

QUESTION 20

The Goodness and Badness of the Exterior Act

Next we have to consider goodness and badness with respect to exterior acts. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Do goodness and badness first exist in the act of willing or in the exterior act? (2) Does the entire goodness or badness of the exterior act depend on the goodness [or badness] of the act of willing? (3) Are the goodness and badness of the interior acts the same as the goodness and badness of the exterior acts? (4) Does the exterior act add any goodness or badness beyond that of the interior act? (5) Do subsequent events add any goodness or badness to the exterior act? (6) Can the same exterior act be both good and bad?

Article 1

Do goodness and badness exist in the exterior act before they exist in the act of willing?

It seems that goodness and badness exist in the exterior act before they exist in the act of willing:

Objection 1: As was explained above (q. 19, aa. 1-2), an act of willing has its goodness from its object. But the exterior act is the object of the interior act of willing; for instance, we are said to will theft or to will to give alms. Therefore, badness and goodness exist in the exterior act before they exist in the act of willing.

Objection 2: Goodness belongs first to the end, because the means to the end have the character of goodness from their being ordered toward the end. But as was explained above (q. 1, a. 1), an act of willing cannot be the end, whereas an act of some other power can be the end. Therefore, goodness exists in the act of some other power before it exists in the act of willing.

Objection 3: As was explained above (q. 18, a. 6), the act of willing is related as a form to the exterior act. But what is formal is posterior, since the form comes to the matter. Therefore, goodness and badness exist in the exterior act before they exist in the act of willing.

But contrary to this: In *Retractationes* Augustine says, “The act of willing is that by which one sins and that by which one lives uprightly.” Therefore, moral goodness and badness exist first in the act of willing.

I respond: There are two possible ways in which exterior acts can be called good or bad:

First, they are called good or bad with respect to their *kind* and with respect to the *circumstances* considered in them, in the way that giving alms in the right sort of circumstances (*dare eleemosynam servatis debitis circumstantiis*) is said to be good.

Second, something is said to be good or bad from its relationship to the *end* (*ex ordine ad finem*), in the way that giving alms out of vainglory is said to be bad.

Now since the end is the proper object of the act of willing, it is clear that the sort of goodness or badness that the exterior act has from its relationship to the end is first found in the act of willing and flows from that act into the exterior act. By contrast, the goodness or badness that the exterior act has in its own right (*secundum se*)—because of the right sort of matter and circumstances (*propter debitam materiam et debitas circumstantias*)—is derived not from the will but rather from reason.

Hence, if one thinks of the exterior act’s goodness insofar as it exists in reason’s ordering and apprehension, then this goodness is prior to the goodness of the act of willing, whereas if one thinks of the exterior act’s goodness insofar as it exists in the execution of the act (*in executione operis*), then this goodness is posterior to the goodness of the act of willing, which is its principle.

Reply to objection 1: The exterior act is the object of the act of willing insofar as it is proposed to the will by reason as a certain good that is apprehended and ordered by reason, and in this sense it is prior to the goodness of the act of willing. However, insofar as it exists in the execution of the act, it is an effect of the act of willing and is posterior to the act of willing.

Reply to objection 2: The end is prior in intention, but it is posterior in the execution.

Reply to objection 3: Insofar as a form is received into matter, it is posterior to the matter in the process of generation—even though it is prior in nature. However, insofar as the form exists in the agent cause, it is prior in every way.

Now the act of willing is related to the exterior act as its efficient cause. Hence, the goodness of the act of willing is the form of the exterior act in the sense that it exists in the agent cause.

Article 2

Do the entire goodness and badness of exterior acts depend on the act of willing?

It seems that the entire goodness and badness (*tota bonitas et malitia*) of exterior acts depend on the act of willing:

Objection 1: Matthew 7:18 says, “A good tree cannot bear bad fruit; nor can a bad tree bear good fruit.” Now according to a Gloss, ‘tree’ means the act of willing, and ‘fruit’ means the exterior act (*opus*). Therefore, it is impossible for the interior act of willing to be good and the exterior act bad, or vice versa.

Objection 2: In *Retractationes* Augustine says that one sins only by an act of willing. Therefore, if sin does not exist in the act of willing, then there will be no sin in the exterior act. And so the entire good or badness of the exterior act depends on the act of willing.

