

QUESTION 137

Perseverance

Next we have to consider perseverance (*perseverantia*) (question 137) and the vices opposed to it (question 138).

As regards perseverance, there are four questions: (1) Is perseverance a virtue? (2) Is perseverance a part of fortitude? (3) How is perseverance related to constancy (*constantia*)? (4) Does perseverance require the assistance of grace?

Article 1

Is perseverance a virtue?

It seems that perseverance (*perseverantia*) is not a virtue:

Objection 1: As the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 7, “Continenence is more important than perseverance.” But as *Ethics* 4 says, “Continenence is not a virtue.” Therefore, perseverance is not a virtue.

Objection 2: According to Augustine in *De Libero Arbitrio*, “Virtue is that by which one lives uprightly.” But as he himself says in *De Perseverantia*, “No one can be said to have perseverance as long as he is alive, if he has not persevered all the way to death.” Therefore, perseverance is not a virtue.

Objection 3: As is clear from *Ethics* 2, “To persist unchangeably” in the work of virtue is required for every virtue. But this pertains to the nature of perseverance; for as Tully says in *Rhetorica*, “Perseverance is the fixed and continued persistence in a well-considered plan.” Therefore, perseverance is a *condition* for every virtue and *not itself a specific virtue*.

But contrary to this: Andronicus says, “Perseverance is a habit regarding things in which one ought to remain, and things in which one ought not to remain, and things which are neither of these.” But a habit that orders us toward correctly doing something or correctly omitting something is a virtue. Therefore, perseverance is a virtue.

I respond: According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, “Virtue has to do with what is *difficult* and *good*.” And so where there is a specific type of difficulty or of goodness, there is a specific virtue.

Now there are two sources from which an act of virtue can have its goodness and difficulty:

First, *from the very species of the act*, which is taken from the nature of its proper object.

Second, *from the long duration itself of time*, since persisting for a long time in something difficult poses a special sort of difficulty. And so to persist in some good for a long time right up to its consummation involves a specific virtue.

Therefore, just as temperance and fortitude are specific virtues because one of them moderates the pleasures of touch, which involve a difficulty in their own right, whereas the other moderates instances of fear and audacity having to do with the danger of death, which is likewise difficult in its own right, so, too, perseverance is a specific virtue that involves persisting for as long a time as is necessary in these or other works of virtue.

Reply to objection 1: In this place the Philosopher is understanding *perseverance* as an individual’s persevering in those things that are the most difficult to endure for a long time. But it is evil things, and not good things, that are difficult to endure.

Now the evils associated with the danger of death are usually not endured for a long time, since they most frequently pass quickly. Hence, the praiseworthiness of perseverance does not mainly have to do with such evils.

Among the other evils, the principal ones are those that oppose the pleasures of touch, since evils of this sort have to do with the necessities of life, e.g., a lack of food and of other things of this sort, and sometimes there is a threat that these evils will have to be endured for a long time. Now those individuals who are not much saddened by these evils and who do not take much delight in the opposed goods, do

not find it difficult to endure these evils for a long time; this is clear in the case of the temperate individual, in whom passions of the sort in question are not vehement. By contrast, enduring these evils for a long time is especially difficult for an individual who is strongly affected by them, since he does not have a perfect virtue that is moderating these passions. And so if perseverance is understood in this sense, then it is not a perfect virtue, but is instead something imperfect in the genus *virtue*.

On the other hand, if we understand perseverance as anyone's persisting for a long time in any sort of difficult good, then it can befit even someone who has perfect virtue. For even if it is less difficult for such an individual to persist, he is nonetheless persisting in a more perfect good. Hence, perseverance of this sort can be virtue, since the perfection of virtue has more to do with the nature of what is *good* than with the nature of what is *difficult*.

Reply to objection 2: Sometimes the *virtue* and the *act of the virtue* are called by the same name; for instance, in *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, "Faith is believing what you do not see." However, it can happen that an individual has the *habit* of a virtue and yet does not exercise the *act*, as in the case of a pauper who has the *habit* of magnificence and yet does not exercise the *act* of magnificence. Again, sometimes an individual who has the *habit* begins to exercise the *act* but does not complete it—as, for instance, when a builder begins to build and does not complete the house.

So, then, one should reply that the name 'perseverance' is sometimes taken for the *habit* by which an individual *chooses* to persevere, whereas sometimes it is taken for the *act* by which an individual *does* persevere. And sometimes an individual who has the *habit* of perseverance chooses to persevere and *begins to exercise* the habit by persisting for some time, but *does not complete the act* because he does not persist to the end.

Now there are two sorts of ends, one of which is the *end of the act or work* and the other of which is the *end of human life*.

