

## QUESTION 88

### Mortal Sin and Venial Sin

Next we have to consider mortal and venial sin, since they are distinguished from one another by the punishments they deserve (*distinguuntur secundum reatum*). We must consider, first, venial sin in relation to mortal sin (question 88) and, second, venial sin in its own right (question 89).

On the first topic there are six questions: (1) Is it appropriate to divide venial sin off against mortal sin? (2) Are mortal sin and venial sin distinct in genus? (3) Is a venial sin a disposition toward a mortal sin? (4) Can a venial sin become mortal? (5) Can an aggravating circumstance surrounding a venial sin make it a mortal sin? (6) Can a mortal sin become a venial sin?

#### Article 1

##### Is it appropriate for venial sin to be divided off against mortal sin?

It seems inappropriate for venial sin to be divided off against mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** In *Contra Faustum* 22 Augustine says, “Sin is a word or deed or desire contrary to the eternal law.” But being contrary to the eternal law makes a sin to be mortal (*dat peccato quod sit mortale*). Therefore, every sin is mortal. Therefore, it is not the case that venial sin is divided off against mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** In 1 Corinthians 10: 31 the Apostle says, “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever else you do, do all for the glory of God.” But anyone who sins acts against this precept, since a sin is not done for the glory of God. Therefore, since doing something contrary to a precept is a mortal sin, it seems that anyone who sins commits a mortal sin (*quicumque peccat mortaliter peccat*).

**Objection 3:** As is clear from Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1, if someone clings to an entity by love, he clings to it either by *enjoying* it or by *using* it. But no one who is sinning clings to a changeable good in the sense of using it, since he is not relating it to the good that gives us beatitude—which is what it is, properly speaking, to use something. Therefore, if someone is sinning, then he is enjoying a changeable good. But as Augustine says in 83 *Quaestiones*, “It is human perversity to enjoy things that we should [merely] be using.” Therefore, since ‘perversity’ is a name for mortal sin, it seems that if anyone sins, he commits a mortal sin.

**Objection 4:** Whoever approaches one terminus by that very fact recedes from the other terminus. But if anyone sins, he approaches a changeable good. Therefore, he recedes from the unchangeable good. Therefore, he commits a mortal sin. Therefore, it is inappropriate for venial sin to be divided off from mortal sin.

**But contrary to this:** In *Homilia 41 Super Ioannem* Augustine says, “A crime (*crimen*) is what merits damnation, whereas what is venial does not merit damnation.” But ‘crime’ is a name for mortal sin. Therefore, it is appropriate for venial sin to be divided off against mortal sin.

**I respond:** There are some names which, if they are taken properly, do not seem to be opposites, but which, if they are taken metaphorically, are found to be opposed to one another. For instance, *smile* is not opposed to *dry*. But if *smile* is said metaphorically of a meadow because it is flowering and turning green, then what is smiling is opposed to what is dry.

Similarly, if *mortal* is taken properly, insofar as it is referred to bodily death, then it does not seem to have any opposition to *venial*, or even to belong to the same genus. But if *mortal* is taken metaphorically, as it is in the case of sins, then what is mortal is opposed to what is venial.

For since, as was established above (q. 71, a. 1 and q. 72, a. 5 and q. 74, a. 9), a sin is a sort of sickness of the soul (*quaedam infirmitas animae*), a sin is called mortal by way of similarity to a disease that is called mortal because, as has been explained (q. 72, a. 5), it causes an irreparable defect through the loss of some principle. But as was explained above (q. 87, a. 3), the principle of the spiritual life, i.e.,

life in accord with virtue, is the ordering toward the ultimate end. If this is lost, then, as was explained above (q. 87, a. 3), the defect cannot be repaired by means of any intrinsic principle; instead, it can be repaired only by God's power. For disorders with respect to the means to the end are repaired by the end, in the way that an error with respect to the conclusions is corrected by the truth of the principles. Therefore, a defect in the ordering to the ultimate end cannot be repaired by anything that is more principal than the ultimate end, just like an error with respect to the principles. And so sins of this sort are called *mortal* in the sense of being irreparable.

