

Thomas Aquinas

De Sortibus (Lots)

translated by Peter Bartholomew Carey, O.P.
Dover, Mass.: Dominican House of Philosophy, 1963

	Forward
1	The matters into which a search for information by lots can be made
2	The end to which lots are ordered is disclosed
3	The manner of seeking information through lots
4	Whence lots derive their power
5	Whether it is permitted to use lots

Forward

633. Your love has requested me to write to you about what is to be noted about lots. And it is not right that the requests which charity confidently extends, should suffer a rebuff among friends. And so, in the desire to satisfy your request, I have taken the trouble to write what seems me should be written about lots, interrupting briefly during the solemn seasons, engrossment in my pursuits. With regard to them, we must consider the place the lot has among things, what the end of lots is, their mode, their power, and whether, in accordance with the teaching of the Christian religion, it is permissible for them to be used.

Chapter 1: The matters into which a search for information by lots can be made

634. First, of all, there are, it should be noted that certain things exist from necessity, and always exist, such as for God to be, for two and three to equal five, for the sun to rise, and other things of this type, which either always exist, or always come about in some way. In these matters, however, there is no place for the lot. Indeed it would seem to be cause for scorn for anyone to think that any information concerning the Divine existence, or concerning numbers, or about the motions of the sun and stars should be sought by means of lots.

635. There are other things, however, such as for the summertime to be dry, and the wintertime to be rainy, which certainly take place naturally, and most of the time happen in the same way; sometimes however, occurring otherwise, although more rarely. Yet it does happen occasionally, although more rarely, that the contrary results, because nature's usual course is impeded by some other causes. In neither of the preceding cases, when considered in themselves, is there place for the lot. But if the matters in the second case be considered according as their course in some way affects the exercise of human life, to such a degree some may inquire by lot, as for instance whether a river might overflow and fill both house and field, or whether the rain might be plentiful during the summer. But no one takes pains to

[Donate bitcoin](#). [St. Isidore e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) where they do not pertain to the service of human life.

630. Hence it is clear that the lot properly has a place in human affairs. But because it pertains to every man to be solicitous about those things which concern the service of his own life and that of those with whom in some way he has a share, it follows that the inquiry of lots is not extended to all human affairs. For no one living perchance in France would bother to make an inquiry about a matter which pertains to the affairs of Indians, whose life he no way shares. But men are accustomed to seek information by lots about those things which in any way whatever pertain to them, or to those connected with them.

637. On the other hand, however, lots do not seem to be sought for information in all of these matters. For no one seeks information by lots about a thing which he can either know through his own effort, or whose effect he can produce. It seems ridiculous, moreover, if one should inquire by means of a lot whether he should eat, or gather the crops from the field, or if a thing which he can see is a man or a horse.

638. It can be concluded, therefore, that men seek information by lot about something in human affairs which in some way pertains to themselves, and which through their own prudence they cannot know, or bring to effect.

Chapter 2: The end to which lots are ordered is disclosed

639. Because, therefore, among the things which pertain to the service of human life, something is required by means of lot, it is necessary that the search for information by lots tend to this?that certain things be adjusted to the service of human life. But regarding the things which enter into human usage, men are anxious first to have them in whatever way they can, secondly to use them once they have them, and thirdly to know the future results of their use. And because we cannot appropriate for our uses things that are of service to our life unless they be possessed in some way?things, however, according to their nature are common to all?it was necessary in order that men might separately use these, that they be in some way divided among men.

640. Whenever, however, a division of common things can be effected by human endeavor and harmony of wills, then lots are not needed. But when human common sense does not suffice to make this division harmoniously, then men are accustomed to make the division by lot, according to Proverbs, "the lot suppresseth contentions."

641. However, just as there is a distinction of possessions, so also there is one of honors or dignities. Whence, whenever it happens that some are unwilling harmoniously to choose one on whom a dignity should be conferred, they conclude that it should be required that the choice be made by lots. This was observed in the Old Law as well, so that certain individuals entered upon the office of the high priest by lot. Hence it is said in chapter one of Saint Luke's Gospel that Zechariah was chosen by lot to burn the incense. Even Saul was elected king by lot, as is read in the First Book of Kings.

