

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 78](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

OF THAT CAUSE OF SIN WHICH IS MALICE (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must now consider the cause of sin on the part of the will, viz. malice: and under this head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether it is possible for anyone to sin through certain malice, i.e. purposely?
 - (2) Whether everyone that sins through habit, sins through certain malice?
 - (3) Whether every one that sins through certain malice, sins through habit?
 - (4) Whether it is more grievous to sin through certain malice, than through passion?
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[Index](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Question: 78](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

[Article: 1](#) [[<<](#) | [>>](#)]

Whether anyone sins through certain malice?

Objection 1: It would seem that no one sins purposely, or through certain malice. Because ignorance is opposed to purpose or certain malice. Now "every evil man is ignorant," according to the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 1); and it is written ([Prov. 14:22](#)): "They err that work evil." Therefore no one sins through certain malice.

Objection 2: Further, Dionysius says (Div. Nom. iv) that "no one works intending evil." Now to sin through malice seems to denote the intention of doing evil [*Alluding to the derivation of "malitia" (malice) from "malum" (evil)] in sinning, because an act is not denominated from that which is unintentional and accidental. Therefore no one sins through malice.

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sin goes on causing sin indefinitely, which is absurd. Therefore no one sins through malice.

On the contrary, It is written ([Job 34:27](#)): "[Who] as it were on purpose have revolted from God [Vulg.: 'Him'], and would not understand all His ways." Now to revolt from God is to sin. Therefore some sin purposely or through certain malice.

I answer that, Man like any other being has naturally an appetite for the good; and so if his appetite incline away to evil, this is due to corruption or disorder in some one of the principles of man: for it is thus that sin occurs in the actions of natural things. Now the principles of human acts are the intellect, and the appetite, both rational (i.e. the will) and sensitive. Therefore even as sin occurs in human acts, sometimes through a defect of the intellect, as when anyone sins through ignorance, and sometimes through a defect in the sensitive appetite, as when anyone sins through passion, so too does it occur through a defect consisting in a disorder of the will. Now the will is out of order when it loves more the lesser good. Again, the consequence of loving a thing less is that one chooses to suffer some hurt in its regard, in order to obtain a good that one loves more: as when a man, even knowingly, suffers the loss of a limb, that he may save his life which he loves more. Accordingly when an inordinate will loves some temporal good, e.g. riches or pleasure, more than the order of reason or Divine law, or Divine charity, or some such thing, it follows that it is willing to suffer the loss of some spiritual good, so that it may obtain possession of some temporal good. Now evil is merely the privation of some good; and so a man wishes knowingly a spiritual evil, which is evil simply, whereby he is deprived of a spiritual good, in order to possess a temporal good: wherefore he is said to sin through certain malice or on purpose, because he chooses evil knowingly.

Reply to Objection 1: Ignorance sometimes excludes the simple knowledge that a particular action is evil, and then man is said to sin through ignorance: sometimes it excludes the knowledge that a particular action is evil at this particular moment, as when he sins through passion: and sometimes it excludes the knowledge that a particular evil is not to be suffered for the sake of possessing a particular good, but not the simple knowledge that it is an evil: it is thus that a man is ignorant, when he sins through certain malice.

Reply to Objection 2: Evil cannot be intended by anyone for its own sake; but it can be intended for the sake of avoiding another evil, or obtaining another good, as stated above: and in this case anyone would choose to obtain a good intended for its own sake, without suffering loss of the other good; even as a lustful man would wish to enjoy a pleasure without offending God; but with the two set before him to choose from, he prefers sinning and thereby incurring God's anger, to being deprived of the pleasure.

Reply to Objection 3: The malice through which anyone sins, may be taken to denote habitual malice, in the sense in which the Philosopher (Ethic. v, 1) calls an evil habit by the name of malice, just as a good habit is called virtue: and in this way anyone is said to sin through malice when he sins through the inclination of a habit. It may also denote actual malice, whether by malice we mean the choice itself of evil (and thus anyone is said to sin through malice, in so far as he sins through making a choice of evil), or whether by malice we mean some previous fault that gives rise to a subsequent fault, as when anyone impugns the grace of his brother through envy. Nor does this imply that a thing is its own cause: for the interior act is the cause of the exterior act, and one sin is the cause of another; not indefinitely, however, since we can trace it back to some previous sin, which is not caused by any previous sin, as was explained above ([Question \[75\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#), ad 3).

Whether everyone that sins through habit, sins through certain malice?

Objection 1: It would seem that not every one who sins through habit, sins through certain malice. Because sin committed through certain malice, seems to be most grievous. Now it happens sometimes that a man commits a slight sin through habit, as when he utters an idle word. Therefore sin committed from habit is not always committed through certain malice.

Objection 2: Further, "Acts proceeding from habits are like the acts by which those habits were formed" (Ethic. ii, 1,2). But the acts which precede a vicious habit are not committed through certain malice. Therefore the sins that arise from habit are not committed through certain malice.

