

St. Thomas Aquinas

The Summa Theologica

(Benziger Bros. edition, 1947)

Translated by

Fathers of the English Dominican Province

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OF VICES OPPOSED TO PRUDENCE BY WAY OF RESEMBLANCE (EIGHT ARTICLES)

We must now consider those vices opposed to prudence, which have a resemblance thereto. Under this head there are eight points of inquiry:

- [\(1\)](#) Whether prudence of the flesh is a sin?
 - [\(2\)](#) Whether it is a mortal sin?
 - [\(3\)](#) Whether craftiness is a special sin?
 - [\(4\)](#) Of guile;
 - [\(5\)](#) Of fraud;
 - [\(6\)](#) Of solicitude about temporal things;
 - [\(7\)](#) Of solicitude about the future;
 - [\(8\)](#) Of the origin of these vices.
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Whether prudence of the flesh is a sin?

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excellent than the other moral virtues, since it governs them all. But no justice or temperance is sinful. Neither therefore is any prudence a sin.

Objection 2: Further, it is not a sin to act prudently for an end which it is lawful to love. But it is lawful to love the flesh, "for no man ever hated his own flesh" ([Eph. 5:29](#)). Therefore prudence of the flesh is not a sin.

Objection 3: Further, just as man is tempted by the flesh, so too is he tempted by the world and the devil. But no prudence of the world, or of the devil is accounted a sin. Therefore neither should any prudence of the flesh be accounted among sins.

On the contrary, No man is an enemy to God save for wickedness according to Wis. 14:9, "To God the wicked and his wickedness are hateful alike." Now it is written ([Rm. 8:7](#)): "The prudence [Vulg.: 'wisdom'] of the flesh is an enemy to God." Therefore prudence of the flesh is a sin.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[13\]](#)), prudence regards things which are directed to the end of life as a whole. Hence prudence of the flesh signifies properly the prudence of a man who looks upon carnal goods as the last end of his life. Now it is evident that this is a sin, because it involves a disorder in man with respect to his last end, which does not consist in the goods of the body, as stated above ([FS](#), [Question \[2\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)). Therefore prudence of the flesh is a sin.

Reply to Objection 1: Justice and temperance include in their very nature that which ranks them among the virtues, viz. equality and the curbing of concupiscence; hence they are never taken in a bad sense. On the other hand prudence is so called from foreseeing [providendo], as stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#); [Question \[49\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)), which can extend to evil things also. Therefore, although prudence is taken simply in a good sense, yet, if something be added, it may be taken in a bad sense: and it is thus that prudence of the flesh is said to be a sin.

Reply to Objection 2: The flesh is on account of the soul, as matter is on account of the form, and the instrument on account of the principal agent. Hence the flesh is loved lawfully, if it be directed to the good of the soul as its end. If, however, a man place his last end in a good of the flesh, his love will be inordinate and unlawful, and it is thus that the prudence of the flesh is directed to the love of the flesh.

Reply to Objection 3: The devil tempts us, not through the good of the appetible object, but by way of suggestion. Wherefore, since prudence implies direction to some appetible end, we do not speak of "prudence of the devil," as of a prudence directed to some evil end, which is the aspect under which the world and the flesh tempt us, in so far as worldly or carnal goods are proposed to our appetite. Hence we speak of "carnal" and again of "worldly" prudence, according to Lk. 16:8, "The children of this world are more prudent [Douay: 'wiser'] in their generation," etc. The Apostle includes all in the "prudence of the flesh," because we covet the external things of the world on account of the flesh.

We may also reply that since prudence is in a certain sense called "wisdom," as stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 1), we may distinguish a threefold prudence corresponding to the three kinds of temptation. Hence it is written ([James 3:15](#)) that there is a wisdom which is "earthly, sensual and devilish," as explained above ([Question \[45\]](#), [Article \[1\]](#), ad 1), when we were treating of wisdom.

Whether prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin?

Objection 1: It would seem that prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin. For it is a mortal sin to rebel against the Divine law, since this implies contempt of God. Now "the prudence [Douay: 'wisdom'] of the flesh... is not subject to the law of God" ([Rm. 8:7](#)). Therefore prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin.

Objection 2: Further, every sin against the Holy Ghost is a mortal sin. Now prudence of the flesh seems to be a sin against the Holy Ghost, for "it cannot be subject to the law of God" ([Rm. 8:7](#)), and so it seems to be an unpardonable sin, which is proper to the sin against the Holy Ghost. Therefore prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin.