Now it pertains to perseverance in its own right (*per se*) that an individual should persevere right up to the end of a virtuous work, in the way that a soldier perseveres right up to the end of a battle and in the way that a magnificent individual perseveres right up to the consummation of his work.

However, there are certain virtues whose act ought to endure through the whole of life, e.g., faith, hope, and charity, since they have to do with the ultimate end of a whole human life. And so with respect to these virtues, which are principal virtues, the act is not consummated until the end of life. And, accordingly, Augustine is taking perseverance for the consummated act of perseverance.

Reply to objection 3: There are two ways in which something can agree with a virtue:

In one way, *by the proper intending of its end*. And, on this score, persisting in the good for a long time right up to the end involves the specific virtue that is called perseverance.

In the second way, *by comparing the habit to its subject*. And, on this score, persisting unchangeably follows upon *every* virtue insofar as it is a quality that is difficult to change.

Article 2

Is perseverance a part of fortitude?

It seems that perseverance is not a part of fortitude:

Objection 1: As the Philosopher explains in *Ethics 7*, perseverance has to do with sorrows associated with touch. But things of this sort pertain to *temperance*. Therefore, perseverance is more a part of *temperance* than a part of *fortitude*.

Objection 2: Every part of a moral virtue has to do with certain passions that the moral virtue moderates. But perseverance does not involve moderating any passions, since the more vehement the passions are, the more praiseworthy the individual who perseveres seems to be. Therefore, it seems that

perseverance is not a part of any moral virtue, but is instead a part of *prudence*, which perfects reason.

Objection 3: In *De Perseverantia* Augustine says, “No one is able to lose perseverance.” But the other virtues are such that a man is able to lose them. Therefore, perseverance is more important than all the other virtues. But a principal virtue is more important than its part. Therefore, perseverance is not a part of any virtue, but is instead itself a principal virtue.

But contrary to this: Tully claims that perseverance is a part of fortitude.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 123, a. 2 and *ST* 1-2, q. 61, aa. 3-4), a principal virtue is a virtue to which one principally ascribes something that involves the praiseworthiness of the virtue—more specifically, the virtue executes that thing with respect to the proper subject matter in which observing that thing is the most difficult and best of all. And it is on this score that fortitude is said to be a principal virtue, since it preserves firmness in that subject matter, viz., in the danger of death, in which it is the most difficult of all to persist with firmness. And so it has to be the case that every virtue whose praiseworthiness consists in enduring something difficult with firmness is adjoined to fortitude in the way that a secondary virtue is joined to a principal virtue.

Now enduring the difficulty that arises from the fact that the good work lasts for a long time is what makes perseverance praiseworthy, and yet this is not as difficult as enduring the danger of death. And so perseverance is joined to fortitude in the way that a secondary virtue is joined to a principal virtue.

Reply to objection 1: The joining of a secondary virtue to the principal virtue has to do not only with the subject matter, but even more with the mode, since in each thing the form is more important than the matter. Hence, even though perseverance seems to agree more in its subject matter with temperance than with fortitude, nevertheless, it agrees more in mode with fortitude insofar as it preserves firmness against the difficulty posed by a long length of time.

Reply to objection 2: The perseverance of which the Philosopher speaks does not moderate any passions but instead consists solely in a sort of firmness of reason and will.

However, insofar as perseverance is posited *as a virtue*, it does moderate certain passions, viz., the fear of fatigue or of failure because of a long length of time. Hence, this virtue exists in the irascible [part of the soul], just as *fortitude* does.

Reply to objection 3: Augustine is talking here about perseverance not insofar as it names the *habit* of the virtue, but insofar as it names a continuous *act* of the virtue right up until the end—this according to Matthew 24:13 (“He who perseveres to the end, he shall be saved”). And so it is contrary to the nature of perseverance so understood that it should be lost, since then it would not endure right up until the end.

Article 3

Does perseverance involve constancy?

It seems that perseverance does not involve constancy (*videtur quod constantia non pertineat ad perseverantiam*):

Objection 1: As was explained above (q. 136, a. 5), patience involves constancy. But patience differs from perseverance. Therefore, perseverance does not involve constancy.

Objection 2: Virtue has to do with the *difficult* and the *good*. But being constant in small works does not seem to be difficult; instead, the only thing that is difficult is being constant in great works, which belong to magnificence. Therefore, it is magnificence rather than perseverance that involves constancy.

Objection 3: If perseverance involved constancy, then constancy would seem not to differ from perseverance in any way at all, since both imply a certain sort of unchangeableness. But they do in fact

differ, since Macrobius divides constancy off from firmness at the same level (*condividit constantiam firmitati*)—where, as was noted above (q. 128, a. 6), by *firmness* he means *perseverance*. Therefore, perseverance does not involve constancy.

