

*Quaestiones Disputatae de Malo*

Question 16, Article 3

**Did the devil in sinning desire equality with God?**

It seems not to be the case that the devil in sinning desired equality with God:

**Objection 1:** In *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, Dionysius says that the evil in the demons consists in a turning away (*aversio*). But he who desires equality or similarity with someone does not turn away from him, but instead approaches him by his desire. Therefore, the devil will not sin if he desires equality with God.

**Objection 2:** In the same place, Dionysius says that the evil in the demons consists in an excess of what is appropriate to them, since they desired to have in an excessive manner that which was appropriate to them. But it was in no way appropriate for them to have equality with God. Therefore, they did not desire equality with God.

**Objection 3:** In *De Casu Diaboli* Anselm says that the devil desired what he would have attained if he had remained faithful (*stessiset*). But he would not have attained equality with God. Therefore, he did not desire equality with God.

**Objection 4:** Someone might reply: He did not desire equality with God absolutely speaking, but he did desire it in a certain respect, viz., he desired to preside over (*praeesse*) the multitude of angels.

Against this: The devil did not sin by desiring what belonged to him according to the order of his nature; to the contrary, as Damascene says, he fell from what he had according to his nature into what lay outside his nature. But to preside over all the other angels is something that belonged to him according to the order of nature, since he was preeminent over the other angels, as Gregory says in one of his homilies. Therefore, he did not sin by desiring to be in charge of the multitude of angels.

**Objection 5:** Someone might reply: He desired to preside over the multitude of angels in the same way that God does.

Against this: John 5:19 says, “Whatever the Father does, the Son also does in like manner.” But from the fact that the Son does whatever the Father does in like manner Augustine proves that the Son is equal, absolutely speaking, to the Father. Therefore, the devil would in this way have been desiring absolute equality with God.

**Objection 6:** Likewise, someone might reply: The devil desired equality with God in the sense of not being subject to God.

Against this: Nothing can exist except by participating in God’s *esse*, which is subsistent *Esse* itself. But everything that participates is subject to that in which it participates. Therefore, if the devil desired not to be subject to God, then it follows that he desired not to exist—which is absurd, since every entity desires to exist.

**Objection 7:** Someone might reply: As *Ethics* 3 says, one can will even the impossible, and so an angel could have willed to exist without being subject to God, even though this is something impossible.

Against this: Even though one can will what is impossible, one cannot will what is not apprehended, since, as *De Anima* 3 says, it is an apprehended good that is the object of the will. But it is not apprehensible that something other than God should exist without being subject to God. For this implies a contradiction, since ‘*esse*’, said of anything other than God, signifies being subject to God in the mode of participation. Therefore, an angel could not in any way have desired not to be subject to God.

**Objection 8:** Someone might reply: That which implicitly involves a contradiction sometimes falls under the will’s desire, since reason gets confused. And so it was because of this sort of confusion in his cognitive power that the devil could have desired something that involves a contradiction.

Against this: Reason’s being confused is either a punishment or a sin. But neither punishment nor

sin preceded the devil's first sin, which is what we are now discussing. Therefore, it is not the case that he was able, because of his reason's being confused, to desire something that implies a contradiction.

**Objection 9:** The devil sinned through free choice, the act of which is to choose. But as *Ethics* 3 says, there is no choice with respect to what is impossible, even if there is willing with respect to what is impossible. Therefore, it is not the case that the devil could have desired not to be subject to God or to be equal to God, given that this is impossible.

**Objection 10:** In *De Natura Boni* Augustine says that sin is not the desire for what is evil, but rather the abandonment of what is good. But nothing can be better than to be equal to God. Therefore, the devil could not have sinned by desiring equality with God in virtue of having abandoned something better.

**Objection 11:** As Augustine says in *De Doctrina Christiana* 1, "Every type of perversity involves either enjoying things that should be made use of or making use of things that should be enjoyed." But if the devil desired equality with God, he did not desire it in the sense that he would use it, since he would not be able to order it toward something better. On the other hand, if he desired it in the sense that he would enjoy it, then he did not sin, since he would be enjoying a thing that should be enjoyed. Therefore, there is no way in which he sinned by desiring equality with God.

