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978-0-521-02931-5 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 23 - Virtue, (1a2ae. 55-67)

W. D. Hughes O.P.

Excerpt

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 55, I

CONSEQUENTER CONSIDERANDUM EST de habitibus in speciali. Et quia habitus, ut dictum est,¹ distinguuntur per bonum et malum,

primo dicendum est de habitibus bonis, qui sunt virtutes, et alia eis adjuncta, scilicet dona, beatitudines et fructus; secundo de habitibus malis, scilicet de vitiis et peccatis.

Circa virtutes autem quinque consideranda sunt:

primo, de essentia virtutis;
secundo, de subjecto ejus;
tertio, de divisione virtutum;
quarto, de causa virtutis;
quinto, de quibusdam proprietatibus virtutis.

Quaestio 55. de essentia virtutis

Circa primum quaeruntur quatuor:

1. utrum virtus humana sit habitus;
2. utrum sit habitus operativus;
3. utrum sit habitus bonus;
4. de definitione virtutis.

articulus 1. utrum virtus humana sit habitus

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur;¹ 1. Videtur quod virtus humana non sit habitus. Virtus enim est *ultimum potentiae*, ut dicitur in I *de Caelo*.² Sed ultimum uniuscujusque reducitur ad genus illud cuius est ultimum; sicut punctum ad genus lineae. Ergo virtus reducitur ad genus potentiae, et non ad genus habitus.

2. Præterea, Augustinus dicit quod *virtus est bonus usus liberi arbitrii*.³ Sed usus liberi arbitrii est actus. Ergo virtus non est habitus, sed actus.

3. Præterea, habitibus non meremur, sed actibus; alioquin homo meretur continue, etiam dormiendo. Sed virtutibus meremur. Ergo virtutes non sunt habitus, sed actus.

¹1a2ae. 54, 3

²Cf II *Sent.* 27, 1; III *Sent.* 23, 1, 3, i & iii. *De virtutibus* 1. In II *Ethic.*, lect. 5

³*De Caelo* III, 281a15

⁴*De libero arbitrio* II, 19. PL 32, 1268. cf *Retractiones* 1, 9. PL 32, 598

*To the preceding treatise on habits or psychological dispositions, 1a2ae. 49–54. Vol. 22 of this series. For the order of the *Summa* see Appendix 1 of this volume.

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NATURE OF VIRTUE

AS A SEQUEL^a specific habits have to be considered. Since, as we have seen,^{1b} they are distinguished by moral good and evil, we shall treat

first, of good habits, which are virtues, and their complements, namely, the Gifts, the Beatitudes and the Fruits;^c
secondly, of bad habits, namely, vices and sins.

The virtues present are treated under five headings:

first, the essence of virtue (55);
second, its seat (56);
third, the division of virtues (57–62);
fourth, the cause of a virtue (63);
fifth, some properties of virtue (64–7).

Question 55. the nature of virtue

Under the first heading four points of inquiry are raised.

1. is human virtue a habit?
2. is it an operative habit?
3. is it a good habit?
4. concerning the definition of virtue.

article 1. is human virtue a habit?

THE FIRST POINT:¹ 1. It seems that human virtue is not a habit. Virtue, so Aristotle says, is the utmost of a power.² This utmost is always taken into the class of that of which it is the ultimate, as a point relative to a line. Virtue, therefore, should be classified as a power, not a habit.³

2. Furthermore, Augustine says that virtue is free choice well-applied.³ Now this application is an act. Virtue is not a habit, therefore, but an act.

3. Moreover, we do not merit by habits but by acts, otherwise a man would merit continuously, even while sleeping. Yet we do merit by virtues. Consequently virtues are not habits but acts.

^{1b}Human acts are similarly distinguished in 1a2ae, 18, 5.

^cThe seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost, the eight Beatitudes, or blessings in the Sermon on the Mount, and the twelve Fruits of the Spirit in *Galatians*. 1a2ae. 68–70. Vol. 24.

