

## Analytical Contents

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<p>St. Thomas investigates whether the traditional understanding of virtue, derived from St. Augustine of Hippo via Peter Lombard, is correct. He considers six possible objections, concerning whether virtue is a good quality, whether it is a quality of the mind, whether it enables us to live rightly, whether it is possible for it to be employed badly, and whether it is brought about in us by God. To solve the problem, he works out the formal, material, final, and efficient causes of virtue.</p>	
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<p>Can a person who lacks intellectual virtue still possess moral virtues such as fortitude, temperance, and justice? For a variety of reasons, at first it seems that this is possible. For example, common observation suggests that some people who do not reason well are morally virtuous. However, Thomas shows that although not all intellectual virtues are necessary for moral virtue, the intellectual virtues of prudence and understanding are necessary for moral virtue.</p>	
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<p>The previous chapter asked whether a person who lacks intellectual virtue can still possess moral virtue; conversely, this chapter asks whether a person who lacks moral virtue can still possess intellectual virtue.</p>	

St. Thomas considers a variety of reasons for thinking that this may be possible, having to do with moral development, with the similarity between moral deeds and craftsmanship, and with the common observation that some people who lack moral virtue seem to advise themselves well. He concludes, however, that although other intellectual virtues can exist without moral virtue, the intellectual virtue of prudence does require moral virtue. Taking this chapter together with the previous one, we see that neither complete moral virtue nor complete intellectual virtue is possible without the other.

Commentary on I-II, Question 61, Article 2: Whether There Are Four Cardinal Virtues? 43

According to a widely held view, all moral virtues pivot or depend on four pivotal or paramount virtues – prudence, justice, temperance, and fortitude – sometimes called “cardinal” virtues after the Latin word for a hinge. If true, this fact would provide a much more powerful way of understanding the virtues than had been offered by the influential philosopher Aristotle – who, after helpfully suggesting that each moral virtue is a “mean” between opposite extremes, had presented a diffuse list of twelve “means” without explaining why he listed just these twelve and not others. Responding to various objections, St. Thomas presents compelling reasons for thinking that the four virtues called cardinal surpass the other moral virtues and are, in a certain sense, their heads. The first is prudence, or practical wisdom, the bridge between the moral and intellectual virtues, which brings the power of moral reasoning to its full and proper development. The other three are fortitude, or courage; temperance, or restraint; and justice, or fairness. All of the other “acquired” virtues are associated in some way with these four (as we will find later that all of the “infused” virtues are associated in some way with faith, hope, and charity).

Commentary on I-II, Question 61, Article 3: Whether Any Other Virtues Should Be Called Principal Rather Than These? 54

Some have suggested that although it is correct to think that all of the acquired moral virtues depend on a smaller number of cardinal virtues, nevertheless certain other virtues besides prudence, fortitude, temperance, and justice should also be called cardinal. Magnanimity has been proposed because it spurs great acts of every virtue; humility, because it gives firmness to every virtue; and patience, because it is through patience that the acts of every other virtue are fully carried out. Without in any way disparaging magnanimity, humility, or patience, St. Thomas argues that the fourfold list of cardinal virtues should be left as it stands. Not only are these four concerned with matters of paramount importance, but every other moral virtue turns out to depend on them. In particular, magnanimity and patience turn out to be aspects of the cardinal virtue of fortitude, and humility turns out to be an aspect of the cardinal virtue of temperance.

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Commentary on I-II, Question 62, Article 1: Whether There Are Any Theological Virtues?

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Besides the four cardinal virtues, the classical tradition had identified three “theological” or spiritual virtues: Faith, hope, and charity or love. The suggestion that we may need spiritual virtues over and above the ordinary qualities of good character is ridiculous to the secular sort of mind. Do such virtues exist? In one sense, it may seem obvious that they exist, but care is needed because the popular culture gives each of these terms different meanings than what the tradition intends. Confidence that my friend will not betray me is not the spiritual virtue of faith; optimism that I will get a raise in salary is not the spiritual virtue of hope; giving money to worthy causes is not the definition of charity; and even though the merely natural loves are good, the love called charity is different from the love of a man and a woman, the love of a mother for her child, or the love of two friends. St. Thomas shows that in their correct meanings, the three theological virtues are genuine, and that they bear the same relation to the virtues infused by Divine grace that the cardinal virtues bear to the virtues acquired by human effort.

Commentary on I-II, Question 63, Article 1: Whether Virtue Is in Us by Nature?

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Is virtue implanted in the constitution of human beings – does it in some sense belong to us just because we possess a human nature? The query sounds very modern: Many secular people believe that we are naturally good, and corrupted only by some disorder of social life which might perhaps be corrected by social engineering. According to Christianity, the human condition is much more complex, for although we were endowed by the Creator with a good nature, this good gift is presently in bad condition. A further complication is that although the term “natural” is sometimes used for things we do without having to learn them, it is also used for things we must learn in order to reach our full and appropriate development. In the former sense, it is “natural” to breathe; in the latter sense, it is “natural” to make friends. St. Thomas responds to the query not just theologically but also philosophically, considering what it means for something to be true of us “by nature,” reviewing the history of the problem from the pre-Socratic philosopher Anaxagoras to his own time, and finally disentangling the senses in which virtue can and cannot be called natural to human beings.