Objection 3: Further, the greatest evil is opposed to the greatest good, as stated in Ethic. viii, 10. Now prudence of the flesh is opposed to that prudence which is the chief of the moral virtues. Therefore prudence of the flesh is chief among mortal sins, so that it is itself a mortal sin.

On the contrary, That which diminishes a sin has not of itself the nature of a mortal sin. Now the thoughtful quest of things pertaining to the care of the flesh, which seems to pertain to carnal prudence, diminishes sin [*Cf. Prov. 6:30]. Therefore prudence of the flesh has not of itself the nature of a mortal sin.

I answer that, As stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[2\]](#), ad 1; [Article \[13\]](#)), a man is said to be prudent in two ways. First, simply, i.e. in relation to the end of life as a whole. Secondly, relatively, i.e. in relation to some particular end; thus a man is said to be prudent in business or something else of the kind. Accordingly if prudence of the flesh be taken as corresponding to prudence in its absolute signification, so that a man place the last end of his whole life in the care of the flesh, it is a mortal sin, because he turns away from God by so doing, since he cannot have several last ends, as stated above ([FS](#), [Question \[1\]](#), [Article \[5\]](#)).

If, on the other hand, prudence of the flesh be taken as corresponding to particular prudence, it is a venial sin. For it happens sometimes that a man has an inordinate affection for some pleasure of the flesh, without turning away from God by a mortal sin; in which case he does not place the end of his whole life in carnal pleasure. To apply oneself to obtain this pleasure is a venial sin and pertains to prudence of the flesh. But if a man actually refers the care of the flesh to a good end, as when one is careful about one's food in order to sustain one's body, this is no longer prudence of the flesh, because then one uses the care of the flesh as a means to an end.

Reply to Objection 1: The Apostle is speaking of that carnal prudence whereby a man places the end of his whole life in the goods of the flesh, and this is a mortal sin.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS055.html](#) when it is stated that "it cannot be subject to the law of God," this does not mean that he who has prudence of the flesh, cannot be converted and submit to the law of God, but that carnal prudence itself cannot be subject to God's law, even as neither can injustice be just, nor heat cold, although that which is hot may become cold.

Reply to Objection 3: Every sin is opposed to prudence, just as prudence is shared by every virtue. But it does not follow that every sin opposed to prudence is most grave, but only when it is opposed to prudence in some very grave matter.

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Whether craftiness is a special sin?

Objection 1: It would seem that craftiness is not a special sin. For the words of Holy Writ do not induce anyone to sin; and yet they induce us to be crafty, according to Prov. 1:4, "To give craftiness [Douay: 'subtlety'] to little ones." Therefore craftiness is not a sin.

Objection 2: Further, it is written ([Prov. 13:16](#)): "The crafty [Douay: 'prudent'] man doth all things with counsel." Therefore, he does so either for a good or for an evil end. If for a good end, there is no sin seemingly, and if for an evil end, it would seem to pertain to carnal or worldly prudence. Therefore craftiness is not a special sin distinct from prudence of the flesh.

Objection 3: Further, Gregory expounding the words of Job 12, "The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn," says (Moral. x, 29): "The wisdom of this world is to hide one's thoughts by artifice, to conceal one's meaning by words, to represent error as truth, to make out the truth to be false," and further on he adds: "This prudence is acquired by the young, it is learnt at a price by children." Now the above things seem to belong to craftiness. Therefore craftiness is not distinct from carnal or worldly prudence, and consequently it seems not to be a special sin.

On the contrary, The Apostle says ([2 Cor. 4:2](#)): "We renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor adulterating the word of God." Therefore craftiness is a sin.

I answer that, Prudence is "right reason applied to action," just as science is "right reason applied to knowledge." In speculative matters one may sin against rectitude of knowledge in two ways: in one way when the reason is led to a false conclusion that appears to be true; in another way when the reason proceeds from false premises, that appear to be true, either to a true or to a false conclusion. Even so a sin may be against prudence, through having some resemblance thereto, in two ways. First, when the purpose of the reason is directed to an end which is good not in truth but in appearance, and this pertains to prudence of the flesh; secondly, when, in order to obtain a certain end, whether good or evil, a man uses means that are not true but fictitious and counterfeit, and this belongs to the sin of craftiness. This is consequently a sin opposed to prudence, and distinct from prudence of the flesh.

