

QUESTION 55

The Vices opposed to Prudence that are Similar to it

Next we have to consider those vices opposed to prudence that bear a similarity to it. And on this topic there are eight questions: (1) Is prudence of the flesh (*prudentia carnis*) a sin? (2) Is prudence of the flesh a mortal sin? (3) Is craftiness (*astutia*) a special sin? (4) What about guile (*dolus*)? (5) What about fraud (*fraus*)? (6) What about care or solicitude with respect to temporal things (*sollicitudo temporalium rerum*)? (7) What about care or solicitude with respect to future things (*sollicitudo futurorum*)? (8) What is the origin of these vices?

Article 1

Is prudence of the flesh a sin?

It seems that prudence of the flesh (*prudentia carnis*) is not a sin:

Objection 1: Prudence is a more noble virtue than the other moral virtues because it directs all the virtues. But no sort of justice or temperance is a sin. Therefore, neither is any sort of prudence a sin.

Objection 2: It is not a sin to act prudently for an end that is licitly loved. But the flesh is licitly loved, since, as Ephesians 5:29 says, “For no one ever hated his own flesh.” Therefore, prudence of the flesh is not a sin.

Objection 3: Just as a man is tempted by the flesh, so he is likewise tempted by the world, as well as by the devil. But no sort of prudence of the world is posited among the sins, and neither is any sort of prudence of the devil. Therefore, neither should any sort of prudence of the flesh be posited among the sins.

But contrary to this: No one is an enemy of God except because of iniquity—this according to Wisdom 14:9 (“To God the wicked individual and his wickedness are hateful alike”). But as Romans 8:7 says, “Prudence of the flesh is inimical to God.” Therefore, prudence of the flesh is a sin.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 47, a. 13), prudence has to do with the means to the end of a whole life. And so we speak properly of prudence of the flesh insofar as someone takes the goods of the flesh as the ultimate end of his life. Now it is clear that this is a sin, since a man is thereby disordered with respect to his ultimate end, which, as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 2, a. 5), does not consist in the goods of the body. And so prudence of the flesh is a sin.

Reply to objection 1: Justice and temperance imply in their very concept the reason why the virtue is praised, viz., equality on the one hand and the restraining of disordered sentient desires on the other (*scilicet aequalitatem et concupiscentiarum refrenationem*); and so they are never taken for something that is bad. By contrast, as was explained above (q. 49, a. 6), the name ‘prudence’ is taken from ‘provide for’, which can be extended even to bad things. And so even though prudence absolutely speaking is taken for something good, it can be taken for something bad when an addition is made to it. And it is in this way that prudence of the flesh is said to be a sin.

Reply to objection 2: The flesh exists for the sake of the soul in the way that matter exists for the sake of form and in the way that an instrument exists for the sake of its principal agent. And so the flesh is licitly loved insofar as it is ordered toward the good of the soul as its end. However, if one’s ultimate end is set up as the good of the flesh itself, then the love of the flesh will be disordered and illicit. And this is the way in which prudence of the flesh is ordered toward the love of the flesh.

Reply to objection 3: The devil tempts us not in the manner of something that is desirable, but rather in the manner of someone who makes suggestions. And so, since prudence implies an ordering toward an end that is desirable, one does not say ‘prudence of the devil’ in the sense of a prudence with respect to a bad end, in the way that the world and the flesh tempt us, viz., insofar as the goods of the world or the flesh are proposed for us to desire. And so one says ‘prudence of the flesh’ and even

‘prudence of the world’—this according to Luke 16:8 (“The children of this world are more prudent in their own generation ...”). Moreover, the Apostle is including everything under the name ‘prudence of the flesh’, since we desire even the exterior things of the world because of the flesh.

Still, one could reply that since, as was explained above (q. 47, a. 2), prudence is in some sense called wisdom, it follows that one can discern three sorts of prudence corresponding to the three types of temptation. Hence, James 3:15 says that wisdom is “worldly, animalistic, diabolical”—as was explained above (q. 45, a. 1) when we were talking about wisdom.

