

QUESTION 46

Foolishness

Next we have to consider foolishness or folly (*stultitia*), which is opposed to wisdom. And on this topic there are three questions: (1) Is foolishness opposed to wisdom? (2) Is foolishness a sin? (3) Which capital sin is foolishness traced back to?

Article 1

Is foolishness opposed to wisdom?

It seems that foolishness is not opposed to wisdom:

Objection 1: It seems that being unwise (*insipientia*) is directly opposed to wisdom (*sapientia*). But foolishness does not seem to be the same thing as being unwise, since being unwise, like wisdom, seems to have to do only with divine things, whereas foolishness has to do with both divine and human things. Therefore, foolishness is not opposed to wisdom.

Objection 2: It is not the case that one of two opposites is a way of arriving at the other opposite. But foolishness is a way of arriving at wisdom; for 1 Corinthians 3:18 says, “If anyone among you seems to be wise in this world, let him become foolish, in order that he might be wise.” Therefore, foolishness is not opposed to wisdom.

Objection 3: It is not the case that one of two opposites is a cause of the other. But wisdom is a cause of foolishness. For Jeremiah 10:14 says, “Every man has become a fool from his knowledge”—and wisdom is a certain sort of knowledge. Again, Isaiah 47:10 says, “Your wisdom and your knowledge, this is what has deceived you”—and being deceived pertains to foolishness. Therefore, foolishness is not opposed to wisdom.

Objection 4: In *Etymologia* Isidore says, “The fool is one who is not moved to sadness by disgrace, and who is not moved by injury.” But as Gregory points out in *Moralia* 10, these are marks of spiritual wisdom. Therefore, foolishness is not opposed to wisdom.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 2 Gregory says that the gift of wisdom is given to guard against foolishness.

I respond: The name *stultitia* seems to be taken from ‘stupor’ or ‘dullness’ (*stupor*), and this is why in the *Etymologia* Isidore says, “One who is foolish (*stultus*) remains through dullness unmoved.” And as he says in the same place, foolishness (*stultitia*) differs from fatuousness (*fatuitas*) because foolishness implies dullness of the heart and bluntness of sensibility (*importat hebetudinem cordis et obtusionem sensuum*), whereas fatuousness implies the total lack of spiritual sensibility.

And so foolishness is appropriately opposed to wisdom. For as Isidore says in the same place, *sapientia* is taken from ‘sapid’ or ‘tasty’ (*sapor*), since just as the sense of taste (*gustus*) is able to distinguish the flavor of different foods, so the wise man has the power to make distinctions among things and among causes. Hence, it is clear that foolishness is opposed to wisdom as its contrary, whereas fatuousness is opposed to wisdom as its pure negation. For the fatuous man lacks a sense of judgment, whereas the foolish man has a sense of judgment, but a dull one, and the wise man has a subtle and perspicacious sense of judgment.

Reply to objection 1: As Isidore says in the same place, “the unwise man (*insipiens*) is contrary to the wise man (*sapiens*) because he does not have a taste for discretion and good sense.” This is why a lack of wisdom (*insipientia*) seems to be the same as foolishness (*stultitia*).

Still, someone seems to be foolish mainly when he is deficient in rendering judgments that have to do with the highest cause. For if someone is deficient in a judgment concerning some ordinary matter, then he is not called ‘foolish’ because of this.

Reply to objection 2: Just as, in the way explained above (q. 45, a. 1), there is a bad wisdom,

which is called ‘the wisdom of the world’ because it takes some earthly good as the highest cause and ultimate end, so, too, there is likewise a ‘good foolishness’, opposed to this bad wisdom, through which one disdains earthly things. And it is this sort of foolishness that the Apostle is talking about.

Reply to objection 3: As is clear from the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 3:19, the wisdom of the world is a ‘wisdom’ that deceives one and makes him a fool in the sight of God.

Reply to objection 4: Not being moved by injuries sometimes happens because a man has a taste only for heavenly things and not for earthly things. Hence, this pertains not to ‘worldly foolishness’ (*pertinet ad stultitiam mundi*), but to the wisdom of God, as Gregory points out in the same place.

