

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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VICES OPPOSED TO FORTITUDE (Questions [125]-140)

OF FEAR* (FOUR ARTICLES) [*St. Thomas calls this vice indifferently 'fear' or 'timidity.' The translation requires one to adhere to these terms on account of the connection with the passion of fear. Otherwise 'cowardice' would be a better rendering.]

We must now consider the vices opposed to fortitude: (1) Fear; (2) Fearlessness; (3) Daring.

Under the first head there are four points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether fear is a sin?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether it is opposed to fortitude?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether it is a mortal sin?
 - [\(4\)](#) Whether it excuses from sin, or diminishes it?
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Whether fear is a sin?

Objection 1: It seems that fear is not a sin. For fear is a passion, as stated above ([FS, Question \[23\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#); [Question \[42\]](#)). Now we are neither praised nor blamed for passions, as stated in Ethic. ii. Since then every sin is blameworthy, it seems that fear is not a sin.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS125.html](#) of the Lord is unspotted" ([Ps. 18:8](#)). Yet fear is commanded in God's law, for it is written ([Eph. 6:5](#)): "Servants, be obedient to them that are your lords according to the flesh, with fear and trembling." Therefore fear is not a sin.

Objection 3: Further, nothing that is naturally in man is a sin, for sin is contrary to nature according to Damascene (De Fide Orth. iii). Now fear is natural to man: wherefore the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 7) that "a man would be insane or insensible to pain, if nothing, not even earthquakes nor deluges, inspired him with fear." Therefore fear is not a sin..

On the contrary, our Lord said ([Mt. 10:28](#)): "Fear ye not them that kill the body," and it is written (Ezech. 2:6): "Fear not, neither be thou afraid of their words."

I answer that, A human act is said to be a sin on account of its being inordinate, because the good of a human act consists in order, as stated above ([Question \[109\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#); [Question \[114\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Now this due order requires that the appetite be subject to the ruling of reason. And reason dictates that certain things should be shunned and some sought after. Among things to be shunned, it dictates that some are to be shunned more than others; and among things to be sought after, that some are to be sought after more than others. Moreover, the more a good is to be sought after, the more is the opposite evil to be shunned. The result is that reason dictates that certain goods are to be sought after more than certain evils are to be avoided. Accordingly when the appetite shuns what the reason dictates that we should endure rather than forfeit others that we should rather seek for, fear is inordinate and sinful. On the other hand, when the appetite fears so as to shun what reason requires to be shunned, the appetite is neither inordinate nor sinful.

Reply to Objection 1: Fear in its generic acceptation denotes avoidance in general. Hence in this way it does not include the notion of good or evil: and the same applies to every other passion. Wherefore the Philosopher says that passions call for neither praise nor blame, because, to wit, we neither praise nor blame those who are angry or afraid, but only those who behave thus in an ordinate or inordinate manner.

Reply to Objection 2: The fear which the Apostle inculcates is in accordance with reason, namely that servants should fear lest they be lacking in the service they owe their masters.

Reply to Objection 3: Reason dictates that we should shun the evils that we cannot withstand, and the endurance of which profits us nothing. Hence there is no sin in fearing them.

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Whether the sin of fear is contrary to fortitude?

Objection 1: It seems that the sin of fear is not contrary to fortitude: because fortitude is about dangers of death, as stated above ([Question \[123\]](#), [Articles \[4\]](#),5). But the sin of fear is not always connected with dangers of death, for a gloss on Ps. 127:1, "Blessed are all they that fear

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worldly goods." Again a gloss on Mt. 27:44, "He prayed the third time, saying the selfsame word," says that "evil fear is threefold, fear of death, fear of pain, and fear of contempt." Therefore the sin of fear is not contrary to fortitude.

Objection 2: Further, the chief reason why a man is commended for fortitude is that he exposes himself to the danger of death. Now sometimes a man exposes himself to death through fear of slavery or shame. Thus Augustine relates (De Civ. Dei i) that Cato, in order not to be Caesar's slave, gave himself up to death. Therefore the sin of fear bears a certain likeness to fortitude instead of being opposed thereto.

