

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### OF EQUALITY AMONG THE VIRTUES (SIX ARTICLES)

We must now consider equality among the virtues: under which head there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether one virtue can be greater or less than another?
  - (2) Whether all the virtues existing together in one subject are equal?
  - (3) Of moral virtue in comparison with intellectual virtue;
  - (4) Of the moral virtues as compared with one another;
  - (5) Of the intellectual virtues in comparison with one another;
  - (6) Of the theological virtues in comparison with one another.
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### Whether one virtue can be greater or less than another?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that one virtue cannot be greater or less than another. For it is written ([Apoc. 21:16](#)) that the sides of the city of Jerusalem are equal; and a gloss says that the sides denote the virtues. Therefore all virtues are equal; and consequently one cannot be greater than another.

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less. Now the nature of virtue consists in a maximum, for virtue is "the limit of power," as the Philosopher states (De Coelo i, text. 116); and Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. ii, 19) that "virtues are very great boons, and no one can use them to evil purpose." Therefore it seems that one virtue cannot be greater or less than another.

**Objection 3:** Further, the quantity of an effect is measured by the power of the agent. But perfect, viz. infused virtues, are from God Whose power is uniform and infinite. Therefore it seems that one virtue cannot be greater than another.

**On the contrary,** Wherever there can be increase and greater abundance, there can be inequality. Now virtues admit of greater abundance and increase: for it is written ([Mt. 5:20](#)): "Unless your justice abound more than that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven": and ([Prov. 15:5](#)): "In abundant justice there is the greatest strength [virtus]." Therefore it seems that a virtue can be greater or less than another.

**I answer that,** When it is asked whether one virtue can be greater than another, the question can be taken in two senses. First, as applying to virtues of different species. In this sense it is clear that one virtue is greater than another; since a cause is always more excellent than its effect; and among effects, those nearest to the cause are the most excellent. Now it is clear from what has been said ([Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#); [Question \[61\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)) that the cause and root of human good is the reason. Hence prudence which perfects the reason, surpasses in goodness the other moral virtues which perfect the appetitive power, in so far as it partakes of reason. And among these, one is better than another, according as it approaches nearer to the reason. Consequently justice, which is in the will, excels the remaining moral virtues; and fortitude, which is in the irascible part, stands before temperance, which is in the concupiscible, which has a smaller share of reason, as stated in Ethic. vii, 6.

The question can be taken in another way, as referring to virtues of the same species. In this way, according to what was said above ([Question \[52\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), when we were treating of the intensity of habits, virtue may be said to be greater or less in two ways: first, in itself; secondly with regard to the subject that partakes of it. If we consider it in itself, we shall call it greater or little, according to the things to which it extends. Now whosoever has a virtue, e.g. temperance, has it in respect of whatever temperance extends to. But this does not apply to science and art: for every grammarian does not know everything relating to grammar. And in this sense the Stoics said rightly, as Simplicius states in his Commentary on the Predicaments, that virtue cannot be more or less, as science and art can; because the nature of virtue consists in a maximum.

If, however, we consider virtue on the part of the subject, it may then be greater or less, either in relation to different times, or in different men. Because one man is better disposed than another to attain to the mean of virtue which is defined by right reason; and this, on account of either greater habituation, or a better natural disposition, or a more discerning judgment of reason, or again a greater gift of grace, which is given to each one "according to the measure of the giving of Christ," as stated in Eph. 4:9. And here the Stoics erred, for they held that no man should be deemed virtuous, unless he were, in the highest degree, disposed to virtue. Because the nature of virtue does not require that man should reach the mean of right reason as though it were an indivisible point, as the Stoics thought; but it is enough that he should approach the mean, as stated in Ethic. ii, 6. Moreover, one same indivisible mark is reached more nearly and more readily by one than by another: as may be seen when several arches aim at a fixed target.

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**Reply to Objection 2:** This "limit" which belongs to virtue, can have the character of something "more" or "less" good, in the ways explained above: since, as stated, it is not an indivisible limit.

**Reply to Objection 3:** God does not work by necessity of nature, but according to the order of His wisdom, whereby He bestows on men various measures of virtue, according to Eph. 4:7: "To every one of you [Vulg.: 'us'] is given grace according to the measure of the giving of Christ."

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## Whether all the virtues that are together in one man, are equal?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the virtues in one same man are not all equally intense. For the Apostle says ([1 Cor. 7:7](#)): "Everyone hath his proper gift from God; one after this manner, and another after that." Now one gift would not be more proper than another to a man, if God infused all the virtues equally into each man. Therefore it seems that the virtues are not all equal in one and the same man.

