

QUESTION 5

The Good in General

Next we will ask about the good—first about the good in general (*bonum in communi*) (question 5) and then about the goodness of God (question 6).

On the first point there are six questions: (1) Are *good* and *being* the same in reality? (2) Assuming that they differ only conceptually, which of the two, *good* or *being*, is conceptually prior? (3) Assuming that *being* is prior, is every being good? (4) To what cause is the notion *good* reduced? (5) Does the nature of good consist in mode, species, and order? (6) In what sense is the good divided into the noble, the useful, and the pleasant?

Article 1

Does *good* differ in reality from *being*?

It seems that *good* differs in reality from *being*:

Objection 1: In *De Hebdomadibus* Boethius says, “Among entities I see that it is one thing for them to be good and another for them to exist.” Therefore, *good* and *being* differ in reality.

Objection 2: Nothing has itself as a form. But, as a comment on the *Liber de Causis* puts it, *good* is predicated of a being as a form. Therefore, *good* differs in reality from *being*.

Objection 3: *Good* admits of more and less. But *being* does not admit of more and less. Therefore, *good* differs in reality from *being*.

But contrary to this: In *De Doctrina Christiana* Augustine says, “To the extent that we exist, we are good.”

I respond: *Good* and *being* are the same in reality and differ only conceptually.

This is clear from the following line of reasoning: The nature of the good consists in something’s being desirable; thus, in *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says, “The good is what all things desire.” But it is obvious that each thing is desirable to the extent that it is perfect, since all things desire their own perfection. But each thing is perfect to the extent that it has actuality. Hence, it is clear that something is good to the extent that it is a being, since, as is obvious from what was said above (q. 3, a. 4 and q. 4, a. 1), being (*esse*) is the actuality of each thing. Hence, it is clear that *good* and *being* are the same in reality, but that *good* expresses the nature of being desirable, whereas *being* does not.

Reply to Objection 1: Even though *good* and *being* are the same in reality, the fact that they nonetheless differ conceptually explains why something is not called unqualifiedly good in the same way that it is unqualifiedly called a being.

For since *being* expresses that something properly has actuality, and since actuality is properly ordered to potentiality, something is unqualifiedly called a being insofar as it is set off in the first instance from that which is merely in potentiality. Now this is the substantial *esse* of each thing, and so it is because of its substantial *esse* that each thing is unqualifiedly called a being. In contrast, it is through additional acts that something is said to exist in a qualified way. For example, *being white* signifies existing in a qualified way. For a thing’s being white does not bring to an end that thing’s existing merely in potentiality, since being white accrues to a thing that already exists in actuality.

In contrast, *good* expresses the nature of the perfect, i.e., the desirable, and thus expresses the nature of an ultimate point. Hence, it is what is ultimately perfect that is called good in an unqualified way. And if something does not have the ultimate perfection that it ought to have, then even though it

has some perfection insofar as it is actual, it is not good in an unqualified way, but good only in a qualified way.

So, then, by virtue of its first *esse*, which is its substantial *esse*, a thing is called a being in an unqualified way and good in a qualified way, i.e., good insofar as it is a being. In contrast, by virtue of its ultimate act it is called a being in a qualified way and good in an unqualified way.

Thus, when Boethius says that “among entities it is one thing for them to be good and another for them to exist,” this should be taken to mean unqualified goodness and unqualified being. For it is by virtue of its first act that something is unqualifiedly a being, and it is by virtue of its ultimate act that it is unqualifiedly good. On the other hand, by virtue of its first act it is good in a qualified way, and by virtue of its ultimate act it is a being in a qualified way.

Reply to Objection 2: *Good* is predicated as a form insofar as it means *unqualifiedly good*, by virtue of its ultimate act.

Reply to Objection 3: Similarly, it is by virtue of some supervening actuality such as knowledge or wisdom that *good* is predicated according to a greater or lesser degree.

Article 2

Is *good* conceptually prior to *being*?

It seems that *good* is conceptually prior to *being*:

Objection 1: The order of names mirrors the order of the things signified by the names. But as is clear in *De Divinibus Nominibus*, chap. 5, Dionysius puts *good* before *being* among the names of God. Therefore, *good* is conceptually prior to *being*.

