

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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INTEGRAL PARTS OF TEMPERANCE (Questions [144]-154)

OF SHAMEFACEDNESS (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must now consider the parts of temperance in particular: and in the first place the integral parts, which are shamefacedness and honesty. With regard to shamefacedness there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether shamefacedness is a virtue?
 - (2) What is its object?
 - (3) Who are the cause of a man being ashamed?
 - (4) What kind of people are ashamed?
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Whether shamefacedness is a virtue?

Objection 1: It seems that shamefacedness is a virtue. For it is proper to a virtue "to observe the mean as fixed by reason": this is clear from the definition of virtue given in Ethic. ii, 6. Now shamefacedness observes the mean in this way, as the Philosopher observes (Ethic. ii, 7). Therefore shamefacedness is a virtue.

Objection 2: Further, whatever is praiseworthy is either a virtue or something connected with virtue. Now shamefacedness is praiseworthy. But it is not part of a virtue. For it is not a part of

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shamefacedness implies a certain passion, whereas justice is not about the passions; nor again is it a part of fortitude, because it belongs to fortitude to be persistent and aggressive, while it belongs to shamefacedness to recoil from something; nor lastly is it a part of temperance, since the latter is about desires, whereas shamefacedness is a kind of fear according as the Philosopher states (Ethic. iv, 9) and Damascene (De Fide Orth. ii, 15). Hence it follows that shamefacedness is a virtue.

Objection 3: Further, the honest and the virtuous are convertible according to Tully (De Offic. i, 27). Now shamefacedness is a part of honesty: for Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 43) that "shamefacedness is the companion and familiar of the restful mind, averse to wantonness, a stranger to any kind of excess, the friend of sobriety and the support of what is honest, a seeker after the beautiful." Therefore shamefacedness is a virtue.

Objection 4: Further, every vice is opposed to a virtue. Now certain vices are opposed to shamefacedness, namely shamelessness and inordinate prudery. Therefore shamefacedness is a virtue.

Objection 5: Further, "like acts beget like habits," according to Ethic. ii, 1. Now shamefacedness implies a praiseworthy act; wherefore from many such acts a habit results. But a habit of praiseworthy deeds is a virtue, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. i, 12). Therefore shamefacedness is a virtue.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 7; iv, 9) that shamefacedness is not a virtue.

I answer that, Virtue is taken in two ways, in a strict sense and in a broad sense. Taken strictly virtue is a perfection, as stated in Phys. vii, 17,18. Wherefore anything that is inconsistent with perfection, though it be good, falls short of the notion of virtue. Now shamefacedness is inconsistent with perfection, because it is the fear of something base, namely of that which is disgraceful. Hence Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 15) that "shamefacedness is fear of a base action." Now just as hope is about a possible and difficult good, so is fear about a possible and arduous evil, as stated above ([FS, Question \[40\], Article \[1\]](#); [FS, Question \[41\], Article \[2\]](#); [FS, Question \[42\], Article \[3\]](#)), when we were treating of the passions. But one who is perfect as to a virtuous habit, does not apprehend that which would be disgraceful and base to do, as being possible and arduous, that is to say difficult for him to avoid; nor does he actually do anything base, so as to be in fear of disgrace. Therefore shamefacedness, properly speaking, is not a virtue, since it falls short of the perfection of virtue.

Taken, however, in a broad sense virtue denotes whatever is good and praiseworthy in human acts or passions; and in this way /shamefacedness is sometimes called a virtue, since it is a praiseworthy passion.

Reply to Objection 1: Observing the mean is not sufficient for the notion of virtue, although it is one of the conditions included in virtue's definition: but it is requisite, in addition to this, that it be "an elective habit," that is to say, operating from choice. Now shamefacedness denotes, not a habit but a passion, nor does its movement result from choice, but from an impulse of passion. Hence it falls short of the notion of virtue.