Objection 3: The goodness and badness of which we are now speaking are specific differences of moral acts (*differentiae moralis actus*). But according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 7, specific differences divide a genus *per se*. Therefore, since an act is a moral act because it is voluntary (*voluntaria*), it seems that goodness and badness are received in an act solely on the part of the act of willing (*solum ex parte voluntatis*).

But contrary to this: In *Contra Mendacium* Augustine says, “There are certain things that cannot be done well for any good end or by a good act of willing.”

I respond: As has already been explained (a. 1), it is possible to think of two kinds of goodness and badness in the exterior act: (a) goodness and badness that stem from the right sort of matter and circumstances (*secundum debitam materiam et circumstantias*) and (b) goodness and badness that stem from the relationship to the end.

The goodness and badness that stem from the relationship to the end depend entirely on the act of willing. By contrast, the goodness and badness that come from the right sort of matter and circumstances depend on reason, and the goodness of the act of willing depends on this sort of goodness to the extent that the act of willing is directed toward it.

However, one should note that, as was explained above (q. 19, a. 6), just a single defect is sufficient for something’s being bad, whereas a single good aspect is not sufficient for its being good absolutely speaking; instead, what is required is *complete* goodness (*integritas bonitatis*). Therefore, if the act of willing is good and has a proper object and end, then it follows that the exterior act is good. But the goodness of the act of willing, which comes from the act of intending the end, is not sufficient for the exterior act’s being good. Rather, if the act of willing is bad *either* because of the act of intending the end *or* because of the act that is willed, the result is that the exterior act is bad.

Reply to objection 1: Insofar as it is a good act of willing that is signified by ‘good fruit’, the act must be understood in such a way that it has goodness *both* from the act that is willed *and* from the intended end.

Reply to objection 2: One sins by the act of willing not only when he wills a bad *end*, but also when he wills a bad *act*.

Reply to objection 3: What is said to be voluntary is not just the interior act of the will, but also the exterior acts insofar as they proceed from the will and reason. And so the specific differences *good* and *bad* can apply to *both* interior and exterior acts (*circa utrosque actus potest esse differentia boni et mali*).

Article 3

Is the goodness or badness of the interior act of willing the same as the goodness or badness of the exterior act?

It seems that the goodness or badness of the interior act of the willing is not the same as the goodness or badness of the exterior act:

Objection 1: The principle of the interior act is an interior power of the soul, either apprehensive or appetitive, whereas the principle of the exterior act is a power that executes a movement. But where there are diverse principles of action, there are diverse acts. Now it is an act that is the subject of goodness or badness. But it is impossible for the same accident to exist in diverse subjects. Therefore, the goodness of the interior act cannot be the same as the goodness of the exterior act.

Objection 2: As *Ethics 2* says, “A virtue is what makes the one who has it good and renders his action good.” But as is clear from *Ethics 6*, an intellectual virtue in a power that commands is different from a moral virtue in a power that is commanded. Therefore, the goodness of the interior act, which is the act of a power that commands, is different from the goodness of the exterior act, which is the act of a power that is commanded.

Objection 3: A cause and its effect cannot be the same thing, since nothing is a cause of itself. But as has been explained (aa. 1-2), either the goodness of the interior act is a cause of the goodness of the exterior act, or vice versa. Therefore, it is impossible for the same goodness to belong to both acts.

But contrary to this: It was shown above (q. 18, a. 6) that the act of willing is like the form of the exterior act. But something unified (*unum*) is effected from the formal and the material. Therefore, the goodness of the interior act is the same as the goodness of the exterior act.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 17, a. 4), to the extent that the interior act of willing and the exterior act are thought of as being in the genus of morals, they are a single act. However, sometimes it happens that an act which is one in subject has more than one type of goodness or badness (*plures rationes bonitatis vel malitiae*), and sometimes it happens that it has just one type (*unam tantum*).

So, then, one should reply that sometimes the goodness or badness of the interior act is the same as the goodness or badness of the exterior act, and sometimes they are different from one another. For as has already been explained (aa. 1-2), the two aforementioned instances of goodness, viz., the goodness of the interior act and the goodness of the exterior act, are ordered toward one another.

