

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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TREATISE ON THE CARDINAL VIRTUES (Questions [47]-170)

ON PRUDENCE (Questions [47]-56)

OF PRUDENCE, CONSIDERED IN ITSELF (SIXTEEN ARTICLES)

After treating of the theological virtues, we must in due sequence consider the cardinal virtues. In the first place we shall consider prudence in itself; secondly, its parts; thirdly, the corresponding gift; fourthly, the contrary vices; fifthly, the precepts concerning prudence.

Under the first head there are sixteen points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether prudence is in the will or in the reason?
 - [\(2\)](#) If in the reason, whether it is only in the practical, or also in the speculative reason?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether it takes cognizance of singulars?
 - [\(4\)](#) Whether it is virtue?
 - [\(5\)](#) Whether it is a special virtue?
 - [\(6\)](#) Whether it appoints the end to the moral virtues?
 - [\(7\)](#) Whether it fixes the mean in the moral virtues?
 - [\(8\)](#) Whether its proper act is command?
 - [\(9\)](#) Whether solicitude or watchfulness belongs to prudence?
 - [\(10\)](#) Whether prudence extends to the governing of many?
 - [\(11\)](#) Whether the prudence which regards private good is the same in species as that which regards the common good?
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[\(13\)](#) Whether prudence is in the wicked?

[\(14\)](#) Whether prudence is in all good men?

[\(15\)](#) Whether prudence is in us naturally?

[\(16\)](#) Whether prudence is lost by forgetfulness ?

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Whether prudence is in the cognitive or in the appetitive faculty?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is not in the cognitive but in the appetitive faculty. For Augustine says (De Morib. Eccl. xv): "Prudence is love choosing wisely between the things that help and those that hinder." Now love is not in the cognitive, but in the appetitive faculty. Therefore prudence is in the appetitive faculty.

Objection 2: Further, as appears from the foregoing definition it belongs to prudence "to choose wisely." But choice is an act of the appetitive faculty, as stated above ([FS, Question \[13\], Article \[1\]](#)). Therefore prudence is not in the cognitive but in the appetitive faculty.

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that "in art it is better to err voluntarily than involuntarily, whereas in the case of prudence, as of the virtues, it is worse." Now the moral virtues, of which he is treating there, are in the appetitive faculty, whereas art is in the reason. Therefore prudence is in the appetitive rather than in the rational faculty.

On the contrary, Augustine says (Questions. lxxxiii, qu. 61): "Prudence is the knowledge of what to seek and what to avoid."

I answer that, As Isidore says (Etym. x): "A prudent man is one who sees as it were from afar, for his sight is keen, and he foresees the event of uncertainties." Now sight belongs not to the appetitive but to the cognitive faculty. Wherefore it is manifest that prudence belongs directly to the cognitive, and not to the sensitive faculty, because by the latter we know nothing but what is within reach and offers itself to the senses: while to obtain knowledge of the future from knowledge of the present or past, which pertains to prudence, belongs properly to the reason, because this is done by a process of comparison. It follows therefore that prudence, properly speaking, is in the reason.

Reply to Objection 1: As stated above ([FP, Question \[82\], Article \[4\]](#)) the will moves all the faculties to their acts. Now the first act of the appetitive faculty is love, as stated above ([FS, Question \[25\], Articles \[1\], 2](#)). Accordingly prudence is said to be love, not indeed essentially, but in so far as love moves to the act of prudence. Wherefore Augustine goes on to say that "prudence is love discerning aright that which helps from that which hinders us in tending to God." Now love is said to discern because it moves the reason to discern.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS047.html](#)le a help or a hindrance to that which has to be done at the present time. Hence it is clear that those things which prudence considers stand in relation to this other, as in relation to the end. Now of those things that are directed to the end there is counsel in the reason, and choice in the appetite, of which two, counsel belongs more properly to prudence, since the Philosopher states (Ethic. vi, 5,7,9) that a prudent man "takes good counsel." But as choice presupposes counsel, since it is "the desire for what has been already counselled" (Ethic. iii, 2), it follows that choice can also be ascribed to prudence indirectly, in so far, to wit, as prudence directs the choice by means of counsel.

Reply to Objection 3: The worth of prudence consists not in thought merely, but in its application to action, which is the end of the practical reason. Wherefore if any defect occur in this, it is most contrary to prudence, since, the end being of most import in everything, it follows that a defect which touches the end is the worst of all. Hence the Philosopher goes on to say (Ethic. vi, 5) that prudence is "something more than a merely rational habit," such as art is, since, as stated above ([FS](#), [Question \[57\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)) it includes application to action, which application is an act of the will.

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Whether prudence belongs to the practical reason alone or also to the speculative reason?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence belongs not only to the practical, but also to the speculative reason. For it is written ([Prov. 10:23](#)): "Wisdom is prudence to a man." Now wisdom consists chiefly in contemplation. Therefore prudence does also.

Objection 2: Further, Ambrose says (De Offic. i, 24): "Prudence is concerned with the quest of truth, and fills us with the desire of fuller knowledge." Now this belongs to the speculative reason. Therefore prudence resides also in the speculative reason.

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher assigns art and prudence to the same part of the soul (Ethic. vi, 1). Now art may be not only practical but also speculative, as in the case of the liberal arts. Therefore prudence also is both practical and speculative.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that prudence is right reason applied to action. Now this belongs to none but the practical reason. Therefore prudence is in the practical reason only.