On the other hand, sins that involve a disorder with respect to the means to the end are reparable as long as the ordering to the ultimate end is preserved. And these sins are called *venial*, since the sin has remission (*peccatum veniam habet*) when one is no longer deserving of punishment (*quando reatus poenae tollitur*), and this ceases when the sin ceases, as has been explained (q. 87, a. 6).

Accordingly, then, mortal sin and venial sin are opposed as the irreparable and the reparable. And I mean reparable or irreparable *by an interior principle*, though not in relation to God's power, which can repair every disease, be it corporeal or spiritual. And it is for this reason that venial sin is appropriately divided off against mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 1:** The division of venial sin from mortal sin is not the division of a genus into species that participate equally in the nature of the genus; instead, it is the division of an analogous term (*divisio analogi*) into things of which it is predicated with respect to *prior* and *posterior*. And so the complete definition of sin, which Augustine is positing here, belongs to mortal sin. By contrast, a sin is called 'venial' in accord with an incomplete nature (*secundum rationem imperfectam*) and in relation to mortal sin, in the way that a being is called an 'accident' in relation to substance and in accord with an incomplete nature of *being*. For a venial sin is not contrary to the law, since one who commits a venial sin (*venialiter peccans*) does not do what the law prohibits, nor does he fail to what the law obliges him to do by a precept. Instead, he acts outside the law (*facit praeter legem*), because he does not observe the mode of reason that the law intends.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Apostle's precept is an affirmative precept and hence does not impose an obligation for all times (*non obligat ad semper*). And so anyone who does not *actually* refer everything he does to the glory of God is not acting contrary to this precept. Therefore, it is sufficient that he *habitually* refer himself and all that belongs to him to God in order that he not always be committing a mortal sin, even if there is some act that he does not *actually* refer to God's glory.

Now venial sin is incompatible only with an *actual ordering* of the act to God's glory and not with a *habitual ordering*. For a venial sin does not exclude charity, which habitually orders one toward God. Hence, it does not follow that one who commits a venial sin thereby commits a mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 3:** One who commits a venial sin clings to a temporal good not in the sense of *enjoying* it, since he does not fix his end in that thing, but in the sense of *using*. For he refers it to God not by an *act* but by a *habit*.

**Reply to objection 4:** A changeable good is taken as a terminus opposed to an unchangeable good only when one's end is fixed in a changeable good. For the means to an end do not have the character of a terminus.

## Article 2

### Do venial sin and mortal sin differ in genus in the sense that some sins are mortal by their genus and some sins are venial by their genus?

It seems that venial sin and mortal sin do not differ in genus in the sense that some sins are mortal by their genus and some sins are venial by their genus:

**Objection 1:** As was explained above (q. 18, a. 2), in the case of human acts, *good by its genus* and *bad by its genus* are said in relation to the the matter or object of the act. But with respect to any object or matter, it is possible to commit a mortal sin and also possible to commit a venial sin. For a man can love a changeable good either less than God, which is what it is to commit a venial sin, or more than God, which is what it is to commit a mortal sin. Therefore, venial sin and mortal sin do not differ in genus.

**Objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 87, a. 3), a sin is called mortal because it is irreparable, whereas a sin is called venial because it is reparable. But to be irreparable belongs to a sin which is committed out of malice and which according to some is called unforgivable, whereas to be reparable belongs to a sin which is committed out of weakness or ignorance and which is called forgivable. Therefore, mortal sin and venial sin differ as a sin committed out of malice and a sin committed out of weakness and ignorance. But as was explained above (q. 77, a. 8), this is for the sins to differ in their *cause* and not in their *genus*. Therefore, venial sin and mortal sin do not differ in genus.

