

QUESTION 116

Quarreling

Next we have to consider quarreling (*litigium*). And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is quarreling opposed to the virtue of friendliness (*amicitia*)? (2) How does quarreling compare with flattery (*adulatio*)?

Article 1

Is quarreling opposed to the virtue of friendliness?

It seems that quarreling is not opposed to the virtue of friendliness:

Objection 1: Quarreling seems to involve discord (*discordia*), just as contention (*contentio*) does. But as was explained above (q. 37, a. 1), discord is opposed to [the virtue of] charity. Therefore, so is quarreling.

Objection 2: Proverbs 26:21 says, “An angry man (*homo iracundus*) stirs up strife.” But a quick temper (*iracundia*) is opposed to mildness (*mansuetudo*). Therefore, so is disputing (*lis*), i.e., quarreling.

Objection 3: James 4:1 says, “Where do wars and disputes among us come from? Is it not from the disordered desires (*ex concupiscentiis*) that wage war within our members?” But to follow disordered desires seems to be opposed to temperance. Therefore, it seems that quarreling is opposed to temperance and not to friendliness.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher claims that quarreling is opposed to friendliness.

I respond: Properly speaking, quarreling consists in words, since one individual is contradicting another. Now there are two possibilities to consider in an act of contradicting another:

For sometimes the act of contradicting another occurs because the person of the interlocutor is such that *one refuses to agree with him due to a lack of love uniting the [two] minds*. And this seems to involve *discord*, which is contrary to charity.

Sometimes, however, the act of contradicting another arises by reason of a person who is such that *one has no compunction about upsetting him (ratione personae quam aliquis contristare non veretur)*. And from this arises [the sin of] quarreling, which is opposed to the aforementioned [virtue of] friendliness or affability that involves living with others in a pleasant way. Hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says, “Those who contradict everything for the sake of upsetting others (*causa eius quod est contristare*), without concern for anything, are called peevish (*discoli*) and quarrelsome (*litigiosi*).”

Reply to objection 1: Contention belongs more properly to the sort of contradiction associated with discord, whereas quarreling belongs to the sort of contradiction that is made with the intention of giving [others] grief.

Reply to objection 2: The direct opposition of a vice to a virtue stems not *from their causes*—for it is possible for a single vice to arise from diverse causes—but from *the species of the acts*. And even though a quarrel sometimes arises from anger, it can nonetheless arise from many other causes. Hence, it need not be *directly* opposed to mildness.

Reply to objection 3: James is talking here about disordered desire insofar as it is a *general* evil from which *all* the vices proceed—just as a Gloss on Romans 7:7 says, “The Law is good and such that when it prohibits disordered desire, it prohibits every evil.”

Article 2

Is quarreling a lesser sin than the contrary vice, viz., the vice of flattery or of an excessive eagerness to please?

It seems that quarreling is a lesser sin than the contrary vice, viz., the vice of flattery (*adulatio*) or of an excessive eagerness to please (*placiditas*):

Objection 1: A sin seems to be worse to the extent that it does more harm. But flattery does more harm than quarreling; for Isaiah 3:12 says, “My people, those who call you blessed are deceiving you, and they are destroying the way of your progress.” Therefore, flattery is a more serious sin than quarreling.

Objection 2: Flattery seems to involve a certain sort of deceit, since what the flatterer says with his mouth is different from what he holds in his heart. But one who quarrels lacks guile, since he openly contradicts another. And as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 7, someone who sins with guile is more vile. Therefore, flattery is a more serious sin than quarreling.

Objection 3: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 4, shame (*verecundia*) is a fear of what is vile (*timor de turpi*). But a man is more ashamed of being a flatterer than of being quarrelsome. Therefore, quarreling is a lesser sin than flattery.

But contrary to this: It seems that a sin is more serious to the extent that it is more in conflict with spiritual well-being (*quanto spirituali statui magis repugnat*). But quarreling seems to be more in conflict with what is spiritual; for 1 Timothy 3:2-3 says, “A bishop should not be quarrelsome,” and 2 Timothy 2:24 says, “A servant of the Lord should not quarrel.” Therefore, quarreling seems to be the more serious sin.

I respond: There are two ways in which we can talk about these two sins:

First, by thinking about *the species of the two sins*. And on this score a vice is more serious to the extent that it is more in conflict with the opposite virtue. Now the virtue of friendliness tends more principally toward giving delight than toward giving grief (*principalius tendit ad delectandum quam ad contristandum*). And so a quarrelsome individual, who abounds in giving grief, sins more seriously than a flatterer or ‘pleaser’, who abounds in giving delight.

Second, the sins can be considered with respect to *some of their exterior motives*. And on this score flattery is sometimes the more serious sin, e.g., when the flatterer improperly intends to acquire honor or money by deception. On the other hand, sometimes quarreling is the more serious sin, e.g., when a man intends either to attack the truth or to expose his interlocutor to contempt.

Reply to objection 1: Just as a flatterer can do harm in a hidden way through deception, so, too, a quarrelsome individual can sometimes do harm openly by his attacks. However, all other things being equal, it is more serious to do harm to someone openly, through violence as it were, than to do harm in a hidden way. This is why, as was explained above (q. 66, a. 9), robbery is a more serious sin than theft.

Reply to objection 2: It is not always the case with human acts that what is more vile is also more serious. For instance, a man’s dignity comes from reason and so carnal sins, by which the flesh dominates reason, are more vile, even though spiritual sins are more serious because they proceed from greater contempt.

Similarly, sins that proceed from deceit are more vile insofar as they seem to proceed from a certain sort of weakness and from a sort of falsity on the part of reason, and yet manifest sins sometimes proceed from greater contempt. And so flattery that exists with deceit seems to be more vile, but quarreling that proceeds from greater contempt seems to be more serious.

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained (q. 41, a. 4 and q. 42, a. 3), shame has to do with a how vile a sin is. Hence, it is not always the case that a man is more ashamed of a more serious sin; instead, he is more ashamed of a more vile sin. And this is why a man is more ashamed of flattery than of

quarreling, even if the quarreling is a more serious sin.