Article 2

Is prudence of the flesh a mortal sin?

It seems that prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin:

Objection 1: To rebel against God’s law is a mortal sin, since the Lord is thereby disdained. But, as Romans 8:7 says, “The prudence of the flesh is not subject to God’s law.” Therefore, prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin.

Objection 2: Every sin against the Holy Spirit is a mortal sin. But prudence of the flesh seems to be a sin against the Holy Spirit. For as Romans 8:7 says, it cannot be “subject to God’s law,” and so it seems to be an unforgivable sin—something that is proper to a sin against the Holy Spirit. Therefore, prudence of the flesh is a mortal sin.

Objection 3: As is clear from *Ethics* 8, the greatest evil is opposed to the greatest good. But prudence of the flesh is opposed to prudence, which is the greatest of the moral virtues (*principua inter virtutes morales*). Therefore, prudence of the flesh is the greatest of the moral sins (*principuum inter peccata moralia*). And so it is a mortal sin.

But contrary to this: What diminishes a sin does not in its own right imply the nature of a mortal sin. But to pursue with caution what pertains to the care of the flesh, which seems to belong to prudence of the flesh, diminishes a sin. Therefore, prudence of the flesh does not by its nature involve a mortal sin.

I respond: As was explained above (q. 47, a. 2 and a. 13), there are two ways in which someone is said to be prudent: (a) *absolutely speaking*, viz., in relation to the end of a whole life; and (b) *in a certain respect*, viz., in relation to some particular end—as, for instance, in the way that an individual is called prudent in business affairs or in something of that sort.

Therefore, if ‘prudence of the flesh’ is taken in accord with the absolute notion of prudence, so that the ultimate end of the whole of one’s life is placed in the care of the flesh, then this is a mortal sin, since through it a man turns away from God. For as was established above (*ST* 1-2, q. 1, a. 5), it is impossible for there to be more than one ultimate end.

On the other hand, if ‘prudence of the flesh’ is taken in accord with the notion of a particular prudence, then prudence of the flesh is a venial sin. For it sometimes happens that one is fixed upon some pleasure of the flesh without turning away from God through a mortal sin. In such a case, one does not set the end of one’s whole life in the pleasures of the flesh.

By contrast, if one actually relates the care of the flesh to some upright end, as when someone pursues food for the sake of sustaining his body, then this is not called ‘prudence of the flesh’, since in such a case the man is using the care of the flesh as a means to an end.

Reply to objection 1: The Apostle is speaking of prudence of the flesh insofar as one places the end of his whole human life in goods of the flesh. And in this sense it is a mortal sin.

Reply to objection 2: Prudence of the flesh does not involve a sin against the Holy Spirit. For the claim that it cannot be subject to God’s law should not be taken to mean that one who has prudence of

the flesh cannot turn back and submit to God's law; rather, it should be taken to mean that prudence of the flesh cannot itself be subject to God's law. In the same way, injustice cannot be just and heat cannot be cold, even though that which is hot is capable of being cold.

Reply to objection 3: Every sin is opposed to prudence in the same way that prudence participates in every virtue. But this does not mean that every sin opposed to prudence is a very grave sin. Rather, this is true only when the sin is opposed to prudence in some very important matter.

Article 3

Is craftiness a special sin?

It seems that craftiness (*astutia*) is not a special sin:

Objection 1: The words of Sacred Scripture do not induce one to sin. But they do induce one to be crafty—this according to Proverbs 1:4 (“... in order that craftiness might be imparted to the little ones”). Therefore, craftiness is not a sin.

Objection 2: Proverbs 13:16 says, “The crafty man does all things with deliberation.” Therefore, he does all things either for a good end or for a bad end. If for a good end, then this does not seem to be a sin. If for a bad end, then this seems to belong to prudence of the flesh or prudence of the world. Therefore, craftiness is not a special sin distinct from prudence of the flesh.

