

QUESTION 53

Imprudence

Next we have to consider the vices opposed to prudence. Now in *Contra Iulianum* 4 Augustine says, “In the case of all the virtues, there are not just vices that are contrary by an obvious distinction, in the way that temerity or recklessness (*temeritas*) is contrary to prudence, but there are also vices that are in some sense close to the virtue—not in reality, but in the sense that they are similar by a certain deceptive appearance, in the way that craftiness (*astutia*) is similar to prudence itself.” Therefore, we have to consider, first, the vices which have an obvious contrariety to prudence and which are vices stemming from a lack of prudence or of what is required for prudence (questions 53-54), and then, second, we have to consider vices which have a certain deceptive similarity to prudence and which occur through the misuse of what is required for prudence (question 55).

Now since solicitude belongs to prudence, there are two topics to be considered under the first point: the first is imprudence (question 53) and the second is negligence, which is opposed to solicitude (question 54).

As regards the first topic, there are six questions: (1) Is imprudence (*imprudentia*) a sin? (2) Is imprudence a special sin? (3) Is precipitateness (*praecipitatio*), i.e., temerity or recklessness (*temeritas*), a sin? (4) Is not taking account of things (*inconsideratio*) a sin? (5) Is inconstancy (*inconstantia*) a sin? (6) What is the origin of these vices?

Article 1

Is imprudence a sin?

It seems that imprudence (*imprudentia*) is not a sin:

Objection 1: As Augustine points out, every sin is voluntary. But imprudence is not something voluntary, since no one wills to be imprudent. Therefore, imprudence is not a sin.

Objection 2: No sin except original sin is born with a man. But imprudence is born with a man; that is why young people are imprudent. And imprudence is not original sin, which is opposed to original justice. Therefore, imprudence is not a sin.

Objection 3: Every sin is removed through repentance (*per poenitentiam*). But imprudence is not removed through repentance. Therefore, imprudence is not a sin.

But contrary to this: The spiritual treasure of grace is destroyed only by sin. But it is destroyed by imprudence—this according to Proverbs 21:20 (“There is a treasure to be desired, and oil in the dwelling of the just, and the foolish man (*homo imprudens*) will waste it”).

I respond: There are two ways in which imprudence can be taken: (a) as a *privation* (*privative*) and (b) as a *contrary* (*contrarie*). However, it is not properly taken as a *negation* (*negative*), i.e., in a way that implies a simple lack of prudence, since a simple lack of prudence can exist without sin.

Imprudence is taken as a *privation* insofar as someone lacks the prudence that he is able to have and ought to have. Taken in this sense, imprudence is a sin by reason of the *negligence* because of which one does not make the effort to have prudence.

Imprudence is taken as a *contrary* insofar as reason acts or is moved in a way that is contrary to prudence. For instance, if the rectified reason (*recta ratio*) that belongs to prudence acts by deliberating, the imprudent individual spurns the deliberation—and so on for the other things that have to be attended to in an act of prudence. And imprudence in this sense is a sin with respect to the proper nature of prudence. For it cannot happen that a man acts contrary to prudence except by departing from the rules by which the reasoning that belongs to prudence is rectified. Hence, if this happens through a turning away from divine rules, it is a mortal sin—as when someone acts precipitately by disdain and repudiating divine teachings. On the other hand, if he acts outside these teachings without contempt and

without detriment to what is necessary for salvation, then it is a venial sin.

Reply to objection 1: No one wills the deformity of imprudence, but a temerarious individual, who wills to act precipitately, wills an act of imprudence. Hence, in *Ethics* 4 the Philosopher says, “One who sins willfully against prudence is less commended.”

Reply to objection 2: This argument goes through with respect to imprudence insofar as imprudence is taken as a negation.

Still, notice that the absence of prudence—along with the absence of every virtue—is included within the absence of original justice, which had perfected the whole soul. And in this sense every absence of a virtue can be traced back to original sin.

