

QUESTION 148

Gluttony

Next we have to consider gluttony (*gula*). And on this topic there are six questions: (1) Is gluttony a sin? (2) Is gluttony a mortal sin? (3) Is gluttony the greatest of sins? (4) What are the species of gluttony? (5) Is gluttony a capital vice? (6) Which are the daughters of gluttony?

Article 1

Is gluttony a sin?

It seems that gluttony is not a sin (*gula non sit peccatum*):

Objection 1: In Matthew 15:11 our Lord says, “What enters into the mouth does not defile a man.” But gluttony has to do with food, which enters into a man. Therefore, since every sin defiles a man, it seems that gluttony is not a sin.

Objection 2: No one sins in anything that he cannot avoid. But gluttony consists in immoderation with respect to food, which a man cannot avoid; for in *Moralia* 30 Gregory says, “Since pleasure and necessity are mixed together in eating, we do not know what it is that necessity is demanding and what it is that pleasure is asking for.” And in *Confessiones* 10 Augustine says, “Who is there, Lord, who doesn’t eat a little bit beyond the limits of necessity?” Therefore, gluttony is not a sin.

Objection 3: In every genus of sin the first movement is a sin. But the first movement of eating food is not a sin; otherwise, hunger and thirst would be sins. Therefore, gluttony is not a sin.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 30 Gregory says, “If the enemy placed within us, viz., our gluttonous appetite, is not first conquered, then we are not going to rise up to the conflict involved in spiritual combat.” But the interior enemy of a man is sin. Therefore, gluttony is a sin.

I respond: ‘Gluttony’ names not just any sort of desire to eat and drink, but a *disordered* desire. But an appetite is called disordered because it recedes from the order of reason, which the good of moral virtue consists in. And it is because of this that something which is contrary to virtue is called a sin. Hence, it is clear that gluttony is a sin.

Reply to objection 1: What enters a man in the manner of food does not, with respect to its substance and nature, defile a man spiritually. However, the Jews against whom our Lord is speaking, along with the Manicheans, thought that certain foods would make one unclean not because of what they stand for (*non propter figuram*), but by their own nature.

Still and all, a disordered sentient desire for food does defile a man spiritually.

Reply to objection 2: As has been explained, the vice of gluttony does not consist in the substance of the food, but in a sentient desire that is not regulated by reason. And so if an individual is excessive in the quantity of his food, not because of a sentient desire for the food, but because he thinks that it is necessary for him, then this does not involve gluttony but instead involves some sort of ignorance. On the other hand, the only thing that involves gluttony is an individual’s knowingly exceeding the right amount in eating because of his desire for pleasurable food.

Reply to objection 3: There are two sorts of appetite (*duplex est appetitus*):

One sort is a *natural appetite*, which involves the powers of the vegetative soul, and in these powers there can be neither virtue or vice, because they cannot be subject to reason. And on this score the appetitive power is divided into the retentive, the digestive, and the expulsive. And this is the appetite to which hunger and thirst belong.

However, there is another appetite, the *sentient appetite*, and the vice of gluttony consists in the sentient desire (*concupiscentia*) that belongs to this appetite. Hence, the first movement of gluttony involves a disorder in the sentient appetite, and such a disorder does not exist in the absence of sin.

Article 2

Is gluttony a mortal sin?

It seems that gluttony is not a mortal sin:

Objection 1: Every mortal sin is contrary to some precept of the Decalogue. But this does not seem to be the case with gluttony. Therefore, gluttony is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: As is clear from what was said above (q. 35, a. 3 and *ST* 1-2, q. 72, a. 5), every mortal sin is contrary to charity. But gluttony is not opposed to charity, either with respect to the love of God or with respect to the love of neighbor. Therefore, gluttony is never a mortal sin.

