

## Summa of the Summa Part 7 Ethics

### Question 18: Of the Good and Evil of Human Acts, in General

#### Article One: Whether Every Human Action Is Good, or Are there Evil actions?

I answer that: TA is much broader in his concept of evil. It seems that he does not believe that evil exists outside of humanity or in creation in general. He is not speaking as such only moral evil here. He speaks of evil as something that comes from a person that does evil things because evil resides within that person. Evil is the absence of good or the imperfection of someone or something. (PM)

TA says, "We must therefore say that every action has goodness, in so far as it has being: whereas it is lacking in goodness, in so far as it is lacking in something that is due to its fullness of being, and thus it is said to be evil: for instance if it lacks the quantity determined by reason, or its due place, or something of the kind..."

#### Article Two: Whether the Good or Evil of a Man's Action Is Derived from Its Object?

Obj. one: Good or evil is not derived from its object. The object is a thing and according to St. Augustine said that evil is not in things, but in the sinner's use of them. (PM) "Therefore, the good or evil of a human action is not derived from its object.

On the contrary: If a person loves an evil object or a good object this transfers to the person. In other words, if someone loves excessive drinking which is evil this evil is transferred to the person engaging in the evil to excess. The opposite occurs when the object is good. If one devotes time and energy to studying the Bible which is good, this goodness transfers to the person studying.

I answer that: "In natural things, the primary evil is when a generated thing does not realize its specific form (for instance, if instead of a man, something else be generated); so the primary evil in moral actions is that which is from the object, for instance, *to take what belongs to another*. And this action is said to be evil in its *genus*, genus here standing for species, just as we apply the term *mankind* to the whole human species."

Reply to Obj. one: "Although external things are good in themselves nevertheless they have not always a due proportion to this or that action. And so, inasmuch as they are considered as objects of such actions, they have not the quality of goodness."

#### Article Three: Whether Man's Action Is Good or Evil from a Circumstance?

Obj. one: "It would seem that an action is not good or evil from a circumstance."  
Circumstances are outside the good or evil action. Good and evil are things themselves

Question 18 Article three obj. one Cont.

And the evil or good is not outside them but within them.

Obj. three: The evil or good is attributed to its substance and not to its accidents.

On the Contrary: Timing and location of actions whether good or bad is important. This makes the action dependent on circumstances whether the person is behaving virtuous or vicious.

(PM)

I answer that: Circumstances that are lacking some good or completeness introduce an effect which could be good or evil. Therefore the circumstances are to be considered in any act of a person. For under some circumstances a usually good action could be determined evil in one case and good in another. This is the case of telling the truth. In most cases telling the truth is helpful and good, but in others it could be unnecessarily hurtful on the basis of need to know.

(PM)

Reply Obj. one: "Circumstances are outside an action, inasmuch as they are not part of its essence; but they are in an action as accidents thereof. Thus, too, accidents in natural substances are outside the essence.

Reply Obj. three: "Since good and being are convertible, according as being is predicated of substance and of accident, so is good predicated of a thing both in respect of its essential being, and in respect of its accidental being, and this, both in natural things and in moral actions."

Article Four: Whether a Human Action Is Good or Evil from its End?

Obj. one: The claim is made from a philosopher Dionysius that nothing acts with a view to evil. Therefore if the end is the means of determining an evil or a good action there could be no evil. This of course is false. (PM)

I answer that: According to TA goodness is fourfold. The first is the action from its genus because of action and being so much has it of goodness; The second it has its goodness according to its species, which is derived from its suitable object; Thirdly, it has goodness from its circumstances, in respect, as it were, of its accidents and fourthly, it has goodness from its end, to which it is compared as to the cause of its goodness.

Reply Obj. One: "The good in view of which one acts is not always a true good; but sometimes it is a true good, sometimes and apparent good. And in the latter event, an evil action results from the end in view..."

Article Six: Whether an Action Has the Species of Good or Evil from Its End?

### Question 18 Article Six I Answer that

I answer that: TA answers this question from an internal and external viewpoint in respect to voluntary actions. He goes on to say that just as the end of the interior action of the will and the exterior action take their identity from the end. "The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear. Therefore just as the external action takes its species from the object on which it bears; so the interior act of the will takes its species from the end, as from its own proper object. External actions may use instruments which assist the action to come to completions which are of the species of a human act and can be considered formally with regard to the end, but materially with regard to the object of the external action. The example that TA uses links stealing to committing adultery in a way that the act of adultery is considered more than acting as a thief.

Article Eight: Whether Any Action Is Indifferent [Neither Good nor Evil] in Its Species?

Obj. two: The end is either good or evil and not indifferent. "Therefore every human action is good or evil according to its species. None, therefore, is indifferent in its species."

On the contrary: Some actions are indifferent according to their species because there exists a middle road of which at a point in time the action cannot be determined by its outcome.

