

QUESTION 66

Theft and Robbery

Next we have to consider sins which are opposed to justice and through which harm is inflicted on one's neighbor in the *things* he possesses (*infertur nocumentum proximo in rebus*), viz. theft (*furtum*) and robbery (*rapina*). And on this topic there are nine questions: (1) Is the possession of exterior things natural to man? (2) Is it licit for one to possess an entity as his own? (3) Is theft the furtive taking (*occulta acceptio*) of a thing that belongs to someone else? (4) Is robbery a sin that differs in species from theft? (5) Is every instance of theft a sin? (6) Is theft a mortal sin? (7) Is it licit to steal out of neediness (*in necessitate*)? (8) Is every instance of robbery a mortal sin? (9) Is robbery a more serious sin than theft?

Article 1

Is the possession of exterior things natural to man?

It seems that the possession of exterior things is not natural to man:

Objection 1: No one should attribute to himself what belongs to God. But dominion over all creatures belongs properly to God—this according to Psalm 23:1 (“The earth is the Lord’s ...”) Therefore, the possession of things is not natural to man.

Objection 2: In expounding the words of the rich man in Luke 12:18 (“I will gather all the things that are grown to me along with my goods”), Basil says, “Tell me, which things are your own? Where did you get them from and appropriate them into your life?” But one can correctly claim that the things which a man possesses by nature are his own. Therefore, the possession of exterior things is not natural to man.

Objection 3: In *De Trinitate* Ambrose says, “The name ‘lord’ or ‘owner’ (*dominus*) has to do with power.” But a man does not have power over exterior things, since he can change nothing that has to do with their nature. Therefore, the possession of exterior things is not natural to man.

But contrary to this: Psalm 8:8 says, “You have put all things under his [read: man’s] feet.”

I respond: There are two possible ways to think about an exterior thing:

(a) with respect to *the nature* of the thing, which is subject not to human power, but only to the power of God, whom all things obey at will;

(b) with respect to *the use* of the thing—and in this sense man has natural dominion over exterior things, since by his reason and will he can make use of exterior things for his own advantage as things made for his sake. For as was established above (q. 64, a. 1), things that are less perfect or less complete (*imperfectiora*) exist for the sake of things that are more perfect or more complete (*perfectiora*). And this is the line of reasoning by which the Philosopher proves in *Politics* 1 that the possession of exterior things is natural to man.

Now this natural dominion over other creatures that belongs to man in accord with his reason, in which the image of God consists, is made manifest in the very creation of man in Genesis 1:26, where it says, “Let us make man to our likeness and image and set him above the fish of the sea, etc.”

Reply to objection 1: God has the principal dominion over all things. And in accord with His providence He has ordered certain things toward the bodily sustenance of man. And for this reason man has a natural dominion over things as regards the power to use them.

Reply to objection 2: The rich man is reprimanded because he thought that the exterior goods were *principally* his own, in the sense that he had not received them from another, viz., from God.

Reply to objection 3: This argument is about a dominion over things as regards their natures—a dominion that, as has been explained, belongs to God alone.

Article 2

Is one permitted to possess a thing as his own?

It seems that no one is permitted to possess a thing as his own (*non liceat alicui rem aliquam quasi proprium possidere*):

Objection 1: Everything that is contrary to the natural right (*contra ius naturale*) is illicit. But in accord with the natural right, all things are held in common (*omnia sunt communia*), and the ownership of possessions (*possessionum proprietas*) is contrary to this commonality. Therefore, it is illicit for any man to appropriate an exterior thing for himself.

Objection 2: In expounding the aforementioned words of the rich man Basil says, “Just as someone who, getting to the show ahead of time, obstructs those who are arriving by appropriating for himself what is ordered toward common use, so the rich think that the common things they have previously accrued are their own.” But it would be illicit to close off to others the path to obtaining goods that are common. Therefore, it is illicit for one to appropriate for himself anything that is common.

