

QUESTION 107

The Speech of Angels

The next thing we have to consider is the speech of angels. On this topic, there are five questions: (1) Does one angel speak to another? (2) Does a lower angel speak to a higher angel? (3) Does an angel speak to God? (4) Does spatial distance play a role in an angel's speech? (5) Do all the angels know what one angel says to another angel?

Article 1

Does one angel speak to another?

It seems that it is not the case that one angel speaks to another:

Objection 1: In *Moralia* 18 Gregory says that in the resurrected state “the corporeality of the parts of the body does not hide anyone’s mind from the eyes of another.” Therefore, *a fortiori*, an angel’s mind will not be hidden from another. But speech has the purpose of making manifest to another what is hidden in one’s own mind. Therefore, there is no need for one angel to speak to another.

Objection 2: There are two kinds of speech: (a) *interior* speech, by which one speaks to himself, and (b) *exterior* speech, by which one speaks to another. But exterior speech is effected through a sensible sign, e.g., by the spoken word or by a gesture or by some part of the body such as the tongue or a finger—none of which can apply to angels. Therefore, it is not the case that one angel speaks to another.

Objection 3: When someone speaks, he stimulates the hearer to pay attention to what he is saying. But there does not seem to be any way for one angel to stimulate another angel to pay attention to him, since in our own case this is accomplished by a sensible sign. Therefore, it is not the case that one angel speaks to another.

But contrary to this: 1 Corinthians 13:1 says, “If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels

I respond: There is some kind of speech among angels. For as Gregory points out in *Moralia* 2, “It is fitting that our own mind, which exceeds the character of corporeal speech, should be elevated to sublime and unknown modes of intimate speech.” Therefore, to understand the way in which one angel speaks to another, note that, as we explained above when we were discussing the soul’s acts and powers (q. 82, a. 4), the will moves the intellect to its operation.

Now an intelligible thing exists in the intellect in three ways: first, *habitually* or, as Augustine puts it, in memory; second, *as actually being considered or conceived*; and, third, *as related to another*. It is clearly by the command of the will that an intelligible thing moves from the first of these stages to the second. This is why the definition of a habit includes the phrase ‘which someone uses when he wills to’. Similarly, it is through the will that an intelligible thing moves from the second stage to the third. For it is by the will’s command that the mind’s conception (*conceptus*) is directed toward another, either (a) in order to do something or (b) in order to manifest something to someone else.

Now when the mind turns itself to the actual consideration of what it possesses habitually, one is speaking to himself, since the mind’s conception is itself called an ‘interior word’. But one angel’s mental conception is made known to another angel in virtue of the fact that the first angel’s mental conception is directed, by the will of the angel himself, toward being manifested to the second angel. And this is the way in which one angel speaks to another. For to say something to someone else is nothing other than to manifest the conception of one’s mind to someone else.

Reply to objection 1: In our own case, the mind’s interior conception is, as it were, closed off to others by two obstacles.

The first is the will itself, which can either keep the intellect's conception inside or else direct it toward the outside. In this regard, no one else can see one's mind, with the sole exception of God—this according to 1 Corinthians 2:11 (“No one knows the things of a man, but the spirit of a man that is in him”).

Second, a man's mind is closed off from other men by the body's thickness. Hence, even when the will does direct the mental conception toward being manifested to another, the latter does not know it directly; rather, it is necessary to use some sensible sign. This is what Gregory is talking about in *Moralia 2* when he says, “In the eyes of others, we stand within the solitude of our mind, behind the wall of our body; but when we want to manifest ourselves, we go out, as it were, through the door of the tongue in order to show externally what we are like.”

However, an angel does not have this second sort of obstacle. And so as soon as he wills to manifest his own conception, the other angel grasps it immediately.

Reply to objection 2: Exterior speech that is effected through spoken words is necessary in our case because of the obstacle posed by the body. Hence, an angel has only interior speech and not exterior speech. However, his interior speech involves not only what he says to himself by conceiving something interiorly, but also what he directs by his own will to be manifested to another. And so the phrase ‘tongues of angels’ is used metaphorically to express the power by which an angel manifests his conception.

Reply to objection 3: As regards the good angels, who always see one another in the Word, it would not be necessary to posit anything that gets the attention of another. For just as one angel always sees another, so too he always sees anything in the other that is directed toward him.

But given that the angels were likewise able to speak to one another when they were created in the state of nature, and given that the bad angels even now speak to one another, one should say that the intellect is moved by an intelligible thing in the same way that the senses are moved by a sensible thing. Therefore, just as the senses are stimulated by a sensible sign, so too an angel's mind can be stimulated by an intelligible power to pay attention.