642. On the other hand, as a doubt concerning the distribution of honors happens, so also in the case of the distribution of punishments. So therefore, if it is believed that someone is to be punished, but who is to be punished is unknown, it appears to

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) that Jonah was thrown into the sea; also that Joshua by means of lot punished Achor who stole from the anathema, as is read in chapter seven of the Book of Joshua.

Therefore, the lot is one way ordered to finding out who ought to have either a possession, or a dignity, or a punishment, and this may be called the *distributive lot*, because through it is divided that about which it is unknown how it should be divided. Whence also, the word *sortior* [to draw lots] seems to have been taken from *sortes* [lots].

643. Moreover, just as a doubt may occur as to who should have a thing, so also whether a thing should be made use of, and whether it might be altogether expedient to do some thing. For every action is a use either of itself or of some other thing. Therefore, when such a doubt occurs about what ought to be done, if indeed this doubt can be resolved through human prudence, we are of the opinion that one should recur to a human counsel. But because it is said in the Book of Wisdom, "The thoughts of mortal men are fearful, and our counsels uncertain," where uncertainty cannot be fully met by human counsel, they should have recourse to a decision by lots. We read an example of this in Esther, where it says, "The lot was cast into an urn on what day and what month the nation of the Jews should be destroyed." And because a lot of this type takes the place of consultation, it may be called the *advisory lot*, ordained as it were to the asking of counsel.

644. Men are also commonly solicitous about future events, from the knowledge of which man may be directed in doing or avoiding many things. And yet the knowledge of future events exceeds human effort, according to Ecclesiastes, "A great affliction for man because he is ignorant of things past, and things to come he cannot know by any messenger." Wherefore, in order to know something about future events, men sometimes think they ought to have recourse to lots, which type we call the *divining lot*, for they are called divines who foreknow certain things about the future, as if attributing to themselves that which is proper to God, according to Isaiah, "Show the things that are to come hereafter, and we shall know that you are gods."

Chapter 3: The manner of seeking information through lots

645. It must be understood, however, that some people seek, in many ways, a knowledge of things which are beyond human effort. Some beseech clear answers either from God, or from the demons. Of these the first group pertains to prophetic men, who, joined to God by a certain privileged familiarity, merit to be taught by Him about future events or about certain other supernatural things, according to the Book of Amos, "For the Lord God doth nothing without revealing his secrets to his servants the prophets." Sometimes, moreover, He gives His revelation to those who are awake, through a clear vision; sometimes, however, through a dream, according to the Book of Numbers, "If there be among you a prophet of the Lord, I will appear to him in a vision, or I will speak to him in a dream. Moreover, many perfect men having this particular grace have been warned in sleep about things pertaining to their welfare, for which reason the Book of Job says, "By dreams in a vision by night when deep sleep falleth upon men, and they are sleeping in their beds: Then he openeth the ears of men, and teaching instructeth them in what they are to learn, that he may withdraw a man from the things he is doing, and may deliver him from pride."

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) by certain incantations and sacrifices some replies from the devils, made known either by discourse or demonstrated by some manifest signs; and this either while awake or during sleep.

646. But sometimes men seek knowledge of some hidden things, receiving as it were a sign of them from some things which they consider in other things. There are, moreover, various species of this investigation. For some seek knowledge of hidden things, whether relating to future events or to things it is advantageous to do, through a consideration of the heavenly motions, namely, by observing their movements and positions, from which they think they can have knowledge of future and occult things. This pertains to mathematicians or astrologers, who are also called "genetics" [calculators of nativities] because they take note of the days on which people are born.

647. Some think they ought to seek knowledge of things occult by observing the movements and sounds of some animals, and even men's sneezings. All this pertains to augury or to auspicy [inspection of victims], which are called such because they especially observe birds, and pay attention to their chattering.