Reply to objection 3: Infused prudence is restored through repentance, and in that way the lack of this sort of prudence ceases. However, acquired prudence is not restored by repentance as far as the habit is concerned; instead, the contrary act, which the sin of imprudence properly consists in, is removed.

Article 2

Is imprudence a special sin?

It seems that imprudence is not a special sin:

Objection 1: Everyone who sins acts against right reason, i.e., against prudence. But as has been explained (a. 1), imprudence consists in one’s acting against prudence. Therefore, imprudence is not a special sin.

Objection 2: Prudence is more akin to moral acts than scientific knowledge is. But ignorance, which is opposed to scientific knowledge, is posited among the general causes of sin. Therefore, *a fortiori*, imprudence should be posited among the general causes of sin.

Objection 3: Sins occur because the circumstances for the virtues are corrupted; this is why Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, “Evil occurs because of singular defects.” But many things are required for prudence, e.g., reasoning, understanding, docility, and the rest of the things that were posited above (qq. 48-49). Therefore, there are many species of imprudence. Therefore, imprudence is not a special sin.

But contrary to this: As has been explained (a. 1), imprudence is contrary to prudence. But prudence is a single special virtue. Therefore, imprudence is a single special vice.

I respond: There are two ways in which a vice or sin can be called general: in the *first* way, *absolutely speaking*, viz., because it is general with respect to *all* sins; and, in the *second* way, because it is general *relative to* certain vices that are its species.

Now in the *first* mode there are two ways in which a vice can be called general:

(a) in the first way, *by its essence*, viz., because it is predicated of all sins. And imprudence is not a general sin in this sense, just as prudence is not a general virtue in this sense, since they have to do with specific acts, viz., with the very acts of reason.

(b) in the second way, *by participation*. And in this sense imprudence is a general sin. For just as prudence participates in some way in all the virtues insofar as it directs them, so, too, imprudence participates in some way in all vices and sins. For no sin can occur unless there is a defect in some act of reason as directing, and this pertains to imprudence.

On the other hand, if imprudence is being called a general sin *relative to some genus* and not absolutely speaking, viz., because it contains many species under itself, then in this sense imprudence is a general sin. For there are three ways in which it contains diverse species:

(a) *by being opposed to the different subjective parts of prudence*. For in the same way that, as was established above (q. 48), prudence is divided into *monastic prudence* (*prudencia monastica*), which

guides a single individual, and into other species of prudence which guide a multitude, so the same thing holds for imprudence.

(b) *with respect to the potential parts of prudence*, which are adjoined virtues and are enumerated according to the diverse acts of reason. Accordingly, with respect to a defect in *deliberating*, concerning which there is [the virtue of] *euboulia*, the species of imprudence is *precipitateness* or *recklessness* (*praecipitatio sive temeritas*), whereas with respect to a defect in *judging*, concerning which there are [the virtues of] *synesis* and *gnome*, the species of imprudence is *not taking account of things* (*inconsideratio*), and with respect to a defect in *commanding* itself, which is the proper act of prudence, the species of imprudence are inconstancy (*inconstantia*) and negligence (*negligentia*).

(c) *by being opposed to what is required for prudence*, i.e., *to the integral parts, as it were, of prudence*. But since all of these parts are directed toward the three acts of reason just mentioned, it follows that all the opposed defects are traced back to the four species (*partes*) named above. For instance, a lack of caution (*incautela*) and a lack of circumspection (*incircumspectio*) are included under not taking account of things, while the fact that one falls short in docility or memory or reasoning pertains to precipitateness, and a lack of foresight (*improvidentia*) and failures of understanding and shrewdness (*defectus intelligentiae et solertiae*) pertain to negligence and inconstancy.

Reply to objection 1: This argument goes through for the sort of generality that involves participation.