I answer that, According to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 5) "a prudent man is one who is capable of taking good counsel." Now counsel is about things that we have to do in relation to some end: and the reason that deals with things to be done for an end is the practical reason. Hence it is evident that prudence resides only in the practical reason.

absolutely highest cause: so that the consideration of the highest cause in any particular genus belongs to wisdom in that genus. Now in the genus of human acts the highest cause is the common end of all human life, and it is this end that prudence intends. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that just as he who reasons well for the realization of a particular end, such as victory, is said to be prudent, not absolutely, but in a particular genus, namely warfare, so he that reasons well with regard to right conduct as a whole, is said to be prudent absolutely. Wherefore it is clear that prudence is wisdom about human affairs: but not wisdom absolutely, because it is not about the absolutely highest cause, for it is about human good, and this is not the best thing of all. And so it is stated significantly that "prudence is wisdom for man," but not wisdom absolutely.

Reply to Objection 2: Ambrose, and Tully also (De Invent. ii, 53) take the word prudence in a broad sense for any human knowledge, whether speculative or practical. And yet it may also be replied that the act itself of the speculative reason, in so far as it is voluntary, is a matter of choice and counsel as to its exercise; and consequently comes under the direction of prudence. On the other hand, as regards its specification in relation to its object which is the "necessary true," it comes under neither counsel nor prudence.

Reply to Objection 3: Every application of right reason in the work of production belongs to art: but to prudence belongs only the application of right reason in matters of counsel, which are those wherein there is no fixed way of obtaining the end, as stated in Ethic. iii, 3. Since then, the speculative reason makes things such as syllogisms, propositions and the like, wherein the process follows certain and fixed rules, consequently in respect of such things it is possible to have the essentials of art, but not of prudence; and so we find such a thing as a speculative art, but not a speculative prudence.

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Whether prudence takes cognizance of singulars?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence does not take cognizance of singulars. For prudence is in the reason, as stated above ([Articles \[1\],2](#)). But "reason deals with universals," according to Phys. i, 5. Therefore prudence does not take cognizance except of universals.

Objection 2: Further, singulars are infinite in number. But the reason cannot comprehend an infinite number of things. Therefore prudence which is right reason, is not about singulars.

Objection 3: Further, particulars are known by the senses. But prudence is not in a sense, for many persons who have keen outward senses are devoid of prudence. Therefore prudence does not take cognizance of singulars.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 7) that "prudence does not deal with universals only, but needs to take cognizance of singulars also."

consideration of the reason, but also the application to action, which is the end of the practical reason. But no man can conveniently apply one thing to another, unless he knows both the thing to be applied, and the thing to which it has to be applied. Now actions are in singular matters: and so it is necessary for the prudent man to know both the universal principles of reason, and the singulars about which actions are concerned.

Reply to Objection 1: Reason first and chiefly is concerned with universals, and yet it is able to apply universal rules to particular cases: hence the conclusions of syllogisms are not only universal, but also particular, because the intellect by a kind of reflection extends to matter, as stated in De Anima iii.

Reply to Objection 2: It is because the infinite number of singulars cannot be comprehended by human reason, that "our counsels are uncertain" (Wis. 9:14). Nevertheless experience reduces the infinity of singulars to a certain finite number which occur as a general rule, and the knowledge of these suffices for human prudence.

Reply to Objection 3: As the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 8), prudence does not reside in the external senses whereby we know sensible objects, but in the interior sense, which is perfected by memory and experience so as to judge promptly of particular cases. This does not mean however that prudence is in the interior sense as in its principle subject, for it is chiefly in the reason, yet by a kind of application it extends to this sense.

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Whether prudence is a virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is not a virtue. For Augustine says (De Lib. Arb. i, 13) that "prudence is the science of what to desire and what to avoid." Now science is condivided with virtue, as appears in the Predicaments (vi). Therefore prudence is not a virtue.

Objection 2: Further, there is no virtue of a virtue: but "there is a virtue of art," as the Philosopher states (Ethic. vi, 5): wherefore art is not a virtue. Now there is prudence in art, for it is written (2 Paralip. ii, 14) concerning Hiram, that he knew "to grave all sort of graving, and to devise ingeniously [prudenter] all that there may be need of in the work." Therefore prudence is not a virtue.

Objection 3: Further, no virtue can be immoderate. But prudence is immoderate, else it would be useless to say ([Prov. 23:4](#)): "Set bounds to thy prudence." Therefore prudence is not a virtue.

On the contrary, Gregory states (Moral. ii, 49) that prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice are four virtues.

I answer that, As stated above ([FS, Question \[55\], Article \[3\]](#); [FS, Question \[56\], Article \[1\]](#)) when we were treating of virtues in general, "virtue is that which makes its possessor good,

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS047.html](#)lly, for the thing that is good, secondly, formally, under the aspect of good. Good, under the aspect of good, is the object of the appetitive power. Hence if any habits rectify the consideration of reason, without regarding the rectitude of the appetite, they have less of the nature of a virtue since they direct man to good materially, that is to say, to the thing which is good, but without considering it under the aspect of good. On the other hand those virtues which regard the rectitude of the appetite, have more of the nature of virtue, because they consider the good not only materially, but also formally, in other words, they consider that which is good under the aspect of good.