Objection 3: In *Moralia* 10, commenting on Job 12:4 (“The simplicity of the just man is laughed to scorn”), Gregory says, “The wisdom of this world is to hide one's affections by artifice, to conceal one's meaning by words, to exhibit what is false as true, to present what is true as false.” And later he adds, “This sort of prudence is acquired by the young, it is learned at a price by children.” But what is said here seems to pertain to craftiness. Therefore, craftiness is not distinct from prudence of the flesh or prudence of the world, and so it does not seem to be a special sin.

But contrary to this: 2 Corinthians 4:2 says, “But we renounce the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness or adulterating the word of God.” Therefore, craftiness is a sin.

I respond: Prudence is right reason with respect to things that can be done (*recta ratio agibilium*), just as scientific knowledge (*scientia*) is right reason with respect to things that can be known (*recta ratio scibilium*).

Now there are two ways in which one can sin against this rectitude in speculative matters: (a) by reason's being led to a false conclusion that seems true; and (b) by reason's proceeding from something false that seems to be true to either a true conclusion or a false conclusion.

So, too, there can be a sin against prudence that has a certain similarity to prudence—and this in two ways:

(a) because reason's effort is ordered toward an end that is not genuinely good but appears to be good; and this belongs to prudence of the flesh.

(b) because, in pursuing an end, whether good or bad, one uses insincere and deceptive methods rather than straightforward methods (*utitur non veris viis sed simulatis et apparentibus*); and this belongs to the sin of craftiness. And it is in this latter way that craftiness is a sin that is opposed to prudence but is distinct from prudence of the flesh.

Reply to objection 1: As Augustine says in *Contra Iulianum* 4, just as ‘prudence’ is sometimes taken improperly for something bad, so ‘craftiness’ is sometimes taken for something good—and this because of the similarity of the one to the other. However, as the Philosopher likewise points out in *Ethics* 6, ‘craftiness’ is properly taken for something bad.

Reply to objection 2: Craftiness can deliberate with respect to both good and bad ends, and one must arrive at a good end by straightforward methods and not by deceptive and insincere methods (*falsis*

viis et simulatis). Hence, craftiness is a sin even if it is ordered toward a good end.

Reply to objection 3: Gregory includes under ‘prudence of the world’ everything that can belong to false prudence. Hence, craftiness is also included under ‘prudence of the world’.

Article 4

Is guile a sin that belongs to craftiness?

It seems that guile (*dolus*) is not a sin that belongs to craftiness:

Objection 1: Sin, especially mortal sin, is not found in perfected men. But guile is found in them—this according to 2 Corinthians 12:16 (“Since I am crafty, I caught you by guile”).

Objection 2: Guile seems to belong especially to the tongue—this according to Psalm 5:11 (“They wagged their tongues with much guile (*dolose*)”). But craftiness, like prudence, exists in the very act of reason. Therefore, guile does not belong to craftiness.

Objection 3: Proverbs 12:20 says, “Guile is in the heart of those who think evil thoughts.” But not every evil thought belongs to craftiness. Therefore, guile does not seem to belong to craftiness.

But contrary to this: Craftiness is ordered toward circumlocution (*ad circumveniendum*)—this according to the Apostle in Ephesians 4:14 (“In craftiness, for the circumlocution of error”). Guile is also ordered toward this. Therefore, guile belongs to craftiness.

I respond: As was explained above (a. 3), it belongs to craftiness to adopt methods that are insincere and deceptive and not straightforward, and to do this in the pursuit of some end, whether good or bad. Now there are two possible ways to consider the adoption of these methods:

In one way, we can consider *the very concocting of such methods*, and this belongs properly to *craftiness*, just as concocting upright methods for a due end belongs to prudence.

In the second way, we can consider the adoption of such methods as regards *the execution of the deed*, and in this regard it belongs to *guile*.

And so guile involves some sort of execution of craftiness. And this is the way in which it belongs to craftiness.

Reply to objection 1: Just as craftiness is properly taken for something bad and improperly taken for something good, so too with guile, which is the execution of craftiness.

