

QUESTION 135

The Vices opposed to Magnificence

Next we have to consider the vices opposed to magnificence. And on this topic there are two questions: (1) Is *thinking small* or *skimpiness* (*parvificentia*) a vice? (2) Is there a vice opposed to *thinking small* or *skimpiness*?

Article 1

Is *thinking small* or *skimpiness* a vice?

It seems that *thinking small* or *skimpiness* is not a vice (*parvificentia non est vitium*):

Objection 1: Just as a virtue moderates great things (*magna*), so too it moderates small things (*parva*); hence, both generous individuals and magnificent individuals do small things. But magnificence is a virtue. Therefore, *thinking small* or *skimpiness* is a virtue rather than a vice.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that diligence in reasoning “is a small thing to do (*parvifica*).” But diligence in reasoning seems to be praiseworthy, since, as Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, “The good of a man is to live in accord with reason.” Therefore, *thinking small* is not a vice.

Objection 3: One who is skimpy or thinks small is loathe to spend money. But this belongs to *avarice* (*avaritia*) or to *being ungenerous* (*illiberalitas*). Therefore, *thinking small* or *skimpiness* (*parvificentia*) is not a vice distinct from these others.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 2 and 4 the Philosopher posits *thinking small* or *skimpiness* as a specific vice opposed to *magnificence*.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 1, a. 3 and q. 18, a. 6), moral entities receive their species from their end. Hence, they are frequently named from their ends. Thus, someone is said to *think small* from the fact that he *intends* to do something small.

Now according to the Philosopher in the *Categories*, *small* and *great* are relative terms. Hence, when it is said that someone who thinks small (*parvificus*) intends to do something small, *to do something small* is to be understood in relation to the type of work that he is doing. In this matter, there are two possible ways to understand *small* and *great*: (a) *from the side of the work to be done*, and (b) *from the side of the expenditure*.

Thus, the magnificent individual *principally* intends *the greatness of the work* and *secondarily* intends *the greatness of the expenditure*—which, in order that he might do the great work, he does not shy away from. Hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that the magnificent individual “makes a more magnificent work with the same amount of money.”

By contrast, the individual who thinks small *principally* intends *the smallness of the expenditure*; hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that the individual who thinks small “focuses on how little he might spend” and, as a result, *intends* the smallness of the work; that is, he does not mind doing a small work as long as he is making a small expenditure. Hence, in the same place the Philosopher says, “The individual who thinks small, after spending the great sums on something small,”—i.e., after spending what he does not want to spend—“loses the good”—i.e., the good of a magnificent work. Thus it is clear that the individual who thinks small falls short of the proportion that, according to reason, ought to exist between the expenditure and the work. But falling short of what is in accord with reason is a cause of something’s being a vice. Hence, it is manifest that *thinking small* is a vice.

Reply to objection 1: A virtue moderates small things in accord with the rule of reason, but, as has been explained, the individual who thinks small falls short of this rule. For it is not the one who moderates small things who is said to *think small*. Rather, it is the one who, in moderating great and small things, falls short of the rule of reason. And so *thinking small* has the nature of a vice.

Reply to objection 2: As the Philosopher says in *Rhetoric* 2, fear makes for deliberation. And so the individual who thinks small reasons diligently because he has a disordered fear of using up his goods, even in the most trifling cases. Hence, this is something bad and blameworthy rather than praiseworthy, since he does not direct his affections in accord with reason, but instead applies his use of reason to serving his disordered affections (*rationis usum applicat ad inordinationem sui affectus*).

Reply to objection 3: Just as the magnificent individual agrees with the generous individual in spending his money promptly and with delight, so the individual who thinks small agrees with the ungenerous or avaricious individual in making expenditures with hesitation and sadness. However, the difference is that *being ungenerous* has to do with *ordinary* sorts of expenditures, whereas *thinking small* has to do with *great* expenditures, which are more difficult to make. And so *thinking small* is a less serious vice than *being ungenerous*. Hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that even though *thinking small* and its opposed vice are bad, “they nonetheless do not bring down opprobrium on an individual, since they are not harmful to his neighbor, nor are they very shameful.”

Article 2

Is there any vice that is opposed to *thinking small* or *skimpiness*?

It seems that there is no vice that is opposed to *thinking small* or *skimpiness* (*parvificentia*):

Objection 1: What is opposed to *small* (*parvum*) is *great* (*magnum*). But magnificence (*magni-ficientia*) is a virtue and not a vice. Therefore, there is no vice opposed to *thinking small*.

Objection 2: Since, as has been explained (a. 1), *thinking small* involves a deficiency, it seems that if some vice were opposed to thinking small, it would consist only in superfluous expenditure. But as *Ethics* 4 says, “Those who spend a lot where it is necessary to spend little, spend little where it is necessary to spend a lot”—and so they already share in *skimpiness* or *thinking small*. Therefore, there is no vice opposed to *skimpiness* or *thinking small*.

Objection 3: As has been explained (a. 1), moral entities receive their species from their end. But as *Ethics* 4 points out, those who engage in excessive spending do so for the sake of showing off their wealth. But this pertains to *vainglory*, which, as has been explained (q. 132, a. 2), is opposed to magnanimity. Therefore, there is no vice opposed to *skimpiness* or *thinking small*.

But contrary to this is the authority of the Philosopher, who in *Ethics* 2 and 4 posits magnificence as the mean between two opposed vices.

I respond: What is opposed to *small* is *great*. But as has been explained (a. 1), *small* and *great* are relative terms. Now just as it is possible for an expenditure to be small in comparison to the work, so it is likewise possible for an expenditure to be great in comparison to the work, so that it exceeds the appropriate ratio of the expenses to the work according to the rule of reason. Hence, it is clear that the vice of *thinking small* or *skimpiness*, by which one falls short of the appropriate ratio of expenses to the work, intending to spend less than the dignity of the work requires, is opposed to a vice by which one exceeds the said ratio, so that he spends more than is proportionate to the work. This vice is called *banausia* in the Greek, taken from the word for *furnace*, since in the manner of a furnace it consumes everything; alternatively, it is called *apyrokalia*, i.e., “without good fire,” since in the manner of a fire it consumes without a good purpose. Hence, in Latin this vice can be called *consumptio* (*being wasteful*).

Reply to objection 1: Magnificence is so called because it makes a great work and not because it in its spending it exceeds the proportion of the work. For the latter belongs to the vice that is opposed to *thinking small* or *skimpiness*.

Reply to objection 2: The same vice is contrary both to the virtue which is in the middle and to the contrary vice. So, then, the vice of *being wasteful* is opposed to *thinking small* or *skimpiness* because

it exceeds the value of the work in its spending, since it spends a lot where it is necessary to spend less. And *being wasteful* is opposed to *magnificence* on the side of the great work that the magnificent individual primarily intends, insofar as it spends little or nothing where it is necessary to spend a lot.

Reply to objection 3: The one who is wasteful is opposed to the one who thinks small by the very species of his act, since he *exceeds* the [same] rule of reason which the one who thinks small *falls short of*. But nothing prevents this excess from being ordered toward the end of some other vice, e.g., vainglory or another vice of this sort.