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978-0-521-02926-1 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 18 - Principles of Morality, (1a2ae. 18-21)

Thomas Gilby O.P.

Excerpt

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 18, 1

POST HOC CONSIDERANDUM EST de bonitate et malitia humanorum actuum: et

primo, quomodo actio humana sit bona vel mala;
 secundo, de his quæ consequuntur ad bonitatem vel malitiam
 humanorum actuum, puta meritum vel demeritum,
 peccatum et culpa.

Circa primum occurrit triplex consideratio,

prima est de bonitate et malitia humanorum actuum in
 generali;
 secunda, de bonitate et malitia interiorum actuum;
 tertia, de bonitate et malitia exteriorum actuum.

Quæstio 18. de bonitate et malitia humanorum actuum in generali

Circa primum quærentur undecim:

1. utrum omnis actio sit bona vel aliqua sit mala;
2. utrum actio hominis habeat quod sit bona vel mala ex
 objecto;
3. utrum hoc habeat ex circumstantia;
4. utrum hoc habeat ex fine;
5. utrum aliqua actio hominis sit bona vel mala in sua specie;
6. utrum actus habeat speciem boni vel mali ex fine;
7. utrum species quæ est ex fine contineatur sub specie quæ
 est ex objecto sicut sub genere, aut e converso;
8. utrum sit actus indifferens secundum suam speciem;
9. utrum aliquis actus sit indifferens secundum individuum;
10. utrum aliqua circumstantia constituat actum moralem in
 specie boni vel mali;
11. utrum omnis circumstantia augens bonitatem vel malitiam
 constituat actum moralem in specie boni vel mali.

^aThe preceding section of the *Prima Secundæ* (Vols. 16 & 17 of this series) has considered the end and conditions of human activity. Henceforth the one ultimate purpose, the happiness, *beatitudo*, of knowing and therefore loving uncreated truth and good (1a2ae. 1-5) is presupposed. The human acts which reach out to this have been inspected as to their psychological structure (ibid 6-17). 'Human act', *actus humanus*, is the technical term for deeds done from deliberation and choice, and is not applied to activities before responsibility comes into play nor, strictly speaking, to processes that develop from its effective decision. St Thomas here does not stick to the strict terminology of his initial distinction between *actio humana* and *actio hominis* (ibid 1, 1), taking it for granted that the context shows that he is always

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MORALITY OF ACTS IN GENERAL

THE GOODNESS AND MORAL EVIL of human acts have next to be discussed: and

- first, how they are good or bad (18–20);
- second, the consequences, such as being well deserving or ill deserving, of being wrong and at fault (21).

Goodness and moral evil are considered under the three headings of

- first, human acts in general (18);
- second, inner acts (19);
- third, outward acts (20).^a

Question 18. good and moral evil in human acts in general

Here there are eleven points of inquiry:

1. are all acts good or can some be bad?
2. does a man's deed get its good or bad from the objective?
3. from the circumstances?
4. from the end intended?
5. can a human act be good or bad of its kind?
6. and does this come from the end intended?
7. is the kind of act it is because of the end included as under a genus in the kind of act it is because of the objective, or is the reverse true?
8. can an act be morally neutral of its kind?
9. in the individual case?
10. can a circumstance render a moral act good or bad of its kind?
11. does each circumstance altering a moral act for better or for worse establish there a special kind of good or evil?^b

speaking of free acts. These alone are moral acts. As will appear, 'moral' for him does not mean good or right; morality is qualified as good, bad, or indifferent. The opposite of 'moral' is 'non-moral'; he does not speak of 'immoral', or 'amoral'. The '*malitia*' here referred to should be translated 'moral evil', and not narrowed down to maliciousness or spite, *malignitas*; later on it will be given the more specific sense of sinning from ill-will, rather than from ignorance or weakness (ibid 71, 1 & 78, 1). *Inmer acts* are those elicited by mind and will, *outward acts* those elicited by man's organic powers under the control of mind and will. cf Appendix 1.