Reply to objection 2: As is clear from Augustine in *De Doctrina Christiana*, the execution of craftiness aimed at deceiving is primarily and principally accomplished through words, which hold the first place among the signs by which one man signifies something to another. This is why guile is attributed especially to speech.

However, guile can also exist in deeds—this according to Psalm 104:25 (“And they acted with guile against His servants”). Guile also exists in the heart—this according to Ecclesiasticus 19:23 (“His interior is full of guile”). But that has to do with someone concocting modes of guile (*secundum quod aliquis dolos excogitat*)—this according to Psalm 37:13 (“They thought about modes of guile all day long”).

Reply to objection 3: Those who think of something evil to do have to concoct methods to fulfill their goals, and most of the time they think up modes of guile by which they might more easily achieve their goals.

However, it sometimes happens that men do evil openly and by violence, without any craftiness or guile. But since this involves more difficulty, it occurs in fewer instances.

Article 5

Does fraud belong to craftiness?

It seems that fraud (*fraus*) does not belong to craftiness:

Objection 1: It is not laudable that one should allow himself to be deceived, which is what craftiness tends toward. But it is laudable that one should allow himself to be defrauded—this according to 1 Corinthians 6:7 (“Why do you not rather allow yourselves to be defrauded?”). Therefore, fraud does not belong to craftiness.

Objection 2: Fraud seems to involve the illicit taking or receiving of exterior things; for Acts 5:1-2 says, “A man named Ananias, with Saphira his wife, sold a piece of land, and by fraud kept back part of the price of the land.” But to take or retain exterior things illicitly belongs to injustice or to a lack of generosity. Therefore, fraud does not belong to craftiness, which is opposed to prudence.

Objection 3: No one uses craftiness against himself. But the frauds perpetrated by some men are against themselves; for Proverbs 1:18 says of certain men that “they undertake frauds against their own souls.” Therefore, fraud does not belong to craftiness.

But contrary to this: Fraud is ordered toward deception—this according to Job 13:9 (“Shall he be deceived like a man by your frauds?”). And craftiness is ordered toward the same thing. Therefore, fraud belongs to craftiness.

I respond: Just as guile consists in the execution of craftiness, so does fraud as well. They seem to differ in that guile belongs to the execution of craftiness in every case, regardless of whether this execution is done through words or through deeds, whereas fraud belongs more properly to the execution of craftiness insofar as this is done through deeds.

Reply to objection 1: The Apostle is not encouraging the faithful to be deceived in cognition; rather, he is encouraging them to bear patiently the effects of deception when they sustain the harm inflicted upon them by fraud.

Reply to objection 2: The execution of craftiness can be accomplished through some other vice, just as the execution of prudence is accomplished through the virtues. And in this sense nothing prevents fraud from belonging to avarice or to a lack of generosity.

Reply to objection 3: Those who commit fraud do not by their own intention undertake anything contrary to themselves or their souls; instead, by God’s just judgment it happens that what they undertake against others is turned back upon themselves—this according to Psalm 7:16 (“He falls into the pit he has dug”).

Article 6

Is it permissible to have solicitude for temporal things?

It seems that it is permissible to have solicitude for temporal things:

Objection 1: It belongs to one who is in charge of something to be solicitous for the things he is in charge of—this according to Romans 12:8 (“... he who is in charge, with solicitude ...”). But it is by divine ordination that man is in charge of temporal things—this according to Psalm 8:8 (“You have subjected all things under his feet, sheep and oxen ...”). Therefore, man should have solicitude for temporal things.

Objection 2: Each individual is solicitous about the end for the sake of which he acts. But it is permissible for a man to act for the sake of temporal things; hence, in 2 Thessalonians 3:10 the Apostle says, “If someone does not work, he should not eat.” Therefore, it is permissible to be solicitous about

temporal things.

Objection 3: Solicitude about the works of mercy is laudable—this according to 2 Timothy 1:17 (“When he came to Rome, he carefully sought me out”). But solicitude for temporal things sometimes involves the works of mercy, e.g., when someone shows solicitude for the affairs of orphans and of the poor. Therefore, solicitude for temporal things is not impermissible.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 6:31 our Lord says, “Do not be solicitous, saying, ‘What shall we eat or what shall we drink, or how shall we dress?’” But these things especially are necessities (*quae maxime necessaria*).

