

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF THE VIRTUES WHICH ARE CONNECTED WITH PRUDENCE (FOUR ARTICLES)

In due sequence, we must consider the virtues that are connected with prudence, and which are its quasi-potential parts. Under this head there are four points of inquiry:

- (1) Whether {euboulia}, is a virtue?
- (2) Whether it is a special virtue, distinct from prudence?
- (3) Whether {synesis} is a special virtue?
- (4) Whether {gnome} is a special virtue?

[*These three Greek words may be rendered as the faculties of deliberating well {euboulia}, of judging well according to common law {synesis}, and of judging well according to general law {gnome}, respectively.]

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Whether {euboulia} (deliberating well) is a virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a virtue. For, according to Augustine (De Lib. Arb. ii, 18,19) "no man makes evil use of virtue." Now some make evil use of {euboulia} (deliberating well) or good counsel, either through devising crafty counsels in order to achieve evil ends, or through committing sin in order that they may achieve good ends, as those who rob that they may give alms. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a virtue.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS051.html](#)ling well) is concerned with counsel, which implies doubt and research, and these are marks of imperfection. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a virtue.

Objection 3: Further, virtues are connected with one another, as stated above ([FS, Question \[65\]](#)). Now {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not connected with the other virtues, since many sinners take good-counsel, and many godly men are slow in taking counsel. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a virtue.

On the contrary, According to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 9) {euboulia} (deliberating well) "is a right counselling." Now the perfection of virtue consists in right reason. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is a virtue.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[4\]](#)) the nature of a human virtue consists in making a human act good. Now among the acts of man, it is proper to him to take counsel, since this denotes a research of the reason about the actions he has to perform and whereof human life consists, for the speculative life is above man, as stated in Ethic. x. But {euboulia} (deliberating well) signifies goodness of counsel, for it is derived from the {eu}, good, and {boule}, counsel, being "a good counsel" or rather "a disposition to take good counsel." Hence it is evident that {euboulia} (deliberating well) is a human virtue.

Reply to Objection 1: There is no good counsel either in deliberating for an evil end, or in discovering evil means for attaining a good end, even as in speculative matters, there is no good reasoning either in coming to a false conclusion, or in coming to a true conclusion from false premisses through employing an unsuitable middle term. Hence both the aforesaid processes are contrary to {euboulia} (deliberating well), as the Philosopher declares (Ethic. vi, 9).

Reply to Objection 2: Although virtue is essentially a perfection, it does not follow that whatever is the matter of a virtue implies perfection. For man needs to be perfected by virtues in all his parts, and this not only as regards the acts of reason, of which counsel is one, but also as regards the passions of the sensitive appetite, which are still more imperfect.

It may also be replied that human virtue is a perfection according to the mode of man, who is unable by simple insight to comprehend with certainty the truth of things, especially in matters of action which are contingent.

Reply to Objection 3: In no sinner as such is {euboulia} (deliberating well) to be found: since all sin is contrary to taking good counsel. For good counsel requires not only the discovery or devising of fit means for the end, but also other circumstances. Such are suitable time, so that one be neither too slow nor too quick in taking counsel, and the mode of taking counsel, so that one be firm in the counsel taken, and other like due circumstances, which sinners fail to observe when they sin. On the other hand, every virtuous man takes good counsel in those things which are directed to the end of virtue, although perhaps he does not take good counsel in other particular matters, for instance in matters of trade, or warfare, or the like.

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prudence?

Objection 1: It would seem that {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a distinct virtue from prudence. For, according to the Philosopher (Ethic. vi, 5), the "prudent man is, seemingly, one who takes good counsel." Now this belongs to {euboulia} (deliberating well) as stated above. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not distinct from prudence.

Objection 2: Further, human acts to which human virtues are directed, are specified chiefly by their end, as stated above ([FS, Question \[1\], Article \[3\]](#); [FS, Question \[18\], Articles \[4\],6](#)). Now {euboulia} (deliberating well) and prudence are directed to the same end, as stated in Ethic. vi, 9, not indeed to some particular end, but to the common end of all life. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a distinct virtue from prudence.