^aOn the powers or faculties of the soul as distinct from its substance, see 1a. 77, 1; from its habits or dispositions, see 1a2ae. 49, 2.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 55, I

4. Præterea, Augustinus dicit quod *virtus est ordo amoris*.⁴ Et dicit quod *ordinatio, quæ virtus vocatur, est fruendis frui, et utendis uti*.⁵ Ordo autem seu ordinatio nominat vel actum vel relationem. Ergo virtus non est habitus, sed actus vel relatio.

5. Præterea, sicut inveniuntur virtutes humanæ ita et virtutes naturales. Sed virtutes naturales non sunt habitus, sed potentiæ quædam. Ergo etiam neque virtutes humanæ.

SED CONTRA est quod Philosophus scientiam et virtutem ponit esse habitus.⁶

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod virtus nominat quamdam potentiæ perfectionem. Uniuscujusque autem perfectio præcipue consideratur in ordine ad suum finem. Finis autem potentiæ actus est. Unde potentia dicitur esse perfecta, secundum quod determinatur ad suum actum.

Sunt autem quædam potentiæ, quæ secundum seipsas sunt determinatæ ad suos actus, sicut potentiæ naturales activæ. Et ideo hujusmodi potentiæ naturales secundum seipsas dicuntur *virtutes*. Potentiæ autem rationales, quæ sunt propriæ hominis, non sunt determinatæ ad unum, sed se habent indeterminate ad multa. Determinantur autem ad actus per habitus, sicut ex supra dictis patet.⁷ Et ideo virtutes humanæ habitus sunt.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod quandoque virtus dicitur id ad quod est virtus, scilicet vel objectum virtutis, vel actus ejus, sicut fides dicitur quandoque id quod creditur, quandoque vero ipsum credere, quandoque autem ipse habitus quo creditur. Unde quando dicitur quod virtus est *ultimum potentiæ*, sumitur virtus pro objecto virtutis. Id enim in quod ultimo potentia potest est id quod dicitur virtus rei: sicut si aliquis potest ferre centum libras et non plus, virtus ejus consideratur secundum centum libras, non autem secundum sexaginta. Objectio autem procedebat ac si essentialiter virtus esset *ultimum potentiæ*.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod bonus usus liberi arbitrii dicitur esse virtus secundum eandem rationem, quia scilicet est id ad quod ordinatur virtus sicut ad proprium actum. Nihil est enim aliud actus virtutis quam bonus usus liberi arbitrii.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod aliquo dicimur mereri dupliciter. Uno modo, sicut ipso merito, eo modo quo dicimur currere cursu; et hoc modo meremur actibus. Alio modo dicimur mereri aliquo sicut principio merendi,

⁴*De moribus Ecclesiæ* 15, PL 32, 1322. cf *De civitate Dei* xv, 22. PL 41, 467

⁵83 *Quest.* 30. PL 40, 19

⁶*Categoriæ* 6, 8b29

⁷1a2ae. 49, 4

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4. Furthermore, Augustine says *virtue is the order of love*⁴ and that the *ordering which is called virtue is to enjoy what ought to be enjoyed and to use what ought to be used*.⁵ Order or ordering, however, denotes either an action or a relationship. Virtue, therefore, is not a habit but an action or a relationship.

5. Finally, human virtues are discovered to be in the same condition as natural virtues. Natural virtues, however, are not habits but powers. Likewise, therefore, human virtues.

ON THE OTHER HAND the Philosopher says that *science and virtue are habits*.⁶

REPLY: Virtue denotes a determinate perfection of a power.^b The perfection of anything, however, is considered especially in its relation to its end. Yet the end of a power is its act. A power is said to be perfect, therefore, in so far as it is determined to its act.

Now there are some powers which according to their very natures are set towards their acts, such as inborn active powers.^c These in themselves are accordingly called virtues. The rational powers, proper to a man, however, are not determined to one act, but rather in themselves are poised before many. It is through habits that they are set towards acts; this we have shown above.⁷ Human virtues, therefore, are habits.