^bThe Question divides into three parts: morality itself (art. 1), its three determinants (arts. 2–4), and their relationship to one another (arts. 3–11).

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 18, 1

articulus 1. utrum omnis humana actio sit bona vel aliqua mala

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod omnis actio hominis sit bona, et nulla sit mala. Dicit enim Dionysius quod *malum non agit nisi virtute boni*.² Sed virtute boni non fit malum. Ergo nulla actio est mala.

2. Præterea, nil agit nisi secundum quod est actu. Non est autem aliquid malum secundum quod est actu, sed secundum quod potentia privatur actu; inquantum autem potentia perficitur per actum est bonum, ut dicitur in *Meta*.³ Nihil ergo agit inquantum est malum, sed solum inquantum est bonum. Omnis ergo actio est bona, et nulla mala.

3. Præterea, malum non potest esse causa nisi per accidens, ut patet per Dionysium.⁴ Sed omnis actionis est aliquis per se effectus. Nulla ergo actio est mala, sed omnis actio est bona.

SED CONTRA est quod Dominus dicit *Joan.*,⁵ *Omnis qui male agit, odit lucem*. Est ergo aliqua actio hominis mala.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod de bono et malo in actionibus oportet loqui sicut de bono et malo in rebus, eo quod unaquæque res talem actionem producit, qualis est ipsa. In rebus autem unumquodque tantum habet de bono quantum habet de esse; bonum enim et ens convertuntur, ut in *Primo* dictum est.⁶

Solus autem Deus habet totam plenitudinem sui esse secundum aliquid unum et simplex, unaquæque res vero aliam habet plenitudinem essendi, sibi convenientem secundum diversa. Unde in aliquibus contingit quod quantum ad aliquid habent esse et tamen eis aliquid deficit ad plenitudinem essendi eis debitam. Sicut ad plenitudinem esse humani requiritur quod sit

¹cf *De malo* II, 4

²*De divinis nominibus* 20. PG 3, 717. St Thomas, *lect.* 16

³*Metaphysics* VIII, 9. 1051a4–29. St Thomas, *lect.* 10

⁴*De divinis nominibus* 20 & 32. PG 3, 717 & 732

⁵*John* 3, 20

⁶Ia. 5, 1 & 3; 17, 4 ad 2

^cThe discussion follows the usual pattern for a *Summa* article: 1. the title expressed as an open question; 2. a set of arguments for an extreme position; 3. a brief rejoinder, which may be an appeal to a received authority, a compressed proof, or a gambit of persuasion; 4. an exposition of the author's own position; and 5. the replies to the opening arguments. See Vol. 1 of this series, Appendix 1.

^dThe Pseudo-Dionysius, or Denis, author of a group of fifth-century writings of great influence on early medieval religious philosophy: probably a Syrian monk, he was in the past identified with the Areopagite of *Acts* 17, 4, also with the founder of the Abbey of Saint-Denis near Paris.

^eAn indirect cause, *causa per accidens*, contrasted with a direct cause, *causa per se*,

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MORALITY OF ACTS IN GENERAL

article 1. are all human acts good or are some bad?

THE FIRST POINT:¹ 1. It would seem that every human act is good and none evil.² For Dionysius^d holds that *evil is not active save in virtue of good*.² Evil, however, is not done in virtue of good. Hence no action is evil.

2. Moreover, a thing does not act except in so far as it itself is actual. Now a thing is not evil for being actual, but as being potential yet lacking the being actual; when the potential is completed by the actual then it is good, as Aristotle notes.³ Consequently a thing never acts because it is evil, but only because it is good. And so every action is good, and none is evil.

3. Furthermore, as appears from Dionysius,⁴ evil cannot cause save indirectly.⁵ But every action has some direct effect. No action is evil, then, but every one is good.^f

ON THE OTHER HAND is our Lord's saying, *Everyone that does evil hates the light*.⁵ Therefore in fact a bad human action exists.

