QUESTION 168

Modesty as it Exists in Exterior Bodily Movements

Next we have to consider modesty as it exists in exterior bodily movements. And on this topic there are four questions: (1) Can there be virtue and vice in exterior bodily movements that are done in a serious way (*qui serio aguntur*)? (2) Can there be any virtue in the playful or humorous actions (*circa actiones ludi*)? (3) Is there a sin that is committed by an excess of play or humor? (4) Is there a sin that is committed by a lack of play or humor?

Article 1

Can there be virtue with respect to exterior bodily movements?

It seems that there cannot be any virtue with respect to exterior bodily movements:

Objection 1: Every virtue involves the spiritual beauty of the soul—this according to Psalm 46:14 ("All the glory of that daughter of the king is within," and a Gloss adds, "namely, in her conscience"). But bodily movements are exterior and not within. Therefore, there cannot be virtue with respect to movements of this sort.

Objection 2: As is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, virtues do not exist in us by nature. But exterior bodily movements exist in men by nature, insofar as some individuals move quickly and some move slowly, and the same holds for other differences among exterior movements. Therefore, there is no virtue that has to do with such movements.

Objection 3: Every moral virtue has to do either with actions that are directed toward others, e.g., *justice*, or with the passions, e.g., *fortitude* and *temperance*. But exterior bodily movements are not directed toward others, and neither are they passions. Therefore, there is no virtue that has to do with them.

Objection 4: As was explained above (q. 166, a. 2), study has to be applied in every act of virtue. But it is shameful to apply study in ordering one's exterior movements; for in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "A becoming manner of walking is one that has the appearance of authority, the weight of seriousness, and a vestige of tranquillity—yet in such a way that it lacks study and affectation and is instead a pure and simple movement." Therefore, it seems that there is no virtue that has to do with the composition of exterior movements.

But contrary to this: Virtue involves the beauty of uprightness. But the composition of exterior movements is relevant to the beauty of uprightness. For in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "Just as a very soft and weak sound of the voice or gesture of the body meets with my disapproval, so, too, with the coarse and boorish. Let us imitate nature; her reflection is the gracefulness of discipline and the beauty of uprightness." Therefore, there is virtue with respect to the composition of exterior movements.

I respond: A moral virtue consists in the fact that those things which belong to a man are ordered by reason. Now it is clear that a man's exterior movements can be ordered by reason, since it is at the command of reason that the exterior members are moved. Hence, it is clear that moral virtue involves ordering these movements.

Now the ordering of these movements pays attention to two things, viz., (a) their appropriateness for the person and (b) their appropriateness for exterior persons, activities, or places. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1—and this pertains to the first point—Ambrose says, "To preserve the beauty of living is to render what is appropriate to each sex and each person." As regards the second point, he adds, "This is the best way to order our behavior, this is the polish fitting for every action." That is why Andronicus posits two things with respect to exterior movements of the sort in question, viz., (a) *adornment* (*ornatus*), which has to do with appropriateness for the person, and thus he says that it is "knowledge with respect to what is fitting in movement and bearing," and (b) *good order* (*bona ordinatio*), which has

to do with what is fitting for given activities and circumstances; hence, he calls it "experiential knowledge of the separation"— i.e., the distinction—"among actions."

Reply to objection 1: Exterior movements are signs of one's interior disposition—this according to Ecclesiasticus 19:27 ("A man's bodily attire and his open-mouthed laughter and his manner of walking show what he is."). And in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "The condition of the mind is discerned in the posture of the body," and, again, "The body's movement is a sort of voice of the soul."

Reply to objection 2: Even though a man has from his natural disposition an aptitude for this or that ordering of his exterior movements, nonetheless, what he does not have from nature can be supplied by the diligence of reason. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "The nature informs the movement, but even if there is some failing in the nature, diligence corrects it."

