

QUESTION 132

Vainglory

Next we have to consider vainglory (*inanis gloria*). And on this topic there are five questions: (1) Is the desire for glory a sin? (2) Is vainglory opposed to magnanimity? (3) Is vainglory a mortal sin? (4) Is vainglory a capital vice? (5) What are the daughters of vainglory?

Article 1

Is the desire for glory a sin?

It seems that the desire for glory is not a sin:

Objection 1: No one sins by becoming similar to God—to the contrary, becoming similar to God is mandated in Ephesians 5:1 (“Be imitators of God, as His most dear children”). But in seeking glory a man seems to be imitating God, who seeks glory from men; hence, Isaiah 43:7 says, “Everyone who calls on my name, I have created him for my glory.” Therefore, the desire for glory is not a sin.

Objection 2: Someone’s being impelled toward the good does not seem to be a sin. But men are impelled toward the good by their desire for glory; for in *De Tusculanis Quaestionibus* Tully says, “Everyone is impelled toward self-exertion by glory.” Again, in Sacred Scripture glory is promised for good works—this according to Romans 2:7 (“To those who live according to the patience of good work ... [He will render] glory and honor”). Therefore, the desire for glory is not a sin.

Objection 3: In *Rhetorica* Tully says, “Glory is an individual’s enduring fame along with praise,” and what Ambrose says amounts to the same thing, viz., that glory is “brilliant renown along with praise (*clara cum laude notitia*).” But to desire laudatory fame is not a sin; to the contrary, it seems to be praiseworthy—this according to Ecclesiasticus 41:15 (“Take care of a good name”) and according to Romans 12:17 (“... providing good things not only in the eyes of God, but also in the eyes of all men”). Therefore, the desire for vainglory is not a sin.

But contrary to this: In *De Civitate Dei* 5 Augustine says, “He sees the matter more clearly who recognizes that even the love of praise is a vice.”

I respond: Glory (*gloria*) signifies a kind of fame (*claritatem quandam significat*), and so, as Augustine says in *Super Ioannem*, to be glorified (*glorificari*) is the same as “being made famous (*clarificari*).” But fame involves both a certain sort of attractiveness and a certain manner of being publicized (*claritas et decorem quandam habet et manifestationem*). And so the name ‘glory’ properly implies someone’s being publicized for something that seems attractive in the eyes of men, whether it is something bodily or something spiritual. However, since what is famous (*clarum*) absolutely speaking can be seen by many and by those who are far away, what is properly designated by the name ‘glory’ is that someone’s good comes into the knowledge and approval of many—in the sense in which it is said in Titus Livy, “There is no such thing as being glorious to a single individual.” Still, if we take the name ‘glory’ in a broader sense, glory consists not only in being known to a multitude, but also in being known to a few or to one or even to oneself alone, viz., when an individual considers his own good as *worthy of praise*.

Now it is not a sin for someone to recognize and approve of his own good; for 1 Corinthians 2:12 says, “We have received not the spirit of this world but the Spirit that is from God, in order that we might know the things that are given to us by God.” Similarly, it is likewise not a sin for someone to want his goods to be approved of by another; for Matthew 5:16 says, “Let your light shine before men.” And so ‘desire for glory’ does not by itself designate anything sinful. By contrast, the desire for empty or vain glory does imply a sin, since it is sinful to desire anything that is vain—this according to Psalm 4:3 (“Why do you love vanity and seek after lies?”).

Now in one sense glory can be called vain *on the part of the thing for which one seeks glory*, e.g.,

when someone seeks glory for what does not exist or for what is not worthy of glory, as when someone seeks glory for what is frail and perishable.

In a second sense, glory can be called vain *on the part of the one from whom someone seeks glory*, e.g., a man whose judgment is not fixed.

In a third sense, glory can be called vain *on the part of the one who is seeking the glory*, viz., when he does not refer his desire for glory to an appropriate end, viz., to the honor of God or to the well-being of his neighbor (*ad honorem Dei vel proximi salutem*).

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine explains in commenting on John 13:13 (“You call me Teacher and Lord, and it is right for you to say it”), “It is dangerous for someone to puff himself up when he has to be wary of becoming proud. But no matter how much He who is above all things might praise Himself, He is not puffing Himself up. For it is expedient for us, but not for Him, to know God. Nor does anyone have cognition of Him if He Himself who knows does not make Himself known.” Hence, it is clear that God seeks His own glory not for His own sake, but for our sake. And, similarly, a man can likewise laudably seek his own glory for the advantage of others—this according to Matthew 5:16 (“Let them see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven”).

Reply to objection 2: The glory had by God is not vain glory but true glory. And it is this sort of glory that is promised as a reward for good works. This is what 2 Corinthians 10:17-18 is talking about: “Let him who glories glory in the Lord; for it is not he who commends himself who is approved, but he whom God commends.”