REPLY: Good and bad in actions should be discussed like good and bad in things, since action springs from each thing according to the sort of thing it is.^g Now the degree of good it possesses matches its degree of real existence, for 'good' and 'being' are convertible terms, as explained in the *Prima Pars*.⁶

Now God alone has the fulness of his own existence singly and simply, whereas anything else has another sort of fulness of being, belonging to it for various causes.^h So it may come about that some things though real in some measure nevertheless fall short of the complete reality which is their due. For instance, to be really fully human a body-soul compound should

is an agent that happens to be present in a causal situation without entering into the essential cause-effect relationship, because its own effect is either unintended by or is no more than an incidental condition of the main cause's action (cf *De potentia* III, 6 ad 6; *In Meta.* v, lect. 3). For evil and causality see Ia. 49, 1 & 2.

^fThe three arguments are variations of the theme that all that is positive, real, and active is good, whereas evil is negative, unreal, and inactive; cf Ia. 48-9.

^gThis opening declaration of the continuity between being and acting should be noted. The thought runs throughout St Thomas's moral theory, and indeed develops from his metaphysics and psychology. For the notion of 'moral' see 1a2ae. 58; for evil in being and evil in acting see Ia. 48, 5. Also Appendices 2 & 3.

^hThe argument is based on the distinction between sheer perfection, which is God's alone, and the partial yet due perfection of a creature; cf Ia. 3, 4; 4, 2; 6, 3 & 4.

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quoddam compositum ex anima et corpore habens omnes potentias et instrumenta cognitionis et motus, unde si aliquid horum deficiat alicui homini, deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine sui esse. Quantum igitur habet de esse tantum habet de bonitate; inquantum vero aliquid ei deficit de plenitudine essendi intantum deficit a bonitate, et dicitur ‘malum’: sicut homo cæcus habet de bonitate quod vivit, et malum est ei quod caret visu. Si vero nihil haberet de entitate vel bonitate neque ‘malum’ neque ‘bonum’ dici posset.

Sed quia de ratione boni est ipsa plenitudo essendi, si quidem alicui aliquid defuerit de debita essendi plenitudine non dicitur simpliciter bonum, sed secundum quid in quantum est ens. (Poterit tamen dici simpliciter ens et secundum quid non ens, ut in *Primo* dictum est.⁷)

Sic igitur dicendum est quod omnis actio, inquantum habet aliquid de esse intantum habet de bonitate; inquantum vero deficit ei aliquid de plenitudine essendi quæ debetur actioni humanæ intantum deficit a bonitate, et sic dicitur mala: puta, si deficiat ei vel determinata quantitas secundum rationem, vel debitus locus, vel aliquid huiusmodi.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod malum agit in virtute boni deficientis. Si enim nihil esset ibi de bono, neque esset ens neque agere posset. Si autem non esset deficientis, non esset malum. Unde et actio causata est quoddam bonum deficientis, quod* secundum quid est bonum, simpliciter autem malum.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod nihil prohibet aliquid esse secundum quid in actu unde agere possit, et secundum aliud privari actu unde causet deficientem actionem: sicut homo cæcus actu habet virtutem gressivam, per quam ambulare potest, sed inquantum caret visu, qui dirigit in ambulando, patitur defectum in ambulando dum ambulat cespitando.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod actio mala potest habere aliquem effectum per se secundum id quod habet de bonitate et entitate: sicut adulterium est causa generationis humanæ, inquantum habet commixtionem maris et fœminæ, non autem inquantum caret ordine rationis.

*Piana: *quia*, because

⁷1a. 5, 1 ad 1

¹Evil cannot exist in itself, but only in good; cf 1a. 48, 3.

¹Like the curate’s egg, good in parts.

¹‘To be good’ says more than ‘to be’. The implications are important in a metaphysics of the good, e.g. in 1a. 5, but the parenthesis may be neglected in a discussion of moral good.

¹The complete integrity of a good moral act will be a recurring theme in the four Questions that follow, an integrity composed from its objective, its end, and its circumstances. The text speaks here of ordered measure, *determinata quantitas*.

