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978-0-521-02952-0 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 44 - Well-Tempered Passion,
(2a2ae. 155-170)

Thomas Gilby O.P.

Excerpt

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Well-tempered passion

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SUMMA THEOLOGIAE, 2a2ae. 155, 1

POSTEA CONSIDERANDUM est de partibus potentialibus temperantiae:

- et primo de continentia;
- secundo de clementia;
- tertio de modestia.

Circa primum considerandum est de continentia et de incontinentia.

Quaestio 155. de continentia

Circa continentiam quaeruntur quatuor:

1. utrum continentia sit virtus;
2. quae sit materia ejus;
3. quod sit ejus subjectum;
4. de comparatione ejus ad temperantiam.

articulus 1. utrum continentia sit virtus

AD PRIMUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod continentia non sit virtus. Species enim non dividitur generi. Sed continentia dividitur virtuti, ut patet per Philosophum.² Ergo continentia non est virtus.

2. Præterea, nullus utendo virtute peccat, quia, secundum Augustinum, *virtus est qua nemo male utitur*.³ Sed aliquis continendo potest peccare; puta si desideret aliquid bonum facere et ab eo se contineat. Ergo continentia non est virtus.

3. Præterea, nulla virtus retrahit hominem a licitis, sed solum ab illicitis. Sed continentia retrahit hominem a licitis: dicit enim glossa quod per continentia aliquis se etiam a licitis abstinet.⁴ Ergo continentia non est virtus.

SED CONTRA, omnis habitus laudabilis videtur esse virtus.⁵ Sed continentia¹cf *De veritate* XIV, 1²*Ethics* VI, 1. 1145a17, 36. cf IV, 9. 1128b33³*De lib. arbit.* II, 9. PL 32, 1268⁴Lombard's Gloss, on *Galatians* 5, 23. PL 132, 160⁵The preceding treatise (vol. 43 of this series) has discussed the cardinal virtue of temperance as a specific virtue; the present treatise takes it as a more general or principal virtue and discusses its allied virtues, or virtual or 'potential' parts. A potential part is a virtue specifically distinct from the principal virtue, under the heading of which it is treated, because its subject-matter is different, yet shares in

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VIRTUES ALLIED TO TEMPERANCE^a come next into discussion; and

- first, continence (155-6);
- second, clemency (157-9);
- third, modesty (160-9).

To begin with continence and its opposite, incontinence.

Question 155. continence

There are four points of inquiry:

1. whether continence is a virtue;
2. what it is about;
3. where it is seated;
4. and how it compares with temperance.

article 1. is continence a virtue?

THE FIRST POINT:¹ 1. It seems not. For a species is not classified over and against its genus. Now this is how Aristotle contrasts continence with virtue.² So it is not a virtue.

2. Again, nobody sins in exercising a virtue, which, according to Augustine, is that which nobody uses ill.³ Yet a person may not do well by being continent, for instance, when he would like to perform a good deed yet holds himself in. Continence, then, is not a virtue.

3. Further, virtue may restrain a person from what is unlawful, but never from what is lawful. A gloss on *Galatians*, however, speaks of continence holding a man back from things licit.⁴ Consequently it is not a virtue.

ON THE OTHER HAND every commendable disposition would appear to be a

some of its essential character because it echoes the same mood. See below, 2a2ae. 157, 3; 160, 1; 161, 4; 167, 2. Thus religion, or divine worship, is a potential part of justice, for though it is not a transaction between equals, it offers what is strictly due: cf 2a2ae. 180, 1.

Other technical terms are the *partes integrales*, the integral parts or components of a virtue, the qualities that enter into its make-up, thus the firm will to act fairly is a component of justice; and the *partes subjectivæ*, the proximate species of a virtue considered more widely but still specifically, thus sobriety and chastity are specific types of temperance; cf 2a2ae. 143, 1.

