

## QUESTION 146

### Abstinence [from Food and Drink]

Next we have to consider the *subjective parts* of temperance: first, those having to do with the pleasures of nutrition (questions 146-150); and, second, those having to do with the pleasures of sex (questions 151-154).

Concerning the first, we have to consider abstinence, which has to do with food and drink (questions 146-148), and then sobriety, which has to do specifically with drink (questions 149-150).

Concerning abstinence, we have to consider three things: first, abstinence itself (question 146); second, the act of abstinence, i.e. fasting (*ieiunium*) (question 147); and, third, the opposed vice, viz. gluttony (*gula*).

Concerning abstinence, there are two questions: (1) Is abstinence a virtue? (2) Is abstinence a specific virtue?

### Article 1

#### Is abstinence a virtue?

It seems that abstinence is not a virtue (*abstinentia non sit virtus*):

**Objection 1:** In 1 Corinthians 4:20 the Apostle says, “The kingdom of God lies not in words, but in virtue (*non in sermone, sed in virtute*).” But the kingdom of God does not consist in abstinence; for in Romans 14:17 the Apostle says, “The kingdom of God does not lie in food and drink,” where a Gloss says, “Justice lies neither in abstaining nor in eating.” Therefore, abstinence is not a virtue.

**Objection 2:** In *Confessiones* 10 Augustine, in speaking to God, says, “You have taught me that I am to take food in the way that I take medicine.” However, moderating medicine belongs not to any virtue, but instead to the art of medicine. Therefore, by parity of reasoning, moderating food, which belongs to abstinence, is not the act of a virtue, but the act of an art.

**Objection 3:** As is established in *Ethics* 2, every virtue consists in a mean. By contrast, abstinence seems to exist not in a *mean*, but in a *defect*, since it is named from a withdrawal (*cum ex subtractione nominetur*). Therefore, abstinence is not a virtue.

**Objection 4:** No virtue excludes any other virtue. But abstinence excludes *patience*, since in *Pastoralis* Gregory says, “Impatience often shakes from the bosom of tranquility the minds of those who are abstaining.” Likewise, in the same place he says, “Sometimes the sin of pride transfixes the thoughts of those who are abstaining and so drives out *humility*.” Therefore, abstinence is not a virtue.

**But contrary to this:** 2 Peter 1:5-6 says, “Supplement your faith with virtue, and your virtue with knowledge, and your knowledge with abstinence”—where abstinence is listed along with other virtues. Therefore, abstinence is a virtue.

**I respond:** Abstinence by its very name implies a withdrawal from food. Now there are two ways in which the name ‘abstinence’ can be taken:

In one way, insofar as it designates the withdrawal from food *absolutely speaking*. And on this score ‘abstinence’ designates neither a virtue nor the act of a virtue, but instead something indifferent.

In the second way, it can be taken as something that is *regulated by reason*. And on this score it signifies either the habit of a virtue or the act of that virtue. And this is what is signified in the above passage from 2 Peter, where it is said that abstinence should be added to knowledge—so that, namely, a man should, as necessary, abstain from food in a way that takes into account those with whom he lives, his own person, and the requirements of his own well-being.

**Reply to objection 1:** The use of food and the abstaining from food, considered in themselves, do not pertain to the kingdom of God, since in 1 Corinthians 8:8 the Apostle says, “Eating does not commend us to God. For we are not lacking in anything if we do not eat, and we do not abound in

anything [if we do eat]”—that is, *spiritually*. Rather, both of them pertain to the kingdom of God insofar as they are done in accord with reason out of faith in God and love for God (*secundum quod fit rationabiliter ex fide et dilectione Dei*).

**Reply to objection 2:** The moderation of food according to quantity and quality belongs to the art of medicine in relation to bodily well-being, but the moderation of food with respect to the interior affections, in relation to the good of reason, belongs to abstinence. Hence, in *De Quaestionibus Evangeliorum* Augustine says, “It does not matter at all which food, or how much food, someone eats, as long as he does it in a way that takes into account the people with whom he lives, his own person, and the requirements of his own well-being; instead, what matters is how readily and serenely he is able to go without food when duty or necessity requires this.”

**Reply to objection 3:** Temperance involves keeping under control the pleasures which attract the mind to themselves excessively, just as fortitude involves firming up the mind against fears that push one away from the good of reason. And so just as the praiseworthiness of fortitude consists in a sort of excess from which all the parts of fortitude are named, so, too, the praiseworthiness of temperance consists in a sort of defect, from which all the parts of temperance are named. Hence, since abstinence is a part of temperance, it is denominated from a defect. And yet abstinence consists in a mean insofar as it is in accord with correct reasoning (*inquantum est secundum rationem rectam*).

**Reply to objection 4:** The vices in question arise from abstinence insofar as it is not in accord with correct reasoning. For correct reasoning makes one abstain in the way that is necessary, viz., with a cheerfulness of mind (*cum hilaritate mentis*) and for the sake of something necessary, viz., for the sake of the glory of God and not for the sake of one’s own glory.

## Article 2

### Is abstinence a specific virtue?

It seems that abstinence is not a specific virtue:

**Objection 1:** Every virtue is praiseworthy in its own right (*secundum seipsam*). But abstinence is not praiseworthy in its own right; for in *Pastoralis* Gregory says, “The virtue of abstinence is commended only because of the other virtues.” Therefore, abstinence is not a specific virtue.

**Objection 2:** In *De Fide ad Petrum* Augustine says, “The saints abstain from food and drink not because some creature of God’s is bad, but solely in order to castigate their body (*pro sola corporis castigatione*).” But castigation belongs to chastity (*pertinet ad castitatem*), as is clear from the name itself. Therefore, abstinence is not a specific virtue distinct from chastity.

**Objection 3:** Just as a man ought to be content with moderated food, so, too, with moderated clothing—this according to 1 Timothy 6:8 (“Having food and something by way of clothing, with these we are content”). But there is no specific virtue for moderating clothes. Therefore, neither is abstinence, which moderates food, a specific virtue.

**But contrary to this:** Macrobius posits abstinence as a specific part of temperance.

**I respond:** As was explained above (q. 123, 12 and q. 136, a. 1 and q. 141, a. 3), a moral virtue preserves the good of reason against the force of the passions, and so where one finds a specific reason why a passion might draw one away from the good of reason, there has to be a specific virtue.

Now the pleasures of food are apt to draw a man away from the good of reason, both because they are so strong and also because of the necessity for food, which a man needs in order to preserve his life—something that a man desires most of all. And this is why abstinence is a specific virtue.

**Reply to objection 1:** As was explained above (*ST 1 -2*, q. 65, a. 1), the virtues have to be connected. And so one virtue is aided and made commendable by another, in the way that justice is aided

and made commendable by fortitude. Likewise, it is in this way that the virtue of abstinence is made commendable by other virtues.

**Reply to objection 2:** Through abstinence the body is castigated not only against the inducements of lust, but also against the inducements of gluttony. For when a man abstains, he is rendered stronger for overcoming the onslaughts of gluttony, which become stronger the more a man gives in to them. And yet abstinence is not prevented from being a specific virtue by the fact that it assists chastity, since one virtue helps another.

**Reply to objection 3:** The use of clothing is introduced by art, whereas the use of food is introduced by nature. And so there has to be a specific virtue that moderates food more than a specific virtue that moderates clothing.