

QUESTION 153

Lust

Next we have to consider the vice of lust (*luxuria*): first, lust in general (question 153) and, second, the species of lust (question 154).

On the first topic there are five questions: (1) What is the subject matter of lust? (2) Is every instance of copulation illicit? (3) Is lust a mortal sin? (4) Is lust a capital vice? (5) Which vices are the daughters of lust?

Article 1

Is it just excessive sentient desire and sexual pleasure that are the subject matter of lust?

It seems that it is not just excessive sentient desire and sexual pleasure that are the subject matter of lust (*materia luxuriae non sit solum concupiscentia et delectationes venerea*):

Objection 1: In *Confessiones* 2 Augustine says, “Lust wishes itself to be called to fullness and abundance (*ad satietatem atque abundantiam*).” But fullness pertains to food and drink, while abundance pertains to wealth. Therefore, lust does not have to do properly with excessive sentient desire and sexual pleasure.

Objection 2: Wine is a lustful thing (*luxuriosa res*). But wine pertains to the pleasure of food and drink. Therefore, lust (*luxuria*) seems to have to do with food and drink most of all.

Objection 3: Lust is said to be the appetite for sensual pleasure (*libidosae voluptatis appetitus*). Yet sensual pleasure is found not only in sex, but in many other things as well. Therefore, lust does not have to do only with excessive sentient desire and sexual pleasure.

But contrary to this: In *De Vera Religione* [Augustine] says to the lustful, “He who sows in the flesh will reap corruption from the flesh.” But “sowing in the flesh” is done through sexual pleasure. Therefore, lust has to do with this sort of pleasure.

I respond: As Isidore puts it in *Etymologia*, “An individual is called lustful in the sense of being consumed with pleasure (*quasi solutus in voluptates*).” But it is the pleasures of sex that especially consume a man’s mind. And so lust is thought of as having to do especially with the pleasures of sex.

Reply to objection 1: Just as temperance has to do principally and properly with the pleasures of touch, whereas [the name ‘temperance’] is used in a derived sense (*ex consequenti*) and because of some similitude in the case of certain other subject matters, so, too, lust occurs principally in the case of sexual pleasures, which consume a man’s mind mainly and most of all, whereas [the name ‘lust’] is used in a secondary way in the case of certain other matters involving excess. Hence, a Gloss on Galatians 5:19 says that lust is “any sort of excess” (*quaelibet superfluitas*).

Reply to objection 2: Wine is said to be something lustful (*luxuriosa*) either (a) in the sense in which abundance in any sort of matter is referred to as lust or (b) insofar as the excessive enjoyment of wine serves as an inducement to sexual pleasure.

Reply to objection 3: Even if sensual pleasure (*libidiosa voluptas*) is attributed to other subject matters, nonetheless, as Augustine points out in *De Civitate Dei* 14, the name ‘sensual pleasure’ is applied in a special way to sexual pleasures, in relation to which the name ‘sensual desire’ (*libido*) is also predicated in a special way.

Article 2

Can any sexual act exist without sin?

It seems that no sexual act can exist without sin (*nullus actus venereus possit esse sine peccato*):

Objection 1: Nothing seems to impede a virtue except sin. But every sexual act impedes virtue to a very great degree; for in *Soliloquium* 1 Augustine says, “I think that nothing casts a man’s mind down from its heights more than a woman’s blandishments, along with the contact between bodies ...” Therefore, no sexual act seems to exist without sin.

Objection 2: Whenever there is something excessive through which one draws back from the good of reason, there is a sin, since, as *Ethics* 2 explains, virtue is corrupted “by excess and deficiency.” But in every sexual act there is an excess of pleasure, which absorbs reason to such an extent that (a), as the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 7, “it is impossible for it to have an understanding of anything,” and that (b), as Jerome says, “in the presence of such an act the spirit of prophecy does not touch the hearts of the prophets.” Therefore, no sexual act can exist without sin.

Objection 3: A cause is more powerful than its effect. But original sin is transmitted to children by excessive sentient desire, without which, as is clear from Augustine in *De Nuptiis et Concupiscentia*, a sexual act cannot exist. Therefore, no sexual act can exist without sin.

But contrary to this: In *De Bono Coniugali* Augustine says, “This is a sufficient answer to heretics, if only they will understand that there is no sin that is not contrary either to nature or to morals or to a precept.” And he is talking about the sexual act by which the ancient fathers had intercourse with their many wives. Therefore, not every sexual act is a sin.

I respond: Among human acts, a sin is something that is contrary to the ordering that belongs to reason. Now the ordering of reason is such that it orders everything appropriately toward its end. And so there is no sin if through his reason a man enjoys certain things, in the appropriate order and manner, for the end toward which they are ordered—as long as that end is something genuinely good.

