

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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HOW THE MORAL VIRTUES DIFFER FROM ONE ANOTHER (FIVE ARTICLES)

We must now consider how the moral virtues differ from one another: under which head there are five points of inquiry:

(1) Whether there is only one moral virtue?

(2) Whether those moral virtues which are about operations, are distinct from those which are about passions?

(3) Whether there is but one moral virtue about operations?

(4) Whether there are different moral virtues about different passions?

(5) Whether the moral virtues differ in point of the various objects of the passions?

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Whether there is only one moral virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that there is only one moral virtue. Because just as the direction of moral actions belongs to reason which is the subject of the intellectual virtues; so does their inclination belong to the appetite which is the subject of moral virtues. But there is only one intellectual virtue to direct all moral acts, viz. prudence. Therefore there is also but one moral virtue to give all moral acts their respective inclinations.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS060.html](#) the formal aspect of their objects. Now the formal aspect of the good to which moral virtue is directed, is one thing, viz. the mean defined by reason. Therefore, seemingly, there is but one moral virtue.

Objection 3: Further, things pertaining to morals are specified by their end, as stated above ([Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)). Now there is but one common end of all moral virtues, viz. happiness, while the proper and proximate ends are infinite in number. But the moral virtues themselves are not infinite in number. Therefore it seems that there is but one.

On the contrary, One habit cannot be in several powers, as stated above ([Question \[56\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)). But the subject of the moral virtues is the appetitive part of the soul, which is divided into several powers, as stated in the FP, Question [80], Article [2]; FP, Question [81], Article [2]. Therefore there cannot be only one moral virtue.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[58\]](#), [Articles \[1\],2,3](#)), the moral virtues are habits of the appetitive faculty. Now habits differ specifically according to the specific differences of their objects, as stated above ([Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)). Again, the species of the object of appetite, as of any thing, depends on its specific form which it receives from the agent. But we must observe that the matter of the passive subject bears a twofold relation to the agent. For sometimes it receives the form of the agent, in the same kind specifically as the agent has that form, as happens with all univocal agents, so that if the agent be one specifically, the matter must of necessity receive a form specifically one: thus the univocal effect of fire is of necessity something in the species of fire. Sometimes, however, the matter receives the form from the agent, but not in the same kind specifically as the agent, as is the case with non-univocal causes of generation: thus an animal is generated by the sun. In this case the forms received into matter are not of one species, but vary according to the adaptability of the matter to receive the influx of the agent: for instance, we see that owing to the one action of the sun, animals of various species are produced by putrefaction according to the various adaptability of matter.

Now it is evident that in moral matters the reason holds the place of commander and mover, while the appetitive power is commanded and moved. But the appetite does not receive the direction of reason univocally so to say; because it is rational, not essentially, but by participation (Ethic. i, 13). Consequently objects made appetible by the direction of reason belong to various species, according to their various relations to reason: so that it follows that moral virtues are of various species and are not one only.

Reply to Objection 1: The object of the reason is truth. Now in all moral matters, which are contingent matters of action, there is but one kind of truth. Consequently, there is but one virtue to direct all such matters, viz. prudence. On the other hand, the object of the appetitive power is the appetible good, which varies in kind according to its various relations to reason, the directing power.

Reply to Objection 2: This formal element is one generically, on account of the unity of the agent: but it varies in species, on account of the various relations of the receiving matter, as explained above.

Reply to Objection 3: Moral matters do not receive their species from the last end, but from their proximate ends: and these, although they be infinite in number, are not infinite in species.

Whether moral virtues about operations are different from those that are about passions?

Objection 1: It would seem that moral virtues are not divided into those which are about operations and those which are about passions. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 3) that moral virtue is "an operative habit whereby we do what is best in matters of pleasure or sorrow." Now pleasure and sorrow are passions, as stated above ([Question \[31\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); [Question \[35\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Therefore the same virtue which is about passions is also about operations, since it is an operative habit.

Objection 2: Further, the passions are principles of external action. If therefore some virtues regulate the passions, they must, as a consequence, regulate operations also. Therefore the same moral virtues are about both passions and operations.

Objection 3: Further, the sensitive appetite is moved well or ill towards every external operation. Now movements of the sensitive appetite are passions. Therefore the same virtues that are about operations are also about passions.

On the contrary, The Philosopher reckons justice to be about operations; and temperance, fortitude and gentleness, about passions (Ethic. ii, 3,7; v, 1, seqq.).

