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John Fearon O.P.

Excerpt

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 71, 1

CONSEQUENTER CONSIDERANDUM EST de vitiis et peccatis. Circa quæ sex consideratae occurrunt:

- primo quidem, de ipsis vitiis et peccatis secundum se;
- secundo, de distinctione eorum;
- tertio, de comparatione eorum ad invicem;
- quarto, de subjecto peccati;
- quinto, de causa ejus;
- sexto, de effectu ipsius.

Quæstio 71. de vitiis et peccatis secundum se

Circa primum quærentur sex:

1. utrum vitium contrarietur virtuti;
2. utrum vitium sit contra naturam;
3. quid sit pejus, utrum vitium vel actus vitiosus;
4. utrum actus vitiosus possit esse simul cum virtute;
5. utrum in omni peccato sit aliquis actus;
6. de definitione peccati quam Augustinus ponit, *Peccatum est dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem æternam.*¹

articulus 1. utrum vitium contrarietur virtuti

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur: 1. Videtur quod vitium non contrarietur virtuti. *Uni enim unum est contrarium*, ut probatur in *Meta.*² Sed virtuti contrariantur peccatum et malitia. Non ergo contrariatur ei vitium: quia vitium dicitur etiam si sit indebita dispositio membrorum corporalium, vel quarumcumque rerum.

2. Præterea, virtus nominat quandam perfectionem potentiæ. Sed vitium nihil nominat ad potentiam pertinens. Ergo vitium non contrariatur virtuti.

3. Præterea, Tullius dicit,³ quod *virtus est quædam sanitas animæ*. Sanitati autem opponitur ægritudo vel morbus magis quam vitium. Ergo virtuti non contrariatur vitium.

SED CONTRA est quod dicit Augustinus, quod *vitium est qualitas secundum*

¹*Contra Faustum* xxii, 27. PL 42, 418

²*Metaphysics* x, 4. 1055a19-21

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CONSIDERATION MUST next be given to vice and sin. This will be done under six headings:

- first, vice and virtue considered in themselves;
- second, their subdivision;
- third, their comparative aspects;
- fourth, the subject;
- fifth, the cause
- sixth, the effect of sin.

Question 71. vice and virtue considered in themselves

Under the first of these questions there are six points of inquiry:

1. is vice contrary to virtue?
2. is vice contrary to nature?
3. is vice worse than vicious action?
4. can evil co-exist with virtue?
5. does every sin involve an action?
6. St Augustine's definition of sin as *a word, deed, or desire which is against the eternal law*.¹

article 1. is vice contrary to virtue?

THE FIRST POINT: 1. It seems that vice is not contrary to virtue. For Aristotle says that *one thing cannot have more than one contrary*.² Sin and malice are contrary to virtue. Therefore vice is not contrary to virtue since vice also applies to any undue disposition whether of bodily members or of any other thing.

2. Moreover, virtue refers to a certain perfection of power whereas vice in no way refers to a power. Therefore vice is not contrary to virtue.

3. Furthermore, Cicero³ says that *virtue is the health of the soul*.³ However, the opposite of health is sickness or disease rather than vice. Therefore vice is not contrary to virtue.

ON THE OTHER HAND St Augustine says that *vice is a quality whereby the*

¹*De Tusculanis Quaestiones* IV, 13

²Cicero (106–34 B.C.) Roman politician and philosopher, translated many Greek concepts into Latin.

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*quam malus est animus.*⁴ Virtus autem est *qualitas quæ facit bonum habentem*, ut ex supradictis patet.⁵ Ergo vitium contrariatur virtuti.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod circa virtutem duo possumus considerare: scilicet ipsam essentiam virtutis, et id ad quod est virtus.

In essentia quidem virtutis aliquid considerari potest directe, et aliquid ex consequenti.

Directe quidem virtus importat dispositionem quandam alicujus convenienter se habentis secundum modum suæ naturæ: unde Philosophus dicit⁶ quod *virtus est dispositio perfecti ad optimum; dico autem perfecti, quod est dispositum secundum naturam*.

Ex consequenti autem sequitur quod virtus sit bonitas quædam: in hoc enim consistit uniuscujusque rei bonitas, quod convenienter se habeat secundum modum suæ naturæ.

Id autem ad quod virtus ordinatur, est actus bonus, ut ex supradictis patet.⁷

Secundum hoc igitur tria inveniuntur opponi virtuti.

Quorum unum est peccatum, quod opponitur sibi ex parte ejus ad quod virtus ordinatur: nam peccatum proprie nominat actum inordinatum, sicut actus virtutis est actus ordinatus et debitus.