**Objection 12:** Just as the intellect is carried toward what is connatural to it, so too is the will. But it is not connatural to the devil to be equal to God. Therefore, he was unable to desire this.

**Objection 13:** A desire is only for what is good. But being equal to God would not have been good for the devil. For if he had been transferred to a higher nature, then he would have lost his own nature—just as if a horse were to become a man, then he would no longer be a horse. Therefore, the devil did not desire equality with God.

**Objection 14:** In *De Summo Bono* Isidore says that the devil did not desire what belonged to God, but instead desired what belonged to himself. But equality belongs especially to God. Therefore, the devil did not desire equality with God.

**Objection 15:** Just as good and evil are opposed to one another, so too are the praiseworthy and the blameworthy. But to be dissimilar to God is reprehensible and blameworthy. Therefore, it is praiseworthy to be maximally similar to God—and this is what is involved in the notion of equality. Therefore, the devil did not sin by desiring equality with God.

**But contrary to this:**

1. The Gloss on Philippians 2:6 ("He thought it not robbery to be equal with God") says, "The devil usurped equality with God for himself." But the passage in question is talking about the Son's equality with the Father, which is an absolute equality. Therefore, the devil desired absolute equality with God.

2. The Gloss on Psalm 68:5 ("Then did I pay that which I took not away") says, "The devil willed to steal divinity, and he lost happiness." Therefore, he desired equality with God.

3. According to Isaiah 14:13, the devil said, "I will ascend into heaven." But this cannot be taken to mean the empyrean heaven, in which he was created along with the other angels. Therefore, it means the heaven of the Holy Trinity. Therefore, he wanted to ascend to equality with God.

4. As can be gathered from Augustine in *De Trinitate* 9, desire outstrips understanding. Hence, the soul, which does not know itself perfectly, desires to know itself perfectly. But an angel's intellect knew that God is infinite. Therefore, his appetite was able to tend toward desiring equality with God.

5. Things that cannot be divided according to their nature can sometimes be divided by the will and reason. Hence, nothing prevents someone from desiring what implies his own non-existence; for instance, nothing prevents someone from desiring not to suffer from unhappiness, even if he does not desire his own non-existence. Thus, in the same way, nothing prevents the devil from desiring equality

with God, even though it follows from this that he himself would not be among the things that exist.

6. In *De Libero Arbitrio* Augustine says that it is especially pleasure (*libido*) that dominates in every sin. But the sin of the devil was the greatest sin, since it was the first in its genus. Therefore, it held the greatest pleasure; therefore, he desired the greatest good, viz., equality with God.

7. In *De Summo Bono* Isidore says that the devil sinned in willing that his own strength should be preserved not by God, but by himself. But it is proper to God to preserve a creature and not to be preserved by anything higher. Therefore, the devil wanted what is proper to God, and in this sense he wanted to be equal to God.

**I respond:** The different authors seem inclined toward the position that the devil sinned by desiring equality with God in an inordinate way.

However, it is impossible that he should have desired equality with God absolutely speaking, given that equality is a relation of two things to one another. The reason for this is clear on the part of both terms.

First, *on the part of God*: Not only is it impossible for anything to be equal to God, but this is also contrary to the very notion of His essence. For through His essence God is subsistent *esse* itself, and it is impossible for there to be two such beings, just as it would not be possible for there to be two separated Forms (*ideae*) of *man*, or two whitenesses subsisting *per se*. Hence, whatever is distinct from God must be something that participates in *esse*, and such a thing cannot be equal to that which is *esse* itself by its essence. Nor could the devil not have known this fact at the beginning of his existence. For it is natural to an intelligence, i.e., a separated substance, that he should understand his own substance; and so he knew by nature that his own *esse* was a participation in some higher *esse*, and his natural cognition had not yet been corrupted by sin. Hence, it follows that his intellect could not have apprehended his own equality with God as something possible. But, as *De Caelo et Mundo* 1 says, no one tends toward that which he apprehends as impossible. Hence, it is impossible that the movement of the devil's will should have tended toward desiring equality with God absolutely speaking.