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be endowed with all the powers and organs of perception and motion, so that if there be anything missing here a man lacks something of his full being. As much as he is real so much is he good; as much as he lacks something of his full reality so much does he fall short of goodness, and is termed 'bad': thus a blind man has a quality of goodness for being alive, yet it is an evil for him to lack sight. Were there nothing real or good about him you could not apply either of the terms 'good' or 'bad'.¹

Since to be completely real is of the very essence of good, it follows that if there be some deficiency whereby a thing is not so fully real as it should be then it should not be spoken of as unreservedly good, but as good up to a point, that is to the extent that it is real.^l (Though, as remarked in the *Prima Pars*, you might talk about its being real simply speaking yet unreal in a qualified sense.^{7k})

Accordingly we should say that every action inasmuch as it has something real about it has something good about it; and that inasmuch as it fails to have the full reality a human act should possess then it falls short of goodness, and so is referred to as bad: thus, for example, when it fails to meet the measure of what is reasonable or is out of place or exhibits some such shortcoming.¹

Hence: 1. Evil acts in virtue of a good that is defective. Were no good present at all then nothing at all would be there nor any possibility of activity. Were the good there present not defective there would be no evil. Hence the action caused is a sort of deficient good—good in part yet bad on the whole.

2. There is nothing to stop a thing being in one respect actual and therefore able to act while in another respect so lacking and non-actual as to produce a defective action. Take the case of a blind man with the use of his limbs; he is able to walk, yet because he is sightless he does not direct his steps, and suffers from this defect when he stumbles.

3. A bad action can have some direct effect because of what is real and good in it. Thus adultery is the cause of fresh human life coming to be, but as a coupling of a man and a woman, not as a failure to maintain the the order of reasonable living.^m

'Amount' is an analogical term, transferred from bodily quantities to psychic and moral values, cf 1a2ae. 52, 1. For the notion of the 'virtuous mean' between the extremes of too much or too little see 1a2ae. 64. For example, the virtue of liberality hits the mark between the defect of miserliness and the excess of prodigality.

^mThe reasonable order, *ordo rationis*, deranged by moral evil includes but in the *Summa* goes beyond that described in the *Nicomachean Ethics*. See Appendices 6, 7 & 10.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 18, 2

articulus 2. utrum actio humana habeat bonitatem vel malitiam ex objecto

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod actio non habeat bonitatem vel malitiam ex objecto. Objectum enim actionis est res. In rebus autem non est malum, sed in usu peccantium, ut Augustinus dicit.² Ergo actio humana non habet bonitatem vel malitiam ex objecto.

2. Præterea, objectum comparatur ad actionem ut materia. Bonitas autem rei non est ex materia, sed magis ex forma, quæ est actus. Ergo bonum et malum non est in actibus ex objecto.

3. Præterea, objectum potentiæ activæ comparatur ad actionem, sicut effectus ad causam. Sed bonitas causæ non dependet ex effectu, sed magis e converso. Ergo actio humana non habet bonitatem vel malitiam ex objecto.

SED CONTRA est quod dicitur *Oseæ*,³ *Facti sunt abominabiles, sicut ea quæ dilexerunt*. Fit autem homo Deo abominabilis propter malitiam suæ operationis. Ergo malitia operationis est secundum objecta mala quæ homo diligit; et eadem ratio est de bonitate actionis.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod, sicut dictum est⁴ bonum et malum actionis, sicut et cæterarum rerum, attenditur ex plenitudine essendi vel defectu ipsius.

Primum autem quod ad plenitudinem essendi pertinere videtur est id quod dat rei speciem. Sicut autem res naturalis habet speciem ex sua forma ita actio habet speciem ex objecto, sicut et motus ex termino. Et ideo sicut