On the other hand, sometimes this happens because a man is simply foolish or stupid with respect to everything, as in the case of the mindless, who do not recognize what an injury is. And this pertains to foolishness absolutely speaking.

Article 2

Is foolishness a sin?

It seems that foolishness is not a sin:

Objection 1: No sin exists in us by nature. But some individuals are naturally foolish. Therefore, foolishness is not a sin.

Objection 2: As Augustine explains, every sin is voluntary. But foolishness is not voluntary. Therefore, it is not a sin.

Objection 3: Every sin is opposed to a divine precept. But foolishness is not opposed to any precept. Therefore, foolishness is not a sin.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 1:32 says, “The prosperity of fools will destroy them.” But no one is destroyed except by sin. Therefore, foolishness is a sin.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), foolishness implies a certain dullness of sensibility in judging (*stupor sensus in iudicando*), and mainly with respect to the highest cause, which is the ultimate end and highest good. Now there are two ways in which a man can suffer from a dullness in judging:

In the first way, from a *natural indisposition*, as is clear in the case of mindless individuals. And this sort of foolishness is not a sin.

In the second way, insofar as a man immerses his sensibilities in earthly things, because of which his sensibility is rendered incapable of perceiving divine things—this according to 1 Corinthians 2:14, “The animalistic man does not perceive the things that belong to the spirit of God,” in the same way that sweet things are not appetizing to a man whose sense of taste has been infected by a bad humor. And this sort of foolishness is a sin.

Reply to objection 1: This makes clear the reply to the first objection.

Reply to objection 2: Even though no individual wills foolishness, he does nonetheless will things which result in his being foolish, viz., by drawing his sensibility away from spiritual things and immersing it in earthly things. The same thing happens in the case of other sins as well. For instance, the lustful individual wills the pleasure without which there is no sin—even though he does not will the sin absolutely speaking, since he wills to enjoy the pleasure without the sin.

Reply to objection 3: Foolishness is opposed to the precepts that are given concerning the contemplation of truth. We talked about these precepts above when we were discussing [the gifts of] knowledge and understanding (q. 16).

Article 3

Is foolishness a child of lust?

It seems that foolishness is not a child of lust (*stultitia non est filia luxuriae*):

Objection 1: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory enumerates the children of lust, but foolishness is not contained among them. Therefore, foolishness does not proceed from lust.

Objection 2: In 1 Corinthians 3:19 the Apostle says, “The wisdom of this world is foolishness in the sight of God.” But as Gregory says in *Moralia* 10, “The wisdom of the world is to cover the heart with contrivances,” and this belongs to duplicity. Therefore, foolishness is more a child of duplicity than a child of lust.

Objection 3: Out of anger some individuals mainly turn to fury and madness, which belong to foolishness. Therefore, foolishness arises from anger rather than from lust.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 7:22 says, “Immediately he follows her,” viz., the prostitute, “not knowing that he is being drawn like a fool to bonds.”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 2), foolishness, insofar as it is a sin, comes from one’s spiritual sensibility being blunted, so that one is unable to judge spiritual things. But a man’s sensibility is especially plunged into earthly things by lust, which has to do with the greatest of pleasures, by which the soul is absorbed most of all. And so the foolishness that is a sin arises especially from lust.

Reply to objection 1: It belongs to foolishness that a man has an aversion to God and His gifts. This is why Gregory enumerates two children of lust that pertain to foolishness, viz., the hatred of God and despair about the future life (*desperatio futuri saeculi*), thus dividing foolishness into two parts, as it were.

Reply to objection 2: The passage from the Apostle should be understood to be talking about the essence of foolishness and not its cause (*non est intelligendum causaliter, sed essentialiter*), because the wisdom of the world is itself foolishness in the sight of God. Hence, it is unnecessary for anything pertaining to the wisdom of the world to be a cause of this foolishness.

Reply to objection 3: As was explained above (*ST* 1 2, q. 48, a. 2), anger by its sharpness changes the nature of the body most of all. Hence, it especially causes the sort of foolishness which arises from a corporeal impediment.

However, as has been explained, the sort of foolishness which arises from a spiritual impediment, viz., from the mind’s immersion in earthly things, comes especially from lust.