

FIRST PART OF THE SECOND PART, QUESTION 56

Of the Subject of Virtue (In Six Articles)

We now have to consider the subject of virtue, about which there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether the subject of virtue is a power of the soul?
- (2) Whether one virtue can be in several powers?
- (3) Whether the intellect can be the subject of virtue?
- (4) Whether the irascible and concupiscible faculties can be the subject of virtue?
- (5) Whether the sensitive powers of apprehension can be the subject of virtue?
- (6) Whether the will can be the subject of virtue?

Whether the subject of virtue is a power of the soul?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 1

Objection 1. It would seem that the subject of virtue is not a power of the soul. For Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. ii, 19) that “virtue is that by which we live righteously.” But we live by the essence of the soul, and not by a power of the soul. Therefore virtue is not a power, but in the essence of the soul.

Objection 2. Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 6) that “virtue is that which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise.” But as work is set up by power, so he that has a virtue is set up by the essence of the soul. Therefore virtue does not belong to the power, any more than to the essence of the soul.

Objection 3. Further, power is in the second species of quality. But virtue is a quality, as we have said above (q. 55, a. 4): and quality is not the subject of quality. Therefore a power of the soul is not the subject of virtue.

On the contrary, “Virtue is the limit of power” (De Coelo ii). But the limit is in that of which it is the limit. Therefore virtue is in a power of the soul.

I answer that, It can be proved in three ways that virtue belongs to a power of the soul. First, from the notion of the very essence of virtue, which implies perfection of a power; for perfection is in that which it perfects. Secondly, from the fact that virtue is an operative habit, as we have said above (q. 55, a. 2): for all operation proceeds

from the soul through a power. Thirdly, from the fact that virtue disposes to that which is best: for the best is the end, which is either a thing’s operation, or something acquired by an operation proceeding from the thing’s power. Therefore a power of the soul is the subject of virtue.

Reply to Objection 1. “To live” may be taken in two ways. Sometimes it is taken for the very existence of the living thing: in this way it belongs to the essence of the soul, which is the principle of existence in the living thing. But sometimes “to live” is taken for the operation of the living thing: in this sense, by virtue we live righteously, inasmuch as by virtue we perform righteous actions.

Reply to Objection 2. Good is either the end, or something referred to the end. And therefore, since the good of the worker consists in the work, this fact also, that virtue makes the worker good, is referred to the work, and consequently, to the power.

Reply to Objection 3. One accident is said to be the subject of another, not as though one accident could uphold another; but because one accident inheres to substance by means of another, as color to the body by means of the surface; so that surface is said to be the subject of color. In this way a power of the soul is said to be the subject of virtue.

Whether one virtue can be in several powers?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 2

Objection 1. It would seem that one virtue can be in several powers. For habits are known by their acts. But one act proceeds in various way from several powers: thus walking proceeds from the reason as directing, from the will as moving, and from the motive power as executing. Therefore also one habit can be in several powers.

Objection 2. Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 4) that three things are required for virtue, namely: “to know, to will, and to work steadfastly.” But “to know”

belongs to the intellect, and “to will” belongs to the will. Therefore virtue can be in several powers.

Objection 3. Further, prudence is in the reason since it is “the right reason of things to be done” (Ethic. vi, 5). And it is also in the will: for it cannot exist together with a perverse will (Ethic. vi, 12). Therefore one virtue can be in two powers.

On the contrary, The subject of virtue is a power of the soul. But the same accident cannot be in several sub-

jects. Therefore one virtue cannot be in several powers of the soul.

I answer that, It happens in two ways that one thing is subjected in two. First, so that it is in both on an equal footing. In this way it is impossible for one virtue to be in two powers: since diversity of powers follows the generic conditions of the objects, while diversity of habits follows the specific conditions thereof: and so wherever there is diversity of powers, there is diversity of habits; but not vice versa. In another way one thing can be subjected in two or more, not on an equal footing, but in a certain order. And thus one virtue can belong to several powers, so that it is in one chiefly, while it extends to others by a kind

of diffusion, or by way of a disposition, in so far as one power is moved by another, and one power receives from another.

