

QUESTION 106

Thankfulness, i.e., Gratitude

Next we have to consider thankfulness, i.e., gratitude (*gratia sive gratitudo*). And on thankfulness there are six questions: (1) Is thankfulness a specific virtue distinct from other virtues? (2) Who is obligated to make greater acts of thanksgiving to God, the innocent or the repentant? (3) Is a man always obligated to render thanks for human favors? (4) Should the repayment of kindnesses be deferred? (5) Should thankfulness be proportioned to the favor received or to the affections of the giver? (6) Should one pay back something greater [than he has received]?

Article 1

Is thankfulness a specific virtue distinct from other virtues?

It seems that thankfulness (*gratia*) is not a specific virtue distinct from other virtues:

Objection 1: We have received our greatest benefits from God and from our parents. But the honor that we have given back to God belongs to the virtue of religion, whereas the honor that we have given back to our parents belongs to the virtue of piety. Therefore, thankfulness or gratitude is not a virtue distinct from the others.

Objection 2: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 5, proportional repayment belongs to commutative justice. But as is explained in the same place, thanksgiving is rendered in order to serve as a repayment. Therefore, the rendering of thanks, which belongs to gratitude, is an act of justice. Therefore, gratitude is not a specific virtue distinct from the others.

Objection 3: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 7 and 8, recompense is required in order to preserve friendship. But friendship involves all the virtues because of which a man is loved. Therefore, thankfulness or gratitude, to which it belongs to make recompense for favors, is not a specific virtue.

But contrary to this: Tully posits thankfulness as a specific part of justice.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 60, a. 3), the notion of repaying a debt (*debiti reddendi ratio*) must be diversified (a) in a way that corresponds to the diverse causes because of which something is owed, but (b) always in such a way that what is lesser is contained within what is greater.

Now a cause of something's being owed is found first and principally in God, because He is the first principle of all our goods. Second, it is found in one's father, who is the proximate principle of our generation and upbringing. Third, it is found in a person who occupies an office of leadership from which common benefits proceed (*in persona quae dignitate praecellit ex qua communia beneficia procedunt*). Fourth, it is found in a benefactor from whom we receive certain particular and private benefits for which we are obligated in particular to him.

Therefore, since it is not the case that we owe to any of the benefactors from whom we have received some particular benefit what we owe to God or to our father or to a person who occupies an office of leadership, it follows that after (a) *religion* (*religio*), by which we give due veneration to God, and (b) *piety* (*pietas*), by which we venerate our parents, and (c) respectfulness (*observantia*), by which we venerate persons who occupy offices of leadership, there comes (d) *thankfulness* or *gratitude* (*gratia sive gratitudo*), which returns thanks to our benefactors. And this last virtue is distinguished from the virtues that precede it in the way that each of the later virtues is distinguished from the one that precedes it, viz., as falling short of it.

Reply to objection 1: Just as *religion* is a sort of super-excellent *piety*, so, too, it is a sort of excellent *thankfulness* or *gratitude*. Hence, the act of giving thanks to God was posited above (q. 83, a. 17) as one of the things that belongs to [the virtue of] *religion*.

Reply to objection 2: Proportional repayment (*restitutio proportionalis*) belongs to commutative justice when it involves a *legal* debt, i.e., if it is set by an agreement that such-and-such will be paid for such-and-such. But what belongs to thankfulness or gratitude is a repayment which arises just from a

‘debt of *uprightness*’ (*ex solo debito honestatis*) and which one makes spontaneously. Hence, as Seneca points out in *De Beneficiis*, gratitude is less grateful if it is coerced.

Reply to objection 3: Since genuine friendship is founded upon virtue, anything in one’s friend that is contrary to virtue impedes friendship, and anything that is virtuous in him promotes friendship. Accordingly, friendship is preserved by recompense, even though the recompense of favors belongs specifically to the virtue of gratitude.

Article 2

Is an innocent individual more obligated to give thanks to God than a penitent?

It seems that an innocent individual is more obligated to give thanks to God than a penitent:

Objection 1: To the extent that one receives a greater gift from God, he is more obligated to make acts of thanksgiving. But the gift of innocence is greater than the gift of restored justice. Therefore, it seems that an innocent individual is more obligated to make acts of thanksgiving than the penitent.