Secundum autem quod ad rationem virtutis consequitur quod sit bonitas quædam, opponitur virtuti malitia.

Sed secundum id quod directe est de ratione virtutis, opponitur virtuti vitium: vitium enim uniuscujusque rei esse videtur quod non sit disposita secundum quod convenit suæ naturæ.

Unde Augustinus dicit,⁸ *Quod perfectioni naturæ deesse perspexeris, id voca vitium*.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod illa tria non contrariantur virtuti secundum idem: sed peccatum quidem contrariatur secundum quod virtus est operativa boni; malitia autem secundum quod est bonitas quædam; vitium autem proprie secundum quod est virtus.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod virtus non solum importat perfectionem potentiæ quæ est principium agendi, sed etiam importat debitam dispositionem ejus cujus est virtus: et hoc ideo quia unumquodque operatur secundum quod actu est. Requiritur ergo quod aliquid sit in se bene

⁴*De perfectione justitiæ*, 2. PL 44, 294. Augustine (354–430) was Saint and Bishop of Hippo Regius in North Africa. St Thomas shows a very wide and thorough knowledge of his works.

⁵1a2ae. 55, 3 & 4

⁶*Physics* VII, 3. 246b23–4

⁷1a2ae. 56, 3

⁸*De libero arbitrio* III, 14. PL 32, 1291

⁹Aristotle (384–322 B.C.) was a philosopher from Stygeria who wrote in Greek;

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*soul is evil.*⁴ But it has already been established that virtue is a quality which makes one good.⁵ Therefore vice is contrary to virtue.

REPLY: Two things may be considered in virtue: the essence of virtue, and that to which virtue is ordered.

As a matter of fact, in its essence virtue implies both a direct and a consequent element.

That which is directly implied in virtue is a suitable disposition of a given thing with reference to its nature, wherefore Aristotle says that⁶ *virtue is a disposition of a perfect^b thing to that which is best; and by perfect I mean that which is disposed according to nature.*^c

It follows that the consequent element in virtue is a kind of goodness, for the goodness of a thing consists in its being suitably disposed with reference to its nature.

However, as was shown previously, good action is the thing to which virtue is ordered.⁷

Accordingly, three things are found which are somehow opposites^d to virtue.

One of these is sin, which is opposed to virtue in the sense that it is opposed to the thing to which virtue is ordered; for, properly speaking, sin denotes an inordinate action just as an act of virtue is an ordinate and due action.

However, in terms of that which virtue implies consequently, i.e. that it has a kind of goodness, the opposite of virtue is malice.

But in terms of what is directly of the essence of virtue, its opposite is vice, for defect in each and every thing consists in its not being disposed in a way befitting its nature.

Thus St Augustine says, *Whatever you see lacking to the perfection of nature, call that thing vice.*⁸

Hence: 1. These three things are not contrary to virtue under one and the same aspect; sin is contrary but only inasmuch as virtue is productive of good, malice inasmuch as virtue is a kind of goodness, while vice is contrary to virtue in its proper sense.

2. Virtue implies not only perfection of a power which is a principle of action, but also the appropriate disposition of the one possessing the virtue. After all, a thing operates only to the extent that it is actualized. It follows

the English equivalent of perfection should be completion, which implies finishing what has been started.

^aThe term 'nature' in English comes from the Latin root word which means 'born'. Here nature can be the equivalent of what is had at birth.

^bContrariety is one of several types of opposition; it assumes that there are extremes more or less distant from a middle point. cf Appendix 1.

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dispositum, quod debet esse boni operativum. Et secundum hoc virtuti vitium opponitur.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod, sicut Tullius dicit,⁹ *morbi et ægrotationes partes sunt vitiositatis*: in corporibus enim *morbum appellant totius corporis corruptionem*, puta febrem vel aliquid huiusmodi; *ægrotationem vero, morbum cum imbecillitate*; *vitium autem, cum partes corporis inter se dissident*. Et quamvis in corpore quandoque sit morbus sine ægrotatione, puta cum aliquis est interius male dispositus, non tamen exterius præpeditur a solitis operationibus; *in animo tamen*, ut ipse dicit, *hæc duo non possunt nisi cogitatione secerni*. Necessè est enim quod quodcumque aliquid interius est male dispositus, habens inordinatum affectum, quod ex hoc imbecillis reddatur ad debitas operationes exercendas: quia *unaquæque arbor ex suo fructu cognoscitur*, idest homo ex opere, ut dicitur *Matt.*¹⁰ Sed *vitium animi*, ut Tullius ibidem dicit, *est habitus aut affectio animi in tota vita inconstans, et a seipsa dissentiens*. Quod quidem invenitur etiam absque morbo vel ægrotatione, ut puta cum aliquis ex infirmitate vel ex passione peccat. Unde in plus se habet vitium quam ægrotatio vel morbus: sicut etiam virtus in plus se habet quam sanitas: nam sanitas etiam quædam virtus ponitur in *Physic.*¹¹ Et ideo virtuti convenientius opponitur vitium quam ægrotatio vel morbus.

