

QUESTION 54

Negligence

Next we have to consider negligence. And on this topic there are three questions: (1) Is negligence (*negligentia*) a specific sin? (2) Which virtue is negligence opposed to? (3) Is negligence a mortal sin?

Article 1

Is negligence a specific sin?

It seems that negligence (*negligentia*) is not a specific sin:

Objection 1: Negligence is opposed to diligence (*diligentia*). But diligence is required in *every* virtue, in the same way that wise choosing (*eligentia*) is. Therefore, negligence is not a specific sin.

Objection 2: Something that is found in every sin is not a specific sin. But negligence is found in every sin, since everyone who sins neglects that by which he might withdraw from the sin, and everyone who persists in a sin neglects to be contrite with respect to that sin. Therefore, negligence is not a specific sin.

Objection 3: Every specific sin has a determinate subject matter. But negligence does not seem to have a determinate subject matter. For it does not have to do with what is bad or indifferent, since failing to do such things is not imputed to anyone as negligence; similarly, it does not have to do with what is good, since if good things are done negligently, then they are no longer good. Therefore, it seems that negligence is not a specific vice.

But contrary to this: Sins that are committed out of negligence are distinct from sins that are committed out of contempt.

I respond: Negligence implies a lack of due care or solicitude (*importat defectum debitae sollicitudinis*). But every instance of the lack of a due act has the nature of a sin. Hence, it is clear that negligence has the nature of a sin; and in the same way that care or solicitude is the act of a specific virtue, it must be the case that negligence is a specific sin.

For some sins are specific because they have to do with a specific subject matter, in the way that lust has to do with sexual matters; but other vices are specific because of the specificity of an act that extends to every subject matter. All the vices that have to do with acts of reason are of this latter type, since every type of act of reason extends to every moral subject matter whatsoever. And so, since, as was established above (q. 47, a. 9), care or solicitude is a specific act of reason, it follows that negligence, which involves a lack of care or solicitude, is a specific sin.

Reply to objection 1: Diligence (*diligentia*) seems to be the same thing as solicitude, because we show greater solicitude for things that we love (*diligimus*). Hence, diligence, like solicitude, is required for every virtue insofar as the due acts of reason are required in every virtue.

Reply to objection 2: In every sin there has to be some defect in an act of reason, e.g., a defect in deliberating, etc. Hence, just as precipitateness, even though it can be found in every genus of sin, is a specific sin because of the omission of a specific act of reason, viz., deliberating, so, too, negligence, even though it is in some sense found in all sins, is a specific sin because of the lack of the specific act of reason which is care or solicitude.

Reply to objection 3: The subject matter of negligence consists in the good things that one ought to do—not in the sense that the things themselves are good when they are done negligently, but in the sense that a lack of goodness accrues to them through negligence, either because the due act is totally omitted because of a lack of solicitude or because some due circumstances of the act are omitted.

Article 2

Is negligence opposed to prudence?

It seems that negligence is not opposed to prudence:

Objection 1: As is clear from Gregory in *Moralia* 31, negligence seems to be the same thing as laziness (*pigritia*) or listlessness (*torpor*), which have to do with acedia. But as was explained above (q. 35, a. 3), acedia is opposed not to prudence, but instead to charity. Therefore, negligence is not opposed to prudence.

Objection 2: Every sin of omission seems to belong to negligence. But a sin of omission is opposed not to prudence, but instead to the moral virtues that involve the execution of deeds (*virtutibus moralibus executivis*). Therefore, negligence is not opposed to prudence.

Objection 3: Imprudence has to do with acts of reason. But *negligence* does not imply a defect in deliberating, since *precipitateness* is a failure in deliberating; nor does it imply a defect in judging, since *not taking account of things* is a failure in judging; nor does it imply a defect in commanding, since *inconstancy* is a failure in commanding (cf. q. 53). Therefore, negligence does not have to do with prudence.

Objection 4: Ecclesiastes 7:19 says, “He who fears God does not neglect anything.” But each sin is principally excluded by the opposite virtue. Therefore, negligence is opposed to fear [of the Lord] rather than to prudence.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 20:7 says, “One who is licentious and imprudent will not observe the proper time.” But this has to do with negligence. Therefore, negligence is opposed to prudence.