Reply to Objection 2: As stated above, shamefacedness is fear of baseness and disgrace. Now it has been stated ([Question \[142\], Article \[4\]](#)) that the vice of intemperance is most base and disgraceful. Wherefore shamefacedness pertains more to temperance than to any other virtue,

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS144.html](#) the passion, namely fear. Nevertheless in so far as the vices opposed to other virtues are base and disgraceful, shamefacedness may also pertain to other virtues.

Reply to Objection 3: Shamefacedness fosters honesty, by removing that which is contrary thereto, but not so as to attain to the perfection of honesty.

Reply to Objection 4: Every defect causes a vice, but not every good is sufficient for the notion of virtue. Consequently it does not follow that whatever is directly opposed to vice is a virtue, although every vice is opposed to a virtue, as regards its origin. Hence shamelessness, in so far as it results from excessive love of disgraceful things, is opposed to temperance.

Reply to Objection 5: Being frequently ashamed causes the habit of an acquired virtue whereby one avoids disgraceful things which are the object of shamefacedness, without continuing to be ashamed in their regard: although as a consequence of this acquired virtue, a man would be more ashamed, if confronted with the matter of shamefacedness.

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Whether shamefacedness is about a disgraceful action?

Objection 1: It would seem that shamefacedness is not about a disgraceful action. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 9) that "shamefacedness is fear of disgrace." Now sometimes those who do nothing wrong suffer ignominy, according to Ps. 67:8, "For thy sake I have borne reproach, shame hath covered my face." Therefore shamefacedness is not properly about a disgraceful action.

Objection 2: Further, nothing apparently is disgraceful but what is sinful. Yet man is ashamed of things that are not sins, for instance when he performs a menial occupation. Therefore it seems that shamefacedness is not properly about a disgraceful action.

Objection 3: Further, virtuous deeds are not disgraceful but most beautiful according to Ethic. i, 8. Yet sometimes people are ashamed to do virtuous deeds, according to Lk. 9:26, "He that shall be ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of man shall be ashamed," etc. Therefore shamefacedness is not about a disgraceful action.

Objection 4: Further, if shamefacedness were properly about a disgraceful action, it would follow that the more disgraceful the action the more ashamed would one be. Yet sometimes a man is more ashamed of lesser sins, while he glories in those which are most grievous, according to Ps. 51:3, "Why dost thou glory in malice?" Therefore shamefacedness is not properly about a disgraceful action.

On the contrary, Damascene (De Fide Orth. ii, 15) and Gregory of Nyssa [*Nemesius, (De Nat. Hom. xx)] say that "shamefacedness is fear of doing a disgraceful deed or of a disgraceful deed done."

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when we were treating of the passions, fear is properly about an arduous evil, one, namely, that is difficult to avoid. Now disgrace is twofold. There is the disgrace inherent to vice, which consists in the deformity of a voluntary act: and this, properly speaking, has not the character of an arduous evil. For that which depends on the will alone does not appear to be arduous and above man's ability: wherefore it is not apprehended as fearful, and for this reason the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 5) that such evils are not a matter of fear.

The other kind of disgrace is penal so to speak, and it consists in the reproach that attaches to a person, just as the clarity of glory consists in a person being honored. And since this reproach has the character of an arduous evil, just as honor has the character of an arduous good, shamefacedness, which is fear of disgrace, regards first and foremost reproach or ignominy. And since reproach is properly due to vice, as honor is due to virtue, it follows that shamefacedness regards also the disgrace inherent to vice. Hence the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 5) that "a man is less ashamed of those defects which are not the result of any fault of his own."

Now shamefacedness regards fault in two ways. In one way a man refrains from vicious acts through fear of reproach: in another way a man while doing a disgraceful deed avoids the public eye through fear of reproach. In the former case, according to Gregory of Nyssa (Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xx), we speak of a person "blushing," in the latter we say that he is "ashamed." Hence he says that "the man who is ashamed acts in secret, but he who blushes fears to be disgraced."