Objection 2: That which is conceptually prior extends to more things. But *good* extends to more things than *being*, since, as Dionysius says in *De Divinibus Nominibus*, chap. 5, “*Good* extends both to things that exist and to things that do not exist, whereas *being* extends only to things that exist.” Therefore, *good* is conceptually prior to *being*.

Objection 3: That which is more universal is conceptually prior. But *good* seems to be more universal than *being*, since the good has the nature of being desirable, and non-being is itself desirable for certain things. For instance, Matthew 26:24 says of Judas that “it were better for him, if that man had not been born”—and there are other such examples. Therefore *good* is conceptually prior to *being*.

Objection 4: It is not just being that is desirable, but also life and wisdom and many other such things. And so it seems that being is one particular desirable thing, whereas the good is something universally desirable. Therefore, *good* is conceptually prior to *being*.

But contrary to this: The *Liber De Causis* says, “Being (*esse*) is the first among creatures.”

I respond: *Being* is conceptually prior to *good*. For the nature signified by a term is that which the intellect conceives with respect to an entity and signifies through the spoken term. Therefore, it is that which comes first in the intellect’s conception that is conceptually prior. But *being* comes first in the intellect’s conception, since, as *Metaphysics* 9 says, each thing is susceptible to cognition insofar as it is actual. Hence, *being* is the proper object of the intellect and so is the first intelligible thing, in the same way that sound is the first audible thing. Therefore, *being* is conceptually prior to *good*.

Reply to Objection 1: Dionysius orders the divine names according to how they express God’s status as a cause. For, as he says, we name God from creatures, as a cause from its effects.

Since *good* has the nature of the desirable, it expresses the status of a final cause. Now the causality of the final cause is first, since an agent acts only for the sake of an end, and the matter is

moved toward the form by the agent. This is why the end is called the cause of causes. And so, as far as causality is concerned, *good* is prior to *being*, in the sense that the end is prior to the form. For this reason, among the names signifying God's causality, *good* is prior to *being*.

Likewise, according to the Platonists—who, not distinguishing the matter from the privation, claimed that the matter is a non-being—participation in the good extends to more things than does participation in being. For primary matter participates in the good—since it desires the good, and nothing desires what is not similar to itself—but it does not participate in being, given that it is claimed to be a non-being. This is why Dionysius says that “the good extends itself to things that do not exist.”

Reply to Objection 2: The answer to this objection is clear from what has just been said.

An alternative reply is that one could claim that *good* extends to both existents and non-existents, not by predication but by causality—as long as ‘non-existent’ does not mean things which simply do not exist at all, but rather things that exist in potentiality and not in actuality. For the good has the nature of an end, and an end is not only such that things with actuality come to rest in it, but also such that things existing only in potentiality and not in actuality move toward it.

Reply to Objection 3: Non-being is not desirable taken in itself, but is desirable only *per accidens*, viz., insofar as the removal of some evil is desirable and the evil is removed through non-being. But the removal of an evil is desirable only insofar as one is deprived of some being because of the evil. Therefore, that which is desirable *per se* is being, whereas non-being is desirable only *per accidens*, viz., insofar as some [other] being is desired which a man does not tolerate being deprived of. It is in this way, too, that non-being is said to be good *per accidens*.

Reply to Objection 4: Life and knowledge and other things of this sort are desired to the extent that they are actual. Hence, in all cases some being is desired. And so nothing is desired except being, and, consequently, nothing is good except a being.

Article 3

Is every being good?

It seems that not every being is good:

Objection 1: As is clear from what has been said (a. 1), *good* adds something to *being*. But those things that add something to *being*—for instance, *substance*, *quantity*, *quality*, etc.—limit it. Therefore, *good* limits *being*. Therefore, not every being is good.

Objection 2: Nothing evil is good, according to Isaiah 5:20 (“Woe to you that call evil good, and good evil”). But some beings are called bad. Therefore, not every being is good.

Objection 3: The good has the nature of the desirable. But primary matter does not have the nature of something desirable; instead, it only has the nature of something that desires. Therefore, primary matter does not have the nature of the good. Therefore, not every being is good.

