

QUESTION 138

The Vices Opposed to Perseverance

Next we have to consider the vices opposed to perseverance. And on this topic there are two questions: first, concerning softness (*mollities*) and, second, concerning stubbornness or obstinacy (*pertinacia*).

Article 1

Is softness opposed to perseverance?

It seems that softness (*mollities*) is not opposed to perseverance:

Objection 1: A Gloss on 1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (“... nor adulterers nor the soft nor sodomites ...”) explains, “The soft, i.e., those given to unnatural lusts, or men who allow themselves to be used like women (*molles, idest pathici, hoc est muliebria patientes*).” But this is opposed to *chastity*. Therefore, softness is not a vice opposed to perseverance.

Objection 2: In *Ethics 7* the Philosopher says, “Delicacy (*delicia*) is a certain sort of softness.” But being delicate seems to pertain to *intemperance* (*intemperantia*). Therefore, softness is opposed to *temperance* and not to perseverance.

Objection 3: In the same place the Philosopher says, “The individual who is overly fond of amusement (*lusivus*) is soft.” But as *Ethics 4* explains, to be immoderately fond of amusement is opposed to *eutrapelia*, which is the virtue having to do with the pleasures of play. Therefore, softness is not opposed to perseverance.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 7* the Philosopher says, “The individual who perseveres is opposed to the soft individual.”

I respond: As was explained above (q. 137, aa. 1-2), the praiseworthiness of perseverance consists in an individual’s holding on to the good (*non recedit a bono*) by virtue of having endured toils and difficulties for a long time. Directly opposed to him seems to be the individual who readily withdraws from the good because of difficulties that he cannot endure. And this pertains to the nature of *softness*; for something is called *soft* if it easily gives way to someone’s touching it.

However, a thing is not thought of as soft if it gives way to something that forcefully strikes it, since even walls give way to a battering ram. And so someone is not considered soft if he yields to exceedingly forceful blows. Hence, in *Ethics 7* the Philosopher says, “If someone is conquered by strong and exceptional pleasures or sorrows, then he is not admirable, though he can be condoned if he resists.” Now it is clear that the fear of danger impinges on an individual more strongly than the desire for pleasure does; hence, in *De Officiis 1* Tully says, “It is unusual for someone who is not broken by fear to be broken by excessive desire, and it is unusual for someone who shows himself unconquered by toil to be conquered by sensual pleasure.” Again, sensual pleasure moves one more strongly by attracting him than sorrow over the absence of sensual pleasure moves him to withdraw, since the absence of sensual pleasure is a pure negation (*purus defectus*). And so according to the Philosopher, an individual is properly called *soft* if he withdraws from the good because of the sorrow caused by a lack of pleasure, since he is yielding to a weak mover.

Reply to objection 1: The sort of softness just discussed is caused in two ways:

In one way, *by habituation* (*ex consuetudine*), since when an individual becomes used to enjoying sensual pleasures, it can be more difficult for him to endure their absence.

In the second way, *by natural disposition*, more specifically, some individuals have a less constant mind because of a weakness in their makeup. And as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics 7*, this is the way in which women are thought of in comparison to men. And so those men who allow themselves to be used like women are called soft in the sense that they have become womanish.

Reply to objection 2: Toil is opposed to corporeal pleasure, and so only laborious things impede sensual pleasure. Now individuals are called delicate if they cannot endure certain sorts of toil or anything that diminishes pleasure; hence, Deuteronomy 28:56 says, “The tender and delicate woman, who could not walk upon the ground or leave a footprint because of her softness ...” And so delicacy is a certain sort of softness. But, strictly speaking, softness has to do with the absence of pleasure, whereas delicacy has to do with the cause that impedes the pleasure, viz., toil and other things of this sort.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of play there are two things to consider:

First, *the pleasure of play*, and on this score the individual who is inordinately fond of amusement (*inordinate lusivus*) is opposed to *eutrapelia*.

The second thing to be considered in play is a sort of *relaxation or rest (remissio sive quies)*, which is opposed to toil. And so just as softness involves not being able to endure laborious things, so, too, it involves an excessive desire for the relaxation of play or for any other sort of rest.

Article 2

Is stubbornness opposed to perseverance?

It seems that stubbornness or obstinacy (*pertinacia*) is not opposed to perseverance:

Objection 1: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory says that stubbornness arises from vainglory. But as was explained above (q. 132, a. 2), vainglory is opposed not to *perseverance* but instead to *magnanimity*. Therefore, stubbornness is not opposed to perseverance.

Objection 2: If stubbornness is opposed to perseverance, then it is opposed to it either by way of *excess* or by way of *deficiency*. But it is not opposed to it by way of *excess*, since even a stubborn individual yields to some pleasure and sorrow; for as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 7, “They rejoice when they win, and they are hurt if their opinions appear weak.” On the other hand, if stubbornness is opposed to perseverance by way of *deficiency*, then *stubbornness* will be the same thing as *softness*—which is clearly false. Therefore, stubbornness is not opposed to perseverance in any way at all.

Objection 3: Just as an individual who perseveres persists in the good against sorrows, so an individual who is *continent* and *temperate* persists in the good against pleasures, and a courageous individual persists in the good against *fears*, and a mild individual persists in the good against instances of *anger*. But someone is called stubborn because he persists in something to an excessive degree. Therefore, stubbornness is no more opposed to perseverance than to the other virtues.

But contrary to this: In *Rhetorica* Tully says that stubbornness is related to perseverance in the way that superstition is related to religion. But as was explained above (q. 92, a. 1), superstition is opposed to religion. Therefore, stubbornness is likewise opposed to perseverance.

I respond: As Isidore explains in *Etymologia*, ‘stubborn’ (*pertinax*) signifies someone who “holds on impudently” in the sense of “clinging to all things.” And this means the same as ‘pervicacious’ (*pervicax*), because “he perseveres in his purpose until he is victorious. For what we call *victoria* (victory) the ancients called *vicia* (winning).” And in *Ethics* 7 the Philosopher calls these individuals *ischyrognomones*, i.e., strong-headed, or *idiognomones*, i.e., wed to their own opinions, since they persevere in their own opinions more than is called for (*plus quam oportet*), whereas the individual who is *soft* perseveres in his opinions less than is called for (*minus quam oportet*), and the individual who has [the virtue of] *perseverance* perseveres in his opinion in the way that is called for (*secundum quod oportet*).

Hence, it is clear that perseverance is praised as standing at the mean, whereas the stubborn individual is blamed insofar as he *exceeds* the mean, and the soft individual is blamed insofar as he *falls*

short of the mean.

Reply to objection 1: The reason why someone persists in his own opinion in an excessive manner is that he wants thereby to display his excellence. And so this arises from vainglory as a cause. However, it was explained above (q. 127, a. 2 and q. 133, a. 2) that the opposition of vices to virtues focuses not on their causes but on their proper species.

Reply to objection 2: The stubborn individual is *excessive* in that he persists in something in a disordered way against many difficulties—and yet he derives a certain pleasure in the end, just as the courageous individual and the persevering individual do. However, since the particular pleasure [felt by the stubborn individual] is wicked—for he desires it and avoids the contrary pain in a disordered way—he is like the incontinent individual or the soft individual.

Reply to objection 3: Even though the other virtues persist against the impetus of the passions, nonetheless, their praiseworthiness—unlike the praiseworthiness of perseverance—does not stem from the persistence. On the other hand, the praiseworthiness of continence seems rather to stem from conquering the relevant pleasures. And so stubbornness is directly opposed to perseverance.