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sometimes improperly taken in a bad sense, so is craftiness sometimes taken in a good sense, and this on account of their mutual resemblance. Properly speaking, however, craftiness is taken in a bad sense, as the Philosopher states in Ethic. vi, 12.

Reply to Objection 2: Craftiness can take counsel both for a good end and for an evil end: nor should a good end be pursued by means that are false and counterfeit but by such as are true. Hence craftiness is a sin if it be directed to a good end.

Reply to Objection 3: Under "worldly prudence" Gregory included everything that can pertain to false prudence, so that it comprises craftiness also.

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Whether guile is a sin pertaining to craftiness?

Objection 1: It would seem that guile is not a sin pertaining to craftiness. For sin, especially mortal, has no place in perfect men. Yet a certain guile is to be found in them, according to 2 Cor. 12:16, "Being crafty I caught you by guile." Therefore guile is not always a sin.

Objection 2: Further, guile seems to pertain chiefly to the tongue, according to Ps. 5:11, "They dealt deceitfully with their tongues." Now craftiness like prudence is in the very act of reason. Therefore guile does not pertain to craftiness.

Objection 3: Further, it is written ([Prov. 12:20](#)): "Guile [Douay: 'Deceit'] is in the heart of them that think evil things." But the thought of evil things does not always pertain to craftiness. Therefore guile does not seem to belong to craftiness.

On the contrary, Craftiness aims at lying in wait, according to Eph. 4:14, "By cunning craftiness by which they lie in wait to deceive": and guile aims at this also. Therefore guile pertains to craftiness.

I answer that, As stated above ([Article \[3\]](#)), it belongs to craftiness to adopt ways that are not true but counterfeit and apparently true, in order to attain some end either good or evil. Now the adopting of such ways may be subjected to a twofold consideration; first, as regards the process of thinking them out, and this belongs properly to craftiness, even as thinking out right ways to a due end belongs to prudence. Secondly the adopting of such like ways may be considered with regard to their actual execution, and in this way it belongs to guile. Hence guile denotes a certain execution of craftiness, and accordingly belongs thereto.

Reply to Objection 1: Just as craftiness is taken properly in a bad sense, and improperly in a good sense, so too is guile which is the execution of craftiness.

Reply to Objection 2: The execution of craftiness with the purpose of deceiving, is effected first and foremost by words, which hold the chief place among those signs whereby a man signifies something to another man, as Augustine states (De Doctr. Christ. ii, 3), hence guile is

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS055.html](#) to deal deceitfully with his servants." Guile is also in the heart, according to Ecclus. 19:23, "His interior is full of deceit," but this is to devise deceits, according to Ps. 37:13: "They studied deceits all the day long."

Reply to Objection 3: Whoever purposes to do some evil deed, must needs devise certain ways of attaining his purpose, and for the most part he devises deceitful ways, whereby the more easily to obtain his end. Nevertheless it happens sometimes that evil is done openly and by violence without craftiness and guile; but as this is more difficult, it is of less frequent occurrence.

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Whether fraud pertains to craftiness?

Objection 1: It would seem that fraud does not pertain to craftiness. For a man does not deserve praise if he allows himself to be deceived, which is the object of craftiness; and yet a man deserves praise for allowing himself to be defrauded, according to 1 Cor. 6:1, "Why do you not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?" Therefore fraud does not belong to craftiness.

Objection 2: Further, fraud seems to consist in unlawfully taking or receiving external things, for it is written ([Acts 5:1](#)) that "a certain man named Ananias with Saphira his wife, sold a piece of land, and by fraud kept back part of the price of the land." Now it pertains to injustice or illiberality to take possession of or retain external things unjustly. Therefore fraud does not belong to craftiness which is opposed to prudence.

Objection 3: Further, no man employs craftiness against himself. But the frauds of some are against themselves, for it is written ([Prov. 1:18](#)) concerning some "that they practice frauds [Douay: 'deceits'] against their own souls." Therefore fraud does not belong to craftiness.

On the contrary, The object of fraud is to deceive, according to Job 13:9, "Shall he be deceived as a man, with your fraudulent [Douay: 'deceitful'] dealings?" Now craftiness is directed to the same object. Therefore fraud pertains to craftiness.

I answer that, Just as "guile" consists in the execution of craftiness, so also does "fraud." But they seem to differ in the fact that "guile" belongs in general to the execution of craftiness, whether this be effected by words, or by deeds, whereas "fraud" belongs more properly to the execution of craftiness by deeds.