Objection 2: Just as an act of thanksgiving is owed to one’s benefactor, so too is an act of love (*dilectio*). But in *Confessiones* 2 Augustine says, “What man, aware of his own weakness, dares to attribute his chastity and innocence to his own powers, so that he loves You less—as if Your mercy, which forgives the sins of those who are converted to You, were less necessary for him?” And later he adds, “And so let him love You just as much—indeed, let him love You more—because the One through Whom he sees me to have been freed from the great lethargy of my sins is the One through Whom he sees himself not to have become entangled in the great lethargy of his own sins.” Therefore, it is the innocent individual, rather than the penitent, who is more obligated to render thanks.

Objection 3: To the extent that a benefit is more continuous, a greater act of thanksgiving is appropriate for it. But in an innocent individual the benefit of divine grace is more continuous than it is in the penitent. For in the same place Augustine says, “To Your grace and to Your mercy I attribute the fact that You have melted away my sins like ice. And to Your grace I also attribute the fact that there are evils of every sort that I have not done. For what was I not capable of doing? All of them I confess to have been forgiven me, both the evils that I have committed by my own will and the evils that I have not committed because You were my guide.” Therefore, an innocent individual is more obligated to make an act of thanksgiving than a penitent.

But contrary to this: Luke 7:42:43 says, “The one to whom more has been forgiven loves more.” Therefore, for the same reason, that individual is more obligated to make acts of thanksgiving.

I respond: The act of thanksgiving in the recipient corresponds to the favor bestowed by the giver (*actio gratiarum in accipiente respicit gratiam dantis*). Hence, when there is a greater favor on the part of the giver, a greater act of thanksgiving is required on the part of the recipient.

Now a favor (*gratia*) is something that is given gratuitously or undeservedly (*gratis datur*). Hence, there are two ways in which a favor on the part of the giver can be greater:

In one way, *because of the quantity of what is given*. And on this score, an innocent individual is obligated to make greater acts of thanksgiving, since, all other things being equal, a greater and more continuous gift, absolutely speaking, is given to him by God.

The second way in which a favor can be said to be greater is that *it is given more gratuitously or more undeservedly (magis datur gratis)*. And on this score, a penitent is more obligated to make acts of thanksgiving than an innocent individual is, since what is given to him by God is given more gratuitously or undeservedly, since even though he deserves punishment, grace is given to him.

And so even though the gift that is given to the innocent individual is greater *absolutely speaking*, nonetheless, the gift that is given to the penitent is greater *in relation to himself*, in the same sense in

which a small gift given to a poor man is greater than a large gift given to a rich man. And as the Philosopher says about the voluntary and the involuntary in *Ethics* 3, since acts have to do with singular things, in matters pertaining to action (*in his quae agenda*) what is such-and-such *here* or *now* is taken into account more than what is such-and-such *absolutely speaking*.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the objections are clear from what has been said.

Article 3

Is a man obligated to make acts of thanksgiving to every man who does something good for him?

It seems that a man is not obligated to make acts of thanksgiving to every man who does something good for him:

Objection 1: Someone can do something good for himself, just as he can likewise harm himself—this according to Ecclesiasticus 14:5 (“He that is bad to himself, to whom else will he be good?”) But a man cannot give thanks to himself, since the act of giving thanks seems to pass from one individual to another. Therefore, it is not the case that an act of thanksgiving is due to every benefactor.

Objection 2: An act of thanksgiving is a sort of repayment for a favor. But some favors are done not with kindness (*cum gratia*) but with rudeness and with delay or reluctance (*cum contumelia et tarditate vel tristia*). Therefore, thanks are not always to be rendered to a benefactor.

Objection 3: No one is owed an act of thanksgiving for something that works to his own advantage. But sometimes individuals confer benefits for their own advantage. Therefore, they are not owed an act of thanksgiving.

Objection 4: A servant is not owed an act of thanksgiving, since the very thing that he is belongs to his master. But it sometimes happens that a servant is generous with his master. Therefore, it is not the case that an act of thanksgiving is owed to every benefactor.

Objection 5: No one is obligated to do anything that he cannot do uprightly and usefully. But it sometimes happens that one who has done a favor is in a state of great good-fortune (*in statu magnae felicitatis*) and that it would be useless to pay him back anything for the favor received. Again, it sometimes happens that a benefactor changes from being virtuous to being vicious, and so it seems that he cannot be paid back uprightly. Again, sometimes the one who receives a favor is poor and cannot pay it back in any way at all. Therefore, it seems that it is not always the case that a man is obligated to pay back favors.