Now in things that are ordered toward something else, it is possible for something to be good solely because it is ordered toward that other thing, in the way that a bitter-tasting medicine is good solely because it effects health (*potio amara ex hoc solo est bona quod est sanativa*). Hence, the goodness of health and the goodness of the medicine are not different from one another, but one and the same. On the other hand, sometimes what is ordered toward something else has within itself (*in se*) some type of goodness, even beyond its being ordered toward that other good; for instance, a good-tasting medicine has a type of pleasurable goodness over and beyond the fact that it is a cause of health.

So, then, one should reply that when the exterior act is good or bad solely because it is ordered toward the end, then the goodness or badness of the act of willing, which is related *per se* to the end, is altogether the same as the goodness or badness of the exterior act, which is related to the end by the mediation of the act of willing. On the other hand, when the exterior act has goodness or badness in its

own right (*secundum se*), either because of its matter or because of the circumstances, then the goodness of the exterior act is one thing and the goodness of the act of willing, which comes from the end, is another thing—yet, as has already been explained (aa. 1-2), in such a way that (a) the goodness of the end spills over from the act of willing into the exterior act and that (b) the goodness of the matter and the circumstances spills over into the act of willing.

Reply to objection 1: This argument shows that the interior act and the exterior act are diverse in their natural genera (*diversi secundum genus naturae*). However, as was explained above (q. 17, a. 4), acts that are diverse in this way constitute a single act in the genus of morals.

Reply to objection 2: As is explained in *Ethics* 6, the moral virtues are ordered toward the very acts of the virtues, which are, as it were, their ends, whereas prudence, which exists in reason, is ordered toward the means to the end. And this is why diverse virtues are required. But correct reason concerning the end of the virtues does not have a goodness that is different from the goodness of the virtue, since reason's goodness participates in every virtue.

Reply to objection 3: When one thing is derived from another and the latter is a *univocal agent cause*, then what exists in each of them is different; for instance, when a hot thing effects heat, the heat of that which effects heat is different from the heat in the thing that is heated, even though they are the same in species.

However, when one thing is derived from another *by virtue of an analogy or proportion* (*secundum analogiam vel proportionem*), then there is only one thing numerically; for instance, health with respect to urine and medicine (*sanum ad medicinam et urinam*) is derived from health that exists in an animal's body (*sanum quod est in corpore animalis*); nor is health as it belongs to the medicine and the urine (*sanitas medicinae et urinae*) different from the animal's health (*sanitas animalis*), which the medicine effects and which the urine is a sign of. And it is in this latter sense that the goodness of the act of willing spills over into the exterior act, and vice versa, viz., because the one is ordered toward the other.

Article 4

Does the exterior act add any goodness or badness beyond that of the interior act?

It seems that the exterior act does not add any goodness or badness beyond that of the interior act (*non addat in bonitate vel malitia supra actum interiore*):

Objection 1: In *Super Mattheum* Chrysostom says, "The act of willing is what is rewarded for its goodness or condemned for its badness." Works, by contrast, are a testimony to acts of willing (*opera testimonia sunt voluntatis*). Therefore, God does not want works for His own sake, so that He might know how to judge them; rather, He wants them for the sake of others, so that all might understand that He is a just God. But goodness or badness is to be thought of in accord with God's judgment rather than in accord with the judgment of men. Therefore, the exterior act adds nothing to goodness or badness beyond that of the interior act.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 3), the interior act's goodness is one and the same as the exterior act's goodness. But an increase is accomplished through the addition of one thing to something else (*per additionem unius ad alterum*). Therefore, the exterior act does not add any goodness or badness beyond that of the interior act.

Objection 3: The entirety of a creature's goodness does not add anything to God's goodness, since the entirety of a creature's goodness flows from God's goodness. But as has been explained (aa. 1-2), sometimes the entirety of the exterior act's goodness flows from the interior act's goodness, and sometimes vice versa. Therefore, it is not the case that the one act adds goodness or badness to the other.

But contrary to this: Every agent intends to attain good and to avoid evil. Therefore, if no

goodness or badness is added by the exterior act, then it will be useless for anyone who has a good or bad act of willing to do a good work or to desist from a bad work. But this is absurd.