**Objection 2:** Further, if all the virtues were equally intense in one and the same man, it would follow that whoever surpasses another in one virtue, would surpass him in all the others. But this is clearly not the case: since various saints are specially praised for different virtues; e.g. Abraham for faith ([Rm. 4](#)), Moses for his meekness ([Num. 7:3](#)), Job for his patience ([Tob. 2:12](#)). This is why of each Confessor the Church sings: "There was not found his like in keeping the law of the most High," [\*See Lesson in the Mass Statuit (Dominican Missal)], since each one was remarkable for some virtue or other. Therefore the virtues are not all equal in one and the same man.

**Objection 3:** Further, the more intense a habit is, the greater one's pleasure and readiness in making use of it. Now experience shows that a man is more pleased and ready to make use of one virtue than of another. Therefore the virtues are not all equal in one and the same man.

**On the contrary,** Augustine says ([De Trin. vi, 4](#)) that "those who are equal in fortitude are equal in prudence and temperance," and so on. Now it would not be so, unless all the virtues in one man were equal. Therefore all virtues are equal in one man.

**I answer that,** As explained above ([Article \[1\]](#)), the comparative greatness of virtues can be understood in two ways. First, as referring to their specific nature: and in this way there is no doubt that in a man one virtue is greater than another, for example, charity, than faith and hope. Secondly, it may be taken as referring to the degree of participation by the subject, according as a virtue becomes intense or remiss in its subject. In this sense all the virtues in one man are equal with an equality of proportion, in so far as their growth in man is equal:

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Now the nature of this equality is to be explained in the same way as the connection of virtues; for equality among virtues is their connection as to greatness. Now it has been stated above ([Question \[65\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)) that a twofold connection of virtues may be assigned. The first is according to the opinion of those who understood these four virtues to be four general properties of virtues, each of which is found together with the other in any matter. In this way virtues cannot be said to be equal in any matter unless they have all these properties equal. Augustine alludes to this kind of equality (De Trin. vi, 4) when he says: "If you say these men are equal in fortitude, but that one is more prudent than the other; it follows that the fortitude of the latter is less prudent. Consequently they are not really equal in fortitude, since the former's fortitude is more prudent. You will find that this applies to the other virtues if you run over them all in the same way."

The other kind of connection among virtues followed the opinion of those who hold these virtues to have their own proper respective matters ([Question \[65\]](#), [Articles \[1\],2](#)). In this way the connection among moral virtues results from prudence, and, as to the infused virtues, from charity, and not from the inclination, which is on the part of the subject, as stated above ([Question \[65\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Accordingly the nature of the equality among virtues can also be considered on the part of prudence, in regard to that which is formal in all the moral virtues: for in one and the same man, so long as his reason has the same degree of perfection, the mean will be proportionately defined according to right reason in each matter of virtue.

But in regard to that which is material in the moral virtues, viz. the inclination to the virtuous act, one may be readier to perform the act of one virtue, than the act of another virtue, and this either from nature, or from habituation, or again by the grace of God.

**Reply to Objection 1:** This saying of the Apostle may be taken to refer to the gifts of gratuitous grace, which are not common to all, nor are all of them equal in the one same subject. We might also say that it refers to the measure of sanctifying grace, by reason of which one man has all the virtues in greater abundance than another man, on account of his greater abundance of prudence, or also of charity, in which all the infused virtues are connected.

**Reply to Objection 2:** One saint is praised chiefly for one virtue, another saint for another virtue, on account of his more admirable readiness for the act of one virtue than for the act of another virtue.

This suffices for the Reply to the Third Objection.

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**Whether the moral virtues are better than the intellectual virtues?**

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS066.html](#) that which is more necessary, and more lasting, is better. Now the moral virtues are "more lasting even than the sciences" (Ethic. i) which are intellectual virtues: and, moreover, they are more necessary for human life. Therefore they are preferable to the intellectual virtues.

**Objection 2:** Further, virtue is defined as "that which makes its possessor good." Now man is said to be good in respect of moral virtue, and art in respect of intellectual virtue, except perhaps in respect of prudence alone. Therefore moral is better than intellectual virtue.

**Objection 3:** Further, the end is more excellent than the means. But according to Ethic. vi, 12, "moral virtue gives right intention of the end; whereas prudence gives right choice of the means." Therefore moral virtue is more excellent than prudence, which is the intellectual virtue that regards moral matters.