Objection 3: In a sermon on purgatory Augustine says, “Whenever a man takes more meat and drink than is necessary, he should know that this involves one of the lesser sins (*ad minuta peccata noverit pertinere*).” But this pertains to gluttony. Therefore, gluttony is counted among the lesser sins, i.e., among the venial sins.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 30 Gregory says, “As long as the vice of gluttony dominates, everything that men have done courageously perishes; and as long as their belly is not restrained, all their virtues are together ruined (*simul cunctae virtutes obruuntur*).” But virtue is not destroyed except through mortal sin. Therefore, gluttony is a mortal sin.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), the vice of gluttony properly consists in a disordered sentient desire. Now there are two ways in which reason’s ordering of a sentient desire can be removed (*ordo rationis concupiscentiam ordinantis dupliciter tolli potest*):

In one way, *with respect to the means to the end*, viz., insofar as the means are not measured in such a way as to be proportionate to the end.

In the second way, *with respect to the end itself*, viz., insofar as the sentient desire turns the man away from a fitting end.

Thus, if the disorder of the sentient desire involved in gluttony is taken as a turning away from the individual’s ultimate end, then the gluttony will be a mortal sin. This occurs when a man adheres to the pleasure involved in the gluttony as an end for the sake of which he disdains God; that is, he is prepared to act contrary to God’s precepts in order to pursue pleasures of the sort in question.

On the other hand, if one understands in the vice of gluttony a disorder of sentient desire only with respect to the means to the end, in the sense that the individual desires the pleasures of food excessively, but not in such a way that because of this he would do something contrary to God’s law, then the gluttony is a venial sin.

Reply to objection 1: The vice of gluttony is a mortal sin insofar as it turns away from the ultimate end. And on this score, through a sort of reduction, gluttony is opposed to the sanctification of the Sabbath, in which rest in the ultimate end is commanded. For not every mortal sin is directly contrary to the precepts of the Decalogue, but only those that contain an injustice, since, as was established above (q. 122, a. 1), the precepts of the Decalogue pertain specifically to justice and its parts.

Reply to objection 2: To the extent that [an act of] gluttony turns away from the ultimate end, it is contrary to the love of God, who, as the ultimate end, is to be loved above all things. And on this score gluttony is a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 3: This passage from Augustine is applied to gluttony insofar as it implies a sentient desire that is disordered only with respect to the means to the end.

Reply to the argument for the contrary: Gluttony is said to ruin the virtues not so much because of itself as because of the vices which arise from it. For instance, in *Pastoralis* Gregory says, “When the belly is distended by overindulgence, the virtues of the soul are destroyed by lust.”

Article 3

Is gluttony the greatest of sins?

It seems that gluttony is the greatest of sins:

Objection 1: The magnitude of a sin is read off from the magnitude of its punishment. But the sin of gluttony is punished most seriously of all; for instance, Chrysostom says, “Incontinence of the belly drove Adam out of Paradise, and it caused the flood that occurred at the time of Noah”—this according to Ezechiel 16:49 (“This was the iniquity of Sodom, your sister, being full of bread ...”) Therefore, the sin of gluttony is the greatest sin.

Objection 2: In any genus the cause is the most important thing. But gluttony seems to be the cause of other sins, since a Gloss on Psalm 135:10 (“... who struck Egypt in their firstborn”) says, “Lust, concupiscence, and pride are what the belly generates.” Therefore, gluttony is the most serious of sins.

Objection 3: As was established above (q. 26, a. 4), after God, a man should love himself most of all. But through the vice of gluttony a man inflicts harm on himself; for instance, Ecclesiasticus 37:34 says, “Many have perished through overindulgence.” Therefore, gluttony is the greatest sin—at least, the greatest sin beyond the sins that are sins against God.

But contrary to this: According to Gregory, the carnal sins, among which gluttony is counted, involve less guilt.

I respond: There are three possible ways of considering the seriousness of a sin:

First, and principally, *with respect to the matter in which one sins*. And on this score, sins that have to do with divine things are the greatest. Accordingly, the vice of gluttony will not be the greatest sin, since it has to do with things that look to bodily sustenance.

Second, *on the part of the sinner*. And on this score, the sin of gluttony becomes less serious rather than more serious, both (a) because of the necessity of eating food, and also (b) because of the difficulty of discerning what is appropriate in such cases and regulating it.