Again, some are impelled toward the works of the virtues by a desire for human glory, just as by a desire for other worldly goods; and yet as Augustine shows in *De Civitate Dei* 5, one who does works of virtue for the sake of human glory is not truly virtuous.

Reply to objection 3: A man’s perfection involves his having cognition, but his perfection does not involve his being known by others, and so this is not something that should be desired in its own right.

Yet glory can be desired insofar as it is useful for something, either for God’s being glorified by men or for men’s profiting from the good that they recognize in others—or because the man himself, in light of the goods that he recognizes within himself through the testimony of the praise of others, becomes eager to persevere in those goods and to progress toward better things. And on this score it is praiseworthy for an individual to care about his good name and to provide goods in the eyes of men—but it is not praiseworthy for him to delight fruitlessly in the praise of men.

Article 2

Is vainglory opposed to magnanimity?

It seems that vainglory is not opposed to magnanimity:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), vainglory involves an individual’s glorying either (a) in what does not exist, which pertains to *untruthfulness (falsitas)*, or (b) in worldly or perishable things, which pertains to *disordered desire (cupiditas)*, or (c) in the testimony of men whose judgment is not fixed, and this pertains to *imprudence (imprudencia)*. But vices of this sort are not opposed to magnanimity. Therefore, vainglory is not opposed to magnanimity.

Objection 2: Vainglory is not opposed to magnanimity by way of *deficiency*—unlike *pusillanimity*, which seems incompatible with vainglory. Similarly, vainglory is not opposed to magnanimity by way of *excess*; for, as has been explained (q. 130, a. 2 and q. 131, a. 2), it is *presumptuousness* and *ambition*, from which vainglory differs, that are opposed to magnanimity in this way. Therefore, vainglory is not opposed to magnanimity.

Objection 3: A Gloss on Philippians 2:3 (“Let nothing be done through contention or vainglory”) says, “They were disagreeing with one another, restless, contending out of vainglory.” But contention is not opposed to magnanimity. Therefore, neither is vainglory.

But contrary to this: In *De Officiis* 1 Tully says, “One should guard against a disordered desire for glory, since it robs the mind of its freedom, which magnanimous men should strive for in every way. Therefore, vainglory is opposed to magnanimity.

I respond: As has been explained (q. 130, a. 1), glory is a certain effect of honor and praise; for from the fact that an individual is praised or has some sort of reverence shown to him, he becomes famous in other people’s eyes. And since, as was explained above (q. 129, aa. 1-2), magnanimity has to do with honor, it follows that it likewise has to do with glory in the sense that just as magnanimity makes use of honor with moderation, so, too, it makes use of glory with moderation. And so a disordered desire for glory is directly opposed to magnanimity.

Reply to objection 1: The very fact that someone would value ordinary things only because he might glory in them is incompatible with greatness of spirit. Hence, *Ethics* 4 says of the magnanimous individual that honor means “little” to him. Similarly, other things that are sought for the sake of honor, e.g., power and riches, are likewise counted as small things by him.

Again, it is incompatible with greatness of spirit that an individual should glory in what does not exist. Hence, *Ethics* 4 says of the magnanimous individual that he cares more about truth than about opinion.

Again, it is incompatible with greatness of spirit that an individual should glory in the testimony of human praise as if this were being thought of as something great. Hence, *Ethics* 4 says of the magnanimous individual that he does not care about being praised.

And so nothing prevents [vices] that are opposed to other virtues from being opposed to magnanimity insofar as they take small things for great things.

Reply to objection 2: As far as the *truth of the matter* is concerned, an individual who has a disordered desire for vainglory *falls short* of the magnanimous individual, since, as has been explained, he glories in things that the magnanimous individual considers small.

However, if we take account of the vainglorious individual’s *way of thinking*, then he is opposed to the magnanimous individual by way of *excess*, since he thinks of the glory that he desires as something great and his tending toward it exceeds his worthiness.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (q. 127, a. 2), the opposition among vices does not have to do with their effects. And yet the very fact that an individual intends to be contentious is opposed to greatness of spirit; for no one contends for a thing unless he thinks of it as great. This is why in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that the magnanimous individual “is not contentious, because there is nothing he thinks of as great.”

Article 3

Is vainglory a mortal sin?

It seems that vainglory is a mortal sin:

Objection 1: Nothing except mortal sin rules out an eternal reward. But vainglory rules out an eternal reward; for Matthew 6:1 says, “Beware of practicing your righteousness before men in order to be seen by them; [for then you will have no reward from your Father who is in heaven].” Therefore, vainglory is a mortal sin.

Objection 2: If an individual usurps for himself something that is proper to God, then he commits a mortal sin. But by desiring empty glory one attributes to himself what is proper to God; for Isaiah 42:8

says, “I will not give my glory to another,” and 1 Timothy 1:17 says, “Honor and glory to God alone!” Therefore, vainglory is a mortal sin.