But contrary to this: An individual is said to be *constant* because he stays with a thing (*ex eo quod in aliquo stat*). But as is clear from the definition given by Andronicus, perseverance involves remaining with certain things. Therefore, perseverance involves constancy.

I respond: Perseverance and constancy agree in their end, since both of them involve persisting with firmness in some good, whereas they differ with respect to what it is that makes it difficult to persist in the good. For the virtue of *perseverance* properly brings it about that a man persists with firmness in some good against the sort of difficulty that arises *from the very fact that the act lasts for a long time*, whereas *constancy* brings it about that a man persists with firmness in some good against a difficulty that arises *from any other kind of exterior impediment*.

And so *perseverance* is a more principal part of fortitude than *constancy* is, because the sort of difficulty that arises from the act's lasting for a long time is more essential to an act of virtue than the sort of difficulty that arises from exterior impediments.

Reply to objection 1: The exterior impediments to persisting in the good are mainly those which inflict sadness. But, as has been explained (q. 136, a. 1), patience has to do with sadness. And so *constancy* agrees with *perseverance* as regards its *end*, whereas it agrees with *patience* as regards *the things which inflict the difficulty*. But the end is more important. And so perseverance involves constancy more than patience does.

Reply to objection 2: It is more difficult to persist in great works, but in small or medium works there is difficulty in persisting for a long time—if not because of the magnitude of the work, which magnificence looks to, at least because of how long it takes, which perseverance looks to. And in this way each of them can involve constancy.

Reply to objection 3: Perseverance involves constancy insofar as constancy agrees with it, but perseverance is not the same as constancy, because it differs from it in the way that has been explained.

Article 4

Does perseverance need the assistance of grace?

It seems that perseverance does not need the assistance of grace:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), perseverance is a certain virtue. But as Tully says in *Rhetorica*, a virtue acts in the manner of a nature. Therefore, the inclination of a virtue is by itself sufficient for persevering. Therefore, the further assistance of grace is not required for this.

Objection 2: As is clear from Romans 5:15ff., the gift of the grace of Christ is greater than the harm that Adam inflicted. But before sin the man was so constituted that, as Augustine puts it, “he could persevere by means of that which he had received.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, a man who has been restored through the grace of Christ can persevere without the assistance of any further grace (*absque auxilio novae gratiae*).

Objection 3: Sinful works are sometimes more difficult than virtuous works; hence, Wisdom 5:7 says in the person of wicked men, “We have walked along difficult paths.” But some individuals persevere in sinful works without any other assistance. Therefore, a man can likewise persevere in virtuous works without the assistance of grace.

But contrary to this: In *De Perseverantia* Augustine says, “We have claimed that one gift of God is perseverance, by which one perseveres in Christ right up until the end.”

I respond: As is clear from what has been said, there are two ways in which ‘perseverance’ is

used:

In one way, it is used for the *very habit of perseverance insofar as it is a virtue*. And on this score one needs the gift of habitual grace, just as with the other infused virtues.

In the second way, ‘perseverance’ can be used for an *act of perseverance that lasts right up to death*. And on this score it needs not only habitual grace, but also, as was explained above when we were talking about grace (*ST* 1-2, q. 109, a. 10), the gratuitous assistance of God, who conserves a man in the good right up to the end of his life. For even though free choice can in its own right go either way (and this is not taken away from it by habitual grace in the present life), establishing itself *unchangeably* in the good is not subject to the power of free choice, even as repaired by grace—even though it is within its power to *choose* this. For it is often the case that the *choice* falls within our power, but not the *execution*.

Reply to objection 1: The virtue of perseverance, as far as it itself is concerned (*quantum est de se*), inclines one toward persevering. But since it is a habit that an individual makes use of when he wills to, it is not necessary for someone who has the habit to make use of it unchangeably right up to death.

Reply to objection 2: As Augustine says in *De Correptione et Gratia*, “At first it was granted to man not that he should persevere through free choice, but he should *be able to persevere* through free choice”—for at that time there was no corruption in human nature which would present a difficulty for persevering—“but in the present time it has been granted to those predestined by the grace of Christ not only to *be able to persevere*, but also to *actually persevere*. Hence, the first man, whom no man was threatening and yet used his free will against the rule of a threatening God, did not remain in his great happiness, along with his great facility not to sin. But those [who have been predestined], even as the world rages against their persevering, have persevered in the Faith.”

Reply to objection 3: A man is able to fall into sin on his own, but he cannot rise up from sin on his own without the assistance of grace. And so by the very fact that a man falls into sin, insofar as he is on his own, he makes himself persevere in sin if he is not liberated by the grace of God.

By contrast, it is not the case that by the very fact that he does good he makes himself persevere in the good, since he is able to sin on his own. And so for this he needs the assistance of grace.