

QUESTION 84

One Sin as a Cause of Another Sin

The next thing we have to consider about the cause of sin is that one sin is a cause of another.

On this topic there are four questions: (1) Is avid desire or covetousness (*cupiditas*) the root of all sins? (2) Is pride (*superbia*) the beginning of every sin? (3) Besides pride and avarice (*praeter superbiam et avaritiam*), should any special sins be called capital vices? (4) How many capital vices are there, and what are they?

Article 1

Is avid desire or covetousness the root of all sins?

It seems that avid desire or covetousness (*cupiditas*) is not the root of all sins:

Objection 1: Avid desire, which is an immoderate desire for riches, is opposed to the virtue of generosity (*opponitur virtuti liberalitatis*). But generosity is not the root of all virtues. Therefore, avid desire is not the root of all sins.

Objection 2: The desire (*appetitus*) for the means to an end proceeds from a desire for the end. But as *Ethics* 1 points out, riches, the desire for which is avid desire, are desired only as useful for some end. Therefore, avid desire is not the root of every sin, but instead proceeds from some other prior root.

Objection 3: It is often the case that avarice, which is a name for avid desire, arises from other sins—as, for instance, when someone desires money for the sake of ambition or in order to satisfy his gluttony. Therefore, it is not the root of all sins.

But contrary to this: In 1 Timothy 6:10 the Apostle says, “Avid desire [for money] is the root of all evils.”

I respond: According to some, ‘avid desire’ (*cupiditas*) is said in many ways:

In one sense, it is a *disordered desire for riches*. And in this sense it is a special sin.

In another sense, ‘avid desire’ signifies a *disordered desire for any temporal good whatsoever*. And, as has been explained (q. 72, a. 2), in this sense it is a genus of every sin, since in every sin there is a disordered turning-toward a changeable good.

In a third sense, it is taken to signify a certain *inclination* on the part of a corrupted nature toward desiring corruptible goods in a disordered way. And they claim that in this sense avid desire is the root of all sins, by analogy with the root of a tree, because the root *draws nourishment from the earth*. For this is the way in which every sin proceeds from the love of temporal goods.

Now even though, to be sure, these points are true, they do not seem to conform to the Apostle’s intention when he said that avid desire is the root of all sins. For in that passage he is clearly speaking in opposition to those who, since they desire to become rich, fall into the devil’s temptations and snares, because “avid desire is the root of all evils.” Hence, it is clear that he is speaking of avid desire insofar as it is a disordered desire for riches.

Accordingly, one should respond that it is as a *special* sin that avid desire is called the root of all evils, and this by analogy with the root of a tree, because the root *provides nourishment for the whole tree*. For we see that through riches a man acquires the ability to commit every sin and to fulfill his desire for every sin, since money can help a man to have every sort of temporal good—this according to Ecclesiastes 10:19 (“All things obey money”). Accordingly, it is clear that the avid desire for riches is the root of all sins.

Reply to objection 1: Virtue and sin do not arise from the same thing. For sin arises from the desire for changeable goods, and so the desire for that particular good which helps one to acquire all temporal goods is called the root of sin. By contrast, virtue arises from a desire for an unchangeable good, and so charity, i.e., the love of God, is posited as the root of virtue—this according to Ephesians

3:17 (“... rooted and grounded in charity”).

Reply to objection 2: The desire for money is called the root of sins not because the riches are sought for their own sake as an ultimate end, but because they are much sought after as useful with respect to every temporal end. And since a universal good is more desirable than any particular good, riches move the appetite more than singular goods, which can be had along with many other goods by means of money.

Reply to objection 3: Just as, in the case of natural things, one looks not for what always occurs but instead for what occurs in most cases, since the nature of corruptible things can be impeded so that they do not always operate in the same way, so, too, in the case of moral matters, one considers what occurs in most cases and not what occurs in all cases, since the will does not operate by necessity. Therefore, avarice is not called the root of every evil in a sense that rules out some other evil’s sometimes being the root of avarice; rather, avarice is called the root of every evil because it more frequently happens that other evils arise from it in the way explained above.

Article 2

Is pride the beginning of every sin?