Now it belongs to prudence, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#), ad 3; [Article \[3\]](#)) to apply right reason to action, and this is not done without a right appetite. Hence prudence has the nature of virtue not only as the other intellectual virtues have it, but also as the moral virtues have it, among which virtues it is enumerated.

Reply to Objection 1: Augustine there takes science in the broad sense for any kind of right reason.

Reply to Objection 2: The Philosopher says that there is a virtue of art, because art does not require rectitude of the appetite; wherefore in order that a man may make right use of his art, he needs to have a virtue which will rectify his appetite. Prudence however has nothing to do with the matter of art, because art is both directed to a particular end, and has fixed means of obtaining that end. And yet, by a kind of comparison, a man may be said to act prudently in matters of art. Moreover in certain arts, on account of the uncertainty of the means for obtaining the end, there is need for counsel, as for instance in the arts of medicine and navigation, as stated in *Ethic.* iii, 3.

Reply to Objection 3: This saying of the wise man does not mean that prudence itself should be moderate, but that moderation must be imposed on other things according to prudence.

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Whether prudence is a special virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is not a special virtue. For no special virtue is included in the definition of virtue in general, since virtue is defined (*Ethic.* ii, 6) "an elective habit that follows a mean appointed by reason in relation to ourselves, even as a wise man decides." Now right reason is reason in accordance with prudence, as stated in *Ethic.* vi, 13. Therefore prudence is not a special virtue.

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says (*Ethic.* vi, 13) that "the effect of moral virtue is right action as regards the end, and that of prudence, right action as regards the means." Now in every virtue certain things have to be done as means to the end. Therefore prudence is in every virtue, and consequently is not a special virtue.

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object, for it is right reason "applied to action" (Ethic. vi, 5); and all works of virtue are actions.
Therefore prudence is not a special virtue.

On the contrary, It is distinct from and numbered among the other virtues, for it is written (Wis. 8:7): "She teacheth temperance and prudence, justice and fortitude."

I answer that, Since acts and habits take their species from their objects, as shown above ([FS, Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#); [FS, Question \[18\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#); [FS, Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#)), any habit that has a corresponding special object, distinct from other objects, must needs be a special habit, and if it be a good habit, it must be a special virtue. Now an object is called special, not merely according to the consideration of its matter, but rather according to its formal aspect, as explained above ([FS, Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 1). Because one and the same thing is the subject matter of the acts of different habits, and also of different powers, according to its different formal aspects. Now a yet greater difference of object is requisite for a difference of powers than for a difference of habits, since several habits are found in the same power, as stated above ([FS, Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Consequently any difference in the aspect of an object, that requires a difference of powers, will "a fortiori" require a difference of habits.

Accordingly we must say that since prudence is in the reason, as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)), it is differentiated from the other intellectual virtues by a material difference of objects. "Wisdom," "knowledge" and "understanding" are about necessary things, whereas "art" and "prudence" are about contingent things, art being concerned with "things made," that is, with things produced in external matter, such as a house, a knife and so forth; and prudence, being concerned with "things done," that is, with things that have their being in the doer himself, as stated above ([FS, Question \[57\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)). On the other hand prudence is differentiated from the moral virtues according to a formal aspect distinctive of powers, i.e. the intellective power, wherein is prudence, and the appetitive power, wherein is moral virtue. Hence it is evident that prudence is a special virtue, distinct from all other virtues.

Reply to Objection 1: This is not a definition of virtue in general, but of moral virtue, the definition of which fittingly includes an intellectual virtue, viz., prudence, which has the same matter in common with moral virtue; because, just as the subject of moral virtue is something that partakes of reason, so moral virtue has the aspect of virtue, in so far as it partakes of intellectual virtue.

Reply to Objection 2: This argument proves that prudence helps all the virtues, and works in all of them; but this does not suffice to prove that it is not a special virtue; for nothing prevents a certain genus from containing a species which is operative in every other species of that same genus, even as the sun has an influence over all bodies.

Reply to Objection 3: Things done are indeed the matter of prudence, in so far as they are the object of reason, that is, considered as true: but they are the matter of the moral virtues, in so far as they are the object of the appetitive power, that is, considered as good.

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Objection 1: It would seem that prudence appoints the end to moral virtues. Since prudence is in the reason, while moral virtue is in the appetite, it seems that prudence stands in relation to moral virtue, as reason to the appetite. Now reason appoints the end to the appetitive power. Therefore prudence appoints the end to the moral virtues.

Objection 2: Further, man surpasses irrational beings by his reason, but he has other things in common with them. Accordingly the other parts of man are in relation to his reason, what man is in relation to irrational creatures. Now man is the end of irrational creatures, according to Polit. i, 3. Therefore all the other parts of man are directed to reason as to their end. But prudence is "right reason applied to action," as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). Therefore all actions are directed to prudence as their end. Therefore prudence appoints the end to all moral virtues.

Objection 3: Further, it belongs to the virtue, art, or power that is concerned about the end, to command the virtues or arts that are concerned about the means. Now prudence disposes of the other moral virtues, and commands them. Therefore it appoints their end to them.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 12) that "moral virtue ensures the rectitude of the intention of the end, while prudence ensures the rectitude of the means." Therefore it does not belong to prudence to appoint the end to moral virtues, but only to regulate the means.