Objection 3: Ambrose says (and this is found in *Decretals*, dist. 47, Canon “Just as they”), “Let no one call his own anything that is common.” But what he is calling ‘common’ are exterior things, as is clear from what he had said before this. Therefore, it seems to be illicit for anyone to appropriate for himself any exterior thing.

But contrary to this: In *De Haeresibus* Augustine says, “The ‘Apostolics’ are those who have arrogantly called themselves by this name because, like monks and many clerics that the Catholic Church includes, they do not admit into their communion those who are married or those who have their own possessions.” But the reason why they are heretics is that, separating themselves from the Church, they believe that there is no hope for those who take advantage of these things that they themselves lack. Therefore, it is erroneous to claim that a man is not permitted to possess his own things.

I respond: As regards exterior things, there are two things that belong to a man:

The *first* is the power to taking care of and managing exterior things (*potestas procurandi et dispensandi*). And on this score it is licit for a man to possess his own things. Indeed, there are three reasons why this is necessary for human life:

(a) because each individual is more solicitous about taking care of something that belongs to him alone than about taking care of what is common to everyone or common to many individuals. For each individual, shrugging off the work, leaves for someone else what pertains to everyone, as happens when there is a multitude of attendants.

(b) because human affairs are conducted in a more orderly way if the proper care of a thing that needs to be taken care of falls to individuals, whereas there would be confusion if everyone were supposed to take care of everything indiscriminately.

(c) because in this way a more peaceful condition is preserved among men, as each is content with his own possessions. Hence, we see that quarrels more frequently break out among those who possess something in common and in an undivided way.

The *second* thing that belongs to a man regarding exterior things is *the use of them*. And on this score a man should hold his exterior things not as his own but as common, viz., in order that he might freely share them when others are in need (*de facili aliquis ea communicet in necessitate aliorum*). Hence, in 1 Timothy 6:17-18 the Apostle says, “Charge the rich of this world to give freely, to share.”

Reply to objection 1: The commonality of things is attributed to the natural right not because the natural right dictates that all things are to be possessed in common and that nothing is to be possessed as one’s own, but because the distinction among possessions is not itself a matter of the *natural* right but rather a matter of human agreement, which, as was explained above (q. 57, aa. 2-3), pertains to the *positive* right. Hence, the ownership of possessions is not contrary to the natural right, but is added to the

natural right by the inventiveness of human reason.

Reply to objection 2: One who arrived at the show ahead of time and prepared the way for the others would not be acting illicitly; rather, he acts illicitly by blocking the others. Similarly, a rich man does not act illicitly if he gains possession of a thing that was common at the beginning and shares it with others; rather, he sins if he prevents others indiscriminately from making use of the thing. Hence, in the same place Basil says, “Why do you have abundance while he begs, except that you might gain the merit of good stewardship, whereas he might be crowned with the reward of patience?”

Reply to objection 3: When Ambrose says, “Let no one call his own what is common,” he is talking about ownership (*proprietas*) with respect to *use*. This is why he adds, “That which exceeds what is sufficient for an expenditure has been obtained through violence (*violenter*).”

Article 3

Is it the nature of theft to take furtively a thing that belongs to someone else?

It seems that it is not the nature of theft to take furtively a thing that belongs to someone else (*non sit de ratione furti occulte accipere rem alienam*):

Objection 1: What lessens a sin does not seem to belong to the nature of that sin. But to sin furtively pertains to lessening the sin, just as, contrariwise, in order to magnify the sin of certain people, Isaiah 3:9 says, “They have broadcast their sin as Sodom did, nor did they hide it.” Therefore, it is not part of the nature of theft that the taking of what belongs to someone else be *furtive*.

Objection 2: Ambrose says (and this is found in *Decretals*, dist. 47), “It is no less of a crime to take from one who has than to refuse those who have not, when you are able to help them and equipped to help them.” Therefore, just as theft may consist in *taking a thing* that belongs to someone else, so too it may consist in *holding a thing back*.

Objection 3: A man can take furtively from someone else even what is his own—for instance, a thing which he had deposited with someone else or a thing which had been taken unjustly from him. Therefore, it is not part of the nature of theft that it is the furtive taking of *a thing that belongs to someone else*.