Commentary on I-II, Question 63, Article 2: Whether Any Virtue Is Caused in Us by Habituation?

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According to the tradition, the “acquired” virtues are brought about in us by practicing the acts which correspond to them until they become habitual. Is this true? Up to this point in his discussion, St. Thomas has assumed the habituation hypothesis to be correct; in the present chapter, he scrutinizes it to find out whether it really is. He takes up and discusses various reasons for thinking that it is false, for example the theological argument that

apart from Divine grace humans can do nothing to become virtuous, and the metaphysical argument that a cause (in this case repeated acts) cannot be more perfect than its effect (in this case complete virtue). His solution depends on a distinction between virtues which are directed to the good as measured by the rule of human reason, and virtues which are directed to the good as measured by the Divine law. The former can be brought about by habituation; the latter can be brought about in us only by the work of God Himself.

Commentary on I-II, Question 65, Article 1: Whether the Moral Virtues Are Connected with One Another?

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Can we pick and choose among the virtues – is it possible to possess some of them without the others? The classical tradition supposes that this is impossible; if you are defective in any virtue, then to some degree you will be defective in each of them, so that if you are serious about cultivating any of them you must cultivate all of them. Yet today, we often view the virtues as disconnected, saying things like “He may be a crooked businessman, but he’s good to his mom,” “Even a bad man can be a good statesman,” and “There is honor among thieves.” St. Thomas takes very seriously the reasons for thinking that the classical view is false, for example, the everyday observation that a man may perform the acts of one virtue without performing the acts of another. Ultimately, however, Thomas defeats the objections by distinguishing between fully developed virtues, and merely incipient or incomplete virtues. The former really are mutually dependent and interconnected; the latter are not. He shows that this conclusion can be reached in two different ways, depending on the precise method adopted for distinguishing among the cardinal virtues.

Commentary on I-II, Question 84, Article 4: Whether the Seven Capital Vices Are Suitably Reckoned?

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Capital vices are those from which other vices arise; they are like leaders and directors of all the other vices. Just as we must practice all of the virtues to be fully developed in any of them, so we cannot let one vice into the house without opening the door wide to its brothers. The question in this chapter, however, is not so much whether certain vices should be considered capital, but which vices they are. The tradition had viewed seven vices as capital: Vainglory, envy, anger, sloth, covetousness, gluttony, and lust. Various reasons can be offered for thinking either that this list is defective, some obvious (for example that since there are four cardinal virtues, there must be four capital vices), some not so obvious (for example that although gluttony and lust concern pleasure, and sloth and envy concern sadness, the list should also include vices pertaining to the other chief passions, hope and fear). By means of a subtle and multifaceted analysis of the psychology of sin as a distortion of the natural desire for happiness, St. Thomas defends the traditional enumeration, comparing the seven capital vices to seven generals with pride as their queen.

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PART II: THE VIRTUE OF JUSTICE, ESPECIALLY IN RELATION TO LAW

Commentary on II-II, Question 30, Article 3: Whether Mercy Is a Virtue?

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Is mercy a virtue? At first it may seem that it is not. In the first place, pity, like anger, can impede deliberation. In the second place, the virtue of justice involves punishment, but mercy involves remission of punishment. Besides, even if the acts of mercy are meritorious, it might be argued that they are merely effects of another virtue, so that mercy is not a virtue in itself. In careful response to these objections, St. Thomas shows that the virtue of mercy is as genuine as the virtue of justice. Although unregulated passion may indeed impede deliberation, the virtue of mercy is neither unregulated nor a passion. Moreover, far from being an impediment to justice, mercy may actually serve the purposes of justice, provided that certain conditions are met. Finally, mercy is not merely an effect of charity, but a distinct virtue subordinate to charity, for it concerns a particular mode in which the acts of charity are carried out.

Commentary on II-II, Question 58, Article 1: Whether Justice Is Fittingly Defined as Being the Perpetual and Constant Will to Render to Each One His Right?

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According to a long tradition, justice is “a constant and perpetual will to give to each person his right.” In our day the expression “right” is most often used to signify a liberty to do something, for example the right to bear arms, to speak freely, or to worship according to conscience. In the classical definition of justice, however, the term is used in a much broader sense: A person’s “right” is whatever is his, whatever he deserves, whatever is properly due to him. The present chapter’s query is whether this time-honored definition suitably expresses the essence of justice. St. Thomas considers six objections, each of which targets some element in the definition. Objections 1 and 2 deny that justice “a will”; Objection 3 denies that it is “perpetual”; Objection 4, that it is both “perpetual” and “constant,” as though these words signified different qualities; and Objections 5 and 6, that it “renders to each one his right.”

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 1: Whether Judgment Is an Act of Justice?