articulus 2. utrum vitium sit contra naturam

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur:¹ I. Videtur quod vitium non sit contra naturam. Vitium enim contrariatur virtuti, ut dictum est.² Sed virtutes non sunt in nobis a natura, sed causantur in nobis per infusionem aut ab assuetudine, ut dictum est.³ Ergo vitia non sunt contra naturam.

2. Præterea, ea quæ sunt contra naturam, non possunt assuefieri, sicut *lapis nunquam assuescit ferri sursum*, ut dicitur in *Ethic.*⁴ Sed aliqui assuefiunt ad vitia. Ergo vitia non sunt contra naturam.

3. Præterea, nihil quod est contra naturam, invenitur in habentibus illam naturam ut in pluribus. Sed vitia inveniuntur in hominibus ut in pluribus: quia, sicut dicitur *Matt.*,⁵ *lata est via quæ ducit ad perditionem, et multi vadunt per eam*. Ergo vitium non est contra naturam.

4. Præterea, peccatum comparatur ad vitium sicut actus ad habitum, ut ex supradictis⁶ patet. Sed peccatum definitur esse *dictum vel factum vel concupitum contra legem Dei*; ut patet per Augustinum.⁷ Lex autem Dei est supra naturam. Magis ergo dicendum est quod vitium sit contra legem, quam sit contra naturam.

⁹loc cit, note 3¹⁰Matthew 12, 33¹¹Physics VII, 3. 246b4-5¹cf *In Rom.* 1, lect. 8. *In Gal.* 5, lect. 6²1a2æ. 71, 1³1a2æ. 63, 1-3⁴*Ethics* II, 1. 1103a20-6⁵Matthew 7, 13⁶1a2æ. 71, 1

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that if a thing is in itself well disposed it is productive of good. From this point of view virtue and vice are opposites.

3. As Cicero says, *disease and sickness^e are vicious qualities*; for in speaking of the body *we say that it is diseased when the whole body is infected*,⁹ for instance, with fever or the like. *We call it sickness when the disease is attended with weakness, and vice when the parts of the body are not well adjusted.* And although at times there may be disease in the body without sickness, as when a man has an internal maladjustment without any external impairment of function, *yet, in the soul as he says, these two things are indistinguishable, except in thought.* For whenever a man is inwardly ill disposed through some inordinate affection he of necessity becomes unfit for fulfilling his duties, since *a tree is known by its fruit*, or, a man by his work, according to *Matthew*.¹⁰ But *vice of the soul*, as Cicero says, *is a habit or affection of the soul discordant and inconsistent with itself for the whole of life.* And this is to be found even without disease and sickness, for example, when a man sins from weakness or from passion. Consequently vice is a broader term than sickness or disease, even as virtue is a broader term than health, for health is thought of as a type of virtue.¹¹ Therefore, it is preferable to think of vice, rather than sickness or disease, as the contrary to virtue.

article 2. is vice contrary to nature?

THE SECOND POINT:¹ 1. It would seem that vice is not contrary to nature for it has just been established that vice is contrary to virtue.² Now virtue is not naturally a part of man but comes to him either by way of infusion or habituation, as has been said above.³ Therefore it follows that vices are not contrary to nature.

2. Furthermore, habituation never goes against nature, e.g. *no stone develops the habit of falling up*.⁴ However, some people do develop habits of vice. Therefore vices are not contrary to nature.

3. Moreover, anything that is contrary to nature is not found in the majority of those who share the nature. But vices are found in the majority of men according to Matthew, who says, *wide is the way that leads to perdition and many are they who find it*.⁵ Therefore, it follows that vices are not contrary to nature.

4. Further, it has already been stated that sin is compared to vice as act to habit.⁶ But sin is defined by Augustine as *word, deed or desire contrary to the law of God*.⁷ The law of God is above nature. Therefore, one ought to say that vice is contrary to law rather than to virtue.

¹*Contra Faustum* XXII, 27, PL 42, 418

^eIn introducing a Hellenic concept into the Latin language Cicero had to utilize sickness, a concept already known and verbalized in Latin.