Objection 3: Further, all despair arises from fear. But despair is opposed not to fortitude but to hope, as stated above ([Question \[20\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); FS, [Question \[40\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Neither therefore is the sin of fear opposed to fortitude.

On the contrary, The Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 7; iii, 7) states that timidity is opposed to fortitude.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[19\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#); FS, [Question \[43\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), all fear arises from love; since no one fears save what is contrary to something he loves. Now love is not confined to any particular kind of virtue or vice: but ordinate love is included in every virtue, since every virtuous man loves the good proper to his virtue; while inordinate love is included in every sin, because inordinate love gives use to inordinate desire. Hence in like manner inordinate fear is included in every sin; thus the covetous man fears the loss of money, the intemperate man the loss of pleasure, and so on. But the greatest fear of all is that which has the danger of death for its object, as we find proved in Ethic. iii, 6. Wherefore the inordinateness of this fear is opposed to fortitude which regards dangers of death. For this reason timidity is said to be antonomastically* opposed to fortitude. [*Antonomasia is the figure of speech whereby we substitute the general for the individual term; e.g. The Philosopher for Aristotle: and so timidity, which is inordinate fear of any evil, is employed to denote inordinate fear of the danger of death.]

Reply to Objection 1: The passages quoted refer to inordinate fear in its generic acceptation, which can be opposed to various virtues.

Reply to Objection 2: Human acts are estimated chiefly with reference to the end, as stated above (FS, [Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#); FS, [Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)): and it belongs to a brave man to expose himself to danger of death for the sake of a good. But a man who exposes himself to danger of death in order to escape from slavery or hardships is overcome by fear, which is contrary to fortitude. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 7), that "to die in order to escape poverty, lust, or something disagreeable is an act not of fortitude but of cowardice: for to shun hardships is a mark of effeminacy."

Reply to Objection 3: As stated above (FS, [Question \[45\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)), fear is the beginning of despair even as hope is the beginning of daring. Wherefore, just as fortitude which employs daring in moderation presupposes hope, so on the other hand despair proceeds from some kind of fear. It does not follow, however, that any kind of despair results from any kind of fear, but that only from fear of the same kind. Now the despair that is opposed to hope is referred to another kind, namely to Divine things; whereas the fear that is opposed to fortitude regards dangers of death. Hence the argument does not prove.

Whether fear is a mortal sin?

Objection 1: It seems that fear is not a mortal sin. For, as stated above (FS, Question [23], Article [1]), fear is in the irascible faculty which is a part of the sensuality. Now there is none but venial sin in the sensuality, as stated above (FS, [Question \[74\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore fear is not a mortal sin.

Objection 2: Further, every mortal sin turns the heart wholly from God. But fear does not this, for a gloss on Judges 7:3, "Whosoever is fearful," etc., says that "a man is fearful when he trembles at the very thought of conflict; yet he is not so wholly terrified at heart, but that he can rally and take courage." Therefore fear is not a mortal sin.

Objection 3: Further, mortal sin is a lapse not only from perfection but also from a precept. But fear does not make one lapse from a precept, but only from perfection; for a gloss on Dt. 20:8, "What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted?" says: "We learn from this that no man can take up the profession of contemplation or spiritual warfare, if he still fears to be despoiled of earthly riches." Therefore fear is not a mortal sin.

On the contrary, For mortal sin alone is the pain of hell due: and yet this is due to the fearful, according to Apoc. 21:8, "But the fearful and unbelieving and the abominable," etc., "shall have their portion in the pool burning with fire and brimstone which is the second death." Therefore fear is a mortal sin.