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est huiusmodi: dicit enim Andronicus quod *continentia est habitus invictus a delectatione*.⁶ Ergo continentia est virtus.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod nomen continentiae dupliciter sumitur a diversis. Quidam enim continentiam nominant per quam aliquis ab omni delectatione venerea abstinet; unde et Apostolus ad *Gal.* continentiam castitati conjungit.⁷ Et sic continentia perfecta principalis quidem est virginitas, secundaria vero viduitas. Unde secundum hoc eadem ratio est de continentia quae de virginitate, quam supra diximus virtutem.⁸

Alii vero dicunt continentiam esse per quam aliquis resistit concupiscentiis pravis, quae in eo vehementes existunt: et hoc modo accipit Philosophus continentiam in *Ethic*.⁹ Hoc etiam modo accipitur continentia in *Collationibus Patrum*.¹⁰ Hoc autem modo continentia habet aliquid de ratione virtutis, inquantum scilicet ratio firmata est contra passiones ne ab eis deducatur; non tamen attingit ad perfectam rationem virtutis moralis, secundum quam etiam appetitus sensitivus subditur rationi sic ut in eo non insurgant vehementes passiones rationi contrariae. Et ideo Philosophus dicit quod *continentia non est virtus, sed quaedam mixta*,¹¹ inquantum scilicet habet aliquid de virtute et in aliquo deficit a virtute.

Largius tamen accipiendo nomen virtutis pro quolibet principio laudabilium operum, possumus dicere continentiam esse virtutem.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod Philosophus continentiam dividit virtuti quantum ad hoc in quo deficit a virtute.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod homo proprie est id quod est secundum rationem. Et ideo ex hoc dicitur aliquis in seipso se tenere quo tenet se in eo quod convenit rationi. Quod autem pertinet ad perversitatem rationis non est conveniens rationi. Unde ille solus vere continens dicitur qui tenet se in eo quod est secundum rationem rectam, non autem in eo quod est secundum rationem perversam. Rationi autem rectae opponuntur concupiscentiae pravae, sicut et rationi perversae opponuntur concupiscentiae bonae. Et ideo proprie et vere continens est qui persistit in ratione recta, abstinens a concupiscentiis pravis; non autem qui persistit in ratione perversa, abstinens a concupiscentiis bonis; sed hic magis potest dici obstinatus in malo.

3. Ad tertium dicendum quod glossa ibi loquitur de continentia secundum primum modum, secundum quem continentia nominat quamdam

⁶*Ethics* I, 13. 1003a9⁷*Galatians* 5, 23⁸*Ethics* VI, 1. 1145b, cf 1151b25¹⁰*Collat. Patrum* XII, 10. PL 49, 888. cf Jerome PL 26, 449. Rabanus Maurus PL 112, 360¹¹*Ethics* IV, 9. 1128b33⁶*De affect.* DD 576^{2a2ae.} 152, 3. Vol. 53

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virtue.⁵ And such is continence; accordingly Andronicus^b praises it as a quality unconquered by pleasure.⁶ Hence continence is a virtue.^c

REPLY: The term is taken in one of two senses by the various authors. Some^d treat it as abstinence from all sex pleasures; thus St Paul couples it with chastity.^{7e} And in this sense virginity is the principal, and chaste widowhood the secondary form of perfect continence. Accordingly the same reasoning holds for continence as for virginity, which we have already shown to be a virtue.⁸

Others, however, treat it as resistance to the crooked lusts that shake us. Thus Aristotle;⁹ thus also Cassian.^{10f} In this sense continence has some of the quality of virtue, in that the reason remains steadfast against the passions which would lead us astray. Nevertheless it does not achieve the full stature of a moral virtue, which so composes even the sensory appetite according to reason that powerful rebellious passions do not rear up. Thus Aristotle speaks of continence as being, not unalloyed virtue, but a sort of mixture¹¹ which has some of the ingredients of virtue while yet in part falling short of virtue.

Nevertheless, broadly speaking and taking virtue to mean any ability to perform commendable deeds, we can allow that continence is a virtue.

Hence: 1. Aristotle's division of continence against virtue hinges on the point where it is lacking in the full quality of virtue.

2. To be reasonable, that is man's proper prerogative. Consequently a person is said to be continent or self-possessed when he holds himself well to the maintenance, not to the subversion of reason. He alone is called continent who practises self-restraint when it accords with right reason, not wrong reason. Distorted lusts are opposed to right reason, healthy lusts to wrong reason. He, then, is well and truly continent who abstains from perverse lust and steadily holds to right reason, not he who abstains from rightful lusts and persists in wrong reason—he, rather, should be called obstinate in evil.

3. This gloss is referring to continence in the first sense, and as denoting a certain gallantry of virtue, which not merely abstains from what is

^bAndronicus of Rhodes, c. 40 BC, the first systematic editor of the works of Aristotle. A somewhat eclectic Aristotelean, he is praised by Plotinus; his influence began early, and he will re-appear as an approved authority.

^cOrdinarily a *sed contra* is a statement of position, not a proof.

