

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### OF THE VICES OPPOSED TO TEMPERANCE (FOUR ARTICLES)

We must now consider the vices opposed to temperance. Under this head there are four points of inquiry:

(1) Whether insensibility is a sin?

(2) Whether intemperance is a childish sin?

(3) Of the comparison between intemperance and timidity;

(4) Whether intemperance is the most disgraceful of vices?

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### Whether insensibility is a vice?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that insensibility is not a vice. For those are called insensible who are deficient with regard to pleasures of touch. Now seemingly it is praiseworthy and virtuous to be altogether deficient in such matters: for it is written ([Dan. 10:2,3](#)): "In those days Daniel mourned the days of three weeks, I ate no desirable bread, and neither flesh nor wine entered my mouth, neither was I anointed with ointment." Therefore insensibility is not a sin.

**Objection 2:** Further, "man's good is to be in accord with reason," according to Dionysius (Div. Nom. iv). Now abstinence from all pleasures of touch is most conducive to man's progress in the good of reason: for it is written ([Dan. 1:17](#)) that "to the children" who took pulse for their

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Therefore insensibility, which rejects these pleasures altogether, is not sinful.

**Objection 3:** Further, that which is a very effective means of avoiding sin would seem not to be sinful. Now the most effective remedy in avoiding sin is to shun pleasures, and this pertains to insensibility. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 9) that "if we deny ourselves pleasures we are less liable to sin." Therefore there is nothing vicious in insensibility.

**On the contrary,** Nothing save vice is opposed to virtue. Now insensibility is opposed to the virtue of temperance according to the Philosopher (Ethic. ii, 7; iii, 11). Therefore insensibility is a vice.

**I answer that,** Whatever is contrary to the natural order is vicious. Now nature has introduced pleasure into the operations that are necessary for man's life. Wherefore the natural order requires that man should make use of these pleasures, in so far as they are necessary for man's well-being, as regards the preservation either of the individual or of the species. Accordingly, if anyone were to reject pleasure to the extent of omitting things that are necessary for nature's preservation, he would sin, as acting counter to the order of nature. And this pertains to the vice of insensibility.

It must, however, be observed that it is sometimes praiseworthy, and even necessary for the sake of an end, to abstain from such pleasures as result from these operations. Thus, for the sake of the body's health, certain persons refrain from pleasures of meat, drink, and sex; as also for the fulfilment of certain engagements: thus athletes and soldiers have to deny themselves many pleasures, in order to fulfil their respective duties. In like manner penitents, in order to recover health of soul, have recourse to abstinence from pleasures, as a kind of diet, and those who are desirous of giving themselves up to contemplation and Divine things need much to refrain from carnal things. Nor do any of these things pertain to the vice of insensibility, because they are in accord with right reason.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Daniel abstained thus from pleasures, not through any horror of pleasure as though it were evil in itself, but for some praiseworthy end, in order, namely, to adapt himself to the heights of contemplation by abstaining from pleasures of the body. Hence the text goes on to tell of the revelation that he received immediately afterwards.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Since man cannot use his reason without his sensitive powers, which need a bodily organ, as stated in the FP, Question [84], Articles [7],8, man needs to sustain his body in order that he may use his reason. Now the body is sustained by means of operations that afford pleasure: wherefore the good of reason cannot be in a man if he abstain from all pleasures. Yet this need for using pleasures of the body will be greater or less, according as man needs more or less the powers of his body in accomplishing the act of reason. Wherefore it is commendable for those who undertake the duty of giving themselves to contemplation, and of imparting to others a spiritual good, by a kind of spiritual procreation, as it were, to abstain from many pleasures, but not for those who are in duty bound to bodily occupations and carnal procreation.

**Reply to Objection 3:** In order to avoid sin, pleasure must be shunned, not altogether, but so that it is not sought more than necessity requires.

## Whether intemperance is a childish sin?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that intemperance is not a childish sin. For Jerome in commenting on Mt. 18:3, "Unless you be converted, and become as little children," says that "a child persists not in anger, is unmindful of injuries, takes no pleasure in seeing a beautiful woman," all of which is contrary to intemperance. Therefore intemperance is not a childish sin.

**Objection 2:** Further, children have none but natural desires. Now "in respect of natural desires few sin by intemperance," according to the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 11). Therefore intemperance is not a childish sin.

**Objection 3:** Further, children should be fostered and nourished: whereas concupiscence and pleasure, about which intemperance is concerned, are always to be thwarted and uprooted, according to Col. 3:5, "Mortify... your members upon the earth, which are... concupiscence" [\*Vulg.: 'your members which are upon the earth, fornication... concupiscence'], etc. Therefore intemperance is not a childish sin.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 12) that "we apply the term intemperance\* to childish faults." [\*{Akolasia} which Aristotle refers to {kolazo} to punish, so that its original sense would be 'impunity' or 'unrestraint.']

