

QUESTION 109

Truthfulness

Next we have to consider truthfulness (*veritas*) and the vices opposed to it (questions 109-113). Now there are four questions concerning truthfulness: (1) Is truthfulness (*veritas*) a virtue? (2) Is truthfulness a specific virtue? (3) Is truthfulness a part of [the virtue of] justice? (4) Does truthfulness lean toward what is *less* (*utrum magis declinet ad minus*)?

Article 1

Is truthfulness a virtue?

It seems that truthfulness is not a virtue (*veritas non sit virtus*):

Objection 1: Faith, the object of which is truth (*veritas*), is the first of the virtues. Therefore, since the object is prior to the habit and the act, it seems that truthfulness (*veritas*) is not a virtue but is instead something prior to virtue.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that it belongs to truthfulness (*veritas*) that someone “should acknowledge how things are with himself, and neither more nor less.” But this is not always praiseworthy—both (a) in the case of good things, since Proverbs 27:2 says, “Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth,” and also (b) in the case of bad things, since Isaiah 3:9 says against certain individuals, “They proclaimed their own sin like Sodom did, and they did not hide it.” Therefore, truthfulness (*veritas*) is not a virtue.

Objection 3: Every virtue is either a theological virtue or an intellectual virtue or a moral virtue. But truthfulness (*veritas*) is not a theological virtue, since it has temporal things and not God as its object; for Tully says, “Truthfulness is that through which things that are and were and will be are described without alteration.” Similarly, truth or truthfulness is not an intellectual virtue, but the *goal* of intellectual virtue. Again, neither is truthfulness a moral virtue, since it does not consist in a mean between *excess* and *deficiency*; for the more someone tells the truth, the better he is. Therefore, truthfulness is not a virtue.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 2 and 4 the Philosopher posits truthfulness (*veritas*) among the other virtues.

I respond: There are two ways in which truth or truthfulness (*veritas*) can be understood:

In the one way, insofar as truth (*veritas*) is that by which something is true. And on this score it is not a virtue, but is instead an object or end of virtue. For so understood, truth is not a *habit*, which is the genus of virtue, but is instead, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 16 aa. 1-2 and q. 21, a. 2), the adequacy (*aequalitas*) of an understanding or sign with respect to the thing understood and signified or, in addition, the adequacy of a thing with respect to its rule or measure (*aequalitas rei ad suam regulam*).

In the second way, truth or truthfulness is that by which someone tells the truth, in the sense that because of it someone is called veracious or truthful (*verax*). And this sort of truth (*veritas*), i.e., truthfulness (*veracitas*), has to be a virtue, because the very telling of the truth is a good act, and a virtue is something that makes the one having it good and that renders his deed good.

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for truth taken in the first way.

Reply to objection 2: Insofar as it is an acknowledgment of what is true, acknowledging how things are with oneself is good by its genus. However, this is not sufficient for the act’s being an act of virtue. Rather, for this it is required further that the act be clothed with due circumstances which are such that if they are not preserved, then the act will be an act of vice.

Accordingly, it is an act of vice for someone, without due cause, to praise himself even for what is true. Likewise, it is an act of vice for someone to make his own sin public, either by praising himself for it or by making it manifest needlessly (*inutiliter*) in any way at all.

Reply to objection 3: One who tells the truth offers certain signs that conform to things, and these signs are either words (*verba*) or certain exterior deeds (or any sort of exterior thing). Now with respect to things of this sort, the only virtues are the *moral* virtues, to which the use of the exterior bodily members likewise belongs insofar as this is done by the command of the will. Hence, truthfulness (*veritas*) is not a theological or intellectual virtue, but is instead a moral virtue.

Now there are two sorts of mean between excess and deficiency, one on the part of the *object* and the other on the part of the *act*.