Second, this is clear *on the part of the angel who has the desire*: The will always desires something that is good either for oneself or for another. Now the claim is not that the devil sinned because he willed equality with God for someone else (for he could have willed without sin that the Son be equal to the Father), but rather that he sinned because he desired equality with God for himself. For in *Ethics* 9 the Philosopher says that everyone desires what is good for himself. But if he is going to become someone else, then he does not now care what happens to that other. Hence, it is clear that the devil did not desire something such that once it came to be, he would not be the same being. But if he were equal to God (even if this were possible), then he would no longer be the same being—for his species would be destroyed if he were transferred to a higher grade of nature. Hence, it follows that he could not have desired absolute equality with God. Moreover, for the same sort of reason, he could not have desired not to be subject to God absolutely speaking. For, first of all, this is impossible and, as is clear from what was said above, he could not have apprehended it as possible. And, second, he would cease to exist if he were not at all subject to God.

Moreover, whatever else can be said about the order of nature, the devil's badness cannot reside in that order; for as *Metaphysics* 9 says, evil is found not in those things that always exist in actuality, but only in those things in which potentiality can be separated from actuality. But all the angels were created in such a way that they had immediately, from the very beginning of their creation, everything that pertained to their natural perfection. However, they were in potentiality with respect to the supernatural goods that they were able to acquire through God's grace. Hence, it follows that the devil's sin was not in anything pertaining to the natural order, but rather had to do with something supernatural.

Therefore, the devil's first sin lay in the fact that in order to attain supernatural beatitude, which consists in seeing God, he did not direct himself toward God and, unlike the holy angels, did not seek his

ultimate perfection from God's grace. Instead, he willed to attain his ultimate perfection through the power of his own nature—not, to be sure, without God's operating on his nature, but rather without God's conferring His grace. Hence, in *De Libero Arbitrio* Augustine claims that the devil's sin lay in his taking pleasure in his own power; and in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 4, he says that if an angelic nature turned toward itself, then it would often happen that the angel is more pleased with himself than with Him by participation in whom he is beatified and, being puffed up, he would fall by pride. And since having ultimate beatitude by one's own power is proper to God, it is clear that in this respect the devil desired equality with God. And in the same way, he also desired not to be subject to God in the sense of not needing God's grace over and beyond the power of his own nature.

This also fits in with what was said above, viz., that the devil sinned not by desiring something evil, but rather by desiring something good, viz., ultimate beatitude, but not in a fitting manner, that is, not in such a way as to attain it by God's grace.

**Reply to objection 1:** In desiring equality with God, the devil did, to be sure, turn toward divine things insofar as he desired what was good in itself. However, he turned away from God with respect to the manner in which he desired it, because he thereby turned away from the order of God's rule (*regula*)—just as, by desiring some changeable good, every sinner turns toward God, through participation in whom all things are good, whereas in desiring this good in a disordered way, he turns away from God, i.e., from the order of God's justice.

**Reply to objection 2:** The evil of the demons consisted in an excess (*excessus*) of what was appropriate for them in the sense that they desired the beatitude for which they had been created and which they would have attained if they had desired it in the proper way. But, as has been explained, they departed from (*excesserunt*) the measure of the proper order.

**Reply to objection 3:** The reply to the third objection is clear from what was just said.

**Reply to objection 4:** One can claim that the devil sinned by wanting to preside over the multitude of angels not in a way not in keeping with the natural order, but rather in such a way that the others would attain through his largesse the beatitude that he wanted to attain through his own nature.

**Reply to objection 5:** The devil did not desire to preside over the lower angels in the way that God does, viz., by being presiding completely as their first principle. Rather, it is in the way just explained that he could have desired to preside as God does.

**Reply to objection 6:** This objection has to do with his not being subject to God in any way at all—something that the devil could not have desired in those matters pertaining to the natural order.

**Reply to objection 7:** The same reply holds for the seventh objection.

**Reply to objection 8:** In the case of the angels there could not have been cognitive confusion—except, perhaps, after their sin. However, as has been explained, it was possible for them to lack knowledge of matters pertaining to grace.