**I answer that,** A thing is said to be childish for two reasons. First, because it is becoming to children, and the Philosopher does not mean that the sin of intemperance is childish in this sense. Secondly, by way of likeness, and it is in this sense that sins of intemperance are said to be childish. For the sin of intemperance is one of unchecked concupiscence, which is likened to a child in three ways. First, as rewards that which they both desire, for like a child concupiscence desires something disgraceful. This is because in human affairs a thing is beautiful according as it harmonizes with reason. Wherefore Tully says (De Offic. i, 27) under the heading "Comeliness is twofold," that "the beautiful is that which is in keeping with man's excellence in so far as his nature differs from other animals." Now a child does not attend to the order of reason; and in like manner "concupiscence does not listen to reason," according to Ethic. vii, 6. Secondly, they are alike as to the result. For a child, if left to his own will, becomes more self-willed: hence it is written (Ecclus. 30:8): "A horse not broken becometh stubborn, and a child left to himself will become headstrong." So, too, concupiscence, if indulged, gathers strength: wherefore Augustine says (Confess. viii, 5): "Lust served became a custom, and custom not resisted became necessity." Thirdly, as to the remedy which is applied to both. For a child is corrected by being restrained; hence it is written ([Prov. 23:13,14](#)): "Withhold not correction from a child... Thou shalt beat him with a rod, and deliver his soul from Hell." In like manner by resisting concupiscence we moderate it according to the demands of virtue. Augustine indicates this when he says (Music. vi, 11) that if the mind be lifted up to spiritual things, and remain fixed "thereon, the impulse of custom," i.e. carnal concupiscence, "is broken, and being suppressed is gradually weakened: for it was stronger when we followed it, and though not wholly destroyed, it is certainly less strong when we curb it." Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 12) that "as a child ought to live according to the direction of his tutor, so ought the concupiscible to accord with reason."

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[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS142.html](#) in children. It is not in this sense that the sin of intemperance is said to be childish, but by way of likeness, as stated above.

**Reply to Objection 2:** A desire may be said to be natural in two ways. First, with regard to its genus, and thus temperance and intemperance are about natural desires, since they are about desires of food and sex, which are directed to the preservation of nature. Secondly, a desire may be called natural with regard to the species of the thing that nature requires for its own preservation; and in this way it does not happen often that one sins in the matter of natural desires, for nature requires only that which supplies its need, and there is no sin in desiring this, save only where it is desired in excess as to quantity. This is the only way in which sin can occur with regard to natural desires, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. iii, 11).

There are other things in respect of which sins frequently occur, and these are certain incentives to desire devised by human curiosity [\*Cf. Question [167]], such as the nice [curiosa] preparation of food, or the adornment of women. And though children do not affect these things much, yet intemperance is called a childish sin for the reason given above.

**Reply to Objection 3:** That which regards nature should be nourished and fostered in children, but that which pertains to the lack of reason in them should not be fostered, but corrected, as stated above.

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## Whether cowardice\* is a greater vice than intemperance? [\*Cf. Question [125]]

**Objection 1:** It would seem that cowardice is a greater vice than intemperance. For a vice deserves reproach through being opposed to the good of virtue. Now cowardice is opposed to fortitude, which is a more excellent virtue than temperance, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#); [Question \[141\]](#), [Article \[8\]](#)). Therefore cowardice is a greater vice than intemperance.

**Objection 2:** Further, the greater the difficulty to be surmounted, the less is a man to be reproached for failure, wherefore the Philosopher says (Ethic. vii, 7) that "it is no wonder, in fact it is pardonable, if a man is mastered by strong and overwhelming pleasures or pains." Now seemingly it is more difficult to control pleasures than other passions; hence it is stated in Ethic. ii, 3, that "it is more difficult to contend against pleasure than against anger, which would seem to be stronger than fear." Therefore intemperance, which is overcome by pleasure, is a less grievous sin than cowardice, which is overcome by fear.

**Objection 3:** Further, it is essential to sin that it be voluntary. Now cowardice is more voluntary than intemperance, since no man desires to be intemperate, whereas some desire to avoid dangers of death, which pertains to cowardice. Therefore cowardice is a more grievous sin than intemperance.

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***I answer that,*** one may be compared with another in two ways. First, with regard to the matter or object; secondly, on the part of the man who sins: and in both ways intemperance is a more grievous sin than cowardice.

First, as regards the matter. For cowardice shuns dangers of death, to avoid which the principal motive is the necessity of preserving life. On the other hand, intemperance is about pleasures, the desire of which is not so necessary for the preservation of life, because, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#), ad 2), intemperance is more about certain annexed pleasures or desires than about natural desires or pleasures. Now the more necessary the motive of sin the less grievous the sin. Wherefore intemperance is a more grievous vice than cowardice, on the part of the object or motive matter.

