

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF GOODNESS AND MALICE IN EXTERNAL HUMAN AFFAIRS (SIX ARTICLES)

We must next consider goodness and malice as to external actions: under which head there are six points of inquiry:

[\(1\)](#) Whether goodness and malice is first in the act of the will, or in the external action?

[\(2\)](#) Whether the whole goodness or malice of the external action depends on the goodness of the will?

[\(3\)](#) Whether the goodness and malice of the interior act are the same as those of the external action?

[\(4\)](#) Whether the external action adds any goodness or malice to that of the interior act?

[\(5\)](#) Whether the consequences of an external action increase its goodness or malice?

[\(6\)](#) Whether one and the same external action can be both good and evil?

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Whether goodness or malice is first in the action of the will, or in the external action?

Objection 1: It would seem that good and evil are in the external action prior to being in the act of the will. For the will derives goodness from its object, as stated above ([Question \[19\]](#), [Articles \[1\],2](#)). But the external action is the object of the interior act of the will: for a man is

Objection 2: Further, the aspect of good belongs first to the end: since what is directed to the end receives the aspect of good from its relation to the end. Now whereas the act of the will cannot be an end, as stated above ([Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 2), the act of another power can be an end. Therefore good is in the act of some other power prior to being in the act of the will.

Objection 3: Further, the act of the will stands in a formal relation to the external action, as stated above ([Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)). But that which is formal is subsequent; since form is something added to matter. Therefore good and evil are in the external action, prior to being in the act of the will.

On the contrary, Augustine says (Retract. i, 9) that "it is by the will that we sin, and that we behave aright." Therefore moral good and evil are first in the will.

I answer that, External actions may be said to be good or bad in two ways. First, in regard to their genus, and the circumstances connected with them: thus the giving of alms, if the required conditions be observed, is said to be good. Secondly, a thing is said to be good or evil, from its relation to the end: thus the giving of alms for vainglory is said to be evil. Now, since the end is the will's proper object, it is evident that this aspect of good or evil, which the external action derives from its relation to the end, is to be found first of all in the act of the will, whence it passes to the external action. On the other hand, the goodness or malice which the external action has of itself, on account of its being about due matter and its being attended by due circumstances, is not derived from the will, but rather from the reason. Consequently, if we consider the goodness of the external action, in so far as it comes from reason's ordination and apprehension, it is prior to the goodness of the act of the will: but if we consider it in so far as it is in the execution of the action done, it is subsequent to the goodness of the will, which is its principle.

Reply to Objection 1: The exterior action is the object of the will, inasmuch as it is proposed to the will by the reason, as good apprehended and ordained by the reason: and thus it is prior to the good in the act of the will. But inasmuch as it is found in the execution of the action, it is an effect of the will, and is subsequent to the will.

Reply to Objection 2: The end precedes in the order of intention, but follows in the order of execution.

Reply to Objection 3: A form as received into matter, is subsequent to matter in the order of generation, although it precedes it in the order of nature: but inasmuch as it is in the active cause, it precedes in every way. Now the will is compared to the exterior action, as its efficient cause. Wherefore the goodness of the act of the will, as existing in the active cause, is the form of the exterior action.

the goodness of the will?

Objection 1: It would seem that the whole goodness and malice of the external action depend on the goodness of the will. For it is written ([Mt. 7:18](#)): "A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit." But, according to the gloss, the tree signifies the will, and fruit signifies works. Therefore, it is impossible for the interior act of the will to be good, and the external action evil, or vice versa.

Objection 2: Further, Augustine says (*Retract. i, 9*) that there is no sin without the will. If therefore there is no sin in the will, there will be none in the external action. And so the whole goodness or malice of the external action depends on the will.

Objection 3: Further, the good and evil of which we are speaking now are differences of the moral act. Now differences make an essential division in a genus, according to the Philosopher (*Metaph. vii, 12*). Since therefore an act is moral from being voluntary, it seems that goodness and malice in an act are derived from the will alone.

On the contrary, Augustine says (*Contra Mendac. vii*), that "there are some actions which neither a good end nor a good will can make good."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), we may consider a twofold goodness or malice in the external action: one in respect of due matter and circumstances; the other in respect of the order to the end. And that which is in respect of the order to the end, depends entirely on the will: while that which is in respect of due matter or circumstances, depends on the reason: and on this goodness depends the goodness of the will, in so far as the will tends towards it.

