

QUESTION 56

The Subject of Virtue

Next we have to consider the subject of a virtue. And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Does any virtue exist in a power of the soul as in its subject? (2) Can a single virtue exist in more than one power? (3) Can the intellect be the subject of any virtue? (4) Can the irascible and concupiscible powers of the soul be the subject of any virtue? (5) Can the [interior] sentient apprehensive powers be the subject of any virtue? (6) Can the will be the subject of any virtue?

Article 1

Does a virtue exist in a power of the soul as in its subject?

It seems that a virtue does not exist in a power of the soul as in its subject:

Objection 1: In *De Libero Arbitrio* 2 Augustine, “A virtue is that by which one lives uprightly.” But *to live* is from the soul’s essence and not from its power. Therefore, virtue exists in the essence of the soul and not in its power.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says, “A virtue is what makes the one who has it good and renders his work good.” But just as one’s work is constituted through a power, so, too, having a virtue is constituted through the soul’s essence. Therefore, it is not the case that a virtue belongs to a power of the soul more than to its essence.

Objection 3: *Power* is in the second species of *quality*. But as was explained above (q. 55, a. 4), a virtue is a certain quality, and no quality belongs to a quality. Therefore, it is not the case that a virtue exists in a power of the soul as in its subject.

But contrary to this: As *De Caelo* 1 says, a virtue is the limit of a power. But a limit exists in that of which it is the limit. Therefore, a virtue exists in a power of the soul.

I respond: There are three considerations from which it is clear that a virtue belongs to a power of the soul:

First, from the very concept *virtue*, which implies the perfection of a power, and a perfection exists in that of which it is a perfection.

Second, from the fact that, as was explained above (q. 55, a. 2), a virtue is a habit ordered toward an operation, and every operation is from the soul through some power.

Third, from the fact that a virtue disposes one toward what is best, and the best thing is the end, which is either the entity’s operation or else something that follows through an operation that comes from a power.

Hence, a human virtue exists in a power of the soul as in its subject.

Reply to objection 1: *To live* is taken in two ways. For sometimes *to live* means the very *esse* that belongs to a living thing, and in this sense it pertains to the soul’s essence, which is the principle of being for a living thing (*viventi essendi principium*). In a second sense, *to live* means the operation of the living thing, and this is the sense in which one lives uprightly by means of a virtue, insofar as it is through the virtue that one acts uprightly.

Reply to objection 2: What is called good is either the end or what is ordered toward the end. And so since the good of one who is acting consists in his operation, the very fact that a virtue makes the one who is acting good is likewise traced back to an operation and, as a result, to a power.

Reply to objection 3: One accident is said to exist in another accident as in a subject not because an accident is in its own right (*per seipsum*) able to sustain another accident, but because the one accident inheres in the substance by the mediation of another accident, in the way that a color inheres in a body by the mediation of the body’s surface. That is why the surface is said to be the subject of the color. And it is in this sense that a power of the soul is said to be the subject of a virtue.

Article 2

Can a single virtue exist in two powers?

It seems that a single virtue can exist in two powers:

Objection 1: Habits are known through their acts. But a single act proceeds in diverse ways from diverse powers; for instance, walking proceeds from reason as from what *directs* it, from the will as from what *effects* it, and from the moving power as from what *executes* it. Therefore, the single habit of a virtue can likewise exist in more than one power.

Objection 2: In *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says that there are three things required for a virtue, viz., “to know, to will, and to operate in a firm way (*immobilititer*).” But *to know* belongs to the intellect, whereas *to will* belongs to the will. Therefore, a virtue can exist in more than one power.

Objection 3: Prudence exists in reason, since, as *Ethics* 6 says, prudence is “right reason with respect to actions (*recta ratio agibilium*).” It also exists in the will, since it cannot exist in the presence of a perverse will (*non potest esse cum voluntate perversa*), as is pointed out in the same book. Therefore, a single virtue can exist in two powers.

But contrary to this: A virtue exists in a power of the soul as in a subject. But the same accident cannot exist in more than one subject. Therefore, a single virtue cannot exist in more than one power of the soul.

I respond: There are two possible ways for something to exist in two things:

In one way, so as to exist *equally* in both of them. And in this sense it is impossible for a single virtue to exist in two powers, since the diversity of powers corresponds to *general* conditions on their objects (*secundum generales condiciones obiectorum*), whereas the diversity of habits corresponds to *specific* conditions on their objects (*secundum condiciones speciales obiectorum*). Hence, whenever there is a diversity of powers, there is a diversity of habits, but not vice versa.