Hence: 1. What a virtue is related to is sometimes called virtue, namely, either the object of a virtue or its activity. For example, 'faith' sometimes refers to what is believed, sometimes to the very act of believing, sometimes, however, to the habit whereby one believes. Consequently, when virtue is spoken of as the *utmost of a power*, virtue is taken as the object of virtue; the ultimate point which a power can attain is what is called a thing's virtue. For instance, if anyone can carry a hundred pounds and no more, his strength is assessed at that weight, not at sixty pounds. The objection argues as though virtue essentially lies in being this ultimate.

2. The good use of free choice is said to be virtue for the same reason, namely as being the proper activity which virtue is for; indeed an act of virtue is nothing other than free choice well applied.

3. We are said to merit by something in a twofold sense. First, as by the merit itself, thus we are said to run while running; in this way we merit by acting. Secondly, as by the principle of meriting, thus we are said to run

^bA recurrent theme, exposed in the commentary on the *Metaphysics* v, 16 (1021b6) *lectio* 18. See *De veritate* 1, 10. *De malo* 1, 4. 1a, 6, 2.

^cCf 2a2ae, 4, 1, also 1a2ae, 18, 2. II *Sent.* 23, 1, 3, 1. *De potentia* 1, 1. Natural powers: 'natural' here used in a technical sense as contrasted with conscious or voluntary, not as contrasted with artificial or forced.

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sicut dicimur currere potentia motiva; et sic dicimur mereri virtutibus et habitibus.

4. Ad quartum dicendum quod virtus dicitur *ordo* vel *ordinatio amoris*, sicut id ad quod est virtus: per virtutem enim ordinatur amor in nobis.

5. Ad quintum dicendum quod potentiae naturales sunt de se determinatae ad unum, non autem potentiae rationales. Et ideo non est simile, ut dictum est.⁸

articulus 2. utrum virtus humana sit habitus operativus

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:¹ I. Videtur quod non sit de ratione virtutis humanae quod sit habitus operativus. Dicit enim Tullius quod *sicut est sanitas et pulchritudo corporis, ita est virtus animae*.² Sed sanitas et pulchritudo non sunt habitus operativi. Ergo neque etiam virtus.

2. Præterea, in rebus naturalibus invenitur virtus non solum ad agere, sed etiam ad esse, ut patet per Philosophum, in I de Caelo,³ quod quaedam habent virtutem ut sint semper, quaedam vero non ad hoc quod sint semper, sed aliquo tempore determinato. Sed sicut se habet virtus naturalis in rebus naturalibus, ita se habet virtus humana in rationalibus. Ergo etiam virtus humana non solum est ad agere, sed etiam ad esse.

3. Præterea, Philosophus dicit in *Physic.*, quod virtus est *dispositio perfecti ad optimum*.⁴ Optimum autem ad quod hominem oportet disponi per virtutem, est ipse Deus, ut probat Augustinus,⁵ ad quem disponitur anima per assimilationem ad ipsum. Ergo videtur quod virtus dicatur qualitas quaedam animae in ordine ad Deum, tanquam assimilativa ad ipsum, non autem in ordine ad operationem. Non igitur est habitus operativus.

SED CONTRA est quod Philosophus dicit in *Ethic.* quod 'virtus uniuscujusque rei est quæ opus ejus bonum reddit.'⁶

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod virtus ex ipsa ratione nominis importat quamdam perfectionem potentiae, ut supra dictum est.⁷ Unde cum duplex sit potentia, scilicet potentia *ad esse*, et potentia *ad agere*, utriusque potentiae perfectio virtus vocatur. Sed potentia ad esse se tenet ex parte materiae, quæ est ens in potentia; potentia autem ad agere se tenet ex

⁸body of article²*Tusculan Questions*, IV, 13⁴*Physics* VII, 3, 246b23⁶*Ethics* II, 6, 1106a15⁸The hylomorphic concepts of matter and form are applications of the wider notions of potentiality and act. cf *De spiritualibus creaturis* 5. There is an analogous relation¹II *Sent.* 23, I, 3, i³*De Caelo* I, 12, 281a28⁵*De moribus Ecclesiae* II, 3, PL 32 1347⁷art. I above

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by reason of a power of movement; this way we are said to merit by virtues and habits.