Reply to Objection 1: Shamefacedness properly regards disgrace as due to sin which is a voluntary defect. Hence the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 6) that "a man is more ashamed of those things of which he is the cause." Now the virtuous man despises the disgrace to which he is subject on account of virtue, because he does not deserve it; as the Philosopher says of the magnanimous (Ethic. iv, 3). Thus we find it said of the apostles ([Acts 5:41](#)) that "they (the apostles) went from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer reproach for the name of Jesus." It is owing to imperfection of virtue that a man is sometimes ashamed of the reproaches which he suffers on account of virtue, since the more virtuous a man is, the more he despises external things, whether good or evil. Wherefore it is written ([Is. 51:7](#)): "Fear ye not the reproach of men."

Reply to Objection 2: As stated above ([Question \[63\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)), though honor is not really due save to virtue alone, yet it regards a certain excellence: and the same applies to reproach, for though it is properly due to sin alone, yet, at least in man's opinion, it regards any kind of defect. Hence a man is ashamed of poverty, disrepute, servitude, and the like.

Reply to Objection 3: Shamefacedness does not regard virtuous deeds as such. Yet it happens accidentally that a man is ashamed of them either because he looks upon them as vicious according to human opinion, or because he is afraid of being marked as presumptuous or hypocritical for doing virtuous deeds.

Reply to Objection 4: Sometimes more grievous sins are less shameful, either because they are less disgraceful, as spiritual sins in comparison with sins of the flesh, or because they connote a certain abundance of some temporal good; thus a man is more ashamed of cowardice than of daring, of theft than of robbery, on account of a semblance of power. The same applies to other sins.

Whether man is more shamefaced of those who are more closely connected with him?

Objection 1: It would seem that man is not more shamefaced of those who are more closely connected with him. For it is stated in Rhet. ii, 6 that "men are more shamefaced of those from whom they desire approbation." Now men desire this especially from people of the better sort who are sometimes not connected with them. Therefore man is not more shamefaced of those who are more closely connected with him.

Objection 2: Further, seemingly those are more closely connected who perform like deeds. Now man is not made ashamed of his sin by those whom he knows to be guilty of the same sin, because according to Rhet. ii, 6, "a man does not forbid his neighbor what he does himself." Therefore he is not more shamefaced of those who are most closely connected with him.

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 6) that "men take more shame from those who retail their information to many, such as jokers and fable-tellers." But those who are more closely connected with a man do not retail his vices. Therefore one should not take shame chiefly from them.

Objection 4: Further, the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 6) that "men are most liable to be made ashamed by those among whom they have done nothing amiss; by those of whom they ask something for the first time; by those whose friends they wish to become." Now these are less closely connected with us. Therefore man is not made most ashamed by those who are more closely united to him.

On the contrary, It is stated in Rhet. ii, 6 that "man is made most ashamed by those who are to be continually with him."

I answer that, Since reproach is opposed to honor, just as honor denotes attestation to someone's excellence, especially the excellence which is according to virtue, so too reproach, the fear of which is shamefacedness, denotes attestation to a person's defect, especially that which results from sin. Hence the more weighty a person's attestation is considered to be, the more does he make another person ashamed. Now a person's attestation may be considered as being more weighty, either because he is certain of the truth or because of its effect. Certitude of the truth attaches to a person's attestations for two reasons. First on account of the rectitude of his judgement, as in the case of wise and virtuous men, by whom man is more desirous of being honored and by whom he is brought to a greater sense of shame. Hence children and the lower animals inspire no one with shame, by reason of their lack of judgment. Secondly, on account of his knowledge of the matter attested, because "everyone judges well of what is known to him" [*Ethic. i, 3]. In this way we are more liable to be made ashamed by persons connected with us, since they are better acquainted with our deeds: whereas strangers and persons entirely unknown to us, who are ignorant of what we do, inspire us with no shame at all.

