

Summa of the Summa

Ethics Questions 20 & 21

Of Goodness and Malice in External Human Actions

Article One: Whether Goodness or Malice Is First in the Action of the Will, or in the External Action?

On the contrary: “Augustine says (Retract. i. 9) that *it is by the will that we sin, and that we behave aright*. Therefore moral good and evil are first in the will.

I answer that: There are two ways that external action can be good or bad. One is in regard to their genus, and the situation that is joined to it. Such as giving of alms may be good if the conditions are observed as good. The other is something is good or evil in relation to the end; in that if one gives alms for it to be seen by others it is determined as evil. The object of the will is to be good or evil by which an action derives from its relation to the end. Thus it is to be found first in the act of the will.

Article Two: Whether the Whole Goodness and Malice of the External Action Depends on the Goodness of the Will?

I answer that: Regarding the action to be good or evil as we have seen in the previous article as related to matter and circumstances and/or the end depends completely on the will. However, respect of due matter or circumstances, depends on the reason: and on this goodness depends the goodness of the will. It is pointed out that for an act to be good it must be so in its intended purpose, the circumstances and the outcome. But if it is evil it is only necessary to be evil in only one of those three possibilities. (PM) “But if the will be good from its intention of the end, this is not enough to make the external action good; and if the will be evil either by reason of its intention of the end, or by reason of the act willed, it follows that the external action is evil...”

Article Three: Whether the Goodness and Malice of the External Action Are the Same As Those of the Interior Act?

On the Contrary: Goodness and malice of the external action are not always the same for there is but one goodness of the internal and external act.

I answer that: “Now it happens sometimes that one and the same individual act has several aspects of goodness or malice, and sometimes that it has but one...Sometimes the goodness of an interior act or malice of the interior act is the same as that of the external action, and

Cont. Article Three I answer that

sometimes not. For as we have already said (AA, 1,2), these two goodnesses or malices, of the internal and external acts, are ordained to one another...”

Article Four: Whether the External Action Adds Any Goodness or Malice to That of the Interior Act?

On the contrary: “Every agent intends to attain good and avoid evil. If therefore by the external action no further goodness or malice be added, it is to no purpose that he who has a good or an evil will, does a good deed or refrains from an evil deed. Which is unreason

I answer that: “If we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from the will tending to the end, then the external action adds nothing to this goodness...On the other hand if we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from its matter and due circumstances...it adds to the goodness or malice of the will, because every inclination or movement is perfected y attaining its end or reaching its term.”

Article Five: Whether the Consequences of the External Action Increase Its Goodness or Malice?

On the contrary: The end never justifies the means when the means are evil. “The consequences do not make an action that was evil, to be good, nor one that was good to be evil.” If a man gives money to a beggar and the person uses the money to buy booze then that desire to do good turns out to be evil even though one could say that it wasn’t one’s fault. This is popular today without thinking it through. The consequences of an action are seen as good or bad. Therefore, the consequences of an action do not increase its goodness or malice.”

I answer that: If a man foresees that the consequences of his action leave a pathway of confusion and destruction and proceeds anyway his consequences are even more self-condemning. (PM) “But if the consequences are not foreseen,...if the consequences follow by accident and seldom, then they do not increase the goodness or malice of the action: because we do not judge of a thing according to that which belongs to it by accident, but only according to that which belongs to it of itself...”

Q & A for Question 20

1. Is goodness or malice first in the action of the will or in the external action?

There are two ways that external action can be good or bad. One is in regard to their genus, and the situation that is joined to it. Such as giving of alms may be good if the conditions are observed as good. The other is something is good or evil in relation to the end; in that if one gives alms for it to be seen by others it is determined as evil. The object of the will is to be good or evil by which an action derives from its relation to the end. Thus it is to be found first in the act of the will.

2. Does the whole goodness and malice of the external action depend on the goodness of the will? Regarding the action to be good or evil as we have seen in the previous article as related to matter and circumstances and/or the end depends completely on the will. However, respect of due matter or circumstances, depends on the reason: and on this goodness depends the goodness of the will. It is pointed out that for an act to be good it must be so in its intended purpose, the circumstances and the outcome. But if it is evil it is only necessary to be evil in only one of those three possibilities. (PM) "But if the will be good from its intention of the end, this is not enough to make the external action good; and if the will be evil either by reason of its intention of the end, or by reason of the act willed, it follows that the external action is evil..."

3. Is the goodness and malice of the external action the same as those of the interior act? "Now it happens sometimes that one and the same individual act has several aspects of goodness or malice, and sometimes that it has but one...Sometimes the goodness of an interior act or malice of the interior act is the same as that of the external action, and sometimes not. For as we have already said (AA, 1,2), these two goodnesses or malices, of the internal and external acts, are ordained to one another..."

4. Does the external action add any goodness or malice to that of the interior act? "If we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from the will tending to the end, then the external action adds nothing to this goodness...On the other hand if we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from its matter and due circumstances...it adds to the goodness or malice of the will, because every inclination or movement is perfected by attaining its end or reaching its term."

5. Do the consequences of the external action increase its goodness or malice? If a man foresees that the consequences of his action leave a pathway of confusion and destruction and proceeds anyway his consequences are even more self-condemning. (PM) "But if the consequences are not foreseen,...if the consequences follow by accident and seldom, then they do not increase the goodness or malice of the action: because we do not judge of a thing according to that which belongs to it by accident, but only according to that which belongs to it of itself..."

Question 21

Of the Consequences of Human Actions by Reason of Their Goodness and Malice

Article One: Whether a Human Action Is Right or Sinful, in so far as it is good or evil?

I answer that: "Evil is more comprehensive than sin, as also is good than right. For every privation of good, in whatever subject, is an evil: whereas sin consists properly in an action done for a certain end, and lacking due order to that end..." Human reason is crucial in determining whether an action is right or sinful, good or evil. "Every voluntary action that turns aside from the order of reason and of the Eternal Law, is evil, and that every good action is in accord with reason and the Eternal Law. Hence it follows that a human action is right or sinful by reason of its being good or evil"

Q & A

Question 21

1. Can a human action be right or sinful on the basis of whether it is good or evil?

"Evil is more comprehensive than sin, as also is good than right. For every privation of good, in whatever subject, is an evil: whereas sin consists properly in an action done for a certain end, and lacking due order to that end..." Human reason is crucial in determining whether an action is right or sinful, good or evil. "Every voluntary action that turns aside from the order of reason and of the Eternal Law, is evil, and that every good action is in accord with reason and the Eternal Law. Hence it follows that a human action is right or sinful by reason of its being good or evil"