Reply to objection 2: Since scientific knowledge is more remote from moral acts than prudence is, in keeping with the proper nature of each of them, it follows that ignorance has the nature of a mortal sin not in its own right, but only by reason of a previous negligence or an ensuing effect. And this is the reason why ignorance is posited among the general causes of sin. By contrast, imprudence involves moral vice by its own nature, and this is why it is instead posited as a special sin.

Reply to objection 3: When the corruption of the different circumstances has the same motive, then the species of a sin is not diversified; for instance, someone's taking something that does not belong to him *where* he ought not to is a sin of the same species as his taking something that does not belong to him *when* he ought not to. By contrast, if there were different motives, then there would be different species of sin—for instance, if one individual took something *where* he ought not to in order to inflict damage on a sacred place, which would make for the species *sacrilege*, whereas another did it *when* he ought not to just because of his excessive desire for it, which would be simple *avarice*.

And so, as has been explained, defects in the things required for prudence do not make for different species except insofar as they are ordered toward diverse acts of reason.

Article 3

Is precipitateness (*praecipitatio*) a sin contained under imprudence?

It seems that precipitateness (*praecipitatio*) is not a sin contained under imprudence:

Objection 1: Imprudence is opposed to the virtue of prudence. But precipitateness is opposed to the gift of counsel; for in *Moralia* 2 Gregory says that the gift of counsel is given in opposition to precipitateness. Therefore, precipitateness is not a sin contained under imprudence.

Objection 2: Precipitateness seems to belong to temerity or recklessness (*videtur ad temeritatem pertinere*). But temerity implies presumption, which belongs to pride. Therefore, precipitateness is not a vice contained under prudence.

Objection 3: Precipitateness seems to involve a sort of disordered hurriedness (*videtur importare quandam inordinatam festinationem*). But in the case of deliberating, it is possible for there to be a sin not only because one is in a hurry, but also if one is excessively slow, with the result that the opportunity

for acting is lost. Therefore, precipitateness should not be posited as a sin contained under prudence more than slowness is—or any other thing of this sort that involves a disorder in deliberating.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 4:19 says, “The way of the wicked is dark, they know not where they fall.” But the darkness of the way of wickedness has to do with imprudence. Therefore, to fall, i.e., to go over the precipice (*corruere sive praecipitari*), pertains to imprudence.

I respond: In the case of acts of the soul, precipitateness is predicated metaphorically in accord with a similarity taken from corporeal movement. In the case of corporeal movement, to fall precipitately is for something to arrive at the lowest places from the highest with a certain vehemence that derives either from its own movement or from something that impels it—and not by descending gradually in an orderly fashion. Now the highest point of the soul is reason itself and the lowest point is an operation exercised through the body, whereas the middle places, through which one must descend in an orderly fashion, include the *memory* of past things, the *understanding* of present things, *shrewdness* in considering future events, *reasoning* that connects one thing to another, and *docility*, through which one acquiesces in the opinions of those in charge. And by these steps one descends in an orderly fashion by rightly deliberating. By contrast, if one falls into an action through an impulsive movement of will or of passion, skipping over steps of this sort, there will be precipitateness. Therefore, since a disorder in deliberating pertains to imprudence, it is clear that the vice of precipitateness is contained under imprudence.

Reply to objection 1: As was explained above (q. 52, a. 2), rectitude in deliberating involves both the gift of counsel and the virtue of prudence, though in different ways. And so precipitateness is contrary to both of them.

Reply to objection 2: Things are said to be done temerarily (*temere*) when they are not directed by reason. There are two ways in which this can happen: (a) because of an impulsive movement of will or of passion; and (b) out of contempt for the directing rule. And it is the second way that properly involves temerity (*temeritas*). This is why temerity or recklessness seems to have its root in pride, which refuses to be subject to the direction of another.

Now precipitateness is related to both of these. Hence, temerity is contained under precipitateness, even though precipitateness has more to do with the first way above.

Reply to objection 3: In the inquiry that belongs to deliberating there are many particular things that have to be taken account of, and this is why, in *Ethics* 6, the Philosopher says, “One must deliberate slowly.” Hence, precipitateness is more directly opposed to rectitude of deliberating than is excessive slowness, which has a sort of similarity to correct deliberating.