In the second way, something can exist in two or more things not equally, but *with a certain ordering*. And in this sense a single virtue can belong to more than one power in such a way that it exists in one of the powers principally and extends itself to the other powers in the manner of a diffusion or in the manner of a disposition, to the extent that the one power is moved by the other and to the extent that the one power receives something from the other.

Reply to objection 1: The same act cannot belong to diverse powers equally and within the same order, but it can belong to diverse powers in accord with diverse conceptions and in different orders.

Reply to objection 2: *To know* is required for moral virtue insofar as moral virtue acts in accord with right reason. But *in its essence* (*essentialiter*) moral virtue consists in appetition (*in appetendo*).

Reply to objection 3: Prudence as a real entity (*realiter*) exists in reason, but, as will be explained below (a. 3 and q. 57, a. 4), it presupposes uprightness of will.

Article 3

Is the intellect the subject of any virtue?

It seems that the intellect is not the subject of any virtue:

Objection 1: In *De Moribus Ecclesiae* Augustine says that every virtue is love. But the subject of love is exclusively the appetitive power and not the intellect. Therefore, no virtue exists in the intellect.

Objection 2: As is clear from what has been said above (q. 55, a. 3), a virtue is ordered toward the good. But the good is not the object of the intellect. Therefore, the subject of a virtue is the appetitive

power and not the intellect.

Objection 3: As the Philosopher puts it, “A virtue is what makes the one who has it good.” But a habit that perfects the intellect does not make the one who has it good, since a man is not called good because of his scientific knowledge or because of his craftsmanship (*non propter scientiam vel artem dicitur homo bonus*). Therefore, the intellect is not the subject of any virtue.

But contrary to this: ‘Mind’ means especially the intellect. But as is clear from the definition of virtue introduced above (q. 55, a. 4), the subject of a virtue is the mind. Therefore, the intellect is the subject of virtue.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 55, a. 3), a virtue is a habit by which someone operates well. Now there are two ways in which a habit is ordered toward a good act:

In one way, there is the sort of habit that is such that through it a man acquires a facility (*facultas*) for a good act, in the way that through the habit of grammar (*per habitum grammaticae*) a man acquires a facility for speaking correctly. However, the habit of grammar (*grammatica*) does not make it the case that the man speaks correctly at all times; for a grammatical individual is able to utter barbarisms or to commit a solecism (*potest barbarizare aut soloecismum facere*). And the same line of reasoning holds for the other crafts and for the types of scientific knowledge.

In the second way, there is the sort of habit that not only effects a facility for acting but also makes it the case that one uses that facility correctly; for instance, justice makes it the case not only that a man has a prompt will for doing just things, but also that he acts justly. And since *good*, like *being*, designates a thing absolutely speaking insofar as it is actual (*est in actu*) and not insofar as it is potential (*est in potentia*), it follows that it is because of this sort of habit that a man is said to do good and to be good absolutely speaking, e.g., because he is just or temperate. And the same line of reasoning holds for similar habits.

Moreover, since a virtue is what makes the man who has it good and renders his works good, it is habits of this latter sort that are called virtues absolutely speaking; for they make his works good in actuality, and they make the one who has them good absolutely speaking. By contrast, habits of the first sort are not called virtues absolutely speaking, because they do not render the works good except in terms of a certain facility, and they do not make the one who has them good. For a man is not called good absolutely speaking (*bonus simpliciter*) from the fact that he is a craftsman or someone with scientific knowledge; instead, he is called good only in a certain respect (*bonus solum secundum quid*), e.g., a good workman or good at grammar. For this reason, as is clear from *Ethics* 6, scientific knowledge and craftsmanship (*scientia et ars*) are most commonly divided off from virtue, though sometimes they are called virtues.

Therefore, the subject of a habit that is called a virtue in a certain respect (*qui secundum quid dicitur virtus*) can be the intellect—not only the practical intellect, but also the speculative intellect in the absence of any ordering to the will. For this is the sense in which the Philosopher, in *Ethics* 6, claims that scientific knowledge (*scientia*), wisdom (*sapientia*), understanding (*intellectus*), and even art (*ars*) are intellectual virtues.

By contrast, the subject of a habit that is called a virtue absolutely speaking can only be either the will or a power insofar as it is moved by the will. The reason for this is that, as was established above (q. 9, a. 1 and q. 17, a. 1 and *ST* 1, q. 82, a. 4), the will moves all the other powers that are in any sense rational, and so the fact that a man acts well stems from the fact that the man has a good will. Hence, a virtue which makes one act well in actuality, and not just in his facility, must exist either in the will or in some power insofar as it is moved by the will.

