

## QUESTION 125

### The Vice of Fear

Next we have to consider the vices opposed to fortitude: first, fear (*timor*) (question 125); second, fearlessness (*intimiditas*) (question 126); and third, daring (*audacia*) (question 127).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is fear a sin? (2) Is it opposed to fortitude? (3) Is it a mortal sin? (4) Does it excuse or diminish a sin?

#### Article 1

##### Is fear a sin?

It seems that fear (*timor*) is not a sin:

**Objection 1:** As was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 23, a. 4 and q. 41, a. 1), fear (*timor*) is a passion. But as *Ethics* 2 says, “We neither praise nor blame the passions.” Therefore, since a sin is blameworthy, it seems that fear (*timor*) is not a sin.

**Objection 2:** Nothing that is commanded by the divine law is a sin, since, as Psalm 18:8 says, “The law of the Lord is unspotted.” But fear is commanded by God’s law; for Ephesians 6:5 says, “Servants, obey those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling (*cum timore et tremore*).” Therefore, fear is not a sin.

**Objection 3:** Nothing that is a sin exists naturally in a man, since, as Damascene says in *De Fide Orthodoxa* 2, a sin is “contrary to nature.” But it is natural to a man to be afraid; hence, in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “An individual would be insane, or at least insensible to pain, if nothing frightened him, not even earthquakes or deluges.” Therefore, fear is not a sin.

**But contrary to this:** In Matthew 10:28 our Lord says, “Do not fear those who kill the body.” And Ezechiel 2 says, “Do not be afraid of them or fear their words.”

**I respond:** In the case of human acts, something is said to be a sin because of some disorder; for as is clear from what was said above (q. 109, a. 2 and q. 114, a. 1), the goodness of a human act consists in some sort of order, and the appropriate order is that the appetite should be subject to the rule of reason.

Now reason dictates that some things are to be avoided and some things are to be pursued, and, among the things to be avoided, it dictates that some are to be avoided more than others, and, similarly, among the things to be pursued, it dictates that some are to be pursued more than others, and to the degree to which a good is to be pursued, so to that degree some opposed evil is to be avoided. And so it is that reason dictates that certain goods are to be pursued more than certain evils are to be avoided.

Therefore, when reason dictates that certain things ought to be endured in order not to lose out on other things that are to be pursued to a greater degree, and when the appetite then avoids those things, the fear is disordered and has the character of a sin. By contrast, when the appetite in its fear draws back from what, according to reason, ought to be avoided, then the appetite is not disordered and there is no sin.

**Reply to objection 1:** Fear as it is commonly understood implies by its nature avoidance in general, and so on this score does not imply the notion *good* or the notion *bad*. And the same holds for all the other passions. And that is why the Philosopher says that the passions are neither praiseworthy nor blameworthy, i.e., that it is not those who are angry or fearful who are either praised or blamed, but rather those who behave in either a well-ordered way or a disordered way in the presence of these passions.

**Reply to objection 2:** The fear that the Apostle is talking about here is consonant with reason, so that, namely, a servant should fear falling short of the compliance that he should extend to his master.

**Reply to objection 3:** Reason dictates that evils should be avoided that are such that (a) a man cannot resist them and (b) nothing good comes to him from his enduring them. And so the fear of such

evils is not a sin.

## Article 2

### Is the sin of fear opposed to fortitude?

It seems that the sin of fear is not opposed to fortitude (*peccatum timoris non opponatur fortitudini*):

**Objection 1:** As was established above (q. 123, a. 4), fortitude has to do with the danger of death. But the sin of fear does not always involve the danger of death; for a Gloss on Psalm 127:1 (“All the blessed who fear the Lord ...”) says, “Human fear is the fear by which we are afraid to undergo hardships of the flesh or to lose the goods of the world.” And a Gloss on Matthew 26:44 (“He prayed the third time with the same words ...”) says, “Bad fear is of three kinds: fear of death, fear of contempt, and fear of pain.” Therefore, the sin of fear is not opposed to fortitude.

**Objection 2:** The main thing that is commended in fortitude is exposing oneself to the danger of death. But sometimes an individual exposes himself to death out of fear of servitude or fear of ignominy, in the way that in *De Civitate Dei* 1 Augustine tells the story of Cato, who handed himself over to death in order not to incur servitude to Caesar. Therefore, the sin of fear is not opposed to fortitude but instead bears a similarity to it.