Objection 3: A sin that is especially dangerous and harmful seems to be a mortal sin. But vainglory is a sin of this sort; for a Gloss by Augustine on 1 Thessalonians 2:4 (“... to God, who probes our hearts ...”) says, “If an individual does not wage war against the love of human glory, then he does not understand the harmful power that it has. For even if it is easy for someone not to desire praise as long as it is denied him, it is nonetheless difficult for him not to take pleasure in it when it is offered.” And in commenting on Matthew 6:1 Chrysostom likewise says, “Vainglory enters secretly and insensibly destroys everything interior within us.” Therefore, vainglory is a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: In *Super Matthaicum* Chrysostom says, “While the other vices have a place among the servants of the devil, vainglory also has a place among the servants of Christ.” But there is no mortal sin in the latter. Therefore, vainglory is not a mortal sin.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 35, a. 3 and *ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5), a sin is mortal by reason of the fact that it is contrary to charity.

Now the sin of vainglory, taken in its own right, does not seem to be contrary to charity *as regards love of neighbor*.

As regards love of God, on the other hand, there are two ways in which it might be contrary to charity:

In one way, by reason of *the matter which someone glories in*, for instance, (a) as when an individual glories in something false which is contrary to reverence for God—this according to Ezechiel 28:2 (“Your heart is puffed up and you have said, ‘I am God’”) and according to 1 Corinthians 4:7 (“What do you have that you have not received? But if you have received, then why do you glory as if you had not received?”)—or, again, (b) as when someone prefers to God a temporal gift in which he glories; this is prohibited by Jeremiah 9:23-24: “Let a wise man not glory in his wisdom, nor a brave man in his courage, nor a rich man in his wealth, but instead let him who glories glory in the fact that he understands and knows me,” or, again, (c) as when someone prefers human testimony to God’s testimony, in the way that John 12:43 speaks against certain individuals “who have loved human glory more than the glory of God.”

In the second way, on the part of *the one himself who is glorying*, given that he refers his intention to glory as the ultimate end which is such that (a) he orders his virtuous deeds toward it and that (b) he does not hesitate to perform even deeds that are contrary to God for the sake of attaining it. And in such a case [vainglory] is a mortal sin. Hence, in *De Civitate Dei* 5 Augustine says that “this vice,” viz., the love of human praise, “is so inimical to pious faith, when there is more desire for glory in the heart than there is fear or love of God, that our Lord said (John 5:44): ‘How can you believe if you receive glory one from another and yet do not seek the glory which is from God alone?’”

On the other hand, if an instance of the love of human glory, even though empty, is nonetheless not incompatible with charity either with respect to what is gloried in or with respect to the intention of the individual who is seeking the glory, then it is a venial sin and not a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: No one merits eternal life by sinning. Hence, a virtuous work loses the power to merit eternal life if it is done for the sake of empty glory—even if the instance of vainglory in question is not a mortal sin.

By contrast, when, because of vainglory, someone loses an eternal reward absolutely speaking and not just with respect to a single act, then the vainglory is in that case a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 2: Not every individual who desires empty glory desires for himself the sort of excellence that belongs to God alone. For the glory that is owed only to God is different from the glory that is owed to a virtuous man or to a rich man.

Reply to objection 3: Vainglory is said to be a dangerous sin not so much because of its gravity as because of the fact that it disposes one toward serious sins, viz., insofar as through vainglory a man is

rendered presumptuous and excessively confident about himself. And so little by little it disposes a man toward being deprived of interior goods.

Article 4

Is vainglory a capital vice?

It seems that vainglory is not a capital vice:

Objection 1: A vice that always arises from another vice does not seem to be a *capital* vice. But vainglory (*inanis gloria*) always arises from pride (*superbia*). Therefore, vainglory is not a capital vice.

Objection 2: Honor seems to be something more important than glory, which is an effect of honor. But ambition, which is a disordered desire for honor, is not a capital vice. Therefore, neither is vainglory.

Objection 3: A capital vice has a certain sort of importance. But vainglory does not seem to have any importance, either (a) with respect to the nature of the sin, since it is not always a mortal sin, or (b) with respect to the nature of the good being desired, since human glory seems to be something fragile and something that exists outside of a man. Therefore, vainglory is not a capital sin.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory numbers vainglory among the seven capital vices.

I respond: There are two ways in which the capital vices are spoken of:

Some posit pride (*superbia*) as one of the capital vices, and these individuals do not count vainglory as a capital vice.

