, a sin is more grave, all other things being equal, to the extent that the sinful movement belongs to the will itself to a greater degree (*quanto motus peccati est magis proprius voluntati*). But when one sins from fixed malice, the sinful movement belongs more to the will itself, which is moved in its own right toward what is bad, than when one sins from passion, i.e., from an extrinsic impulse toward sinning. Hence, a sin is aggravated by the very fact that it is a sin of malice; and the stronger the malice is, the more grave the sin. By contrast, a sin is diminished by the fact that it is a sin of passion; and the stronger the passion is, the more the sin is diminished.

Second, a passion that inclines the will toward sinning passes quickly, and so the man quickly returns to a good intention, repenting of his sin. But the habit by which a man sins from malice is a permanent quality, and so someone who sins from malice remains in sin for a longer time (*peccat diuturnius*). This is why, in *Ethics 7*, the Philosopher compares the intemperate man who sins from malice to a sick man who suffers from a chronic disease (*continue laborat*), whereas he compares the incontinent man who sins from passion to the man who is sick intermittently (*laborat interpolate*).

Third, someone who sins from fixed malice is badly disposed with respect to the end itself, which is the principle in matters of action. And so his defect is more dangerous than that of the one who sins from passion, whose intention tends toward a good end, even though this intention is interrupted for a while (*ad horam*) because of the passion. But a defect with respect to the principle is the worst sort of defect.

Hence, it is clear that a sin of malice is more grave than a sin of passion is.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 76, aa. 3-4) ignorance in choosing (*ignorantia electionis*), which is what the objection is concerned with, neither excuses a sin nor diminishes it. Hence, neither does a greater ignorance of this sort make for a lesser sin.

Reply to objection 2: The impulse that comes from a passion is, as it were, from the ‘outside’ as

far as the will is concerned, whereas the will is inclined from the 'inside', as it were, by a habit. Hence, the arguments are not parallel.

Reply to objection 3: It is one thing for someone *to sin while he is choosing* (*peccare eligentem*) and another thing *to sin by choice* (*peccare ex electione*). Someone who sins from a passion sins, to be sure, while he is choosing, but he does not sin by choice. For in his case the act of choosing is not the first source of the sin. Instead, he is induced by a passion to choose what he would not choose if he were without the passion. By contrast, one who sins by fixed malice chooses on his own (*secundum se*) what is bad, in the way explained above (a. 1). And in his case the act of choosing is the source of the sin, and because of this he is said to sin by choice.