^de.g. Haymo of Halberstadt, d. 853, PL 117, 694; and Rupert of Deutz, d. 1129, PL 167, 787. cf Lombard's Gloss, PL 192, 162, and Augustine, PL 40, 349.

^e*egkrateia*, mastery, self-control, power, strength. cf 2a2æ. 151, Vol. 43.

^fJohn Cassian, b. Scythia, 360, d. Marseilles, between 432 and 435, ascetical writer who introduced Palestinian and Egyptian monasticism into the West.

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virtutem perfectam, quæ non solum abstinet ab illicitis bonis, sed etiam a quibusdam licitis minus bonis, ut totaliter intendatur perfectioribus bonis.

*articulus 2. utrum materia continentiae sint concupiscentiae
delectationum tactus*

AD SECUNDUM sic proceditur: 1. Videtur quod materia continentiae non sint concupiscentiae delectationum tactus. Dicit enim Ambrosius, *Generale decorum ita est ac si æquabilem formam, atque universitatem honestatis habeat in omni actu suo continentem*.¹ Sed non omnis actus humanus pertinet ad delectationes tactus. Ergo continentia non est solum circa concupiscentias delectationum tactus.

2. Præterea, nomen continentiae ex hoc sumitur quod aliquis tenet se in bono rationis rectæ, sicut dictum est.² Sed quædam aliæ passiones vehementius abducunt hominem a ratione recta quam concupiscentiae delectabilium tactus; sicut timor periculorum mortis, qui stupefacit hominem; et ira, quæ est insaniam similis, ut Seneca dicit.³ Ergo continentia non dicitur proprie circa concupiscentias delectationum tactus.

3. Præterea, Tullius dicit quod *continentia est per quam cupiditas consilii gubernatione regitur*.⁴ Cupiditas autem magis consuevit dici divitiarum quam delectabilium tactus, secundum illud, *Radix omnium malorum est cupiditas*.⁵ Ergo continentia non est proprie circa concupiscentias delectationum tactus.

4. Præterea, delectationes tactus non solum sunt in rebus venereis, sed etiam in usu ciborum. Sed continentia solum circa usum venereorum consuevit dici. Ergo non est propria materia ejus concupiscentia delectationum tactus.

5. Præterea, inter delectationes tactus quædam sunt non humanæ, sed bestiales, tam in cibis, utpote si quis delectaretur in esu carniarum humanarum, quam etiam in venereis, puta in abusu bestiarum vel puerorum. Sed

¹*De offic.* 46. PL 16, 96

²art. 1 ad 2

³*De ira* 1, 1

⁴*De invent. rhet.* 54

⁵1 *Timothy* 6, 10

⁶An echo of the teaching in 1 *Corinthians* 7, 25–35. The notion of virtue pushing to extremes, of an extravagance in virtue, has been applied to magnificence and virginity, 2a2ae. 152, 3. For heroic virtue, see 1a2ae. 61, 5, and incontinence in virtue, below 2a2ae. 156, 2.

⁷St Ambrose of Milan, b. Treves, c. 339, d. 397. His moral-ascetical work, *De officiis*, is modelled on the Stoic treatise of Cicero, but relies on Scripture for examples and authority.

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unlawful but also denies itself what is lawful, in order that by giving up lesser goods it may be committed whole-heartedly to the more perfect.⁸

article 2. are the lusts for carnal pleasure what continence is about?

THE SECOND POINT: 1. It seems not. Ambrose^a writes, *General decorum is such as to balance and hold together every part of honourableness throughout every action.*¹ Not all human acts, however, are engaged with carnal pleasures.^b Hence continence is not restricted to the lusts for them.

2. Moreover, continence takes its name, as we have mentioned,² from being contained or self-possessed in the good life according to right reason. But there are passions more powerful than carnal lust to drag us away from reasonable living, such as the numbing fear of mortal peril, and the rage which, as Seneca^c remarks, verges on madness.³ Consequently continence does not especially refer to carnal pleasure.

3. Again, Cicero^d writes that continence rules cupidity with the governance of counsel.⁴ Cupidity usually refers to riches rather than to carnal pleasures; in this sense St Paul calls it *the root of all evil.*⁵ And so, properly speaking, continence is not about carnal desires.

4. Besides, there are carnal pleasures in eating as well as in sexuality. In ordinary speech continence refers only to sexuality. Therefore the desire for carnal pleasure is not its proper subject-matter.