Article 4

Is not taking account of things (*inconsideratio*) a special sin contained under imprudence?

It seems that not taking account of things (*inconsideratio*) is not a special sin contained under imprudence:

Objection 1: Divine law does not induce us toward any sin—this according to Psalm 18:8 (“The law of the Lord is unspotted”). But it does induce us toward not taking account of things—this according to Matthew 10:19 (“Do not give thought to how you will speak or what you are to say”). Therefore, not taking account of things is not a sin.

Objection 2: Whoever deliberates must take account of many things. But precipitateness occurs through a defect in deliberating and, as a result, from a defect in taking account of things. Therefore, precipitateness is contained under not taking account of things. Therefore, not taking account of things is not a special sin.

Objection 3: Prudence consists in acts of practical reason, viz., deliberating, judging about what has been deliberated, and commanding. But taking account of things precedes all these acts, since it belongs to the speculative intellect as well. Therefore, not taking account of things is not a special sin contained under imprudence.

But contrary to this: Proverbs 4:25 says, “Let your eyes look straight ahead, and let your gaze precede your steps”—which has to do with prudence. But the contrary of this occurs by not taking account of things. Therefore, not taking account of things is a special sin contained under imprudence.

I respond: Taking account of something involves an act of the intellect grasping the truth of a thing. Now in the same way that inquiring has to do with reasoning, judging has to do with understanding. Hence, in speculative matters demonstrative science is called *adjudicative* insofar as, through a resolution into first intelligible principles, one passes judgment on the truth of what is inquired into. And so taking account of things belongs especially to judgment.

Thus, a defect in right judgment has to do with the vice of not taking account of things, viz., insofar as one falls short in judging rightly because he disdains or neglects to attend to those things from which a correct judgment proceeds. Hence, it is clear that not taking account of things is a sin.

Reply to objection 1: Our Lord does not prohibit taking account of things that are to be done or said when a man has the opportunity to do so. Instead, in the cited passage He is giving the disciples confidence that when the opportunity is lacking, either because of their inexperience or because they are overtaken suddenly, they may trust in God’s guidance alone; for, as 2 Paralipomenon 20:12 says, “When we do not know what we have to do, all we have left is to turn our eyes to God.” Otherwise, if a man fails to do what he can and just looks for divine assistance, he seems to be tempting God.

Reply to objection 2: The whole consideration of what is attended to in deliberating is ordered toward judging rightly, and so taking account of things is brought to completion in judging. Hence, not taking account of things is likewise opposed especially to rectitude of judgment.

Reply to objection 3: ‘Not taking account of things’ is being understood here with respect to a determinate subject matter, i.e., with respect to human actions, in which more things have to be attended to in judging correctly than in the case of speculative matters. For operations have to do with singulars.

Article 5

Is inconstancy (*inconstantia*) a vice contained under imprudence?

It seems that inconstancy (*inconstantia*) is not a vice contained under imprudence:

Objection 1: Inconstancy seems to consist in a man’s not persisting in some difficulty. But persisting in difficulties pertains to fortitude. Therefore, inconstancy is opposed to fortitude rather than to prudence.

Objection 2: James 3:16 says, “Where jealousy and contention exist, there is inconstancy and every evil deed.” But jealousy pertains to envy. Therefore, inconstancy pertains not to prudence, but to envy instead.

Objection 3: It seems that the inconstant individual is one who does not persevere in what he had proposed to do. But as *Ethics* 6 explains, in matters of pleasure this belongs to someone who is *incontinent*, whereas in matters of pain it belongs to someone who is *soft* or *squeamish* (*ad mollem sive delicatum*). Therefore, inconstancy does not belong to imprudence.

But contrary to this: It belongs to prudence to prefer a greater good to a lesser good. Therefore, to withdraw from what is better belongs to imprudence. But this is inconstancy. Therefore, inconstancy pertains to imprudence.