I answer that, Operation and passion stand in a twofold relation to virtue. First, as its effects; and in this way every moral virtue has some good operations as its product; and a certain pleasure or sorrow which are passions, as stated above ([Question \[59\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#), ad 1).

Secondly, operation may be compared to moral virtue as the matter about which virtue is concerned: and in this sense those moral virtues which are about operations must needs differ from those which are about passions. The reason for this is that good and evil, in certain operations, are taken from the very nature of those operations, no matter how man may be affected towards them: viz. in so far as good and evil in them depend on their being commensurate with someone else. In operations of this kind there needs to be some power to regulate the operations in themselves: such are buying and selling, and all such operations in which there is an element of something due or undue to another. For this reason justice and its parts are properly about operations as their proper matter. On the other hand, in some operations, good and evil depend only on commensuration with the agent. Consequently good and evil in these operations depend on the way in which man is affected to them. And for this reason in such like operations virtue must needs be chiefly about internal emotions which are called the passions of the soul, as is evidently the case with temperance, fortitude and the like.

It happens, however, in operations which are directed to another, that the good of virtue is overlooked by reason of some inordinate passion of the soul. In such cases justice is destroyed in so far as the due measure of the external act is destroyed: while some other virtue is destroyed in so far as the internal passions exceed their due measure. Thus when through

This suffices for the Replies to the Objections. For the first considers operations as the effect of virtue, while the other two consider operation and passion as concurring in the same effect. But in some cases virtue is chiefly about operations, in others, about passions, for the reason given above.

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Whether there is only one moral virtue about operations?

Objection 1: It would seem that there is but one moral virtue about operations. Because the rectitude of all external operations seems to belong to justice. Now justice is but one virtue. Therefore there is but one virtue about operations.

Objection 2: Further, those operations seem to differ most, which are directed on the one side to the good of the individual, and on the other to the good of the many. But this diversity does not cause diversity among the moral virtues: for the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 1) that legal justice, which directs human acts to the common good, does not differ, save logically, from the virtue which directs a man's actions to one man only. Therefore diversity of operations does not cause a diversity of moral virtues.

Objection 3: Further, if there are various moral virtues about various operations, diversity of moral virtues would needs follow diversity of operations. But this is clearly untrue: for it is the function of justice to establish rectitude in various kinds of commutations, and again in distributions, as is set down in Ethic. v, 2. Therefore there are not different virtues about different operations.

On the contrary, Religion is a moral virtue distinct from piety, both of which are about operations.

I answer that, All the moral virtues that are about operations agree in one general notion of justice, which is in respect of something due to another: but they differ in respect of various special notions. The reason for this is that in external operations, the order of reason is established, as we have stated ([Article \[2\]](#)), not according as how man is affected towards such operations, but according to the becomingness of the thing itself; from which becomingness we derive the notion of something due which is the formal aspect of justice: for, seemingly, it pertains to justice that a man give another his due. Wherefore all such virtues as are about operations, bear, in some way, the character of justice. But the thing due is not of the same kind in all these virtues: for something is due to an equal in one way, to a superior, in another way, to an inferior, in yet another; and the nature of a debt differs according as it arises from a contract, a promise, or a favor already conferred. And corresponding to these various kinds of debt there are various virtues: e.g. "Religion" whereby we pay our debt to God; "Piety,"

Reply to Objection 1: Justice properly so called is one special virtue, whose object is the perfect due, which can be paid in the equivalent. But the name of justice is extended also to all cases in which something due is rendered: in this sense it is not as a special virtue.

Reply to Objection 2: That justice which seeks the common good is another virtue from that which is directed to the private good of an individual: wherefore common right differs from private right; and Tully (De Inv. ii) reckons as a special virtue, piety which directs man to the good of his country. But that justice which directs man to the common good is a general virtue through its act of command: since it directs all the acts of the virtues to its own end, viz. the common good. And the virtues, in so far as they are commanded by that justice, receive the name of justice: so that virtue does not differ, save logically, from legal justice; just as there is only a logical difference between a virtue that is active of itself, and a virtue that is active through the command of another virtue.

Reply to Objection 3: There is the same kind of due in all the operations belonging to special justice. Consequently, there is the same virtue of justice, especially in regard to commutations. For it may be that distributive justice is of another species from commutative justice; but about this we shall inquire later on ([SS, Question \[61\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)).

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Whether there are different moral virtues about different passions?