**Objection 3:** Every instance of despair arises from some sort of fear. But as was established above (q. 20, a. 1 and *ST* 1-2, q. 40, a. 4), despair is opposed to hope rather than to fortitude. Therefore, neither is the sin of fear opposed to fortitude.

**But contrary to this:** In *Ethics* 2 and 3 the Philosopher claims that timidity (*timiditas*) is opposed to fortitude.

**I respond:** Every instance of fear proceeds from love, since no one is afraid of anything except a contrary of what he loves. Now love is not determined to any genus of virtue or vice. Rather, well-ordered love is included in every virtue, since every virtuous individual loves the proper good of virtue, whereas disordered love is included in every sin, since a disordered desire proceeds from a disordered love.

Similarly, disordered fear is included in every sin; for instance, the avaricious individual fears the loss of money, the intemperate individual fears the loss of pleasure, and so on for the others. But as is shown in *Ethics* 3, the principal fear is the fear of the danger of death, and so a disorder in this sort of fear is opposed to fortitude, which has to do with the danger of death. And it is for this reason that timidity (*timiditas*) is said, by way of antonomasia, to be opposed to fortitude.

**Reply to objection 1:** These passages are speaking of disordered fear taken in general, which can be opposed to diverse virtues.

**Reply to objection 2:** As is clear from what has been said above (*ST* 1-2, q. 1, a. 3 and q. 18, a. 6), human acts are principally judged by their ends. Now being a courageous individual involves exposing oneself to the danger of death for the sake of some good, but someone who exposes himself to the danger of death in order to avoid servitude or something difficult is being conquered by fear, and this is contrary to fortitude. Hence, in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “To die in order to avoid poverty or ardent longing or something disagreeable belongs not to the courageous but to the cowardly; for to evade hardships is a mark of softness.”

**Reply to objection 3:** As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 45, a. 2), just as hope is the beginning of daring, so fear is the beginning of despair. Hence, just as hope is presupposed for the courageous individual, who uses daring with moderation, so, conversely, despair proceeds from some sort of fear.

However, it is not necessary for a given instance of despair to proceed from just any sort of fear;

instead, it proceeds from a fear which is of the same kind. Now the despair that is opposed to hope is traced back to a different genus, viz., divine matters, from the fear that is opposed to fortitude, which has to do with the danger of death. Hence, the objection does not go through.

### Article 3

#### Is fear a mortal sin?

It seems that fear is not a mortal sin:

**Objection 1:** As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q. 23, aa. 1 and 4), fear exists in the irascible power, which is a part of the sentient appetite (*pars sensualitatis*). But as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 73, aa. 3-4), only venial sin exists in the sentient appetite. Therefore, fear is not a mortal sin.

**Objection 2:** Every mortal sin turns one's heart completely away from God. But fear does not do this, since a Gloss on Judges 7:3 (... anyone who is timorous ...) says, "A timid individual is one who fears a hostile encounter at first sight and yet is not afraid in his heart, but is able to gather himself and become stouthearted." Therefore, fear is not a mortal sin.

**Objection 3:** A mortal sin draws one back not only from perfection but also from a precept. But fear draws one back only from perfection and not from a precept; for a Gloss on Deuteronomy 20:8 ("What man is there who is fearful and fainthearted?") says, "This teaches us that no one can take up the perfection of contemplation or spiritual warfare if he is still afraid of being stripped of earthly riches." Therefore, fear is not a mortal sin.

**But contrary to this:** The punishment of hell is fitting only for a mortal sin. But this punishment is fitting for the timid—this according to Apocalypse 21:8: "But the cowardly and the unbelieving and the abominable ... will have their portion in the pool that burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death". Therefore, timidity is a mortal sin.

**I respond:** As has been explained (a. 1), fear is a sin insofar as it is disordered, so that, namely, it runs away from what, according to reason, should not be run away from.

Now the disorder in an instance of fear sometimes resides just in the sentient appetite without the added consent of the rational appetite, and in such a case there can be only a venial sin and not a mortal sin.

By contrast, sometimes the disorder in an instance of fear reaches all the way to the rational appetite, which is called the will and which by its free choice runs away from something in a way that does not accord with reason. And this sort of disorder in an instance of fear is sometimes a mortal sin and sometimes a venial sin. For instance, if because of the fear by which he runs away from the danger of death, or from any other temporal evil, an individual is disposed in such a way that he does something forbidden or fails to do something that is commanded by divine law, then fear of this sort is a mortal sin. Otherwise, it will be a venial sin.