¹cf 1a2ae. 18, 5; 19, 1. II *Sent.* 36, 5

²*De doctrina Christiana* III, 12. PL 34, 73

³*Hosea* 9, 10

⁴1a2ae. 18, 1

⁴Objective, object, *objectum*, literally a thing thrown before, that to which an activity is addressed: a key-term in the classification of powers, dispositions, and acts, divided into the *material object* (*materia circa quam*), or general subject-matter, and the *formal object* (*formalis ratio objecti*, St Thomas calls it), or the specific interest engaged: thus property is the material object of theft, property that is not yours to take is the formal object. The distinction begins to appear in the replies to the objections; there also the foundations of an 'objective morality' are laid. There are types or kinds of moral action which can be discussed apart from the nuances arising from individual circumstances (art. 3 following) and even apart from personal intention (art. 4), though this is what counts above all (art. 7): in other words, valid moral judgments can be formed in abstraction from case-histories so long as the abstraction is recognized. Moral kinds, such as 'the worship of God' or 'contraception', are not to be wrenched out of real life or to be treated as though they represented complete human situations. See Appendix 11.

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article 2. does a human act get good or moral evil from its objective?

THE SECOND POINT:¹ 1. It would appear that an act does not get good or evil from its objective.² For this is a thing. Evil, however, does not lie in things, but in the use to which sinners put them, as Augustine remarks.³ Therefore a human act does not get its good or evil from the objective.

2. Moreover, the objective is like the act's material in which it works.^b Now a thing's goodness comes not so much from its material as from its form that actually shapes it. Likewise in acts as well—it is not their objective which makes them good or bad.

3. Besides, the objective of an active power is to action as effect is to cause.^c Yet a cause's goodness does not depend on its effect, indeed rather the reverse. Hence the good or bad in a human action does not come from the objective.

ON THE OTHER HAND there is *Hosea* saying, *Their abominations were according as they loved*.³ Now a man becomes abominable in the sight of God because of the evil he does, which in its turn is because of the evil objects he chooses. The same reasoning applies when he does good.

REPLY: As was stressed in the preceding article,⁴ good or bad in actions, as elsewhere in things, is judged according to the completeness or incompleteness of their reality.

Here the first relevant factor is what provides a thing's specific character. As in a physical thing this is given by its form, so in an action this is given by its objective character, as also in motion this comes from its term.^d Hence as the basic goodness of a natural thing is provided by its form,

^bMaterial, *materia*; here the physical and psychological stuff out of which the moral deed is wrought. It is potential to being made part of what is actually right or wrong, and therefore, so the argument runs, is not itself a moral factor. All three arguments are for a 'subjective morality', subjective in the sense that by implication they will make morality entirely dependent on personal intention.

^cActive power, the ability to produce an effect; here by contrast with passive power, the aptness to receive an effect. Note that activity may be immanent and not linked with causality or the production of an outside effect; cf e.g. Ia. 27, 1; 33, 1.

^dTerm, *terminus*: a state of 'being' implied in a process of 'becoming'. The third reply speaks of 'terms' to a movement. These are what it starts from, *terminus a quo*, and what it arrives at, *terminus ad quem*: unless these are indicated no definition of a process can be attempted, nor even be distinctively recognized.

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prima bonitas rei naturalis attenditur ex sua forma, quæ dat speciem ei, ita et prima bonitas actus moralis attenditur ex objecto convenienti: unde et a quibusdam vocatur ‘bonum ex genere’, puta uti re sua.

Et sicut in rebus naturalibus primum malum est, si res generata non consequitur formam specificam, puta si non generetur homo sed aliquid loco hominis, ita primum malum in actionibus moralibus est quod est ex objecto, sicut accipere aliena: et dicitur ‘malum ex genere’, ‘genere’ pro ‘specie’ accepto, eo modo loquendi quo dicimus ‘humanum genus’ totam humanam speciem.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod licet res exteriores sint in seipsis bonæ, tamen non semper habent debitam proportionem ad hanc vel illam actionem; et ideo in quantum considerantur ut objecta talium actionum non habent rationem boni.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod objectum non est *materia ex qua*, sed *materia circa quam*; et habet quodammodo rationem formæ, in quantum dat speciem.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod non semper objectum actionis humanæ est objectum activæ potentiæ. Nam appetitiva potentia est quodammodo passiva in quantum movetur ab appetibili; et tamen est principium humanorum actuum. Neque etiam potentialium activarum objecta semper habent rationem effectus, sed quando jam sunt transmutata; sicut alimentum transmutatum est effectus nutritivæ potentiæ, sed alimentum nondum transmutatum comparatur ad potentiam nutritivam sicut materia circa quam operatur.