Objection 4: In *Metaphysics* 3 the Philosopher says that among mathematical entities there is no such thing as the good. But mathematical entities are certain beings—otherwise, there would be no science with respect to them. Therefore, not every being is good.

But contrary to this: Every being that is not God is a creature of God. But, as 1 Timothy 4:4 says, every creature of God is good, while God is maximally good. Therefore, every being is good.

I respond: Every being, insofar as it is a being, is good. For every being, insofar as it is a being, has actuality and is in some sense perfect, since every actuality is a certain perfection. But, as is clear from what has been said (a. 1), what is perfect has the nature of something desirable and good. Hence, it

follows that every being, as such, is good.

Reply to Objection 1: *Substance, quantity, quality*, and the things contained under them limit *being* by applying *being* to some ‘what-ness’ (*quidditas*) or nature. However, this is not the way in which *good* adds something to *being*; instead, it adds only the notion of desirability and perfection, which belong to being itself (*ipsi esse*) no matter what nature it is in. Hence, *good* does not limit *being*.

Reply to Objection 2: No being is called bad insofar as it is a being. Rather, it is called bad insofar as it lacks some sort of being. For instance, a man is called bad insofar as he lacks the being of virtue, and an eye is called bad insofar as it lacks keenness of sight.

Reply to Objection 3: Just as primary matter is a being only in potentiality, so too it is good only in potentiality. And even though, according to the Platonists, one could claim that matter is a non-being because of the privation connected with it, it nonetheless has some participation in being because of its very ordering or inclination toward the good. This is why primary matter is appropriately said to desire rather than to be desirable.

Reply to Objection 4: Mathematical entities do not subsist as separate entities with their own *esse*. For if they did so subsist, there would be goodness in them, viz., their very *esse* itself. Rather, mathematical entities are separate only conceptually, insofar as they are abstracted from motion and matter and thus abstracted from the notion of an end, which has the nature of a mover. But there is nothing problematic about a conceptual entity not having the good or the nature of the good, since, as was said above (a. 2), the concept of being is prior to the concept of good.

Article 4

Does *good* have the nature of a final cause?

It seems that *good* does not have the nature of a final cause, but that it instead has the nature of one of the other causes:

Objection 1: As Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, “The good is praised as beautiful.” But *beautiful* expresses the nature of a formal cause. Therefore, *good* has the nature of a formal cause.

Objection 2: The good is diffusive of itself, according to one interpretation of the words of Dionysius when he says that “the good is that by which all things subsist and have their being.” But *to be diffusive* expresses the nature of an efficient cause. Therefore, *good* has the nature of an efficient cause.

Objection 3: In *De Doctrina Christiana* 1 Augustine says, “We exist because God is good.” But our existence is from God as an efficient cause. Therefore, *good* expresses the nature of an efficient cause.

But contrary to this: In *Physics* 2 the Philosopher says, “That for the sake of which something exists is, as it were, the end and the good of other things.” Therefore, *good* has the nature of a final cause.

I respond: Since the good is that which everything desires, and since [being desired] has the character of an end, it is clear that *good* expresses the nature of an end.

Still, the concept of the good presupposes the concept of an efficient cause as well as the concept of a formal cause. For we notice that what is first in causing is last in being caused. For example, fire gives heat before inducing the form of fire, and yet the heat in the [caused] fire follows upon the substantial form of fire.

Now in causing, the first thing we find is the good and the end, which moves the efficient cause;

next is the action of the efficient cause, moving [the patient] toward the form; and third is the appearance of the form. Thus, the converse must be the case in the thing caused: First comes the form itself, through which there is being; next we see the form's effective power, by virtue of which it has perfection in being (since, as the Philosopher says in *Meteorology* 4, a thing is perfect when it can make something similar to itself); and third follows the nature of the good, through which the perfection is grounded in the entity.

Reply to Objection 1: *Good* and *beautiful* are the same in the subject, since they are grounded in the same reality, viz., the form, and it is for this reason that the good is praised as beautiful. However, they differ conceptually.

For *good* has to do properly with desire, since everything desires the good. And because of this it has the nature of an end, since desire is, as it were, a sort of movement toward a thing.