Objection 1: It would seem that there are not different moral virtues about different passions. For there is but one habit about things that concur in their source and end: as is evident especially in the case of sciences. But the passions all concur in one source, viz. love; and they all terminate in the same end, viz. joy or sorrow, as we stated above ([Question \[25\]](#), [Articles \[1\],2,4](#); [Question \[27\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore there is but one moral virtue about all the passions.

Objection 2: Further, if there were different moral virtues about different passions, it would follow that there are as many moral virtues as passions. But this clearly is not the case: since there is one moral virtue about contrary passions; namely, fortitude, about fear and daring; temperance, about pleasure and sorrow. Therefore there is no need for different moral virtues about different passions.

Objection 3: Further, love, desire, and pleasure are passions of different species, as stated above ([Question \[23\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Now there is but one virtue about all these three, viz. temperance. Therefore there are not different moral virtues about different passions.

On the contrary, Fortitude is about fear and daring; temperance about desire; meekness about anger; as stated in Ethic. iii, 6,10; iv, 5.

since some passions are not in the same power as other passions; for some belong to the irascible, others to the concupiscible faculty, as stated above ([Question \[23\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)).

On the other hand, neither does every diversity of passions necessarily suffice for a diversity of moral virtues. First, because some passions are in contrary opposition to one another, such as joy and sorrow, fear and daring, and so on. About such passions as are thus in opposition to one another there must needs be one same virtue. Because, since moral virtue consists in a kind of mean, the mean in contrary passions stands in the same ratio to both, even as in the natural order there is but one mean between contraries, e.g. between black and white. Secondly, because there are different passions contradicting reason in the same manner, e.g. by impelling to that which is contrary to reason, or by withdrawing from that which is in accord with reason. Wherefore the different passions of the concupiscible faculty do not require different moral virtues, because their movements follow one another in a certain order, as being directed to the one same thing, viz. the attainment of some good or the avoidance of some evil: thus from love proceeds desire, and from desire we arrive at pleasure; and it is the same with the opposite passions, for hatred leads to avoidance or dislike, and this leads to sorrow. On the other hand, the irascible passions are not all of one order, but are directed to different things: for daring and fear are about some great danger; hope and despair are about some difficult good; while anger seeks to overcome something contrary which has wrought harm. Consequently there are different virtues about such like passions: e.g. temperance, about the concupiscible passions; fortitude, about fear and daring; magnanimity, about hope and despair; meekness, about anger.

Reply to Objection 1: All the passions concur in one common principle and end; but not in one proper principle or end: and so this does not suffice for the unity of moral virtue.

Reply to Objection 2: Just as in the natural order the same principle causes movement from one extreme and movement towards the other; and as in the intellectual order contraries have one common ratio; so too between contrary passions there is but one moral virtue, which, like a second nature, consents to reason's dictates.

Reply to Objection 3: Those three passions are directed to the same object in a certain order, as stated above: and so they belong to the same virtue.

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Whether the moral virtues differ in point of the various objects of the passions?

Objection 1: It would seem that the moral virtues do not differ according to the objects of the passions. For just as there are objects of passions, so are there objects of operations. Now those moral virtues that are about operations, do not differ according to the objects of those operations: for the buying and selling either of a house or of a horse belong to the one same

Objection 2: Further, the passions are acts or movements of the sensitive appetite. Now it needs a greater difference to differentiate habits than acts. Hence diverse objects which do not diversify the species of passions, do not diversify the species of moral virtue: so that there is but one moral virtue about all objects of pleasure, and the same applies to the other passions.

Objection 3: Further, more or less do not change a species. Now various objects of pleasure differ only by reason of being more or less pleasurable. Therefore all objects of pleasure belong to one species of virtue: and for the same reason so do all fearful objects, and the same applies to others. Therefore moral virtue is not diversified according to the objects of the passions.

Objection 4: Further, virtue hinders evil, even as it produces good. But there are various virtues about the desires for good things: thus temperance is about desires for the pleasure of touch, and "eutrapelia" [*{eutrapelia}] about pleasures in games. Therefore there should be different virtues about fears of evils.

On the contrary, Chastity is about sexual pleasures, abstinence about pleasures of the table, and "eutrapelia" about pleasures in games.

I answer that, The perfection of a virtue depends on the reason; whereas the perfection of a passion depends on the sensitive appetite. Consequently virtues must needs be differentiated according to their relation to reason, but the passions according to their relation to the appetite. Hence the objects of the passions, according as they are variously related to the sensitive appetite, cause the different species of passions: while, according as they are related to reason, they cause the different species of virtues. Now the movement of reason is not the same as that of the sensitive appetite. Wherefore nothing hinders a difference of objects from causing diversity of passions, without causing diversity of virtues, as when one virtue is about several passions, as stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)); and again, a difference of objects from causing different virtues, without causing a difference of passions, since several virtues are directed about one passion, e.g. pleasure.

