

Three Articles From The Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas

II-II, Q. 88, Art. 3

Whether All Vows Are Binding?

Objection 1: It would seem that vows are not all binding. For man needs things that are done by another, more than God does, since He has no need for our goods (Ps. 15:2). Now according to the prescription of human laws... a simple promise made to a man is not binding; and this seems to be prescribed on account of the changeableness of the human will. Much less binding therefore is a simple promise made to God, which we call a vow.

Objection 2: Further, no one is bound to do what is impossible. Now sometimes that which a man has vowed becomes impossible to him, either because it depends on another's decision, as when, for instance, a man vows to enter a monastery, the monks of which refuse to receive him.... Therefore a vow is not always binding.

Objection 3: Further, if a man is bound to pay something, he must do so at once. But a man is not bound to pay his vow at once, especially if it be taken under a condition to be fulfilled in the future. Therefore a vow is not always binding.

On the contrary, It is written (Eccles. 5:3, 4): "Whatsoever thou hast vowed, pay it; and it is much better not to vow, than after a vow not to perform the things promised."

I answer that, For one to be accounted faithful one must keep one's promises. Wherefore, according to Augustine... faith takes its name "from a man's deed agreeing with his word".... Cicero gives the same etymology (De Offic. i, 7)]. Now man ought to be faithful to God above all, both on account of God's sovereignty, and on account of the favors he has received from God. Hence man is obliged before all to fulfill the vows he has made to God, since this is part of the fidelity he owes to God. On the other hand, the breaking of a vow is a kind of infidelity. Wherefore Solomon gives the reason why vows should be paid to God, because "an unfaithful . . . promise displeaseth Him" [*Eccles. 5:3].

Reply to Objection 1: Honesty demands that a man should keep any promise he makes to another man, and this obligation is based on the natural law. But for a man to be under a civil obligation through a promise he has made, other conditions are requisite. And although God needs not our goods, we are under a very great obligation to Him: so that a vow made to Him is most binding.

Reply to Objection 2: If that which a man has vowed becomes impossible to him through any cause whatsoever, he must do what he can, so that he have at least a will ready to do what he can. Hence if a man has vowed to enter a monastery, he must endeavor to the best of his power to be received there. And if his intention was chiefly to bind himself to enter the religious life, so that, in consequence, he chose this particular form of religious life, or this place, as being most agreeable to him, he is bound, should he be unable to be received there, to enter the religious life elsewhere. But if his principal intention is to bind himself to this particular kind of religious life, or to this particular place, because the one or the other pleases him in some special way, he is not bound to enter another religious house, if they are unwilling to receive him into this particular one. On the other hand, if he be rendered incapable of fulfilling his vow through his own fault, he is bound over and above to do penance for his past fault...

Reply to Objection 3: The obligation of a vow is caused by our own will and intention, wherefore it is written (Deut. 23:23): "That which is once gone out of thy lips, thou shalt observe, and shalt do as thou hast promised to the Lord thy God, and hast spoken with thy own will and with thy own mouth." Wherefore if in taking a vow, it is one's intention and will to bind oneself to fulfil it at once, one is bound to fulfil it immediately. But if one intend to fulfil it at a certain time, or under a certain condition, one is not bound to immediate fulfilment. And yet one ought not to delay longer than one intended to bind oneself, for it is written (Deut. 23:21): "When thou hast made a vow to the Lord thy God thou shalt not delay to pay it: because the Lord thy God will require it; and if thou delay, it shall be imputed to thee for a sin."

II-II Q. 168, A. 4

Whether there is a sin in lack of mirth (fun?)

Objection 1. It would seem that there is no sin in lack of mirth. For no sin is prescribed to a penitent. But Augustine speaking of a penitent says (De Vera et Falsa Poenit. 15) [Spurious]: "Let him refrain from games and the sights of the world, if he wishes to obtain the grace of a full pardon." Therefore there is no sin in lack of mirth.

Objection 2. Further, no sin is included in the praise given to holy men. But some persons are praised for having refrained from mirth; for it is written (Jeremiah 15:17): "I sat not in the assembly of jesters," and (Tobit 3:17): "Never have I joined myself with them that play; neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness." Therefore there can be no sin in the lack of mirth.

Objection 3. Further, Andronicus counts austerity to be one of the virtues, and he describes it as a habit whereby a man neither gives nor receives the pleasures of conversation. Now this pertains to the lack of mirth. Therefore the lack of mirth is virtuous rather than sinful.

