

Summary of the Summa of the Summa on Vices

Question 77 Of the Cause of Sin, on the Part of the Sensitive Appetite

Article Two: Whether the Reason Can Be Overcome by a Passion, against Its Knowledge?

Obj. 4: Socrates (Plato) argues that reason cannot be overcome by a passion against its knowledge. Further the universal knows the particular. If one knows the general category you can assume with accuracy the particular. Such as if you know mules are sterile you also know that the particular one standing in front of you is sterile. Therefore it seems that knowledge does extend to the particular. (PM)

Objection 5: Also according to the Philosopher (*Peri Herm. i.*), *words express the thoughts of the mind*. If while in the state of passion a person knows what one has chosen to do is evil, then this knowledge must extend to the particular situation in which one is involved. (PM)

“Therefore it seems that the passions cannot draw the reason against its universal knowledge; because it is impossible for it to have universal knowledge together with an opposite particular judgment.”

On the contrary: The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 7:23 that he sees another law in his members which fights against the law of his mind and captivated by it in the law of sin. This law is concupiscence of which he was speaking of in the early section he had written. Now concupiscence is a passion, and therefore it seems that a passion draws away reason in opposition to knowledge. (PM)

I answer that: There is the possibility that even one has the correct knowledge and it makes sense to the intellect yet through the passion of the moment do wrong despite the general and specific knowledge one may have. (PM) TA says that this can happen in three ways: 1. By way of distraction 2. By way of opposition, because a passion often inclines to something contrary to what man knows in general and, 3. By way of bodily transmutation, the result of which is that the reason is somehow fettered so as not to exercise its act freely; even as sleep or drunkenness, on account of some change wrought on the body, fetters the use of reason.

Reply to obj. 4: One that has knowledge in a universal can be hindered by a passion from reasoning that the universal idea encourages a conclusion, but one reasons another universal proposition suggested by the inclination of the passion draws one's conclusion accordingly. Such as by diversion the first proposition is fettered by passion and hinders it from arguing, but while the passion lasts the reason argues and concludes under the second proposition. (PM)

Reply to Obj. 5: In one's drunken state a person may give utterance to words of deep significant meaning, but is incompetent to judge because his drunken state hinders that person

Cont. Chapter 77 Reply to Obj. 5

as one in a state of passion one may say words not wisely spoken and yet inwardly thinks that one must do it. (See Ethic. vii. 3) (PM)

Article three: Whether a sin committed through passion, should be called a sin of weakness?

Obj. 1: A sin committed through passion should not be called a sin of weakness because a passion is a vehement movement against the sensitive appetite. This is an evidence of strength rather than weakness.

On the contrary: According to Cicero passion should be called a sin of weakness because passions are diseases of the soul and weakness is another name for disease. (PM)

I answer that: Yes, According to TA, “when the concupiscible or irascible power is affected by any passion contrary to the order of reason, the result being that an impediment arises in the aforesaid manner to the due action of man, it is said to be a sin of weakness.”

Reply to obj. 1: TA asserts “just as in the body the stronger the movement against the order of nature, the greater the weakness, so likewise, the stronger the movement of passion against the order of reason, the greater the weakness of the soul.” PK leaves a note saying that irrationally passionate people are not strong people, as they may seem to be.

Article four: Whether self-love is the source of every sin?

Obj. 1: “It would seem that self-love is not the source of every sin.” Self-love cannot be the proper cause of sin for the Scriptures teach (Lev 19:18) that we are to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.

Obj. 4: Inordinate love of self and or neighbor can lead to sin. (PM) “Thus, self-love is not the cause of every sin.”

On the contrary: Augustine says that self-love is the cause of every sin. (PM)

I answer that: TA says. Yes, every sinful act proceeds from inordinate desire for some temporal good. Now the fact that anyone desires a temporal good inordinately is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately; for to wish anyone some good is to love him.

Reply Obj. 1: Augustine reminds us that well-ordered self-love, whereby one desires a fitting good for oneself, is right and natural; but it is inordinate self-love which can lead to the contempt of God and thereby reckons to be the cause of sin. (PM)

Question 77 cont. Article four reply obj. 4

Reply Obj. 4: Since a friend is like another self, (Ethic. ix): wherefore the sin which is committed through love for a friend, appears to be committed through self-love. (PM)

Article Six: Whether sin is alleviated on account of a passion?