648. Again, there are others who seek knowledge of concealed things from some things which are said or done by men under some testimony, which type of inquiry, namely, is properly called omen. We may take an example of this from Valerius Maximus who narrates that when the consul Lucius Paulus had been about to make war with the Persian king, returning from court and finding his daughter sad, he asked the cause of the sadness. She replied, "Persa is dead," for a certain young puppy named Persa had passed away. Paulus therefore seized upon the omen, and conceived in his mind the hope of a brilliant triumph.

649. And certain men seek to learn obscure things by observing certain figures appearing in certain bodies, as, for example, along the lines of the human hand, which is called "chiromancy", or even in the shoulder-blade of a certain animal, which is called "spatulamancy".

650. And by a third way some seek after knowledge of the hidden from the things through which they are manifested, considering their issue. This also occurs in many ways. The use of geomancy pertains to this type, whereby marking off certain small points, and by arranging them in different ways according to different figures, they think that through this they can acquire knowledge of some hidden things. It also pertains to this type that by concealing some sheets of paper in a hidden place, writing different things on some of them and on others nothing, there is discerned what must happen to those taking the papers, or there is discerned from them what ought to be done. Similar to this also is the hiding of certain unequal straws, whereby different things are indicated with reference to those who choose the larger. It seems also that sometimes the throwing of dice pertains to this type, or, if anything else is done whereby it might be decided how something is to be divided, or what ought to be done in order to know something hidden in the past or in the future. Whence also duels seem to pertain to this, except insofar as one man overcomes another mostly through art or strength. Also judgments by the red-hot iron or water or other things of this sort seem to pertain to this type, except that in these things there is no indifferent issue. Whence in these matters a more express judgment of divine power is required than in the other things mentioned above.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) of inquiry, namely, when something is done that by a consideration of its outcome something hidden might be known. Whence lots are said to be cast, or thrown into the lap, or something else is added in the mentioning of lots which pertains to a human act, according to Proverbs, "Lots are cast into the laps."

652. It is clear, then, from the preceding that the lot is an inquiry of the occult, exceeding human endeavor, through something done by us; namely, in human things which pertain to us either to be possessed or to be used or to be known.

653. It is necessary to know, however, that sometimes this third category of inquiry, which is said to pertain to lots, can be mingled with some one of the previously mentioned types. Sometimes with prophetic consultation, as is clear in the deed of Gideon who, spreading a fleece on the ground, asked a sign of dew from the Lord as we read in Judges. Or sometimes it is mixed with a consideration of necromancy, as in auspicy [inspection of victims], according as the viscera of animals sacrificed to the demons are examined. Sometimes, in fact, it is mixed with the considerations of astrology, also with the observation of auguries, as, for example, if the sight of such a star or such a bird should present itself to one doing the former or the latter. Sometimes, to be sure, with divination, which comes about through the observation of words spoken for some other reason, to which it seems to pertain that some in opening books heed what they happen upon. And similarly other different types of lots can be easily gathered together according as the third type is mixed with the other two. And thus, let these be the things said about the manner [of seeking information] by lots.

Chapter 4: Whence lots derive their power

654. It is also necessary to consider if the above-mentioned search for information by lots is efficacious. In this regard it is necessary to take into consideration various opinions about the occurrence of human affairs. There have been some who thought human affairs were regulated by no higher control, but by reason alone, in such a way that whatever happened in human affairs beyond human prudence, they believed to be completely fortuitous. Therefore, according to their opinion, there can be no foreknowledge of future events. For those things which happen fortuitously are unknowable. Whence, the divining lot is completely done away with. Similarly also, the advisory lot has no place, for the usefulness of seeking advice is reckoned from future events. Whence if the happenings of the future are unknowable, consultation will be in vain. Nevertheless, according to them, the distributive lot can have a place, not that through it might be discerned what is advantageous in dividing things, but so that what cannot be determined by reason may at least be left to fortune.

But this opinion confines divine providence, which is infinite, within a certain limit. For while they remove from divine providence human affairs in which, however, clear indications of divine rule are for the most part apparent, they also do an injustice to human affairs, which they assert to vacillate without direction. It also removes cult from all religion, and takes from men the fear of God. Whence it is to be utterly repudiated.