5. Then also, some carnal pleasures are not human but beastly, in matters both of food and of sex, for instance cannibalism, pederasty, and bestiality. According to the *Nicomachean Ethics*, continence is not about such

^bCarnal pleasure, literally the pleasures of touch, *tactus*, *haphē*, one of the five external senses. A complex sense, not to be restricted to skin-contacts, is better translated 'body-sense'. This can be treated as a single sense for purposes of moral science, although it is multiple from the point of view of physiology and psychology. cf 2a2ae. 142, 4, Vol. 43, note a. *De Anima* II, 11. 422b23 St Thomas, in loc. lect. 22. For its pleasures, cf 1a2ae. 31, 6. Note the distinction, drawn by the manualists, between carnal pleasure and sensible or sensuous pleasure: neither necessarily carry a pejorative meaning, though homilists may load them with one. The former is body-sense gratification, thus the relief in and from a healthy bowel-motion. The latter has an element of cognitive appreciation and is, in varying degrees, a disinterested *aesthesia*. It is the difference between a predator and a fox-hunting man. cf 2a2ae. 142, 4 ad 3.

^cLucius Annaeus Seneca, c. 4 B.C.–A.D. 65.

^dMarcus Tullius Cicero, 106–43 B.C. The Latin Stoics were a strong though not dominant influence on Western patristic and early scholastic ethics. Boëthius has been called the heir to Cicero, though he was much else besides. Seneca and Cicero were received authorities for the tradition into which St Thomas was born; in the present treatise especially he will appeal to them, if sometimes rather dutifully.

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circa hujusmodi non est continentia, ut dicitur in *Ethic.*⁶ Non ergo propria materia continentiae sunt concupiscentiae delectationum tactus.

SED CONTRA est quod Philosophus dicit, quod *continentia et incontinentia sunt circa eadem, circa quae temperantia et intemperantia.*⁷ Sed temperantia et intemperantia sunt circa concupiscentias delectationum tactus, ut supra habitum est.⁸ Ergo etiam continentia et incontinentia sunt circa eandem materiam.

RESPONSIO: Dicendum quod nomen continentiae refrenationem quamdam importat, inquantum scilicet tenet se aliquis ne passiones sequatur. Et ideo proprie continentia dicitur circa illas passiones quae impellunt ad aliquid prosequendum in quibus laudabile est ut ratio retrahat hominem a prosequendo; non autem proprie est circa illas passiones quae important retractionem quamdam, sicut timor et alia hujusmodi. In his enim laudabile est firmitatem servare in prosequendo quod ratio dictat, ut supra dictum est.⁹

Est autem considerandum quod naturales inclinationes principia sunt omnium supervenientium, ut supra dictum est.¹⁰ Et ideo passiones tanto vehementius impellunt ad aliquid prosequendum quanto magis sequuntur inclinationem naturae; quae praecipue inclinatur ad ea quae sunt sibi necessaria vel ad conservationem individui, sicut sunt cibi, vel ad conservationem speciei, sicut sunt actus venerei, quorum delectationes ad tactum pertinent. Et ideo continentia et incontinentia proprie dicuntur circa concupiscentias delectationum tactus.

1. Ad primum ergo dicendum quod, sicut nomen temperantiae potest communiter accipi in quacumque materia, proprie tamen dicitur in illa materia in qua est optimum hominem refrenari, ita etiam continentia proprie dicitur in materia in qua est optimum et difficillimum contineri, scilicet in concupiscentiis delectationum tactus, communiter autem et secundum quid potest dici in quacumque alia materia: et hoc modo utitur Ambrosius nomine continentiae.

2. Ad secundum dicendum quod circa timorem non proprie laudatur continentia, sed magis firmitas animi quam fortitudo importat. Ira autem impetum quidem facit ad aliquid prosequendum; iste tamen impetus magis sequitur apprehensionem animalem, prout scilicet aliquis apprehendit se esse ab alio laesum, quam inclinationem naturalem. Et ideo dicitur quidem aliquis secundum quid continens irae, non tamen simpliciter.

⁶*Ethics* VII, 5. 1148b34

⁷*Ethics* VII, 4. 1148b10

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pleasures.⁶ Accordingly the lusts for carnal pleasure are not its specific subject-matter.

ON THE OTHER HAND there is Aristotle holding that continence and incontinence occupy the same field as temperance and intemperance,⁷ which, as we have seen,⁸ are about carnal pleasure.

REPLY: 'Continence' implies a certain reserve or holding back, in that a person contains himself against being carried away by passion. And so, to be precise, it applies to passions which drive him to get something attractive when it is commendable that they should be withheld, not to passions, such as fear and the like, which imply a recoil from something unattractive; there, as we have seen,⁹ it is commendable to press on firmly towards what reason dictates.