**Objection 3:** It was explained above (q. 74, aa. 3 and 10) that sudden movements of either sensuality or reason are venial sins. But sudden movements are found in every genus of sin. Therefore, there are no sins that are venial by their genus (*non sunt aliqua peccata venialia ex genere*).

**But contrary to this:** In his sermon *De Purgatorio* Augustine enumerates some genera of venial sins and some genera of mortal sins.

**I respond:** The name ‘venial sin’ (*peccatum veniale*) is derived from ‘pardon’ (*venia*).

Therefore, in one sense a sin can be called venial because it receives pardon, and it is in this sense that Ambrose says, “Every sin becomes venial through repentance.” This is called *being venial by outcome* (*veniale ex eventu*).

In another sense, a sin is called venial because it does not have within itself anything that would keep it from receiving pardon, either totally or in part:

(a) *in part*, as when the sin has within itself diminished guilt because, for instance, it is committed out of weakness or ignorance, and this is called *being venial by cause* (*veniale ex causa*); and

(b) *totally*, because it does not destroy the ordering to the ultimate end, and so merits a temporal punishment and not an eternal punishment. And this is the sense of *venial sin* that we have in mind in the present context.

As regards the first two senses, it is clear that they do not have any determinate genus. But *venial sin* in the third sense can have a determinate genus, so that some sins are called *venial by their genus* and some are called *mortal by their genus* insofar as the genus or species of an act is determined by its object.

For when the will carries itself toward something that is incompatible with charity, through which a man is ordered toward his ultimate end, then the sin is mortal by its object (*peccatum ex suo obiecto habet quod sit mortale*). Hence, it is *mortal by its genus*, either because (a) it is contrary to love of God, as in the case of blasphemy, perjury, and other sins of this sort, or because (b) it is contrary to love of neighbor, as with homicide, adultery, and similar sins. Hence, sins of this sort are mortal by their genus.

By contrast, the will sometimes is directed toward (*fertur in*) what contains some disorder within itself but is not contrary to love of God and neighbor—as, for instance, engaging in an idle conversation or superfluous laughter or other things of this sort. And such sins are *venial by their genus*.

However, because, as was established above (q. 18, aa. 4 and 6), moral acts receive their character of goodness and badness not only from their objects but also from the agent’s disposition, it sometimes happens that a sin that is venial by its genus in virtue of its object becomes *mortal on the part of the agent*—either because the agent fixes his ultimate end in the act or because he orders it toward something that is a mortal sin by its genus—as, for instance, when someone orders an idle conversation toward committing adultery. Similarly, it can happen on the part of the agent that a sin that is mortal by its genus becomes venial, viz., *because the act is imperfect*, i.e., not deliberated by reason, which is the proper principle of a bad act. This was explained above (q. 74, a. 10) for the case of sudden movements

of unbelief (*de subitis motibus infidelitatis*).

**Reply to objection 1:** The very fact that someone chooses what is incompatible with divine charity shows that he prefers that thing to divine charity and, as a result, that he loves that thing more than he loves God. And so some sins that are of themselves (*de se*) incompatible with divine charity are such that by their genus something is being loved more than God. And so they are mortal sins by their genus.

**Reply to objection 2:** This argument goes through for a sin that is venial by its cause.

**Reply to objection 3:** This argument goes through for a sin that is venial because of the imperfection of the act.

### Article 3

#### Is a venial sin a disposition toward a mortal sin?

It seems that a venial sin is not a disposition toward a mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** One opposite does not effect a disposition toward the other opposite. But as has been explained (a. 2), venial sin and mortal sin are divided off against one another as opposites. Therefore, a venial sin is not a disposition toward a mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** An act disposes one toward something similar in species to itself; hence, *Ethics 2* says that similar dispositions and habits are generated from similar acts. But as has been explained (a. 2), mortal sin and venial sin differ in genus or species. Therefore, a venial sin does not dispose one toward a mortal sin.