655. But there have been others who said that all human actions, and their issue, and all human affairs are subject to the necessity of the stars. Whence, because there

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#); that from the consideration of these they can foreknow with certitude future human occurrences, except insofar as men lack experience for this. And because according to their opinion all human actions result by necessity from the stars, it follows that even those human actions which are required for lots, proceed from the disposition of the stars, that this or that thing might result. For example, if a geomancer marks out points in the dust, they claim that his hand is moved according to the power of the heavens to this extent?that such a number of points appears as is in agreement with the heavenly disposition. They say the same thing in other similar matters. Thus they say that the future can be foreknown according to those things which come about from actions of this type inasmuch as they proceed from the power of the heavenly bodies, from which they thought human occurrences to be disposed.

And thus according to this opinion, the divine lot, through which future occurrences are considered, has a place. And consequently the advisory lot, which depends on a consideration of future events. The distributive lot also has a place, not only to this extent, that the distribution of this is left to the judgment of the lot, but also that, as the disposition of the heavens requires, things are possessed. And because they say that not only human acts, but also the movements of other animals, and of all natural bodies are subject to the stars, they also say according to the preceding opinion, that future events can be foreknown through auguries, and the other already mentioned methods of inquiry pertaining to the same type, inasmuch as they say that these movements or dispositions proceed from the power of the stars. Whence they call stars of this type second, because there appears in these a certain impression of the heavenly bodies.

And because a sleeping man does not have perfect use of reason, but is moved according to the common imagination, for the above-mentioned reason, they say that dreams have a divining power, namely, inasmuch as the movements of the phantasms which occur in dreams proceed from the disposition of the heavenly bodies.

656. But this opinion also contains evident falsity. For it is not possible that the heavenly bodies make an impression on anything incorporeal because any incorporeal thing is more powerful and more exalted than any body. The human intellect, however, is neither a body nor the power of a bodily organ, as Aristotle proves; otherwise it would not be able to know the natures of all bodies, just as they would not be able to see all colors if the pupil were tinged by some color.

It is therefore impossible for a heavenly body to make an impression on the human intellect. The will, moreover, is in the intellective part and is moved by the good apprehended through the intellect. Whence, with equal reason, the heavenly bodies are unable to make an impression on it. All human acts, moreover, proceed principally from the intellect and the will. By an investigation of the heavenly bodies, therefore, future human acts cannot be foreknown for certain, and much less through an investigation of any other things which are moved by them, for example, by the chattering of birds, by marking off points, and by the other things already mentioned. It is clear, however, that most of the occurrences in human affairs depend upon human acts. Whence, the occurrences in human affairs cannot be foreknown in the ways just mentioned.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) | eal causes, such as the abundance of crops from the dryness of the atmosphere, or from the rainfall, noting prevents these from being foreknown from an investigation of the stars, and consequently from a consideration of other bodies which follow upon the disposition of the stars, for, as Augustine says in the fifth book of the City of God, "It is not altogether absurd to say that certain sidereal influences have some power to cause differences in bodies alone?as, for instance, we see that the seasons of the year come round by the approaching and receding of the sun." We see also the times of the year change, and by the lunar waxings and wanings certain kinds of things are increased or diminished. Whence also sailors foreknow oncoming winds and storms from a consideration of the stars and from the condition of animals.

658. There will not, however, be similar reasoning about lots, because through lots not only are human acts investigated, but the very inquiry itself also proceeds through human acts. For that reason one cannot say that the throwing of lots itself follows necessarily the disposition of the heavenly bodies.

Yet, because in human acts not only are the intellect and will involved, which are not subject to the impression of the stars, but also the sensitive part of the soul, which, because it uses a corporeal organ, is necessarily subject to the heavenly bodies, one can say that from the disposition of the heavenly bodies, some inclination exists in us to do this or that, insofar, that is to say, as we are led to this through the apprehension of the imagination, and through the passions of the sensitive appetite, namely, anger, fear and others of this type, to which man is more or less disposed according to bodily make-up, which is subject to the disposition of the stars.

