

QUESTION 142

The Vices opposed to Temperance

Next we have to consider the vices opposed to temperance (*de vitiis oppositis temperantiae*). And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Is insensibility (*insensibilitas*) a sin? (2) Is intemperance a childish vice (*vitium puerile*)? (3) How does intemperance compare to cowardice (*timiditas*)? (4) Is intemperance the most shameful vice of all (*maxime opprobriosum*)?

Article 1

Is insensibility a vice?

It seems that insensibility is not a vice:

Objection 1: Individuals are called insensible when they are deficient in the pleasures of the sense of touch. But it seems to be entirely praiseworthy and virtuous to be deficient in these pleasures; for Daniel 10:2-3 says, “In those days I, Daniel, was mourning for three weeks. I ate no desirable bread, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor was I anointed with ointment.” Therefore, insensibility is not a sin.

Objection 2: According to Dionysius in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, “The good of a man is to exist in accord with reason.” But to abstain from all the delights of the sense of touch moves a man forward most of all in the good of reason; for instance, Daniel 1:17 says that to the boys who ate beans “God granted knowledge, every sort of book learning, and wisdom.” Therefore, insensibility, which completely rejects pleasures of the sort in question, is not a vice.

Objection 3: That through which most of all one draws back from sin does not seem to be sinful. But the most powerful means of abstaining from sin is for an individual to avoid pleasures, which is what insensibility involves; for in *Ethics* 2 the Philosopher says, “We will sin less if we flee from pleasure.” Therefore, insensibility is not something sinful.

But contrary to this: Nothing is opposed to a virtue except a vice. But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2 and 3, insensibility is opposed to the virtue of temperance. Therefore, insensibility is a vice.

I respond: Whatever is contrary to the order of nature is sinful (*vitiosum*). But nature appends pleasure to the operations that are needed for human life. And so the natural order requires that a man indulge in pleasures of this sort to the extent that this is needed for human well-being, either as regards the conservation of the individual or as regards the conservation of the species. Therefore, if someone avoided pleasure to the extent that he omitted what is needed for the conservation of his nature, he would be sinning in the sense of acting contrary to the natural order. And this pertains to the vice of insensibility.

However, one should note that sometimes, because of some end in view, it is praiseworthy, or even necessary, to abstain from pleasures of the sort that follow upon the operations in question. For instance, there are some who abstain from certain pleasures associated with food and drink and sex for the sake of bodily health—or, again, for the sake of carrying out some role, in the way that it is necessary for athletes and soldiers to abstain from many pleasures in order to carry out their proper roles. Similarly, in order to recover the health of their souls, penitents make use of abstinence from pleasures as a sort of rule of life (*quasi quadam diaeta*). Again, men who want to make time for contemplation and divine things have to remove themselves to a greater extent from carnal things. And yet none of the practices just mentioned involve the sin of insensibility, since they are in accord with correct reasoning (*sunt secundum rationem rectam*).

Reply to objection 1: Daniel engaged in abstinence from pleasures not because he abhorred those pleasures for their own sake, i.e., as things evil in their own right, but instead for the sake of a praiseworthy end, viz., so that by abstaining from bodily pleasures he might render himself fit for the

heights of contemplation. Hence, the passage in question goes on to speak immediately of the revelation that was made to him.

Reply to objection 2: Since, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 48, aa. 7-8), a man cannot use reason in the absence of the sentient powers, which require a corporeal organ, a man must sustain his body in order to make use of reason. But sustaining the body is something that is brought about through pleasurable operations. Hence, the good of reasoning cannot exist in a man if he abstains from everything pleasurable.

However, to the extent that a man needs more or less bodily power in executing the act of reasoning, he has more or less need for indulging in bodily pleasures. And so men who have taken on the responsibility of setting aside time for contemplating and for transmitting spiritual good to others by a sort of spiritual propagation are praiseworthy for abstaining from many pleasures which those who have the responsibility of making time for corporeal works and for carnal generation would not laudably abstain from.

Reply to objection 3: In order to avoid sin, pleasure is to be fled from—not *totally* fled from, but in such a way that it is not sought beyond what necessity requires.

Article 2

Is intemperance a childish sin?