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SED CONTRA est quod Augustinus dicit,⁸ *Omne vitium, eo ipso quod vitium est, contra naturam est.*

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod, sicut dictum est,⁹ vitium virtuti contrariatur. Virtus autem uniuscujusque rei consistit in hoc quod sit bene disposita secundum convenientiam suae naturae, ut supra dictum est.¹⁰

Unde oportet quod in qualibet re vitium dicatur ex hoc quod est disposita contra id quod convenit naturae. Unde et de hoc unaquaque res vituperatur: a vitio autem nomen vituperationis tractum creditur, ut Augustinus dicit.¹¹

Sed considerandum est quod natura uniuscujusque rei potissime est forma secundum quam res speciem sortitur. Homo autem in specie constituitur per animam rationalem. Et ideo id quod est contra ordinem rationis proprie est contra naturam hominis inquantum est homo; quod autem est secundum rationem est secundum naturam hominis inquantum est homo. Bonum autem hominis est secundum rationem esse, et malum hominis est *præter rationem esse*, ut Dionysius dicit.¹² Unde virtus humana, quæ *hominem facit bonum, et opus ipsius bonum reddit*,¹³ intantum est secundum naturam hominis inquantum convenit rationi; vitium autem intantum est contra naturam hominis inquantum est contra ordinem rationis.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod virtutes, etsi non causentur a natura secundum suum esse perfectum, tamen inclinant ad id quod est secundum naturam, idest secundum ordinem rationis: dicit enim Tullius¹⁴ quod *virtus est habitus in modum naturæ rationi consentaneus*. Et hoc modo virtus dicitur esse secundum naturam: et per contrarium intelligitur quod vitium sit contra naturam.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod Philosophus ibi loquitur de his quæ sunt contra naturam, secundum quod esse contra naturam opponitur ei quod est esse a natura: non autem secundum quod esse contra naturam opponitur ei quod est esse secundum naturam, eo modo quo virtutes dicuntur esse secundum naturam, inquantum inclinant ad id quod naturæ convenit.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod in homine est duplex natura, scilicet rationalis et sensitiva. Et quia per operationem sensus homo pervenit ad

⁸*De libero arbitrio* III, 13. PL 32, 1291¹⁰*ibid*¹²*De divinis nominibus*, 4. PG 3, 733¹³Aristotle, *Ethics* II, 5. 1106a15–24¹⁴*Rhetoric* II, 53⁹1a2ae. 71, 1¹¹*De libero arbitrio* III, 14. PL 32, 1291

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ON THE OTHER HAND St Augustine says, *Every vice, simply because it is a vice, is contrary to nature.*⁸

REPLY: It has already been shown that vice is contrary to virtue⁹ and that the virtue of anything consists in its being disposed in a manner suitable to its nature.¹⁰

Hence, it would seem that any disposition which is not suitable to a given nature should be called a vice. And for this reason such things are in fact liable to vituperation,^a a word *which is derived from vice*, according to St Augustine.¹¹

One ought to keep in mind that the nature of each and every thing is chiefly determined by the form whereby it is specified.^b Man is specified by his rational soul, properly speaking, and therefore anything contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the nature of man as such. Dionysius^c says that *things which are in accord with reason are good for man and things which are not are bad.*¹² Accordingly, human virtue, *which makes both man himself and his work good,*¹³ is in accord with human nature only to the extent that it is in accord with reason; and vice is contrary to human nature to the extent that it is contrary to the order of reason.^d

Hence: 1. Although nature does not bring about virtue in its entirety, it does incline^e one to those things which are natural, i.e. in accord with reason, for Cicero says that *virtue is a habit in accord with reason, like second nature.*¹⁴ In this sense one can say that virtue is in accord with and vice contrary to nature.

2. Aristotle is speaking of a thing being against nature in the sense that being against is contrary to being in accord with nature.^f Virtues are said to be in accord with nature inasmuch as they incline us to what is suitable to nature.

3. Man has a twofold nature, rational and sensient. Since it is through

^bThe specific difference as part of a definition arises from an awareness of the formal cause of a thing; genus follows the material cause which is shared with other species in the general class.

^cAlso known as Pseudo-Denis or the Pseudo-Areopagite. He lived from the earlier to the latter half of the fifth century, and was probably a native of Syria. He was a Christian Platonist and a disciple of Proclus. His writings were translated into Latin about 858 A.D. by Scotus Erigena.

^dA man becomes a better man or more human, not by becoming a better animal, but by living a more rational kind of life.

^eAn integral part of Thomistic thought is that natures incline to goals. His usual example is gravitation; but in conscious beings this inclination is a datum of psychological experience, sometimes called natural desire.

