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[J. F. CONWELL]

CONTENSON, GUILLAUME VINCENT DE

Dominican theologian and preacher; b. Auvillar, France, 1641; d. Creil-sur-Oise, Dec. 26, 1674. After six years of study under the Jesuits at Montauban, Contenson became a Dominican at Toulouse in 1655. He began teaching philosophy in 1664 at Albi at the invitation of the archbishop but was called back to Toulouse in 1666 to teach theology. He taught in various episcopal seminaries throughout France. His sermons testified to his extensive learning and earned him great popularity. But Contenson's reputation is based primarily on his *Theologia mentis et cordis*, which is still used and highly valued by many. It was completed by Massoulie and published in nine volumes, the last of which appeared posthumously (1681). Basically, the work is a speculative commentary on the *Summa theologiae* of St. Thomas Aquinas. Contenson, believing strongly that theology does not attain its perfection until it unites knowledge and love, attempted to appeal to the heart as well as the mind and to enliven the dry reasoning of scholasticism. He added to his speculative comments, which are accurate and solidly established, asceticomystical reflections drawn from his own opinions and personal experience, illustrating them with imagery borrowed from the Fathers of the Church.

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[C. LOZIER]

CONTINENCE

According to Aristotle, continence is "a virtue of the appetite, by which men, through thought, control the appetite that induces to evil pleasures" (*Virt. et vit.* 1250a). Evil pleasures are indulged particularly in immoderate eating and drinking and in seeking unreasonable sexual

satisfactions; they are evil because such pleasures pass the bounds laid down by reason. In Christian literature the object of continence is sometimes as comprehensive as it is in Greek philosophy; but in the common parlance of the early Christians, the virtue of continence was associated primarily with sexuality and was synonymous with chastity (Acts 24.25; 1 Cor 7.9; Gal 5.23; Tit 1.8). Today it is variously used in moral theology and popular speech to mean (1) self-restraint in general, or (2) self-restraint with respect to illicit sexual pleasures, or (3) abstention from all sexual pleasure, licit or illicit, or (4) a disposition of the will to resist vehement impulses of the sexual appetite.

In the first of the above senses, continence is identifiable with all virtue, for every virtue implies self-restraint and a holding back from what is repugnant to it. In the second sense it is identifiable with the virtue of CHASTITY, whose function it is to moderate the sexual appetite. In the third sense it can indicate a perfection of chastity, although, as the term is understood in popular usage, the abstention from legitimate sexual activity may have a motive other than that of chastity, in which case it is materially, but not formally, identifiable with that virtue.

Continence in the fourth, and for some moral theologians the most proper, sense of the word, although a most commendable quality, is something less than a virtue inasmuch as it supposes its possessor subject to conditions that would not exist if he were perfectly virtuous. Continence is exercised in holding firm against a riot of disorderly impulses in the sense appetite. In a perfectly chaste man vehement disturbance of this kind would not occur, for it is the function of the virtue of chastity to hold the sense appetite itself under such control that strong irrational movements do not occur in it. Hence continence, which is a quality rooted in the will, is necessary only when chastity has not been equal in its function of controlling the appetite. Continence is therefore a second line of defense, but a necessary one inasmuch as ideally perfect chastity, such as would equip a man to face all manner of circumstances without disorderly reactions of some violence, is a rare quality.

The distinction between continence understood in this sense and temperance was noted by Aristotle (*Eth. Nic.* 7.1), but it was employed also in Christian literature, equivalently at least, from an early date, as can be seen in Cassian's account of the degrees in the practice of chastity (*Collationes* 12, *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne [Paris 1878–90] 49:869–898). St. Thomas Aquinas acknowledged the propriety of speaking of continence both as a virtue in the perfect sense and as something less than perfect virtue, but ordered to the genus of virtue (*Summa theologiae* 2a2ae, 155.1).