Now just as it is genuinely good that the bodily nature of a single individual should be preserved, so, too, it is an excellent good that the nature of the human species should be preserved. And just as the enjoyment of food is ordered toward the preservation of the life of an individual man, so, too, the enjoyment of sexual acts is ordered toward the preservation of the whole human race. Hence, in *De Bono Coniugali* Augustine says, “What food is for a man’s well-being, sexual intercourse (*concupitus*) is for the well-being of the [human] race.”

And so just as the enjoyment of food can exist without sin, as long as it is done in an appropriate manner and order that befits the well-being of the body, so, too, the enjoyment of sexual acts can exist without any sin, as long as it is done in an appropriate manner and order that befits the end of human generation.

Reply to objection 1: There are two ways in which something can impede virtue:

In one way, with respect to *the general state* of virtue, and a virtue can be impeded in this way only by sin.

In the second way, with respect to *the perfect state* of virtue, and a virtue can be impeded in this way by something that is not a sin but is less good. And in this way intercourse with a woman (*usus feminae*) throws a man’s mind down not from virtue, but from the height, i.e., the perfection, of virtue. Hence, in *De Bono Coniugali* Augustine says, “Just as it was good for Martha to do things that were taken up with serving holy men, but better for Mary to listen to the word of God, so, too, we praise the good of Susanna in her conjugal chastity, but we prefer the good of the widow Anna and, even more, the good of the virgin Mary.”

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above (q. 152, a. 2 and *ST* 1-2, q. 64, a. 2), the mean of virtue does not have to do with quantity, but instead has to do with what accords with right reason. And

an abundance of pleasure accompanying a sexual act that is ordered in accord with reason is not contrary to the mean of virtue.

What's more, just how much the exterior sense delights—something that follows upon the body's disposition—is not relevant to virtue; instead, what pertains to virtue is how much the interior appetite for such pleasure is affected.

Again, that fact that reason is unable to consider a free act of reason with respect to spiritual things at the same time that it is having the pleasure in question does not show that [the sexual] act is contrary to virtue. For it is not contrary to virtue if the act of reason is sometimes interrupted by something that is done in accord with reason; otherwise, the fact that an individual gives himself over to sleep would be contrary to virtue.

However, the fact that sentient desire and sexual pleasure are not subject to being ruled and moderated by reason stems from the punishment for the first sin—more specifically, as is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 13, reason as a rebel against God deserved to have its own flesh as a rebel.

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in the same place, “From the flesh's excessive desire, which is not imputed as a sin to those who have been regenerated, as from a daughter of sin, is born a child who is shackled with original sin.” Hence, it does not follow that the very act is a sin; instead, what follows is that there is in that act some element of punishment that derives from the first sin.

Article 3

Can lust with respect to sexual acts be a sin?

It seems that lust with respect to sexual acts cannot be a sin (*luxuria quae est circa actus venereos non possit esse aliquod peccatum*):

Objection 1: What is emitted by a sexual act is semen, which, as is clear from the Philosopher in *De Generatione Animalium*, is a surplus of food. But no sin is involved in the emission of other superfluous fluids. Therefore, neither can a sin occur with respect to sexual acts.

Objection 2: Anyone can licitly use as he pleases whatever belongs to him. But in a sexual act a man uses nothing except what belongs to him—except perhaps in the case of adultery or rape. Therefore, there can be no sin in a use that is sexual. And so lust will not be a sin.

Objection 3: Every sin has an opposed vice. But lust does not seem to have any opposed vice. Therefore, lust is not a sin.

But contrary to this 1: A cause is more powerful than its effect. But wine is prohibited because of lust—this according to the Apostle in Ephesians 5:18 (“Do not become drunk with wine, wherein is lust”). Therefore, lust is prohibited.

But contrary to this 2: In Galatians 5:19, [lust] is numbered among the works of the flesh.

I respond: The more necessary something is, the more the order of reason has to be preserved with respect to it—and, as a result, it is more sinful if the order of reason is disregarded.

Now as has been explained (a. 2), the use of sexual acts is absolutely necessary for the common good, i.e., for the conservation of the human race. And with respect to this use the order of reason should be especially attended to. As a result, if something is done in this regard that goes beyond what the order of reason dictates, there will be a sin. But the nature of lust involves going beyond the order and mode of reason with respect to sexual acts. And so lust is without question a sin.