**Objection 3:** If a sin is called venial because it disposes one toward a mortal sin, then it will have to be the case that any acts that dispose one toward a mortal sin are venial sins. But good works dispose one toward a mortal sin, since as Augustine says in *De Regula*, “Pride lies in wait for good works, in order that it might destroy them.” Therefore, even good works will count as venial sins—which is absurd.

**But contrary to this:** Ecclesiasticus 19:1 says, “He who spurns little things will fall little by little.” But he who commits venial sins seems to spurn little things. Therefore, he is little by little disposed toward falling totally through mortal sin.

**I respond:** That which effects a disposition is in some sense a cause (*disponens est quodammodo causa*). Hence, there are two modes of a disposition, corresponding to the two modes of a cause. For there is a certain sort of cause that effects a movement toward the effect *directly*, in the way that what is hot effects heat (*sicut calidum calefacit*). And there is also a sort of cause that effects a movement to the effect *indirectly* by removing an obstacle, in the way that one who removes a column is said to remove the rock that sits on top of it.

Accordingly, there are two ways in which a sinful act (*actus peccati*) effects a disposition toward something:

In one way, *directly*, and in such a case it disposes one toward an act similar in species. And in this first sense, when the two acts in question differ in species, a sin that is venial by its genus does not primarily and *per se* dispose one toward a sin that is *mortal by its genus*. However, a venial sin is in this sense able to dispose one, as a sort of consequence, toward a sin that is *mortal on the part of the agent* (cf. a. 2). For when a disposition or habit is strengthened (*augmentata*) through acts of venial sin, the avid desire to sin grows to such an extent that the one who sins will fix his own end in the venial sin. For anyone who has a habit is such that, insofar as he has the habit, his end is to operate in accord with the habit. And so by committing many venial sins, he will be disposed toward a mortal sin.

In the second way, a human acts disposes one toward something *by removing an obstacle*. And in this sense a sin that is venial by its genus can dispose one toward a sin that is mortal by its genus. For

one who commits a sin that is venial by its genus overlooks some ordering, and by the fact that he becomes accustomed to not submitting his will to the appropriate ordering in smaller matters, he is disposed toward likewise not submitting his will to the ordering that belongs to the ultimate end—and this by choosing a sin that is mortal by its genus.

**Reply to objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 1), venial sin and mortal sin are not divided off from one another as two species of a single genus; rather, they are divided off against one another in the way that *accident* is divided off against *substance*. Hence, just as an accident can be a disposition toward some substantial form, so, too, a venial sin can be a disposition toward some mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 2:** A venial sin is not similar to a mortal sin in species, and yet it is indeed similar to a mortal sin in genus, in the sense that both of them involve a defect with respect to some due ordering—though in different ways, as has been explained.

**Reply to objection 3:** A good work is not *per se* a disposition toward a mortal sin, and yet it can *per accidens* be the matter or occasion of a mortal sin. By contrast, as has been explained, a venial sin disposes one *per se* toward a mortal sin.

#### Article 4

##### Can a venial sin become a mortal sin?

It seems that a venial sin can become a mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** In his exposition of John 3:36 (“He who does not believe the Son shall not see life”), Augustine says, “The smallest sins [read: venial sins] will kill if they are neglected.” But a sin is called mortal from the fact that it kills the soul spiritually. Therefore, a venial sin can become a mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** As was explained above (q. 74, a. 8), a movement of sensuality that precedes reason’s consent is a venial sin, whereas a movement of sensuality that comes after reason’s consent is a mortal sin. Therefore, a venial sin can become a mortal sin.

**Objection 3:** As has been explained (a. 1), venial sin and mortal sin differ from one another as a curable disease and an incurable disease. But a curable disease can become incurable. Therefore, a venial sin can become a mortal sin.

**Objection 4:** A disposition can become a habit. But as has been explained (a. 3), a venial sin is a disposition toward a mortal sin. Therefore, a venial sin can become a mortal sin.