Now it is possible for the intellect, like the other powers, to be moved by the will; for an individual considers something in actuality because he wills to. And so insofar as the intellect has an ordering to the will, it can be the subject of a virtue absolutely speaking. And it is in this way that the speculative intellect, or reason, is the subject of *faith*. For the intellect is moved to assent by the command of the will

to what belongs to the Faith, since no one has faith unless he wills to have it (*nullus credit nisi volens*). On the other hand, the practical intellect is the subject of *prudence*. For since prudence is right reason with respect to actions (*recta ratio agibilium*), it is required for prudence that the man be related in the right way to the principles of right reason with respect to things to be done, viz., the ends, to which a man is related in the right way by the uprightness of his will—just as it is through the natural light of the active intellect that he is related in the right way to the principles of the objects of the speculative intellect (*ad principia speculabilium*). And so just as the subject of scientific knowledge, which is right reason with respect to the objects of the speculative intellect, is the speculative intellect in relation to the active intellect, so the subject of prudence is the practical intellect in relation to right willing (*in ordine ad voluntatem rectam*).

Reply to objection 1: The passage from Augustine should be understood to be saying, about virtue absolutely speaking, not that every such virtue is love absolutely speaking, but that every such virtue depends in some way on love, insofar as it depends on the will, whose primary affection, as was explained above (q. 25, a. 1 and q. 27, a. 4), is love.

Reply to objection 2: The good of each thing is its end, and so, since the true is the intellect's end, to know what is true is a good act of the intellect. Hence, a habit that perfects the intellect in knowing what is true, whether in speculative matters or in practical matters, is called a virtue.

Reply to objection 3: This argument goes through for virtue absolutely speaking.

Article 4

Can the irascible and concupiscible powers be the subject of any virtue?

It seems that the irascible and concupiscible powers cannot be the subject of any virtue:

Objection 1: Powers of this sort are common to us and brute animals. But at present we are speaking of virtue insofar as it is proper to man; for this is why it is being called 'human virtue'. Therefore, the irascible and concupiscible powers, which, as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 81, a. 2), are parts of the sentient appetite, cannot be the subject of any human virtue.

Objection 2: The sentient appetite is a power that uses a corporeal organ. But the good of virtue cannot exist in a man's body; for in Romans 7:18 the Apostle says, "I know that good does not dwell in my flesh." Therefore, the sentient appetite cannot be the subject of any virtue.

Objection 3: In *De Moribus Ecclesiae* Augustine proves that virtue exists in the soul and not in the body, because the body is governed by the soul. Thus, the fact that someone uses his body well is traced back entirely to the soul: "For instance, if my coachman, obeying me, governs well the horses he is driving, this is wholly due to me." But just as the soul governs the body, so, too, reason governs the sentient appetite. Therefore, it is wholly due to the rational part of the soul that the irascible and concupiscible powers are correctly governed. But as was explained above (q. 55, a. 4), virtue is "that by which one lives uprightly." Therefore, virtue exists only in the rational part of the soul and not in the irascible or concupiscible parts.

Objection 4: As *Ethics* 8 says, "The principal act of moral virtue is the act of choosing (*electio*)."
But as was explained above (q. 13, a. 2), the act of choosing is an act of reason and not an act of the irascible or concupiscible powers. Therefore, moral virtue exists in reason and not in the irascible or concupiscible powers.

But contrary to this: Fortitude is claimed to exist in the irascible power, whereas temperance is claimed to exist in the concupiscible power. Hence, in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, "These virtues belong to the non-rational parts of the soul."

I respond: There are two ways in which the irascible and concupiscible powers can be thought of:

In one way, they can be thought of *in their own right*, insofar as they are parts of the sentient appetite; and in this sense, it cannot belong to them to be the subject of any virtue.

In the second way, they can be thought of *insofar as they participate in reason* by being ready to obey reason (*per hoc quod natae sunt rationi obedire*). And in this sense the irascible power or concupiscible power can be the subject of a human virtue, since insofar as these powers participate in reason, they are a principle of a human act.