Now it must be observed, as was noted above ([Question \[19\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#), ad 1), that for a thing to be evil, one single defect suffices, whereas, for it to be good simply, it is not enough for it to be good in one point only, it must be good in every respect. If therefore the will be good, both from its proper object and from its end, it follows that the external action is good. But if the will be good from its intention of the end, this is not enough to make the external action good: and if the will be evil either by reason of its intention of the end, or by reason of the act willed, it follows that the external action is evil.

Reply to Objection 1: If the good tree be taken to signify the good will, it must be in so far as the will derives goodness from the act willed and from the end intended.

Reply to Objection 2: A man sins by his will, not only when he wills an evil end; but also when he wills an evil act.

Reply to Objection 3: Voluntariness applies not only to the interior act of the will, but also to external actions, inasmuch as they proceed from the will and the reason. Consequently the difference of good and evil is applicable to both the interior and external act.

Whether the goodness and malice of the external action are the same as those of the interior act?

Objection 1: It would seem that the goodness and malice of the interior act of the will are not the same as those of the external action. For the principle of the interior act is the interior apprehensive or appetitive power of the soul; whereas the principle of the external action is the power that accomplishes the movement. Now where the principles of action are different, the actions themselves are different. Moreover, it is the action which is the subject of goodness or malice: and the same accident cannot be in different subjects. Therefore the goodness of the interior act cannot be the same as that of the external action.

Objection 2: Further, "A virtue makes that, which has it, good, and renders its action good also" (Ethic. ii, 6). But the intellective virtue in the commanding power is distinct from the moral virtue in the power commanded, as is declared in Ethic. i, 13. Therefore the goodness of the interior act, which belongs to the commanding power, is distinct from the goodness of the external action, which belongs to the power commanded.

Objection 3: Further, the same thing cannot be cause and effect; since nothing is its own cause. But the goodness of the interior act is the cause of the goodness of the external action, or vice versa, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)). Therefore it is not the same goodness in each.

On the contrary, It was shown above ([Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)) that the act of the will is the form, as it were, of the external action. Now that which results from the material and formal element is one thing. Therefore there is but one goodness of the internal and external act.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[17\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)), the interior act of the will, and the external action, considered morally, are one act. Now it happens sometimes that one and the same individual act has several aspects of goodness or malice, and sometimes that it has but one. Hence we must say that sometimes the goodness or malice of the interior act is the same as that of the external action, and sometimes not. For as we have already said ([Articles \[1\],2](#)), these two goodnesses or malices, of the internal and external acts, are ordained to one another. Now it may happen, in things that are subordinate to something else, that a thing is good merely from being subordinate; thus a bitter draught is good merely because it procures health. Wherefore there are not two goodnesses, one the goodness of health, and the other the goodness of the draught; but one and the same. On the other hand it happens sometimes that that which is subordinate to something else, has some aspect of goodness in itself, besides the fact of its being subordinate to some other good: thus a palatable medicine can be considered in the light of a pleasurable good, besides being conducive to health.

We must therefore say that when the external action derives goodness or malice from its relation to the end only, then there is but one and the same goodness of the act of the will which of itself regards the end, and of the external action, which regards the end through the medium of the act of the will. But when the external action has goodness or malice of itself, i.e. in regard to its matter and circumstances, then the goodness of the external action is distinct from the goodness of the will in regarding the end; yet so that the goodness of the end passes into the external action, and the goodness of the matter and circumstances passes into the act of the will, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)).

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different in the physical order: yet distinct as they are in that respect, they combine to form one thing in the moral order, as stated above ([Question \[17\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)).

Reply to Objection 2: As stated in Ethic. vi, 12, a moral virtue is ordained to the act of that virtue, which act is the end, as it were, of that virtue; whereas prudence, which is in the reason, is ordained to things directed to the end. For this reason various virtues are necessary. But right reason in regard to the very end of a virtue has no other goodness than the goodness of that virtue, in so far as the goodness of the reason is participated in each virtue.

Reply to Objection 3: When a thing is derived by one thing from another, as from a univocal efficient cause, then it is not the same in both: thus when a hot thing heats, the heat of the heater is distinct from the heat of the thing heated, although it be the same specifically. But when a thing is derived from one thing from another, according to analogy or proportion, then it is one and the same in both: thus the healthiness which is in medicine or urine is derived from the healthiness of the animal's body; nor is health as applied to urine and medicine, distinct from health as applied to the body of an animal, of which health medicine is the cause, and urine the sign. It is in this way that the goodness of the external action is derived from the goodness of the will, and vice versa; viz. according to the order of one to the other.