But contrary to this: In *Etymologia* Isidore says, “‘Thief’ (*fur*) is taken from ‘swarthy’ (*furvus*), i.e., from ‘dark’ (*fuscus*), since a thief makes use of the night time.”

I respond: Three things come together for the nature of theft:

The *first* is what belongs to it insofar as it is contrary to justice, which gives to each individual what is his own. And from this it belongs to theft that it involves *taking what belongs to someone else*.

The *second* belongs to the nature of theft insofar as it is distinct from sins that are against one’s person, such as homicide and adultery. And on this score, it belongs to theft that it has to do with *a thing that is possessed*. For if someone takes from someone else what belongs to him not as a possession but as a part (e.g., if he cuts off a bodily part) or as a connected person (e.g., if he takes his child or his wife), then this act does not, properly speaking, have the nature of theft.

The *third* difference is the one that brings the nature of theft to completion, viz., that it *furtively* takes what belongs to someone else.

Accordingly, the proper nature of theft is that it is *the furtive taking of a thing that belongs to someone else*.

Reply to objection 1: Furtiveness is sometimes a cause of a sin—for instance, when someone uses furtiveness in order to sin, as happens in cases of fraud and deceit. And in this sense it does not diminish the sin, but instead *constitutes the species* of the sin. And this is how it is with theft.

In other cases, furtiveness is a simple *circumstance* of a sin. And in such cases it diminishes the sin,

both because it is a sign of shame and also because it removes scandal.

Reply to objection 2: To hold back what is due to someone else involves the same sort of harm as taking it. And so the unjust holding back of a thing is likewise understood as included under *unjust taking*.

Reply to objection 3: Nothing prevents what belongs absolutely speaking to one individual from also belonging in some sense to someone else. For instance, a deposited thing belongs absolutely speaking to the one who deposits it, but it belongs to the one with whom it is deposited as regards its safekeeping (*sed est eius apud quem deponitur quantum ad custodiam*). And what is taken in a robbery belongs to the robber—not absolutely speaking, but as regards its being held back.

Article 4

Are theft and robbery sins that differ in species?

It seems that theft (*furtum*) and robbery (*rapina*) are not sins that differ in species:

Objection 1: Theft and robbery differ with respect to *furtive* and *open*, since theft involves furtive taking, whereas robbery involves open and violent taking. But in other genera of sins *furtive* and *open* do not make for diverse species. Therefore, theft and robbery are not sins that are diverse in species.

Objection 2: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 18, a. 6), moral acts receive their species from their end. But theft and robbery are ordered toward the same end, viz., to have what belongs to someone else. Therefore, they do not differ in species.

Objection 3: Just as a thing is taken by force (*rapitur*) in order to possess it, so a woman is taken by force (*rapitur*) in order to take pleasure in her. Hence, in the *Etymologia* Isidore says, “He who commits a rape is called a corrupter, and the one who is raped is said to be corrupted (*raptor dicitur corruptor et rapta corrupta*).” But it is called rape (*raptus*) whether the woman is carried off publicly or in secret. Therefore, a possessed thing is said to be taken by force (*rapi*) whether it is taken by force furtively or publicly. Therefore, theft and robbery do not differ.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 5 the Philosopher distinguishes theft from robbery, claiming that theft is furtive, whereas robbery is violent.

I respond: Theft and robbery are vices opposed to justice insofar as one does something unjust to someone else. But as is shown in *Ethics* 5, no one suffers what is unjust willingly. And so the reason why theft and robbery have the nature of a sin is that the taking is involuntary on the part of the one from whom something is taken. But as *Ethics* 3 establishes, there are two ways in which something is called involuntary, viz., because of *ignorance* and because of *violence*. And so robbery has one type of sinfulness and theft another (*aliam rationem peccati habet rapina et aliam furtum*). And because of this they differ in species.