The comparative excellence of continence and temperance depends on the sense in which the term is taken. If it is understood to denote abstinence from all venereal pleasures, it is greater than temperance, absolutely speaking; but if it is used in the sense of a strong will to resist lustful impulses, temperance is much greater than continence, for it is more thoroughly in accord with reason. The good of reason is more dominant in the temperate person whose appetite is obedient to reason than in the continent person whose sense appetite strongly resists reason by its evil inclinations. From this point of view, therefore, continence is compared to temperance as something imperfect to something perfect.

See Also: LUST; VIRGINITY; CELIBACY.

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[T. J. HAYES/J. VAN PAASSEN]

CONTINGENCY

In general usage, contingency represents the possible occurrence of future events or conditions that have the character of accidents or emergencies. Viewed as possible or even as probable, although never as certain to occur, contingency involves variability and dependence, and antecedent or concurrent causes or conditions. Because sometimes unforeseen or outside the intention of an agent, it may be identified with CHANCE; in a derived meaning it may be associated with FREEDOM and CHOICE.

Modes of Being. In its metaphysical meaning, contingency represents one of the four modes of being: NECESSITY, contingency, POSSIBILITY, and impossibility. It can therefore best be explained by relating it to the other modes.

Contingency and Necessity. In its opposition to necessity, that condition of fixed, unchangeable being, which is not subordinate to antecedent conditions or prior CAUSALITY, contingency may be viewed either as actual or possible. In terms of possible EXISTENCE, contingency represents the state of an ESSENCE or nature that admits of, but does not demand, actualization; and in this meaning, contingency is coextensive and synonymous with possibility. In terms of actual existence, contingency represents the condition of an essence which, although actualized, is equally disposed toward nonexistence. In short, necessity represents that which cannot not-be; contingency represents that which can be or not-be. In this sense

contingency is predicable of all FINITE BEING that has a beginning, is subject to change, and can perish; that is to say, of all things the mind can conceive as either existing or not existing without thereby falling into contradiction.

Contingency and necessity, however, are not mutually exclusive. The most contingent of things involves at least existential necessity, in the sense that having being it cannot at the same time and under the same aspect not have being. By the same token, contingency involves certain essential necessities: for a triangle to exist, for example, it must have three sides. It may also involve necessity in the sense that certain effects or conditions are relatively necessitated by determined causes or antecedents. This co-presence of necessity and contingency in concrete beings is significant, for it enables the mind to achieve knowledge of the necessary, ranging from universal laws of nature to the existence of God, from the analysis of contingent reality.

Contingency and Possibility. Contingency is sometimes confused with possibility, which also involves the capacity for being. The two may be distinguished in this way: possibility is that which does not imply any contradiction, or that which is not impossible; contingency, on the other hand, is that whose opposite does not imply any contradiction, or that which is not necessary.

Logical Contingency. The logical meaning of contingency closely parallels the metaphysical meaning. In classical logic, it represents one of the modal propositions, i.e., propositions that express a mode of agreement or disagreement between two terms. Necessity and impossibility represent universal modes since the necessary always is and the impossible never is; possibility and contingency represent particular modes, with contingency as the contradictory of necessity, the subcontrary of possibility, and the subaltern of impossibility. In this way the contingent mode of the necessary proposition “It is necessary that *S* be *P*” would read: “It is not necessary that *S* be *P* and it is possible that *S* be not *P*.” Modern symbolic logic tends to avoid the metaphysical implications of modal propositions and identifies the contingent proposition with tautology. (*See* LOGIC, SYMBOLIC; OPPOSITION.)

Greek Views of Contingency. Considered historically, contingency in the universe is generally recognized by all philosophers, even those basing their speculation on determinism or necessity. For ARISTOTLE, contingency meant that which is neither necessary nor impossible, or that of which affirmative or negative predication can be made (*Anal. pr.* 46b 40–47b 14). Certain phenomena indicate that the determinate series of causes (formal, final, efficient, and material) does not dominate reality completely, but points to a fifth cause, chance (*Physics* 195b 31–198a 13). Events that thus form exceptions to