Objection 6: No one ought to do for another anything that is harmful to him and not expedient for him. But it sometimes happens that paying back a favor is harmful or disadvantageous to the one who is being paid back. Therefore, it is not always the case that a favor should be paid back with an act of thanksgiving.

But contrary to this: 1 Thessalonians 5:18 says, “In all things give thanks.”

I respond: Every effect is naturally turned toward its cause. Hence, in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 1, Dionysius claims that God turns all things toward Himself as the cause of all things. For it is always necessary for an effect to be ordered toward the agent’s end.

Now it is clear that a benefactor, insofar as he is a benefactor, is a cause of the one who is benefitted. And so the natural order requires that the one who receives a benefit be turned toward his benefactor through the recompense of thanksgiving, in a way that corresponds to the mode of each of them. And just as we explained above concerning a father (q. 101, a. 2), so, too, a benefactor is owed honor and reverence insofar as he is a benefactor, since he has the character of a principle, and he is

owed support and sustenance incidentally (*per accidens*) if he is in need.

Reply to objection 1: As Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* 5, “Just as a man is not generous if he gives something to himself, or gracious if he forgives himself, or compassionate if he is moved by his own misfortunes, but only if he does these things for others, so too, no man confers a favor on himself, but is instead complying with his own nature, which moves him to resist what is harmful to himself and to seek what is advantageous for himself.” Hence, in matters having to do with oneself there is no room for gratitude or ingratitude, since a man cannot deny himself anything except by holding on to it.

Still, as the Philosopher points out about justice in *Ethics* 5, those things that are said *properly* with respect to others are taken *metaphorically* with respect to oneself, insofar as the diverse parts of a man are thought of as diverse persons.

Reply to objection 2: A healthy mind (*animus bonus*) pays more attention to what is good than to what is bad. And so if someone does a favor but not in the way in which he ought to do it, it is not the case that the recipient ought to refrain from any act of thanksgiving whatsoever. Instead, he owes a lesser act than if the favor had been done in the appropriate way, since the favor was likewise a lesser one. For as Seneca puts it in *De Beneficiis* 2, “Promptness does more, delay withholds more.”

Reply to objection 3: As Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* 4, “It matters a lot whether someone does a favor for his own sake, or for both his sake and ours. One who looks wholly to himself and profits us because otherwise he cannot profit himself is such, it seems, that I should think of him like someone who is seeking fodder for his own cow ... If he has admitted me into his company, if he was thinking of both of us, then I am being ungrateful and unjust unless I am glad that what has profited me has profited him as well. It is the height of malevolence not to call something a favor unless it puts the giver at a disadvantage.”

Reply to objection 4: As Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* 3, “As long as a servant does what is normally demanded of a servant, it is part of his service, but when he does more than it is necessary from a servant, then it is a favor. For when there is a transition to the affection of a friend, it begins to be called a favor. And so even servants are to be given thanks when they do something beyond what they have to do.”

Reply to objection 5: Even a poor man is not ungrateful if he does what he can. For just as a favor consists more in its affections than in its effect, so, too, the repayment consists more in the affections. Hence, in *De Beneficiis* 2 Seneca says, “One who accepts a favor with gratitude is already making his first payment for it. Let us indicate by our effusive affections how grateful we are for the favors that have come to us, and let us bear witness to them not only within the hearing of our benefactor, but everywhere.” From this it is clear that no matter how well off [our benefactor is], repayment for a favor can still be made by showing reverence and honor. Hence, in *Ethics* 7 the Philosopher says, “One who has everything should be repaid with honor, whereas the poor man should be repaid with money.” And in *De Beneficiis* 4 Seneca says, “There are many ways in which we can repay whatever we owe even to those who are well off: loyal advice, frequent fellowship, pleasant conversation without flattery.” And so it is not necessary for a man to wish for neediness or unhappiness on the part of one who has done him a favor in order that the favor might be repaid. For as Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* 6, “If you wished for this in one from whom you receive no favors, it would be inhuman. How much more inhuman to wish it for one to whom you owe a favor.”

On the other hand, if the one who has done you a favor were to change for the worse, repayment should still be made to him in accord with his status, so that he might be led back to virtue if this is possible. On the other hand, if he is incurable because of his malice, then the effect is other than it was before, and so no repayment of the favor is owed to him in the way that it was before. And yet, to the extent that this is possible while preserving one’s own uprightness, the memory of the favor bestowed should be held on to. This is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 9.