Third, *on the part of the effect which follows*. And on this score, the vice of gluttony has a certain sort of greatness, insofar as it occasions diverse sins.

Reply to objection 1: The punishments are referred back either (a) to the vices that follow upon gluttony or (b) to the roots of gluttony rather than to gluttony itself. For the first man was expelled from Paradise because of pride, from which he proceeded to an act of gluttony. On the other hand, the flood and the punishment of Sodom were inflicted because of previous sins of lust that were occasioned by gluttony.

Reply to objection 2: This argument is about sins that arise from gluttony. However, the cause does not have to be more important except in the case of direct causes (*nisi in causis per se*), whereas gluttony is an incidental and occasional cause (*causa per accidens et per occasionem*) of these vices and not a direct (*per se*) cause of them.

Reply to objection 3: The gluttonous individual does not intend to inflict harm on his own body, but instead intends to take pleasure in the food, and if harm to his body ensues, then this is incidental (*per accidens*) and hence not directly relevant to the seriousness of the gluttony. Still, the guilt associated with gluttony is increased if an individual incurs harm because of his immoderation in the consumption of food.

Article 4

Does Gregory appropriately distinguish the species of gluttony?

It seems that Gregory does not appropriately distinguish the species in *Moralia* 30 when he says: “The vice of gluttony tempts us in five ways: (a) sometimes it comes before the necessary times [for eating]; (b) sometimes it seeks sumptuous food; (c) sometimes it requires that the food to be eaten should be very meticulously prepared; (d) sometimes it exceeds the measure of eating by the sheer quantity of the food; (e) sometimes the individual sins by the very ardor of his immense desire”— which are contained in the following verse: “Too soon, too sumptuous, too much, too ardent, too meticulous (*praepropere, laute, nimis, ardentem, studiose*).”

Objection 1: The aforementioned [species] are diversified by diverse circumstances. But since circumstances are accidents of acts, they do not diversify species. Therefore, the species of gluttony are not diversified by the aforementioned circumstances.

Objection 2: Just as time is a circumstance, so, too, is place. Therefore, if one species of gluttony is taken from time, then it seems, by parity of reasoning, that other species should be taken from place and from the other circumstances.

Objection 3: Just as temperance observes appropriate circumstances, so also do the other moral virtues. But in the case of the vices that are opposed to the other moral virtues, their species are not distinguished by diverse circumstances. So, too, in the case of gluttony.

But contrary to this is the passage cited from Gregory.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), gluttony involves a disordered sentient desire to eat. Now in eating there are two things to consider, viz., the *food itself* that is being eaten, and the *eating* of the food. Therefore, there are two ways in which a disorder occurs in the sentient desire [to eat]:

In one way, *with respect to the food itself which is eaten*. And so as regards the *substance or species* of the food, an individual asks for (a) *sumptuous, i.e., expensive*, food; and as regards the *quality*, he asks for (b) food that has been *very meticulously, i.e., assiduously, prepared*; and as regards the quantity, he is (c) excessive in that he eats *too much*.

In the other way, the disorder in the sentient desire has to do with the eating of the food, either because the eating (d) *comes before the appropriate time for eating*, i.e., the eating comes too soon, or because the eating (e) *does not observe the proper manner of eating*, i.e., the eating is too ardent.

Isidore, on the other hand, combines (a) and (b) into one and says that the gluttonous individual is excessive in food with respect to *what, how much, in what manner, and when*.

Reply to objection 1: The corruption of diverse circumstances makes for diverse species of gluttony because of diverse motives, and the species of moral acts are diversified by diverse motives. For instance, in an individual who is seeking sumptuous food, the sentient desire is excited by the very species of the food, whereas in an individual who moves the time [of eating] forward, the sentient desire is disordered because of his impatience with the delay—and so on for the others.

Reply to objection 2: In the case of place and the other circumstances there is not a different motive pertaining to the use of food that would make for a different species of gluttony.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of any of the other vices in which diverse circumstances make for different motives, it is necessary for diverse species to be taken from diverse circumstances. But, as has been explained, this does not happen with *all* the other vices.