**On the contrary,** Moral virtue is in that part of the soul which is rational by participation; while intellectual virtue is in the essentially rational part, as stated in Ethic. i, 13. Now rational by essence is more excellent than rational by participation. Therefore intellectual virtue is better than moral virtue.

**I answer that,** A thing may be said to be greater or less in two ways: first, simply; secondly, relatively. For nothing hinders something from being better simply, e.g. "learning than riches," and yet not better relatively, i.e. "for one who is in want" [\*Aristotle, Topic. iii.]. Now to consider a thing simply is to consider it in its proper specific nature. Accordingly, a virtue takes its species from its object, as explained above ([Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#); [Question \[60\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Hence, speaking simply, that virtue is more excellent, which has the more excellent object. Now it is evident that the object of the reason is more excellent than the object of the appetite: since the reason apprehends things in the universal, while the appetite tends to things themselves, whose being is restricted to the particular. Consequently, speaking simply, the intellectual virtues, which perfect the reason, are more excellent than the moral virtues, which perfect the appetite.

But if we consider virtue in its relation to act, then moral virtue, which perfects the appetite, whose function it is to move the other powers to act, as stated above ([Question \[9\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), is more excellent. And since virtue is so called from its being a principle of action, for it is the perfection of a power, it follows again that the nature of virtue agrees more with moral than with intellectual virtue, though the intellectual virtues are more excellent habits, simply speaking.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The moral virtues are more lasting than the intellectual virtues, because they are practised in matters pertaining to the life of the community. Yet it is evident that the objects of the sciences, which are necessary and invariable, are more lasting than the objects of moral virtue, which are certain particular matters of action. That the moral virtues are more necessary for human life, proves that they are more excellent, not simply, but relatively. Indeed, the speculative intellectual virtues, from the very fact that they are not referred to something else, as a useful thing is referred to an end, are more excellent. The reason for this is that in them we have a kind of beginning of that happiness which consists in the knowledge of truth, as stated above ([Question \[3\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)).

**Reply to Objection 2:** The reason why man is said to be good simply, in respect of moral virtue, but not in respect of intellectual virtue, is because the appetite moves the other powers to their acts, as stated above ([Question \[56\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)). Wherefore this argument, too, proves merely that moral virtue is better relatively.

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS066.html](#)is, but also in appointing the end. Now the end of each moral virtue is to attain the mean in the matter proper to that virtue; which mean is appointed according to the right ruling of prudence, as stated in Ethic. ii, 6; vi, 13.

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## Whether justice is the chief of the moral virtues?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that justice is not the chief of the moral virtues. For it is better to give of one's own than to pay what is due. Now the former belongs to liberality, the latter to justice. Therefore liberality is apparently a greater virtue than justice.

**Objection 2:** Further, the chief quality of a thing is, seemingly, that in which it is most perfect. Now, according to Jm. 1:4, "Patience hath a perfect work." Therefore it would seem that patience is greater than justice.

**Objection 3:** Further, "Magnanimity has a great influence on every virtue," as stated in Ethic. iv, 3. Therefore it magnifies even justice. Therefore it is greater than justice.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 1) that "justice is the most excellent of the virtues."

**I answer that,** A virtue considered in its species may be greater or less, either simply or relatively. A virtue is said to be greater simply, whereby a greater rational good shines forth, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). In this way justice is the most excellent of all the moral virtues, as being most akin to reason. This is made evident by considering its subject and its object: its subject, because this is the will, and the will is the rational appetite, as stated above ([Question \[8\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); [Question \[26\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)): its object or matter, because it is about operations, whereby man is set in order not only in himself, but also in regard to another. Hence "justice is the most excellent of virtues" (Ethic. v, 1). Among the other moral virtues, which are about the passions, the more excellent the matter in which the appetitive movement is subjected to reason, so much the more does the rational good shine forth in each. Now in things touching man, the chief of all is life, on which all other things depend. Consequently fortitude which subjects the appetitive movement to reason in matters of life and death, holds the first place among those moral virtues that are about the passions, but is subordinate to justice. Hence the Philosopher says (Rhet. 1) that "those virtues must needs be greatest which receive the most praise: since virtue is a power of doing good. Hence the brave man and the just man are honored more than others; because the former," i.e. fortitude, "is useful in war, and the latter," i.e. justice, "both in war and in peace." After fortitude comes temperance, which subjects the appetite to reason in matters directly relating to life, in the one individual, or in the one species, viz. in matters of food and of sex. And so these three virtues, together with prudence, are called principal virtues, in excellence also.