Reply to objection 1: In the other genera of sins, the nature of the sin does not involve anything involuntary, in the way that this is involved in sins opposed to justice. And so where diverse types of involuntariness are present, there are diverse species of sin.

Reply to objection 2: The remote end is the same in the case of robbery and theft, but this is not sufficient for an identity of species, since there is a diversity in their proximate ends. For the robber wants to obtain the thing through his own power, whereas the thief wants to obtain it through cunning (*astutia*).

Reply to objection 3: The rape of a woman cannot be hidden on the part of the woman who is raped. And so even if it is hidden on the part of the others by whom she is raped, the nature of violence (*ratio rapinae*) still remains on the part of the woman on whom the violence is inflicted.

Article 5

Is theft always a sin?

It seems that theft is not always a sin:

Objection 1: No sin falls under a divine precept; for Ecclesiasticus 15:21 says, “He has not commanded anyone to act wickedly.” But God is seen to have commanded theft. For Exodus 12:35-36 says, “The children of Israel did as the Lord of Moses had commanded ... and despoiled the Egyptians.” Therefore, theft is not always a sin.

Objection 2: One who finds a thing that is not his own seems to commit theft, since he takes a thing that belongs to someone else. But as the jurists comment, this seems to be licit according to natural equity. Therefore, it seems that theft is not always a sin.

Objection 3: One who takes his own thing does not seem to sin, since he does not act contrary to justice, the balance of which he does not upset. But theft is committed even if someone furtively takes a thing which is his own and which is being held or guarded by someone else. Therefore, it seems that theft is not always a sin.

But contrary to this: Exodus 20:15 says, “You shall not steal (*non furtum facies*).”

I respond: If one thinks carefully about the nature of theft, he will find two types of sinfulness in it:

(a) *by reason of an opposition to justice*, which renders to each individual what is his own. And this is the way in which theft is opposed to justice, since theft is the taking of a thing that belongs to someone else.

(b) *by reason of deceit or fraud (ratione doli seu fraudis)*, which a thief commits by taking a thing that belongs to some else furtively and, as it were, by insidious means (*occulte et quasi ex insidiis*).

Hence, it is clear that every instance of theft is a sin.

Reply to objection 1: It is not theft to take a thing that belongs to someone else, whether furtively or openly, by the authority of a judge who issues a decree for this. For it becomes one’s due by the fact that it has been awarded to one by the decree. Hence, *a fortiori*, it was not theft for the children of Israel to take the spoils of the Egyptians at the command of the Lord, who issued this decree in light of the afflictions that the Egyptians had inflicted on them without cause. This is why Wisdom 10:19 says expressly, “The just took the spoils of the wicked.”

Reply to objection 2: One must draw a distinction with respect to things that are found.

Some of them were never included among anyone’s goods, e.g., precious stones and jewels that are found on the seashore. Such things are conceded to the one who takes possession of them. And the same thing applies to treasures from past times which are hidden underground and which now have no owner—except that, according to civil law, the finder is obligated to give half to the owner of the land if he has found it on some else’s land. Because of this, in the Gospel parable (Matthew 13:44) it says of the the finder of a treasure buried in a field that he bought the field, so that, as it were, he would have the right to possess the whole treasure (*quasi ut haberet ius possidendi totum thesaurum*).

By contrast, some things that are found were at some recent time included among someone’s goods. And in that case, if someone takes these things not with the intention of keeping them but with the intention of restoring them to their owner, who has not given them up for lost, then he does not commit theft. Similarly, if they have been given up for lost and the finder believes this, then even if he keeps the goods for himself, he does not commit theft.

In all other cases, the sin of theft is committed. Hence, in a one of his homilies Augustine says (and this is found in *Decretals* 14, q. 5), “If you have found something and not returned it, then you have stolen it (*rapuisti*).”

Reply to objection 3: Someone who furtively takes something of his own that has been deposited

with someone else is burdening the one with whom he deposited it, since the latter is obligated either to make restitution or to prove that he is innocent. Hence, it is clear that the one who takes the thing commits a sin and is obligated to ease the burden of the one with whom he deposited it.