Objection 3: Further, when a man commits a sin through certain malice, he is glad after having done it, according to Prov. 2:14: "Who are glad when they have done evil, and rejoice in most wicked things": and this, because it is pleasant to obtain what we desire, and to do those actions which are connatural to us by reason of habit. But those who sin through habit, are sorrowful after committing a sin: because "bad men," i.e. those who have a vicious habit, "are full of remorse" (Ethic. ix, 4). Therefore sins that arise from habit are not committed through certain malice.

On the contrary, A sin committed through certain malice is one that is done through choice of evil. Now we make choice of those things to which we are inclined by habit, as stated in Ethic. vi, 2 with regard to virtuous habits. Therefore a sin that arises from habit is committed through certain malice.

I answer that, There is a difference between a sin committed by one who has the habit, and a sin committed by habit: for it is not necessary to use a habit, since it is subject to the will of the person who has that habit. Hence habit is defined as being "something we use when we will," as stated above ([Question \[50\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). And thus, even as it may happen that one who has a vicious habit may break forth into a virtuous act, because a bad habit does not corrupt reason altogether, something of which remains unimpaired, the result being that a sinner does some works which are generically good; so too it may happen sometimes that one who has a vicious habit, acts, not from that habit, but through the uprising of a passion, or again through ignorance. But whenever he uses the vicious habit he must needs sin through certain malice: because to anyone that has a habit, whatever is befitting to him in respect of that habit, has the aspect of something lovable, since it thereby becomes, in a way, connatural to him, according as custom and habit are a second nature. Now the very thing which befits a man in respect of a vicious habit, is something that excludes a spiritual good: the result being that a man chooses a spiritual evil, that he may obtain possession of what befits him in respect of that habit: and this is to sin through certain malice. Wherefore it is evident that whoever sins through habit, sins through certain malice.

Reply to Objection 1: Venial sin does not exclude spiritual good, consisting in the grace of God or charity. Wherefore it is an evil, not simply, but in a relative sense: and for that reason the

Reply to Objection 2: Acts proceeding from habits are of like species as the acts from which those habits were formed: but they differ from them as perfect from imperfect. Such is the difference between sin committed through certain malice and sin committed through passion.

Reply to Objection 3: He that sins through habit is always glad for what he does through habit, as long as he uses the habit. But since he is able not to use the habit, and to think of something else, by means of his reason, which is not altogether corrupted, it may happen that while not using the habit he is sorry for what he has done through the habit. And so it often happens that such a man is sorry for his sin not because sin in itself is displeasing to him, but on account of his reaping some disadvantage from the sin.

[Index](#) [<< | >>]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [<< | >>]

[Question: 78](#) [<< | >>]

[Article: 3](#) [<< | >>]

Whether one who sins through certain malice, sins through habit?

Objection 1: It would seem that whoever sins through certain malice, sins through habit. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 9) that "an unjust action is not done as an unjust man does it," i.e. through choice, "unless it be done through habit." Now to sin through certain malice is to sin through making a choice of evil, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Therefore no one sins through certain malice, unless he has the habit of sin.

Objection 2: Further, Origen says (Peri Archon iii) that "a man is not suddenly ruined and lost, but must needs fall away little by little." But the greatest fall seems to be that of the man who sins through certain malice. Therefore a man comes to sin through certain malice, not from the outset, but from inveterate custom, which may engender a habit.

Objection 3: Further, whenever a man sins through certain malice, his will must needs be inclined of itself to the evil he chooses. But by the nature of that power man is inclined, not to evil but to good. Therefore if he chooses evil, this must be due to something supervening, which is passion or habit. Now when a man sins through passion, he sins not through certain malice, but through weakness, as stated ([Question \[77\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)). Therefore whenever anyone sins through certain malice, he sins through habit.

On the contrary, The good habit stands in the same relation to the choice of something good, as the bad habit to the choice of something evil. But it happens sometimes that a man, without having the habit of a virtue, chooses that which is good according to that virtue. Therefore sometimes also a man, without having the habit of a vice, may choose evil, which is to sin through certain malice.

I answer that, The will is related differently to good and to evil. Because from the very nature of the power, it is inclined to the rational good, as its proper object; wherefore every sin is said to be contrary to nature. Hence, if a will be inclined, by its choice, to some evil, this must be occasioned by something else. Sometimes, in fact, this is occasioned through some defect in the

impulse of the sensitive appetite, as when anyone sins through passion. Yet neither of these amounts to a sin through certain malice; for then alone does anyone sin through certain malice, when his will is moved to evil of its own accord. This may happen in two ways. First, through his having a corrupt disposition inclining him to evil, so that, in respect of that disposition, some evil is, as it were, suitable and similar to him; and to this thing, by reason of its suitability, the will tends, as to something good, because everything tends, of its own accord, to that which is suitable to it. Moreover this corrupt disposition is either a habit acquired by custom, or a sickly condition on the part of the body, as in the case of a man who is naturally inclined to certain sins, by reason of some natural corruption in himself. Secondly, the will, of its own accord, may tend to an evil, through the removal of some obstacle: for instance, if a man be prevented from sinning, not through sin being in itself displeasing to him, but through hope of eternal life, or fear of hell, if hope give place to despair, or fear to presumption, he will end in sinning through certain malice, being freed from the bridle, as it were.