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Whether the external action adds any goodness or malice to that of the interior act?

Objection 1: It would seem that the external action does not add any goodness or malice to that of the interior action. For Chrysostom says (Hom. xix in Mt.): "It is the will that is rewarded for doing good, or punished for doing evil." Now works are the witnesses of the will. Therefore God seeks for works not on His own account, in order to know how to judge; but for the sake of others, that all may understand how just He is. But good or evil is to be estimated according to God's judgment rather than according to the judgment of man. Therefore the external action adds no goodness or malice to that of the interior act.

Objection 2: Further, the goodness and malice of the interior and external acts are one and the same, as stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)). But increase is the addition of one thing to another. Therefore the external action does not add to the goodness or malice of the interior act.

Objection 3: Further, the entire goodness of created things does not add to the Divine Goodness, because it is entirely derived therefrom. But sometimes the entire goodness of the external action is derived from the goodness of the interior act, and sometimes conversely, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)). Therefore neither of them adds to the goodness or malice of the other.

On the contrary, Every agent intends to attain good and avoid evil. If therefore by the external action no further goodness or malice be added, it is to no purpose that he who has a

I answer that, If we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from the will tending to the end, then the external action adds nothing to this goodness, unless it happens that the will in itself is made better in good things, or worse in evil things. This, seemingly, may happen in three ways. First in point of number; if, for instance, a man wishes to do something with a good or an evil end in view, and does not do it then, but afterwards wills and does it, the act of his will is doubled and a double good, or a double evil is the result. Secondly, in point of extension: when, for instance, a man wishes to do something for a good or an evil end, and is hindered by some obstacle, whereas another man perseveres in the movement of the will until he accomplish it in deed; it is evident that the will of the latter is more lasting in good or evil, and in this respect, is better or worse. Thirdly, in point of intensity: for these are certain external actions, which, in so far as they are pleasurable, or painful, are such as naturally to make the will more intense or more remiss; and it is evident that the more intensely the will tends to good or evil, the better or worse it is.

On the other hand, if we speak of the goodness which the external action derives from its matter and due circumstances, thus it stands in relation to the will as its term and end. And in this way it adds to the goodness or malice of the will; because every inclination or movement is perfected by attaining its end or reaching its term. Wherefore the will is not perfect, unless it be such that, given the opportunity, it realizes the operation. But if this prove impossible, as long as the will is perfect, so as to realize the operation if it could; the lack of perfection derived from the external action, is simply involuntary. Now just as the involuntary deserves neither punishment nor reward in the accomplishment of good or evil deeds, so neither does it lessen reward or punishment, if a man through simple involuntariness fail to do good or evil.

Reply to Objection 1: Chrysostom is speaking of the case where a man's will is complete, and does not refrain from the deed save through the impossibility of achievement.

Reply to Objection 2: This argument applies to that goodness which the external action derives from the will as tending to the end. But the goodness which the external action takes from its matter and circumstances, is distinct from that which it derives from the end; but it is not distinct from that which it has from the very act willed, to which it stands in the relation of measure and cause, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)).

From this the reply to the Third Objection is evident.

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Whether the consequences of the external action increase its goodness or malice?

Objection 1: It would seem that the consequences of the external action increase its goodness or malice. For the effect pre-exists virtually in its cause. But the consequences result from the action as an effect from its cause. Therefore they pre-exist virtually in actions. Now a thing is

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS020.html](#)le good" (Ethic. ii, 6). Therefore the consequences increase the goodness or malice of an action.

Objection 2: Further, the good actions of his hearers are consequences resulting from the words of a preacher. But such goods as these redound to the merit of the preacher, as is evident from Phil. 4:1: "My dearly beloved brethren, my joy and my crown." Therefore the consequences of an action increase its goodness or malice.

Objection 3: Further, punishment is not increased, unless the fault increases: wherefore it is written ([Dt. 25:2](#)): "According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be." But the punishment is increased on account of the consequences; for it is written ([Ex. 21:29](#)): "But if the ox was wont to push with his horn yesterday and the day before, and they warned his master, and he did not shut him up, and he shall kill a man or a woman, then the ox shall be stoned, and his owner also shall be put to death." But he would not have been put to death, if the ox, although he had not been shut up, had not killed a man. Therefore the consequences increase the goodness or malice of an action.