I respond: Inconstancy implies a sort of retreat from a good that had been intended and fixed

(*recessum a bono proposito et definito*). Now a retreat of this sort does, to be sure, have a beginning in the appetitive power, since one does not retreat from a good that had been intended beforehand except because of something that pleases him in a disordered way. However, this retreat is brought to completion only through a defect in reason, which mistakenly repudiates what it had rightly accepted, and which, because it is able to resist the impulsive movement of passion, is such that if it does not resist it, this stems from its own weakness in not holding on firmly to the good that had been conceived. And so as far as its consummation is concerned, inconstancy involves a defect of reason.

Now just as every instance of the rectitude of practical reason belongs in some way to prudence, so every defect in the rectitude of practical reason belongs to imprudence. And so, as regards its consummation, inconstancy belongs to imprudence. And just as precipitateness stems from a defect in the act of deliberating, and just as not taking account of things stems from a defect in the act of judging, so inconstancy stems from a defect in the act of commanding. For someone is called inconstant from the fact that reason fails to command what has been deliberated and judged.

Reply to objection 1: The good of prudence participates in all the moral virtues and, accordingly, persistence in the good pertains to all the moral virtues—though mainly to fortitude, which undergoes a stronger impulse toward the contrary.

Reply to objection 2: Envy—along with anger, which is a source of contention—make for inconstancy on the part of the *appetitive* power; and, as has been explained, the beginnings of inconstancy lie in the appetitive power.

Reply to objection 3: Continence and perseverance seem to exist only in reason and not in the appetitive power. For the continent individual undergoes perverse sense desires and the persevering individual undergoes serious sorrows, which are signs of a defect in the appetitive power, whereas it is reason that firmly persists—the reason of the continent individual against the sense desires, and the reason of the persevering individual against the sorrows. Hence, continence and perseverance seem to be species of constancy that belong to reason, and it is likewise to reason that inconstancy belongs.

Article 6

Do the vices just discussed arise from lust?

It seems that the vices just discussed do not arise from lust (*ex luxuria*):

Objection 1: As has been explained, inconstancy arises from envy. But envy is a vice distinct from lust. Therefore, the vices just discussed do not arise from lust.

Objection 2: James 1:8 says, “A double-minded man is inconstant in all his ways.” But double-mindedness seems to pertain not to lust, but rather to cunning (*dolositas*), which, according to Gregory in *Moralia* 31, is a child of avarice. Therefore, the vices just discussed do not arise from lust.

Objection 3: The vices just discussed have to do with a defect in reason. But spiritual vices are closer to reason than carnal vices are. Therefore, the vices just discussed arise more from spiritual vices than from carnal vices.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory asserts that the vices just discussed arise from lust.

I respond: As the Philosopher says in *Ethics* 6, “It is especially pleasure that corrupts the judgment of prudence (*delectatio maxime corrumpit existimationem prudentiae*)”—and mainly the pleasure that exists in sexual activity, which occupies the whole soul and draws one toward sensual pleasure. Hence, since, as has been established (aa. 2 and 5), the vices just discussed involve a defect in prudence and practical reason, it follows that they arise especially from lust.

Reply to objection 1: Envy and anger cause inconstancy by drawing reason toward some other thing, but lust causes inconstancy by totally extinguishing the judgment of reason. Hence, in *Ethics* 7 the

Philosopher says, “The individual who is incontinent because of anger listens to reason, yet not perfectly, whereas an individual who is incontinent because of lust does not listen to it at all.”

Reply to objection 2: Double-mindedness is likewise something that follows upon lust, just as inconstancy does, insofar as double-mindedness involves the mind’s fluctuating between diverse things. Hence, in *Eunuchus* Terence says, “In love there is war, and likewise peace and armistice.”

Reply to objection 3: Carnal vices extinguish the judgment of reason to a greater degree insofar as they lead one further away from reason.