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), fear is a sin through being inordinate, that is to say, through shunning what ought not to be shunned according to reason. Now sometimes this inordinateness of fear is confined to the sensitive appetites, without the accession of the rational appetite's consent: and then it cannot be a mortal, but only a venial sin. But sometimes this inordinateness of fear reaches to the rational appetite which is called the will, which deliberately shuns something against the dictate of reason: and this inordinateness of fear is sometimes a mortal, sometimes a venial sin. For if a man through fear of the danger of death or of any other temporal evil is so disposed as to do what is forbidden, or to omit what is commanded by the Divine law, such fear is a mortal sin: otherwise it is a venial sin.

Reply to Objection 1: This argument considers fear as confined to the sensuality.

Reply to Objection 2: This gloss also can be understood as referring to the fear that is confined within the sensuality. Or better still we may reply that a man is terrified with his whole heart when fear banishes his courage beyond remedy. Now even when fear is a mortal sin, it may happen nevertheless that one is not so wilfully terrified that one cannot be persuaded to put fear aside: thus sometimes a man sins mortally by consenting to concupiscence, and is turned aside from accomplishing what he purposed doing.

Reply to Objection 3: This gloss speaks of the fear that turns man aside from a good that is necessary, not for the fulfilment of a precept, but for the perfection of a counsel. Such like fear

Whether fear excuses from sin?

Objection 1: It seems that fear does not excuse from sin. For fear is a sin, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). But sin does not excuse from sin, rather does it aggravate it. Therefore fear does not excuse from sin.

Objection 2: Further, if any fear excuses from sin, most of all would this be true of the fear of death, to which, as the saying is, a courageous man is subject. Yet this fear, seemingly, is no excuse, because, since death comes, of necessity, to all, it does not seem to be an object of fear. Therefore fear does not excuse from sin.

Objection 3: Further, all fear is of evil, either temporal or spiritual. Now fear of spiritual evil cannot excuse sin, because instead of inducing one to sin, it withdraws one from sin: and fear of temporal evil does not excuse from sin, because according to the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 6), "one should not fear poverty, nor sickness, nor anything that is not a result of one's own wickedness." Therefore it seems that in no sense does fear excuse from sin.

On the contrary, It is stated in the Decretals (I, [Question \[1\]](#), Cap. Constat.): "A man who has been forcibly and unwillingly ordained by heretics, has an ostensible excuse."

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), fear is sinful in so far as it runs counter to the order of reason. Now reason judges certain evils to be shunned rather than others. Wherefore it is no sin not to shun what is less to be shunned in order to avoid what reason judges to be more avoided: thus death of the body is more to be avoided than the loss of temporal goods. Hence a man would be excused from sin if through fear of death he were to promise or give something to a robber, and yet he would be guilty of sin were he to give to sinners, rather than to the good to whom he should give in preference. On the other hand, if through fear a man were to avoid evils which according to reason are less to be avoided, and so incur evils which according to reason are more to be avoided, he could not be wholly excused from sin, because such like fear would be inordinate. Now the evils of the soul are more to be feared than the evils of the body. and evils of the body more than evils of external things. Wherefore if one were to incur evils of the soul, namely sins, in order to avoid evils of the body, such as blows or death, or evils of external things, such as loss of money; or if one were to endure evils of the body in order to avoid loss of money, one would not be wholly excused from sin. Yet one's sin would be extenuated somewhat, for what is done through fear is less voluntary, because when fear lays hold of a man he is under a certain necessity of doing a certain thing. Hence the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 1) says that these things that are done through fear are not simply voluntary, but a mixture of voluntary and involuntary.

Reply to Objection 2: Although death comes, of necessity, to all, yet the shortening of temporal life is an evil and consequently an object of fear.

Reply to Objection 3: According to the opinion of Stoics, who held temporal goods not to be man's goods, it follows in consequence that temporal evils are not man's evils, and that therefore they are nowise to be feared. But according to Augustine (De Lib. Arb. ii) these temporal things are goods of the least account, and this was also the opinion of the Peripatetics. Hence their contraries are indeed to be feared; but not so much that one ought for their sake to renounce that which is good according to virtue.