**But contrary to this:** Things that are infinitely different from one another are not transformed into one another. But as is clear from what has been said (q. 87, a. 5), mortal sin and venial sin are infinitely different from one another. Therefore, a venial sin cannot become a mortal sin.

**I respond:** There are three possible ways to understand the claim that a venial sin becomes a mortal sin:

In one way, numerically the same act is first a venial sin and later on a mortal sin. And this is impossible. For a sin consists principally in an act of the will, just as every moral act does. Hence, an act is not called one *morally speaking (moraliter)* if the will changes, even if the action is continuous *naturally speaking (secundum naturam)*. On the other hand, if the will does not change, then it is impossible for a mortal sin to come to be from a venial sin.

In the second possible way to understand the claim, what is a venial by its genus becomes mortal. And this is indeed possible, insofar as the end is fixed in the sin, or insofar as the venial sin has the mortal sin as its end (*inquantum refertur ad mortale peccatum sicut ad finem*). This was explained above (a. 2).

In the third possible way to understand the claim, many venial sins constitute one mortal sin:

Now if this means that a single mortal sin is constituted *as an integral whole (integraliter)* from

many venial sins, then it is false. For all the venial sins in the world cannot deserve as much punishment as a single mortal sin does (*non omnia peccata venialia de mundo possunt habere tantum de reatu quantum unum peccatum mortale*). This is clear as regards the *duration* of the punishment, since, as has been explained (q. 87, aa. 3 and 5), a mortal sin is deserving of an eternal punishment, whereas a venial sin is deserving of a temporal punishment. It is likewise clear as regards the *punishment of loss* (*ex parte poenae damni*), since a mortal sin merits the absence of the vision of God, which, as Chrysostom says, no other punishment can be compared to. It is also clear as regards the *punishment of the senses* (*ex parte poenae sensus*), at least as far as the worm of conscience is concerned—though perhaps as regards the punishment of fire, the punishments are not disproportionate.

On the other hand, if it means that many venial sins make one mortal sin *as a disposition* (*dispositive*), then, as was shown above (a. 3), this is true, in accord with the two modes of disposition in which a venial sin disposes one toward a mortal sin.

**Reply to objection 1:** Augustine is speaking here in that sense according to which many venial sins cause a mortal sin as a disposition.

**Reply to objection 2:** It will never be the same movement of sensuality that preceded reason's consent that becomes a mortal sin; rather, what is a mortal sin is the very act of reason giving its consent.

**Reply to objection 3:** A bodily disease is not an act but a sort of long-lasting disposition; hence, since it is the same disposition, it can change. By contrast, a venial sin is a transient act, which cannot be resumed. And on this score there is no similarity between the two.

**Reply to objection 4:** A disposition that becomes a habit is something imperfect within the same species; for instance, when imperfect scientific knowledge is perfected, it becomes a habit. But a venial sin is a disposition of a different species, like an accident in relation to a substantial form, into which it will never change.

## Article 5

### Can some circumstance surrounding a venial sin make it a mortal sin?

It seems that a circumstance surrounding a venial sin can make it a mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** In his sermon *De Purgatorio* Augustine says, "If the anger is held on to for a long time, and if the drunkenness is continual, they pass into the company of mortal sins." But anger and drunkenness are by their genus venial sins and not mortal sins; otherwise, they would always be mortal sins. Therefore, a circumstance makes a venial sin to be a mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** In 2 *Sentences*, dist. 24 the Master says that taking pleasure [in evil], if it lingers, is a mortal sin (*delectatio si sit morosa est peccatum mortale*), whereas if it does not linger, it is a venial sin. But whether something lingers is a certain circumstance. Therefore, a circumstance makes a mortal sin out of venial sin.

**Objection 3:** Good and evil differ more from one another than do venial sin and mortal sin, both of which are in the genus of the evil. But a circumstance makes a bad act out of a good act, as is clear when someone gives alms for the sake of vainglory. Therefore, *a fortiori*, a circumstance can make a mortal sin out of a venial sin.