There is a mean on the part of the *object*, because *true* by its nature implies a certain equality or adequacy (*aequalitas*). But *equal* (*aequale*) is a mean between *more* and *less*. Hence, from the fact that someone tells the truth about himself, he holds to a mean between one who tells *more* about himself and one who tells *less* about himself.

On the part of the *act*, the mean holds insofar as someone tells the truth *when* this is required and *to the extent* that it is required. By contrast, *excess* belongs to someone who reveals things about himself in unsuitable circumstances (*importune*), whereas *deficiency* belongs to someone who hides something when he is required to reveal it.

Article 2

Is truthfulness a specific virtue?

It seems that truthfulness is not a specific virtue (*veritas non specialis virtus*):

Objection 1: *True* and *good* are convertible. But goodness is not a specific virtue; at the very least, every virtue is goodness, since a virtue makes the one having it good. Therefore, truth or truthfulness (*veritas*) is not a specific virtue.

Objection 2: The revelation of what pertains to a man himself is the act of truthfulness (*actus veritatis*) that we are talking about now. But this belongs to every virtue, since every habit of virtue whatsoever is revealed through one's own act. Therefore, truthfulness is not a specific virtue.

Objection 3: The '*truth of life*' is the truth by which someone lives in an upright way and about which Isaiah 38:3 says, "Remember, I beseech you, how I have walked before you in truth, and with a perfect heart." But as is clear from the definition of virtue cited just above (a. 1), life is lived in an upright way by means of every virtue. Therefore, truthfulness is not a specific virtue.

Objection 4: Truthfulness seems to be the same as simplicity, since dissimulation (*simulatio*) is opposed to both of them. But simplicity is not a specific virtue, since it effects an upright intention—something that is required by every virtue. Therefore, truthfulness is not a specific virtue, either.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 2* truthfulness is numbered along with other virtues.

I respond: It belongs to the nature of a human virtue that it makes a man's deed good. Hence, whenever one finds in a man's act a specific kind of goodness, it must be the case that the man is disposed toward this kind of goodness by a specific virtue.

Now since according to Augustine in *De Natura Boni*, the good consists in order, a specific kind of good has to be thought of in light of a determinate ordering. Now there is a specific ordering according to which our exterior words or deeds are appropriately ordered toward things in the way that signs are ordered toward what is signified. And a man is perfected in this by the virtue of truthfulness. Hence, it is clear that truthfulness is a specific virtue.

Reply to objection 1: *True* and *good* are convertible in their *subjects*, since everything that is true is good, and everything that is good is true. However, in their *notions* they exceed each other, in the way the intellect and will include each other; for the intellect understands the will, along with many other

things, and the will desires things that pertain to the intellect, along with many other things. Hence, *true*, according to its proper notion, by which it is a perfection of the intellect, is a certain particular *good* insofar as it is something desirable. Likewise, *good*, according to its proper notion, insofar as it is the end of an appetite, is something *true* insofar as it is something intelligible.

Therefore, since a virtue includes a kind of goodness, it is possible for truth or truthfulness to be a specific virtue in the same way that *true* is a specific *good*. However, it is not possible for goodness to be a *specific* virtue, since by its nature it is instead the *genus* of virtue.

Reply to objection 2: The habits corresponding to the virtues and vices receive their species from what is intended in its own right (*per se intentum*), and not from what is incidental (*per accidens*) and lies outside that intention. Now what someone reveals about himself belongs to the virtue of truthfulness as what is intended in its own right, whereas it belongs to other virtues as something that follows upon them, outside their principal intention. For instance, a brave man intends to act courageously, but the fact that in acting courageously he reveals the fortitude that he has is a consequence of his act that lies outside of his principal intention.

Reply to objection 3: The '*truth of life*' is the truth according to which something is true, not the truth according to which someone tells the truth. And, just like every other thing, it is called '*true life*' because it attains its rule and measure—in this case divine law, through conformity to which it has rectitude. And it is this sort of truth, i.e., rectitude, that is common to every virtue.

