

I. THE HUMAN VIRTUES

Human virtues are firm attitudes, stable dispositions, habitual perfections of intellect and will that govern our actions, order our passions, and guide our conduct according to reason enlightened by faith. They make possible ease, self-mastery, and joy in leading a morally good life. The virtuous man is he who freely practices the good. The moral virtues are acquired by human effort (not infused). They are the fruit and seed of morally good **acts**; they **dispose** all the powers of the human being for communion with divine love. (dispose one to receive grace if not in grace) Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called "cardinal" (*cardinalis* – that which serves as a pivot); all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. "If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom's] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage." (Wis. 8) These virtues are praised under other names in many passages of Scripture.

heroic prudence

HYPERLINK "javascript:openWindow('cr/1806.htm');" 1806 *Prudence* is the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; "the prudent man looks where he is going." (Prov. 14:15) Prudence is "right reason in action," writes St. Thomas Aquinas, following Aristotle. It is not to be confused with timidity or fear, nor with duplicity or dissimulation. It is called *auriga virtutum* (the charioteer of the virtues); it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. The prudent man determines and directs his conduct in accordance with this judgment. With the help of this virtue we apply moral principles to particular cases.

The intellectual virtue of prudence has the task of recognizing possible means of action in order to achieve a determined end (the good), of making a correct judgment between those means as to which one is the best and of inciting the moral virtues to act in accordance with that judgment. This virtue is heroic when, by means of the Gifts of Knowledge and Counsel, its task is performed, notwithstanding difficult circumstances, easily, immediately and with joy, without human reasoning or consultation. (ex. of mother with child in danger, St. Francis de Sales, St. Pio of Pietrelcina) Furthermore, since prudence guides the other virtues, then when one of the other cardinal virtues is heroic, prudence will also be heroic.

heroic justice

HYPERLINK "javascript:openWindow('cr/1807.htm');" 1807 *Justice* is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men

disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. "You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor."(Lev. 19:15)

The heroic virtue, under the action of the Gifts of Counsel and Fortitude, gives one his due without common reasoning, with joy and without fear of losing one's own goods, dignity or even one's life.

Ex. St. Thomas More: "Although he could have taken advantage of his job as lawyer to grow rich on bribes, he never did, as those who tried to convict him of dishonesty found to their cost. Coupled with honesty was a great love for justice, demonstrated in Thomas's remark that, "if the parties will at my hands call for justice, then all were it my father stood on one side, and the devil on the other, his cause being good, the devil should have right!" (testimony of Roper 45, HYPERLINK "http://www.wf-f.org/07-3-ThomasMore_Pfang.html" http://www.wf-f.org/07-3-ThomasMore_Pfang.html)

(Some virtues that fall under justice and can also arrive at heroism are religion, piety, observance, gratitude, truthfulness, friendship, affability, mercy, clemency and liberality.)

heroic fortitude

HYPERLINK "[javascript:openWindow\('cr/1808.htm'\);](http://www.wf-f.org/07-3-ThomasMore_Pfang.html)" 1808 *Fortitude* is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause.

- "only by passing through many tribulations can we enter the kingdom of God."

- constancy of the saint in book of Revelation
- “the kingdom of heaven *suffereth violence*, and the violent bear it away.”

We consider heroic fortitude under its two aspects of affronting difficulties (active) and tolerating evils (passive).

The common virtue of fortitude inclines one to **continue forward** (*sempre avanti*) through spiritual and temporal difficulties that present themselves as one habitually acts according to right reason and for a supernatural end in all things: in observing the Commandments and the Counsels. Heroic fortitude, aided by the Gift of Fortitude, inclines one to affront every conceivable difficulty and danger, in a manner that is prompt and eager and without human reasoning.

The second aspect, that of **tolerating evils**, is done by means of common fortitude which inclines and aids one to be patient without complaint and to suffer evils, pains, hatred and other trials permitted by God, for the love of Him. Heroic fortitude does the same, but with respect to more grievous trials, especially death, and assisted by the corresponding Gift and the Gift of Counsel, one may suffer promptly, gratefully, peacefully and joyfully for the love of God.

heroic temperance

HYPERLINK "javascript:openWindow('cr/1809.htm');" 1809 *Temperance* is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will's mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: "Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites." (Sir. 18:30) In the New Testament it is called "moderation" or "sobriety." We ought "to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world." (Titus 2:12)

The sign of the common virtue of temperance is the moderation of pleasure, whatever kind it may be, for a supernatural end. The same virtue practiced heroically is elevated by the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, without human reasoning, even with regard to licit

things and with perfect self-denial. We have especially the example of Christ, who was born in a stable and lived and labored in poverty and abstinence.

signs of heroic humility

Humility, that virtue particularly loved by God, consists in disregarding one's own excellence as dictated by right reason. Humility avoids both excess and defect with regard to the desire for honors. (excess, striving after important offices in order to receive honor; defect, not accepting offices when it is clearly God's will in order to avoid honor, or not using one's talents for God's glory out of false humility)

There are three signs of heroic humility:

1. Heroic humility is the same habit as the common virtue, but it is aided by the Gift of Fear, as well as Wisdom and Counsel, to disregard one's own excellence in all things and before all men, be they superiors, equals or inferiors, and all this done promptly, easily and with joy.
2. Heroic humility hides things regarding the supernatural order from honor and esteem.
3. Heroic humility often flies from licit honors and dignities.

signs of heroic chastity

Avoidance from all sins against purity, internal and external, according to the virginal, spousal, and widowed states.

Signs of heroic chastity in any of these three states is the due flight of all sins against purity of mind or body for a supernatural end, without human reasoning, easily, promptly and with joy, even at the cost of great inconvenience or life itself. (e.g. St. Maria Goretti)

One need not necessarily be seriously threatened with bodily harm or death in order to give evidence of heroic chastity, but it is necessary to have this interior disposition. The interior disposition can be known if the person in question has overcome great temptation against the virtue of chastity without yielding. Anyone who employs the useful means of prayer, fasting, corporal penances of various kinds and is solicitous in warding off temptations against chastity for a significant period of time, demonstrates to possess the virtue of chastity in an heroic degree.