4. When virtue is called the order or ordering of love, the meaning is that this is its objective, our loves become ordered through virtue.

5. The natural powers of themselves are set towards one act, which is not the case with the rational powers. We have pointed this out.⁸ Accordingly there is no comparison.

article 1. is human virtue an operative habit?

THE SECOND POINT:¹ 1. It would seem that it is not essential to human virtue to be an operative habit. Cicero says that as health and beauty belong to the body, so virtue belongs to the soul.² Yet health and beauty are not operative habits. Consequently neither is virtue.

2. Furthermore, virtue is met with not only in reference to act, but also in reference to being, as is clear from Aristotle;³ some things have a virtue to be always, whereas others have the virtue to be only for some limited time. Yet as natural virtue is to natural things, so human virtue is to rational beings. And so human virtue is not only for acting, but also for being.

3. Moreover, Aristotle says that virtue is the *disposition of what is perfect to what is best*.⁴ The best object to which man needs to be disposed by virtue is, as Augustine proves,⁵ God himself, to whom the soul is fitted by being made like to him. It seems, therefore, that virtue is a sort of quality of the soul in relation to God, and not in relation to operation. It is not, therefore, an operative habit.

ON THE OTHER HAND, Aristotle says that *the virtue of anything is that which makes its work good*.⁶

REPLY: 'Virtue', by the very significance of the term, implies a sort of perfection of a power, as was stated above.⁷ Consequently, since power has a double sense, namely, of potentiality in relation to being, and potency in relation to act, perfection with regard to both is called virtue.⁸ Yet potentiality for being is on the part of matter, which is being potentially, whereas

of matter to form, as a being to its activity, as a body to its soul. Although matter, being, and body, just as form, act, and soul are far from identical, there is in each a relation to it expressible as a relation of potentiality to act. Just as every finite being, as essence and existence, what is and that it is, is composed within itself of this relationship, so also is it related in that same way to its proper activity. For a concise expression of this doctrine see *CG II*, 54. Also Vernon Burke, 'The Role of Habitus in the Thomistic Metaphysics of Potency and Act'. *Essays on Thomism*, New York, 1942, pp. 103-9.

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parte formæ, quæ est principium agendi, eo quod unumquodque agit, inquantum est actu.

In constitutione autem hominis corpus se tenet sicut materia, anima vero sicut forma. Et quantum quidem ad corpus, homo communicat cum aliis animalibus; et similiter quantum ad vires quæ sunt animæ et corpori communes. Solæ autem illæ vires quæ sunt propriæ animæ, scilicet rationales, sunt hominis tantum. Et ideo virtus humana, de qua loquimur, non potest pertinere ad corpus, sed tantum ad id quod est proprium animæ. Unde virtus humana non importat ordinem ad esse, sed magis ad agere. Et ideo de ratione virtutis humanæ est quod sit habitus operativus.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod modus actionis sequitur dispositionem agentis; unumquodque enim quale est, talia operatur. Et ideo cum virtus sit principium aliqualis operationis, oportet quod in operante præexistat secundum virtutem aliqua conformis dispositio. Facit autem virtus operationem ordinatam. Et ideo ipsa virtus est quædam dispositio ordinata in anima, secundum scilicet quod potentiæ animæ ordinantur aliqualiter ad invicem, et ad id quod est extra. Et ideo virtus, inquantum est conveniens dispositio animæ, assimilatur sanitati et pulchritudini, quæ sunt debitæ dispositiones corporis. Sed per hoc non excluditur quin virtus etiam sit operationis principium.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod virtus quæ est ad esse non est propria hominis, sed solum virtus quæ est ad opera rationis, quæ sunt propria hominis.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod cum Dei substantia sit ejus actio, summa assimilatio hominis ad Deum est secundum aliquam operationem. Unde, sicut supra dictum est,⁸ felicitas sive beatitudo per quam homo Deo maxime conformatur, quæ est finis humanæ vitæ, in operatione consistit.

articulus 3. utrum virtus humana sit habitus bonus

AD TERTIUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod non sit de ratione virtutis quod sit habitus bonus. Peccatum enim in malo semper sumitur. Sed etiam peccati est aliqua virtus, secundum illud I *Cor.*, *Virtus peccati lex.*² Ergo virtus non semper est habitus bonus.