Beautiful, on the other hand, has to do with the cognitive power. For things are called beautiful because they are pleasing to look at. Hence, the beautiful consists in due proportion, since the sensory power delights in things that are duly proportioned, because they are similar to it. For the sensory power, like every cognitive power, involves a kind of proportion. And because cognition is accomplished through assimilation, and because similarity has to do with form, the beautiful properly pertains to the nature of a formal cause.

Reply to Objection 2: *Good* is said to be diffusive of itself in the sense that the end is said to cause movement.

Reply to Objection 3: Whoever has a will is called good insofar as he has a good will, since it is through the will that we make use of all that is in us. Hence, a man is called good not because he has a good intellect, but because he has a good will. Now the will has the end as its proper object, and so what Augustine says—viz., that we exist because God is good—has to do with final causality.

Article 5

Does the nature of the good consist in mode, species, and order?

It seems that the nature of the good does not consist in mode, species, and order:

Objection 1: As was said above (a. 1), *good* and *being* differ conceptually. But mode, species, and order seem to pertain to the concept *being*, since Wisdom 11:21 says, “You have ordered all things in measure, and number, and weight,” and these three are traced back to species, mode, and order. For, as Augustine puts it in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 4, “Measure fixes the mode for every being, and number gives a species for every being, and weight is what draws each being to rest and stability.” Therefore, the nature of the good does not consist in mode, species, and order.

Objection 2: Mode, species, and order are themselves certain goods. Therefore, if the nature of the good consists in mode, species, and order, then it must be the case that mode likewise has mode, species, and order—and similarly for species and order. Therefore, there will be an infinite regress.

Objection 3: Evil is the privation of mode, species and order. But evil does not totally destroy the good. Therefore, the nature of the good does not consist in mode, species, and order.

Objection 4: That in which the nature of the good consists cannot be called bad. But some modes are called bad modes and some species bad species and some orders bad orders. Therefore, the nature of the good does not consist in mode, species, and order.

Objection 5: As the passage from Augustine cited above makes clear, mode, species, and order are caused by weight, number, and measure. But not all good things have weight, number, and measure. For in *Hexameron* Ambrose says that “the nature of light is such that it is not created either in number or in

weight or in measure.” Therefore, it is not the case that the nature of the good consists in mode, species, and order.

But contrary to this: In *De Natura Boni* Augustine says: “These three—mode, species, and order—are general goods in the things made by God. And so where these three are great, there are great goods; and where they are small, there are small goods; and where they are absent, there is no good.” But this would not be the case if the nature of the good did not consist in these things. Therefore, the nature of the good consists in mode, species and order.

I respond: As was said above (a. 1), the good is desirable to the extent that it is perfect. But what is called perfect is such that it lacks nothing with respect to the mode of its perfection. Now since each thing is what it is through its form, and since the form presupposes certain things and has other things consequent upon it, it follows that in order for something to be perfect and good, it must have (a) the form and (b) the things presupposed by the form and (c) the things consequent upon the form.

What is presupposed by the form is the determination or commensuration of its principles—either its material principles or the principles that effect it. This is signified by ‘mode’, and this is why measure is said to fix the mode.

The form itself, on the other hand, is signified by ‘species’, since it is through its form that each thing is constituted in a species. And the reason why number is said to give the species is that the definitions signifying the species are like numbers, according to the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 7. For just as the addition or subtraction of a unit changes the species of a number, so too the addition or subtraction of a difference changes the definition.

What is consequent upon the form is its inclination to an end or to action or to something else of this sort. For each thing acts insofar as it is in actuality, and it tends toward that which befits it, given its form. And this pertains to weight and order.

Hence, the nature of the good, insofar as it consists in perfection, likewise consists in mode, species, and order.

Reply to Objection 1: These three things follow upon *being* only insofar as it is perfect and thus good.

Reply to Objection 2: Mode, species, and order are called goods—as well as beings—not because they are, as it were, subsistent things, but because other things are both beings and good because of them. Hence, they themselves do not need to have some other things by virtue of which they are good. For they are called good not because they are formally good by virtue of other things, but because certain things are formally good by virtue of them. In the same way, whiteness is called a being not because it itself exists in some way, but rather because by virtue of it something exists in a qualified way, viz., as a white thing.