**Reply to objection 1:** This argument goes through for the case of an instance of fear that remains within the sentient appetite.

**Reply to objection 2:** The Gloss in question can likewise be understood to apply to fear existing in the sentient appetite.

Alternatively, one can reply better that someone who is afraid with his whole heart is one whose mind fear conquers irreparably. However, it can happen that even if the fear is a mortal sin, the individual is not so obstinately afraid that he cannot be called back by persuasive arguments, in the way that sometimes an individual who is committing a mortal sin by consenting to a disordered desire is called back from fulfilling with a deed what he had intended to do.

**Reply to objection 3:** This Gloss is talking about an instance of fear that calls a man back from

some good that involves the perfection of a counsel rather than a necessity of precept. Now fear of this sort is not a mortal sin, but sometimes it is a venial sin and sometimes it is not a sin at all, e.g., when someone has a reasonable cause for the fear.

#### Article 4

##### Does fear excuse one from sin?

It seems that fear does not excuse one from sin (*timor non excuset a peccato*):

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (aa. 1 and 3), fear is a sin. But a sin does not excuse one from a sin; instead, it aggravates that sin. Therefore, fear does not excuse one from sin.

**Objection 2:** If some sort of fear excused one from sin, it would especially be the fear of death, which is said to befall even an immovable man. But this sort of fear does not seem to provide an excuse; for since death threatens everyone by necessity, it does not seem that it should be feared. Therefore, fear does not excuse one from sin.

**Objection 3:** Every instance of fear is either a fear of some temporal evil or fear of some spiritual evil. But fear of a spiritual evil cannot provide an excuse for a sin, since this fear does not induce one to sin but instead draws one back from sin. Again, fear of a temporal evil does not excuse one from a sin, since as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 3, “It is unnecessary to fear poverty or sickness or anything that does not proceed from one’s own wickedness.” Therefore, it seems that fear in no way excuses one from sin.

**But contrary to this:** *Decretals*, q. 1, says, “A man who has been forcibly and unwillingly ordained by heretics appears to have an excuse.”

**I respond:** As was explained above (aa. 1 and 3), fear has the character of a sin insofar as it is contrary to the order of reason.

Now reason judges that some evils should be avoided more than others. And so if anyone, in order to avoid evils that should, according to reason, be avoided to a greater degree, does not back away from evils that should be avoided to a lesser degree, then there is no sin. For instance, bodily death should be avoided to a greater degree than the loss of possessions, and so if anyone, out of fear of death, promised something or gave something to robbers, then he would be excused from the sin he would have incurred if, without a legitimate reason, he had given those possessions to sinners while overlooking the good people to whom they should have been given instead.

On the other hand, if (a) out of fear someone were avoiding evils that, according to reason, should be avoided to a lesser degree, and if (b) he incurred evils that, according to reason, should be avoided to a greater degree, then he could not be entirely excused from sin, since the fear in question would be disordered.

Now evils of the soul are to be feared more than evils of the body, and evils of the body are to be feared more than evils with respect to exterior things. And so if (a) someone takes on evils of the soul—i.e., if he sins—while avoiding evils of the body, e.g., scourging or death, or evils with respect to exterior things, e.g., the loss of money, or if (b) he endures evils of the body in order to avoid the loss of money, then he is not totally excused from sin. However, his sin is to some degree diminished because what is done out of fear is less voluntary; for a degree of necessity for doing something is imposed on the man because of the fear that hangs over him. Hence, the Philosopher says that acts of this sort, which are done out of fear, are not voluntary absolutely speaking, but are instead a mixture of the voluntary and the involuntary.

**Reply to objection 1:** The fear does not excuse insofar as it is a sin; instead, it excuses insofar as it is involuntary.

**Reply to objection 2:** Even though death looms over everyone by necessity, still, the shortening of the time of one's life is itself an evil and, as a result, something to be feared.

**Reply to objection 3:** According to the Stoics, who claimed that temporal goods are not good for a man, it follows as a result that temporal evils are not bad for a man and therefore not to be feared in any way at all.

By contrast, according to Augustine in *De Libero Arbitrio*, temporal goods of the sort in question are minimal goods—and this is likewise what the Peripatetics thought. And so the contraries of such goods should, to be sure, be feared, and yet not feared so much that because of them one would draw back from what is good according to virtue.