Moreover, it is necessary to posit virtues in these powers, since it is clear that some virtues exist in the irascible and concupiscible powers. For an act that proceeds from one power insofar as it is moved by another power cannot be perfect unless both powers are well disposed with respect to the act—just as a craftsman’s act cannot be fitting unless both the craftsman and also his instrument are well disposed toward acting. Therefore, in those matters with respect to which the irascible and concupiscible powers operate insofar as they are moved by reason, it is necessary that a habit that perfects one for acting well should exist not only in reason, but also in the irascible and concupiscible powers. And because the good disposition of a power that is a moved mover involves a conformity with the power that effects its movement, it follows that a virtue that exists in the irascible or concupiscible power is nothing other than a certain habitual conformity of that power with reason.

Reply to objection 1: Considered in their own right (*secundum se*), the irascible and concupiscible powers, as parts of the sentient appetite, are common to us and brute animals. But it is insofar as they are rational by participation, as obedient to reason, that they are proper to man. And this is the sense in which they can be the subject of a human virtue.

Reply to objection 2: Just as a man’s flesh does not in its own right have the good of virtue but is nonetheless the instrument of a virtuous act insofar as, with reason as the mover, we use our members to serve justice, so, too, the irascible and concupiscible powers likewise have in their own right the infection of the stimulant [to sin] (*infectio fomitis*) and not the good of virtue, but insofar as they are conformed to reason, the good of moral virtue is begotten in them (*in eis adgeneratur bonum virtutis moralis*).

Reply to objection 3: The irascible and concupiscible powers are governed by reason in a way different from the way in which the body is governed by the soul.

For the body obeys the soul at will without contradiction in those things in which it is apt to be moved by the soul. This is why the Philosopher says in *Politics* 1, “The soul governs the body by despotic rule,” i.e., in the way that a master governs his servant. And so the body’s entire movement is traced back to the soul. And this is why virtue exists only in the soul and not in the body.

By contrast, the irascible and concupiscible powers do not obey reason at will, but have their own proper movements by which they sometimes oppose reason (*interdum rationi repugnant*). This is why in the same book the Philosopher says, “Reason governs the irascible and concupiscible powers with the political rule by which free men are ruled who have their own will in certain matters.” And this is why it is likewise necessary for there to be some virtues in the irascible and concupiscible powers by which they might be well disposed toward their acts.

Reply to objection 4: There are two things in the act of choosing, viz., (a) the act of intending the end, which pertains to the moral virtues, and (b), as *Ethics* 6 says, the act of preferring a means to that end, which pertains to prudence. The fact that the act of choosing involves an upright intending of the end stems from the good disposition of the irascible and concupiscible powers. And so the moral virtues with respect to the passions exist in the irascible and concupiscible powers, whereas prudence exists in reason.

Article 5

Can any virtue exist in the interior sentient apprehensive powers?

It seems that a virtue can exist in the interior sentient apprehensive powers (*in viribus apprehensivis interioribus*):

Objection 1: The sentient appetite can be the subject of a virtue insofar as it obeys reason. But the interior sentient powers obey reason, since the powers of imagining, cogitating, and remembering operate at reason's command.

Objection 2: Just as the rational appetite, i.e., the will, can be impeded, as well as assisted, in its act by the sentient appetite, so, too, the intellect, i.e., reason, can be impeded, as well as assisted, by the powers in question. Therefore, just as a virtue can exist in the sentient appetitive powers, so, too, a virtue can exist in the sentient apprehensive powers.

Objection 3: Prudence is a virtue, and in *Rhetorica* Tully posits memory as a part of prudence. Therefore, there can likewise be a virtue in the power of remembering. And, for the same reason, there can be virtues in the other interior apprehensive powers (*in aliis interioribus apprehensivis viribus*).

But contrary to this: As *Ethics* 2 says, all the virtues are either intellectual virtues or moral virtues. But as is clear from *Ethics* 6, the moral virtues all exist in the appetitive part of the soul, whereas the intellectual virtues all exist in the intellect or reason. Therefore, no virtue exists in the interior sentient apprehensive powers.

I respond: Some habits are posited in the interior sentient apprehensive powers. This is clear mainly from what the Philosopher says in *De Memoria*: "In remembering one thing after another there is customary usage at work (*operatur consuetudo*), which is, as it were, a sort of nature." But this habit of customary usage (*habitus consuetudinalis*) is nothing other than a disposition (*habitus*) acquired through customary usage (*per consuetudinem*), which is something in the manner of a nature. This is why Tully, in his *Rhetorica*, says of a virtue that "it is a habit consonant with reason in the manner of a nature."