I respond: Solicitude implies a certain effort applied to attaining something. Now it is clear that greater effort is applied when there is a fear of falling short, and so when one is assured of attaining the thing, then there is less solicitude.

Therefore, there are three possible ways in which solicitude for temporal things can be impermissible:

In one way, *on the part of what we are solicitous about*, viz., if we are seeking after temporal things as an end. Hence, in *De Operis Monachum* Augustine says, “When our Lord says, ‘Do not be solicitous, etc.’, He says this in order that they not pay attention to those things or do for the sake of those things whatever they are commanded to do in the preaching of the Gospel.”

In the second way, solicitude about temporal things can be impermissible *because of the excessive effort that is allotted to procuring temporal things*, for the sake of which a man draws back from the spiritual things that he should be more principally devoted to. And this is why Matthew 13:22 says, “The cares of this world suffocate the word.”

In the third way, *because of excessive fear*, viz., when one fears that if he does what he ought to be doing, he will lack what is necessary for him. Our Lord rules this out in three ways. First, because of the greatness of the benefits that have been divinely bestowed on a man without his solicitude, viz., his body and his soul. Second, because of the assistance by which, without any human work, God aids plants and animals in a way that befits their natures. Third, because of divine providence, due to the ignorance of which the gentiles are mainly solicitous about seeking temporal goods.

And so he concludes that our solicitude should mainly have to do with spiritual goods, hoping that if we do what we ought to be doing, then temporal things will also come to us for our necessities.

Reply to objection 1: Temporal goods are subject to man in order that he might use them for necessities, and not in order that he might place his end in them and be excessively solicitous about them.

Reply to objection 2: The solicitude of someone who acquires bread by corporeal labor is moderate and not excessive. And this is why Jerome says, “Work is to be done and solicitude removed [read: excessive solicitude that disquiets the mind].”

Reply to objection 3: Solicitude for temporal goods within the works of mercy is ordered toward the end of charity. And so it is not an impermissible solicitude unless it is excessive.

Article 7

Should one be solicitous about the future?

It seems that one should be solicitous about the future:

Objection 1: Proverbs 6:6-8 says, “Go to the ant, O sluggard, and consider her ways, and learn wisdom: Although she has no leader or master, she provides food for herself in the summer, and she gathers what she will eat in the fall harvest.” But this is what it is to be solicitous about the future. Therefore, solicitude about future things is praiseworthy.

Objection 2: Solicitude belongs to prudence. But prudence is mainly about future things, since, as

was explained above (q. 49, a. 6), its main part is providence with respect to future things. Therefore, it is virtuous to be solicitous about future things.

Objection 3: If one saves something to preserve it for later, he is being solicitous for the future. But in John 12:6 Christ Himself is said to have had a money bag that Judas kept. And as Acts 4:35 reports, the Apostles likewise saved the proceeds from real estate that had been “placed at their feet.” Therefore, it is permissible to be solicitous about the future.

But contrary to this: In Matthew 6:34 our Lord says, “Do not worry about tomorrow.” But as Jerome says, ‘tomorrow’ is here being used for ‘the future’.

I respond: No deed can be virtuous unless it is adorned with the right circumstances, one of which is the appropriate time—this according to Ecclesiastes 8:6 (“There is a time and opportunity for every business”). This is relevant not only to exterior deeds but also to interior solicitude. For to each time there belongs a proper sort of solicitude; for instance, during the summertime there is solicitude for reaping crops, whereas during the fall there is solicitude for gathering grapes. Therefore, if someone were already in the summertime solicitous about gathering grapes, he would be prematurely occupied to an excessive degree with solicitude for a future time. Hence, it is this sort of solicitude that our Lord proscribes as excessive when He says, “Do not worry about tomorrow.” That is why He adds, “For tomorrow will be solicitous about itself”—that is, it will have its own proper solicitude, which will be distressing enough for the mind. This is what He means when He adds, “The evil of the day is sufficient,” i.e., the distress of solicitude.