In like manner again, on the part of the man who sins, and this for three reasons. First, because the more sound-minded a man is, the more grievous his sin, wherefore sins are not imputed to those who are demented. Now grave fear and sorrow, especially in dangers of death, stun the human mind, but not so pleasure which is the motive of intemperance. Secondly, because the more voluntary a sin the graver it is. Now intemperance has more of the voluntary in it than cowardice has, and this for two reasons. The first is because actions done through fear have their origin in the compulsion of an external agent, so that they are not simply voluntary but mixed, as stated in *Ethic.* iii, 1, whereas actions done for the sake of pleasure are simply voluntary. The second reason is because the actions of an intemperate man are more voluntary individually and less voluntary generically. For no one would wish to be intemperate, yet man is enticed by individual pleasures which make of him an intemperate man. Hence the most effective remedy against intemperance is not to dwell on the consideration of singulars. It is the other way about in matters relating to cowardice: because the particular action that imposes itself on a man is less voluntary, for instance to cast aside his shield, and the like, whereas the general purpose is more voluntary, for instance to save himself by flight. Now that which is more voluntary in the particular circumstances in which the act takes place, is simply more voluntary. Wherefore intemperance, being simply more voluntary than cowardice, is a greater vice. Thirdly, because it is easier to find a remedy for intemperance than for cowardice, since pleasures of food and sex, which are the matter of intemperance, are of everyday occurrence, and it is possible for man without danger by frequent practice in their regard to become temperate; whereas dangers of death are of rare occurrence, and it is more dangerous for man to encounter them frequently in order to cease being a coward.

***Reply to Objection 1:*** The excellence of fortitude in comparison with temperance may be considered from two standpoints. First, with regard to the end, which has the aspect of good: because fortitude is directed to the common good more than temperance is. And from this point of view cowardice has a certain precedence over intemperance, since by cowardice some people forsake the defense of the common good. Secondly, with regard to the difficulty, because it is more difficult to endure dangers of death than to refrain from any pleasures whatever: and from this point of view there is no need for cowardice to take precedence of intemperance. For just as it is a greater strength that does not succumb to a stronger force, so on the other hand to be overcome by a stronger force is proof of a lesser vice, and to succumb to a weaker force, is the proof of a greater vice.

***Reply to Objection 2:*** Love of self-preservation, for the sake of which one shuns perils of death, is much more connatural than any pleasures whatever of food and sex which are

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[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS142.html](#) of death, than the desire of pleasure in matters of food and sex: although the latter is more difficult to resist than anger, sorrow, and fear, occasioned by certain other evils.

**Reply to Objection 3:** The voluntary, in cowardice, depends rather on a general than on a particular consideration: wherefore in such cases we have the voluntary not simply but in a restricted sense.

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## Whether intemperance is the most disgraceful of sins?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that intemperance is not the most disgraceful of sins. As honor is due to virtue so is disgrace due to sin. Now some sins are more grievous than intemperance: for instance murder, blasphemy, and the like. Therefore intemperance is not the most disgraceful of sins.

**Objection 2:** Further, those sins which are the more common are seemingly less disgraceful, since men are less ashamed of them. Now sins of intemperance are most common, because they are about things connected with the common use of human life, and in which many happen to sin. Therefore sins of intemperance do not seem to be most disgraceful.

**Objection 3:** Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. vii, 6) temperance and intemperance are about human desires and pleasures. Now certain desires and pleasures are more shameful than human desires and pleasures; such are brutal pleasures and those caused by disease as the Philosopher states (Ethic. vii, 5). Therefore intemperance is not the most disgraceful of sins.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 10) that "intemperance is justly more deserving of reproach than other vices."

**I answer that,** Disgrace is seemingly opposed to honor and glory. Now honor is due to excellence, as stated above ([Question \[103\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), and glory denotes clarity ([Question \[103\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 3). Accordingly intemperance is most disgraceful for two reasons. First, because it is most repugnant to human excellence, since it is about pleasures common to us and the lower animals, as stated above ([Question \[141\]](#), [Articles \[2\],3](#)). Wherefore it is written ([Ps. 48:21](#)): "Man, when he was in honor, did not understand: he hath been compared to senseless beasts, and made like to them." Secondly, because it is most repugnant to man's clarity or beauty; inasmuch as the pleasures which are the matter of intemperance dim the light of reason from which all the clarity and beauty of virtue arises: wherefore these pleasures are described as being most slavish.

**Reply to Objection 1:** As Gregory says [\*Moral. xxxiii. 12], "the sins of the flesh," which are comprised under the head of intemperance, although less culpable, are more disgraceful. The reason is that culpability is measured by inordinateness in respect of the end, while disgrace

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***Reply to Objection 2:*** The commonness of a sin diminishes the shamefulness and disgrace of a sin in the opinion of men, but not as regards the nature of the vices themselves.

***Reply to Objection 3:*** When we say that intemperance is most disgraceful, we mean in comparison with human vices, those, namely, that are connected with human passions which to a certain extent are in conformity with human nature. But those vices which exceed the mode of human nature are still more disgraceful. Nevertheless such vices are apparently reducible to the genus of intemperance, by way of excess: for instance, if a man delight in eating human flesh, or in committing the unnatural vice.