Still, in the case of a man, what is acquired by habituation in memory and the other sentient apprehensive powers is not, as was explained above (q. 50, a. 4), a habit *per se*; instead, it is something annexed to the habits of the intellective part of the soul. Yet even if there are habits in the powers in question, they cannot be called virtues. For a virtue is a perfect habit by which it is possible to do only what is good, and so a habit has to exist in a power that consummates a good work (*est consummativa boni operis*). But the cognition of what is true is not consummated in the sentient apprehensive powers; instead, powers of this sort are, as it were, a preparation for intellective cognition. And so in these powers there are no virtues by which what is true is known; instead, virtues of this sort exist in the intellect or reason.

Reply to objection 1: The sentient appetite is related to the will, which is reason's appetite, as something moved by the will. And so the work of the appetitive power is consummated in the sentient appetite. Because of this, the sentient appetite is the subject of virtues.

By contrast, the virtues of the sentient apprehensive part are related as movers with respect to the intellect, since, as *De Anima* 3 explains, the phantasms are related to the intellective soul in the way that colors are related to sight. And so the work of cognition is terminated in the intellect. And because of this, the cognitive virtues exist in the intellect or reason itself.

Reply to objection 2: This makes clear the reply to the second objection.

Reply to objection 3: Memory is posited as a part of prudence not in the way in which a species is a part of its genus—as if memory were a virtue in its own right (*per se*)—but rather in the sense that one of the things required for prudence is goodness of memory. As such, memory is in some sense related to prudence like an integral part.

Article 6

Is the will the subject of any virtue?

It seems that the will is not the subject of any virtue:

Objection 1: No habit is required for what belongs to a power by the power's very nature (*ex ipsa ratione potentiae*). But according to the Philosopher in *De Anima* 3, since the will exists in reason, it tends by its very nature toward what is good according to reason, and it is to this that every virtue is ordered. For each thing naturally desires its own good, and as Tully says in his *Rhetorica*, "A virtue is a habit that is consonant with reason in the manner of a nature." Therefore, the will is not the subject of any virtue.

Objection 2: As *Ethics* 1 and 2 say, every virtue is either an intellectual virtue or a moral virtue. But intellectual virtue exists in the intellect and reason as in a subject and not in the will, whereas moral virtue exists, as in a subject, in the irascible and concupiscible powers, which are rational by participation. Therefore, no virtue exists in the will as in a subject.

Objection 3: All human acts—and the virtues are ordered toward human acts—are voluntary. Therefore, if there is a virtue in the will with respect to *some* human acts, then by parity of reasoning there will be a virtue in the will with respect to *all* human acts. Therefore, either (a) there will not be any virtues in any other power, or else (b) two virtues will be ordered to the very same act—which seems absurd. Therefore, the will cannot be the subject of any virtue.

But contrary to this: More perfection is required in what effects movement than in what is moved. But the will moves the irascible power and the concupiscible power. Therefore, virtue has to exist in the will much more than in the irascible power or concupiscible power.

I respond: Since a power is perfected in its acting by a habit, it is in those cases in which the power's proper nature is not sufficient that the power needs a habit that perfects it for acting well—which habit is a virtue.

Now every proper conception of a power involves an ordering to its object. Hence, since, as was explained above (q. 19, a. 3), the will's object is a good of reason that is proportioned to the will, in this respect the will does not need a perfecting virtue. But if what confronts a man to be willed is a good that is disproportionate to the one willing—either (a) with respect to the whole human species, as in the case of the divine good, which transcends the limits of human nature or (b) with respect to an individual, as in the case of the good of his neighbor, then the will needs a virtue in such a case. And so virtues of the sort that order a man's affections toward God or toward his neighbor exist in the will as in a subject, e.g., charity, justice, and others of this sort.

Reply to objection 1: This argument has a place in the case of a virtue which orders one to the proper or private good of the one who is willing himself (*ad bonum proprium ipsius volentis*)—for instance, in the case of temperance and fortitude, which, as is clear from what has been said (q. 21, a. 1 and q. 25, a. 6), have to do with the human passions and other things of this sort.

Reply to objection 2: As *Ethics* 1 says, what is rational by participation is not just the irascible power and concupiscible power, but the appetitive as a whole, i.e., in general (*sed omnino, idest universaliter, appetitivum*). Now the will is included under the appetitive. And so if a virtue exists in the soul, then it will be a moral virtue—unless it is a theological virtue, as will become clear below (q. 58, a. 3 and q. 62, a. 3).

Reply to objection 3: Some virtues are ordered toward the good of moderated passion, which is proper to *this* man or *that* man, and in such cases it is not necessary for there to be a virtue in the will, since, as has been explained, the power's nature is sufficient for this. Rather, it is necessary only in the case of those virtues that are ordered toward an extrinsic good.