2. Præterea, virtus potentiæ respondet. Sed potentia non solum se habet ad bonum, sed etiam ad malum, secundum illud *Isa.*, *Væ qui potentes estes ad bibendum vinum, et viri fortes ad miscendam ebrietatem.*³ Ergo etiam virtus se habet et ad bonum et ad malum.

3. Præterea, secundum Apostolum, II *Cor.*, *Virtus in infirmitate perficitur.*⁴

⁸1a2ae. 3, 2. cf 1a. 93, 7

¹III *Sent.* 23, 1, 3, i; 26, 2, 1. In *Ethic.* II, *lect.* 6

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potency for act is on the part of a form, which is the source of action, since each thing is active inasmuch as it is in act.

Man is so constituted that his body is like matter, his soul like form. As for the body, that indeed a man possesses in common with other animals, and likewise the powers common to animated body. Those powers alone which are proper to soul, namely the rational powers, belong exclusively to man. Consequently human virtue, of which we are now speaking, cannot belong to what is bodily, but only to what is proper to soul. Human virtue, therefore, does not imply relation to being, but rather to activity. Essentially, then, it is an operative habit.

Hence: 1. The mode of action corresponds to the agent's condition, for as a thing is, so does it act. Since, therefore, a virtue is a principle of a certain sort of deed, there should be in the doer a corresponding predisposition to act in accord with it. Now a virtue causes an ordered operation. So then virtue itself is an ordered disposition of soul, inasmuch as, namely, the powers of the soul are in some way ordered to one another, and to what is outside. Consequently virtue, as being a fitting disposition of soul, is likened to health and beauty, which are fitting dispositions of body. This does not, however, prevent virtue from being a principle of operation as well.

2. Virtue which refers to being is not peculiar to man, but only the virtue which refers to works of reason proper to man.

3. Since God's substance is his activity, the highest likeness of man to God relates to some operation. Consequently, as has been said above,⁸ happiness or beatitude, by which a man is made most perfectly conformed to God, and which is the fulfilment of human life, is an activity.

article 3. is human virtue a good habit?

THE THIRD POINT:¹ 1. It would seem that it is not essential to virtue that it should be a good habit. Sin is always assumed to be evil. Yet there is a virtue even of sin, according to 1 *Corinthians*, *The virtue of sin is the law.*² Virtue, therefore, is not always a good habit.

2. Furthermore, virtue corresponds to power. Power, however, is not only for good, but for evil as well, according to *Isaiah*, *Woe to you that are mighty to drink wine and stout men at drunkenness.*³ Consequently, virtue also is for both good and evil.

3. Moreover, according to St Paul, *Virtue is made perfect in infirmity.*⁴

²1 *Corinthians* 15, 56.³*Isaiah* 5, 22⁴II *Corinthians* 12, 9

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 55, 4

Sed infirmitas est quoddam malum. Ergo virtus non solum se habet ad bonum, sed etiam ad malum.

SED CONTRA est quod Augustinus dicit, *Nemo autem dubitaverit quod virtus animam facit optimam*;⁵ et Philosophus dicit quod *virtus est quæ bonum facit habentem, et opus ejus bonum reddit*.⁶