Article 5

Is gluttony a capital vice?

It seems that gluttony is not a capital vice (*vitium capitale*):

Objection 1: Capital vices are vices from which, in the manner of a final cause, other vices arise. But food, which is what gluttony has to do with, does not have the nature of an end, since it is sought not for its own sake, but for the sake of bodily nutrition. Therefore, gluttony is not a capital vice.

Objection 2: A capital vice seems to have some sort of importance in the category of the sinful. But this does not befit gluttony, which seems to be a lesser sin by its genus, since it is more like something that happens by nature. Therefore, gluttony does not seem to be a capital vice.

Objection 3: A sin occurs when an individual recedes from an *upright* good for the sake of something that is *useful* for the present life or *pleasurable* to the senses. But with respect to the goods that have the nature of the *useful*, only a single capital sin is posited, viz., avarice. Therefore, it seems that, with respect to pleasures, it should likewise be the case that only a single capital vice is posited. But lust is posited with respect to the greater pleasures, and lust is a greater vice than gluttony. Therefore, gluttony is not a capital sin.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory counts gluttony among the capital vices.

I respond: As was explained above (*ST* 1-2, q.84, aa. 3-4), a capital sin is a sin from which, in the nature of a final cause, other sins arise—more specifically, insofar as this sin has a highly desirable end which is such that out of a desire for that end, men are moved to sin in many ways. Now an end is rendered highly desirable when it possesses some of the conditions of the happiness (*felicitas*), which is naturally desirable. But as is clear from *Ethics* 1 and 10, *pleasure* belongs to the nature of happiness. And so the vice of gluttony, which has to do with the pleasures associated with the sense of touch, is appropriately posited among the capital vices.

Reply to objection 1: Food is ordered toward something as to an end, but since the end, viz., the preservation of life, is especially desirable, and since life cannot be preserved without food, it follows that food itself is especially desirable and such that almost all the work involved in human life is ordered toward it—this according to Ecclesiastes 6:7 (All of a man’s labor is for his mouth”).

Still, gluttony, it seems, has more to do with the *pleasures* of food than with *food*. And because of this, as Augustine says in *De Vera Religione*, “Those for whom bodily health is tedious prefer eating”—in which, that is, there is pleasure—“to being satisfied ... even though the whole point of this pleasure is to no longer be hungry or thirsty.”

Reply to objection 2: In the case of sins, the *end* of the sin is taken from what is ‘turned toward’ (*ex parte conversionis*), but the *seriousness* of the sin is taken from what is ‘turned away from’ (*ex parte aversionis*). And so it is not necessary for a capital vice, which has an especially desirable end, to have a high degree of seriousness (*magnam gravitatem*).

Reply to objection 3: The *pleasureable* is desirable in its own right (*secundum se*). And so, in accord with the diversity of pleasures, two capital sins are posited, viz., gluttony (*gula*) and lust (*luxuria*).

By contrast, the *useful* does not of itself have the character of being desirable, but is instead desirable insofar as it is ordered toward something else. And there seems to be a single character of desirability in all useful things. For this reason, only a single capital vice is posited with respect to things of this sort.

Article 6

Does Gregory appropriately assign five daughters to gluttony?

It seems that Gregory inappropriately assigns five daughters to gluttony, viz., *unseemly joy* (*inepta laetitia*), *coarseness* (*scurrilitas*), *uncleanness* (*immunditia*), *loquaciousness* (*multiloquium*), and *dullness of mind with respect to theoretical understanding* (*hebetudo mentis circa intelligentiam*):

Objection 1: Unseemly joy (*inepta laetitia*) follows upon *every* sin—this according to Proverbs 2:14 (“They rejoice when they act badly and exult in the worst things”). Similarly, dullness of mind (*hebetudo mentis*) is found in *every* sin—this according to Proverbs 14:22 (“Those who do evil are in error”). Therefore, the daughters of gluttony are not appropriately posited.

