

## QUESTION 112

### Boasting

Next we have to consider boasting (*iactantia*) (question 112) and self-depreciation (*ironia*) (question 113), which are parts of lying according to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 4.

First of all, then, there are two questions about boasting: (1) Which virtue is boasting opposed to? (2) Is boasting a mortal sin?

### Article 1

#### Is boasting opposed to the virtue of truthfulness?

It seems that boasting (*iactantia*) is not opposed to the virtue of truthfulness (*veritas*):

**Objection 1:** Lying is opposed to truthfulness. But sometimes there can be boasting even without lying, as when someone shows off his own excellence; for instance, Esther 1:3-4 says, “Assuerus threw a grand banquet in order to show off the riches of his own glory and of his kingdom, and the greatness and boast (*iactantia*) of his own power.” Therefore, boasting is not opposed to the virtue of truthfulness.

**Objection 2:** In *Moralia* 33 Gregory posits boasting (*iactantia*) as one of the four species of pride (*superbia*), viz., when someone boasts that he has what he does not in fact have. Hence, Jeremiah 48:28-29 says, “We have heard of the pride of Moab; he is exceedingly proud. ‘I know’, says the Lord, ‘of his haughtiness and of his arrogance and of his pride and of his uppity heart, and of his boasting, and I know that his strength does not warrant his boasting’.” And in *Moralia* 31 Gregory says that boasting arises from vainglory. But pride and vainglory are opposed to the virtue of humility. Therefore, boasting is opposed to humility and not to truthfulness.

**Objection 3:** Boasting seems to be caused by riches; hence, Wisdom 5 says, “What has pride profited us? Or what has boasting about riches conferred upon us?” But an abundance of riches has to do, it seems, with the sin of avarice, which is opposed to justice or to generosity. Therefore, it is not the case that boasting is opposed to truthfulness.

**But contrary to this:** In *Ethics* 2 and 4 the Philosopher places boasting opposite truthfulness.

**I respond:** Boasting (*iactantia*) seems, properly speaking, to involve a man’s lifting himself up with words (*verbis se extollat*); for what a man wants to throw (*iactare*) a long way is such that he elevates it on high. So, then, someone lifts himself up, properly speaking, when he says about himself something that is high above himself (*quando de se supra se aliquid dicit*). And there are two ways in which this can happen:

Sometimes what an individual says about himself does not, to be sure, go beyond what is in fact in him, but it does go beyond what other men think about him. This is what the Apostle refrains from doing in 2 Corinthians 12:6 when he says, “I spare you, lest anyone think more of me than what he sees in me or hears about me.”

In the second way, an individual extols himself with words by saying about himself something that goes beyond what is in him as a matter of fact (*supra id quod in se est secundum rei veritatem*). And since something of this sort should be judged more on the basis of what it is in fact in him rather than on the basis of what is in him in the opinion of others, it follows that it is more properly an instance of boasting when someone exalts himself beyond what is in fact in him than when he exalts himself beyond the opinion that others have of him—even though it can be called boasting in both cases.

And so boasting properly speaking is opposed to truthfulness by way of excess.

**Reply to objection 1:** This argument goes through for the sort of boasting that exceeds the opinion of others.

**Reply to objection 2:** There are two possible ways to think about the sin of boasting:

In one way, with respect to *the species of the act*. And, as has been explained, on this score boasting

is opposed to truthfulness.

In a second way, with respect to *a cause* through which it occurs very frequently, even if not always. And on this score boasting proceeds from pride as an interior moving and impelling cause. For from the fact that someone is interiorly elevated above himself through arrogance, it often follows that he exteriorly boasts of greater things concerning himself—even though sometimes it is not from arrogance, but from a certain vanity that someone proceeds toward boasting and delights in it because this sort of action is habitual for him. And so the arrogance by which someone is lifted up above himself is a species of pride, and yet it is not identical with boasting, though it is very often its cause. This is why Gregory posits boasting as a species of pride. Now a boaster commonly tends toward pursuing glory through his boasting. And this is why, according to Gregory, boasting arises from vainglory as a sort of end.

**Reply to objection 3:** There are two ways in which opulence is likewise a cause of boasting:

In one way, as an *occasional cause (occasionaliter)*, insofar as someone boasts about his riches. This is why in Proverbs 8:18, *riches* are explicitly said to be *proud*.