It seems that pride (*superbia*) is not the beginning of every sin (*initium omnis peccati*):

Objection 1: The root is a certain principle or source (*principium*) of a tree, and so the root of a sin seems to be the same thing as the beginning of a sin. But as has been explained (a. 1), avid desire (*cupiditas*) is the root of every sin. Therefore, avid desire—and not pride—is likewise the beginning of every sin.

Objection 2: Ecclesiasticus 10:14 says, “The beginning of the pride of man is to apostatize from God.” But apostatizing from God is a sin. Therefore, there is a sin that is the beginning of pride and pride itself is not the beginning of every sin.

Objection 3: It is what effects every sin that seems to be the beginning of every sin. But this is disordered self-love (*inordinatus amor sui*), which “builds up the city of Babylon,” as Augustine puts it in *De Civitate Dei* 14. Therefore, self-love—and not pride—is the beginning of every sin.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 10:15 says, “The beginning of every sin is pride.”

I respond: Some claim that ‘pride’ is said in three ways:

In one sense, ‘pride’ signifies a *disordered desire for one’s own excellence* (*inordinatum appetitum propriae excellentiae*). And in this sense it is a special sin.

In a second sense, it implies a certain *actual contempt for God*, with respect to the effect of not being subject to His command. And in this sense, they claim, pride is a general sin.

In the third sense, it implies a certain *inclination* toward contempt of this sort, stemming from the corruption of the nature. And in this sense, they claim, pride is the beginning of every sin. Moreover, pride differs from avid desire (*cupiditas*). For avid desire has to do with sin as a turning-toward some changeable good, and is that by which a sin is in some sense nourished and fostered; and it is because of this that avid desire is called the root. Pride, on the other hand, has to do with sin as a turning-away from God, whose command man refuses to submit to; and so it is called the beginning, because the character of evil begins with a turning-away from God.

Now even though, to be sure, these points are true, they nonetheless do not conform to the intention of the wise man who said, “The beginning of every sin is pride” (Ecclesiasticus 10:15). For he is clearly talking about pride as the disordered desire for one’s own excellence, as is obvious from the fact that he adds, “God has overturned the thrones of the proud leaders.” And he talks about this matter in almost the whole of relevant chapter.

Accordingly, one should respond that it is pride even as a special sin that is the beginning of every sin. For notice that, in the case of voluntary acts—which is what sins are—one finds two orderings: an order of *intention* and an order of *execution*.

In the first order, as has been explained many times above (cf. q. 18, a. 7), the end has the character of a principle or beginning (*habet rationem principii finis*). But in the acquisition of all temporal goods, the end is that the man should have, through those goods, a certain sort of perfection and excellence. And so on this score, pride, which is a desire for excellence, is posited as the beginning of every sin.

On the other hand, as far as execution is concerned, what is first is that which offers an opportunity for fulfilling all the desires involved in the sin, and this has the character of a root, viz., riches. And on this score, as has been explained (a. 2), avarice (*avaritia*) is the root of all evils.

Reply to objection 1: This makes clear the reply to the first objection.

Reply to objection 2: To apostatize from God is said to be the beginning of pride as far as the turning-away is concerned, because from the fact that a man wills not to submit to God, it follows that in temporal matters he wills his own excellence in a disordered way. And so ‘apostatize from God’ is being taken here not in the sense of a special sin, but rather as a certain general condition of every sin, viz., the turning-away from an unchangeable good.

An alternative reply is that to apostatize from God is the beginning of pride in the sense that it is the first species of pride. For it belongs to pride not to want to be subject to any superior and especially not to God. And from this it follows, with respect to the other species of pride, that the man is exalted in an unfitting way beyond himself.

Reply to objection 3: A man loves himself by desiring his own excellence. For to love oneself is the same as willing the good for oneself. Hence, whether one posits pride or self-love as the beginning of every sin, it amounts to the same thing.

Article 3

Besides pride and avarice, are there any other sins that might be called capital sins?

It seems that besides pride and avarice (*praeter superbiam et avaritiam*), there are no other sins that might be called capital sins (*peccata capitalia*):

Objection 1: As *De Anima 2* says, the head (*caput*) seems to be related to animals in the way that the root is related to plants, since roots are similar to a mouth. Therefore, if avid desire is called the root of all evils, then it seems that it alone, and no other sin, should be called a capital vice.

Objection 2: The head has a certain ordering to the other members of the body, insofar as sensation and movement (*sensus et motus*) are in some sense diffused from the head. But something is called a sin because of the privation of order. Therefore, a sin does not have the character of a head. And so no capital sins should be posited.