**But contrary to this:** Since a circumstance is an accident, its quantity cannot exceed the quantity of the act itself, which the act has by its genus; for a subject is always more eminent than its accident. Therefore, if an act is a venial sin by its genus, then it will not be able to become a mortal sin, since, as is clear from what has been said (q. 87, a. 5), a mortal sin in some sense infinitely exceeds the quantity of a venial sin.

**I respond:** As was explained above when we were talking about circumstances (q. 7, a. 1 and

q. 18, aa. 5 and 10 and 11), a circumstance is, *as such*, an accident of a moral act. However, it is possible for a circumstance to be taken as the *specific difference* of a moral act, in which case it loses its character of being a circumstance and constitutes the species of the moral act. In the case of sins, this occurs when the circumstance adds some deformity of a different genus.

For instance, when a man has sexual intercourse with someone who is not his wife (*cum aliquis accedat ad non suam*), the act is deformed by a deformity opposed to *chastity*. But if he has sexual intercourse with someone who is not his wife and who is instead the wife of another, a deformity is added that is opposed to *justice*, since it is contrary to justice to take what belongs to another. Accordingly, this circumstance constitutes a new species of sin, which is called adultery.

However, it is impossible for a circumstance to make a mortal sin out of a venial sin unless it brings to bear a deformity of some other genus. For it has been explained (a. 1) that a venial sin has a deformity by the fact that it involves a disorder with respect to the means to an end, whereas a mortal sin has a deformity by the fact that it involves a disorder with respect to the ultimate end. Hence, it is clear that a circumstance cannot make a mortal sin out of a venial sin as long as it remains a circumstance; rather, it can do this only when it transfers the sin to another species and becomes in some sense the specific difference of the moral act.

**Reply to objection 1:** Long-lastingness is not a circumstance that draws an act into another species, and neither are frequency or continuity—except perhaps *per accidens* because of something that supervenes. Nor does anything acquire a new species from the fact that it is multiplied or prolonged—unless perhaps something supervenes in the prolonged or multiplied act that varies the species, e.g., disobedience or contempt or something of the sort.

Therefore, one should reply that since anger is a movement of the mind toward harming one's neighbor, if the harm toward which the movement of anger is tending is itself a *mortal sin by its genus*, e.g., homicide or theft, then anger of this sort is a mortal sin by its genus. And if this movement is a venial sin, it is because of the act's imperfection in the sense of its being a sudden movement of sensuality. However, if the movement is long-lasting, then it returns to the nature of its own genus by the consent of reason.

By contrast, if the harm toward which the movement of anger is tending would itself be a *venial sin by its genus*, as when someone who becomes angry with another wills to say some trifling and joking word to him that will mildly upset him; this anger will not be a mortal sin, no matter how long it lasts—except, perhaps, *per accidens*, if, say, a grave scandal or some other such thing should come from it.

As regards drunkenness, one should reply that by its own nature drunkenness is a mortal sin. For it is openly contrary to virtue that a man should, without necessity and solely from his lust for wine, render himself unable to make use of reason, by which a man is ordered toward God and avoids many sins that lie in wait (*multa peccata occurrentia vitat*). And if drunkenness is a venial sin, this is because of some sort of ignorance or weakness, as when a man does not know the power of wine or his own susceptibility, and so does not realize that he is getting inebriated. For in such a case it is only the excessive drinking, and not the drunkenness, that is imputed to him as a sin. However, when he gets drunk frequently, this sort of ignorance cannot be used as an excuse for that fact that his will seemingly chooses to undergo drunkenness rather than to abstain from an excess of wine. Hence, the sin returns to its nature [as a mortal sin].

**Reply to objection 2:** The lingering enjoyment [of evil] (*delectatio morosa*) is not called a mortal sin except in those matters that are mortal sins by their genus. In such matters, if the enjoyment does not linger, the sin is venial by reason of the imperfection of the act, as was explained above in the case of anger. For it is because of the approval of deliberative reason that the anger is said to be long-lasting and the enjoyment is said to linger.

