

Universitas 2017 [Cardinal virtues]

Previous reading: *Compendium*, 377-383; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1803-1811.

[*Happiness and virtues*]. “If there is a definite way of reaching a fixed end, they who travel along a road leading in the opposite direction or who turn aside from the right road, will never reach the goal. A sick man is not cured by using the wrong medicines, forbidden by the doctor, except, perhaps, quite by accident.”

There is such a definite way of arriving at happiness, namely, the practice of virtue. Nothing will reach its end unless it performs well the operations proper to it. A plant will not bear fruit if the procedure natural to it is not followed. A runner will not win a trophy or a soldier a medal of honor, unless each of them carries out his proper functions. To say that a man discharges his proper office is equivalent to saying that he acts virtuously; for the virtue of any being is that which makes its possessor good and also makes his work good (*Ethics* [II, 6, 1106 a 15]). Accordingly, since the ultimate end of man is eternal life... not all attain it, but only those who act as virtue requires them to.

Besides, as we said above, not only natural things, but also in human affairs, these are contained under divine providence and this is not only in general but in a particular way. But He who has care of individual men has disposal of the rewards to be assigned for virtue and of the punishments to be inflicted for sin. For punishment has (1°) a medicinal value with regard to sin and (2°) restores right order when violated by sin...; and

the reward of virtue is happiness, to be granted to man by God's goodness. Therefore, God will not grant happiness to those who act against virtue, but will assign as punishment the opposite of happiness, namely, extreme misery" (Aquinas, *Compendium of Theology*, I, ch. 172).

[*Original harmony, original sin and its wounds, and virtues*] In his *Compendium of Theology*, Aquinas said: "man was originally constituted by God in such a condition that his body was completely subject to his soul. Furthermore, among the faculties of the soul the lower powers were subject to reason without any rebelliousness, and man's reason itself was subject to God. In consequence of the perfect subjection of the body to the soul, no passion could arise in the body that would in any way conflict with the soul's dominion over the body. Therefore, neither death nor illness had any place in man. And from the subjection of the lower powers to reason there resulted in man complete peace of mind, for the human reason was troubled by no inordinate passions. Finally, owing to the submission of man's will to God, man referred all things to God as to his last end, and in this his justice and innocence consisted.

– Of these three subordinations, the last was the cause of the other two. Surely man's freedom from dissolution or from any suffering that would be a threat to his life, did not come from the nature of his body, as we see if we regard its component parts; for the body was made up of contrary elements. Similarly, the fact that man's sense faculties were subservient to reason

without any rebelliousness did not come from the nature of the soul, since the sense powers naturally tend toward objects that cause pleasure in the senses, even when, as often happens, delights of this sort are at odds with right reason” (Aquino, *Comp. Th.* I, ch. 186).

“The harmonious integrity of the original state depended entirely on the submission of man’s will to God. Consequently, as soon as the human will threw off the yoke of subjection to God, the perfect subjection of the lower powers to reason and of the body to the soul likewise disintegrated. As a result, man experienced in his lower, *sensitive appetite* the inordinate stirrings of concupiscence, anger, and all the other passions. These movements no longer followed the order set by reason but rather resisted reason, frequently darkening the mind and, so to speak, throwing it into confusion. This is that rebellion of the *flesh against the spirit* which Scripture mentions. For, since the sensitive appetite, like all the other sense powers, operates through a bodily instrument, whereas reason functions without any bodily organ, what pertains to the sensitive appetite is rightly ascribed to the flesh, and what pertains to reason is attributed to the spirit. This is why substances that are without bodies are commonly called spiritual substances” (Aquinas, *Comp. Th.* I, ch. 192).

“As a result of original justice, the reason had perfect hold over the lower parts of the soul, while reason itself was perfected by God, and was subject to Him. Now this same original justice was forfeited through the sin of our first parent...; so that all the powers of the soul are left, as it were, *destitute of their proper order*, whereby they

are naturally directed to virtue; which destitution is called a *wounding of nature*.