On the other hand, one who furtively takes something of his own that is being kept unjustly by another does, to be sure, sin, but not because he is burdening the one who is keeping the thing, and so he is not obligated to restore it to him or to give him compensation. Rather, he sins against common justice when he appropriates to himself the judgment of his own case by bypassing the order of law. And so he is obligated to make satisfaction to God and to work at making the scandal to his neighbors subside if any scandal has arisen because of what he did.

Article 6

Is theft a mortal sin?

It seems that theft is not a mortal sin:

Objection 1: Proverbs 6:30 says, “The fault is not so great when someone has stolen.” But every mortal sin involves a great fault. Therefore, theft is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: The punishment of death is due for a mortal sin. But the punishment of death is not inflicted for theft in the Law. Instead, only the punishment of a loss is inflicted—this according to Exodus 22:1 (“If someone has stolen an ox or a sheep, he shall restore five oxen for one oxen and four sheep for one sheep”). Therefore, theft is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3: Theft can be committed in small matters as well as in great matters. But it seems inappropriate for someone to be punished with eternal death for the theft of some small thing—say, a needle or a feather. Therefore, theft is not a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: No one is damned in accord with divine judgment except for a mortal sin. But someone is condemned for theft—this according to Zachariah 5:3 (“This is the curse that goes forth over the face of the whole earth: for every thief shall be condemned as is there written”). Therefore, theft is a mortal sin.

I respond: As was established above (q. 59, a. 4 and *ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5), a mortal sin is one that is contrary to charity insofar as charity is the spiritual life of the soul. Now charity consists principally in the love of God, whereas it consists secondarily in the love of neighbor, to which it pertains that we love and work for the good of our neighbor.

Now through theft a man inflicts harm on a neighbor in his possessions, and if men were to steal from one another indiscriminately, human society would perish. Hence, theft, as contrary to charity, is a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 1: There are two reasons why theft is said not to be “a great fault.”

First, because of the neediness (*propter necessitatem*) which induces someone to steal and which, as will be explained below (a. 7), diminishes or totally removes the fault. This is why he adds, “For he steals to fill his hungry soul.”

Second, theft is said not to be a great fault by comparison with the guilt of adultery, which is punished by death. Hence, he adds about the thief that “if found out, he will restore sevenfold ... but he that is an adulterer ... will destroy his own soul.”

Reply to objection 2: The punishments of the present life are medicinal rather than retributive; for retribution is reserved for God’s judgment, which is aimed at sinners “according to the truth” (Romans 2:2). And so in accord with the judgment of the present life, the punishment of death is not imposed for every mortal sin. Instead, it is imposed only for those mortal sins that inflict irreparable damage or at least for those that involve some horrible deformity.

And so in accord with the present judgment the punishment of death is not imposed for theft, which inflicts repairable damage, unless the theft is aggravated by some grave circumstance, as one sees in a case of sacrilege, which is the theft of a sacred thing, or in a case of the embezzlement, which, as is clear from Augustine in *Super Ioannem*, is the theft of a common thing, or in a case of kidnapping, which is the theft of a human being and for which, as is clear from Exodus 21:16, one is punished with death.

Reply to objection 3: Reason apprehends what is scanty as if it were nothing. And so in those matters that are minimal a man does not calculate that any harm has been inflicted on him, and the one who takes the thing can presume that this is not contrary to the will of the one to whom the thing belongs. Accordingly, if someone furtively takes minimal things of this sort, then he can be excused from a mortal sin.

Still, if one has the intention of stealing and inflicting harm on his neighbor, then there can be a mortal sin even in the case of such minimal things, just as there can be a mortal sin in thought alone through one's consent.

Article 7

Is one permitted to steal out of neediness?

It seems that one is not permitted to steal out of neediness (*propter necessitatem*):

Objection 1: A penance is not imposed on anyone except a sinner. But in *Extra, de furtis*, it says, "If anyone has stolen food or clothing or a beast because forced to do so by starvation or nakedness (*propter necessitatem famis aut nuditatis*), he shall do penance for three weeks." Therefore, one is not permitted to steal because of neediness.