Reply to objection 3: As has been pointed out, exterior movements are signs of one's interior disposition, which mainly has to do with the passions of the soul. And so moderating one's exterior movements requires moderating one's interior passions. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "From them"—i.e., from the exterior movements—"the man that lies hidden in our heart is thought of as more frivolous or boastful or turbulent or, on the other side, as more serious and steady and pure and mature." Again, through our exterior movements other men make a judgment about us—this according to Ecclesiasticus 19:26 ("A man is known by his look, and a man, when sensed, is known by his countenance").

And so the moderation of the exterior movements is in some sense ordered toward others—this according to what Augustine says in *Regula*: "In all your movements, do nothing to offend the eye of anyone, but instead do only what befits your holiness."

And so the moderation of exterior movements can be traced to two virtues that the Philosopher touches upon in *Ethics* 4. Insofar as one's exterior movements are *ordered toward others*, moderating them pertains to *friendliness* (*amicitia*) or *affability* (*affabilitas*), which has to do with the pleasures and sorrows in what is said and done in relation to the others with whom a man lives. On the other hand, insofar as an individual's exterior movements are signs of his interior disposition, the moderation of exterior movements belongs to the virtue of *truthfulness* (*veritas*), since an individual is showing himself in words and deeds as he is interiorly.

Reply to objection 4: Study is blameworthy in the composition of exterior movements to the extent that an individual makes use of a sort of deception in his exterior movements (*aliquis fictione quadam in exterioribus motibus utitur*), so that they do not match his interior disposition.

On the other hand, study of the sort in question should be applied in order to correct whatever is disordered in one's exterior movements. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "Let artifice be absent, let correction not be absent."

Article 2

Can there be any virtue in play or humor?

It seems that there cannot be any virtue in play or humor (*in ludis non possit esse aliqua virtus*):

Objection 1: In *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "Our Lord said: 'Woe to you who are laughing, for you shall weep.' Therefore, I think that all humor (*omnes ioci*)—and not just excessive humor—should be avoided." Therefore, there is no virtue having to do with play or humor.

Objection 2: As was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 55, a. 4), virtue is that which "God does in us without us." But Chrysostom says, "It is not God, but the devil, who gives us play (*dat ludere*). Listen to what happened to those who played: 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they rose up to play'." Therefore, there cannot be any virtue having to do with play.

Objection 3: In *Ethics* 10 the Philosopher says, "The actions of play are not ordered toward anything else." But as is clear from the Philosopher in *Ethics* 2, for virtue "it is required that an individual choose to act for the sake of something." Therefore, there cannot be any virtue having to do with games."

But contrary to this: In *Musica* 2 Augustine says, "I want you to take it easy on yourself at times (*volo tandem tibi parcas*). For it is fitting for a wise man to sometimes relax his intense sharpness for doing things." But it is through playful words and deeds that this remission of the mind from doing things occurs. Therefore, being wise and virtuous involves sometimes making use of such things. Again, the Philosopher posits the virtue of *eutrapelia* with respect to play or humor, and we can call this *agreeableness* (*iucunditas*).

I respond: Just as a man needs bodily rest for restoring the body, which cannot work continually because it has limited power that is proportioned to determinate tasks, so too with the soul, the power of which is likewise limited and proportioned to determinate tasks. And so when it extends itself beyond its measure in its tasks, it labors and thereby becomes tired—especially because in the soul's operation the body also works at the same time, insofar as the soul, even the intellective soul, makes use of powers that operate through bodily organs.

Now goods that can be sensed are connatural to a man. And so when the soul, intent on the works of reason, is elevated above things that can be sensed, a certain weariness of soul (*fatigatio animalis*) is thereby engendered, regardless of whether the man is intent on operations of practical reason or on operations of theoretical reason—though more so if he is intent on works of contemplation, because through these works he is elevated further from what can be sensed, despite the fact that more bodily labor is involved in certain exterior works of practical reason. Still, in both cases the individual has more bodily weariness to the extent that he attends more intensely to the works of reason.