Reply to objection 1: As the Philosopher says in the same book, “Semen is a surplus over what is needed”—where it is called a ‘surplus’ because it is a residue of the nutritive power's operation, even though it is needed for the work of the generative power. On the other hand, there are other surplus fluids of the human body that are not needed, and so it does not matter how they are emitted, provided that the

decency of human living is preserved. But this is unlike the emission of semen, which ought to be done in such a way that it is appropriate to the end for which it is needed.

Reply to objection 2: As the Apostle says in 1 Corinthians 6:20 when speaking against lust, “You have been bought at a great price. Therefore, glorify God and carry Him around in your body.” Therefore, by the fact that an individual uses his body in a disordered way through lust, he wrongs the Lord, who is the principal master over our body. Hence, in *De Decem Chordis* Augustine says, “The Lord, who governs His servants to their advantage and not to His own, commanded that no one should through illicit pleasures destroy that temple of His that you have begun to be.”

Reply to objection 3: The opposite of lust does not occur in many individuals because men are more inclined toward pleasures. And yet the opposed vice is indeed contained under *insensibility*. This vice occurs in someone who detests intercourse with women to such a degree that he does not render what is due even to his wife.

Article 4

Is lust a capital sin?

It seems that lust is not a capital sin:

Objection 1: As is clear from a Gloss on Ephesians 5:3, lust (*luxuria*) seems to be the same as uncleanness (*immunditia*). But as is clear from Gregory in *Moralia* 31, uncleanness is a daughter of gluttony. Therefore, lust is not a capital sin.

Objection 2: In *De Summo Bono* Isidore says, “As pride of mind leads to the depravity of lust (*in prostitutionem libidinis*), so does humility of mind safeguard the chastity of the flesh.” But it seems contrary to the nature of a capital vice that it should find its origin in another vice. Therefore, lust (*luxuria*) is not a capital vice.

Objection 3: Lust is caused by despair—this according to Ephesians 4:19 (“... who in their despair have handed themselves over to lasciviousness (*seipsos tradiderunt impudicitiae*)”). But despair is not a capital sin—at the very least, as was established above (q. 35, a. 4), it is posited as a daughter of acedia. Therefore, *a fortiori*, lust is not a capital vice.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory posits lust as a capital vice.

I respond: As is clear from what has been said (q. 148, a. 5 and *ST* 1-2, q. 48, aa. 3-4), a vice that is capital has a highly desirable end, with the result that from a desire for this end a man proceeds to commit many sins, all of which are said to arise from the vice in question as a principal source.

Now the end of lust is sexual pleasure, which is the greatest pleasure. Hence, pleasure of this sort is the most desirable to the sentient appetite, both because of the intensity of the pleasure and also because of the connaturality of sentient desire. Hence, it is clear that lust is a capital vice.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 148, a. 6), the uncleanness that is posited as a daughter of gluttony is, according to some, a sort of bodily uncleanness. And on this score the objection is not to the point.

However, if uncleanness is understood as the uncleanness of lust, then one should reply that it is caused *materially* by gluttony, i.e., insofar as gluttony furnishes the bodily matter of lust, but it is not caused by gluttony under the notion of a *final cause*, which is what the origin of other vices from the capital sins mainly has to do with.

Reply to objection 2: As was explained above when we were talking about vainglory (q. 132, a. 3), pride is posited as a common mother of *all* sins, and so even capital vices arise from pride.

Reply to objection 3: Some individuals abstain from the pleasures of lust mainly for the sake of their hope for future glory, which despair removes. And so despair is a cause of lust in the sense that it

removes something that prevents lust and *not* in the sense that it is in its own right a cause of lust (*non sicut per se causa*). But the latter seems to be what is required for being a capital vice.

Article 5

Are the daughters of lust appropriately enumerated?

It seems that the daughters of lust are not appropriately said to be (a) blindness of mind (*caecitas mentis*), (b) thoughtlessness (*inconsideratio*), (c) inconstancy (*inconstantia*), (d) rashness (*praecipitatio*), (e) love of self (*amor sui*), (f) hatred of God (*odium Dei*), (g) love of the present world (*affectus praesentis saeculi*), and abhorrence or despair with respect to the future world (*horror vel desperatio futuri*):

Objection 1: Blindness of mind, thoughtlessness, and rashness pertain to imprudence, which is found in *every* sin, just as prudence is found in every virtue. Therefore, they should not be posited as special daughters of lust.

Objection 2: As was established above (q. 128, a. 1), constancy is posited as a part of fortitude. But lust is opposed to temperance and not to fortitude. Therefore, inconstancy is not a daughter of lust.

Objection 3: As is clear from Augustine in *De Civitate Dei* 14, love of self to the point of having contempt for God is a principle of *every* sin. Therefore, it should not be posited as a daughter of lust.