Reply to Objection 3: Every *esse* corresponds to some form. Thus, it is by virtue of the *esse* of a thing that mode, species, and order follow upon it. For instance, a man has a species, a mode, and an order insofar as he is a man; and, similarly, insofar as he is white, he likewise has a mode, a species, and an order; and insofar as he is virtuous, and insofar as he has knowledge, and so on for all the other things that are predicated of him.

Evil, on the other hand, is the privation of some *esse* or other, in the way that, say, blindness is the privation of the *esse* of sight. Hence, it does not destroy every mode, species, and order, but rather destroys only the mode, species, and order that follow upon the *esse* of sight.

Reply to Objection 4: As Augustine says in *De Natura Boni*, “Every mode, insofar as it is a mode, is good” (and one can say the same of species and order), “but a mode or a species or an order is called bad either because it is less than it ought to be or because it is not proportioned to the things it should be proportioned to; hence, they are called bad when they are out of place and incongruous.”

Reply to Objection 5: The nature of light is said to be without number, weight, and measure not absolutely speaking, but rather by comparison to corporeal things. For the power of light extends to all corporeal things insofar as it is an active quality of the first body that is an agent of change, viz., a celestial body.

Article 6

Is the good appropriately divided into the noble, the useful, and the pleasant?

It seems that the good is not appropriately divided into the noble (*honestum*), the useful (*utile*), and the pleasant (*delectabile*):

Objection 1: In *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says that *good* is divided into the ten categories. But the noble, the useful, and the pleasant are all found in just one category. Therefore, the good is not appropriately divided into them.

Objection 2: Every division is made by means of opposites. But the three things in question do not seem to be opposites. For noble things are pleasant; and, as Tully claims in *De Officiis*, nothing ignoble is useful (which would have to be the case if the division were being made by means of opposites in such a way that the noble and the useful were opposed). Therefore, the division in question is not appropriate.

Objection 3: Where one thing is for the sake of another, there is just a single thing. But the useful is good only for the sake of either the pleasant or the noble. Therefore, the useful should not be divided off from the pleasant and the noble.

But contrary to this: Ambrose uses this division of the good in *De Officiis*.

I respond: The division in question seems, properly speaking, to be a division of the human good. But even if we are considering a higher and more general notion of the good, this division seems to belong properly to the good insofar as it is good.

For something is good insofar as it is desirable and is the terminus of a movement of desire. The termination of such a movement can be thought of like the motion of a natural body. The motion of a natural body terminates, absolutely speaking, at the last point, but it also terminates, relatively speaking, at the middle point through which it passes on its way to the last point that terminates the motion. This middle point is called a terminus of the motion insofar as it terminates a part of the motion. And the last terminus of the motion can be understood in one of two ways: either (a) as the thing itself toward which the motion tends, e.g., a place or a form, or (b) as rest in that thing.

So, then, in a movement of desire, that which is desirable in such a way that it terminates the motion of desire, relatively speaking—that is, as a middle point through which it tends toward another—is called the *useful*.

On the other hand, that which is desired as the last point and wholly terminates the movement of desire as the thing toward which the desire tends *per se*, is called the *noble*. For what is called noble is that which is desired for its own sake (*per se*).

Lastly, that which terminates the movement of desire, in the sense of resting in the thing desired, is *pleasure*.

Reply to Objection 1: *Good* is divided into the ten categories insofar as it is identical in subject with *being*. However, the division under discussion belongs to it in accord with its proper nature.

Reply to Objection 2: The division in question is not by means of opposite things, but rather by means of opposed concepts. Still, the things that are properly called pleasant have no desirable character

other than pleasure, since such things are sometimes harmful and ignoble. On the other hand, the things that are [properly] called useful have nothing desirable within themselves, but are desired only because they lead to other things—as, for example, ingesting bitter medicine. Lastly, the things that are [properly] called noble have within themselves something that is desirable.

Reply to Objection 3: The good is not divided into the three types in question as if it were something univocal predicated on a par of each of them. Rather, it is divided into them as something analogous that is predicated of them according to an ordering of the prior and the posterior. For the good is first predicated of the noble, then of the pleasant, and, thirdly, of the useful.