Reply to objection 4: Simplicity has as its opposite duplicity, by which someone has one thing in his heart but shows something else exteriorly. And if it is taken in this sense, then simplicity pertains to the virtue under discussion.

Now simplicity makes one's intention upright—not, to be sure, *directly*, since this belongs to *every* virtue, but instead *by excluding duplicity*, by which a man pretends one thing and intends another.

Article 3

Is truthfulness a part of [the virtue of] justice?

It seems that truthfulness is not a part of [the virtue of] justice:

Objection 1: It seems proper to justice to render to someone else what is owed to him (*iustitiae proprium esse videtur quod reddat alteri debitum*). But unlike what has been the case with all the parts of justice discussed up until now, the fact that someone tells the truth does not seem to render to anyone else what is owed to him. Therefore, truthfulness is not a part of justice.

Objection 2: Truthfulness belongs to the intellect. But as was established above (q. 58, a. 4), justice exists in the will. Therefore, truthfulness is not a part of justice.

Objection 3: According to Jerome, *truth* is divided into three, viz., *truth of life*, *truth of justice*, and *truth of doctrine*. But none of these is a part of justice. For, as has been explained (a. 2), *truth of life* contains *every* virtue within itself, and *truth of justice* is the same as justice and hence not a part of justice, whereas *truth of doctrine* has to do instead with the intellectual virtues. Therefore, truth or truthfulness (*veritas*) is in no way a part of justice.

But contrary to this: Tully posits truthfulness among the parts of justice.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 80), a virtue is adjoined to the virtue of justice in the way that a secondary virtue is adjoined to a principal virtue, viz., by virtue of the fact that it partly agrees with justice and partly falls short of the full nature of justice.

Now the virtue of truthfulness agrees with justice in two respects:

First, it is *directed toward another individual*. For the act of revealing, which we claim to be the act of truthfulness, is directed toward another individual insofar as the one man reveals to the other man

things that have to do with himself.

Second, it agrees with justice insofar as *justice establishes a certain equality or adequacy (aequalitas) among things*. And the virtue of truthfulness does this by making the signs equal to, or adequate to, the realities concerning oneself.

On the other hand, truthfulness falls short of the proper nature of justice with respect to the notion of a *debt* or of *what is owed*. For this virtue does not involve a *legal debt*, as justice does, but instead involves a *moral debt*, viz., insofar as one man owes to another, out of uprightness, a revelation of the truth (*inquantum ex honestate unus homo alteri debet veritatis manifestationem*).

This is the way in which truthfulness is a part of justice as a secondary virtue adjoined to a principal virtue.

Reply to objection 1: Since man is a social animal, one man owes to another whatever is such that without it human society could not be conserved. But it would be impossible for men to live with one another if they did not believe one another when they revealed the truth to one another. And the virtue of truthfulness in some way involves the notion of a debt.

Reply to objection 2: Insofar as the truth is known, it pertains to the intellect. But it is through his own will, by which he makes use of his habits and bodily members, that a man puts forth exterior signs in order to reveal the truth. Accordingly, revealing the truth is an act of the will.

Reply to objection 3: As has already been explained (a. 2), the truth or truthfulness of which we are now speaking differs from the *truth of life*.

Now there are two ways in which the phrase '*truth of justice*' is used:

In the first way, justice is itself a certain uprightness (*rectitudo*) that is regulated by the rule of divine law. And in this sense the *truth of justice* differs from the *truth of life* because the *truth of life* is that according to which someone lives rightly in himself, whereas the *truth of justice* is that according to which someone preserves the uprightness of the law in judgments that are directed toward others. And in this sense the *truth of justice* does not pertain to the truth or truthfulness of which we are now speaking in the same way that the *truth of life* does not pertain to it.