It seems that intemperance is not a childish vice (*puerile peccatum*):

Objection 1: In commenting on Matthew 18:3 (“Unless you become like little children ...”), Jerome says, “A little child does not remain angry, does not remember injuries, is not aroused when he sees a beautiful woman”—all of which is contrary to intemperance. Therefore, intemperance is not a childish sin.

Objection 2: Children have only *natural* sentient desire (*non habent nisi concupiscentias naturales*). But the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 3 that as regards natural sentient desire, individuals sin very little through intemperance. Therefore, intemperance is not a childish sin.

Objection 3: Children are to be nurtured and cherished (*nutriendi et fovendi*). But sentient desire and pleasure, which intemperance has to do with, should always be diminished and extirpated (*est semper diminuenda et extirpanda*)—this according to Colossians 3:5 (“Mortify your members upon the earth ... which are concupiscence”). Therefore, intemperance is not a childish sin.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “We apply the name ‘intemperance’ to childish sins.”

I respond: There are two senses in which something is said to be childish: (a) *because it is actually found in children*, and this is not what the Philosopher means when he says that the sin of intemperance is childish; and (b) *according to a certain likeness (secundum quandam similitudinem)*, and it is in this sense that sins of intemperance are called childish.

For a sin of intemperance is a sin of excessive sentient desire (*peccatum superfluae concupiscentiae*), which is compared to a child in three respects:

(a) *with respect to what both desire*. For like a child, sentient desire (*concupiscentia*) desires something unseemly (*aliquid turpe*). The reason for this is that in human affairs what is beautiful is something that is ordered in accord with reason; hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Cicero says, “The beautiful is what is in keeping with man’s excellence insofar as his nature differs from the other animals.” But a child does not pay attention to the order of reason, and, similarly, as *Ethics* 7 says, “Sentient desire does not listen to reason.”

(b) *with respect to the outcome*. If a child is left to his own will, he grows in his will; hence,

Ecclesiasticus 30:8 says, “A horse not broken becomes stubborn, and a child left to himself will become headstrong.” So, too, if sentient desire is indulged, it becomes stronger; hence, in *Confessiones* 8 Augustine says, “When lust is served, it becomes a custom, and when custom is not resisted, it becomes a need.”

(c) *with respect to the remedy that is offered for both of them.* A child is corrected by being coerced; hence, Proverbs 23:13-14 says, “Do not withhold discipline from a child ... Beat him with a rod and you will free his soul from hell.” Similarly, when sentient desire is resisted, it is led back to a fitting mode of uprightness. This is why Augustine says in *Musica* 6, “When the mind is lifted up to spiritual things and remains fixed thereon, the force of custom”—i.e. of carnal concupiscence—“is broken and, being suppressed, it is little by little weakened. For it was stronger when we followed it, but it is certainly weaker, even if not entirely gone, when we keep it under control.”

And this is why in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “Sentient desire should be consonant with reason in the way that a child has to live in accord with the direction of his teacher.”

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for the sense in which what is called childish (*puerile*) is something that is actually found in children. But as has been explained, the sin of intemperance is called childish not in this sense, but according to a likeness.

Reply to objection 2: There are two senses in which sentient desires can be called ‘natural’:

(a) *according to their genus.* And on this score temperance and intemperance have to do with natural sentient desires, since they have to do with sentient desires for food and sex, which are ordered toward the preservation of the nature.

(b) *with respect to the species of that which the nature requires for being preserved.* And on this score it does not often happen that one sins with respect to natural sentient desires. For nature requires only that through which its need is taken care of, and a desire for this cannot be a sin—except because of an excess of quantity, which, as the Philosopher explains in *Ethics* 3, is the only way to sin by a natural sentient desire. However, other things, with respect to which many sins are committed, are certain inducements to sentient desire that human inventiveness (*curiositas*) comes up with, e.g., painstakingly prepared food and finely attired women. Now even though children do not seek such things, nonetheless, intemperance is called a childish sin for the reasons already explained.

Reply to objection 3: What pertains to nature in the case of children is that they should be brought up and cherished. However, as has been explained, whatever involves defects of reason in children has to be corrected and not cherished.

Article 3

Is cowardice a greater vice than intemperance?