Ex hoc autem quod objectum est aliquo modo effectus potentiæ activæ, sequitur quod sit terminus actionis ejus, et per consequens quod det ei

⁶Befitting objective, *objectum conveniens*, appropriate to: what this implies will appear progressively when the requirements of virtue are considered in the *Prima Secundæ* and *Secunda Secundæ*.

The translation has shifted the emphasis of ‘*primum*’ from ‘first’ to ‘basic’ in order to prepare for later developments.

⁷Genus and species, *γένος* and *εἶδος*, the first and second of Porphyry’s ‘Five Predicables’ of manners of classifying predicates in relation to Subjects. The term ‘*bonum ex genere*’ comes from Peter Lombard, II *Sentences*, 36, 6. cf *De malo* II, 4 ad 5. II *Sent.* 36, 1, 5. Note that in art. 4 the term ‘*bonum secundum genus*’ refers to non-moral foundation of a good moral act.

⁸Thus the human body is good in itself, but when considered in a moral system of reference it may become a good or bad kind of objective, thus the body of another ‘to be cherished’ or ‘to be murdered’. The treatise is already suggesting that this difference is not constituted entirely by personal intentions; if we restrict our attention to the immediate objectives in the above examples we may remark that cherishing may be prompted by illicit sexuality, and murder can be done from exalted motives.

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which makes it the kind of thing it is, so also the basic goodness of a moral act is provided by the befitting objective on which it is set:^e hence some moralists refer to an act as being 'good of its kind', *bonum ex genere*, for instance using what belongs to you.

And so, to continue the comparison, as in things of nature the basic evil is for the specific form to be missing, thus when instead of a human being something else is begotten, likewise the basic evil in moral acts arises from the objective, for instance to take what does not belong to you: then an act is referred to as being 'bad of its kind', *malum ex genere*, by a turn of speech which makes 'genus' and 'species' synonymous, as when we call the whole human species the '*genus humanum*'.^f

Hence: 1. Exterior things are good in themselves, all the same they are not always fitting objectives for this action or that; accordingly when considered as the objectives of such actions they are not invested with the quality of being good.^g

2. An objective is not the material out of which an act is made, but the material with which it deals; it takes on the rôle of form in that it gives specific nature to an act.^h

3. The objective of a human act is not always that set by an active power. For the root of human desire is a passive power in that what arouses it is something desirable outside it, yet it is from desire that human activity issues.ⁱ Nor indeed do the objectives of active powers always have the nature of an effect, for this is not the case until they have been worked on and transformed; food, for instance, is the effect of our digestive powers once it is assimilated, but beforehand it was the material on which they were at work.

Yet given that an objective is somehow the effect of an active power, then in consequence it does represent the term of its action, to which accordingly

^hThe compression of the reply makes it difficult to follow; the thought is somewhat expanded in the next reply. It may be briefly rendered as follows: the world does not offer us stuff that is morally either good or bad, yet it contributes to the type of good or bad that men do; thus some things do not call for courage while others do. A dangerous or difficult enterprise sets up an emotion that enters into the texture of the controlling virtue. Note already at this stage, that a moral objective is not just a physical fact, but also a psychological datum, and presented as something we can freely either accept or reject. There is no moral responsibility without psychological responsibility: murder as a moral type of action is not on the map of a homicidal maniac. And so by analogy the conclusion applies to all 'compulsions'.

ⁱThe root of human desire; the text simply says '*appetiva potentia*', here taken to mean early basic condition of the will at a stage preceding choice; it does not initiate its own motion and its first motions are not free: cf 1a2ae. 9, 3, 4 & 6; 10, 2 & 4. Also to include the *voluntas sensualitatis* and unpremeditated emotions within the unity of the body-soul compound; cf 1a2ae. 9, 2; 10, 3. 3a. 18, 2 & 5.