Again, there are four of the soul's powers that can be subject of virtue, viz.

- the reason, where prudence resides,
- the will, where justice is,
- the irascible, the subject of fortitude,
- and the concupiscible, the subject of temperance.

Therefore, in so far as the reason is deprived of its order to the true, there is the *wound of ignorance*; in so far as the will is deprived of its order of good, there is the *wound of malice*; in so far as the irascible is deprived of its order to the arduous, there is the *wound of weakness*; and in so far as the concupiscible is deprived of its order to the delectable, moderated by reason, there is the *wound of concupiscence*.

Accordingly, these are the four wounds inflicted on the whole of human nature as a result of our first parent's sin. But since the inclination to the good of virtue is diminished in everyone because actual sin..., these four wounds are also the result of other sins, in so far as, through sin, the reason is obscured, especially in practical matters, the will hardened to evil, good actions become more difficult and concupiscence more impetuous" (*STh* 1-2, 85, 3).

[**Essential notions**] a) *Etymologically* "virtue" seems to be derived from the same root as the Latin *vis* (*power*), suggesting that in its primitive sense, virtue implied the possession of such qualities as strength and courage and, in the moral order, of goodness and human perfection.

The Scriptures have several equivalents for the English "virtue," notably, *ischus* (strength or power), *dunamis* (might), and *arethe* (moral excellence or perfection).

According to Aristotle "virtue is that which confers goodness on its owner and makes his acts good". St. Augustine gives another definition (referring to the infused virtues): "virtue is a good quality of the soul enabling man to live well, which no one can use for evil, produced in man by God without man's assistance".

b) On the Cardinal virtues: What is a supernatural virtue? A supernatural virtue is a quality infused by God into the soul by which the latter acquires an inclination, facility, and promptness to know good and direct it towards the attainment eternal life.

How many principal supernatural virtues are there? The principal supernatural virtues are seven: three theological, and four cardinal virtues.

Name the Cardinal virtues. The cardinal virtues are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance.

Why are prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance called Cardinal virtues? Prudence, justice, fortitude and temperance are called cardinal virtues because all the moral virtues are founded and hinged around them (in Latin, *cardo* means pivot, axis...) (St. Pius X, *Mayor Catechism*).

c) Sin and vices: What is a vice? A vice is an evil disposition of the mind to avoid good and do evil, arising from the frequent repetition of evil acts.

What difference is there between a sin and a vice? Between sin and vice there is this difference that sin is a passing act, whereas vice is a bad habit, contracted by continually falling into some sin.

Which are the vices called capital? The vices called capital are seven: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth [acedia].

How are the capital vices conquered? The capital vices are conquered by the exercise of the opposite virtues: thus pride is conquered by humility; covetousness by liberality; lust by chastity; anger by patience; gluttony by abstinence; envy by brotherly love; sloth by diligence and fervor [devotion] in the service of God.

Why are these vices called capital? They are called capital because they are the head and fount of many other vices and sins.

d) valuation of virtues: "... virtues do three things: it removes one from evil, they work towards and make one to work for what is good, and disposes one to what is best" (Aquinas, *In Mt* c. 5, lc. 1, n. 414).

My consistent effort to concentrate on a given course of action, repeating the process over a long period of time and in spite of obstacles, gradually develops a tendency to perform the action spontaneously and almost without reflection, yet with a degree of perfection that someone else without the virtue cannot duplicate (cfr. *maximum potentiae, ultimum potentiae*).

[Individual question and answer session]

Do I consider "virtues" as the only way to be happy?

Are there things that need to be corrected, rectified, or changed in my view on virtues and vices?

What are the wounds that I am able to recognize or discover in myself?

Do I consider virtues as the best things for myself and those around me?

Do I consider virtues as the most necessary things for my family, for those around me, or for my country?

I find myself seeing bad things in my family, in society, within the people in the church; what can I do to change this?