Article 2

Does a lower angel speak to a higher angel?

It seems that a lower angel does not speak to a higher angel:

Objection 1: The Gloss on 1 Corinthians 13:1 (“If I speak with the tongues of men or of angels”) says that every instance of angelic speech is an illumination by which a higher angel illuminates a lower angel. But as was explained above (q. 106, a. 3), lower angels never illuminate higher angels. Therefore, lower angels do not speak to higher angels, either.

Objection 2: As was explained above (*ibid.*), to illuminate is nothing other than to make manifest to another what is already manifest to oneself. But this is the same as speaking. Therefore, to illuminate and to speak are the same thing, and so the same conclusion follows as above.

Objection 3: In *Moralia 2* Gregory says, “God speaks to the angels by the very fact that He reveals His own hidden and invisible things to their hearts.” But this is just to illuminate them. Therefore, all of God's locutions are illuminations. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, all of an angel's locutions are illuminations. Therefore, there is no way in which a lower angel can speak to a higher angel.

But contrary to this: As Dionysius explains in *De Caelesti Hierarchia 7*, it was the lower angels who asked the higher angels, “Who is this king of glory?” (Psalm 23:10).

I respond: Lower angels can speak to higher angels. To see this clearly, note that among the angels every illumination is an instance of speaking, but not every instance of speaking is an illumination. For as has been explained (a. 1), for one angel to speak to another is nothing other than for the first, by his own will, to direct his conception toward being made known to the second. Now what is mentally conceived can be related to one of two sources (*principium*), viz., (a) to *God Himself*, who is the first truth, or (b) to the conceiver's act of *will*, in virtue of which we are actually conceiving of something.

Now since truth is the light of the intellect, and since the standard (*regula*) of all truth is God Himself, it follows that insofar as what is mentally conceived depends on the first truth, its manifestation is both an instance of speaking and an illumination—as, for instance, when one man says to another, 'Heaven is created by God' or 'A man is an animal'.

By contrast, the manifestation of what depends on the conceiver's will is merely an instance of speaking and cannot be called an illumination—as, for instance, if someone says to another, 'I want to learn this' or 'I want to do this' or 'I want to do that'. The reason for this is that a created will is not a light or a standard of truth, but instead participates in the light. Hence, to communicate what stems from a created will *qua* created will is not to illuminate. For it is irrelevant to the perfection of my intellect to know what you want, or to know what you are conceiving of; rather, all that is relevant to the perfection of my intellect is what the truth about the world (*rei veritas*) is.

Now it is clear that angels are said to be higher or lower in relation to the source which is *God*. And so illumination, which depends on the source which is God, passes only through higher angels to lower angels.

However, in relation to the source which is the *will*, the one who is doing the willing is himself the first and highest source. And so the manifestation of what pertains to the will passes through the angel who does the willing to whomever else he wishes. And as far as this sort of manifestation is concerned, it is true both that higher angels speak to lower angels and that lower angels speak to higher angels.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2: The replies to the first and second objections are clear from what been said.

Reply to objection 3: Every instance of God's speaking to the angels is an illumination. For since God's will is the standard of truth, it is relevant to the perfection and illumination of a created mind to know even what God wills. But as has been explained, the same line of reasoning does not apply to an angel's will.

Article 3

Does an angel speak to God?

It seems that it is not the case that an angel speaks to God:

Objection 1: Speaking has the purpose of making something known to another. But an angel cannot make anything known to God, who already knows all things. Therefore, an angel does not speak to God.

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 1), to speak is to direct the intellect's conception toward another. But an angel always directs the conceptions of his mind toward God. Therefore, if there is any time at which an angel is speaking to God, then he is always speaking to God—which might strike someone as absurd, since sometimes an angel is speaking to another angel. Therefore, it seems that an angel is never speaking to God.

But contrary to this: Zachariah 1:12 says, “The angel of the Lord answered, and said, ‘O Lord of hosts, how long will you not have mercy on Jerusalem?’” Therefore, an angel speaks to God.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1 and 2), an angel speaks by directing the conception of his mind toward another. But there are two ways in which something might be directed toward another.

First, it might be directed toward another in order to communicate something to the other—in the way that an agent is ordered to a patient among natural things, and in the way that a teacher is ordered toward his student in the case of human speech. And as far as this sort of speech is concerned, an angel does not in any sense speak to God, either about what pertains to the truth or about what depends on his created will. For God is the principle and source of all truth and of all acts of will.