And because diverse passions belonging to diverse powers, always belong to diverse virtues, as stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)); therefore a difference of objects that corresponds to a difference of powers always causes a specific difference of virtues--for instance the difference between that which is good absolutely speaking, and that which is good and difficult to obtain. Moreover since the reason rules man's lower powers in a certain order, and even extends to outward things; hence, one single object of the passions, according as it is apprehended by sense, imagination, or reason, and again, according as it belongs to the soul, body, or external things, has various relations to reason, and consequently is of a nature to cause a difference of virtues. Consequently man's good which is the object of love, desire and pleasure, may be taken as referred either to a bodily sense, or to the inner apprehension of the mind: and this same good may be directed to man's good in himself, either in his body or in his soul, or to man's good in relation to other men. And every such difference, being differently related to reason, differentiates virtues.

Accordingly, if we take a good, and it be something discerned by the sense of touch, and something pertaining to the upkeep of human life either in the individual or in the species, such as the pleasures of the table or of sexual intercourse, it will belong to the virtue of "temperance." As regards the pleasures of the other senses, they are not intense, and so do not

On the other hand, good discerned not by the senses, but by an inner power, and belonging to man in himself, is like money and honor; the former, by its very nature, being employable for the good of the body, while the latter is based on the apprehension of the mind. These goods again may be considered either absolutely, in which way they concern the concupiscible faculty, or as being difficult to obtain, in which way they belong to the irascible part: which distinction, however, has no place in pleasurable objects of touch; since such are of base condition, and are becoming to man in so far as he has something in common with irrational animals. Accordingly in reference to money considered as a good absolutely, as an object of desire, pleasure, or love, there is "liberality": but if we consider this good as difficult to get, and as being the object of our hope, there is "magnificence" [*{megaloprepeia}]. With regard to that good which we call honor, taken absolutely, as the object of love, we have a virtue called "philotimia" [*{philotimia}], i.e. "love of honor": while if we consider it as hard to attain, and as an object of hope, then we have "magnanimity." Wherefore liberality and "philotimia" seem to be in the concupiscible part, while magnificence and magnanimity are in the irascible.

As regards man's good in relation to other men, it does not seem hard to obtain, but is considered absolutely, as the object of the concupiscible passions. This good may be pleasurable to a man in his behavior towards another either in some serious matter, in actions, to wit, that are directed by reason to a due end, or in playful actions, viz. that are done for mere pleasure, and which do not stand in the same relation to reason as the former. Now one man behaves towards another in serious matters, in two ways. First, as being pleasant in his regard, by becoming speech and deeds: and this belongs to a virtue which Aristotle (Ethic. ii, 7) calls "friendship" [*{philia}], and may be rendered "affability." Secondly, one man behaves towards another by being frank with him, in words and deeds: this belongs to another virtue which (Ethic. iv, 7) he calls "truthfulness" [*{aletheia}]. For frankness is more akin to the reason than pleasure, and serious matters than play. Hence there is another virtue about the pleasures of games, which the Philosopher "eutrapelia" [*{eutrapelia}] (Ethic. iv, 8).

It is therefore evident that, according to Aristotle, there are ten moral virtues about the passions, viz. fortitude, temperance, liberality, magnificence, magnanimity, "philotimia," gentleness, friendship, truthfulness, and "eutrapelia," all of which differ in respect of their diverse matter, passions, or objects: so that if we add "justice," which is about operations, there will be eleven in all.

Reply to Objection 1: All objects of the same specific operation have the same relation to reason: not so all the objects of the same specific passion; because operations do not thwart reason as the passions do.

Reply to Objection 2: Passions are not differentiated by the same rule as virtues are, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 3: More and less do not cause a difference of species, unless they bear different relations to reason.

Reply to Objection 4: Good is a more potent mover than evil: because evil does not cause movement save in virtue of good, as Dionysius states (Div. Nom. iv). Hence an evil does not prove an obstacle to reason, so as to require virtues unless that evil be great; there being, seemingly, one such evil corresponding to each kind of passion. Hence there is but one virtue, meekness, for every form of anger; and, again, but one virtue, fortitude, for all forms of daring.

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in that particular kind of passion. Consequently there are various moral virtues about desires,
as stated above.

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