On the contrary, The Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 7; iv, 8) reckons the lack of mirth to be a vice.

I answer that, In human affairs whatever is against reason is a sin. Now it is against reason for a man to be burdensome to others, by offering no pleasure to others, and by hindering their enjoyment. Wherefore Seneca [Martin of Braga, Formula Vitae Honestae: cap. De Continentia] says (De Quat. Virt., cap. De Continentia): "Let your conduct be guided by wisdom so that no one will think you rude, or despise you as a cad." Now a man who is without mirth, not only is lacking in playful speech, but is also burdensome to others, since he is deaf to the moderate mirth of others. Consequently they are vicious, and are said to be boorish or rude, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. iv, 8).

Since, however, mirth is useful for the sake of the rest and pleasures it affords; and since, in human life, pleasure and rest are not in quest for their own sake, but for the sake of operation, as stated in Ethic. x, 6, it follows that "lack of mirth is less sinful than excess thereof." Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. ix, 10): "We should make few friends for the sake of pleasure, since but little sweetness suffices to season life, just as little salt suffices for our meat."

Reply to Objection 1. Mirth is forbidden [to] the penitent because he is called upon to mourn for his sins. Nor does this imply a vice in default, because this very diminishment of mirth in them is in accordance with reason.

Reply to Objection 2. Jeremiah speaks there in accordance with the times, the state of which required that man should mourn; wherefore he adds: "I sat alone, because Thou hast filled me with threats." The words of Tobit refer to excessive mirth; and this is evident from his adding: "Neither have I made myself partaker with them that walk in lightness."

Reply to Objection 3. Austerity, as a virtue, does not exclude all pleasures, but only such as are excessive and inordinate; wherefore it would seem to pertain to affability, which the Philosopher (Ethic. iv, 6) calls "friendliness," or *eutrapelia*, otherwise [known as] wittiness.

Nevertheless he names and defines it thus in respect of its agreement with temperance, to which it belongs to restrain pleasure

I-II, Q. 4, Art. 8

Whether the Fellowship of Friends Is Necessary for Happiness?

Objection 1: It would seem that friends are necessary for Happiness. For future Happiness is frequently designated by Scripture under the name of "glory." But glory consists in man's good being brought to the notice of many. Therefore the fellowship of friends is necessary for Happiness.

Obj. 2: Further, Boethius [*Seneca, Ep. 6] says that "there is no delight in possessing any good whatever, without someone to share it with us." But delight is necessary for Happiness. Therefore fellowship of friends is also necessary.

Obj. 3: Further, charity is perfected in Happiness. But charity includes the love of God and of our neighbor. Therefore it seems that fellowship of friends is necessary for Happiness.

On the contrary, It is written (Wis. 7:11): "All good things came to me together with her," i.e. with divine wisdom, which consists in contemplating God. Consequently nothing else is necessary for Happiness.

I answer that, If we speak of the happiness of this life, the happy man needs friends, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. ix, 9), not, indeed, to make use of them, since he suffices himself; nor to delight in them, since he possesses perfect delight in the operation of virtue; but for the purpose of a good operation, viz. that he may do good to them; that he may delight in seeing them do good; and again that he may be helped by them in his good work. For in order that man may do well, whether in the works of the active life, or in those of the contemplative life, he needs the fellowship of friends.

But if we speak of perfect Happiness which will be in our heavenly Fatherland, the fellowship of friends is not essential to Happiness; since man has the entire fulness of his perfection in God. But the fellowship of friends conduces to the well-being of Happiness. Hence Augustine says (Gen. ad lit. viii, 25) that "the spiritual creatures receive no other interior aid to happiness than the eternity, truth, and charity of the Creator. But if they can be said to be helped from without, perhaps it is only by this that they see one another and rejoice in God, at their fellowship."

Reply Obj. 1: That glory which is essential to Happiness, is that which man has, not with man but with God.

Reply Obj. 2: This saying is to be understood of the possession of good that does not fully satisfy. This does not apply to the question under consideration; because man possesses in God a sufficiency of every good.

Reply Obj. 3: Perfection of charity is essential to Happiness, as to the love of God, but not as to the love of our neighbor. Wherefore if there were but one soul enjoying God, it would be happy, though having no neighbor to love. But supposing one neighbor to be there, love of him results from perfect love of God. Consequently, friendship is, as it were, concomitant with perfect Happiness.