Second, the *truth of justice* can be understood in such a way that someone reveals the truth out of justice—as, for instance, when one confesses the truth or gives true testimony in a judicial proceeding. The *truth of justice* in this sense is a certain particular act of justice. And it does not pertain directly to the truth or truthfulness of which we are now speaking, because in this sort of revelation of the truth a man principally intends to render to another what is due to him. Hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says the following in explaining the truth [or truthfulness of which we are now speaking]: “We are not here talking about one who is truthful in his agreements or contracts, i.e.. in whatever pertains to justice or injustice.”

On the other hand, the *truth of doctrine* consists in a revelation concerning which there is scientific knowledge (*consistit in quadam manifestatione verorum de quibus est scientia*). Hence, this sort of truth does not pertain to the virtue of which we are now speaking; instead, all that pertains to the truth we have been talking about is the truth by which “someone, in both his living and his speech, reveals himself to be such as he is, neither more nor less—and reveals nothing else about himself.” Nonetheless, since knowable truths are about us and pertain to us insofar as we have knowledge of them, the *truth of doctrine* can accordingly pertain to the truth we have been talking about, along with any other truth by which someone reveals, by word or deed, what he knows.

Article 4

Does the virtue of truthfulness lean toward what is *less*?

It seems that the virtue of truthfulness does not lean toward what is *less* (*virtus veritatis non declinet in minus*):

Objection 1: Just as someone incurs falsity by saying *more*, so, too, he incurs falsity by saying *less*; for it is no more false that four equals five than that four equals three. But as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 4, “Everything false is bad in its own right (*secundum se*) and should be avoided.” Therefore, the virtue of truthfulness does not lean more toward *less* than toward *more*.

Objection 2: A virtue’s leaning more toward one extreme than toward the other stems from the fact that the mean is closer to the one extreme than to the other; for instance, fortitude is closer to audacity than to timidity. But the mean of truthfulness is not closer to one extreme than to the other, since truthfulness, given that it is a sort of equality or adequacy (*aequalitas quaedam*), consists in the middle point (*in medio punctali consistit*). Therefore, truthfulness does not lean toward *less*.

Objection 3: One seems to recede from truthfulness in the direction of *less* when he denies a truth, whereas one seems to recede from truthfulness in the direction of *more* when he adds something to the truth. But someone who denies a truth is more in conflict with truthfulness than someone who adds something to the truth, since truthfulness is not compatible with the denial of a truth, whereas it is compatible with an addition. Therefore, it seems that truthfulness should lean toward *more* rather than toward *less*.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says that in accord with the virtue of truthfulness a man “leans rather toward *less*.”

I respond: There are two ways in which it occurs that someone leans away from truthfulness toward *less*:

One way of leaning toward *less* is *by affirming* [*less*]—as, for instance, when someone does not reveal all the good that exists within himself, e.g., all the knowledge or all the holiness or something else of this sort. This is done without prejudice to truthfulness, since what is *less* is contained within what is *more*. And on this score, the virtue of truthfulness leans toward *less*. For as the Philosopher says in the same place, “This seems to be more prudent, because exaggerations are wearisome.” For men who tell more about themselves than there is to tell are wearisome to others because they want to excel over others, whereas men who say less about themselves are gracious in the sense that they show regard for others by their moderation. Hence, in 2 Corinthians 12:6 the Apostle says, “If I wanted to boast, I would not be foolish, for I would be telling the truth. But I forbear, lest any man should think more of me than what he sees in me or hears from me.”

The second way of leaning toward *less* is *by denying*, i.e., by denying that what is within oneself is indeed within oneself. And in this sense it does not belong to truthfulness to lean toward *less*, since by doing this one incurs falsehood. And yet this very thing would be less in conflict with virtue—not, to be sure, less in conflict with the proper nature of truthfulness, but rather less in conflict with the nature of prudence, which must be preserved in all the virtues. For someone’s thinking or conjecturing that he has what he does not have is more in conflict with prudence, since it is more dangerous to and wearisome for others, than is his thinking or claiming that he does not have what he does indeed have.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: This makes clear the replies to the objections.