Objection 3: Capital crimes are those that are punished with capital punishment (*quae capite plectuntur*). But there are sins in every genus that are punished with this sort of punishment. Therefore, the capital vices are not determinate in species.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia 31* Gregory lists certain special vices that he claims to be capital vices.

I respond: The term ‘capital’ (*capitale*) is taken from ‘head’ (*caput*). But the head is properly speaking that member of an animal which is a principle and which directs the whole animal. Hence, metaphorically speaking, every principle is called a ‘head’, and men who direct and govern others are likewise called the heads of the others.

Therefore, a capital vice is in one sense taken from the head properly speaking, and in this sense a

capital sin is a sin that is punished by capital punishment (*peccatum quod capitis poena punitur*).

However, this is not the sense in which we now mean to be speaking about capital sins. Instead, we mean to be speaking in accord with the other way in which a capital sin is taken from ‘head’, viz., insofar as ‘head’ metaphorically signifies a principle or something that directs others. And in this sense a vice is called capital because other vices originate from it—and especially with respect to the origin of the final cause, which, as was explained (q. 72, a. 6) above, is the formal origin.

And so a capital vice is not only the principle of other vices but is also such that it directs and in some sense guides the others; for a craft or habit, to which the end belongs, always initiates and commands the means to the end. This is why, in *Moralia* 31, Gregory compares the capital vices to the leaders of an army.

Reply to objection 1: ‘Capital’ is taken denominatively from ‘head’, and this is through a certain derivation from or participation in ‘head’, in the sense of having some property of a head and not in the sense of a head absolutely speaking. And so the vices that are called ‘capital’ are not just those which have the character of a *first* origin—such as avarice, which is called ‘the root’, and pride, which is called ‘the beginning’—but also those which have the character of a *nearby* origin with respect to many sins (*quae habent rationem originis propinquae respect plurimum peccatorum*).

Reply to objection 2: A sin lacks order as far as its being a turning-away is concerned, since it is on this score that it has the character of evil—and evil, according to Augustine in *De Natura Boni*, is “the privation of mode, species, and order.” However, as far as the turning-toward is concerned, sin has to do with some good. And so it is on this score that sin can have an order.

Reply to objection 3: This objection has to do with ‘capital sin’ insofar as it expresses the punishment deserved. And we are not talking about it in this sense here.

Article 4

Should one claim that there are seven capital vices, viz., vainglory, envy, anger, sadness, avarice, gluttony, and lust?

It seems that one should not claim that there are seven capital vices, viz., vainglory (*inanis gloria*), envy (*invidia*), anger (*ira*), sadness (*tristitia*), avarice (*avaritia*), gluttony (*gula*), and lust (*luxuria*):

Objection 1: Sins are opposed to virtues. But as has been explained (q. 61, a. 2), there are four principal virtues. Therefore, there are likewise just four principal or capital vices.

Objection 2: As was explained above (q. 77), the passions of the soul are causes of sin. Among the sins listed above there is no mention of two of these passions, viz., hope and fear. By contrast, there are some vices listed that pleasure and sadness belong to. For pleasure belongs to gluttony and lust, whereas sadness (*tristitia*) belongs to sloth (*acedia*) and envy. Therefore, the principal sins are not appropriately enumerated.

Objection 3: Anger is not a principal passion. Therefore, it should not be posited among the principal vices.

Objection 4: As was explained above (aa. 1 and 2), just as avid desire (*cupiditas*), i.e., avarice, is the root of sin, so pride (*superbia*) is the beginning of sin. But avarice is posited as one of the seven capital vices. Therefore, pride should have been listed among the capital vices.

Objection 5: There are sins committed which cannot be caused by any of these, as when someone errs out of ignorance, or as when someone commits a sin with a good intention—for instance, when someone steals in order to give alms. Therefore, this list of capital sins is insufficient.