Reply to Objection 1. One act cannot belong to several powers equally, and in the same degree; but only from different points of view, and in various degrees.

Reply to Objection 2. “To know” is a condition required for moral virtue, inasmuch as moral virtue works according to right reason. But moral virtue is essentially in the appetite.

Reply to Objection 3. Prudence is really subjected in reason: but it presupposes as its principle the rectitude of the will, as we shall see further on (a. 3; q. 57, a. 4).

Whether the intellect can be the subject of virtue?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 3

Objection 1. It would seem that the intellect is not the subject of virtue. For Augustine says (De Moribus Eccl. xv) that all virtue is love. But the subject of love is not the intellect, but the appetitive power alone. Therefore no virtue is in the intellect.

Objection 2. Further, virtue is referred to good, as is clear from what has been said above (q. 55, a. 3). Now good is not the object of the intellect, but of the appetitive power. Therefore the subject of virtue is not the intellect, but the appetitive power.

Objection 3. Further, virtue is that “which makes its possessor good,” as the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 6). But the habit which perfects the intellect does not make its possessor good: since a man is not said to be a good man on account of his science or his art. Therefore the intellect is not the subject of virtue.

On the contrary, The mind is chiefly called the intellect. But the subject of virtue is the mind, as is clear from the definition, above given, of virtue (q. 55, a. 4). Therefore the intellect is the subject of virtue.

I answer that, As we have said above (q. 55, a. 3), a virtue is a habit by which we work well. Now a habit may be directed to a good act in two ways. First, in so far as by the habit a man acquires an aptness to a good act; for instance, by the habit of grammar man has the aptness to speak correctly. But grammar does not make a man always speak correctly: for a grammarian may be guilty of a barbarism or make a solecism: and the case is the same with other sciences and arts. Secondly, a habit may confer not only aptness to act, but also the right use of that aptness: for instance, justice not only gives man the prompt will to do just actions, but also makes him act justly.

And since good, and, in like manner, being, is said of a thing simply, in respect, not of what it is potentially, but of what it is actually: therefore from having habits of the latter sort, man is said simply to do good, and to be good; for instance, because he is just, or temperate; and

in like manner as regards other such virtues. And since virtue is that “which makes its possessor good, and his work good likewise,” these latter habits are called virtuous simply: because they make the work to be actually good, and the subject good simply. But the first kind of habits are not called virtues simply: because they do not make the work good except in regard to a certain aptness, nor do they make their possessor good simply. For through being gifted in science or art, a man is said to be good, not simply, but relatively; for instance, a good grammarian or a good smith. And for this reason science and art are often divided against virtue; while at other times they are called virtues (Ethic. vi, 2).

Hence the subject of a habit which is called a virtue in a relative sense, can be the intellect, and not only the practical intellect, but also the speculative, without any reference to the will: for thus the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 3) holds that science, wisdom and understanding, and also art, are intellectual virtues. But the subject of a habit which is called a virtue simply, can only be the will, or some power in so far as it is moved by the will. And the reason of this is, that the will moves to their acts all those other powers that are in some way rational, as we have said above (q. 9, a. 1; q. 17, Aa. 1,5; Ia, q. 82, a. 4): and therefore if man do well actually, this is because he has a good will. Therefore the virtue which makes a man to do well actually, and not merely to have the aptness to do well, must be either in the will itself; or in some power as moved by the will.