659. Nevertheless, because men thought the intellect and the will can curb the phantasms of the imagination and the passions of the sensitive appetite, no necessity from the disposition of the stars impels men to act, but only some inclination, which wise men restrain by moderation. For this reason Ptolemy in the Centiloquium says that "the wise man rules the stars," that is, the inclination which remains from the disposition of the stars.

660. Foolish people, on the other hand, are led entirely according to such things, as though not making use of reason. In this they differ little from beasts, according to Psalm 48, "And man when he was in honor did not understand; he is compared to senseless beasts, and is become like to them." And because according to Solomon, "the number of fools is infinite," reason rules perfectly but in a few; the inclinations of the heavenly bodies decide the outcome in many men. And for this reason astrologers sometimes foretell true things from an examination of the stars, especially about common occurrences, although in particular occurrences they frequently fail, on account of reason, which is not subject to the heavenly bodies. Whence, in the drawing of points of geomancy, the performers thing that this should be observed, that he who draws the points proceed without the premeditation of reason, and that he who consults questions as though urged by an inner solicitude, and not as it were from the deliberation of reason. This they say should be observed also in all such consultations.

661. But although according to the above mentioned mode of inclination the heavenly bodies by not imposing a necessity dispose to some human acts, nevertheless such and inclination cannot extend to all human occurrences. For the

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) end to one thing, just as also the action of a natural thing also proceeds from one principle, namely, from the proper form of the thing, which is the principle of natural action. The intellect, however, acts through forms conceived in the mind, which in the same intellect can be multiplied. Consequently, the rational powers are not determined to one thing, but pertain to many. But indeed those things which happen by chance in human events are per accidens, for example, that a man should find a treasure while digging a grave. But what is per accidens is not one. Whence, no natural agent can be inclined to that which occurs per accidens. There could be, therefore, in a man some natural inclination to dig a grave, because here this is some one thing, and similarly to seek a treasure; but that he should meet up with treasure while digging? this cannot have a natural cause.

Therefore an investigation of lots according to the preceding opinion through a mode of inclination to all human occurrences cannot be efficacious. But the intellect can receive as one that which happens per accidens by forming from many things one composite. Therefore, nothing prevents things which seem to happen by accident from being pre-ordained by some intellect. For example, if someone places a stone in the road on which one sent [along the road] by him, trips and falls. The falling of the traveler is indeed by accident, not happening according to his intention; it is, however, disposed by the intellect of the other who sends him.

662. And according to this mode, others say that those things which in human occurrences seem to be fortuitous according to us are ordained by some superior intellect. But the supreme intellect is God, Who, just as by His wisdom He causes all things to exist, so also He conserves and moves the same, directing all to their appointed end, according to the book of Wisdom, "She reacheth therefore from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly."

However, by divine disposition not only bodies are moved, but the minds of men with respect to their proper actions as well. For the human intellect is enlightened by God to know the truth, for which reason the Psalmist begs, "Enlighten my eyes that I never sleep in death." By His power as well human wills are moved to desire and to act, according to the Apostle in the Epistle to the Philippians, "For it is God who of His good pleasure works in you both the will and the performance." And because the intellect and will are the proper principles of human acts, it follows that human acts are subject to divine disposition, according to Isaiah, "For thou has wrought all our works in us."

Therefore, because both human acts and the motions of external things are subject to divine providence, that which is bound to befall each one, proceeds from the divine disposition, though which some achieve the appointed end of their design. Therefore, the Psalmist begs, "Direct me in thy truth."

And sometimes also men are led to some good by divine disposition beyond their own intention. Whence the Apostle said to the Ephesians, "God is able to accomplish all things in a measure far beyond what we ask or conceive." In the same way also from the divine disposition it turns out that men fall away from their own purpose, according to Job, "Who bringeth to nought the designs of the malignant, so that their hands cannot accomplish what they had begun."

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) adversities which they could not avoid, according to Isaiah, "her feet shall carry her afar off to sojourn. Who hath taken this counsel against Tyre, that was formerly crowned?" And after that follows, "The Lord of hosts hath designed it." And then there is that said in Jeremiah, "I know, O Lord, that the way of a man is not his: neither is it in a man to walk, and to direct his steps."