I respond: If we are talking about the goodness that an exterior act has *from the act of willing the end*, then the exterior act adds no goodness—unless it happens that the act of willing is in its own right made better in the case of good acts or worse in the case of bad acts. There seem to be three ways in which this can happen:

(a) The act of willing is made better or worse *in number (secundum numerum)*. For instance, someone wills to do something with a good or bad end, then does not do it, but later wills it and does it. Here the act of willing is duplicated, and so there is a twofold goodness or twofold badness.

(b) The act of willing is made better or worse *by being extended (secundum extensionem)*. For instance, one individual wills to do something with a good or bad end and desists because of some obstacle, whereas another individual prolongs the movement of his will up to the point of bringing that movement to completion by means of the work. It is clear that an act of willing of this latter sort lasts longer in goodness or badness and is accordingly worse or better.

(c) The act of willing is made better or worse *by its intensity (secundum intensionem)*. There are some exterior acts which, to the extent that they are pleasurable or painful, are apt to make the act of willing more intense or less intense (*nati sunt intendere voluntatem vel remittere*). Now it is clear that the more intensely the will tends toward something good or bad, the better or worse it is.

On the other hand, if we are talking about the goodness an exterior act has *because of its matter and due circumstances*, then the exterior act is related to the act of willing as its terminus and end. And in this sense it adds to the goodness or badness of the act of willing, since every inclination or movement is perfected in attaining its end or reaching its terminus. Hence, it is not a perfect act of willing unless it is such that, given the opportunity, it issues forth in a work (*nisi sit talis quae opportunitate data operetur*).

However, if the opportunity is lacking (*si vero possibilitas desit*), even though there is a perfect act of willing—so that the individual would do the work if he were able to—then the lack of perfection associated with the exterior act is involuntary, absolutely speaking. But just as what is involuntary does not merit a punishment or reward in the doing of what is good or bad, so too neither is any of the reward or punishment removed if a man desists involuntarily, absolutely speaking, from doing something good or evil.

Reply to objection 1: Chrysostom is talking about a case in which (a) the man's act of willing has already been completed (*consummata*) and in which (b) he has desisted from the act only because he lacks the power to do it.

Reply to objection 2: This argument goes through as regards the goodness that an exterior act has from the act of willing the end. However, the goodness that the exterior act has because of its matter and circumstances is different from the goodness that the act of willing has from its end—though, as was explained above (aa. 1-2), it is not different from the goodness that the act of willing has from the very act that is willed, but is instead related to that goodness as its reason and cause.

Reply to objection 3: This makes clear the reply to the third objection.

Article 5

Do subsequent events add to an act's goodness or badness?

It seems that subsequent events add to an act's goodness or badness:

Objection 1: An effect preexists virtually in its cause. But subsequent events follow acts in the way the effects follow causes. Therefore, they preexist virtually in those acts. But each thing is judged to be good or bad according to its virtue, since, as *Ethics 2* says, "Virtue is what makes the one who has it

good.” Therefore, subsequent events add to an act’s goodness or badness.

Objection 2: The good things that the listeners do are certain effects that follow from the teacher’s preaching (*quidam consequentes praedicatione doctoris*). But good things of this sort redound to the preacher’s merit, as is clear from what is said in Philippians 4:1 (“My dearly beloved and longed for brothers, my joy and my crown”). Therefore, subsequent events add to the goodness and badness of acts.

Objection 3: One does not add to the punishment unless the guilt increases; hence, Deuteronomy 25:2 says, “According to the measure of the sin shall the measure also of the stripes be.” But the punishment is increased because of subsequent events; for Exodus 21:3 says, “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 unless the ox—even if not shut up—had not killed a human being. Therefore, subsequent events add to an act’s goodness or badness.

Objection 4: If one does something that may cause death—say, by striking someone or passing sentence on him—but death does not ensue, then no [sacramental] irregularity is contracted. But it would be contracted if death were to follow. Therefore, subsequent events add to an act’s goodness or badness.

But contrary to this: Subsequent events do not make an act that was good bad, or an act that was bad good. For instance, if someone gives alms to a poor man and the poor man makes bad use of the alms in order to sin, nothing is lost to the one who gave the alms; and, similarly, if someone patiently bears an injury done to him, the one who inflicted the injury is not on that account excused. Therefore, subsequent events do not add to an act’s goodness or badness.

I respond: A subsequent event is either foreseen or not foreseen (*praecogitatus aut non*).