Objection 2: In *Ethics 2* the Philosopher says, "Certain things, when named, are immediately associated with wickedness," and he posits theft among them. But what is bad in its own right (*secundum se malum*) cannot be made good because of a good end. Therefore, no one can licitly steal in order to relieve his own need.

Objection 3: A man ought to love his neighbor as himself. But as Augustine points out in *Contra Mendacium*, one is not permitted to steal in order to assist his neighbor with alms. Therefore, one is likewise not permitted to steal in order to relieve his own need.

But contrary to this: In times of need all things are held in common (*in necessitate sunt omnia communia*). And so it does not seem to be a sin if someone takes a thing which belongs to someone else but which has become common because of need.

I respond: Those things that fall under the *human* right cannot detract from the *natural* right or from the *divine* right. Now in accord with the natural order instituted by divine providence, lower things are ordered toward alleviating human need. And the division and appropriation of things, which proceeds by the human right, does not keep it from being the case that a man's need should be relieved by things of this sort. And so the things that some individuals have in abundance are owed by the natural right to sustaining the poor (*ex naturali iure debentur pauperum sustentationi*). Hence, Ambrose says (and this is found in *Decretals*, dist. 47), "It is the bread of those who are hungry that you are withholding; it is the clothing of the naked that you are storing away; the money that you bury in the earth is the price of the poor man's ransom and release."

However, since there are many who suffer need and since it is impossible for all of them to be helped from the same source (*ex eadem re*), the dispensation of each individual's own things in relieving those who suffer from need is committed to his own judgment. Still, if the need is urgent and evident to the point that it is clear that the need of the moment has to be relieved from the resources that are available—for instance, when danger threatens a person and he cannot be otherwise helped—then

someone can licitly relieve his need from things that belong to someone else, whether those things are taken openly or furtively. And this does not properly have the nature of either theft or robbery.

Reply to objection 1: The *Decretals* are speaking of cases in which the need is not urgent.

Reply to objection 2: To make use of a thing that has been taken furtively in a case of need does not have the nature of theft properly speaking. For because of such a need the thing that one takes in order to sustain his own life becomes his own.

Reply to objection 3: In a case of similar need one can likewise furtively take a thing that belongs to someone else in order to assist a neighbor who is in need in this sort of way.

Article 8

Can a robbery be carried out without sin?

It seems that a robbery can be carried out without sin:

Objection 1: Spoils are taken by violence, which, given what was said above, seems to pertain to robbery. But to take spoils from one's enemies is permitted; for in *De Patriarchis* Ambrose says, "Since spoils fall within the victor's power, it befits military discipline that they should all be reserved to the king, in order that he might distribute them." Therefore, in some cases robbery is licit.

Objection 2: It is licit to take from someone what does not belong to him. But the things that non-believers possess do not belong to them; for in the letter *Ad Vincentium Donatistam* Augustine says, "You falsely call those things yours which you not possess justly and which by the laws of earthly rulers you have been ordered to give up." Therefore, it seems that one can licitly rob non-believers.

Objection 3: The rulers of the earth violently extort many things from their subjects, and this seems to pertain to the nature of robbery. But it seems troublesome to claim that they sin in this, since if that were so, then almost all rulers would be damned. Therefore, in some cases robbery is licit.

But contrary to this: One can make a sacrifice or oblation to God of anything that has been taken licitly. But this cannot be done in the case of robbery—this according to Isaiah 61:8 ("I the Lord who loves judgment and who hates robbery in the holocaust"). Therefore, it is not licit to take anything by robbery.

I respond: Robbery implies a sort of violence and coercion through which, contrary to justice, what belongs to someone is taken away from him (*per quam, contrat iustitiam, alicui aufertur quod suum est*). Now in human society no one has the power to coerce except through a public authority. And so if anyone takes something from someone else through violence and if he is a private person who is not using a public authority, then he acts illicitly and commits robbery, as is clear in the case of highwaymen (*in latronibus*).