Reply to objection 6: As has been explained, paying back a favor depends principally on the

affections. And so the recompense should be made in a way in which it is more useful. If, however, through the benefactor's carelessness the recompense later proves detrimental to him, this is not imputed to the one who repays him. Hence, in *De Beneficiis* 7 Seneca says, "I should repay, and I should not hold back and be on my guard when I repay."

Article 4

Should a man repay a favor immediately?

It seems that a man should repay a favor immediately:

Objection 1: We are obligated to restore immediately what we owe without a fixed term. But there is no prescribed term for the repaying of favors—which, as has been explained (a. 3), falls under the notion of something owed. Therefore, a man is obligated to repay a favor immediately.

Objection 2: The greater the fervor of heart (*fervor animi*) with which something good is done, the more praiseworthy this good thing seems to be. But it seems to proceed from the fervor of a man's heart that he does not resort to delaying in doing what he ought to do. Therefore, it seems more praiseworthy that a man should repay a favor immediately.

Objection 3: In *De Beneficiis* 2 Seneca says, "It is proper to a benefactor to act freely and quickly." But the repayment ought to be like the favor. Therefore, one ought to make the repayment immediately.

But contrary to this: In *De Beneficiis* 4 Seneca says, "He who rushes to repay [a favor] has the attitude of a debtor and not of a grateful man."

I respond: Just as there are two things to take into account in the doing of a favor, viz., the *affection* and the *gift*, so, too, these same two things are likewise into account in the repayment of a favor.

As regards the *affection*, the repayment should be made immediately. Hence, in *De Beneficiis* 2 Seneca says, "Do you wish to repay a favor? Then accept it graciously (*begnine accipe*)."

As regards the *gift*, one should look for a time at which the repayment is opportune for one's benefactor. By contrast, if one wanted to repay a gift for a gift immediately, when the time was not appropriate, then the repayment would not, it seems, be virtuous. For as Seneca says in *De Beneficiis* 4, "One who wants to repay too quickly is unwilling to be in someone's debt, and one who is unwilling to be in someone's debt is ungrateful."

Reply to objection 1: A *legal* debt should be paid immediately; otherwise, the balance of justice would not be maintained if one individual held on to something belonging to another without the latter's consent. By contrast, a *moral* debt depends on the uprightness of the debtor. And so it should be rendered at an appropriate time according to what the rectitude of virtue demands.

Reply to objection 2: Fervor of heart is not virtuous unless it is ordered by reason. And so if someone preempts the appropriate time because of the fervor of his heart, then this should not be praised.

Reply to objection 3: Favors should likewise be bestowed at an opportune time. And one should not delay any further when an opportune time arrives. And the same rule should be observed in repaying the favor.

Article 5

Should the repayment of favors look to the affection of one's benefactor or to the effect [of that affection]?

It seems that the repayment of favors should look not to the affection of one's benefactor but to the effect [of that affection]:

Objection 1: Repayment is owed for favors (*beneficia*). But a favor consists in the effect, as the name *good deed* (*beneficium*) itself suggests. Therefore, the repayment should look to the effect.

Objection 2: The gratitude with which one repays favors is a part of justice. But justice has to do with a balance between what is given and what is received (*respicit aequalitatem dati et accepti*). Therefore, in the repayment that belongs to thankfulness the effect should be looked to more than the benefactor's affection.

Objection 3: No one can look to what he is ignorant of. But God alone has cognition of someone's interior affections. Therefore, the repayment that belongs to thanksgiving cannot be made in a way that corresponds to the benefactor's affections (*non potest fieri gratiae recompensatio secundum affectum*).

But contrary to this: In *De Beneficiis* 1 Seneca says, "Sometimes it is the one who has given us something small but in a magnificent way who obligates us more, the one who has bestowed on us something little but cheerfully."

I respond: There are three virtues that can be involved in the repayment of a favor, viz., *justice* (*iustitia*), *gratitude* (*gratia*), and *friendship* (*amicitia*).

Justice is involved when the repayment has the character of [fulfilling] a *legal* debt, as in the case of a loan and other things of this sort. And in such cases the repayment has to look to the quantity of what has been given.

