

## St. Thomas Aquinas

# The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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### OF COUNSEL, WHICH PRECEDES CHOICE (SIX ARTICLES)

We must now consider counsel; concerning which there are six points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether counsel is an inquiry?
  - (2) Whether counsel is of the end or of the means?
  - (3) Whether counsel is only of things that we do?
  - (4) Whether counsel is of all things that we do?
  - (5) Whether the process of counsel is one of analysis?
  - (6) Whether the process of counsel is indefinite?
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### Whether counsel is an inquiry?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that counsel is not an inquiry. For Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 22) that counsel is "an act of the appetite." But inquiry is not an act of the appetite. Therefore counsel is not an inquiry.

**Objection 2:** Further, inquiry is a discursive act of the intellect: for which reason it is not found in God, Whose knowledge is not discursive, as we have shown in the FP, Question [14],

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things according to the counsel of His will." Therefore counsel is not inquiry.

**Objection 3:** Further, inquiry is of doubtful matters. But counsel is given in matters that are certainly good; thus the Apostle says ([1 Cor. 7:25](#)): "Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: but I give counsel." Therefore counsel is not an inquiry.

**On the contrary,** Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiv.] says: "Every counsel is an inquiry; but not every inquiry is a counsel."

**I answer that,** Choice, as stated above ([Question \[13\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 2; [Article \[3\]](#)), follows the judgment of the reason about what is to be done. Now there is much uncertainty in things that have to be done; because actions are concerned with contingent singulars, which by reason of their vicissitude, are uncertain. Now in things doubtful and uncertain the reason does not pronounce judgment, without previous inquiry: wherefore the reason must of necessity institute an inquiry before deciding on the objects of choice; and this inquiry is called counsel. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 2) that choice is the "desire of what has been already counselled."

**Reply to Objection 1:** When the acts of two powers are ordained to one another, in each of them there is something belonging to the other power: consequently each act can be denominated from either power. Now it is evident that the act of the reason giving direction as to the means, and the act of the will tending to these means according to the reason's direction, are ordained to one another. Consequently there is to be found something of the reason, viz. order, in that act of the will, which is choice: and in counsel, which is an act of reason, something of the will--both as matter (since counsel is of what man wills to do)--and as motive (because it is from willing the end, that man is moved to take counsel in regard to the means). And therefore, just as the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 2) that choice "is intellect influenced by appetite," thus pointing out that both concur in the act of choosing; so Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 22) that counsel is "appetite based on inquiry," so as to show that counsel belongs, in a way, both to the will, on whose behalf and by whose impulsion the inquiry is made, and to the reason that executes the inquiry.

**Reply to Objection 2:** The things that we say of God must be understood without any of the defects which are to be found in us: thus in us science is of conclusions derived by reasoning from causes to effects: but science when said of God means sure knowledge of all effects in the First Cause, without any reasoning process. In like manner we ascribe counsel to God, as to the certainty of His knowledge or judgment, which certainty in us arises from the inquiry of counsel. But such inquiry has no place in God; wherefore in this respect it is not ascribed to God: in which sense Damascene says (De Fide Orth. ii, 22): "God takes not counsel: those only take counsel who lack knowledge."

**Reply to Objection 3:** It may happen that things which are most certainly good in the opinion of wise and spiritual men are not certainly good in the opinion of many, or at least of carnal-minded men. Consequently in such things counsel may be given.

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**Objection 1:** It would seem that counsel is not only of the means but also of the end. For whatever is doubtful, can be the subject of inquiry. Now in things to be done by man there happens sometimes a doubt as to the end and not only as to the means. Since therefore inquiry as to what is to be done is counsel, it seems that counsel can be of the end.

**Objection 2:** Further, the matter of counsel is human actions. But some human actions are ends, as stated in Ethic. i, 1. Therefore counsel can be of the end.

**On the contrary,** Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiv.] says that "counsel is not of the end, but of the means."

**I answer that,** The end is the principle in practical matters: because the reason of the means is to be found in the end. Now the principle cannot be called in question, but must be presupposed in every inquiry. Since therefore counsel is an inquiry, it is not of the end, but only of the means. Nevertheless it may happen that what is the end in regard to some things, is ordained to something else; just as also what is the principle of one demonstration, is the conclusion of another: and consequently that which is looked upon as the end in one inquiry, may be looked upon as the means in another; and thus it will become an object of counsel.

**Reply to Objection 1:** That which is looked upon as an end, is already fixed: consequently as long as there is any doubt about it, it is not looked upon as an end. Wherefore if counsel is taken about it, it will be counsel not about the end, but about the means.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Counsel is about operations, in so far as they are ordained to some end. Consequently if any human act be an end, it will not, as such, be the matter of counsel.