Objection 2: Uncleanness (*immunditia*), which especially follows upon gluttony, seems to pertain to vomiting—this according to Isaiah 28:8 (“All the tables were full of the vomit of filth”). But this seems to be a punishment and not a sin, or even something useful that falls under a counsel—this according to Ecclesiasticus 31:25 (“If you have been forced to eat a lot, rise up from their midst and vomit, and it will refresh you”). Therefore, uncleanness should not be posited as a daughter of gluttony.

Objection 3: Isidore posits coarseness (*scurrilitas*) as a daughter of lust. Therefore, it should not be counted among the daughters of gluttony.

But contrary to this is that in *Moralia* 31 Gregory assigns these daughters to gluttony.

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), gluttony properly consists in the unmoderated pleasure that is found in food and drink. And so the vices that are counted among the daughters of gluttony are those which follow upon the unmoderated pleasure of food and drink. And these daughters can be understood either on the part of the *soul* or on the part of the *body*.

On the part of the *soul* in four ways:

(a) First, with respect to *reason*, the sharpness of which is dulled by immoderation in food and drink. And on this score, *dullness of sense with respect to theoretical understanding* (*circa intelligentiam*) is posited as a daughter of gluttony because of the vapors, given off by the food, which throw the head into confusion, just as, contrariwise, abstinence contributes to the perception of wisdom—this according to Ecclesiastes 2:3 (“I resolved in my heart to keep my flesh away from wine, in order that I might turn my mind to wisdom”).

(b) Second, with respect to *appetite*, which is disordered in many ways by immoderation in food and drink, and operates, as it were, under the sleepy helm of reason. And on this score, *unseemly joy* is posited, because, as *Ethics* 2 explains, all the other disordered passions are ordered toward joy and sadness. And this is what 3 Esdras 3:20 is talking about: “Wine ... turns every mind toward confidence and cheerfulness.”

(c) Third, with respect to *disordered speech*. And on this score *loquaciousness* is posited, since, as Gregory puts it in *Pastoralis*, “If unmoderated speech did not ravish those given to gluttony, that rich man who is said to have feasted sumptuously every day would not have had such a great burning in his tongue [see Luke 16:24].”

(d) Fourth, with respect to *disordered acting*. And on this score *coarseness* is posited, i.e., the sort of jocularity that arises from a lack of reason, where reason becomes such that, just as it cannot restrain speech, so it cannot restrain exterior gestures, either. Hence, a Gloss on Ephesians 5:4 (“... or foolish talking or coarseness ...”) says, “This—i.e., jocularity, which is wont to cause laughter—is called ‘congeniality’ (*curialitas*) by fools.” Both of these, however, can be referred to speech, in which it is possible to sin either (a) by reason of excess, which pertains to *loquaciousness*, or (b) by reason of a lack of uprightness, which pertains to *coarseness*.

On the part of the *body*, what is posited is (e) *uncleanness*. This can have to do either with a disordered emission of any kind of excess or, more specifically, with the emission of semen. Hence, a

gloss on Ephesians 5:3 (“... fornication and every sort of uncleanness ...”) says, “That is, incontinence pertaining in any way to unmoderated sensual desire (*libido*).”

Reply to objection 1: The joy that belongs to the act or the end of sin follows upon every sin, especially a sin that proceeds from habit. But the unsteady and disorderly joy which is described here as ‘unseemly’ arises mainly from the unmoderated consumption of food or drink.

Similarly, one should likewise claim that dullness of understanding with respect to what is choiceworthy is found generally in every sin. But dullness of understanding with respect to theoretical matters proceeds especially from gluttony, for the reason already explained.

Reply to objection 2: Even though vomiting is useful after eating too much, it is nonetheless a sin that someone should subject himself to this necessity because of his immoderation with respect to food or drink.

Still, vomiting can be procured without sin on the advice of a physician as a remedy for illness.

Reply to objection 3: Coarseness does indeed proceed from the act of gluttony, though it proceeds not from the *act* of lust, but rather from the *act of willing* an act of lust. And in this way coarseness can belong to both vices.