By contrast, public authority is committed to rulers in order for them to be the guardians of justice. And so they are not permitted to use violence and coercion except in accord with the preservation of justice, either against enemies (*contra hostes*) by fighting them or against civil evildoers (*contra cives malefactores*) by punishing them. And what is taken away by this sort of violence does not have the nature of robbery, since it is not contrary to justice. However, if someone takes something violently through the public authority but in a way contrary to justice, then he acts illicitly and commits robbery, and he is obligated to make restitution.

Reply to objection 1: A distinction must be drawn concerning spoils.

For if those who are despoiling their enemies have a just war, the things that they acquire in the war through violence become their own. And this does not have the nature of robbery, and so they are not obligated to make restitution. Still, those who have a just war could sin in taking the spoils through a disordered desire stemming from a depraved intention, viz., if they are fighting mainly for the sake of the

spoils and not for the sake of justice. For in *De Verbis Domini* Augustine says, “The military sin is for the sake of the spoils.”

On the other hand, if those who take the spoils have an unjust war, then they commit robbery and are obligated to make restitution.

Reply to objection 2: Certain non-believers possess their things unjustly insofar as they have been ordered to give them up by the laws of earthly rulers. And so those things can be taken from them through violence—not by any private authority but by a public authority.

Reply to objection 3: If the rulers exact from their subjects what is due in justice for the sake of conserving the common good, then even if they use violence, it is not robbery.

However, if the rulers extort something through violence in an undue way, then it is robbery in the same sense that highway robbery is. Hence, in *De Civitate Dei* 4 Augustine says, “Once justice is removed, what are kingdoms other than big crime rings (*magna latrocinia*)? For what are crime rings other than little kingdoms?” And Ezechiel 22:27 says, “Her rulers in her midst are like wolves ravaging for spoils.” Hence, they are obligated to make restitution, just as robbers are. And they sin more gravely than robbers do to the extent that they act more dangerously and more pervasively against public justice, which they have been appointed to be guardians of.

Article 9

Is theft a more serious sin than robbery?

It seems that theft is a more serious sin than robbery:

Objection 1: Over and beyond the taking of a thing that belongs to someone else, theft has an added element of fraud and deceit, which is not found in robbery. But as was established above (q. 55, aa. 4-5), fraud and deceit have the nature of sin in their own right. Therefore, theft seems to be a more serious sin than robbery.

Objection 2: As *Ethics* 4 says, shame is fear concerning a base action. But men are more ashamed of theft than of robbery. Therefore, theft is more shameful (*turpius*) than robbery.

Objection 3: A sin seems to be more serious to the extent that it harms a greater number of individuals. But harm can be inflicted on both the great and the small by theft, whereas harm is inflicted by robbery only on the powerless, whom violence can be brought to bear on. Therefore, it seems that the sin of theft is more serious than the sin of robbery.

But contrary to this: According to the laws, robbery is punished more gravely than theft is.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 4), robbery and theft have the nature of sin because of the involuntariness that exists on the part of the one from whom something is taken, yet in such a way that the involuntariness stems from ignorance in the case of theft, whereas it stems from violence in the case of robbery. But something is more involuntary through violence than through ignorance, since violence is more directly opposed to the will than ignorance is. And so robbery is a graver sin than theft.

There is also a second reason. For not only is a loss in the *things* he possesses inflicted on someone by robbery, but, in addition, robbery tends toward a sort of ignominy or injury on the part of the *person*. And this outweighs the fraud or deceit that belongs to theft.

Reply to objection 1: This makes clear the reply to the first objection.

Reply to objection 2: Men who cling to sensible things take more glory in exterior virtuosity (*de virtute exteriori*), which is manifested in robbery, than in interior virtue (*de interiori virtute*), which is destroyed by sin. And this is why they are less ashamed of robbery than of theft.

Reply to objection 3: Even if more individuals can be harmed by theft than by robbery, more serious harms can nonetheless be inflicted by robbery than by theft. Hence, this is another reason why

robbery is more detestable.