It seems that cowardice (*timiditas*) is a greater vice than intemperance:

Objection 1: A vice is blameworthy because it is opposed to the good of a virtue. But as is clear from what was said above (q. 123, a. 12 and q. 141, a. 8), cowardice is opposed to fortitude, which is a more noble virtue than temperance, to which intemperance is opposed. Therefore, cowardice is a greater vice than intemperance.

Objection 2: Someone is less blameworthy to the extent that he falls short in a matter that is more difficult to overcome; hence, in *Ethics* 7 the Philosopher says, “It is not admirable, though it is pardonable, if a man is conquered by strong and overwhelming pleasures or pains.” But it seems more difficult to overcome pleasures than other passions; hence, *Ethics* 2 says, “It is more difficult to fight against pleasure than against anger”—and anger seems stronger than fear. Therefore, intemperance, which is conquered by pleasure, is a lesser sin than cowardice, which is conquered by fear.

Objection 3: It is part of the nature of a sin that it be voluntary. But cowardice is more voluntary than intemperance is; for no one desires to be intemperate, whereas some do desire to run away from the dangers surrounding death, which involves cowardice. Therefore, cowardice is a more serious sin than intemperance is.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 3* the Philosopher says, “Intemperance is more assimilated to the voluntary than cowardice is.” Therefore, intemperance has more of the nature of a sin.

I respond: There are two ways in which one vice can be compared to another: (a) on the part of *the matter or object*, and (b) on the part of *the man himself who is sinning*. And in both cases intemperance is a more serious vice than cowardice is.

First, on the part of the *matter*. Cowardice runs away from the dangers associated with death, the avoidance of which is induced by the all-important need to preserve one’s life. By contrast, intemperance has to do with pleasures, the desire for which is not as necessary for preserving life; for, as has been explained (a. 2), intemperance has more to do with *appended* pleasures and sentient desires than with *natural* sentient desires or pleasures. But what moves one toward sin is such that the more compelling (*necessarium*) it seems to be, the less serious the sin is. And so intemperance is a more serious vice than cowardice on the part of the *object* or *matter* that moves one.

Again, it is similar on the part of *the man himself who is sinning*, and this for three reasons:

First, because the more the individual who sins is in possession of his own mind, the more serious his sin is; hence, sins are not imputed to those who are insane (*alientatis non imputantur*). But severe fears and pains—especially those associated with the danger of death—stupefy a man’s mind. Pleasure, which moves one to intemperance, does not do this.

Second, because the more voluntary a sin is, the more serious it is. But intemperance involves more of the voluntary than cowardice does, and this for two reasons:

(a) What is done because of fear (*per timorem*) has its origin in a forceful exterior source and hence is not voluntary absolutely speaking, but is instead, as *Ethics 3* puts it, “mixed.” By contrast, what is done because of pleasure (*per delectationem*) is voluntary absolutely speaking.

(b) Acts that are intemperate are *more voluntary with respect to the particular object (magis voluntaria in particulari)*, but *less voluntary with respect to the general object (minus voluntaria in universali)*. For no one wants to be *intemperate [in general]*, and yet a man is lured by *the singular pleasurable things* that make him intemperate. Because of this, the best means for avoiding intemperance is for a man not to linger over the thought of *the singular things*. But it is just the opposite with the things that pertain to cowardice. For the *singular objects* that are imminent are *less voluntary*, e.g., casting away one’s shield and other things of this sort, but the *general object itself is more voluntary*, viz., fleeing to safety. However, what is more voluntary in the *singular circumstances* in which the act takes place is more voluntary *absolutely speaking*. And so since intemperance is more voluntary absolutely speaking than cowardice is, it is a greater vice.

Third, because it can be easier to apply a remedy against intemperance than against cowardice, since the pleasures of food and sex, which intemperance has to do with, occur throughout the whole of life and a man can without danger practice in order to become temperate with respect to those pleasures, whereas (a) the dangers of death occur more rarely, and also (b) it is more perilous for a man to practice in the midst of those dangers in order to stop being cowardly.

And so intemperance is absolutely speaking a greater sin than cowardice.

Reply to objection 1: There are two possible ways of thinking about fortitude’s preeminence over temperance:

First, *on the part of the end*, which involves the notion of the good, viz., because fortitude is more ordered toward the common good than temperance is. On this score cowardice exceeds intemperance in a certain way, viz., insofar as through cowardice an individual stops defending the common good.

