

QUESTION 149

Sobriety

Next we have to consider sobriety (*sobrietas*) (question 149) and its opposed vice, drunkenness (*ebrietas*) (question 150).

On the topic of sobriety there are four questions: (1) What is the subject matter of sobriety? (2) Is sobriety a specific virtue? (3) Is the use of wine licit? (4) For whom is sobriety especially appropriate?

Article 1

Is drink the proper subject matter of sobriety?

It seems that the proper subject matter of sobriety is not drink:

Objection 1: Romans 12:3 says, "... not to be more wise than you ought to be wise, but to be wise with sobriety." Therefore, sobriety has to do with wisdom, and not just with drink.

Objection 2: Wisdom 8:7 says of God's wisdom that "it teaches sobriety and prudence, justice and virtue," where 'sobriety' is being used for 'temperance'. But temperance has to do not only with drink, but also with food and sex. Therefore, sobriety does not have to do only with drink.

Objection 3: The name 'sobriety' (*sobrietas*) seems to be taken from a *measure* (*mensura* or *bria*). But in all things which pertain to us we ought to preserve the measure. Hence, Titus 2:12 says, "Let us live soberly and justly and piously," where a Gloss says, "soberly, within ourselves," and 1 Timothy 2:9 says, "Women ... in decent apparel, adorning themselves with modesty and sobriety,"—and so it seems that sobriety exists not only interiorly but also in exterior apparel. Therefore, it is not the case that the proper subject matter of sobriety is drink.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 31:32 says, "Wine that is drunk with sobriety makes a man's life balanced (*aequa*)."

I respond: Virtues that are named from a general condition for virtue appropriate to themselves in a special way the subject matter in which it is the most difficult and commendable to preserve the condition in question, e.g., the danger of death in the case of fortitude, and the pleasures associated with the sense of touch in the case of temperance.

Now the name 'sobriety' (*sobrietas*) is taken from *measure*, since someone is said to be sober (*sobrius*) because he observes moderation (*bria*), i.e., the measure. And so sobriety appropriates in a special way to itself a subject matter in which it is especially praiseworthy to observe the measure. But drink that is able to inebriate is a subject matter of this sort, given that its measured use is very profitable and a modest excess produces much harm, since it impairs the use of reason even more than an excess of food does. Hence, Ecclesiasticus 31:37-38 says, "Sober drinking is health to soul and body; drinking too much makes for irritation and anger and much ruin."

And so sobriety has to do in a special way with drink—not just any sort of drink, but drink which is by its volatility apt to disturb the head (*sed eum qui sua fumositate natus est caput conturbare*), like wine and every drink capable of inebriating.

On the other hand, if one takes the name 'sobriety' in the general [and not specific] way, then it can be used for any subject matter, as was explained above (q. 123, a. 2 and q. 141, a. 2) for the case of fortitude and temperance.

Reply to objection 1: Just as material wine inebriates one corporally, so, too, the consideration of wisdom is metaphorically called an inebriating drink, because it allures the soul with its pleasure—this according to Psalm 22:5 ("My chalice that inebriates me, how good it is!"). And so sobriety is said of the contemplation of wisdom by a certain similitude.

Reply to objection 2: All the [subject matters] that belong properly to temperance are necessary for the present life, and an excess of them is harmful. And so it is necessary to adhere to the measure in

all of them, and this pertains to the role of sobriety. That is why temperance is here signified by the name ‘sobriety’. But a modest excess in drink does more damage than an excess in other things. And this is why sobriety has to do specifically with drink.

Reply to objection 3: Even though measure is required in all things, ‘sobriety’ is properly predicated not in all cases, but only in cases in which the measure is especially necessary.

Article 2

Is sobriety a specific virtue in its own right?

It seems that sobriety is not a specific virtue in its own right (*non sit per se quaedam specialis virtus*):

Objection 1: Abstinence has to do with both food and drink. But there is no specific virtue that has to do specifically with food. Therefore, sobriety, which has to do with drink, is not a specific virtue, either.

Objection 2: Abstinence and gluttony have to do with the pleasures of touch insofar as touch is a sensory power associated with nutrition. But food and drink both contribute to nutrition, since an animal needs to take nutrition from the humid and the dry together. Therefore, sobriety, which has to do with drink, is not a specific virtue.

Objection 3: Just as food is distinguished from drink in those matters that pertain to nutrition, so, too, diverse kinds of food and diverse kinds of drink are distinguished. Therefore, if sobriety were a specific virtue in its own right, then it seems that there would be some specific virtue for each difference of drink or food—which is absurd. Therefore, it does not seem that sobriety is a specific virtue.

But contrary to this: Macrobius posits sobriety as a specific part of temperance.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 146, a. 2), moral virtue involves preserving the good of reason against things that it can be impeded by, and so where one finds a specific impediment to reason, there has to be a specific virtue to remove it.

Now inebriating drink has a specific way of impeding the use of reason, viz., insofar as it disturbs the brain with its vapors. And what is required for removing this impediment to reason is a specific virtue, viz., sobriety.

Reply to objection 1: Food and drink are generally able to impede the good of reason by engrossing reason with an excess of pleasure (*absorbendo eam per immoderationem delectationis*). And as far as this is concerned, abstinence has to do *generally* with food and drink. But as has been explained, drink that is able to inebriate impedes the good of reason in a *special* way. And so it requires a specific virtue.

Reply to objection 2: The virtue of abstinence has to do with food and drink not insofar as they provide nourishment, but insofar as they impede reason. And so it is unnecessary for there to be specific virtues (*specialitas virtutis*) having to do with different types of nourishment.