Now it happens that the intellect is moved by the will, just as are the other powers: for a man considers something actually, because he wills to do so. And therefore the intellect, in so far as it is subordinate to the will, can be the subject of virtue absolutely so called. And in this way the speculative intellect, or the reason, is the subject of Faith: for the intellect is moved by the command of the will to assent to what is of faith: for “no man be-

lieveth, unless he will”*. But the practical intellect is the subject of prudence. For since prudence is the right reason of things to be done, it is a condition thereof that man be rightly disposed in regard to the principles of this reason of things to be done, that is in regard to their ends, to which man is rightly disposed by the rectitude of the will, just as to the principles of speculative truth he is rightly disposed by the natural light of the active intellect. And therefore as the subject of science, which is the right reason of speculative truths, is the speculative intellect in its relation to the active intellect, so the subject of prudence is the practical intellect in its relation to the right will.

Reply to Objection 1. The saying of Augustine is to

be understood of virtue simply so called: not that every virtue is love simply: but that it depends in some way on love, in so far as it depends on the will, whose first movement consists in love, as we have said above (q. 25, Aa. 1,2,3; q. 27, a. 4; Ia, q. 20, a. 1).

Reply to Objection 2. The good of each thing is its end: and therefore, as truth is the end of the intellect, so to know truth is the good act of the intellect. Whence the habit, which perfects the intellect in regard to the knowledge of truth, whether speculative or practical, is a virtue.

Reply to Objection 3. This objection considers virtue simply so called.

Whether the irascible and concupiscible powers are the subject of virtue?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 4

Objection 1. It would seem that the irascible and concupiscible powers cannot be the subject of virtue. For these powers are common to us and dumb animals. But we are now speaking of virtue as proper to man, since for this reason it is called human virtue. It is therefore impossible for human virtue to be in the irascible and concupiscible powers which are parts of the sensitive appetite, as we have said in the Ia, q. 81, a. 2.

Objection 2. Further, the sensitive appetite is a power which makes use of a corporeal organ. But the good of virtue cannot be in man’s body: for the Apostle says (Rom. 7): “I know that good does not dwell in my flesh.” Therefore the sensitive appetite cannot be the subject of virtue.

Objection 3. Further, Augustine proves (De Moribus Eccl. v) that virtue is not in the body but in the soul, for the reason that the body is ruled by the soul: wherefore it is entirely due to his soul that a man make good use of his body: “For instance, if my coachman, through obedience to my orders, guides well the horses which he is driving; this is all due to me.” But just as the soul rules the body, so also does the reason rule the sensitive appetite. Therefore that the irascible and concupiscible powers are rightly ruled, is entirely due to the rational powers. Now “virtue is that by which we live rightly,” as we have said above (q. 55, a. 4). Therefore virtue is not in the irascible and concupiscible powers, but only in the rational powers.

Objection 4. Further, “the principal act of moral virtue is choice” (Ethic. viii, 13). Now choice is not an act of the irascible and concupiscible powers, but of the rational power, as we have said above (q. 13, a. 2). Therefore moral virtue is not in the irascible and concupiscible powers, but in the reason.

On the contrary, Fortitude is assigned to the irascible power, and temperance to the concupiscible power. Whence the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 10) says that “these

virtues belong to the irrational part of the soul.”

I answer that, The irascible and concupiscible powers can be considered in two ways. First, in themselves, in so far as they are parts of the sensitive appetite: and in this way they are not competent to be the subject of virtue. Secondly, they can be considered as participating in the reason, from the fact that they have a natural aptitude to obey reason. And thus the irascible or concupiscible power can be the subject of human virtue: for, in so far as it participates in the reason, it is the principle of a human act. And to these powers we must needs assign virtues.

For it is clear that there are some virtues in the irascible and concupiscible powers. Because an act, which proceeds from one power according as it is moved by another power, cannot be perfect, unless both powers be well disposed to the act: for instance, the act of a craftsman cannot be successful unless both the craftsman and his instrument be well disposed to act. Therefore in the matter of the operations of the irascible and concupiscible powers, according as they are moved by reason, there must needs be some habit perfecting in respect of acting well, not only the reason, but also the irascible and concupiscible powers. And since the good disposition of the power which moves through being moved, depends on its conformity with the power that moves it: therefore the virtue which is in the irascible and concupiscible powers is nothing else but a certain habitual conformity of these powers to reason.