Now, to recall an earlier observation,¹⁰ our inborn drives are the sources of all our subsequent wants. And so the more closely passions follow our fundamental instincts, so much the more powerfully do they urge us on. Nature impels us above all towards what is necessary to it, food for the preservation of the individual, and sexuality for that of the race. Both are matters of carnal pleasure. Consequently continence and incontinence properly speaking refer to our desires for them.

Hence: 1. As temperance can be seen at work in any matter of human interest,^e though precisely as a specific virtue it is engaged with matters where the control of reason is most called for, so it is with continence. As a general condition it is somehow present in every act of virtue, and this is how Ambrose takes it. Yet properly speaking it is engaged with matters where containing oneself is most difficult and desirable, namely with lusting for carnal pleasures.

2. In the face of fear, the quality proper to courage that is praised is not self-possession exactly, but stout-heartedness or a steadiness of spirit. As for anger, it sets up an impulse to get something, but it rises from a psychological perception of having been done an injury, rather than from the very drive of nature.^f Accordingly a person is called continent of anger, that is continent not simply, but with a qualification.^g

⁶2a2ae. 141, 4

⁷2a2ae. 123, 1, 3 & 4; 141, 3

¹⁰1a. 60, 2. cf 2a2ae. 26, 3, 7 & 8

^eTemperance as a general virtue, 2a2ae. 141, 2.

^f*Appetitus animalis*, an 'ensouled' or psychological desire through some form of knowledge, here contrasted with *inclinatio naturalis*, or blind desire. cf 1a. 80, 1.

^gcf below 2a2ae. 156, 4, on being self-possessed or swallowing your anger.

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3. Ad tertium dicendum quod huiusmodi exteriora bona, sicut honores, divitiæ et huiusmodi, ut Philosophus dicit,¹¹ videntur quidem secundum se esse eligibilia, non autem quasi necessaria ad conservationem naturæ. Et ideo circa ea non dicimus simpliciter aliquos continentes vel incontinentes, sed secundum quid, apponendo quod sint continentes vel incontinentes luci, vel honoris, vel alicujus huiusmodi. Et ideo vel Tullius communiter usus est nomine continentia, prout comprehendit sub se etiam continentiam secundum quid, vel accipit cupiditatem stricte pro concupiscentia delectabilium tactus.

4. Ad quartum dicendum quod delectationes venereorum sunt vehementiores quam delectationes ciborum: et ideo circa venerea magis consuevimus continentiam et incontinentiam dicere quam circa cibos, licet secundum Philosophum circa utrumque possit dici.

5. Ad quintum dicendum quod continentia est bonum rationis humanæ: et ideo attenditur circa passiones quæ possunt esse homini connaturales. Unde Philosophus dicit quod si aliquis tenens puerum concupiscat eum vel comedere, vel ad venereorum inconvenientem delectationem, sive sequatur concupiscentiam sive non, non dicitur simpliciter continens, sed secundum quid.¹²

articulus 3. utrum subjectum continentia sit vis concupiscibilis

AD TERTIUM sic proceditur:¹ 1. Videtur quod subjectum continentia sit vis concupiscibilis. Subjectum enim alicujus virtutis oportet esse proportionatum materia. Sed materia continentia, sicut dictum est,² sunt concupiscentia delectabilium tactus, quæ pertinent ad vim concupiscibilem. Ergo continentia est in vi concupiscibili.

2. Præterea, opposita sunt circa idem. Sed incontinentia est in concupiscibili, cujus passiones superant rationem: dicit enim Andronicus quod *incontinentia est malitia concupiscibilis, secundum quam eligit pravas delectationes, prohibente rationali*.³ Ergo et continentia pari ratione est in concupiscibili.

3. Præterea, subjectum virtutis humanæ vel est ratio vel vis appetitiva, quæ dividitur in voluntatem, concupiscibilem et irascibilem. Sed continentia non est in ratione, quia sic esset virtus intellectualis; neque etiam in voluntate, quia continentia est circa passiones, quæ non sunt in volun-

¹¹*Ethics* VII, 4. 1147b29¹²*ibid* 5. 1149a1, 12¹cf III *Sent.* III, 2, 4, ii. In *Ethic.* VII, lect. 10²art. 2³*Comm. on Ethics* VI, 6⁴art. 2 ad 2^aDesirous sensory appetite, the *concupiscibile*, Aristotle's *epithumetikon*, which with