I answer that, The end of moral virtues is human good. Now the good of the human soul is to be in accord with reason, as Dionysius declares (Div. Nom. iv). Wherefore the ends of moral virtue must of necessity pre-exist in the reason.

Now, just as, in the speculative reason, there are certain things naturally known, about which is "understanding," and certain things of which we obtain knowledge through them, viz. conclusions, about which is "science," so in the practical reason, certain things pre-exist, as naturally known principles, and such are the ends of the moral virtues, since the end is in practical matters what principles are in speculative matters, as stated above ([Question \[23\]](#), [Article \[7\]](#), ad 2; [FS, Question \[13\]](#), [Article \[3\]](#)); while certain things are in the practical reason by way of conclusions, and such are the means which we gather from the ends themselves. About these is prudence, which applies universal principles to the particular conclusions of practical matters. Consequently it does not belong to prudence to appoint the end to moral virtues, but only to regulate the means.

Reply to Objection 1: Natural reason known by the name of "synderesis" appoints the end to moral virtues, as stated above ([FP, Question \[79\]](#), [Article \[12\]](#)): but prudence does not do this for the reason given above.

This suffices for the Reply to the Second Objection.

Reply to Objection 3: The end concerns the moral virtues, not as though they appointed the end, but because they tend to the end which is appointed by natural reason. In this they are helped by prudence, which prepares the way for them, by disposing the means. Hence it follows that prudence is more excellent than the moral virtues, and moves them: yet "synderesis" moves prudence, just as the understanding of principles moves science.

Whether it belongs to prudence to find the mean in moral virtues?

Objection 1: It would seem that it does not belong to prudence to find the mean in moral virtues. For the achievement of the mean is the end of moral virtues. But prudence does not appoint the end to moral virtues, as shown above ([Article \[6\]](#)). Therefore it does not find the mean in them.

Objection 2: Further, that which of itself has being, would seem to have no cause, but its very being is its cause, since a thing is said to have being by reason of its cause. Now "to follow the mean" belongs to moral virtue by reason of itself, as part of its definition, as shown above ([Article \[5\]](#), Objection [1]). Therefore prudence does not cause the mean in moral virtues.

Objection 3: Further, prudence works after the manner of reason. But moral virtue tends to the mean after the manner of nature, because, as Tully states (De Invent. Rhet. ii, 53), "virtue is a habit like a second nature in accord with reason." Therefore prudence does not appoint the mean to moral virtues.

On the contrary, In the foregoing definition of moral virtue ([Article \[5\]](#), Objection [1]) it is stated that it "follows a mean appointed by reason... even as a wise man decides."

I answer that, The proper end of each moral virtue consists precisely in conformity with right reason. For temperance intends that man should not stray from reason for the sake of his concupiscences; fortitude, that he should not stray from the right judgment of reason through fear or daring. Moreover this end is appointed to man according to natural reason, since natural reason dictates to each one that he should act according to reason.

But it belongs to the ruling of prudence to decide in what manner and by what means man shall obtain the mean of reason in his deeds. For though the attainment of the mean is the end of a moral virtue, yet this mean is found by the right disposition of these things that are directed to the end.

This suffices for the Reply to the First Objection.

Reply to Objection 2: Just as a natural agent makes form to be in matter, yet does not make that which is essential to the form to belong to it, so too, prudence appoints the mean in passions and operations, and yet does not make the searching of the mean to belong to virtue.

Reply to Objection 3: Moral virtue after the manner of nature intends to attain the mean. Since, however, the mean as such is not found in all matters after the same manner, it follows that the inclination of nature which ever works in the same manner, does not suffice for this purpose, and so the ruling of prudence is required.

Whether command is the chief act of prudence?

Objection 1: It would seem that command is not the chief act of prudence. For command regards the good to be ensued. Now Augustine (De Trin. xiv, 9) states that it is an act of prudence "to avoid ambushes." Therefore command is not the chief act of prudence.

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that "the prudent man takes good counsel." Now "to take counsel" and "to command" seem to be different acts, as appears from what has been said above ([FS, Question \[57\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)). Therefore command is not the chief act of prudence.

Objection 3: Further, it seems to belong to the will to command and to rule, since the will has the end for its object, and moves the other powers of the soul. Now prudence is not in the will, but in the reason. Therefore command is not an act of prudence.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 10) that "prudence commands."

I answer that, Prudence is "right reason applied to action," as stated above ([Article \[2\]](#)). Hence that which is the chief act of reason in regard to action must needs be the chief act of prudence. Now there are three such acts. The first is "to take counsel," which belongs to discovery, for counsel is an act of inquiry, as stated above ([FS, Question \[14\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). The second act is "to judge of what one has discovered," and this is an act of the speculative reason. But the practical reason, which is directed to action, goes further, and its third act is "to command," which act consists in applying to action the things counselled and judged. And since this act approaches nearer to the end of the practical reason, it follows that it is the chief act of the practical reason, and consequently of prudence.