Second, *on the part of the difficulty involved*, viz., insofar as it is more difficult to undergo the

dangers associated with death than to abstain from pleasures. And on this score cowardice does not have to exceed intemperance. For just as it belongs to a greater virtue not to be conquered by what is strong, so, too, on the other side, it belongs to a lesser vice to be conquered by what is strong and to a greater vice to be overcome by what is weaker.

Reply to objection 2: The love of preserving one's life, because of which the dangers associated with death are avoided, is much more connatural than any of the pleasures of food or sex that are ordered toward the preservation of life. And so it is more difficult to conquer the fear of the dangers associated with death than the desire for the pleasures that are found in food and sex—though the latter desires are more difficult to resist than anger, sadness, and the fear of certain other evils.

Reply to objection 3: Cowardice is thought of as having more voluntariness [than intemperance] with respect to the *general object*, but less voluntariness with respect to the *particular object*. And so cowardice has more voluntariness [than intemperance] in a certain respect (*secundum quid*), but not absolutely speaking (*non simpliciter*).

Article 4

Is the sin of intemperance the most worthy of reproach?

It seems that the sin of intemperance is not the most worthy of reproach (*maxime exprobrabile*):

Objection 1: Just as honor owed to virtue, so reproach (*exprobratio*) is owed to sin. But there are more serious sins than intemperance, e.g., homicide, blasphemy, and others of this sort. Therefore, the sin of intemperance is not the most worthy of reproach.

Objection 2: Sins that are more common seem to be less worthy of reproach, since men are less ashamed of them. But sins of intemperance are the most common of all, since they have to do with things which occur commonly in human life and are also such that many individuals sin with respect to them. Therefore, sins of intemperance do not seem to be the most worthy of reproach.

Objection 3: In *Ethics 7* the Philosopher says, "Temperance and intemperance have to do with human desires and pleasures." But there are some sentient desires and pleasures which are more shameful than human desires and pleasures and which are called 'bestial' and 'sick' (*quae dicuntur bestiales et aegritudinales*), as the Philosopher explains in the same book. Therefore, intemperance is not the most worthy of reproach.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 3* the Philosopher says that among the vices intemperance "seems to be justly subject to reproach (*iuste exprobrabilis*)."

I respond: Reproach seems to be opposed to honor and glory. Now as was established above (q. 102, a. 2 and q. 103, a. 1), honor is owed to excellence, whereas glory implies renown. Therefore, intemperance is the most worthy of reproach, and this for two reasons:

First, because intemperance conflicts the most with a man's excellence; for, as was established above (q. 141, a. 2), intemperance has to do with pleasures that are common to us and the non-rational animals (*communes nobis et brutis*). Hence, Psalm 48:21 says, "Though man existed with honor, he did not understand; he was comparable to the senseless beasts and became similar to them."

Second, because intemperance conflicts the most with man's renown and beauty, viz., insofar as in the pleasures that intemperance has to do with there is less of the light of reason, from which all the renown and beauty of virtue derives. This is why pleasures of this sort are called the most slavish of all.

Reply to objection 1: As Gregory puts it [in *Moralia* 1], "Even if the carnal vices contained under intemperance are less culpable (*sint minoris culpae*), they are nonetheless more disgraceful (*sunt maioris infamiae*)."
For the magnitude of a sin has to do with how disordered it is with respect to the end (*respicit deordinationem a fine*), whereas its disgracefulness (*infamia*) has to do with its shamefulness (*respicit*

turpitudinem), which is thought of most of all in terms of the indecency of the sinner (*secundum indecentiam peccantis*).

Reply to objection 2: The commonness of the sins diminishes their disgracefulness and shamefulness in the opinion of men, but not with respect to the nature of the vices themselves.

Reply to objection 3: When one claims that intemperance is the most worthy of reproach, this should be understood to apply to *human* vices, i.e., those vices that have to do with passions that in some sense *conform to* human nature.

However, those vices that *exceed* the mode of human nature are more worthy of reproach. And yet they likewise seem to be traced back to the genus of intemperance because of a certain sort of *excess*—as, for instance, if a man were to take delight in eating human flesh or in coitus with beasts or with males.