

QUESTION 6

God's Goodness

Next we ask about God's goodness. And on this matter there are four questions: (1) Does it befit God to be good? (2) Is God the greatest good? (3) Is He alone good through His essence? (4) Are all things good by God's goodness?

Article 1

Does it befit God to be good?

It seems that it does not befit God to be good:

Objection 1: The nature of the good consists in mode, species, and order. But these do not seem to befit God. For God is immense and is not ordered to anything. Therefore, it does not befit God to be good.

Objection 2: The good is that which all things desire. But it is not the case that all things desire God; for not all things know Him, and nothing is desired unless it is known. Therefore, it does not befit God to be good.

But contrary to this: Lamentations 3:25 says: "The Lord is good to them that hope in Him, to the soul that seeks Him."

I respond: It especially befits God to be good. For something is good to the extent that it is desirable. But each thing desires its own perfection, and the perfection and form of an effect is a certain likeness of the agent, since every agent effects what is similar to itself. Hence, the agent itself is desirable and has the nature of the good; for what is desired of it is that its likeness should be participated in. Therefore, since God is the first efficient cause of all things, it is clear that the nature of the good and the desirable befits Him. This is why in *De Divinis Nominibus* Dionysius attributes goodness to God as the first efficient cause, claiming that God is called good "insofar as all things subsist because of Him."

Reply to Objection 1: Having mode, species, and order pertains to the nature of caused goodness. By contrast, God's goodness is, as it were, the goodness in a cause; hence, it is His role to impose mode, species, and order on other things. Hence, these three things are in God as a cause.

Reply to Objection 2: In desiring their own proper perfections, all things desire God Himself insofar as the perfections of all things are certain likenesses of the divine *esse*—as was made clear above (q. 4, a. 3). And so of those things that desire God, some know Him in Himself (this is proper to the rational creature); others know some types of participation in His goodness (this includes sentient cognition as well); and others have a natural desire without cognition insofar as they are inclined to their ends by a higher knower.

Article 2

Is God the greatest good?

It seems that God is not the greatest good:

Objection 1: *Greatest good* adds something to *good*—otherwise, it would belong to every good thing. But everything that has something by addition is composite. Therefore, the highest good is composite. But, as was shown above (q. 3), God is maximally simple. Therefore, God is not the greatest good.

Objection 2: As the Philosopher says, “The good is that which all things desire.” But nothing other than God, who is the end of all things, is such that all things desire it. Therefore, nothing other than God is good; this is also evident from Matthew 19:17 (“No one is good except God alone”). But ‘greatest’ is said in comparison with other things; for instance, something is said to have the greatest heat in comparison to other hot things. Therefore, God cannot be called the greatest good.

Objection 3: ‘Greatest’ implies a comparison. But things that do not belong to the same genus are not comparable; for example, it is not appropriate to say that sweetness is either greater or less than a line. Therefore, since, as was shown above (q. 3, a. 5), God does not belong to same genus as other good things, it seems that God cannot be called the greatest good in relation to them.

But contrary to this: In *De Trinitate* 1 Augustine says, “The Trinity of divine persons is the greatest good and is seen by the most purified minds.”

I respond: God is the greatest good, absolutely speaking, and not just the greatest good in some genus or order of things.

For, as has been explained (a. 1), *good* is attributed to God insofar as all desired perfections flow from Him as the first cause. But, as is clear from what was said above (q. 4, a. 3), these perfections flow from Him not as a univocal cause, but rather as an agent who does not agree with His effects either in the nature of their species or in the nature of their genus (*neque in ratione speciei nec in ratione generis*). Now the likeness in the effect is found in exactly the same way in a univocal cause, whereas in an equivocal cause it is found in a more excellent way—for instance, heat exists in a more excellent way in the sun than it does in a fire. So, then, since goodness exists in God as the non-univocal first cause of all things, it must exist in Him in the most excellent way. And because of this He is called the greatest good.

Reply to Objection 1: *Greatest good* adds to *good* not any absolute entity, but merely a relation. And a relation that is predicated of God relative to creatures is a real entity in the creature but not in God; rather, in God it exists only conceptually. In the same way, what is knowable is predicated relative to the knowledge of it, not because it is related [by a real entity] to the knowledge, but because the knowledge is related to it. And so it is not necessary that there be any composition in the greatest good; rather, all that is necessary is that the other things fall short of it [in goodness].

Reply to Objection 2: When we say, “The good is what all things desire,” this should be understood to mean not that there is some single good that is desired by all things, but rather that whatever is desired has the nature of the good. On the other hand, when it is said that “No one is good but God alone,” it means “good through His essence.” This will be explained below (a. 3).

Reply to Objection 3: Things that are not in the same genus—if, that is, each is contained in a different genus—are in no way comparable. However, in the case of God, it is denied that He is in the same genus with other goods, not because He is in some other genus, but rather because He is outside of any genus and the principle of every genus. And so He can be compared to other things by the fact that He exceeds them. It is a comparison of this sort that *greatest good* implies.

Article 3

Is it proper to God alone to be good through His essence?

It seems that it is not proper to God alone to be good through His essence:

Objection 1: As explained above (q. 5, a. 1), just as *one* is convertible with *being*, so too *good* is convertible with *being*. But, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 4, every entity is one through its essence. Therefore, every entity is good through its essence.