From these things, therefore, it is proved that the occurrences of human affairs are not totally subjected to a human disposition, but to a divine disposition. Whence it happens that some come to ampler goods than they were able to devise; they are called fortunate. Others, on the other hand, fall short of those things which they have prudently planned and are cast down into disordered evils; they are called unfortunate.

663. This is established, however, not only on divine authority, but is proven by the opinions of philosophers. For Aristotle, in the book *De bona fortuna* says this: "The starting point of man is not reason, but something better. What, then, could be better than knowledge and intellect but God? And for this reason they are rightly called fortunate who, whatever they start on, succeed in it without being good at reasoning, for they have in them a principle that is better than intellect and deliberation."

664. Thus therefore, according to what has already been determined, an investigation of lots can have efficacy from the divine disposition both insofar as the occurrences of external things are subject to divine providence, and insofar as through it human acts are directed. And thus it can happen, by God's doing, that human acts draw such an effect or course which belongs to the occurrences of external things. Whence in Proverbs it says, "Lots are cast into the lap, but they are disposed of by the Lord." And Dionysius, in the fifth chapter of the *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* says concerning the divine lot which fell divinely upon Matthias: "Certain others say otherwise, speaking not in a religious fashion, so I think; but I myself will say my opinion. It seems to me that the sacred sayings called the lot "thearchic", that is, a certain divine gift, showing to that hierarchic band," that is, to the apostolic band, "that he had been chosen by divine election." One is given to understand through this that it pertains to lot, when by a gift of God there is declared to men through a certain effect of human acts that the divine disposition is either in dividing things, which pertains to the distributive lot; or in doing things, which pertains to the advisory lot; or in foreknowing future things, which pertains to the divining lot.

665. We ought, moreover, to consider that the divine disposition works by the ministry of certain spirits, according to Psalm 102, "Bless the Lord, all ye his angels." And after that follows, "you ministers of his that do his will." Whence their operation accords in all things with the divine disposition, and thus the judgment is the same about those things which are done through them as about those things which are done by the divine disposition.

There are, however, certain beguiling spirits, whom we call demons, whom, even though they reject the divine disposition insofar as they are capable, nevertheless God uses for the fulfillment of His disposition, just as He uses evil men to fulfill the purpose of His will, as is clear in the case of tyrants whose wickedness was used to form the crowns for the martyrs.

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#)fer by men of the honor of divinity, and thus they involve themselves in those things which seem to pertain to God, so that the honor of divinity might be shown to themselves by deceived men. And so it is that the demons involved themselves in the images which men made from the beginning out of an inordinate regard toward the dead, and in them they gave answers, so that from this they might procure divine honor for themselves.

Likewise also, when through lots or in some other way men inordinately seek after the occult, demons obtrude themselves so that they might lead men into error under a pretext of divination. Whence Augustine, in the second book of the *Literal Interpretation of Genesis*, speaking about mathematicians who foretell future occurrences through the stars says: "It should be acknowledged that when truths are spoken by such as these, they are said by a certain very hidden instinct which human minds undergo without knowing it. This is the work of the foul and seducing spirits, since its purpose is to deceive men." And in book two of *Christian Doctrine* he says that all types of such divination pertain to pacts made with the demons. And the opinion of Valerius Maximus does not disagree with this, who says that "men's observance rested upon some contract of religion, for not upon a chance notion is it believed to depend but upon divine providence."

It is clear from the preceding that source lots have efficacy.

Chapter 5: Whether it is permitted to use lots

666. Having seen those things, therefore, it is effortlessly clear whether it is permitted to use lots. First of all, it is obvious that no Christian is permitted to have any pact of association with the demons. For the Apostle in the First Epistle to the Corinthians says, "I would not have you become associates of the devil," to which association pertain not only open invocations of the devil, which necromancers use, but any hidden pacts made with demons. Thus Augustine, in the second book of *Christian Doctrine*, having treated of the various superstitious observances of men, adds, "All arts of this sort are either nullities, or are part of a guilty superstition, springing out of a baleful fellowship between men and evils, and are to be utterly repudiated and avoided by the Christian as the covenants of a false and treacherous friendship." Wherefore, also, in Deuteronomy it says, "Neither lot there be found among you any one that shall expiate his son or daughter, making them to pass through the fire; or that consulteth soothsayers, or observeth dreams and omens, neither let there be any wizard, nor charmer, nor any one that consulteth pythonic spirits, or fortune tellers, or that seeketh the truth from the dead."