Reply to Objection 1. The irascible and concupiscible powers considered in themselves, as parts of the sensitive appetite, are common to us and dumb animals. But in so far as they are rational by participation, and are obedient to the reason, they are proper to man. And in this way they can be the subject of human virtue.

Reply to Objection 2. Just as human flesh has not

* Augustine: Tract. xxvi in Joan.

of itself the good of virtue, but is made the instrument of a virtuous act, inasmuch as being moved by reason, we “yield our members to serve justice”; so also, the irascible and concupiscible powers, of themselves indeed, have not the good of virtue, but rather the infection of the “fomes”: whereas, inasmuch as they are in conformity with reason, the good of reason is begotten in them.

Reply to Objection 3. The body is ruled by the soul, and the irascible and concupiscible powers by the reason, but in different ways. For the body obeys the soul blindly without any contradiction, in those things in which it has a natural aptitude to be moved by the soul: whence the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 3) that the “soul rules the body with a despotic command” as the master rules his slave: wherefore the entire movement of the body is referred to the soul. For this reason virtue is not in the body, but in the soul. But the irascible and concupiscible powers do not obey the reason blindly; on the contrary, they have

their own proper movements, by which, at times, they go against reason, whence the Philosopher says (Polit. i, 3) that the “reason rules the irascible and concupiscible powers by a political command” such as that by which free men are ruled, who have in some respects a will of their own. And for this reason also must there be some virtues in the irascible and concupiscible powers, by which these powers are well disposed to act.

Reply to Objection 4. In choice there are two things, namely, the intention of the end, and this belongs to the moral virtue; and the preferential choice of that which is unto the end, and this belongs to prudence (Ethic. vi, 2,5). But that the irascible and concupiscible powers have a right intention of the end in regard to the passions of the soul, is due to the good disposition of these powers. And therefore those moral virtues which are concerned with the passions are in the irascible and concupiscible powers, but prudence is in the reason.

Whether the sensitive powers of apprehension are the subject of virtue?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 5

Objection 1. It would seem that it is possible for virtue to be in the interior sensitive powers of apprehension. For the sensitive appetite can be the subject of virtue, in so far as it obeys reason. But the interior sensitive powers of apprehension obey reason: for the powers of imagination, of cogitation, and of memory* act at the command of reason. Therefore in these powers there can be virtue.

Objection 2. Further, as the rational appetite, which is the will, can be hindered or helped in its act, by the sensitive appetite, so also can the intellect or reason be hindered or helped by the powers mentioned above. As, therefore, there can be virtue in the interior powers of appetite, so also can there be virtue in the interior powers of apprehension.

Objection 3. Further, prudence is a virtue, of which Cicero (De Invent. Rhetor. ii) says that memory is a part. Therefore also in the power of memory there can be a virtue: and in like manner, in the other interior sensitive powers of apprehension.

On the contrary, All virtues are either intellectual or moral (Ethic. ii, 1). Now all the moral virtues are in the appetite; while the intellectual virtues are in the intellect or reason, as is clear from Ethic. vi, 1. Therefore there is no virtue in the interior sensitive powers of apprehension.

I answer that, In the interior sensitive powers of apprehension there are some habits. And this is made clear principally from what the Philosopher says (De Memoria ii), that “in remembering one thing after another, we become used to it; and use is a second nature.” Now a habit of use is nothing else than a habit acquired by use, which is like unto nature. Wherefore Tully says of virtue

in his Rhetoric that “it is a habit like a second nature in accord with reason.” Yet, in man, that which he acquires by use, in his memory and other sensitive powers of apprehension, is not a habit properly so called, but something annexed to the habits of the intellective faculty, as we have said above (q. 50, a. 4, ad 3).

Nevertheless even if there be habits in such powers, they cannot be virtues. For virtue is a perfect habit, by which it never happens that anything but good is done: and so virtue must needs be in that power which consummates the good act. But the knowledge of truth is not consummated in the sensitive powers of apprehension: for such powers prepare the way to the intellective knowledge. And therefore in these powers there are none of the virtues, by which we know truth: these are rather in the intellect or reason.