Reply to objection 3: In all the drinks that have the power to inebriate there is one and the same way of impeding the use of reason. And so the variety of drinks is related incidentally (*per accidens*) to virtue. And that is why this sort of variety does not make for a diversity of virtues. And the same argument holds for the diversity of foods.

Article 3

Is the use of wine licit?

It seems that the use of wine is totally illicit:

Objection 1: Without wisdom no one can be in the state of salvation; for instance, Wisdom 7:28 says, “God loves no one except him who dwells with wisdom,” and later Wisdom 9:19 says, “Whoever pleased you from the beginning was healed through wisdom.” But the use of wine impedes wisdom; for instance, Ecclesiastes 2:3 says, “I resolved to keep my flesh away from wine, in order that I might turn my mind to wisdom.” Therefore, the drinking of wine is absolutely illicit (*universaliter illicitus*).

Objection 2: In Romans 14:21 the Apostle says, “It is good not to eat meat and not to drink wine, and not to do anything whereby your brother is offended or scandalized or made weak.” But to desist from a good of virtue is sinful—as is, likewise, giving scandal to your brothers. Therefore, making use of wine is illicit.

Objection 3: Jerome says, “After the Flood wine was affirmed (*est dedicatum*) along with meat, but Christ came at the end of the ages and brought the end back into line with the beginning.” Therefore, in the time of the Christian law it seems to be illicit to make use of wine.

But contrary to this: In 1 Timothy 5:23 the Apostle says, “Do not continue to drink water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and of your frequent illnesses.” And Ecclesiasticus 31:36 says, “Wine that is drunk in moderation is the joy of the soul and of the heart.”

I respond: No food or drink, considered in its own right, is illicit according to the position of our Lord, who in Matthew 15:11 says, “Nothing that enters through the mouth defiles a man.” And so drinking wine is not illicit in its own right (*secundum se loquendo*).

Still, it can be rendered illicit incidentally (*per accidens*): (a) sometimes in light of *the condition of the drinker*, either because he is easily harmed by wine or because he is obligated by some special promise not to drink wine; and (b) sometimes in light of *the manner of drinking*, i.e., because the drinker exceeds the measure in drinking; and (c) sometimes *on the part of others*, who would be scandalized by his drinking.

Reply to objection 1: Wisdom can be had in two senses:

(a) in one sense, *according to the common manner*, insofar as it suffices for salvation. And on this score it is not a requirement for having wisdom that one should abstain from wine altogether; instead, it is required that he abstain from an immoderate use of wine.

(b) in a second sense, *according to a certain level of perfection*. And on this score, in order that certain individuals might perceive wisdom perfectly, it is required that they abstain from wine altogether, depending on the conditions of the persons and the places.

Reply to objection 2: The Apostle does not say that it is good absolutely speaking to abstain from wine, but instead that this is good in cases in which some individuals are scandalized by one’s drinking wine.

Reply to objection 3: Christ draws us back from some things as altogether illicit, and He draws us back from other things as impediments to perfection. And it is in this latter way that He draws some back from wine by way of a desire for perfection, just He draws some back from riches and other things of this sort.

Article 4

Is sobriety required more in persons of higher standing?

It seems that sobriety is required more in persons of higher standing (*sobrietas magis requiratur in maioribus personis*):

Objection 1: Old age gives a certain standing (*excellentiam quandam*) to a man, and this is why reverence and honor are owed to the old—this according to Leviticus 19:32 (“Rise up before the hoary head, and honor the person of the aged man”). But the Apostle specifically says that the elderly should be urged to sobriety—this according to Titus 2:2 (“... that the elderly should be sober”). Therefore, sobriety is required most of all in persons of higher standing.

Objection 2: A bishop occupies the most excellent level in the Church. Sobriety is urged upon him by the Apostle—this according to 1 Timothy 3:2 (“A bishop should be blameless, the husband of one wife ... sober, prudent ...”). Therefore, sobriety is required most of all in persons of high standing.

Objection 3: Sobriety involves abstaining from wine. But wine is forbidden to kings, who hold the highest position in human affairs, whereas it is permitted to those who are in a state of affliction—this according to Proverbs 31:4 (“Do not give wine to kings”) and later in Proverbs 31:6 (“Give strong drink to those who are sad and wine to those who are grieved in mind”). Therefore, sobriety is required more in persons of higher standing.

But contrary to this: In 1 Timothy 3:11 the Apostle says, “... women in like manner should be chaste ... sober.” And in Titus 2:6 he says, “Exhort young men in like manner to be sober.”

I respond: There are two things that a virtue has a relation to: (a) in one way, to *the contrary vices* that the virtue excludes and to *the excessive sentient desires* that it keeps under control, and (b) in a second way, to *the end* toward which the virtue leads one.

Accordingly, there are two reasons why a given virtue is required more in certain individuals:

First, because those individuals are more prone (a) to the excessive desires which have to be kept under control by the virtue and (b) to the vices which are removed by the virtue. And on this score sobriety is required most of all in young people and in women, since in young people the desire for what is pleasurable is very strong because of the fervor of their age, whereas in women there is not enough strength of mind to resist such desires. Hence, according to Maximus Valerius, among the Romans in ancient times the women did not drink wine.

Second, sobriety is more required in certain individuals because it is more necessary for their proper activity. Now when wine is consumed without moderation, it mainly impedes the use of reason. And so sobriety is specifically prescribed for (a) the elderly, in whom reason ought to be strong for the instruction of others, and for (b) the bishops or, for that matter, all the ministers of the Church, who should carry out their spiritual duties with a devout mind, and for (c) kings, who should govern with wisdom the people subject to them.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: This makes clear the replies to the objections.