In confirmation of this we find that the perfection of art consists in judging and not in commanding: wherefore he who sins voluntarily against his craft is reputed a better craftsman than he who does so involuntarily, because the former seems to do so from right judgment, and the latter from a defective judgment. On the other hand it is the reverse in prudence, as stated in Ethic. vi, 5, for it is more imprudent to sin voluntarily, since this is to be lacking in the chief act of prudence, viz. command, than to sin involuntarily.

Reply to Objection 1: The act of command extends both to the ensuing of good and to the avoidance of evil. Nevertheless Augustine ascribes "the avoidance of ambushes" to prudence, not as its chief act, but as an act of prudence that does not continue in heaven.

Reply to Objection 2: Good counsel is required in order that the good things discovered may be applied to action: wherefore command belongs to prudence which takes good counsel.

Reply to Objection 3: Simply to move belongs to the will: but command denotes motion together with a kind of ordering, wherefore it is an act of the reason, as stated above ([FS, Question \[17\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)).

Whether solicitude belongs to prudence?

Objection 1: It would seem that solicitude does not belong to prudence. For solicitude implies disquiet, wherefore Isidore says (Etym. x) that "a solicitous man is a restless man." Now motion belongs chiefly to the appetitive power: wherefore solicitude does also. But prudence is not in the appetitive power, but in the reason, as stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)). Therefore solicitude does not belong to prudence.

Objection 2: Further, the certainty of truth seems opposed to solicitude, wherefore it is related ([1 Kgs. 9:20](#)) that Samuel said to Saul: "As for the asses which were lost three days ago, be not solicitous, because they are found." Now the certainty of truth belongs to prudence, since it is an intellectual virtue. Therefore solicitude is in opposition to prudence rather than belonging to it.

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3) the "magnanimous man is slow and leisurely." Now slowness is contrary to solicitude. Since then prudence is not opposed to magnanimity, for "good is not opposed to good," as stated in the Predicaments (viii) it would seem that solicitude does not belong to prudence.

On the contrary, It is written ([1 Pt. 4:7](#)): "Be prudent... and watch in prayers." But watchfulness is the same as solicitude. Therefore solicitude belongs to prudence.

I answer that, According to Isidore (Etym. x), a man is said to be solicitous through being shrewd [solers] and alert [citus], in so far as a man through a certain shrewdness of mind is on the alert to do whatever has to be done. Now this belongs to prudence, whose chief act is a command about what has been already counselled and judged in matters of action. Hence the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 9) that "one should be quick in carrying out the counsel taken, but slow in taking counsel." Hence it is that solicitude belongs properly to prudence, and for this reason Augustine says (De Morib. Eccl. xxiv) that "prudence keeps most careful watch and ward, lest by degrees we be deceived unawares by evil counsel."

Reply to Objection 1: Movement belongs to the appetitive power as to the principle of movement, in accordance however, with the direction and command of reason, wherein solicitude consists.

Reply to Objection 2: According to the Philosopher (Ethic. i, 3), "equal certainty should not be sought in all things, but in each matter according to its proper mode." And since the matter of prudence is the contingent singulars about which are human actions, the certainty of prudence cannot be so great as to be devoid of all solicitude.

Reply to Objection 3: The magnanimous man is said to be "slow and leisurely" not because he is solicitous about nothing, but because he is not over-solicitous about many things, and is trustful in matters where he ought to have trust, and is not over-solicitous about them: for

Whether solicitude belongs to prudence?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence does not extend to the governing of many, but only to the government of oneself. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. v, 1) that virtue directed to the common good is justice. But prudence differs from justice. Therefore prudence is not directed to the common good.

Objection 2: Further, he seems to be prudent, who seeks and does good for himself. Now those who seek the common good often neglect their own. Therefore they are not prudent.

Objection 3: Further, prudence is specifically distinct from temperance and fortitude. But temperance and fortitude seem to be related only to a man's own good. Therefore the same applies to prudence.

On the contrary, Our Lord said ([Mt. 24:45](#)): "Who, thinkest thou, is a faithful and prudent [Douay: 'wise'] servant whom his lord hath appointed over his family?"

I answer that, According to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 8) some have held that prudence does not extend to the common good, but only to the good of the individual, and this because they thought that man is not bound to seek other than his own good. But this opinion is opposed to charity, which "seeketh not her own" ([1 Cor. 13:5](#)): wherefore the Apostle says of himself ([1 Cor. 10:33](#)): "Not seeking that which is profitable to myself, but to many, that they may be saved." Moreover it is contrary to right reason, which judges the common good to be better than the good of the individual.

Accordingly, since it belongs to prudence rightly to counsel, judge, and command concerning the means of obtaining a due end, it is evident that prudence regards not only the private good of the individual, but also the common good of the multitude.

Reply to Objection 1: The Philosopher is speaking there of moral virtue. Now just as every moral virtue that is directed to the common good is called "legal" justice, so the prudence that is directed to the common good is called "political" prudence, for the latter stands in the same relation to legal justice, as prudence simply so called to moral virtue.

Reply to Objection 2: He that seeks the good of the many, seeks in consequence his own good, for two reasons. First, because the individual good is impossible without the common good of the family, state, or kingdom. Hence Valerius Maximus says [**Fact. et Dict. Memor. iv, 6*] of the ancient Romans that "they would rather be poor in a rich empire than rich in a poor empire." Secondly, because, since man is a part of the home and state, he must needs consider what is good for him by being prudent about the good of the many. For the good disposition of parts

Reply to Objection 3: Even temperance and fortitude can be directed to the common good, hence there are precepts of law concerning them as stated in Ethic. v, 1: more so, however, prudence and justice, since these belong to the rational faculty which directly regards the universal, just as the sensitive part regards singulars.