Reply to Objection 1. The sensitive appetite is related to the will, which is the rational appetite, through being moved by it. And therefore the act of the appetitive power is consummated in the sensitive appetite: and for this reason the sensitive appetite is the subject of virtue. Whereas the sensitive powers of apprehension are related to the intellect rather through moving it; for the reason that the phantasms are related to the intellective soul, as colors to sight (De Anima iii, text. 18). And therefore the act of knowledge is terminated in the intellect; and for this reason the cognoscitive virtues are in the intellect itself, or the reason.

And thus is made clear the Reply to the Second Objection.

Reply to Objection 3. Memory is not a part of pru-

* Cf. Ia, q. 78, a. 4

dence, as species is of a genus, as though memory were a virtue properly so called: but one of the conditions re-

quired for prudence is a good memory; so that, in a fashion, it is after the manner of an integral part.

Whether the will can be the subject of virtue?

Ia IIae q. 56 a. 6

Objection 1. It would seem that the will is not the subject of virtue. Because no habit is required for that which belongs to a power by reason of its very nature. But since the will is in the reason, it is of the very essence of the will, according to the Philosopher (*De Anima* iii, text. 42), to tend to that which is good, according to reason. And to this good every virtue is ordered, since everything naturally desires its own proper good; for virtue, as Tully says in his *Rhetoric*, is a “habit like a second nature in accord with reason.” Therefore the will is not the subject of virtue.

Objection 2. Further, every virtue is either intellectual or moral (*Ethic.* i, 13; ii, 1). But intellectual virtue is subjected in the intellect and reason, and not in the will: while moral virtue is subjected in the irascible and concupiscible powers which are rational by participation. Therefore no virtue is subjected in the will.

Objection 3. Further, all human acts, to which virtues are ordained, are voluntary. If therefore there be a virtue in the will in respect of some human acts, in like manner there will be a virtue in the will in respect of all human acts. Either, therefore, there will be no virtue in any other power, or there will be two virtues ordained to the same act, which seems unreasonable. Therefore the will cannot be the subject of virtue.

On the contrary, Greater perfection is required in the mover than in the moved. But the will moves the irascible and concupiscible powers. Much more therefore should there be virtue in the will than in the irascible and concupiscible powers.

I answer that, Since the habit perfects the power in reference to act, then does the power need a habit perfecting it unto doing well, which habit is a virtue, when the

power’s own proper nature does not suffice for the purpose.

Now the proper nature of a power is seen in its relation to its object. Since, therefore, as we have said above (q. 19, a. 3), the object of the will is the good of reason proportionate to the will, in respect of this the will does not need a virtue perfecting it. But if man’s will is confronted with a good that exceeds its capacity, whether as regards the whole human species, such as Divine good, which transcends the limits of human nature, or as regards the individual, such as the good of one’s neighbor, then does the will need virtue. And therefore such virtues as those which direct man’s affections to God or to his neighbor are subjected in the will, as charity, justice, and such like.

Reply to Objection 1. This objection is true of those virtues which are ordained to the willer’s own good; such as temperance and fortitude, which are concerned with the human passions, and the like, as is clear from what we have said (q. 35, a. 6).

Reply to Objection 2. Not only the irascible and concupiscible powers are rational by participation but “the appetitive power altogether,” i.e. in its entirety (*Ethic.* i, 13). Now the will is included in the appetitive power. And therefore whatever virtue is in the will must be a moral virtue, unless it be theological, as we shall see later on (q. 62, a. 3).

Reply to Objection 3. Some virtues are directed to the good of moderated passion, which is the proper good of this or that man: and in these cases there is no need for virtue in the will, for the nature of the power suffices for the purpose, as we have said. This need exists only in the case of virtues which are directed to some extrinsic good.