Reply to Objection 1: The Apostle does not counsel the faithful to be deceived in their knowledge, but to bear patiently the effect of being deceived, and to endure wrongs inflicted on them by fraud.

Reply to Objection 2: The execution of craftiness may be carried out by another vice, just as the execution of prudence by the virtues: and accordingly nothing hinders fraud from

Reply to Objection 3: Those who commit frauds, do not design anything against themselves or their own souls; it is through God's just judgment that what they plot against others, recoils on themselves, according to Ps. 7:16, "He is fallen into the hole he made."

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Whether it is lawful to be solicitous about temporal matters?

Objection 1: It would seem lawful to be solicitous about temporal matters. Because a superior should be solicitous for his subjects, according to Rm. 12:8, "He that ruleth, with solicitude." Now according to the Divine ordering, man is placed over temporal things, according to Ps. 8:8, "Thou hast subjected all things under his feet," etc. Therefore man should be solicitous about temporal things.

Objection 2: Further, everyone is solicitous about the end for which he works. Now it is lawful for a man to work for the temporal things whereby he sustains life, wherefore the Apostle says ([2 Thess. 3:10](#)): "If any man will not work, neither let him eat." Therefore it is lawful to be solicitous about temporal things.

Objection 3: Further, solicitude about works of mercy is praiseworthy, according to 2 Tim. 1:17, "When he was come to Rome, he carefully sought me." Now solicitude about temporal things is sometimes connected with works of mercy; for instance, when a man is solicitous to watch over the interests of orphans and poor persons. Therefore solicitude about temporal things is not unlawful.

On the contrary, Our Lord said ([Mt. 6:31](#)): "Be not solicitous... saying, What shall we eat, or what shall we drink, or wherewith shall we be clothed?" And yet such things are very necessary.

I answer that, Solicitude denotes an earnest endeavor to obtain something. Now it is evident that the endeavor is more earnest when there is fear of failure, so that there is less solicitude when success is assured. Accordingly solicitude about temporal things may be unlawful in three ways. First on the part of the object of solicitude; that is, if we seek temporal things as an end. Hence Augustine says (*De Operibus Monach.* xxvi): "When Our Lord said: 'Be not solicitous,' etc.... He intended to forbid them either to make such things their end, or for the sake of these things to do whatever they were commanded to do in preaching the Gospel." Secondly, solicitude about temporal things may be unlawful, through too much earnestness in endeavoring to obtain temporal things, the result being that a man is drawn away from spiritual things which ought to be the chief object of his search, wherefore it is written ([Mt. 13:22](#)) that "the care of this world... chokes up the word." Thirdly, through over much fear, when, to wit, a man fears to lack necessary things if he do what he ought to do. Now our Lord gives three motives for laying aside this fear. First, on account of the yet greater favors bestowed by God on man, independently of his solicitude, viz. his body and soul ([Mt. 6:26](#));

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [summa](#) » [SS](#) » [SS055.html](#) the assistance of man, according to the requirements of their nature; thirdly, because of Divine providence, through ignorance of which the gentiles are solicitous in seeking temporal goods before all others. Consequently He concludes that we should be solicitous most of all about spiritual goods, hoping that temporal goods also may be granted us according to our needs, if we do what we ought to do.

Reply to Objection 1: Temporal goods are subjected to man that he may use them according to his needs, not that he may place his end in them and be over solicitous about them.

Reply to Objection 2: The solicitude of a man who gains his bread by bodily labor is not superfluous but proportionate; hence Jerome says on Mt. 6:31, "Be not solicitous," that "labor is necessary, but solicitude must be banished," namely superfluous solicitude which unsettles the mind.

Reply to Objection 3: In the works of mercy solicitude about temporal things is directed to charity as its end, wherefore it is not unlawful, unless it be superfluous.

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Whether we should be solicitous about the future?

Objection 1: It would seem that we should be solicitous about the future. For it is written ([Prov. 6:6-8](#)): "Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways and learn wisdom; which, although she hath no guide, nor master... provideth her meat for herself in the summer, and gathereth her food in the harvest." Now this is to be solicitous about the future. Therefore solicitude about the future is praiseworthy.

Objection 2: Further, solicitude pertains to prudence. But prudence is chiefly about the future, since its principal part is "foresight of future things," as stated above ([Question \[49\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#), ad 1). Therefore it is virtuous to be solicitous about the future.

Objection 3: Further, whoever puts something by that he may keep it for the morrow, is solicitous about the future. Now we read ([Jn. 12:6](#)) that Christ had a bag for keeping things in, which Judas carried, and ([Acts 4:34-37](#)) that the Apostles kept the price of the land, which had been laid at their feet. Therefore it is lawful to be solicitous about the future.