By contrast, in *Moralia* 31 Gregory posits pride as “the queen of all the vices,” and he posits vainglory, which flows immediately from pride, as a capital vice. And this is a reasonable position. For as will be explained below (q. 162, aa. 1-2), pride implies a disordered desire for excellence. Now an individual attains a certain perfection and excellence from *every* good that he desires. And so the ends of all the vices are ordered toward the end of pride. Because of this, pride seems to have a sort of *general causality* over all the other vices, and so it should not be counted among the *specific principles* of vice, i.e., among the *capital vices*.

Now among the goods by which a man attains excellence, glory seems especially to contribute to this insofar as it implies the *manifestation* of some goodness; for the good is naturally loved and honored by everyone. And so just as through the glory which exists in the eyes of God a man attains excellence in divine matters, so, too, through human glory a man attains excellence in human matters. And so because of its proximity to excellence, which men desire most of all, it follows that glory is extremely desirable and that many vices arise from a disordered desire for it. And this is the way in which vainglory is a capital vice.

Reply to objection 1: The fact that a given vice arises from pride is not incompatible with that vice’s being a capital vice because, as has been explained, pride is the queen and mother of all vices.

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (a. 2 and q. 103, a. 1), praise and honor are related to glory as the causes from which glory follows. Hence, glory is related to them as an end; for an individual loves to be honored and praised insofar as he thinks that he will thereby become well known in the minds of others.

Reply to objection 3: For the reason already explained, vainglory has a important sort of desirability, and this is sufficient for the nature of a capital vice. Moreover, it is not required that a capital vice should always be a mortal sin, since a mortal sin can arise even from a venial sin, given that venial sin disposes one toward mortal sin.

Article 5

Are disobedience, boasting, hypocrisy, contention, obstinance, discord and a presumption in favor of novelty correctly called daughters of vainglory?

It seems that disobedience (*inobedientia*), boasting (*iactantia*), hypocrisy (*hypocrisis*), contention (*contentio*), obstinance (*pertinacia*), discord (*discordia*) and a presumption in favor of novelty (*novitatum praesumptio*) are not correctly called daughters of vainglory:

Objection 1: According to Gregory in *Moralia* 33, boasting is a species of pride. But as Gregory points out in *Moralia* 31, pride does not arise from vainglory, but rather just the opposite. Therefore, boasting should not be posited as a daughter of vainglory.

Objection 2: Instances of contention and discord seem to arise from anger most of all. But anger is a capital vice divided off on the same level from vainglory. Therefore, it seems that contention and discord are not daughters of vainglory.

Objection 3: In *Super Matthaem* Chrysostom says, “Vainglory is an evil in every case, but especially in the case of philanthropy, i.e., in acts of mercy (*id est in misericordia*).” Yet this is nothing new, but is customary among men. Therefore, a presumption in favor of novelty should not be specifically posited as a daughter of vainglory.

But contrary to this is the authority of Gregory in *Moralia* 31, where he assigns the aforementioned daughters to vainglory.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 34, a. 5 and q. 35, a. 4 and *ST* 1-2, q. 84, aa. 3-4), those vices that are in their own right apt to be ordered toward the end of a given capital vice are called the daughters of that vice. Now as is clear from what has been said (aa. 1-2), the end of vainglory is the manifestation of one’s own excellence.

There are two ways in which a man can tend toward this end:

In one way, *directly*, either (a) through *words*, and this is *boasting*, or (b) through deeds, regardless of whether (I) the deeds are genuine, having a sort of wonder, and this is *a presumption in favor of novelty*, which men are wont to admire to a greater degree, or whether (ii) the deeds are insincere, and this is *hypocrisy*.

In the second way, the man tries to manifest his own excellence *indirectly* by showing himself to be no less great than another. This occurs in four ways. First, with respect to his intellect, and this is *obstinance*, through which a man presses on with his own position and is unwilling to give credence to a better position. Second, with respect to his will, and this is *discord*, when someone is reluctant to forsake his own will in order to agree with others. Third, with respect to his speech, and this is *contention*, when someone quarrels loudly with his words against another. Fourth, with respect to his action, and this is *disobedience*, when someone is unwilling to execute a command from his superior.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 112, a. 1), boasting is posited as a species of pride as regards its interior cause, which is arrogance. But the boasting itself is exterior. As *Ethics* 4 explains, boasting is sometimes ordered toward wealth, but it is frequently ordered toward glory or honor. And it is in this latter sense that boasting arises from vainglory.

Reply to objection 2: Anger is a cause of discord and contention only in conjunction with vainglory, viz., it is because an individual thinks of himself as glorious that he does not yield to the will or the words of others.

Reply to objection 3: It is because of the lack of charity that vainglory is blamed when it comes to acts of mercy (*circa eleemosynam*). This lack of charity seems to lie in the one who prefers empty glory to his neighbor’s welfare as he performs an act of mercy for the sake of empty glory. However, no one is blamed for presuming to perform an act of mercy as if it were something novel.