In the second way, some individuals boast about themselves not only for the sake of glory, but also for the sake of profit, by pretending that they have skills through which they can become rich, e.g., as physicians or as wise men or fortune tellers.

## Article 2

### Is boasting a mortal sin?

It seems that boasting is a mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** Proverbs 28:25 says, “He who boasts about himself and puffs himself up stirs up quarrels.” But it is a mortal sin to stir up quarrels, since, as Proverbs 6:16 and 19 tell us, God detests those who sow the seeds of discord. Therefore, boasting is a mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** Everything forbidden in the law of God is a mortal sin. But a Gloss on Ecclesiasticus 6:2 (“You shall not extol yourself in your thoughts”) says, “This forbids boasting and pride.” Therefore, boasting is a mortal sin.

**Objection 3:** Boasting is a certain sort of lying. But it is not *useful lying (mendacium officiosum)* or *humorous lying (mendacium iocosum)*. This is clear from the purpose of the lying. For as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 4, “The boaster imagines about himself greater things than are real,” sometimes “for the sake of nothing,” sometimes “for the sake of glory or honor,” and sometimes “for the sake of money (*gratia argenti*).” And so it is obvious that the lying is neither humorous nor useful. Therefore, it follows that the lying is always *pernicious (mendacium perniciosum)*. Therefore, it seems that boasting is always a mortal sin.

**But contrary to this:** According to Gregory in *Moralia* 31, boasting arises from vainglory. But vainglory is not always a mortal sin; instead, it is sometimes a venial sin, the avoidance of which is a mark of great perfection. For Gregory says, “By their outward works those who have great perfection seek the glory of their Author in such a way that they do not know how to rejoice with inward exaltation at the praise that is heaped upon them (*sic ut de illata laude privata nesciant exultatione gaudere*).”

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 24, a. 12 and q. 35, a. 3), a mortal sin is a sin that is contrary to charity.

So, then, there are two ways in which boasting can be thought of:

In one way, *in its own right (secundum se)*, insofar as it is a certain sort of lying. And, on this score, boasting is sometimes a mortal sin and sometimes a venial sin. It is a mortal sin when someone boastfully professes of himself (a) something that is contrary to God’s glory, in the way that Ezechiel 28:2 says of the person of the king of Tyre, “Your heart is uppity, and you have said, ‘I am God’,” or (b) something

that is contrary to charity with respect to one's neighbor, in the way that Luke 18:11 tells of the Pharisee who said, "I am not like the rest of men: thieves, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." On the other hand, sometimes boasting is in its own right a venial sin, viz., when someone boasts of things concerning himself that are not contrary to God or to his neighbor.

In the second way, boasting can be thought of *with respect to its cause*, e.g., pride or a desire for money, or vainglory. And on this score, if the boasting proceeds from an instance of pride or vainglory that is a mortal sin, then the boasting itself will likewise be a mortal sin. Otherwise, it will be a venial sin. However, when someone erupts into boasting out of a desire for money, then this seems already to involve deception of one's neighbor and damage to him. And so this sort of boasting is a mortal sin. Hence, in *Ethics 4* the Philosopher says, "One who boasts for the sake of money is worse than one who boasts for the sake of glory or honor." Still, this sort of boasting is not always a mortal sin, since the gain can be such that no one else is harmed by it.

**Reply to objection 1:** The individual who boasts in order to stir up quarrels commits a mortal sin. However, it sometimes happens that boasting is a cause of quarrels *incidentally* (*per accidens*) and not intentionally (*non per se*). Hence, when this happens, boasting is not a mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Gloss in question is talking about boasting insofar as it proceeds from forbidden pride, which is a mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 3:** Boasting does not always involve pernicious lying, but only when the boasting, either in its own right or because of its cause, is directed against love of God or neighbor.

Now as the Philosopher points out, the fact that someone boasts about himself in the sense of delighting in the act itself is somewhat vain. Hence, it is traced back to humorous lying—unless, perhaps, he prefers this boasting to loving God and thus shows contempt for God's commandments. For in that case it would be contrary to charity with respect to God, in whom alone our mind should rest as in its ultimate end.

Moreover, it seems to involve useful lying when someone boasts about himself in order to acquire glory or material gain—as long as the boasting occurs without loss to others, since this is what pertains to pernicious lying.