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therefrom; wherefore men are more desirous of being honored by those who can be of use to them, and are more liable to be made ashamed by those who are able to do them some harm. And for this reason again, in a certain respect, persons connected with us make us more ashamed, since we are to be continually in their society, as though this entailed a continual harm to us: whereas the harm that comes from strangers and passersby ceases almost at once.

Reply to Objection 1: People of the better sort make us ashamed for the same reason as those who are more closely connected with us; because just as the attestation of the better men carries more weight since they have a more universal knowledge of things, and in their judgments hold fast to the truth: so, too, the attestation of those among whom we live is more cogent since they know more about our concerns in detail.

Reply to Objection 2: We fear not the attestation of those who are connected with us in the likeness of sin, because we do not think that they look upon our defect as disgraceful.

Reply to Objection 3: Tale-bearers make us ashamed on account of the harm they do by making many think ill of us.

Reply to Objection 4: Even those among whom we have done no wrong, make us more ashamed, on account of the harm that would follow, because, to wit, we should forfeit the good opinion they had of us: and again because when contraries are put in juxtaposition their opposition seems greater, so that when a man notices something disgraceful in one whom he esteemed good, he apprehends it as being the more disgraceful. The reason why we are made more ashamed by those of whom we ask something for the first time, or whose friends we wish to be, is that we fear to suffer some injury, by being disappointed in our request, or by failing to become their friends.

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Whether even virtuous men can be ashamed?

Objection 1: It would seem that even virtuous men can be ashamed. For contraries have contrary effects. Now those who excel in wickedness are not ashamed, according to Jer. 3:3, "Thou hadst a harlot's forehead, thou wouldst not blush." Therefore those who are virtuous are more inclined to be ashamed.

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says (Rhet. ii, 6) that "men are ashamed not only of vice, but also of the signs of evil": and this happens also in the virtuous. Therefore virtuous men can be ashamed.

Objection 3: Further, shamefacedness is "fear of disgrace" [*Ethic. iv, 9]. Now virtuous people may happen to be ignominious, for instance if they are slandered, or if they suffer reproach undeservedly. Therefore a virtuous man can be ashamed.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS144.html](#) [143]). Now a part is not separated from its whole. Since then temperance is in a virtuous man, it means that shamefacedness is also.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 9) that a "virtuous man is not shamefaced."

I answer that, As stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)) shamefacedness is fear of some disgrace. Now it may happen in two ways that an evil is not feared: first, because it is not reckoned an evil; secondly because one reckons it impossible with regard to oneself, or as not difficult to avoid.

Accordingly shame may be lacking in a person in two ways. First, because the things that should make him ashamed are not deemed by him to be disgraceful; and in this way those who are steeped in sin are without shame, for instead of disapproving of their sins, they boast of them. Secondly, because they apprehend disgrace as impossible to themselves, or as easy to avoid. In this way the old and the virtuous are not shamefaced. Yet they are so disposed, that if there were anything disgraceful in them they would be ashamed of it. Wherefore the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 9) that "shame is in the virtuous hypothetically."

Reply to Objection 1: Lack of shame occurs in the best and in the worst men through different causes, as stated in the Article. In the average men it is found, in so far as they have a certain love of good, and yet are not altogether free from evil.

Reply to Objection 2: It belongs to the virtuous man to avoid not only vice, but also whatever has the semblance of vice, according to 1 Thess. 5:22, "From all appearance of evil refrain yourselves." The Philosopher, too, says (Ethic. iv, 9) that the virtuous man should avoid "not only what is really evil, but also those things that are regarded as evil."

Reply to Objection 3: As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 1) the virtuous man despises ignominy and reproach, as being things he does not deserve, wherefore he is not much ashamed of them. Nevertheless, to a certain extent, shame, like the other passions, may forestall reason.

Reply to Objection 4: Shamefacedness is a part of temperance, not as though it entered into its essence, but as a disposition to it: wherefore Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 43) that "shamefacedness lays the first foundation of temperance," by inspiring man with the horror of whatever is disgraceful.