**Reply to objection 3:** As was likewise established above (q. 18, a. 5), a circumstance does not

make a bad act out of a good act unless it constitutes the species of the sin.

## Article 6

### Can a mortal sin become a venial sin?

It seems that a mortal sin can become a venial sin:

**Objection 1:** The distance of a venial sin from a mortal sin is equal to the opposite distance of a mortal sin from a venial sin (*aequaliter distat peccatum veniale a mortali et e contrario*). But as has been explained (a. 5), a venial sin becomes a mortal sin. Therefore, a mortal sin can likewise become a venial sin.

**Objection 2:** Venial sin and mortal sin are claimed to differ from one another by the fact that one who commits a mortal sin loves a creature more than he loves God, whereas one who commits a venial sin loves the creature less than he loves God. But it is possible for someone who commits an act that is a mortal sin by its genus to love the creature less than he loves God—for instance, if someone, not knowing that simple fornication is a mortal sin and something contrary to the love of God, were to commit fornication, yet in such a way that he would have been prepared, out of love of God, to forego the act of fornicating if he had known that by fornicating he was acting contrary to the love of God. Therefore, he will be committing a venial sin. And in this way a mortal sin can become a venial sin.

**Objection 3:** As has been explained (a. 5), good differs from evil more than a venial sin differs from a mortal sin. But an act that is of itself evil (*de se malum*) can become good; for instance, homicide can become an act of justice, as is clear in the case of a judge who has a robber executed (*sicut patet in iudice qui occidit latronem*). Therefore, a mortal sin can become a venial sin.

**But contrary to this:** What is eternal can never become temporal. But mortal sin merits an eternal punishment, whereas venial sin merits a temporal punishment. Therefore, a mortal sin can never become a venial sin.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), mortal sin and venial sin differ from one another as the perfect and the imperfect in the genus *sin*. Now what is imperfect can come to perfection through something added to it. Hence, venial sin, too, is made mortal by having added to it a deformity that belongs to the genus *mortal sin*, as when someone engages in idle conversation with an eye toward committing fornication.

By contrast, what is perfect cannot be made imperfect by any addition. And so a mortal sin cannot become a venial sin by having added to it a deformity that belongs to the genus *venial sin*. For instance, the sin of someone who commits fornication is not diminished by his engaging in idle conversation, but is instead aggravated by the added deformity.

Still, it is possible for what is a mortal sin by its genus to be a venial sin because of the imperfection of the act, in the sense that it does not perfectly fulfill the definition of a moral act—and this because, as is clear from what was said above (a. 2), it is sudden and not deliberated. This occurs through a sort of subtraction, viz., the subtraction of deliberative reason. And since a moral act has its species from deliberative reason, it follows that the species of the act is corrupted (*solvitur*) by such a subtraction.

**Reply to objection 1:** Venial sin differs from mortal sin as the imperfect from the perfect, in the way that a child differs from a man. Now a man comes from a child, but not vice versa. Hence, the argument is not cogent.

**Reply to objection 2:** If the ignorance is such that it excuses one from sin altogether, as is the case with someone who is furious or insane, then someone who commits fornication out of that kind of ignorance commits neither a mortal sin nor a venial sin. On the other hand, if the ignorance is not

invincible, then the ignorance is itself a sin and contains within itself a lack of love for God insofar as the man neglects to learn that by which he can keep himself in the love of God.

**Reply to objection 3:** As Augustine says in his book *Contra Mendacium*, “What is bad in its own right (*secundum se*) cannot be done well for any end.” But homicide is the killing of the innocent, and this can in no way be done well. By contrast, as Augustine points out in *De Libero Arbitrio*, a judge who has a robber executed, or a soldier who kills an enemy of the republic, is not called homicidal (*non appellantur homicidae*).