Second, something is directed to another in order to receive something from the other—in the way that a patient is directed toward an agent among natural things, and in the way that a student is directed toward his teacher in the case of human speech. This is the way in which an angel speaks to God, either by consulting God’s will about what he should do or by admiring God’s excellence, which he never fully comprehends. As Gregory puts it in *Moralia 2*, “Angels speak to God when, because they look at what is beyond themselves, they rise up in a movement of admiration.”

Reply to objection 1: Speech does not always have the purpose of manifesting something to another; rather, it is sometimes directed toward the end of having something made manifest to the speaker, as when a student asks his teacher a question.

Reply to objection 2: The angels are always speaking to God with the sort of speech by which angels speak to God by praising and admiring Him. However, as regards the sort of speech by which angels consult God about what they should do, they speak to Him when they have something new to do about which they desire to be illuminated.

Article 4

Does spatial distance play a role in angelic speech?

It seems that spatial distance (*localis distantia*) plays a role in angelic speech:

Objection 1: As Damascene says, an angel is located where he is operating. But speech is a certain operation that belongs to an angel. Therefore, since an angel exists in a determinate place, it seems that an angel can speak only out to a determinate spatial distance.

Objection 2: Someone speaks loudly because of his distance from the hearer. But Isaiah 6:3 says of the Seraphim that “they cried out to one another.” Therefore, it seems that spatial distance plays a role in the speech of the angels.

But contrary to this: As Luke 16:24 has it, the rich man in hell was speaking to Abraham despite the spatial distance. Therefore, *a fortiori*, spatial distance cannot impede one angel’s speaking to another.

I respond: As is clear from what has been said (a. 3), angelic speech consists in an intellectual operation. But an angel’s intellectual operation is altogether abstracted from time and place; for even our own intellection operation occurs through an abstraction from the here and now—except incidentally because of phantasms, which do not exist in the angels. But neither temporal difference nor spatial distance plays a role in what is abstracted from place and time. Hence, spatial distance poses no obstacle in the case of angelic speech.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1 and 2), angelic speech is an interior locution that is nonetheless perceived by another; and so angelic speech exists within the angel who is speaking

and, as a result, exists where the angel who is speaking exists. But just as spatial distance does not prevent one angel from being able to see another angel, so also it does not prevent him from perceiving what is directed to him from within that other angel—which is what it is to perceive that other angel’s speech.

Reply to objection 2: The loudness being referred to here is not the sort of loudness which belongs to a bodily voice and which exists because of spatial distance. Rather, ‘loudness’ here signifies the greatness of what was being said, or else the intensity of the affection. Accordingly, in *Moralia 2* Gregory says, “Each cries out less loudly to the extent that he has less desire.”

Article 5

Do all the angels know what one angel says to another angel?

It seems that all the angels know what one angel says to another angel:

Objection 1: Unequal spatial distances are responsible for the fact that not everyone hears what a given man is saying. But as has been explained (a. 4), spatial distance plays no role in angelic speech. Therefore, all the angels perceive what one angel is saying to another.

Objection 2: The angels communicate by their power of understanding. Therefore, if the conception of one angel’s mind that is directed toward another angel is known by that other angel, then by parity of reasoning it is known by the others as well.

Objection 3: Illumination is a certain kind of speech. But the illumination of one angel by another reaches all the angels, since, as Dionysius says in *De Caelesti Hierarchia*, chap. 15, “Each celestial essence communicates to the others what has been handed down to him.” Therefore, the speech of one angel to another angel reaches all the angels.

But contrary to this: It is possible for one man to speak to just one other man. Therefore, *a fortiori*, this can happen in the case of angels.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 1 and 2), the conception of one’s angel mind can be perceived by another angel in virtue of the fact that the one whose conception it is directs that conception toward the other by his own will. Now something can, for whatever reason, be directed toward one angel and not toward another. And so the conception of one angel can be known by a second angel without being known by other angels. And it is in this way that it is possible for an angel’s speech to another to be perceived by one angel and not by the others—not, to be sure, because of an obstacle posed by spatial distance, but rather, as has been explained, because the angel who is speaking directs his conception voluntarily.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2: The response makes clear the replies to the first two objections.

Reply to objection 3: Illumination has to do with things that emanate from the first standard of truth, which is a principle common to all the angels, and so the illuminations are common to them all. But speech can also deal with things that are ordered to the principle of a created will, which is proper to each angel. And so it is not necessary for speech of this kind to be common to all the angels.