Objection 3: Further, in speculative sciences, research and decision belong to the same science. Therefore in like manner these belong to the same virtue in practical matters. Now research belongs to {euboulia} (deliberating well), while decision belongs to prudence. Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a distinct virtue from prudence.

On the contrary, Prudence is preceptive, according to Ethic. vi, 10. But this does not apply to {euboulia} (deliberating well). Therefore {euboulia} (deliberating well) is a distinct virtue from prudence.

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[1\]](#)), virtue is properly directed to an act which it renders good; and consequently virtues must differ according to different acts, especially when there is a different kind of goodness in the acts. For, if various acts contained the same kind of goodness, they would belong to the same virtue: thus the goodness of love, desire and joy depends on the same, wherefore all these belong to the same virtue of charity.

Now acts of the reason that are ordained to action are diverse, nor have they the same kind of goodness: since it is owing to different causes that a man acquires good counsel, good judgment, or good command, inasmuch as these are sometimes separated from one another. Consequently {euboulia} (deliberating well) which makes man take good counsel must needs be a distinct virtue from prudence, which makes man command well. And since counsel is directed to command as to that which is principal, so {euboulia} (deliberating well) is directed to prudence as to a principal virtue, without which it would be no virtue at all, even as neither are the moral virtues without prudence, nor the other virtues without charity.

Reply to Objection 1: It belongs to prudence to take good counsel by commanding it, to {euboulia} (deliberating well) by eliciting it.

Reply to Objection 2: Different acts are directed in different degrees to the one end which is "a good life in general" [*Ethic. vi, 5]: for counsel comes first, judgment follows, and command comes last. The last named has an immediate relation to the last end: whereas the other two acts are related thereto remotely. Nevertheless these have certain proximate ends of their own, the end of counsel being the discovery of what has to be done, and the end of judgment, certainty. Hence this proves not that {euboulia} (deliberating well) is not a distinct virtue from prudence, but that it is subordinate thereto, as a secondary to a principal virtue.

Whether {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is a virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that {synesis} is not a virtue. Virtues are not in us by nature, according to Ethic. ii, 1. But {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is natural to some, as the Philosopher states (Ethic. vi, 11). Therefore {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is not a virtue.

Objection 2: Further, as stated in the same book (10), {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is nothing but "a faculty of judging." But judgment without command can be even in the wicked. Since then virtue is only in the good, it seems that {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is not a virtue.

Objection 3: Further, there is never a defective command, unless there be a defective judgment, at least in a particular matter of action; for it is in this that every wicked man errs. If therefore {synesis} (judging well according to common law) be reckoned a virtue directed to good judgment, it seems that there is no need for any other virtue directed to good command: and consequently prudence would be superfluous, which is not reasonable. Therefore {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is not a virtue.

On the contrary, Judgment is more perfect than counsel. But {euboulia}, or good counsel, is a virtue. Much more, therefore, is {synesis} (judging well according to common law) a virtue, as being good judgment.

I answer that, {synesis} (judging well according to common law) signifies a right judgment, not indeed about speculative matters, but about particular practical matters, about which also is prudence. Hence in Greek some, in respect of {synesis} (judging well according to common law) are said to be {synetoi}, i.e. "persons of sense," or {eusynetoi}, i.e. "men of good sense," just as on the other hand, those who lack this virtue are called {asynetoi}, i.e. "senseless."

Now, different acts which cannot be ascribed to the same cause, must correspond to different virtues. And it is evident that goodness of counsel and goodness of judgment are not reducible to the same cause, for many can take good counsel, without having good sense so as to judge well. Even so, in speculative matters some are good at research, through their reason being quick at arguing from one thing to another (which seems to be due to a disposition of their power of imagination, which has a facility in forming phantasms), and yet such persons sometimes lack good judgment (and this is due to a defect in the intellect arising chiefly from a defective disposition of the common sense which fails to judge aright). Hence there is need, besides {euboulia} (deliberating well), for another virtue, which judges well, and this is called {synesis} (judging well according to common law).