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## Whether counsel is only of things that we do?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that counsel is not only of things that we do. For counsel implies some kind of conference. But it is possible for many to confer about things that are not subject to movement, and are not the result of our actions, such as the nature of various things. Therefore counsel is not only of things that we do.

**Objection 2:** Further, men sometimes seek counsel about things that are laid down by law; hence we speak of counsel at law. And yet those who seek counsel thus, have nothing to do in making the laws. Therefore counsel is not only of things that we do.

**Objection 3:** Further, some are said to take consultation about future events; which, however, are not in our power. Therefore counsel is not only of things that we do.

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what another does. But this is clearly untrue. Therefore counsel is not only of things that we do.

**On the contrary**, Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiv.] says: "We take counsel of things that are within our competency and that we are able to do."

**I answer that**, Counsel properly implies a conference held between several; the very word [consilium] denotes this, for it means a sitting together [considium], from the fact that many sit together in order to confer with one another. Now we must take note that in contingent particular cases, in order that anything be known for certain, it is necessary to take several conditions or circumstances into consideration, which it is not easy for one to consider, but are considered by several with greater certainty, since what one takes note of, escapes the notice of another; whereas in necessary and universal things, our view is brought to bear on matters much more absolute and simple, so that one man by himself may be sufficient to consider these things. Wherefore the inquiry of counsel is concerned, properly speaking, with contingent singulars. Now the knowledge of the truth in such matters does not rank so high as to be desirable of itself, as is the knowledge of things universal and necessary; but it is desired as being useful towards action, because actions bear on things singular and contingent. Consequently, properly speaking, counsel is about things done by us.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Counsel implies conference, not of any kind, but about what is to be done, for the reason given above.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Although that which is laid down by the law is not due to the action of him who seeks counsel, nevertheless it directs him in his action: since the mandate of the law is one reason for doing something.

**Reply to Objection 3:** Counsel is not only about what is done, but also about whatever has relation to what is done. And for this reason we speak of consulting about future events, in so far as man is induced to do or omit something, through the knowledge of future events.

**Reply to Objection 4:** We seek counsel about the actions of others, in so far as they are, in some way, one with us; either by union of affection---thus a man is solicitous about what concerns his friend, as though it concerned himself; or after the manner of an instrument, for the principal agent and the instrument are, in a way, one cause, since one acts through the other; thus the master takes counsel about what he would do through his servant.

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## Whether counsel is about all things that we do?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that counsel is about all things that we have to do. For choice is the "desire of what is counselled" as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). But choice is about all things that we do. Therefore counsel is too.

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through the impulse of passion, we act in virtue of the reason's inquiry. Therefore there is counsel about everything that we do.

**Objection 3:** Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 3) that "if it appears that something can be done by more means than one, we take counsel by inquiring whereby it may be done most easily and best; but if it can be accomplished by one means, how it can be done by this." But whatever is done, is done by one means or by several. Therefore counsel takes place in all things that we do.

**On the contrary,** Gregory of Nyssa [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxxiv.] says that "counsel has no place in things that are done according to science or art."

**I answer that,** Counsel is a kind of inquiry, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). But we are wont to inquire about things that admit of doubt; hence the process of inquiry, which is called an argument, "is a reason that attests something that admitted of doubt" [\*Cicero, Topic. ad Trebat.]. Now, that something in relation to human acts admits of no doubt, arises from a twofold source. First, because certain determinate ends are gained by certain determinate means: as happens in the arts which are governed by certain fixed rules of action; thus a writer does not take counsel how to form his letters, for this is determined by art. Secondly, from the fact that it little matters whether it is done this or that way; this occurs in minute matters, which help or hinder but little with regard to the end aimed at; and reason looks upon small things as mere nothings. Consequently there are two things of which we do not take counsel, although they conduce to the end, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 3): namely, minute things, and those which have a fixed way of being done, as in works produced by art, with the exception of those arts that admit of conjecture such as medicine, commerce, and the like, as Gregory of Nyssa says [\*Nemesius, De Nat. Hom. xxiv.].

**Reply to Objection 1:** Choice presupposes counsel by reason of its judgment or decision. Consequently when the judgment or decision is evident without inquiry, there is no need for the inquiry of counsel.

**Reply to Objection 2:** In matters that are evident, the reason makes no inquiry, but judges at once. Consequently there is no need of counsel in all that is done by reason.