Objection 4: Isidore posits four daughters, viz., “foul speech (*turpiloquia*), the scurrilous (*scurrilia*), the amusing (*ludicra*), and foolish talk (*stultiloquia*).” Therefore, the aforementioned daughters seem to be superfluous.

But contrary to this is the authority of Gregory in *Moralia* 31.

I respond: When the lower powers are attracted to their objects with intensity, the result is that the higher powers are impeded and disordered in their own acts. Now through the vice of lust the lower appetite, viz., sentient desire, tends with intensity toward its object, viz., the pleasurable, because of the intensity of the pleasure. And so the result is that through lust the higher powers, viz., reason and will, are disordered most of all.

Now there are *four acts of reason* with respect to things to be done:

(a) The first act is *simple understanding* (*simplex intelligentia*), which apprehends an end as something good. And this act is impeded by lust—this according to Daniel 13:56 (“Beauty has deceived you, and lust has perverted your heart”). And on this score, one posits *blindness of mind*.

(b) The second act is *deliberating about the things to be done for the sake of an end* (*consilium de his quae sunt agenda propter finem*). And this act is likewise impeded by the sentient desire that belongs to lust; hence, in *Eunuchus* Terence, in speaking of lustful love (*de amore libidinoso*), says, “This thing has in itself neither deliberation nor any other mode, and you cannot govern it with deliberation.” And on this score one posits *rashness*, which, as was established above (q. 53, a. 3), implies the removal of deliberation.

(c) The third act is *judging the things to be done* (*iudicium de agendis*). And this, too, is impeded by lust; for Daniel 13:9 says of the lustful old men, “They perverted their own minds ... so as not to remember righteous judgments.” And on this score one posits *thoughtlessness*.

(d) The fourth act is *reason’s command with respect to what is to be done* (*praeceptum rationis de agendo*). Once again, this is impeded by lust, viz., insofar a man is impeded by the impetus of sentient desire from executing what he had decided should be done. Hence, in *Eunuchus* Terence says of a man who claimed that he was going to break up with his mistress, “One little false tear will undo those words.”

Now on the part of *the will*, there are two acts that come to be disordered:

(a) One of them is *the desire for an end*. And on this score one posits *love of self*, viz., with respect to the pleasure that one desires in a disordered way, and at the opposite end one posits *hatred of God*, viz., insofar as He forbids the desired pleasure.

(b) The other act is *the desire for the means to an end*. And on this score one posits *love of the present world*, in which an individual wills to enjoy the pleasure, and at the opposite end one posits *despair over the future world*, since as long as an individual is excessively detained by carnal pleasures, he feels disgust for spiritual things and does not take care to attain them.

Reply to objection 1: As the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 6, intemperance corrupts prudence especially. And so the vices opposed to prudence arise especially from lust, which is the principal species of intemperance.

Reply to objection 2: Constancy in the midst of what is difficult and fearful is posited as a part of *fortitude*. However, being constant in abstaining from pleasures pertains to *continence*, which, as was explained above (q. 143), is posited as a part of *temperance*. And so it is the inconstancy which is opposed to temperance that is posited as a daughter of lust.

Yet even the first sort of inconstancy is caused by lust, because it softens a man's heart and renders him womanish—this according to Hosea 4:11 (“Fornication, along with wine and drunkenness, take away heart”). And in *De Re Militari* Vegetius says, “The less a man knows of the pleasures of life, the less he fears death.” Nor is it the case, as is often claimed, that the daughters of a capital vice have to agree with that vice in subject matter.

Reply to objection 3: A *common principle* of sin is love of self with respect to any good that an individual desires for himself. By contrast, love of self is posited *specifically* as a daughter of lust insofar as the individual desires the pleasures of the flesh for himself.

Reply to objection 4: What Isidore posits are certain disordered exterior acts, mainly having to do with speech. There are four ways in which something is disordered in speech:

(a) *because of its subject matter*: And on this score one posits *foul speech*. For since, as Matthew 12:34 says, “The mouth speaks out of the abundance of the heart,” lustful individuals, whose heart is full of shameful desires, easily break out into filthy words.

(b) *on the part of its cause*: Since lust is a cause of thoughtlessness and rashness, the result is that it makes an individual break out into words which are uttered frivolously and thoughtlessly and which are called *scurrilous*.

(c) *with respect to its end*: Since a lustful individual is seeking pleasure, he orders even his words toward pleasure, and he breaks out into *amusing* words.

(d) *with respect to the views embodied by the words*, which lust perverts because of the blindness of mind it causes. And so the individual breaks out into *foolish talk*—as, for instance, when with his words he expresses a preference for the pleasures that he desires over everything else.