667. But a doubt still remains as to what inquiries of lots or of any other divinations through which pacts are contracted with demons should be called superstitious. The solution of this doubt may indeed be had from the previous words of Augustine, if they be precisely examined. For he states that pacts with demons come about through the arts of nullities or of guilty superstitions. That is called a guilty superstition which clearly contains something unlawful?such as invocations of and sacrifices to demons or anything else of the sort. A thing is called a nullity, on the other hand, when someone uses some particular thing for a purpose for which the power of the thing cannot be extended. In fact, this seems to come about in vain. Therefore, we call nullities vain. For example, if a sick man took medicine for a disease which it can cure, this is not a superstitious nullity. But if someone were to

[Donate bitcoin](#). St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.html](#)ld seem to have reference to a superstitious nullity, even according to the opinion of doctors. Similarly, when clothes have been gnawed into by mice, to fear more the worry about ture evil than to lament te present damage. And in the same place Augustine stes down many other examples of this type.

668. To what things the power of lots can extend is reckoned from what has been said. For it has been shown that the power of the heavenly bodies extends itself to corporeal effects, but not to change the free will of man. Whence, if someone consults an astrologer as o whether a future summer will be dry or rainy, it is not a nugatory consultation, as it would be if someone should consult as to whether in digging a grave he would come upon a treasure, or what another might answer to his question. Whence such a consideration pertains to he company of demons, who involve themselves in the inordinate motions of men.

The same is also to be observed with regard to an augury, or if someone from the frequent crowing of a crow should thereupon foretell future rain, it is not a nugatory superstition, for animals are moved by a certain natural instinct from an impression of the heavenly bodies, in accordance with the disposition of the air, to he knowledge of the weather, according as it is necessary for their nature, in line with Jeremiah, "The kite in the air hath known her time: The turtle, and the swallow, and the stork have observed the time of their coming."

Similarly also, if from the sudden flight of birds someone should announce that some danger is hidden in that place from which the birds had departed by flying away, this is not a superstition, but human industry. But if through the motions or chatterings of birds something about human actions is foretold, this is superstition.

The same also is to be noted with regard to lots and other similar matters, that whatever can have a sure cause?either natural, human or divine is not superstitious, but only that is called nugatory and superstitious which cannot have a sure cause, and this pertains to the company of the demons, who sometimes manifest efficacy in such matters in order to envelope the souls of men in vanities. Whence in Psalm 39 it says, "Blessed is the man whose trust is in the name of the Lord; and who hath not had regard to vanities, and lying follies." The sacred canons, therefore, condemn these lots, which, provided they come about from harmful and nugatory superstition, pertain to the company of the demons.

669. If, however, those things which have a natural or human cause lack fault, so much the more those which rest upon divine assistance. For it pertains to man's beatitude, according to the same Psalm that the name of the Lord be his trust, and consequently if through the casting of lots someone seeks he divine judgment, it is not in itself a sin. For Augustine, concerning Psalm 30, "My lots are in thy hands," says, "The lot is no evil thing, but it is an event, in human doubt, indicating the Divine Will."

670. In should be known, however, that sin can happen in four ways in lots of this type. In one way, if someone should think that there should be recourse to lots without any necessity, for this seems to test God, if someone having from human industry what he should do, and having omitted it, thinks divine judgment is to be sought. For it says in Second Paralipomenon, "But as we know not what to do, we can only turn our eyes to thee."

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) |ence and devotion, even in necessity. Whence Bede in his *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles* says, "If compelled by some necessity, they thing that God shold be consulted after he example of the Apostles, by lots, they should observe this?that the Apostles themselves acted after having gathered together the band of the brethren, and having poured forth prayers to God."