But contrary to this is the authority of Gregory, who enumerates them in this way in *Moralia* 31.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 3), the capital vices are those from which others arise,

especially with respect to the nature of the final cause. Now an origin of this sort can be thought of in two ways:

(a) *in accord with the condition of the sinner*, who is disposed in such a way that he is especially fixated on a single end, from which he usually proceeds into other sins. However, this mode of origin cannot fall under systematic study (*sub arte cadere non potest*), since there are infinitely many dispositions belonging to men; or

(b) *in accord with the natural relation of the ends themselves to one another*, and, in this regard, one vice arises from another in many cases. Hence, this mode of origin can fall under systematic study. Therefore, in accord with this, the vices that are called capital vices are those whose ends involve certain primary reasons for moving the appetite (*quorum fines habent quasdam primarias rationes movendi appetitum*), and the capital vices are distinguished in a way that corresponds to the distinctions among these reasons.

Now there are two ways in which something moves the appetite: *directly and per se*, and in this way what is good moves the appetite to pursue it, whereas what is bad, for the same reason, moves the appetite to flee from it; and *indirectly and, as it were, because of something else (per aliud)*, in the way that someone pursues something bad because of something good connected with it, or in the way that someone flees from something good because of something bad connected with it.

Now there are three types of good for a man:

The first is a *good of the soul*, which has the character of desirability solely because of someone's apprehension, viz., the excellence of praise or honor, and it is *vainglory* that pursues this good in a disordered way.

The second is a *good of the body*, and this pertains either to the *conservation of the individual*, as with food and drink, and *gluttony* pursues this good in a disordered way, or to the *conservation of the species*, as with sexual intercourse (*sicut coitus*), and *lust* is ordered toward this.

The third type of good is an *exterior good*, viz., riches, and *avarice* is ordered toward this.

And these same four vices flee from the contrary evils.

(Alternatively, a good moves the appetite mainly by the fact that it participates in some way in a property of happiness, which all things naturally desire. Now in the first place, part of the nature of happiness is excellence or renown, and this is what *pride (superbia)* or *vainglory* seeks. Second, part of the nature of happiness is sufficiency, and this is what *avarice* seeks in the riches that promise sufficiency. Third, when happiness is established, there is pleasure, without which happiness cannot exist, and this is what *gluttony* and *lust* seek.)

Now there are two ways in which it happens that someone flees from what is good because of something bad connected with it. For either this occurs with respect to *one's own good*, and this is *sloth (acedia)*, which is saddened by a spiritual good because of the bodily labor connected with it; or it occurs with respect to *someone else's good*, and if it occurs without one's rising up against the other (*sine insurrectione*), then it belongs to *envy*, which is saddened by the good of another insofar as that good poses an obstacle to one's own excellence, whereas if it occurs with some sort of rising up against the other for the purpose of vindication, then it belongs to *anger*.

And the pursuit of the contrary evils pertains to these same vices.

Reply to objection 1: The virtues and the vices do not have the same type of origin. For the virtues are caused by an ordering of desire to reason or even an ordering of desire to the unchangeable good, which is God, whereas the vices arise from a desire for a changeable good. Hence, it does not have to be the case that the principal vices are opposed to the principal virtues.

Reply to objection 2: Fear and hope are passions of the irascible power. But all the passions of the irascible power arise from the passions of the concupiscible power, all of which are ordered in some way toward pleasure and sadness. And so pleasure and sadness are numbered with the capital sins, since, as was established above (q. 25, a. 4), they are the most important passions.

Reply to objection 3: Even though anger is not a principal passion, still, because it involves a special type of appetitive movement, insofar as one attacks the other's good as something that it is upright to do for just vindication, it is distinguished from the other capital vices.

Reply to objection 4: As was explained above (a. 2), pride (*superbia*) is the beginning of every sin because of the nature of its end. And importance of the capital vices is taken from this same nature. And so pride, as a universal vice, is not listed, but is rather posited as "the queen of all vices," as Gregory puts it. Avarice, by contrast, is said to be the root of all sins for another reason, as was explained above (aa. 1 and 2).

Reply to objection 5: The vices in question are called capital vices because other vices very often arise from them. Hence, nothing prevents some sins from sometimes arising from other causes.

Still, one can reply that all the sins that proceed from ignorance can be traced back to sloth, since sloth involves the negligence by which someone is unwilling to acquire spiritual goods because of the labor. For as has been explained (q. 76, a. 2), the ignorance that can be a cause of sin stems from negligence.

Moreover, the fact that someone commits a sin with a good intention seems to pertain to ignorance, viz., insofar as he is ignorant that evil is not to be done in order that good might come from it.