**Reply to Objection 3:** When a thing can be accomplished by one means, but in different ways, doubt may arise, just as when it can be accomplished by several means: hence the need of counsel. But when not only the means, but also the way of using the means, is fixed, then there is no need of counsel.

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**Whether the process of counsel is one of analysis?**

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about things that we do. But the process of our actions is not one of analysis, but rather one of synthesis, viz. from the simple to the composite. Therefore counsel does not always proceed by way of analysis.

**Objection 2:** Further, counsel is an inquiry of the reason. But reason proceeds from things that precede to things that follow, according to the more appropriate order. Since then, the past precedes the present, and the present precedes the future, it seems that in taking counsel one should proceed from the past and present to the future: which is not an analytical process. Therefore the process of counsel is not one of analysis.

**Objection 3:** Further, counsel is only of such things as are possible to us, according to Ethic. iii, 3. But the question as to whether a certain thing is possible to us, depends on what we are able or unable to do, in order to gain such and such an end. Therefore the inquiry of counsel should begin from things present.

**On the contrary,** The Philosopher says (Ethic. iii, 3) that "he who takes counsel seems to inquire and analyze."

**I answer that,** In every inquiry one must begin from some principle. And if this principle precedes both in knowledge and in being, the process is not analytic, but synthetic: because to proceed from cause to effect is to proceed synthetically, since causes are more simple than effects. But if that which precedes in knowledge is later in the order of being, the process is one of analysis, as when our judgment deals with effects, which by analysis we trace to their simple causes. Now the principle in the inquiry of counsel is the end, which precedes indeed in intention, but comes afterwards into execution. Hence the inquiry of counsel must needs be one of analysis, beginning that is to say, from that which is intended in the future, and continuing until it arrives at that which is to be done at once.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Counsel is indeed about action. But actions take their reason from the end; and consequently the order of reasoning about actions is contrary to the order of actions.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Reason begins with that which is first according to reason; but not always with that which is first in point of time.

**Reply to Objection 3:** We should not want to know whether something to be done for an end be possible, if it were not suitable for gaining that end. Hence we must first inquire whether it be conducive to the end, before considering whether it be possible.

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## Whether the process of counsel is indefinite?

**Objection 1:** It would seem that the process of counsel is indefinite. For counsel is an inquiry about the particular things with which action is concerned. But singulars are infinite.

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**Objection 2:** Further, the inquiry of counsel has to consider not only what is to be done, but how to avoid obstacles. But every human action can be hindered, and an obstacle can be removed by some human reason. Therefore the inquiry about removing obstacles can go on indefinitely.

**Objection 3:** Further, the inquiry of demonstrative science does not go on indefinitely, because one can come to principles that are self-evident, which are absolutely certain. But such like certainty is not to be had in contingent singulars, which are variable and uncertain. Therefore the inquiry of counsel goes on indefinitely.

**On the contrary,** "No one is moved to that which he cannot possibly reach" (De Coelo i, 7). But it is impossible to pass through the infinite. If therefore the inquiry of counsel is infinite, no one would begin to take counsel. Which is clearly untrue.

**I answer that,** The inquiry of counsel is actually finite on both sides, on that of its principle and on that of its term. For a twofold principle is available in the inquiry of counsel. One is proper to it, and belongs to the very genus of things pertaining to operation: this is the end which is not the matter of counsel, but is taken for granted as its principle, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). The other principle is taken from another genus, so to speak; thus in demonstrative sciences one science postulates certain things from another, without inquiring into them. Now these principles which are taken for granted in the inquiry of counsel are any facts received through the senses—for instance, that this is bread or iron: and also any general statements known either through speculative or through practical science; for instance, that adultery is forbidden by God, or that man cannot live without suitable nourishment. Of such things counsel makes no inquiry. But the term of inquiry is that which we are able to do at once. For just as the end is considered in the light of a principle, so the means are considered in the light of a conclusion. Wherefore that which presents itself as to be done first, holds the position of an ultimate conclusion whereat the inquiry comes to an end. Nothing however prevents counsel from being infinite potentially, for as much as an infinite number of things may present themselves to be inquired into by means of counsel.

**Reply to Objection 1:** Singulars are infinite; not actually, but only potentially.

**Reply to Objection 2:** Although human action can be hindered, the hindrance is not always at hand. Consequently it is not always necessary to take counsel about removing the obstacle.

**Reply to Objection 3:** In contingent singulars, something may be taken for certain, not simply, indeed, but for the time being, and as far as it concerns the work to be done. Thus that Socrates is sitting is not a necessary statement; but that he is sitting, as long as he continues to sit, is necessary; and this can be taken for a certain fact.