It is evident, therefore, that sin committed through certain malice, always presupposes some inordinateness in man, which, however, is not always a habit: so that it does not follow of necessity, if a man sins through certain malice, that he sins through habit.

Reply to Objection 1: To do an action as an unjust man does, may be not only to do unjust things through certain malice, but also to do them with pleasure, and without any notable resistance on the part of reason, and this occurs only in one who has a habit.

Reply to Objection 2: It is true that a man does not fall suddenly into sin from certain malice, and that something is presupposed; but this something is not always a habit, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 3: That which inclines the will to evil, is not always a habit or a passion, but at times is something else. Moreover, there is no comparison between choosing good and choosing evil: because evil is never without some good of nature, whereas good can be perfect without the evil of fault.

[Index](#) [<< | >>]

[First Part of the Second Part](#) [<< | >>]

[Question: 78](#) [<< | >>]

Article: 4 [<< | >>]

Whether it is more grievous to sin through certain malice than through passion?

Objection 1: It would seem that it is not more grievous to sin through certain malice than through passion. Because ignorance excuses from sin either altogether or in part. Now ignorance is greater in one who sins through certain malice, than in one who sins through passion; since he that sins through certain malice suffers from the worst form of ignorance, which according to the Philosopher (Ethic. vii, 8) is ignorance of principle, for he has a false estimation of the end, which is the principle in matters of action. Therefore there is more excuse for one who sins through certain malice, than for one who sins through passion.

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with regard to a man who is thrown headlong into sin by a more impetuous passion. Now he that sins through certain malice, is impelled by habit, the impulse of which is stronger than that of passion. Therefore to sin through habit is less grievous than to sin through passion.

Objection 3: Further, to sin through certain malice is to sin through choosing evil. Now he that sins through passion, also chooses evil. Therefore he does not sin less than the man who sins through certain malice.

On the contrary, A sin that is committed on purpose, for this very reason deserves heavier punishment, according to Job 34:26: "He hath struck them as being wicked, in open sight, who, as it were, on purpose, have revolted from Him." Now punishment is not increased except for a graver fault. Therefore a sin is aggravated through being done on purpose, i.e. through certain malice.

I answer that, A sin committed through malice is more grievous than a sin committed through passion, for three reasons. First, because, as sin consists chiefly in an act of the will, it follows that, other things being equal, a sin is all the more grievous, according as the movement of the sin belongs more to the will. Now when a sin is committed through malice, the movement of sin belongs more to the will, which is then moved to evil of its own accord, than when a sin is committed through passion, when the will is impelled to sin by something extrinsic, as it were. Wherefore a sin is aggravated by the very fact that it is committed through certain malice, and so much the more, as the malice is greater; whereas it is diminished by being committed through passion, and so much the more, as the passion is stronger. Secondly, because the passion which incites the will to sin, soon passes away, so that man repents of his sin, and soon returns to his good intentions; whereas the habit, through which a man sins, is a permanent quality, so that he who sins through malice, abides longer in his sin. For this reason the Philosopher (Ethic. vii, 8) compares the intemperate man, who sins through malice, to a sick man who suffers from a chronic disease, while he compares the incontinent man, who sins through passion, to one who suffers intermittently. Thirdly, because he who sins through certain malice is ill-disposed in respect of the end itself, which is the principle in matters of action; and so the defect is more dangerous than in the case of the man who sins through passion, whose purpose tends to a good end, although this purpose is interrupted on account of the passion, for the time being. Now the worst of all defects is defect of principle. Therefore it is evident that a sin committed through malice is more grievous than one committed through passion.

Reply to Objection 1: Ignorance of choice, to which the objection refers, neither excuses nor diminishes a sin, as stated above ([Question \[76\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore neither does a greater ignorance of the kind make a sin to be less grave.

Reply to Objection 2: The impulse due to passion, is, as it were, due to a defect which is outside the will: whereas, by a habit, the will is inclined from within. Hence the comparison fails.

Reply to Objection 3: It is one thing to sin while choosing, and another to sin through choosing. For he that sins through passion, sins while choosing, but not through choosing, because his choosing is not for him the first principle of his sin; for he is induced through the passion, to choose what he would not choose, were it not for the passion. On the other hand, he that sins through certain malice, chooses evil of his own accord, in the way already explained ([Articles \[2\],3](#)), so that his choosing, of which he has full control, is the principle of his sin: and for this reason he is said to sin "through" choosing.
