285 Perfection (*Perfectus*)

Noah is read to be the first perfect man, Gen. 6[:9]: “Noe was a just and perfect man,” therefore “he walked with God.” Therefore, he merited that he would work the salvation of others. For in the flood the saved escaped through him. So, they in this world who are perfected to the teaching and are ordained as an example of others. Where also in philosophy,[[1]](#endnote-1) those animals are said to be perfect which can help and protect others. Wherefore Augustine, *De civitate*, book 8, c. 7,[[2]](#endnote-2) great is the joy, when a thing is perfected. For the beginnings are full of solicitude, until they are perfected to the end. Because of this Christ concluded, Matt. 5[:48]: “Be you perfect, as also your heavenly Father.” Avicenna in book 9, of his *Metaphysica*, c. 29,[[3]](#endnote-3) says that a thing perfected takes its perfection from that which it has been made. Chrysostom, *Super Mattheum*, homily 13,[[4]](#endnote-4) says the half of good is, to leave off evil, but not follow the good; the perfect however is, that not only does he flee evil, but also to do the good. To which perfection Christ invited the young man, Matt. 19[:21]: “If you will be perfect, go sell what you have, and come follow me, and you shall have treasure in heaven.” Wherefore the Philosopher says as above,[[5]](#endnote-5) before that imperfect animals do not seek others than they have near them. Nor are they moved to another perfect place. Truly they are moved from places and seek others than they have imperfect. So, the imperfect in this present life do not seek unless the presence of the perfect, truly they desire the heavenly. So, Christ wished that the aforesaid young man would be perfect, Eccli. 31[:8-10]: “Blessed is the rich man that is found without blemish,” up to “he was found perfect.”

¶ Again, the Lord said to Abraham, Gen. 17[:1]: “Walk before me and be perfect.”

Again, the Philosopher, *De animalibus*,[[6]](#endnote-6) the more imperfect animals have many organs, as is evident concerning worms which have many feet. But man, who is the most perfect animal, has only two feet. So, the more imperfect in this world have many ministers and possessions, but few perfections. Wherefore Christ wanted that his followers not take the road with him. Augustine, *Super Genesim*, homily 5,[[7]](#endnote-7) says that Lot exiting from Sodom could not immediately be saved on the mountain, but in the little city Segor he was saved. For to the more perfect it is to say that of Psal. [120:1]: “I have lifted up my eyes to the mountains, from whence help shall come to me.” Pope Leo, in a *Sermone*, of the first Sunday of Lent,[[8]](#endnote-8) this is the true justice of the perfect, that no one presumes himself to be perfect, nor from the road stopping in temptation, there they fall in peril of the failing, where they have put down their desire for going forward. Because therefore no one, is so perfect or hallowed that he can do another good work for our imperfection.

1. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 8.4 1756b33-1157a7 (Barnes 2:1828): This kind of friendship, then, is perfect both in respect of duration and in all other respects, and in it each gets from each in all respects the same as, or something like what, he gives; which is what ought to happen between friends. Friendship for the sake of pleasure bears a resemblance to this kind; for good people too are pleasant to each other. So too does friendship for the sake of utility; for the good are also useful to each other. Among men of these inferior sorts too, friendships are most permanent when the friends get the same thing from each other (e.g. pleasure), and not only that but also from the same source, as happens between readywitted people, not as happens between lover and beloved. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Augustine, *De civitate Dei* 7.7 (PL 41:200): Major enim laetitia est, cum res quaeque perficitur: sollicitudinis autem plena sunt coepta, donec perducantur ad finem, quem qui aliquid incipit, maxime appetit, intendit, exspectat, exoptat; nec de re inchoata, nisi terminetur, exsultat. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Avicenna Latinus, *Liber de Philosophia Prima scientia divina* 9.2.40 ed. S. Van Riet (Louvain: Peeters, 1977, 3:456): Id enim quod factum est acquirit suam perfectionem ab eo a quo factum est; inconveniens est igitur ut a converso perficiat substantiam sui agentis; perfectio enim causati inferior est perfectione causae agentis. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. (Pseudo-)Chrysostom, *Opus imperfectum in Mattheum* hom. 13 ex cap. 5 (PG 56:703): Dimidium enim bonum est, hominem discedere a malo, et non sequi bonum: perfectum est autem, un non solum fugiat malum, sed etiam faciat bonum. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* 10.3 1173a29-34 (Barnes 2:1854-1855): Again, they assume that the good is perfect while movements and comings into being are imperfect, and try to exhibit pleasure as being a movement and a coming into being. But they do not seem to be right even in saying that it is a movement. For speed and slowness are thought to be proper to every movement, and if a movement, e.g. that of the heavens, has not speed or slowness in itself, it has it in relation to something else; but of pleasure neither of these things is true. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Aristotle, *The History of Animals* 1.5 490a27-33 (Barnes 1:780): All creatures that are capable of motion move with four or more points of motion; the blooded animals with four only: as, for instance, man with two hands and two feet, birds with two wings and two feet, quadrupeds and fishes severally with four feet and four fins. Creatures that have two winglets or fins, or that have none at all like serpents, move all the same with not less than four points of motion; for there are four bends in their bodies as they move, or two bends together with their fins. Bloodless and many footed animals, whether furnished with wings or feet, move with more than four points of motion; [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Augustine, *Quaestiones in Genesim*, 47 (PL 34:560): [Ib. XIX, 30.] Timuit enim habitare in Segor. Infirmitati ejus Dominus et timori concesserat civitatem quam Loth ipse delegerat, et in ea promiserat ei securitatem, quod propter illum parceret civitati: tamen etiam ibi esse timuit; ita fides ejus non magni roboris fuit. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Leo I, *Sermones in Praecipuis totius anni festivitatibus*, 40.1 (PL 54:268): ET HAEC EST perfectorum vera justitia, ut numquam praesumant se esse perfectos, ne ab itineris nondum finiti intentione cessantes, ibi incidant deficiendi periculum, ubi proficiendi deposuerint appetitum. Quia ergo nemo nostrum, dilectissimi, tam perfectus et sanctus est, ut perfectior sanctiorque esse non possit, [↑](#endnote-ref-8)