I respond: Negligence is directly opposed to care or solicitude. But solicitude pertains to reason, and rectitude in solicitude pertains to prudence. Hence, contrariwise, negligence pertains to imprudence.

And this is likewise evident from the name itself. For as Isidore says in *Etymologia*, “The negligent individual (*negligens*) is one who does not choose, either (*nec eligens*).” But the correct choice of the means to an end pertains to prudence. Hence, negligence pertains to imprudence.

Reply to objection 1: Negligence consists in the failure of an interior act to which choice likewise pertains. By contrast, laziness (*pigritia*) and listlessness (*torpor*) pertain more to execution, though in such a way that laziness implies a slowness to execute, whereas listlessness implies a certain lack of intensity in the execution itself. And so listlessness is properly born of acedia, since acedia is a heavy sadness, i.e., something that impedes the mind from operating.

Reply to objection 2: Omission pertains to the exterior act, since there is an omission when some due act is omitted. And so omission is opposed to justice and is an effect of negligence—just as the execution of a just work is likewise an effect of right reason.

Reply to objection 3: Negligence has to do with the act of commanding, which care or solicitude also has to do with. However, the negligent individual falls short in this act in one way and the inconstant individual in a different way. For the inconstant individual fails in commanding in the sense that he is impeded from the act, whereas the negligent individual fails through the lack of a prompt will (*per defectum promptae voluntatis*).

Reply to objection 4: Every sort of sin is such that the fear of God works toward avoiding it; for as Proverbs 15:27 says, “By the fear of the Lord everyone turns away from what is bad.” And so fear makes one avoid negligence—not in such a way that negligence is directly opposed to fear, but rather insofar as fear incites a man toward acts of reason. Hence, it was likewise established above, when we were discussing the passions (*ST* 1-2, q. 44, a. 2), that fear makes one deliberative.

Article 3

Is it possible for negligence to be a mortal sin?

It seems impossible for negligence to be a mortal sin:

Objection 1: In a Gloss on Job 9:28 (“I feared my works ...”), Gregory says, “It [read: negligence] is exaggerated by a lesser love of God.” But wherever there is mortal sin, the love of God is totally removed. Therefore, negligence is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: A Gloss on Ecclesiasticus 7:34 (“Purge yourself of negligence with a few things”) says, “Even if your offering is small, it purges negligence with respect to many sins.” But this would not be the case if negligence were a mortal sin. Therefore, negligence is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3: As is clear from Leviticus, under the Law sacrifices were mandated for mortal sins. But no sacrifice was mandated for negligence. Therefore, negligence is not a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 19:16 says, “He who neglects his own life will die.”

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1), negligence proceeds from a certain remission of the will because of which it happens that reason does not take care to command what ought to be commanded or to command it in the way in which it should be commanded. Therefore, there are two ways in which it can happen that negligence is a mortal sin:

(a) *on the part of what is omitted out of negligence:* If what is omitted is necessary for salvation, regardless of whether it is an act or a circumstance, then the sin will be mortal.

(b) *on the part of the cause:* If the will is remiss regarding what belongs to God to such an extent that it falls totally short of charity with respect to God, then negligence of this sort is a mortal sin. And this happens mainly when the negligence flows from contempt.

Otherwise, if the negligence consists in the omission of some act or circumstance that is not necessary for salvation, or if the negligence flows not from contempt, but instead from a lack of fervor—where fervor is sometimes impeded by a venial sin—then the negligence is a venial sin and not a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: There are two ways to understand ‘a lesser love of God’

(a) In one sense, a love of God is lesser through a defect in the fervor of charity, and negligence caused in this way is a venial sin.

(b) In the second sense, a love of God is lesser through a lack of charity itself, in the sense in which it is called ‘a lesser love’ when someone loves God only with a natural love. And in that case what is caused is the sort of negligence that is a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 2: “A small offering made with a humble mind and with pure love,”—to quote from the same place—washes away not only venial sins but mortal sins as well.

Reply to objection 3: When the negligence consists in the omission of what is necessary for salvation, then it becomes another, more manifest, genus of sin. For sins that consist in interior acts are more hidden. And so for the latter no fixed sacrifices were enjoined in the Law, since the offering of sacrifices was a sort of public admission of sin, which did not have to be given in the case of a hidden sin.