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just as it is in reality, and this is due to the right disposition of the apprehensive power. Thus if a mirror be well disposed the forms of bodies are reflected in it just as they are, whereas if it be ill disposed, the images therein appear distorted and misshapen. Now that the cognitive power be well disposed to receive things just as they are in reality, is radically due to nature, but, as to its consummation, is due to practice or to a gift of grace, and this in two ways. First directly, on the part of the cognitive power itself, for instance, because it is imbued, not with distorted, but with true and correct ideas: this belongs to {synesis} (judging well according to common law) which in this respect is a special virtue. Secondly indirectly, through the good disposition of the appetitive power, the result being that one judges well of the objects of appetite: and thus a good judgment of virtue results from the habits of moral virtue; but this judgment is about the ends, whereas {synesis} (judging well according to common law) is rather about the means.

Reply to Objection 2: In wicked men there may be right judgment of a universal principle, but their judgment is always corrupt in the particular matter of action, as stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[13\]](#)).

Reply to Objection 3: Sometimes after judging aright we delay to execute or execute negligently or inordinately. Hence after the virtue which judges aright there is a further need of a final and principal virtue, which commands aright, and this is prudence.

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Whether {gnome} (judging well according to general law) is a special virtue?

Objection 1: It would seem that {gnome} (judging well according to general law) is not a special virtue distinct from {synesis} (judging well according to common law). For a man is said, in respect of {synesis} (judging well according to common law), to have good judgment. Now no man can be said to have good judgment, unless he judge aright in all things. Therefore {synesis} (judging well according to common law) extends to all matters of judgment, and consequently there is no other virtue of good judgment called {gnome} (judging well according to general law).

Objection 2: Further, judgment is midway between counsel and precept. Now there is only one virtue of good counsel, viz. {euboulia} (deliberating well) and only one virtue of good command, viz. prudence. Therefore there is only one virtue of good judgment, viz. {synesis} (judging well according to common law).

Objection 3: Further, rare occurrences wherein there is need to depart from the common law, seem for the most part to happen by chance, and with such things reason is not concerned, as stated in Phys. ii, 5. Now all the intellectual virtues depend on right reason. Therefore there is no intellectual virtue about such matters.

I answer that cognitive habits differ according to higher and lower principles: thus in speculative matters wisdom considers higher principles than science does, and consequently is distinguished from it; and so must it be also in practical matters. Now it is evident that what is beside the order of a lower principle or cause, is sometimes reducible to the order of a higher principle; thus monstrous births of animals are beside the order of the active seminal force, and yet they come under the order of a higher principle, namely, of a heavenly body, or higher still, of Divine Providence. Hence by considering the active seminal force one could not pronounce a sure judgment on such monstrosities, and yet this is possible if we consider Divine Providence.

Now it happens sometimes that something has to be done which is not covered by the common rules of actions, for instance in the case of the enemy of one's country, when it would be wrong to give him back his deposit, or in other similar cases. Hence it is necessary to judge of such matters according to higher principles than the common laws, according to which {synesis} (judging according to common law) judges: and corresponding to such higher principles it is necessary to have a higher virtue of judgment, which is called {gnome} (judging according to general law), and which denotes a certain discrimination in judgment.

Reply to Objection 1: {Synesis} (judging well according to common law) judges rightly about all actions that are covered by the common rules: but certain things have to be judged beside these common rules, as stated above.

Reply to Objection 2: Judgment about a thing should be formed from the proper principles thereof, whereas research is made by employing also common principles. Wherefore also in speculative matters, dialectics which aims at research proceeds from common principles; while demonstration which tends to judgment, proceeds from proper principles. Hence {euboulia} (deliberating well) to which the research of counsel belongs is one for all, but not so {synesis} (judging well according to common law) whose act is judicial. Command considers in all matters the one aspect of good, wherefore prudence also is only one.

Reply to Objection 3: It belongs to Divine Providence alone to consider all things that may happen beside the common course. On the other hand, among men, he who is most discerning can judge a greater number of such things by his reason: this belongs to {gnome} (judging well according to general law), which denotes a certain discrimination in judgment.