Reply to objection 1: The ant has a solicitude that is appropriate for the time, and this is what is being proposed to us for imitation.

Reply to objection 2: What belongs to prudence is an appropriate providence for future things. But there would be a disordered providence or solicitude for future things if one sought temporal things, for which we use the terms ‘past’ and ‘future’, as ends, or if one sought excessive things beyond what is necessary for the present life, or if one were prematurely occupied with solicitude.

Reply to objection 3: As Augustine says in *De Sermone Domini in Monte*, “When we see a servant of God looking ahead lest he lack necessities, we do not judge that he is worrying about tomorrow. For our Lord Himself deigned to possess a money bag by way of example, and in the Acts of the Apostles we read that what was necessary for sustenance was procured for the future because of an imminent famine. Therefore, our Lord does not disapprove of one’s procuring these things according to human custom; rather, what He disapproves of is one’s opposing God because of these things.”

Article 8

Do vices of this sort arise from avarice?

It seems that vices of this sort do not arise from avarice:

Objection 1: As has been explained (q. 53, a. 6), reason suffers the greatest loss of its rectitude from lust. But vices of the sort under discussion are opposed to right reason, viz., to prudence. Therefore, vices of this sort arise mainly from lust—especially given that in *Ethics 7* the Philosopher says, “Venus is full of guile, and her laces are many-colored,” and “One who is incontinent with disordered sentient desire acts with insidious tactics (*ex insidiis agit incontinens concupiscentiae*).”

Objection 2: As has been explained (a. 3), the vices under discussion bear a certain similarity to prudence. But since prudence exists in reason, it is spiritual vices such as pride and vainglory that seem to be closer to it. Therefore, vices of the sort in question seem to arise from pride rather than from avarice.

Objection 3: A man uses insidious tactics not only in snatching away the goods of others, but also

in devising murders—where the former belongs to avarice and latter to anger. But the use of insidious tactics pertains to craftiness, guile, and fraud. Therefore, the vices under discussion arise not only from avarice, but also from anger.

But contrary to this: In *Moralia* 31 Gregory claims that fraud is a child of avarice.

I respond: As has been explained (q. 49, a. 6), prudence of the flesh and craftiness, along with guile and fraud, bear a certain similarity to prudence in the way in which they make use of reason. Now among the other moral virtues the use of reason is most apparent mainly in the case of justice, which exists in the rational appetite. And so the disordered use of reason is especially apparent in the vices that are opposed to justice. But avarice is the vice that is especially opposed to justice. And so the vices under discussion arise especially from avarice.

Reply to objection 1: Because of the vehemence of pleasure and disordered desire, lust totally suppresses reason, so that it does not produce its act. By contrast, in the case of the vices under discussion there is a use of reason, though a disordered use. Hence, the vices in question do not arise directly from lust.

Now when the Philosopher says that Venus is “full of guile,” he says this by way of a certain similitude, viz., insofar as lust seizes a man quickly, in the way that guile does—not through craftiness, but rather through the violent nature of disordered desire and pleasure. This is why he adds that Venus “steals even the wisest man’s intellect.”

Reply to objection 2: To act with insidious tactics seems to belong to a certain sort of faintheartedness (*pusillanimitas*), since, as the Philosopher points out in *Ethics* 4, a magnanimous individual wants to be above-board in all matters. And so since pride has (or feigns) a certain similarity to magnanimity, it follows that vices of the sort in question, which make use of fraud and guile, do not arise directly from pride. This instead pertains to avarice, which seeks its own advantage and places little value on excellence.

Reply to objection 3: Anger involves a sudden movement, and so it acts precipitately and without deliberation; the vices under discussion make use of deliberation, albeit in a disordered way. And the fact that some individuals use insidious tactics for murdering others proceeds not from anger but rather from hatred, since, as the Philosopher points out in *Rhetoric* 2, an angry individual desires to be overt in doing harm.