

SUMMA THEOLOGIAE
SECUNDA SECUNDAE

QUESTION CVI
DE GRATIA SIVE GRATITUDINE
ON THANKS OR GRATITUDE

Article 6

Utrum oporteat aliquem plus exhibere in recompensatione quam susceperit in beneficio?
Whether one should somehow give more in recompensation than what was received in the benefit?

Objections

Ad sextum sic proceditur. Videtur quod non oporteat aliquem plus exhibere in recompensatione quam susceperit in beneficio. Quibusdam enim, sicut parentibus, nec etiam aequalis recompensatio fieri potest, sicut philosophus dicit, in VIII Ethic. Sed virtus non conatur ad impossibile. Non ergo gratiae recompensatio tendit ad aliquid maius.

Obj. 1: We proceed thus to the sixth article. It seems that it is not necessary that one should give more in recompensation than was received in a benefit. For it is not even possible to make recompensation of even an equal kind in certain cases, such as to one's parents, as the Philosopher states in *Ethics* 8.14. But virtue does not strive for the impossible. Therefore the recompense of thanks does not tend to something greater.

Praeterea, si aliquis plus recompensat quam in beneficio acceperit, ex hoc ipso quasi aliquid de novo dat. Sed ad beneficium de novo datum tenetur homo gratiam recompensare. Ergo ille qui primo beneficium dederat tenebitur aliquid maius

Obj. 2: Further, if someone repays another more than he has received from the other's beneficence, from this fact he gives as though something new. But then on account of this new beneficence given, the recipient owes the recompense of thanks for the favor which the former has

recompensare, et sic procederet in infinitum. Sed virtus non conatur ad infinitum, quia *infinitum aufert naturam boni*, ut dicitur in II Metaphys. Ergo gratiae recompensatio non debet excedere acceptum beneficium.

Praeterea, iustitia in aequalitate consistit. Sed maius est quidam aequalitatis excessus. Cum ergo in qualibet virtute excessus sit vitiosus, videtur quod recompensare aliquid maius accepto beneficio sit vitiosum, et iustitiae oppositum.

Sed contra est quod philosophus dicit, in V Ethic., *refamiliari oportet ei qui gratiam fecit, et rursum ipsum incipere*. Quod quidem fit dum aliquid maius retribuitur. Ergo recompensatio debet tendere ad hoc quod aliquid maius faciat.

Respondeo dicendum quod, sicut dictum est, recompensatio gratiae respicit beneficium secundum voluntatem beneficentis. In quo quidem praecipue hoc commendabile videtur quod gratis beneficium contulit ad quod non tenebatur. Et ideo qui beneficium accepit ad hoc obligatur, ex debito honestatis, ut similiter gratis aliquid impendat. Non autem videtur gratis aliquid impendere nisi excedat quantitatem accepti beneficii, quia quandiu recompensat minus vel aequale, non videtur facere gratis, sed reddere quod accepit. Et ideo gratiae recompensatio semper tendit ut, pro suo posse, aliquid maius retribuat.

Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, sicut dictum est, in recompensatione beneficii magis est considerandus affectus beneficii quam effectus. Si ergo consideremus effectum beneficii quod filius a parentibus accepit, scilicet esse et vivere, nihil

given. Therefore he that first conferred a favor will be bound to a yet greater recompense, and thus it will proceed infinitely. But virtue does not strive for the infinite, since “*the infinite removes the nature of the good*” (Meta. 2.,8). Therefore the recompense of thanks should not exceed the benefit received.

Obj. 3: Further, justice consists in equality. But “more” is a certain excess of equality. Since therefore the excess of virtue is a vice in any matter, it would seem that to give recompense greater than the benefit received is vicious and opposed to justice.

On the contrary, the Philosopher says (*Ethics* 5.5): “*We should repay those who are gracious to us, by being gracious to them return*”, and this is accomplished by paying back something greater. Therefore recompense ought to incline to the doing of something greater.

I answer that it must be said that, as stated above (a.5), the recompense of thanks respects the beneficence received according to the will of the benefactor, in whom there seems to be something commendable, especially for having conferred the benefit freely without being obliged to do so. And therefore the one who receives the beneficence is under a moral obligation to bestow something freely in return. Now he does not seem to bestow something freely, unless he exceeds the quantity of the beneficence received—because so long as he repays something less or equal, he would seem to do nothing freely, but only to return what he has received. Therefore the recompense of thanks always inclines, insofar as possible, to pay back something greater.

Ad.1: as stated above (a.3, ad.5; a.5), in the recompense of beneficences we must consider the affect more than the effect. Therefore, if we consider the effect of beneficence, which a son receives from his parents namely, to exist and to live, the son cannot recompense with anything equal, as

aequale filius recompensare potest, ut philosophus dicit. Si autem attendamus ad ipsam voluntatem dantis et retribuētis, sic potest filius aliquid maius patri retribuere, ut Seneca dicit, in III de Benefic. Si tamen non posset, sufficeret ad gratitudinem recompensandi voluntas.

Ad secundum dicendum quod debitum gratitudinis ex caritate derivatur, quae, quanto plus solvitur, tanto magis debetur, secundum illud Rom. XIII, *nemini quidquam debeatis, nisi ut invicem diligatis*. Et ideo non est inconveniens si obligatio gratitudinis interminabilis sit.

Ad tertium dicendum quod sicut in iustitia quae est virtus cardinalis, attenditur aequalitas rerum, ita in gratitudine attenditur aequalitas voluntatum, ut scilicet sicut ex promptitudine voluntatis beneficus aliquid exhibuit ad quod non tenebatur, ita etiam ille qui suscepit beneficium aliquid supra debitum recompenset.

the Philosopher states (*Ethics* 8.14). But if we attend to the will of the giver and of the one making repayment, thus it is possible for the son to pay back something greater to his father, as Seneca declares (*De Benef.* 3). If, however, he were not able to do so, the will to make recompense would be sufficient for gratitude.

Ad.2: The debt of gratitude flows from charity, which the more it is paid the more it is due, according to Rom. 13:8, *Owe no man anything, but to love one another*. Wherefore it is not unreasonable if the obligation of gratitude has no limit.

Ad.3: Just as in justice, which is a cardinal virtue, we attend to the equality of things, so too in gratitude we attend to the equality of wills, namely inasmuch as, on the one hand, the benefactor of from the initiative of his own will gave something he was not bound to extend, so too on the other hand the beneficiary repays something over and above what he has received.