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even as substance is more excellent simply than accident: and yet relatively some particular  
accident is more excellent than substance in so far as it perfects substance in some accidental  
mode of being.

**Reply to Objection 1:** The act of liberality needs to be founded on an act of justice, for "a man is not liberal in giving, unless he gives of his own" (Polit. ii, 3). Hence there could be no liberality apart from justice, which discerns between "meum" and "tuum": whereas justice can be without liberality. Hence justice is simply greater than liberality, as being more universal, and as being its foundation: while liberality is greater relatively since it is an ornament and an addition to justice.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Patience is said to have "a perfect work," by enduring evils, wherein it excludes not only unjust revenge, which is also excluded by justice; not only hatred, which is also suppressed by charity; nor only anger, which is calmed by gentleness; but also inordinate sorrow, which is the root of all the above. Wherefore it is more perfect and excellent through plucking up the root in this matter. It is not, however, more perfect than all the other virtues simply. Because fortitude not only endures trouble without being disturbed, but also fights against it if necessary. Hence whoever is brave is patient; but the converse does not hold, for patience is a part of fortitude.

**Reply to Objection 3:** There can be no magnanimity without the other virtues, as stated in Ethic. iv, 3. Hence it is compared to them as their ornament, so that relatively it is greater than all the others, but not simply.

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## Whether wisdom is the greatest of the intellectual virtues?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that wisdom is not the greatest of the intellectual virtues. Because the commander is greater than the one commanded. Now prudence seems to command wisdom, for it is stated in Ethic. i, 2 that political science, which belongs to prudence (Ethic. vi, 8), "orders that sciences should be cultivated in states, and to which of these each individual should devote himself, and to what extent." Since, then, wisdom is one of the sciences, it seems that prudence is greater than wisdom.

**Objection 2:** Further, it belongs to the nature of virtue to direct man to happiness: because virtue is "the disposition of a perfect thing to that which is best," as stated in Phys. vii, text. 17. Now prudence is "right reason about things to be done," whereby man is brought to happiness: whereas wisdom takes no notice of human acts, whereby man attains happiness. Therefore prudence is a greater virtue than wisdom.

**Objection 3:** Further, the more perfect knowledge is, the greater it seems to be. Now we can have more perfect knowledge of human affairs, which are the subject of science, than of Divine things, which are the object of wisdom, which is the distinction given by Augustine (De

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [FS](#) » [FS066.html](#) "God is great, exceeding our knowledge." Therefore science is a greater virtue than wisdom.

**Objection 4:** Further, knowledge of principles is more excellent than knowledge of conclusions. But wisdom draws conclusions from indemonstrable principles which are the object of the virtue of understanding, even as other sciences do. Therefore understanding is a greater virtue than wisdom.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 7) that wisdom is "the head" among "the intellectual virtues."

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), the greatness of a virtue, as to its species, is taken from its object. Now the object of wisdom surpasses the objects of all the intellectual virtues: because wisdom considers the Supreme Cause, which is God, as stated at the beginning of the Metaphysics. And since it is by the cause that we judge of an effect, and by the higher cause that we judge of the lower effects; hence it is that wisdom exercises judgment over all the other intellectual virtues, directs them all, and is the architect of them all.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Since prudence is about human affairs, and wisdom about the Supreme Cause, it is impossible for prudence to be a greater virtue than wisdom, "unless," as stated in Ethic. vi, 7, "man were the greatest thing in the world." Wherefore we must say, as stated in the same book (Ethic. vi), that prudence does not command wisdom, but vice versa: because "the spiritual man judgeth all things; and he himself is judged by no man" (1 Cor. 2:15). For prudence has no business with supreme matters which are the object of wisdom: but its command covers things directed to wisdom, viz. how men are to obtain wisdom. Wherefore prudence, or political science, is, in this way, the servant of wisdom; for it leads to wisdom, preparing the way for her, as the doorkeeper for the king.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Prudence considers the means of acquiring happiness, but wisdom considers the very object of happiness, viz. the Supreme Intelligible. And if indeed the consideration of wisdom were perfect in respect of its object, there would be perfect happiness in the act of wisdom: but as, in this life, the act of wisdom is imperfect in respect of its principal object, which is God, it follows that the act of wisdom is a beginning or participation of future happiness, so that wisdom is nearer than prudence to happiness.