Objection 4: Further, if a man do something which may cause death, by striking, or by sentencing, and if death does not ensue, he does not contract irregularity: but he would if death were to ensue. Therefore the consequence of an action increase its goodness or malice.

On the contrary, The consequences do not make an action that was evil, to be good; nor one that was good, to be evil. For instance, if a man give an alms to a poor man who makes bad use of the alms by committing a sin, this does not undo the good done by the giver; and, in like manner, if a man bear patiently a wrong done to him, the wrongdoer is not thereby excused. Therefore the consequences of an action do not increase its goodness or malice.

I answer that, The consequences of an action are either foreseen or not. If they are foreseen, it is evident that they increase the goodness or malice. For when a man foresees that many evils may follow from his action, and yet does not therefore desist therefrom, this shows his will to be all the more inordinate.

But if the consequences are not foreseen, we must make a distinction. Because if they follow from the nature of the action and in the majority of cases, in this respect, the consequences increase the goodness or malice of that action: for it is evident that an action is specifically better, if better results can follow from it; and specifically worse, if it is of a nature to produce worse results. On the other hand, if the consequences follow by accident and seldom, then they do not increase the goodness or malice of the action: because we do not judge of a thing according to that which belongs to it by accident, but only according to that which belongs to it of itself.

Reply to Objection 1: The virtue of a cause is measured by the effect that flows from the nature of the cause, not by that which results by accident.

Reply to Objection 2: The good actions done by the hearers, result from the preacher's words, as an effect that flows from their very nature. Hence they redound to the merit of the preacher: especially when such is his intention.

Reply to Objection 3: The consequences for which that man is ordered to be punished, both follow from the nature of the cause, and are supposed to be foreseen. For this reason they are reckoned as punishable.

But it is not the result of the fault, but of the fact, and of the obstacle to the reception of a sacrament.

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Whether one and the same external action can be both good and evil?

Objection 1: It would seem that one and the same external action can be both good and evil. For "movement, if continuous, is one and the same" (Phys. v, 4). But one continuous movement can be both good and bad: for instance, a man may go to church continuously, intending at first vainglory, and afterwards the service of God. Therefore one and the same action can be both good and bad.

Objection 2: Further, according to the Philosopher (Phys. iii, 3), action and passion are one act. But the passion may be good, as Christ's was; and the action evil, as that of the Jews. Therefore one and the same act can be both good and evil.

Objection 3: Further, since a servant is an instrument, as it were, of his master, the servant's action is his master's, just as the action of a tool is the workman's action. But it may happen that the servant's action result from his master's good will, and is therefore good: and from the evil will of the servant, and is therefore evil. Therefore the same action can be both good and evil.

On the contrary, The same thing cannot be the subject of contraries. But good and evil are contraries. Therefore the same action cannot be both good and evil.

On the contrary, The same thing cannot be the subject of contraries. But good and evil are contraries. Therefore the same action cannot be both good and evil.

I answer that, Nothing hinders a thing from being one, in so far as it is in one genus, and manifold, in so far as it is referred to another genus. Thus a continuous surface is one, considered as in the genus of quantity; and yet it is manifold, considered as to the genus of color, if it be partly white, and partly black. And accordingly, nothing hinders an action from being one, considered in the natural order; whereas it is not one, considered in the moral order; and vice versa, as we have stated above ([Article \[3\]](#), ad 1; [Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#), ad 1). For continuous walking is one action, considered in the natural order: but it may resolve itself into many actions, considered in the moral order, if a change take place in the walker's will, for the will is the principle of moral actions. If therefore we consider one action in the moral order, it is impossible for it to be morally both good and evil. Whereas if it be one as to natural and not moral unity, it can be both good and evil.

Reply to Objection 1: This continual movement which proceeds from various intentions, although it is one in the natural order, is not one in the point of moral unity.

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voluntary. And therefore in so far as they are voluntary in respect of wills that differ, they are two distinct things, and good can be in one of them while evil is in the other.

Reply to Objection 3: The action of the servant, in so far as it proceeds from the will of the servant, is not the master's action: but only in so far as it proceeds from the master's command. Wherefore the evil will of the servant does not make the action evil in this respect.