^fWhat is acquired adds to what one is born with and thus is distinct from it; but it does not follow that all acquired characteristics are unsuited to what is of genetic origin.

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 1a2ae. 71, 3

actus rationis, ideo plures sequuntur inclinationes naturæ sensitivæ quam ordinem rationis: plures enim sunt qui assequuntur principium rei, quam qui ad consummationem perveniunt. Ex hoc autem vitia et peccata in hominibus proveniunt, quod sequuntur inclinationem naturæ sensitivæ contra ordinem rationis.

4. Ad quartum dicendum quod quidquid est contra rationem artificiatum, est etiam contra naturam artis qua artificiatum producitur. Lex autem æterna comparatur ad ordinem rationis humanæ sicut ars ad artificiatum. Unde ejusdem rationis est quod vitium et peccatum sit contra ordinem rationis humanæ, et quod sit contra legem æternam. Unde Augustinus dicit¹⁵ quod *a Deo habent omnes naturæ quod naturæ sunt: et intantum sunt vitiosæ, inquantum ab ejus qua factæ sunt arte discedunt.*

articulus 3. utrum vitium sit pejus quam actus vitiosus

AD TERTIUM sic proceditur: 1. Videtur quod vitium idest habitus malus, sit pejus quam peccatum, idest actus malus. Sicut enim bonum quod est diuturnius est melius; ita malum quod est diuturnius est pejus. Sed habitus vitiosus est diuturnior quam actus vitiosi, qui statim transeunt. Ergo habitus vitiosus est pejor quam actus vitiosus.

2. Præterea, plura mala sunt magis fugienda quam unum malum. Sed habitus malus virtualiter est causa multorum malorum actuum. Ergo habitus vitiosus est pejor quam actus vitiosus.

3. Præterea, causa est potior quam effectus. Sed habitus perficit actum tam in bonitate quam in malitia. Ergo habitus est potior actu et in bonitate et in malitia.

SED CONTRA, pro actu vitioso aliquis juste punitur: non autem pro habitu vitioso, si non procedat ad actum. Ergo actus vitiosus est pejor quam habitus vitiosus.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod habitus medio modo se habet inter potentiam et actum.

Manifestum est autem quod actus in bono et in malo præeminet potentia, ut dicitur in *Meta.*:¹ melius est enim bene agere quam posse bene agere; et similiter vituperabilius est male agere quam posse male agere.

Unde etiam sequitur quod habitus in bonitate et in malitia medium gradum obtineat inter potentiam et actum: ut scilicet, sicut habitus bonus vel malus præeminet in bonitate vel malitia potentia, ita etiam subdatur actui.

¹⁵*De lib. arbit.* III, 15. PL 32, 1291-2

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the operation of his senses that man accomplishes acts of reason, more men follow sensient than rational nature because more start than finish. Sin and vice occur among men because they follow the inclination of sensient nature contrary to the order of reason.

4. Anything amiss in a work of art is also foreign to the art which produces such artefacts. Now, the eternal law is compared to the order of human reason as art to artefact. Hence, to say that sin and vice are contrary to the order of human reason and eternal law, amounts to one and the same thing. Thus St Augustine says, *Natures, as such, are from God and they are faulty only to the extent that they part from the divine art whereby they were made.*¹⁵

article 3. is vice worse than a vicious action?

THE THIRD POINT: 1. It would seem that vice, i.e. a bad habit, is worse than sin which is a bad action. Just as the more enduring good is better, so too the more enduring evil is worse. But a vicious habit is more enduring than a vicious action which promptly passes. Therefore a vicious habit is worse than a vicious action.

2. Moreover, if one should avoid even one evil action, all the more so ought he to avoid many evil actions. Now an evil habit is virtually the cause of many evil actions. Therefore, it follows that a vicious habit is worse than a vicious action.

3. Furthermore, a cause is more powerful than its effect. But habits produce actions, whether good or bad. Therefore a habit is more powerful than an action, whether for good or evil.

ON THE OTHER HAND a man is justly punished for a vicious action, but not for a vicious habit, unless it eventuates in action. Therefore a vicious action is worse than a vicious habit.

REPLY: Habit stands half-way between potentiality and actuality.

Quite clearly, actuality, regardless of whether it be in terms of good or evil, is superior to potentiality, as is mentioned in the *Metaphysics*:¹ for it is better to do well than to be able to do well, and more despicable to do evil than to be able to do evil.

Thus it follows that habit, regardless of whether it be in terms of good or evil, stands half-way between potentiality and actuality, so that both good and bad habits are superior in their way to corresponding potentiality, but inferior to corresponding actuality.

¹*Metaphysics IX, 9. 1051a4-15*