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Before I can render someone what is due to him, I have to know what is due to him. So the act of giving him his right seems to presuppose a prior act of judging what his right is. Then is judgment itself the characteristic act of justice? So it would seem, yet this answer lays us open to difficulties. For example, if judging is an act of the intellect, wouldn’t it be the characteristic act of an intellectual rather than a moral virtue? And isn’t some kind of judgment required by every virtue, not only by justice? On the other hand, judgment seems to be what judges do. Where then does this leave the rest of us – is no one just but the judge? To complicate matters still further,

it might even be said that judgment belongs neither to the ordinary person nor to the judge, for St. Paul says that judgment, in some sense, is the act of “the spiritual man.” We see then that what might at first appear to be a fatuous question – “Is judgment the characteristic act of justice?” – turns out to be a stumper. St. Thomas unravels the difficulties.

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 2: Whether It Is Lawful to Judge? 202

Human law appoints certain persons judges, but is it really right for any mere human to stand in judgment? The Objectors think that the answer should be “No”; in their view, human judgment is condemned both by natural and Divine law. In the relativistic ambiance of our own times as well, “judgmentalism” has been judged and found wanting. Yet there is a certain difficulty with antijudgmentalism, for if no one may judge others, then how is it that we may deliver an unfavorable judgment upon those who do judge others? Could it be that we have passed judgment upon judgment too quickly – or perhaps that only certain kinds of judgment are illicit? If so, which kinds? St. Thomas investigates the various senses in which human beings may and may not “judge.”

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 5: Whether We Should Always Judge According to the Written Law? 214

The act of judgment is the means by which justice is actualized, and justice is in turn connected with all the rest of the virtues. Normally, we should do as the written law directs, but earlier in the *Summa* St. Thomas has considered exceptions: (1) Under certain conditions custom can abolish written law. (2) Under certain conditions one may disobey so-called unjust laws, and may even be obligated to disobey them. (3) When cases arise which the written law was not intended to cover, those who have the authority to make the law may also suspend it. (4) In emergencies, when such cases arise but there is no time to consult authority, the citizens themselves may set aside the words of the law and follow its intention instead. Here, though, St. Thomas is not thinking of either lawmakers or ordinary citizens. Must judges follow the written law? And must they do as its very words direct, or may they sometimes set aside the words and follow its intention instead? This inquiry is not just about constitutional rules or judicial role definitions. Taken in its broadest sense it concerns how such matters are related to human moral character.

Commentary on II-II, Question 60, Article 6: Whether Judgment Is Rendered Perverse by Being Usurped? 228

Is justice destroyed when judgment is usurped – when a person is judged by someone who has no public authority to do so? Usurpation of judgment is judging a case without jurisdiction, seizing the power of judgment from the person to whom it belongs. However, in the present chapter St. Thomas is not asking whether it is unjust for a judge to make the sorts of judgments which properly belong to, say, the legislature; he has already established that this is wrong, because the judge must render judgment according to the law.

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Rather he is asking whether it is unjust for someone else to make the sorts of judgments which properly belong to the judge himself. The usurper, the “someone else,” might be another judge who has no jurisdiction in the case, or it might be someone who is not a judge at all. St. Thomas defends the traditional view that the usurpation of judgment is a violation of justice – that judging without proper jurisdiction always destroys justice – even if the usurper renders the correct judgment.

Commentary on II-II, Question 80, Article 1: Whether the Virtues Annexed to Justice Are Suitably Enumerated? 242

Although the many aspects of justice may be called “parts” of justice, they are not all “parts” in the same sense. The present chapter is about the “potential” parts of justice, meaning the secondary virtues which in some way resemble justice or are associated with it. Before St. Thomas, the thinkers who had investigated the potential parts of justice had enumerated them in a bewildering variety of ways. In the present Article, he defends the sixfold classification of Marcus Tullius Cicero against the sevenfold classification of Macrobius, the ninefold classification of Pseudo-Andronicus, the fivefold classification of “certain others” whom he does not name, and a single suggestion drawn from Aristotle. Characteristically, he does not simply discard the thoughts of all these others; whenever he comes upon a worthy insight, he works out what the writer was getting at and finds room for it in a subtler scheme to which the present chapter is merely an introduction.

Commentary on II-II, Question 122, Article 1: Whether the Precepts of the Decalogue Are Precepts of Justice? 267

The notion of some people that virtue ethics is a way of doing ethics without rules would strike St. Thomas as very strange, for the acts to which the virtues predispose us are things which we ought to do; he always connects virtues with precepts, dispositions of character with authoritative rules. In the present chapter he is concerned with the famous set of authoritative rules known as the Ten Commandments. Although they are part of Divine law, Thomas thinks they are also precepts of natural law, upheld by reason. The great question of the chapter – whether they are precepts of justice – should be taken not in the sense “Do they have anything to do with justice?” but in the sense “Is justice their main concern?” For according to the classical tradition, the Divine law addresses all of the virtues, not only justice – yet in some sense the Ten Commandments specialize in the virtue of justice. What Thomas investigates is whether this view of their special concern is correct.

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