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Whether prudence about one's own good is specifically the same as that which extends to the common good?

Objection 1: It seems that prudence about one's own good is the same specifically as that which extends to the common good. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 8) that "political prudence, and prudence are the same habit, yet their essence is not the same."

Objection 2: Further, the Philosopher says (Polit. iii, 2) that "virtue is the same in a good man and in a good ruler." Now political prudence is chiefly in the ruler, in whom it is architectonic, as it were. Since then prudence is a virtue of a good man, it seems that prudence and political prudence are the same habit.

Objection 3: Further, a habit is not diversified in species or essence by things which are subordinate to one another. But the particular good, which belongs to prudence simply so called, is subordinate to the common good, which belongs to political prudence. Therefore prudence and political prudence differ neither specifically nor essentially.

On the contrary, "Political prudence," which is directed to the common good of the state, "domestic economy" which is of such things as relate to the common good of the household or family, and "monastic economy" which is concerned with things affecting the good of one person, are all distinct sciences. Therefore in like manner there are different kinds of prudence, corresponding to the above differences of matter.

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[5\]](#); [Question \[54\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 1), the species of habits differ according to the difference of object considered in its formal aspect. Now the formal aspect of all things directed to the end, is taken from the end itself, as shown above ([FS](#), Prolog.; [FS](#), [Question \[102\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)), wherefore the species of habits differ by their relation to different ends. Again the individual good, the good of the family, and the good of the city and kingdom are different ends. Wherefore there must needs be different species of prudence corresponding to these different ends, so that one is "prudence" simply so called, which is directed to one's own good; another, "domestic prudence" which is directed to the common good of the home; and a third, "political prudence," which is directed to the common good of the state or kingdom.

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS047.html](#) | e same habit as any kind of prudence, but that it is the same as the prudence which is directed to the common good. This is called "prudence" in respect of the common notion of prudence, i.e. as being right reason applied to action, while it is called "political," as being directed to the common good.

Reply to Objection 2: As the Philosopher declares (Polit. iii, 2), "it belongs to a good man to be able to rule well and to obey well," wherefore the virtue of a good man includes also that of a good ruler. Yet the virtue of the ruler and of the subject differs specifically, even as the virtue of a man and of a woman, as stated by the same authority (Polit. iii, 2).

Reply to Objection 3: Even different ends, one of which is subordinate to the other, diversify the species of a habit, thus for instance, habits directed to riding, soldiering, and civic life, differ specifically although their ends are subordinate to one another. In like manner, though the good of the individual is subordinate to the good of the many, that does not prevent this difference from making the habits differ specifically; but it follows that the habit which is directed to the last end is above the other habits and commands them.

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Whether prudence is in subjects, or only in their rulers?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is not in subjects but only in their rulers. For the Philosopher says (Polit. iii, 2) that "prudence alone is the virtue proper to a ruler, while other virtues are common to subjects and rulers, and the prudence of the subject is not a virtue but a true opinion."

Objection 2: Further, it is stated in Polit. i, 5 that "a slave is not competent to take counsel." But prudence makes a man take good counsel (Ethic. vi, 5). Therefore prudence is not befitting slaves or subjects.

Objection 3: Further, prudence exercises command, as stated above ([Article \[8\]](#)). But command is not in the competency of slaves or subjects but only of rulers. Therefore prudence is not in subjects but only in rulers.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 8) that there are two kinds of political prudence, one of which is "legislative" and belongs to rulers, while the other "retains the common name political," and is about "individual actions." Now it belongs also to subjects to perform these individual actions. Therefore prudence is not only in rulers but also in subjects.

I answer that, Prudence is in the reason. Now ruling and governing belong properly to the reason; and therefore it is proper to a man to reason and be prudent in so far as he has a share in ruling and governing. But it is evident that the subject as subject, and the slave as slave, are not competent to rule and govern, but rather to be ruled and governed. Therefore prudence is not the virtue of a slave as slave, nor of a subject as subject.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS047.html](#) the judgment of reason, he is proportionately competent to have prudence. Wherefore it is manifest that prudence is in the ruler "after the manner of a mastercraft" (Ethic. vi, 8), but in the subjects, "after the manner of a handicraft."

Reply to Objection 1: The saying of the Philosopher is to be understood strictly, namely, that prudence is not the virtue of a subject as such.

Reply to Objection 2: A slave is not capable of taking counsel, in so far as he is a slave (for thus he is the instrument of his master), but he does take counsel in so far as he is a rational animal.

Reply to Objection 3: By prudence a man commands not only others, but also himself, in so far as the reason is said to command the lower powers.

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Whether prudence can be in sinners?

Objection 1: It would seem that there can be prudence in sinners. For our Lord said ([Lk. 16:8](#)): "The children of this world are more prudent [Douay: 'wiser'] in their generation than the children of light." Now the children of this world are sinners. Therefore there be prudence in sinners.

Objection 2: Further, faith is a more excellent virtue than prudence. But there can be faith in sinners. Therefore there can be prudence also.