Thirdly, if the divine oracles are turned toward human and worldly business. Hence Augustine says in his *Reply to the Inquiries of Januarius*: "[Regarding] those who draw lots from the pages of the Gospel, although it could be wished tat they would do this rather than run around consulting demons; nevertheless, I do not like this custom of wishing to turn the divine oracles to worldly business and the vanity of this life."

Fourthly, if some should perchance wish to leave to the lot that which should be done through divine inspiration, as when men should be promoted to ecclesiastical dignities by agreement in an election, which the Holy Spirit makes. Consequently, in elections of this kind it is unlawful for the lot to be used. For it would commit an injustice to the Holy Spirit, Who instructs human consciousness so that it judge correctly, according to First Corinthians, "The spiritual man judges all thins." However, "He who is chosen by lot is not grasped by human judgment," as Ambrose says in his *Commentary on Luke*. Whence also Bede, in his *Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles*, says, "Matthias, ordained before Pentecost, is selected by lot, as if the plenitude of the Holy Spirit had not yet poured forth in the Church; however, the seven deacons selected afterwards were ordained not by lot, but by the choice of the disciples, the prayer of the Apostles, and the imposition of hands."

671. The aforesaid necessity, however, by which it is lawful to implore the divine judgment through lots seems especially to have place with regard to the advisory lot, because even among the upright ancients we frequently find some to have consulted God in doubtful affairs, as is read in the First book of Kings that "David consulted the Lord, saying: "Shall I pursue after these robbers, and shall I overtake them, or not?"

672. A necessity of this type also may pertain to the distributive lot, whenever, namely, the disagreements of men concerning the distributions of things cannot otherwise be settled except by being committed through lots to the divine judgment, according to Proverbs, "The lot suppresseth contentions, and determineth even between the mighty."

The necessity of the distributive lot can occur not only in dividing things, but in the division of those things which are to be done by different people as well. Whence, Augustine in his *Letter to Honoratus* says, "If among the servants of God, there is a debate as to which of their number should remain, lest by the flight of all the Church be left destitute, and who should flee, lest by the death of all the Church be left destitute; if this debate were not able otherwise to be terminated, it appears to me that the persons who are to remain and who are to flee should be chosen by lot."

In the same way also the necessity of the lot impends if it happens that something which is to be given to many cannot be given except one of them. Whence Augustine says in the first book of *Christian Doctrine*, "For suppose that you had a great deal of some commodity, and felt bound to give it away to somebody who had none, and

[Donate bitcoin.](#) St. Isidore [e-book library/forum](#) » [aquinas](#) » [english](#) » [Sortibus.htm](#) presented themselves, neither of whom had either from need or relationship a greater claim upon you than the other, you could do nothing fairer than choose b lot to which one you would give what could not be given to both.

And because the office of an earthly dignity is ordained to dispense temporal things, recourse may also be had lawfully to lots of this type if the choice cannot otherwise be harmonious, although a ruler ought not to be sought by lot, but by a prudent zealously. Yet is more tolerable to seek a secular ruler by lot than to belabor the people with dissensions. But of the spiritual ruler there is another consideration, as we have already said above.

673. But in the divining lot, the aforesaid necessity does not seem to occur. Whence also the Lord spoke to the disciples, "It is not for you to know the times or dates which the Father has fixed by his own authority." Nevertheless, if it be necessary that the future be foreknown either for the safety of the church or of some individual person, this will be made known to the faithful through the Holy Spirit, concerning Whom the Lord spoke in John, "The things which are to come he will declare to you." Whence it is lawful to seek divine judgment about future events of this type by means of t advisory lot, as is read in Judges that Gideon sought from the Lord whether by his hand the people of Israel would be saved, by seeking a sign in the fleece.

But because the distributive lot may have a place even when human affairs are done fortuitously, as has been said above, it happens that some use the distributive lot not so as to seek a divine judgment, but as though committing it to fortune which is especially seen in the game of dice-throwing. However, this does not lack the fault of vanity.

And that is all that needs to be said about lots.

* * * * *