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The following article shows that Aquinas was not totally without a sense of humor; he at least was willing to entertain a question that was almost certainly posed as a joke (see Objection 3). As is the case with most medieval thinkers, the answer that Aquinas finally gives is not as surprising as the rationale for the answer. By the astute use of distinctions, he is able to give a coherent answer to what is in itself a silly question.

Questions on Whatever (Quaestiones Qudlibitales), Question 12, Article 20.

Whether truth is stronger than either wine, the king or woman.

Objections:

1. It seems that wine (is stronger than the others) because it affects man the most.
2. Again, (it seems) that the king (is stronger than the others) because he sends man to what is most difficult, namely, to that which exposed himself to mortal danger.
3. Again, (it seems) that woman (is stronger), because she commands even kings.

On the other hand is the fact Eszra IV, 35 says that truth is stronger.

I respond that it should be said that this is the question proposed to youths (who were going to be destroyed) in Eszra. One should realize, therefore, that if we consider these four, namely wine, the king, woman and truth, in themselves they are not comparable because they do not belong to the same genus. Nevertheless, if they are considered in relation to some effect, they coincide in one aspect, and so can be compared with each other. Now, this effect in which they come together and can be compared is the affect they have on the human heart. One ought to see, therefore, which among these most affect the heart of man.

One should know, therefore, that man has a certain ability to be affected corporally and another in his animal (nature). This latter is of two kinds, according to the sense faculties and according to the intelligible faculties. The intelligible, indeed, is of two kinds, the practical and the speculative.

Among those things, however, which pertain to affecting according to the disposition of the body, wine has the excellence which makes (someone) speak through drunkenness. Among those things which pertain to the affecting of the sensitive appetite, pleasure is the more excellent and principally sexual (pleasure), and so woman is stronger. Again in practical things, i.e. in human things, which we are able to do, the king has the greatest ability. In speculative things, the highest and most powerful is truth.

Now, however, bodily powers are subjected to animal powers, animal powers to intellectual (ones), and practical intellectual powers to speculative (ones). And so
simpliciter truth is greater in dignity, and more excellent and stronger.

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