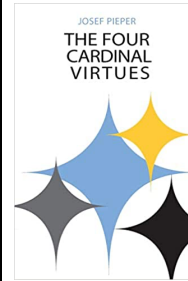
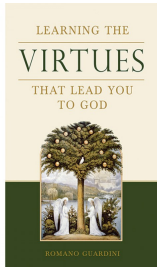


Book Reference



Reading Context – Temperance and Self-Control

#1: Asceticism means that a man resolves to live as a man. This brings about a necessity which does not exist for the animal; that is, the need to keep his urges in an order which is freely willed and to overcome his tendency toward excess or toward a wrong direction. This is not to imply that the urges are in themselves evil. They belong to the nature of man, and operate in all forms and areas of his life. They compose his store of energy. To weaken them would be to weaken life. But life is good. A deep current in the history of religion and ethics proceeds from the thought that the urges as such, sexual activity, the body, and even matter itself are evil—indeed the very principle of evil—while the spirit as such is good. This is dualism, in which, certainly, noble motives are at work; but, as a whole, it becomes a dangerous error, and very often ends in a surrender to the urge.

#2: The motive for true asceticism does not lie in such a struggle to overcome the urges, but in the necessity of bringing them into proper order. The order is determined by various considerations: the question of health, regard for other persons, and our duties to our vocation and our work. Every day makes new demands and obliges us to keep ourselves in order. And this is asceticism. The word, derived from the Greek *askesis*, means practice and exercise, exercise in the proper

#5: The meaning of "temperance" has dwindled miserably to the crude significance of "temperateness in eating and drinking." We may add that this term is applied chiefly, if not exclusively, to the designation of mere quantity, just as "intemperance" seems to indicate only excess. Needless to say, "temperance" limited to this meaning cannot even remotely hint at the true nature of *temperantia*, to say nothing of expressing its full content. *Temperantia* has a wider significance and a higher rank: it is a cardinal virtue, one of the four hinges on which swings the gate of life

#6: A study of the linguistic meaning of the Greek term, *sophrosyne*, and of the Latin *temperantia* reveals a much wider range of significance. The original meaning of the Greek word embraces "directing reason" in the widest sense. And the Latin stays close to this far-ranging significance. In St. Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians (12, 24f.) we read: *Deus temperavit corpus*. "Thus God has established a harmony in the body, giving special honor to that which needed it most. There was to be no want of unity in the body; all the different parts of it were to make each other's welfare their common care." The primary and essential meaning of *temperare*, therefore, is this: to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole.

directing of one's life.

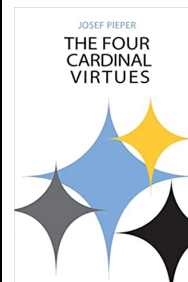
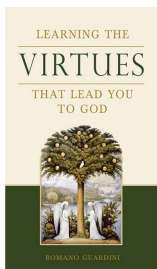
#3: We must also consider the fact that there is a hierarchy of values. For instance, there are everyday values: those that pertain to our physical life; above these there are the values of our vocation and our work; still higher are those of personal relations and intellectual activity; and finally those which are attained by our immediate relation to God. We realize these values by means of the powers of our being; but these are limited, and we must understand clearly to which tasks we want to turn them. We must choose, and then carry out our choice. This requires exertion and sacrifices—and that, too, is asceticism.

#4: Apart from all this, everyone who knows the tendency of human nature toward self-indulgence also knows how necessary it is to impose upon ourselves voluntary exercises in self-control, such as are not demanded by our immediate purposes. They are necessary so that the will may more easily fulfill the demands of duty when these present themselves. They are necessary also as a way to freedom which consists in being master of oneself, of one's impulses and circumstances.

#7: Aquinas says that the second meaning of temperance is "serenity of the spirit" (*quies animi*). . . . What is meant is the serenity that fills the inmost recesses of the human being, and is the seal and fruit of order. The purpose and goal of *temperantia* is man's inner order, from which alone this "serenity of spirit" can flow forth. "Temperance" signifies the realizing of this order within oneself.

#8: *Intemperantia* and despair are connected by a hidden channel. Whoever in stubborn recklessness persists in pursuing perfect satisfaction and gratification in prestige and pleasure has set his foot on the road to despair. Another thing, also, is true: one who rejects fulfillment in its true and final meaning, and, despairing of God and himself, anticipates nonfulfillment may well regard the artificial paradise of unrestrained pleasure-seeking as the sole place, if not of happiness, then of forgetfulness, of self-oblivion: "In their despair, they gave themselves up to incontinence" (Ephesians 4, 19). That sin is a burden and a bondage is nowhere more apparent than in *intemperantia*, in that obsession of selfish self-preservation, which seeks itself in vain.

Book Reference



Questions on Temperance and Self-Control

Q1. Text 1-4 are taken from a chapter called "Asceticism" in Guardini's book,

Q7. What is temperance? Does it differ from asceticism or self-control? [Text #5]

Learning the Virtues that Lead You To

God. For most people today, what are the connotations of the word “asceticism”—do they mean something different by it than self-control? Does Guardini distinguish self-control from asceticism?

Q2. How does the need to direct our urges with order arise from man’s resolve to live as a man (and not an animal)? [Text #1]

Q3. This book by Guardini was written in 1963, over 50 years ago. How widespread is the notion today that Christianity is dualistic—i.e., a Puritan understanding of the body and the world as evil? [Text #1]

Q4. If Asceticism is merely “practice and exercise in the proper directing of life,” why does the word get such bad press? [Text #2]

Q5. Can we have order if we do not know the hierarchy of values—what is most important in life? [Text #3]

Q6. How do our ideals of truth, goodness and beauty help us to direct our response to our animal urges? [Text #4]

Q8. Why does Pieper say that the first definition of temperance is “to dispose various parts into one unified and ordered whole”? [Text#6]

Q7. Why does Pieper say that the second meaning of temperance is “serenity of the spirit”? [Text #7]

Q8. Why does Pieper say that there is a hidden channel between intemperance and despair? Has the intemperate person despaired of his ability to fight his urges? Or of the hope that doing so will lead to happiness? [Text#8]