Objection 3: Further, according to Ethic. vi, 7, "we say that to be of good counsel is the work of prudent man especially." Now many sinners can take good counsel. Therefore sinners can have prudence.

On the contrary, The Philosopher declares (Ethic. vi, 12) that "it is impossible for a man be prudent unless he be good." Now no inner is a good man. Therefore no sinner is prudent.

I answer that, Prudence is threefold. There is a false prudence, which takes its name from its likeness to true prudence. For since a prudent man is one who disposes well of the things that have to be done for a good end, whoever disposes well of such things as are fitting for an evil end, has false prudence, in far as that which he takes for an end, is good, not in truth but in appearance. Thus man is called "a good robber," and in this way may speak of "a prudent robber," by way of similarity, because he devises fitting ways of committing robbery. This is the prudence of which the Apostle says ([Rm. 8:6](#)): "The prudence [Douay: 'wisdom'] of the flesh is death," because, to wit, it places its ultimate end in the pleasures of the flesh.

The second prudence is indeed true prudence, because it devises fitting ways of obtaining a good end; and yet it is imperfect, from a twofold source. First, because the good which it takes for an end, is not the common end of all human life, but of some particular affair; thus when a

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businessman, or a prudent sailor; secondly, because he fails in the chief act of prudence, as when a man takes counsel aright, and forms a good judgment, even about things concerning life as a whole, but fails to make an effective command.

The third prudence is both true and perfect, for it takes counsel, judges and commands aright in respect of the good end of man's whole life: and this alone is prudence simply so-called, and cannot be in sinners, whereas the first prudence is in sinners alone, while imperfect prudence is common to good and wicked men, especially that which is imperfect through being directed to a particular end, since that which is imperfect on account of a failing in the chief act, is only in the wicked.

Reply to Objection 1: This saying of our Lord is to be understood of the first prudence, wherefore it is not said that they are prudent absolutely, but that they are prudent in "their generation."

Reply to Objection 2: The nature of faith consists not in conformity with the appetite for certain right actions, but in knowledge alone. On the other hand prudence implies a relation to a right appetite. First because its principles are the ends in matters of action; and of such ends one forms a right estimate through the habits of moral virtue, which rectify the appetite: wherefore without the moral virtues there is no prudence, as shown above ([FS, Question \[58\], Article \[5\]](#)); secondly because prudence commands right actions, which does not happen unless the appetite be right. Wherefore though faith on account of its object is more excellent than prudence, yet prudence, by its very nature, is more opposed to sin, which arises from a disorder of the appetite.

Reply to Objection 3: Sinners can take good counsel for an evil end, or for some particular good, but they do not perfectly take good counsel for the end of their whole life, since they do not carry that counsel into effect. Hence they lack prudence which is directed to the good only; and yet in them, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 12) there is "cleverness," [*{deinotike}] i.e. natural diligence which may be directed to both good and evil; or "cunning," [*{panourgia}] which is directed only to evil, and which we have stated above, to be "false prudence" or "prudence of the flesh."

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Whether prudence is in all who have grace?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is not in all who have grace. Prudence requires diligence, that one may foresee aright what has to be done. But many who have grace have not this diligence. Therefore not all who have grace have prudence.

Objection 2: Further, a prudent man is one who takes good counsel, as stated above ([Article \[8\]](#), [Objection \[2\]](#); [Article \[13\]](#), [Objection \[3\]](#)). Yet many have grace who do not take good

Objection 3: Further, the Philosopher says (Topic. iii, 2) that "young people are not obviously prudent." Yet many young people have grace. Therefore prudence is not to be found in all who have grace.

On the contrary, No man has grace unless he be virtuous. Now no man can be virtuous without prudence, for Gregory says (Moral. ii, 46) that "the other virtues cannot be virtues at all unless they effect prudently what they desire to accomplish." Therefore all who have grace have prudence.

I answer that, The virtues must needs be connected together, so that whoever has one has all, as stated above ([FS, Question \[65\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)). Now whoever has grace has charity, so that he must needs have all the other virtues, and hence, since prudence is a virtue, as shown above ([Article \[4\]](#)), he must, of necessity, have prudence also.

Reply to Objection 1: Diligence is twofold: one is merely sufficient with regard to things necessary for salvation; and such diligence is given to all who have grace, whom "His unction teacheth of all things" ([1 Jn. 2:27](#)). There is also another diligence which is more than sufficient, whereby a man is able to make provision both for himself and for others, not only in matters necessary for salvation, but also in all things relating to human life; and such diligence as this is not in all who have grace.

Reply to Objection 2: Those who require to be guided by the counsel of others, are able, if they have grace, to take counsel for themselves in this point at least, that they require the counsel of others and can discern good from evil counsel.

Reply to Objection 3: Acquired prudence is caused by the exercise of acts, wherefore "its acquisition demands experience and time" (Ethic. ii, 1), hence it cannot be in the young, neither in habit nor in act. On the other hand gratuitous prudence is caused by divine infusion. Wherefore, in children who have been baptized but have not come to the use of reason, there is prudence as to habit but not as to act, even as in idiots; whereas in those who have come to the use of reason, it is also as to act, with regard to things necessary for salvation. This by practice merits increase, until it becomes perfect, even as the other virtues. Hence the Apostle says ([Heb. 5:14](#)) that "strong meat is for the perfect, for them who by custom have their senses exercised to the discerning of good and evil."

