

QUESTION 126

The Vice of Fearlessness

Next we have to consider the vice of fearlessness (*intimiditas*) or intrepidity (*intrepiditas* or *impaviditas*). On this topic there are two questions: (1) Is it a sin to be fearless (*esse intimidum*)? (2) Is fearlessness opposed to fortitude?

Article 1

Is fearlessness a sin?

It seems that fearlessness (*intimiditas*) is not a sin:

Objection 1: What is pointed to in praise of a just man is not a sin. But in praising the just man Proverbs 28:1 says, “The just man, like a confident lion, will be without terror.” Therefore, being intrepid is not a sin (*esse impavidus non est peccatum*).

Objection 2: According to the Philosopher in *Ethics* 3, the most terrifying thing is death. But one should not fear even death—this according to Matthew 10:28 (“Do not fear those who kill the body”)—or, again, anything that can be inflicted by a man—this according to Isaiah 51:12 (“Who are you, that you should be afraid of a mortal man?”). Therefore, it is not a sin to be intrepid (*impavidum esse non est peccatum*).

Objection 3: As was explained above (q. 125, a. 2), fear arises from love. But there is nothing worldly such that the perfection of virtue involves loving it. For as Augustine says in *De Civitate Dei* 14, “The love of God to the point of contempt for oneself makes us citizens of the heavenly city.” Therefore, it does not seem to be a sin to be afraid of nothing human (*nihil humanum formidare videtur non esse peccatum*).

But contrary to this: Luke 18:2 says of the wicked judge that “he neither feared God nor respected man.”

I respond: Since fear arises from love, the judgment seems to be the same for both love and fear.

Now we are speaking at present of a fear by which temporal evils are feared and which proceeds from the love of temporal goods. But each individual has instilled in him that he should love his own life and the things that are ordered toward that life—yet in a *fitting* manner, so that, namely, things of this sort are loved not in the sense that one’s end is constituted in them, but insofar as they are to be used *for the sake of* the ultimate end. Hence, for an individual to fail to love them in a fitting way is contrary to his natural inclination and is, as a result, a sin.

However, an individual never *totally* loses such love, since what belongs to nature cannot perish totally. It is for this reason that in Ephesians 5:29 the Apostle says, “No one has ever hated his own flesh.” Hence, even those who kill themselves do so out of love for their own flesh, which they want to liberate from its present hardships. Thus it is possible for someone to have less fear than he should have of death and other temporal evils, because he loves [his own life] *less than* he should, but it cannot happen that an individual should not fear these evils *at all* because of a *complete* lack of love. Rather, this can happen only because he believes that the evils opposed to the goods he loves cannot overwhelm him.

Now sometimes this occurs because of the *pride* that belongs to a mind that is presumptuous with respect to itself and disdains others—this in keeping with what is said Job 41:24-25, “He was made to fear no one, he beholds every high thing.” On the other hand, sometimes it occurs because of a *failure of reason*, in the way that in *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says that because of their stupidity (*propter stultitiam*) the Celts feared nothing. Hence, it is clear that it is morally bad to be intrepid (*esse impavidum est vitiosum*), regardless of whether this is caused by a haughtiness of mind (*ex elatione animi*) or by obtuseness (*ex stoliditate*)—though if the obtuseness is invincible, then it excuses one from sin.

Reply to objection 1: The just man is praised because he lacks the fear that draws him back from what is good and not because he is altogether without fear. For Ecclesiasticus 1:28 says, “He who is without fear cannot be justified.”

Reply to objection 2: Neither death nor anything else that can be inflicted by a mortal man is to be feared in such a way that one recedes from justice. However, death is to be feared insofar as through death a man can be prevented from performing virtuous works, either with respect to himself or with respect to the progress which he can cause in others. Hence, Proverbs 14:16 says, “A wise man fears and shies away from evil.”

Reply to objection 3: Temporal goods should be disdained to the extent that they keep one from loving and fearing God. And it is on this score that they should likewise not be feared; hence, Ecclesiasticus 34:16 says, “He who fears the Lord will not be afraid of anything.”

However, to the extent that temporal goods can assist us instrumentally for what is included in loving and fearing God, they should not be disdained.

Article 2

Is fearlessness or intrepidity opposed to fortitude?

It seems that fearlessness or intrepidity is not opposed to fortitude (*esse impavidum non opponatur fortitudini*):

Objection 1: We judge habits by their acts. But no act of fortitude is impeded by an individual’s being intrepid (*impavidus*); for once fear is removed, an individual courageously endures and audaciously attacks. Therefore, being intrepid is not opposed to fortitude.

Objection 2: Being intrepid is morally bad (*esse pavidum est vitiosum*) either because of a lack of fitting love or because of pride or because of stupidity. But a lack of fitting love is opposed to *charity*, and pride is opposed to *humility*, and stupidity is opposed to *prudence* or *wisdom*. Therefore, the vice of intrepidity is not opposed to *fortitude*.

Objection 3: Vices are opposed to a virtue in the way that endpoints are opposed to a midpoint. But a midpoint has only a single endpoint in a given direction (*unum medium ex una parte not habet nisi unum extremum*). Therefore, since fear (*timor*) is opposed fortitude in one direction and daring (*audacia*) is opposed to fortitude in the other direction, it seems that intrepidity (*impaviditas*) is not opposed to fortitude.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher claims that intrepidity (*impaviditas*) is opposed to fortitude.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 123, a. 3), fortitude has to do with fear and daring. Now every moral virtue posits the mode of reason within the subject matter it has to deal with. Hence, fortitude involves fear that is moderated in accord with reason, so that, namely, a man fears *what* he should, and *when* he should, etc.

Now this mode of reason can be corrupted by *deficiency* just as it can be corrupted by *excess*. Hence, just as timidity is opposed to fortitude by an *excess* of fear, insofar as a man fears what he should not fear or in a way in which he should not fear it, so, too, intrepidity is opposed to fortitude by a *deficiency* of fear, insofar as an individual does not fear what he ought to fear.

Reply to objection 1: The act of fortitude is to endure fear and attack fear not in just any way at all, but in a way that accords with reason. The intrepid individual does not do this.

Reply to objection 2: Intrepidity *by its species* corrupts the mean of fortitude and so is directly opposed to fortitude. However, *as regards its causes*, nothing prevents it from being opposed to other virtues.

Reply to objection 3: The vice of daring is opposed to fortitude by way of an *excess of daring*, whereas intrepidity is opposed by way of a *deficiency of fear*. But fortitude posits a mean in both of these passions. Hence, it is not absurd for it to have diverse endpoints with respect to diverse things.