**Reply to Objection 3:** As the Philosopher says (De Anima i, text. 1), "one knowledge is preferable to another, either because it is about a higher object, or because it is more certain." Hence if the objects be equally good and sublime, that virtue will be greater which possesses more certain knowledge. But a virtue which is less certain about a higher and better object, is preferable to that which is more certain about an object of inferior degree. Wherefore the Philosopher says (De Coelo ii, text. 60) that "it is a great thing to be able to know something about celestial beings, though it be based on weak and probable reasoning"; and again (De Part. Animal. i, 5) that "it is better to know a little about sublime things, than much about mean things." Accordingly wisdom, to which knowledge about God pertains, is beyond the reach of man, especially in this life, so as to be his possession: for this "belongs to God alone" (Metaph. i, 2): and yet this little knowledge about God which we can have through wisdom is preferable to all other knowledge.

**Reply to Objection 4:** The truth and knowledge of indemonstrable principles depends on the meaning of the terms: for as soon as we know what is a whole, and what is a part, we know at once that every whole is greater than its part. Now to know the meaning of being and non-being, of whole and part, and of other things consequent to being, which are the terms

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being is the proper effect of the Supreme Cause, which is God. And so wisdom makes use of  
indemonstrable principles which are the object of understanding, not only by drawing  
conclusions from them, as other sciences do, but also by passing its judgment on them, and by  
vindicating them against those who deny them. Hence it follows that wisdom is a greater  
virtue than understanding.

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## Whether charity is the greatest of the theological virtues?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that charity is not the greatest of the theological virtues. Because, since faith is in the intellect, while hope and charity are in the appetitive power, it seems that faith is compared to hope and charity, as intellectual to moral virtue. Now intellectual virtue is greater than moral virtue, as was made evident above ([Question \[62\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)). Therefore faith is greater than hope and charity.

**Objection 2:** Further, when two things are added together, the result is greater than either one. Now hope results from something added to charity; for it presupposes love, as Augustine says (*Enchiridion* viii), and it adds a certain movement of stretching forward to the beloved. Therefore hope is greater than charity.

**Objection 3:** Further, a cause is more noble than its effect. Now faith and hope are the cause of charity: for a gloss on Mt. 1:3 says that "faith begets hope, and hope charity." Therefore faith and hope are greater than charity.

**On the contrary,** The Apostle says ([1 Cor. 13:13](#)): "Now there remain faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity."

**I answer that,** As stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), the greatness of a virtue, as to its species, is taken from its object. Now, since the three theological virtues look at God as their proper object, it cannot be said that any one of them is greater than another by reason of its having a greater object, but only from the fact that it approaches nearer than another to that object; and in this way charity is greater than the others. Because the others, in their very nature, imply a certain distance from the object: since faith is of what is not seen, and hope is of what is not possessed. But the love of charity is of that which is already possessed: since the beloved is, in a manner, in the lover, and, again, the lover is drawn by desire to union with the beloved; hence it is written ([1 Jn. 4:16](#)): "He that abideth in charity, abideth in God, and God in him."

**Reply to Objection 1:** Faith and hope are not related to charity in the same way as prudence to moral virtue; and for two reasons. First, because the theological virtues have an object surpassing the human soul: whereas prudence and the moral virtues are about things beneath man. Now in things that are above man, to love them is more excellent than to know them. Because knowledge is perfected by the known being in the knower: whereas love is perfected by the lover being drawn to the beloved. Now that which is above man is more excellent in

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the other way about in things beneath man. Secondly, because prudence moderates the appetitive movements pertaining to the moral virtues, whereas faith does not moderate the appetitive movement tending to God, which movement belongs to the theological virtues: it only shows the object. And this appetitive movement towards its object surpasses human knowledge, according to Eph. 3:19: "The charity of Christ which surpasseth all knowledge."

**Reply to Objection 2:** Hope presupposes love of that which a man hopes to obtain; and such love is love of concupiscence, whereby he who desires good, loves himself rather than something else. On the other hand, charity implies love of friendship, to which we are led by hope, as stated above ([Question \[62\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)).

**Reply to Objection 3:** An efficient cause is more noble than its effect: but not a disposing cause. For otherwise the heat of fire would be more noble than the soul, to which the heat disposes the matter. It is in this way that faith begets hope, and hope charity: in the sense, to wit, that one is a disposition to the other.