Now just as bodily weariness is dispelled by resting the body, so, too, weariness of the soul has to be dispelled by resting the soul. But as was established above when we were talking about the passions, (*ST* 1-2, q. 25, a. 2 and q. 31, a. 1), rest for the soul is pleasure. And so a remedy for weariness of soul has to be applied through some sort of pleasure, accompanied by an interruption in the tendency to press on with reason's study. For instance, we read in *Collationes Patrum* that when some individuals were scandalized by finding St. John the Evangelist playing with his disciples, he is said to have commanded one of the disciples, who was carrying a bow, to draw an arrow; and when the latter had done this many times, St. John asked whether he could do it indefinitely (*continue*). He replied that if he were to do it indefinitely, the bow would break. Then St. John interjected that a man's mind would similarly break if its intensity were never relaxed.

Now words or deeds in which nothing is sought except pleasure for the soul are called humorous words (*iocosa*) or deeds of play (*ludicra*), and so it is sometimes necessary to make use of such things for resting the soul, as it were. And this is what the Philosopher is pointing to in *Ethics* 4 when he says, "In the common interchanges of this life there is a sort of rest that is had with games," and so it is sometimes necessary to make use of such things.

Still, in these matters there seem to be three things that should especially be avoided:

The first and principal among these is that the pleasure in question not be sought in any deeds or words that are shameful or harmful. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Tully says, "One sort of humor is ignoble (*illiberale*), impudent (*petulans*), disgraceful (*flagitiosum*), obscene (*obscenum*)."

The second thing to be attended to is that the mind's seriousness not be totally lost. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1 Ambrose says, "We should beware that when we seek relaxation of mind, we not destroy all the harmony which is, as it were, the concord of good works." And in *De Officiis* 1 Tully says, "Just as we do not allow children to enjoy absolute freedom in their games, but only that which is not alien to upright actions, so something of the light of an upright mind should be reflected in our very humor."

Third, one must attend to the fact that, as with all other human acts, the act has to fit the person, the

time, and the place, and it has to be ordered in the right way with respect to the other circumstances—so that, namely, "it is worthy of the time and of the man," as Tully puts it in the same place.

Now things of this sort are regulated by the rule of reason. But a habit operating in accord with reason is a moral virtue. And so there can be a virtue with respect to play and humor (*circa ludos potest esse aliqua virtus*), and the Philosopher calls this virtue *eutrapelia*. And an individual is said to have *eutrapelia* from having a good 'turn of mind', i.e., because he does well in turning his words or deeds into a time of rest (*bene convertit aliqua dicta vel facta in solatiam*). And since through this virtue a man holds himself back from immoderation in play and humor, the virtue is contained under *modesty*.

Reply to objection 1: As has been explained, what is humorous should fit the matter at hand and the persons. Hence, in *Rhetorica* 1 Tully says that when the listeners are tired, "it is not useless to begin one's speech with something novel or amusing, as long as the seriousness of the matter at hand does not take away one's freedom to joke."

Now sacred teaching is intent on the greatest things—this according to Proverbs 8:6 ("Listen, for I will be speaking of great things"). Hence, Ambrose is excluding humor not from human life in general, but from sacred teaching. Thus he prefaces his remarks with this: "Even though humor is at times fitting and pleasant, it is nevertheless incompatible with the Church's rule; for how can we have recourse to anything that we do not find in Sacred Scripture?"

Reply to objection 2: This passage from Chrysostom should be taken to refer to those who make a disordered use of games and especially to those who make the pleasure of playing their end—as, for instance, certain individuals about whom Wisdom 15:12 says, "They were of the opinion that our life is a game." Against this opinion Tully says in *De Officiis* 1, "We are not born by nature in such a way that we appear to be made for fun and games; rather, we are made for hardships and for greater and more serious pursuits."

Reply to objection 3: The actions themselves of play are not by their species ordered toward any end. But the pleasure had in such actions is ordered toward a certain sort of refreshment and peace for the soul. Accordingly, if play is carried out in a moderate way, it is licit to make use of it. Hence, in *De Officiis* 1Tully says, "It is licit to make use of play and humor but, as with sleep and other sorts of rest, only after we have taken care of our earnest and serious tasks."