On the contrary, Our Lord said ([Mt. 6:34](#)): "Be not... solicitous for tomorrow"; where "tomorrow" stands for the future, as Jerome says in his commentary on this passage.

I answer that, No work can be virtuous, unless it be vested with its due circumstances, and among these is the due time, according to Eccles. 8:6, "There is a time and opportunity for every business"; which applies not only to external deeds but also to internal solicitude. For every time has its own fitting proper solicitude; thus solicitude about the crops belongs to the summer time, and solicitude about the vintage to the time of autumn. Accordingly if a man

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Reply to Objection 1: The ant is solicitous at a befitting time, and it is this that is proposed for our example.

Reply to Objection 2: Due foresight of the future belongs to prudence. But it would be an inordinate foresight or solicitude about the future, if a man were to seek temporal things, to which the terms "past" and "future" apply, as ends, or if he were to seek them in excess of the needs of the present life, or if he were to forestall the time for solicitude.

Reply to Objection 3: As Augustine says (De Serm. Dom. in Monte ii, 17), "when we see a servant of God taking thought lest he lack these needful things, we must not judge him to be solicitous for the morrow, since even Our Lord deigned for our example to have a purse, and we read in the Acts of the Apostles that they procured the necessary means of livelihood in view of the future on account of a threatened famine. Hence Our Lord does not condemn those who according to human custom, provide themselves with such things, but those who oppose themselves to God for the sake of these things."

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Whether these vices arise from covetousness?

Objection 1: It would seem that these vices do not arise from covetousness. As stated above ([Question \[43\]](#), [Article \[6\]](#)) lust is the chief cause of lack of rectitude in the reason. Now these vices are opposed to right reason, i.e. to prudence. Therefore they arise chiefly from lust; especially since the Philosopher says (Ethic. vii, 6) that "Venus is full of guile and her girdle is many colored" and that "he who is incontinent in desire acts with cunning."

Objection 2: Further, these vices bear a certain resemblance to prudence, as stated above ([Question \[47\]](#), [Article \[13\]](#)). Now, since prudence is in the reason, the more spiritual vices seem to be more akin thereto, such as pride and vainglory. Therefore the aforesaid vices seem to arise from pride rather than from covetousness.

Objection 3: Further, men make use of stratagems not only in laying hold of other people's goods, but also in plotting murders, the former of which pertains to covetousness, and the latter to anger. Now the use of stratagems pertains to craftiness, guile, and fraud. Therefore the aforesaid vices arise not only from covetousness, but also from anger.

On the contrary, Gregory (Moral. xxxi, 45) states that fraud is a daughter of covetousness.

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craftiness, as well as guile and fraud, bear a certain resemblance to prudence in some kind of use of the reason. Now among all the moral virtues it is justice wherein the use of right reason appears chiefly, for justice is in the rational appetite. Hence the undue use of reason appears chiefly in the vices opposed to justice, the chief of which is covetousness. Therefore the aforesaid vices arise chiefly from covetousness.

Reply to Objection 1: On account of the vehemence of pleasure and of concupiscence, lust entirely suppresses the reason from exercising its act: whereas in the aforesaid vices there is some use of reason, albeit inordinate. Hence these vices do not arise directly from lust. When the Philosopher says that "Venus is full of guile," he is referring to a certain resemblance, in so far as she carries man away suddenly, just as he is moved in deceitful actions, yet not by means of craftiness but rather by the vehemence of concupiscence and pleasure; wherefore he adds that "Venus doth cozen the wits of the wisest man" [*Cf. Iliad xiv, 214-217].

Reply to Objection 2: To do anything by stratagem seems to be due to pusillanimity: because a magnanimous man wishes to act openly, as the Philosopher says (Ethic. iv, 3). Wherefore, as pride resembles or apes magnanimity, it follows that the aforesaid vices which make use of fraud and guile, do not arise directly from pride, but rather from covetousness, which seeks its own profit and sets little by excellence.

Reply to Objection 3: Anger's movement is sudden, hence it acts with precipitation, and without counsel, contrary to the use of the aforesaid vices, though these use counsel inordinately. That men use stratagems in plotting murders, arises not from anger but rather from hatred, because the angry man desires to harm manifestly, as the Philosopher states (Rhet. ii, 2,3) [*Cf. Ethic. vii, 6].