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Whether prudence is in us by nature?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence is in us by nature. The Philosopher says that things connected with prudence "seem to be natural," namely "synesis, gnome" [[*{synesis}](#) and [{gnome}](#)], Cf. FS, Question [57], Article [6]] and the like, but not those which are connected with

Therefore prudence also is in us from nature.

Objection 2: Further, the changes of age are according to nature. Now prudence results from age, according to Job 12:12: "In the ancient is wisdom, and in length of days prudence." Therefore prudence is natural.

Objection 3: Further, prudence is more consistent with human nature than with that of dumb animals. Now there are instances of a certain natural prudence in dumb animals, according to the Philosopher (De Hist. Anim. viii, 1). Therefore prudence is natural.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 1) that "intellectual virtue is both originated and fostered by teaching; it therefore demands experience and time." Now prudence is an intellectual virtue, as stated above ([Article \[4\]](#)). Therefore prudence is in us, not by nature, but by teaching and experience.

I answer that, As shown above ([Article \[3\]](#)), prudence includes knowledge both of universals, and of the singular matters of action to which prudence applies the universal principles. Accordingly, as regards the knowledge of universals, the same is to be said of prudence as of speculative science, because the primary universal principles of either are known naturally, as shown above ([Article \[6\]](#)): except that the common principles of prudence are more connatural to man; for as the Philosopher remarks (Ethic. x, 7) "the life which is according to the speculative reason is better than that which is according to man": whereas the secondary universal principles, whether of the speculative or of the practical reason, are not inherited from nature, but are acquired by discovery through experience, or through teaching.

On the other hand, as regards the knowledge of particulars which are the matter of action, we must make a further distinction, because this matter of action is either an end or the means to an end. Now the right ends of human life are fixed; wherefore there can be a natural inclination in respect of these ends; thus it has been stated above ([FS, Question \[51\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); [FS, Question \[63\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#)) that some, from a natural inclination, have certain virtues whereby they are inclined to right ends; and consequently they also have naturally a right judgment about such like ends.

But the means to the end, in human concerns, far from being fixed, are of manifold variety according to the variety of persons and affairs. Wherefore since the inclination of nature is ever to something fixed, the knowledge of those means cannot be in man naturally, although, by reason of his natural disposition, one man has a greater aptitude than another in discerning them, just as it happens with regard to the conclusions of speculative sciences. Since then prudence is not about the ends, but about the means, as stated above ([Article \[6\]](#); [FS, Question \[57\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)), it follows that prudence is not from nature.

Reply to Objection 1: The Philosopher is speaking there of things relating to prudence, in so far as they are directed to ends. Wherefore he had said before (Ethic. vi, 5,11) that "they are the principles of the {ou heneka}" [*Literally, 'for the sake of which' (are the means)], namely, the end; and so he does not mention {euboulia} among them, because it takes counsel about the means.

Reply to Objection 2: Prudence is rather in the old, not only because their natural disposition calms the movement of the sensitive passions, but also because of their long experience.

Reply to Objection 3: Even in dumb animals there are fixed ways of obtaining an end, wherefore we observe that all the animals of a same species act in like manner. But this is

Whether prudence can be lost through forgetfulness?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence can be lost through forgetfulness. For since science is about necessary things, it is more certain than prudence which is about contingent matters of action. But science is lost by forgetfulness. Much more therefore is prudence.

Objection 2: Further, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. ii, 3) "the same things, but by a contrary process, engender and corrupt virtue." Now the engendering of prudence requires experience which is made up "of many memories," as he states at the beginning of his Metaphysics (i, 1). Therefore since forgetfulness is contrary to memory, it seems that prudence can be lost through forgetfulness.

Objection 3: Further, there is no prudence without knowledge of universals. But knowledge of universals can be lost through forgetfulness. Therefore prudence can also.

On the contrary, The Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that "forgetfulness is possible to art but not to prudence."

I answer that, Forgetfulness regards knowledge only, wherefore one can forget art and science, so as to lose them altogether, because they belong to the reason. But prudence consists not in knowledge alone, but also in an act of the appetite, because as stated above ([Article \[8\]](#)), its principal act is one of command, whereby a man applies the knowledge he has, to the purpose of appetition and operation. Hence prudence is not taken away directly by forgetfulness, but rather is corrupted by the passions. For the Philosopher says (Ethic. vi, 5) that "pleasure and sorrow pervert the estimate of prudence": wherefore it is written ([Dan. 13:56](#)): "Beauty hath deceived thee, and lust hath subverted thy heart," and ([Ex. 23:8](#)): "Neither shalt thou take bribes which blind even the prudent [Douay: 'wise']."

Nevertheless forgetfulness may hinder prudence, in so far as the latter's command depends on knowledge which may be forgotten.

Reply to Objection 1: Science is in the reason only: hence the comparison fails, as stated above [*Cf. FS, Question [53], Article [1]].

Reply to Objection 2: The experience required by prudence results not from memory alone, but also from the practice of commanding aright.

Reply to Objection 3: Prudence consists chiefly, not in the knowledge of universals, but in applying them to action, as stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)). Wherefore forgetting the knowledge of universals does not destroy the principal part of prudence, but hinders it somewhat, as stated above.