On the contrary: Augustine says in De Civ. Dei iv, 12 that the passion of concupiscence is called a temptation of the flesh. He goes on to state that the greater the temptation that overcomes a man, the less grievous his sin. (PM)

I answer that: TA answers with a kind of yes and no. He states that sin consists essentially in an act of the free will, which is a faculty of the will and reason; while passion is a movement of the sensitive appetite. Now the sensitive appetite can be related to the free will, antecedently and consequently. If through a passion prior to committing sin it can diminish the sin if it is under voluntary control through reason and will the action is accomplished freely and fully under control and therefore a voluntary act. (PM) "In this respect passion diminishes sin, in so far as it diminishes its voluntariness."

"On the other hand, a consequent passion does not diminish a sin, but increases it; or rather it is a sign of its gravity, in so far as it shows the intensity of the will towards the sinful act; and so it is true that the greater the pleasure or the concupiscence with which anyone sins, the greater the sin." (TA) (PM) TK indicates in his note below that the same is true with virtue. The greater the pleasure in virtue, the greater the virtue. The two ideas are corollaries to each other.

Article Eight: Whether a sin committed through passion can be mortal?

Obj. e: Passion is a hindrance to reason, as explained above (AA. I, 2). Now it belongs to the reason to turn to God, or to turn away from Him, which is the essence of a mortal sin. Therefore a sin committed through passion cannot be mortal."

I answer that: If reason does not drive away the passion leading to sin the effect will be a mortal sin according to TA. This is so since as stated in (Q. 72, A. 5) mortal sin consists in turning away from our last end which is God, which aversion pertains to the deliberating reason, whose function it is also to direct towards the end and thereby relinquish the foolish act of passion leading to mortal sin. Reason may come to the rescue, but it does not drive away the passion or at least prevent the passionate act from happening or having its effect, then a moral sin results. (PM)

Reply Obj. 3: When reason is removed completely from the act it can be regarded as an act of insanity and the sin is no longer either mortal or venial. This is true when the reason no longer remains in possession of its free-will, so as to turn away from God, or turn to Him. (PM)

Q & A for Question 77

1. Can reason be overcome by a passion, against its knowledge? : There is the possibility that even one has the correct knowledge and it makes sense to the intellect yet through the passion of the moment do wrong despite the general and specific knowledge one may have. (PM) TA says that this can happen in three ways: 1. By way of distraction 2. By way of opposition, because a passion often inclines to something contrary to what man knows in general and, 3. By way of bodily transmutation, the result of which is that the reason is somehow fettered so as not to exercise its act freely; even as sleep or drunkenness, on account of some change wrought on the body, fetters the use of reason.
2. Should a sin committed through passion be called a sin of weakness? Yes, According to TA, “when the concupiscible or irascible power is affected by any passion contrary to the order of reason, the result being that an impediment arises in the aforesaid manner to the due action of man, it is said to be a sin of weakness.”
3. Is self-love the source of every sin? Yes, every sinful act proceeds from inordinate desire for some temporal good. Now the fact that anyone desires a temporal good inordinately is due to the fact that he loves himself inordinately; for to wish anyone some good is to love him.
4. Is sin alleviated on account of a passion? TA answers with a kind of yes and no. He states that sin consists essentially in an act of the free will, which is a faculty of the will and reason; while passion is a movement of the sensitive appetite. Now the sensitive appetite can be related to the free will, antecedently and consequently. If through a passion prior to committing sin it can diminish the sin if it is under voluntary control through reason and will the action is accomplished freely and fully under control and therefore a voluntary act. (PM) “In this respect passion diminishes sin, in so far as it diminishes its voluntariness.”
5. Can a sin committed through passion be mortal? If reason does not drive away the passion leading to sin the effect will be a mortal sin according to TA. This is so since as stated in (Q. 72, A. 5) mortal sin consists in turning away from our last end which is God, which aversion pertains to the deliberating reason, whose function it is also to direct towards the end and thereby relinquish the foolish act of passion leading to mortal sin. Reason may come to the rescue, but it does not drive away the passion or at least prevent the passionate act from happening or having its effect, then a mortal sin results. (PM)