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod, sicut supra dictum est,⁷ virtus importat perfectionem potentiae. Unde *virtus cujuslibet rei determinatur ad ultimum in quod res potest*, ut dicitur in I *de Cælo*.⁸ Ultimum autem in quod unaquæque potentia potest, oportet quod sit bonum, nam omne malum defectum quandam importat; unde Dionysius dicit quod omne malum est *infirmum*.⁹ Et propter hoc oportet quod virtus cujuslibet rei dicatur in ordine ad bonum. Unde virtus humana, quæ est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod sicut perfectum, ita et bonum dicitur metaphorice in malis; dicitur enim et perfectus fur sive latro, et bonus fur sive latro, ut patet per Philosophum.¹⁰ Secundum hoc ergo etiam virtus metaphorice in malis dicitur. Et sic *virtus peccati* dicitur lex, in quantum scilicet per legem occasionaliter est peccatum augmentatum, et quasi ad maximum suum posse pervenit.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod malum ebrietatis et nimiae potationis consistit in defectu ordinis rationis. Contingit autem cum defectu rationis esse aliquam potentiam inferiorem perfectam ad id quod est sui generis, etiam cum repugnantia vel defectu rationis. Perfectio autem talis potentiae, cum sit cum defectu rationis, non posset dici virtus humana.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod tanto ratio perfectior esse ostenditur quanto infirmitates corporis et inferiorum partium magis potest vincere seu tolerare. Et ideo virtus humana, quæ rationi attribuitur, in infirmitate perfici dicitur, non quidem rationis, sed in infirmitate corporis et inferiorum partium.

articulus 4. utrum virtus convenienter definiatur

AD QUARTUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod non sit conveniens definitio virtutis quæ solet assignari, scilicet, *Virtus est bona qualitas mentis, qua recte vivitur, qua nullus male utitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur*. Virtus

⁵*De moribus Ecclesiae* I, 6. PL 32, 1314

⁶*Ethics* II, 6. 1106a15

⁷art. 1

⁸*De Cælo*, I, II. 281a14

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Yet infirmity is an evil. Virtue, therefore, refers not only to good but to evil as well.

ON THE OTHER HAND Augustine says, *No one can doubt that virtue makes the soul superlatively good.*⁵ And Aristotle says, *Virtue is what makes its possessor good and his work good likewise.*⁶

REPLY: As has been said above,⁷ virtue implies a perfection of a power. Hence the virtue of a thing is fixed by the limit of which it is capable, as noted in the *De Caelo*.⁸ This utmost of any power is necessarily good, for all evil implies defect. Hence Dionysius says that every evil is a *weakness*.⁹ For this reason the virtue of anything has to be judged in reference to a good. Human virtue, therefore, which is an operative habit, is a good habit and productive of good.^a

Hence: 1. The terms 'perfect' and 'good' are used metaphorically of bad things; as Aristotle notes,¹⁰ we speak of a perfect thief or good robber. Thus is virtue applied in evil things. Thus also, that the virtue of sin is said to be the law, which is an occasion for aggravating it, so that it reaches the limit of its possibility.

2. The evil of drunkenness and excessive drinking consists in a failure in the order of reason. It can happen, however, that this is attended with the full development of some lower power on its own level, even in conflict with or falling away from reason. And then that power's perfection, since it is accompanied by a failure of reason, cannot be called a human virtue.

3. Reason is shown to be so much the stronger the more it is able to overcome or endure the weaknesses of the body and lower powers. Hence, human virtue which is attributed to reason is said to be made *perfect in infirmity*, not indeed that of reason, but that of the body and lower powers.

article 4. is virtue suitably defined?

THE FOURTH POINT:¹ 1. It would seem that the definition of virtue usually given, namely, *Virtue is a good quality of mind by which one lives righteously, of which no one can make bad use, which God works in us without us,*^a is not

⁹*De divinis nominibus* 4. PG 3, 372. St Thomas, *lect.* 3

¹⁰*Metaphysics*, IV, 16. 1021b18

¹cf II *Sent.* 27, 2. *De virtutibus*, 2

^aOnly in morals are acts specifically differentiated by good and evil. cf 1a2ae. 18, 1-4. But as individual acts they are never neutral. *ibid* 9. Vol. 18 of this series. See below 1a2ae. 71 & 85. Appendix 1.

^aThe definition collated from the works of St Augustine and customarily attributed to him is probably due to Peter of Poitiers in his *Sentences* II, 1. PL 211, 1041. cf O. Lottin, *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques*, XVIII (1929), p. 371.