Friendship is involved in the repayment of a favor and, similarly, so is the virtue of *gratitude*, insofar as the debt has the character of a *moral* debt, but the two virtues are involved in different ways. For in the repayment that belongs to friendship there has to be a relation to the cause of the friendship. Hence, in a friendship of utility (*in amicitia utilis*) the repayment has to be made in accord with the usefulness that one has acquired from the favor. On the other hand, in a friendship of virtue (*in amicitia honesti*) there has to be a relation to choice, i.e., to the affection of the giver, since, as *Ethics* 8 points out, it is this that is principally required for virtue. Similarly, since gratitude looks to the favor as having been bestowed gratuitously, which pertains to affection, it follows that the repayment that belongs to gratitude looks more to the affection of the giver than to the effect.

Reply to objection 1: Every moral act depends on an act of will. Hence, a favor, insofar as it is praiseworthy and is owed a repayment in gratitude, consists *materially* in the effect but *formally* and *principally* in the act of will. Hence, in *De Beneficiis* 1 Seneca says, "A favor consists not in what is done or given, but rather in the very spirit (*animus*) of its giver or doer."

Reply to objection 2: Gratitude is a part of justice not in the way in which a species is part of a genus, but, as was explained above (q. 80), by a certain sort of tracing back to the genus of justice. Hence, it is unnecessary for the same sort of a debt to be found in the two virtues.

Reply to objection 3: To be sure, God alone sees a man's affections *in their own right* (*per se*), but insofar as those affections are made manifest through certain signs, a man can likewise have cognition of them. And in this way the benefactor's affections are known by the very manner in which the favor is bestowed, e.g., that someone does the favor cheerfully and promptly.

Article 6

Is it necessary for someone to give more in repayment than he received in the favor?

It seems that it is not necessary for someone to give more in repayment than he received in the favor:

Objection 1: As the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 8, there are some, e.g., one's parents, to whom an equal repayment cannot be made. But virtue does not attempt the impossible. Therefore, it is not the case that the repayment that belongs to gratitude tends toward something greater.

Objection 2: If someone pays back more than he received in the favor, then by that very fact he is, as it were, giving something anew (*de novo*). But a man is obligated to repay in thankfulness for a favor granted anew. Therefore, the one who had first granted a favor will be obligated to repay with something more, and so on *ad infinitum*. But a virtue does not attempt the infinite, since, as *Metaphysics* 2 says, "The infinite removes the nature of the good." Therefore, the repayment that belongs to gratitude should not exceed the favor received.

Objection 3: Justice consists in an equal balance (*in aequalitate consistit*). But *greater* is a sort of excess with respect to balance. Therefore, since in the case of every virtue excess belongs to vice (*excessus est vitiosus*), it seems that it is vicious, and opposed to justice, to pay back something greater than the favor received.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 5 the Philosopher says, "We should repay one who has done a kindness by beginning to do a kindness for him in return." This is done when something greater is repaid. Therefore, repayment ought to tend toward doing something greater.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 5), the repayment that belongs to gratitude looks to the favor in accord with the benefactor's will or affections (*secundum voluntatem benefaciantis*). It seems especially commendable that he has graciously done a favor that he was not obligated to do. And the one who has received the favor is obligated by a debt of uprightness (*ex debito honestatis*) to offer something similarly gratuitous. However, he does not seem to be offering anything gratuitously unless it exceeds the quantity of the favor received, since as long as what he repays is less than or equal to that favor, he seems not to be doing it gratuitously but instead to be paying back what he has received. And so the repayment that belongs to gratitude always tends, as far as possible, toward paying back something greater.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained (a. 3 and a. 5), in the repayment for a favor the affections behind the favor should be considered more than the effect. Therefore, if we consider the effect of the benefits that a child receives from his parents, viz., being and life, then, as the Philosopher says, the child cannot repay anything that is equal. However, if we look to the affections themselves of the ones who give and the ones who repay, then, as Seneca claims in *De Beneficiis* 3, it is possible for a child to pay back something greater to his father. However, if this were not possible, then his wanting to repay would be sufficient for gratitude.

Reply to objection 2: The debt that belongs to gratitude is derived from charity, which is such that the more that is paid, the more that is owed—this according to Romans 13:8 ("Owe no one anything except to love one another"). And so it is not absurd for the obligation that belongs to gratitude to be interminable.

Reply to objection 3: Just as in the case of the justice that is a cardinal virtue one looks to an balance or equality of *things*, so in the case of gratitude one looks to a balance or equality of *affections*—so that, namely, just as the benefactor gives something, out of the promptitude of his will, that he was not obligated to give, so, too, the one who receives the favor repays something that lies beyond what is owed.