I answer that: Indifference according to their species in the end may be neither good or bad such as picking up a straw in a field.

Article Nine: Whether an Individual Action Can Be Indifferent?

I answer that: "Every human action that proceeds from deliberate reason, if it be considered in the individual, must be good or bad. If however, it does not proceed from deliberate reason, but from some act of the imagination, as when a man strokes his beard, or moves his head or foot, such an action, properly speaking, is not moral or human; since this depends on the reason. Hence it will be indifferent, as standing apart from the genus of moral actions."

Article Ten: Whether a Circumstance Places a Moral Action in the Species of Good or Evil?

On the contrary: "Place is a circumstance. But place makes a moral action to be in a certain species of evil, for theft of a thing from a holy place is a sacrilege. Therefore a circumstance makes a moral action to be specifically good or bad..."

Article Eleven: Whether Every Circumstance That Makes an Action Better or Worse, Places a Moral Action in a Species of Good or Evil?

### Question 18 Article Eleven On the contrary

On the contrary: “ More or less do not change a species. But more and less is a circumstance of additional goodness or malic. Therefore not every circumstance that makes a moral action better or worse, places it in a species of good or evil.”

I answer that: The amount of what was stolen may increase or decrease the severity of the sin committed, but it doesn't change the species of the sin. But it could aggravate or diminish the sin. This also applies to other evil or good actions. (PM)

### Questions and Answers for Chapter 18 part 7 on Ethics

1. Is every human action good or are there evil actions? TA is much broader in his concept of evil. It seems that he does not believe that evil exists outside of humanity or in creation in general. He is not speaking as such only moral evil here. He speaks of evil as something that comes from a person that does evil things because evil resides within that person. Evil is the absence of good or the imperfection of someone or something. (PM)

TA says, “We must therefore say that every action has goodness, in so far as it has being: whereas it is lacking in goodness, in so far as it is lacking in something that is due to its fullness of being, and thus it is said to be evil: for instance if it lacks the quantity determined by reason, or its due place, or something of the kind...”

2. Are man's good or evil actions derived from its object? “In natural things, the primary evil is when a generated thing does not realize its specific form (for instance, if instead of a man, something else be generated); so the primary evil in moral actions is that which is from the object, for instance, to take what belongs to another. And this action is said to be evil in its genus, genus here standing for species, just as we apply the term mankind to the whole human species.” (TA)

3. Are man's actions good or evil based upon the circumstances? Circumstances that are lacking some good or completeness introduce an effect which could be good or evil. Therefore the circumstances are to be considered in any act of a person. For under some circumstances a usually good action could be determined evil in one case and good in another. This is the case of telling the truth. In most cases telling the truth is helpful and good, but in others it could be unnecessarily hurtful on the basis of need to know. (PM)

4. Is a human action good or evil depending upon its end? According to TA goodness is fourfold. The first is the action from its genus because of action and being so much has it of goodness; The second it has its goodness according to its species, which is derived from its suitable object; Thirdly, it has goodness from its circumstances, in respect , as it were, of its

Question 18 part 7 on Ethics Q& A cont. question 4

accidents and fourthly, it has goodness from its end, to which it is compared as to the cause of its goodness.

5. Does an action have the species of good or evil from its end? TA answers this question from an internal and external viewpoint in respect to voluntary actions. He goes on to say that just as the end of the interior action of the will and the exterior action take their identity from the end. "The end is properly the object of the interior act of the will: while the object of the external action, is that on which the action is brought to bear. Therefore just as the external action takes its species from the object on which it bears; so the interior act of the will takes its species from the end, as from its own proper object. External actions may use instruments which assist the action to come to completions which are of the species of a human act and can be considered formally with regard to the end, but materially with regard to the object of the external action. The example that TA uses links stealing to committing adultery in a way that the act of adultery is considered more than acting as a thief.

6. Can any action be neither good nor evil in its species? Indifference according to their species in the end may be neither good or bad such as picking up a straw in a field.

7. Can an individual's action be indifferent? "Every human action that proceeds from deliberate reason, if it be considered in the individual, must be good or bad. If however, it does not proceed from deliberate reason, but from some act of the imagination, as when a man strokes his beard, or moves his head or foot, such an action, properly speaking, is not moral or human; since this depends on the reason. Hence it will be indifferent, as standing apart from the genus of moral actions."

8. Does a circumstance place a moral action in the species of good or evil? "Place is a circumstance. But place makes a moral action to be in a certain species of evil, for theft of a thing from a holy place is a sacrilege. Therefore a circumstance makes a moral action to be specifically good or bad..."

9. Does every circumstance that makes an action better or worse place a moral action in a species of good or evil? The amount of what was stolen may increase or decrease the severity of the sin committed, but it doesn't change the species of the sin. But it could aggravate or diminish the sin. This also applies to other evil or good actions. (PM)