Objection 2: If the good is what all things desire, then since *esse* itself is desired by all things, the very *esse* of each entity is its good. But each entity is a being (*ens*) through its essence. Therefore, each entity is good through its essence.

Objection 3: Every entity is good through its own goodness. Therefore, if some entity is not good through its essence, then it will have to be the case that its goodness is not its essence. Therefore, since this goodness itself is an entity, it must be good, and if it is good by yet another goodness, then the same question will be asked about that goodness. So either there will be an infinite regress or we will come to some goodness that is not good through another goodness. For this reason, then, we should have stopped with the very first goodness. It follows that each thing is good through its essence.

But contrary to this: In *De Hebdomadibus* Boethius says that all things other than God are good through participation. Therefore, they are not good through their essence.

I respond: God alone is good through His essence.

For each thing is called good to the extent that it is perfect, and there are three types of perfection a given entity might have. It has the first type insofar as it is constituted in its own *esse*; it has the second type insofar as certain accidents required for its complete operation are added to it; and it has the third type of perfection by virtue of the fact that it attains to something other than itself as an end. For example, in the case of fire the first type of perfection consists in its *esse*, which it has through its substantial form; the second type of perfection consists in its hotness, weightlessness, dryness, etc.; and it has the third type of perfection insofar as it finds rest in its proper place.

Now these three types of perfection belong to no created entity through its essence, but only to God. For God alone is such that His essence is His *esse*. Again, no accidents are added to Him; instead, as is clear from what was said above (q. 3, a. 6), things predicated of other entities as accidents belong to Him essentially, e.g., being powerful, wise, etc. Moreover, He is not ordered to anything other than Himself as an end; rather, He Himself is the ultimate end of all things.

Hence, it is clear that God alone has every type of perfection by virtue of His essence. And so He alone is good through His essence.

Reply to Objection 1: *One* does not connote the nature of perfection, but only the nature of undividedness, which belongs to each thing by virtue of its essence. Now the essences of simple entities are undivided both in actuality and in potentiality, whereas the essences of composite entities are undivided only in actuality. And so each entity must be one through its essence, but, as has been shown, not good through its essence.

Reply to Objection 2: Even though each thing is good insofar as it has *esse*, the essence of a created entity is nevertheless not its very *esse*. And so it does not follow that a created entity is good through its essence.

Reply to Objection 3: The goodness of a created entity is not its very essence, but something added to its essence, viz., either (a) its very *esse*, or (b) some added perfection, or (c) its being ordered to an end.

And even though the goodness added in any of these ways is itself called good in the same way that it is called an entity, still, it is called an entity because it is something and not because it is something by some other thing. Hence, it is called good because it is something good and not because it has some other goodness by which it is good.

Article 4

Are all things good by God's goodness?

It seems that all things are good by God's goodness:

Objection 1: In *De Trinitate* 7 Augustine says, "This good and that good—take away the *this* and the *that* and look at the good itself, if you can. Then you will see God, who is not good by any other good, but is the good of all good." But each thing is good by its own goodness. Therefore, each thing is good by the very goodness that is God.

Objection 2: As Boethius says in *De Hebdomadibus*, all things are called good insofar as they are ordered to God, and this by reason of God's goodness. Therefore, all things are good by God's goodness.

But contrary to this: All things are good insofar as they exist. But every entity is called an entity through its own proper *esse* and not through God's *esse*. Therefore, every being is called good by its own proper goodness and not by God's goodness.

I respond: In the case of that which connotes a relation, nothing prevents a thing from being denominated extrinsically. For instance, a thing that is located in a given place is denominated by that place, and a thing that is measured is denominated by the measure.

By contrast, in the case of that which is predicated non-relationally (*absolute*), there are different opinions.

Plato claimed that the species of all entities are separate, and that the individuals are denominated by them in virtue of participating, as it were, in the separated species. So, for instance, Socrates is called a man by virtue of the separated idea *man*. And just as Plato posited the separated ideas *man* and *horse*, which he called 'man *per se*' and 'horse *per se*', so too he posited a separated idea *being* and a separated idea *one*, which he called 'being *per se*' and 'one *per se*', and each thing is called a being or one in virtue of its participation in those ideas. But that which is good *per se* and one *per se* he claimed to be the most high God, in virtue of whom all things are called good by way of participation.

Now even though, as Aristotle proved in many ways, this view seems unreasonable in positing separated species, subsisting *per se*, for natural things, still, as is clear from what was said above (q. 2, a. 3), this much is absolutely true: There is some one thing that is good through its essence, which we call God. Even Aristotle agreed with this claim.

Therefore, as is clear from what was said above (q. 4, a. 3), each entity can be called good and a being in virtue of the first being—which is good and a being through its essence—insofar as the entity participates, even if remotely and deficiently, in that first being by way of some sort of assimilation. In this sense, then, each thing is called good by God's goodness insofar as He is the first exemplary, efficient, and final principle of all goodness.

Nonetheless, each thing is called good by a likeness of God's goodness that inheres in it and formally constitutes the goodness that denominates it.

And so it is the case both (a) that there is a single goodness of all things and also (b) that there are many goodnesses.

Reply to Objections 1 and 2: The reply to the objections is clear from what has been said.