Article 3

Is it possible to sin by an excess of play or humor?

It seems that it is impossible to sin by an excess of play or humor:

Objection 1: What excuses one from sin does not seem to be itself a sin. But sometimes play or humor (*ludus*) excuses one from sin; for there are many things which would be grave sins if they were done with seriousness, but which are either no sins at all or very slight ones if they are done with humor. Therefore, it seems that there is no sin in an excess of humor.

Objection 2: As Gregory explains in *Moralia* 31, all other vices are traced back to the seven capital vices. But an excess of play or humor does not seem to be traced back to any of the capital vices. Therefore, it seems that it is not a sin.

Objection 3: Actors who order their whole lives toward being playful or humorous seem especially to abound in play or humor. Therefore, if an excess of play or humor were a sin, then all actors would be in the state of sin. Again, all who make use of the services of actors, or who lavish anything on them, would be, as it were, patrons of sin. But this seems false. For one reads in *The Lives of the Fathers* that it was revealed to St. Paphnutius that a certain humorist was going to be his companion in the life to come.

But contrary to this: A Gloss on Proverbs 14:13 ("Laughter will be mixed with sorrow and mourning takes hold of the end points of joy") says, "A perpetual mourning." But in an excess of play and humor there is disordered laughing and a disordered joy. Therefore, there is a mortal sin there, since perpetual mourning is appropriate only for mortal sin.

I respond: In the case of anything that can be directed by reason, what overshoots the rule of reason is called *excessive*, whereas something is called *deficient* insofar as it falls short of the rule of reason. Now it has been explained (a. 2) that humorous or playful words or deeds can be directed by reason. And so what counts as excessive in the case of play is what overshoots the rule of reason. There are two ways in which this can be the case:

(a) It can be the case *by the very species of the actions that are taken up in play*, i.e., the kind of playfulness which is said by Tully to be "ignoble (*illiberale*), impudent (*petulans*), disgraceful (*flagitiosum*), obscene (*obscenum*)"—viz., when, for the sake of humor, an individual makes use of shameful words or deeds, or even things which verge on harm to his neighbor and which are mortal sins in their own right (*de se*). And on this score it is clear that excess in play is a mortal sin.

(b) There can be excess in play in a second way *because of a lack of appropriate circumstances*, as, for instance, when an individual engages in play at inappropriate times or in inappropriate places or, again, when he engages in play in ways that overshoot what is appropriate for the situation at hand or for the persons. And this can sometimes be a mortal sin because of the strength of his affection for play, the pleasure of which the individual places before love of God in such a way that, contrary to a divine precept or precept of the Church, he does not turn away from engaging in play. However, sometimes it is a venial sin, viz., when the individual does not have such a great affection for play that he is thereby willing to do something contrary to God.

Reply to objection 1: Some acts are sins solely because of the intention—more specifically, because they are done to inflict an injury on someone, and such injury is ruled out by playfulness or humor, the intention of which is aimed at pleasure and not toward anyone's being injured. And in such cases playfulness or humor either excuses one from sin or diminishes the sin.

By contrast, there are some acts that are sins by their species, e.g., homicide, fornication, and similar sins. And such sins are not excused by playfulness or humor—at the very least, playfulness or humor is rendered disgraceful and obscene by them.

Reply to objection 2: Excess in play pertains to inappropriate joy, which Gregory claims to be a daughter of gluttony. Hence, Exodus 32:6 says, "The people sat down to eat and drink, and they have gotten up to play."