If it is foreseen, then it is clear that it adds to goodness and badness. For when someone who knows that many bad things can follow from his action does not for that reason desist, his act of willing appears to be more disordered.

On the other hand, if the subsequent event is not foreseen, then we have to draw a distinction.

For if the subsequent event follows *per se* and in most cases from the act in question, then the subsequent event accordingly adds to the act’s goodness or badness. For it is clear that an act is better of its kind if more good things are able to follow from it, and it is worse of its kind if more bad things are apt to follow from it.

On the other hand, if the subsequent event follows *per accidens* and in a fewer number of cases, then the subsequent event does not add to the act’s goodness or badness. For it is only insofar as something is *per se*, and not insofar as it is *per accidens*, that judgment is passed on it.

Reply to objection 1: A cause’s power is measured in accord with its *per se* effects and not according to its *per accidens* effects.

Reply to objection 2: The good things that the listeners do follow from the teacher’s preaching as *per se* effects. Hence, they redound to the reward of the preacher and especially when they are intended ahead of time by the preacher.

Reply to objection 3: The event for which it is commanded that punishment be inflicted is such that both (a) it follows *per se* from the cause in question and (b) it is posited as foreknown. And this is why it is imputed for punishment.

Reply to objection 4: This argument would go through if the [sacramental] irregularity followed from the sin. However, it does not follow from the sin, but instead follows from the deed that is done, because it causes a sacramental defect (*non sequitur culpam sed factum propter defectum sacramenti*).

Article 6

Can a single act be both good and bad?

It seems that a single act can be both good and bad:

Objection 1: As *Physics* 5 says, “A movement that is one is continuous.” But a single continuous movement can be both good and bad, e.g., if someone, while walking continuously to church, first intends to seek empty glory and later intends to serve God. Therefore, a single act can be both good and bad.

Objection 2: According to the Philosopher in *Physics* 3, an action and [corresponding] passion are a single act. But it is possible (a) for the passion, e.g., Christ’s passion, to be good and (b) for the action, e.g., that of the Jews, to be bad. Therefore, a single act can be both good and bad.

Objection 3: Since a servant is, as it were, his master’s instrument, the servant’s action is the master’s action in the way that a tool’s action is the craftsman’s action. But it can happen that the servant’s action (a) proceeds from the master’s good act of willing and so is good, and (b) proceeds from the servant’s bad act of willing and so is bad. Therefore, the same act can be both good and bad.

But contrary to this: Contraries cannot exist in the same thing. But *good* and *bad* are contraries. Therefore, a single act cannot be both good and bad.

I respond: Nothing prevents something from being both (a) a single thing insofar as it is in one genus and (b) more than one thing (*multiplex*) insofar as it is referred to some other genus. For instance, a continuous surface is a single thing insofar as it is thought of as being in the genus of quantity, and yet, given that it is partly white and partly black, it is many things insofar as it is referred to the genus of color.

Accordingly, as has been explained (q. 3, a. 1 and q. 18, a. 7), nothing prevents some act from being a single act insofar as it is referred to the genus of nature, and yet not a single act insofar as it is referred to the genus of morals, or vice versa. For instance, walking is a single continuous act within the genus of nature, and yet it can happen that it is many acts within the genus of morals, given that the walker’s act of willing, which is the principle of moral acts, keeps changing.

Therefore, if one takes an act which is a single act insofar as it is in the genus of morals, then it is impossible for that act to be both good and bad with moral goodness and badness. Yet, if it is a single act by a oneness of nature and not by a oneness of morals (*unus unitate naturae et non unitate moris*), then it can be both good and bad.

Reply to objection 1: Even though the continuous movement in question, which proceeds from diverse intentions, is a single act by a oneness of nature, it is nonetheless not a single act by a oneness of morals.

Reply to objection 2: Action and passion belong to the genus of morals insofar as they have the character of voluntariness. And so to the extent that they are called voluntary because of diverse acts of willing, they are two acts morally speaking, and so it is possible for goodness to be in one part and for badness to be in the other part.

Reply to objection 3: Insofar as the servant’s act proceeds from the servant’s act of willing, it is not the master’s act; rather, the servant’s act is the master’s act only insofar as it proceeds from the master’s command. Hence, in this sense the servant’s bad act of willing does not make the master’s act bad.