**Reply to objection 9:** An act of willing which is said to be directed toward the impossible is not a perfect act of will that tends toward the attainment of something, since, as has been explained, no one tends toward what he takes to be impossible. Rather, it is a certain imperfect act of will, which is called a wish, by which someone wills what he takes to be impossible if only it were possible. However, this is not the sort of act of will which involves a turning away and a turning toward and in which sin and merit consist.

**Reply to objection 10:** A sin is said to be an abandonment of the good as regards the turning away, which completes the notion of a sin. However, in the case of the devil's sin, the turning away has to do not with what he desires, but rather with the fact that he departs from the order of God's justice. It is in this sense that he abandoned what is better; for the standard of God's justice is better than the standard of an angel's will.

**Reply to objection 11:** Anyone who desires something, wanting it for himself, desires that thing for his own sake and so enjoys himself while making use of the thing he desires. This is the sense in which the devil, desiring equality with God for himself in the way explained above, used things which should have been enjoyed.

**Reply to objection 12:** The will of a sinning angel does, to be sure, tend toward what its nature is ordered to, even if it is a good that exceeds the good of the nature itself. However, the *mode* of desiring does not belong to the nature itself.

**Reply to objection 13:** This argument has to do with a desire for absolute equality with God.

**Reply to objection 14:** Since a movement takes its species from its terminus, the one who is said to desire what is his own is the one who desires something in order that it be his own, even if he desires what belongs to someone else. This is the sense in which the devil desires what is his own, viz., by desiring for himself what is proper to God.

**Reply to objection 15:** To be like God, insofar as this befits each thing, is praiseworthy. However, someone wills to be like God in a perverted way when he desires to be like God but not in a way keeping with the divinely instituted order.

**Reply to first argument for the contrary:** It pertains to Christ's excellence, which the Apostle intends to commend in the cited passage, that he should have absolute equality with the Father. Man and the devil sinned by desiring equality with God in a certain respect and not absolutely speaking.

**Reply to second argument for the contrary:** The same reply holds for the second argument.

**Reply to third argument for the contrary:** As Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram* 3 and 11, some have claimed that the demons who sinned were numbered not among the heavenly angels, but among those angels who had presided over the earthly order. And on this view one could give a literal interpretation of ascending into the corporeal heaven.

However, if the demons who sinned were numbered among the heavenly angels, as is more commonly held, then one should claim that they willed to ascend into the heaven of the Holy Trinity—not, to be sure, by desiring absolute equality with God, but instead by desiring a certain sort of equality, as was explained above.

**Reply to fourth argument for the contrary:** As far as the objects themselves are concerned, the desire cannot outstrip the apprehensive power, since a desire can only be a desire for an apprehended good. However, as far as the intensity of the acts is concerned, desire and cognition are able to exceed one another. For sometimes there is a greater fervor of desire than there is clarity of cognition, and sometimes vice versa.

Moreover, the intellect can have a cognition of something without having it, and the will can desire that thing as something apprehended. In this way, even though the intellect does not have a perfect cognition of itself, nonetheless, since it does apprehend what a perfect cognition is, the will is able to desire such a cognition—just as, conversely, the intellect can apprehend something that does not exist in the will. Accordingly, it does not follow that the devil desired something that he could not have apprehended.

**Reply to fifth argument for the contrary:** When someone wills to *remove something from himself*, he is treating himself as the *terminus a quo*, which need not be preserved in a movement. And so someone can desire not to exist in order that he might lack unhappiness.

By contrast, when someone *desires some good for himself*, he is treating himself as a *terminus ad quem*. And a terminus of this sort must be preserved in a movement. And so no one can desire for himself a good such that if it were had, he would no longer remain in existence.

**Reply to sixth argument for the contrary:** The greatest pleasure is not necessarily associated with the greatest good, but is instead associated with the good that is the greatest among the things

desired.

**Reply to seventh argument for the contrary:** The devil willed that his strength should be preserved by himself not with respect to everything, but rather with respect to his acquiring beatitude through himself.