Reply to objection 3: As has been explained (a. 2), play or humor is necessary for human communal life. Now for everything that is useful for human intercourse, certain roles can be counted as licit. And so the role of actors, which is ordered toward giving men relaxation (*ad solatium hominibus exhibendum*), is not illicit in its own right (*secundum se illicitum*), and the actors are not in the state of sin as long as they make use of play in moderation, i.e., by not making use of any illicit words or deeds for their play and by not applying their play to inappropriate subject matters and at inappropriate times. And even if the actors do not play any other role in relation to other men, they nonetheless have other serious and virtuous actions in relation to themselves and to God, e.g., when they pray, and when they order their own passions and actions, and even sometimes when they give alms to the poor. Hence, those who support them in moderation do not sin, but instead do something just by giving them a reward for their services.

On the other hand, if individuals spend too much of their own resources on such people or, again, if they support those who engage in illicit types of play or humor, then they sin by encouraging the actors in their sin. Hence, in *Super Ioannem* Augustine says, "To give one's resources to actors is a dreadful sin"—unless, perhaps, some actor were in dire straits in which he should be helped. For in *De Officiis* Ambrose says, "Feed him who is dying of hunger. For if anyone could have saved a man by feeding him, then if you did not feed him, you killed him."

Article 4

Is there any sin that consists in a deficiency of play or humor?

It seems that there is no sin that consists in a deficiency of play or humor (*in defectu ludi non consistat aliquod peccatum*):

Objection 1: No sin is attributed to a penitent. But in speaking of a penitent Augustine says, "Anyone who wants to obtain the grace of remission will hold himself back from games, from the spectacles of the world." Therefore, there is no sin in a deficiency of play.

Objection 2: No sin is mentioned in the commendation of saints. But in the commendation of some saints it is mentioned that they abstained from play. For instance, Jeremiah 15:17 says, "I did not sit in the assembly of jesters," and Tobit 3:27 says, "Never have I mixed with those who play; nor have I made myself a partaker with those who walk in levity." Therefore, there cannot be any sin in a deficiency of play.

Objection 3: Andronicus claims that *austerity*, which he numbers among the virtues, is "a habit by which individuals neither give the delight of conversation to others nor receive it from others." But this involves a lack of play. Therefore, a lack of play belongs more to virtue than to vice.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 2 and 4 the Philosopher claims that too little play is a vice (*defectum in ludo esse vitiosum*).

I respond: Everything that is contrary to reason in human affairs is sinful. But it is contrary to reason for an individual to present himself as burdensome to others, as when he produces nothing delightful and, in addition, obstructs the pleasures of others. Hence, Seneca says, "Conduct yourself with wisdom in such a way that no one thinks of you as a difficult individual or despises you as unpleasant." But those who are deficient in playfulness or humor "do not say anything amusing and are annoying to their interlocutor," viz., because they do not respond to the moderate playfulness of others. And so such individuals are morally defective (*tales vitiosi sunt*) and, as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 9, they are called "insensible and uncultivated (*duri et agrestes*)."

However, since play and humor are useful for pleasure and relaxation, and since in human life pleasure and relaxation are sought for the sake of action and not for their own sake, too little play and humor is less sinful than too much. Hence, in *Ethics* 9 the Philosopher says, "One should have only a few people who are friends just for the sake of pleasure, since a little pleasure, like a condiment, is sufficient for one's life, just as a little salt is sufficient for one's food."

Reply to objection 1: It is because penitents are supposed to be mournful in light of their sins that they are forbidden to engage in play. And this does not involve a sin of deficiency, since the very fact that play is diminished in them is in accord with reason.

Reply to objection 2: Jeremiah is here speaking in a way that befits a time when the situation required more sadness. Hence, he adds, "I sat alone, because You filled me with bitterness."

On the other hand, what is said in Tobit 3 pertains to excessive play. This clear from what follows: "nor have I made myself a partaker with those who walk in levity."

Reply to objection 3: Insofar as it is a virtue, *austerity* does not exclude all pleasures, but only excessive and disordered pleasures. Hence, it seems to belong to *affability*, which the Philosopher calls *friendliness*, or to *eutrapeliam* or *agreeableness* (*iucunditas*). And yet he names and defines it according to its agreement with *temperance*, the role of which is to curb pleasures.