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978-0-521-02944-5 - Summa Theologiae: Volume 36 - Prudence, (2a2ae. 47-56)

Thomas Gilby O.P.

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The *Summa Theologiae* ranks among the greatest documents of the Christian Church, and is a landmark of medieval western thought. It provides the framework for Catholic studies in systematic theology and for a classical Christian philosophy, and is regularly consulted by scholars of all faiths and none, across a range of academic disciplines. This paperback reissue of the classic Latin/English edition first published by the English Dominicans in the 1960s and 1970s, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, has been undertaken in response to regular requests from readers and librarians around the world for the entire series of 61 volumes to be made available again. The original text is unchanged, except for the correction of a small number of typographical errors.

The original aim of this edition was not narrowly ecclesiastical. It sought to make this treasure of the Christian intellectual heritage available to theologians and philosophers of all backgrounds, including those who, without claiming to be believers themselves, appreciate a religious integrity which embodies hardbitten rationalism and who recognise in Thomas Aquinas a master of that perennial philosophy which forms the bedrock of European civilisation. Because of this the editors worked under specific instructions to bear in mind not only the professional theologian, but also the general reader with an interest in the 'reason' in Christianity. The parallel English and Latin texts can be used successfully by anybody with a basic knowledge of Latin, while the presence of the Latin text has allowed the translators a degree of freedom in adapting their English version for modern readers. Each volume contains a glossary of technical terms and is designed to be complete in itself to serve for private study or as a course text.

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SUMMA
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Latin text and English translation,
Introductions, Notes, Appendices
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IN AN AUDIENCE, 13 December 1963, to a group representing the Dominican Editors and the combined Publishers of the New English *Summa*, His Holiness Pope Paul VI warmly welcomed and encouraged their undertaking. A letter from His Eminence Cardinal Cicognani, Secretary of State, 6 February 1968, expressed the continued interest of the Holy Father in the progress of the work, 'which does honour to the Dominican Order, and the Publishers, and is to be considered without doubt as greatly contributing to the growth and spread of a genuinely Catholic culture', and communicated his particular Apostolic Blessing. The assurance was repeated in a letter, 5 February 1973, from the present Secretary of State, His Eminence Cardinal Villot.

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THE LATIN text is that of the Piana edition, but the Leonine edition has been consulted throughout and a few noted variations have been adopted. The punctuation has been tidied and some passage re-paragraphed for the sake of clearness. The translation matches the original phrase by phrase, yet allows some variation in the rendering of technical phrase, less to avoid dull repetition than to catch the echoes of the discourse.

FOOTNOTES

Those signified by a superior number are usually the references given by St Thomas and tracked down by the Leonine Commission, with the exception of no. 1 to each article which refers to parallel texts in his writings. Those signified alphabetically are editorial references and explanatory remarks.

REFERENCES

Biblical references are to the Vulgate; Patristic references to Migne (PG, Greek Fathers; PL, Latin Fathers). When the English titles are well known, references to the works of St Thomas and Aristotle are in English. Titles of St Thomas's works are abbreviated as follows:

Summa Theologiae, without title. Part, question, article, reply; e.g. 1a. 70, 1 ad 2. 2a2ae. 25, 4.

Summa Contra Gentiles, CG. Book, chapter; e.g. CG 11, 14.

Scriptum in IV Libros Sententiarum, Sent. Book, distinction, question, article, solution, or *quæstiuncula*, reply; e.g. 11 Sent. 15, 1, 1, ii ad 3.

Compendium Theologiae, *Compend. theol.*

Scriptural commentaries (*lecturæ, expositiones reportata*): Job, *In Job*; Psalms, *In Psal.*; Isaiah, *In Isa.*; Jeremiah, *In Jerem.*; St Matthew, *In Matt.*; St John, *In Joann.*; Epistles of St Paul, e.g. *In 1 Cor.* Chapter, verse, *lectio* as required.

Philosophical commentaries: Aristotle, *Peri Hermeneias*, *In Periherm.*; Posterior Analytics, *In Post. Anal.*; Physics, *In Phys.*; *De Cælo et Mundo*, *In de Cæl.*; *De Generatione et Corruptione*, *In de Gen. et Corr.*; *De Anima*, *In de Anima*; Metaphysics, *In Meta.*; Nichomachean Ethics, *In Ethic.*; Politics, *In Pol.* Book, chapter, *lectio* as required, 1, also for references to Dionysius, *De divinis Nominibus*, *In de Div. Nom.* References to Aristotle include the Bekker numbering.

Quæstiones quodlibetæ, *Quodl.*

Fuller titles are given for other works.

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Thomas de Vio, Cardinal Cajetan. His close commentary on the text of the present treatise is printed in the folio edition of the Leonine *Summa*, Vol. 8, Rome, 1895.

Thomas Deman, *La Prudence*. Somme Théologique, 2a2æ. 47-56, 2nd ed. Paris, 1949. An edition which is already a classic; especially valuable for setting the treatise in the history of Aristotelean and Stoic philosophy.

Josef Pieper, *Prudence*, tr. R. & C. Winston, London, New York, 1959.

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1. *The place of the treatise in the Summa.* Written during the author's second professorship at the University of Paris and about two years before his death in 1274, it opens the discussions on the moral virtues in detail which occupy most of the remainder of the *Secunda Secundæ*. Already in the *Prima Secundæ* he had considered the moral virtues in general.¹ There the rôle of right reason in human conduct is stressed, a Platonic escape to an ideal world is refused, and, following the lead of Aristotle, the intelligence is committed, if not altogether easily, to the shifting world of the occasions and opportunities for human virtue and vice. He now turns to an *ex professo* study of the ruling virtue in this field, namely prudence. This is better called practical wisdom if 'prudence' has a mean and grudging ring, or is well translated as 'holy discernment, wit, and decisiveness' in the context of *sacra doctrina*. It is at once a virtue of mind and a virtue of character.² True to his intellectualism, Thomas places it first among the moral virtues, which in practice it binds together.³

2. *The main sources of the treatise.* These fall under two headings, Aristotle and moralists of the Stoic tradition, including patristic authorities.

The *Nichomachean Ethics* as a whole, and in particular Book VI on the virtues of the calculative and deliberative faculty, were not known to the scholastics before the middle of the 13th century. Philip the Chancellor, working from Cicero, Macrobius, and Damascene, had made a rudimentary study of prudence (1230) which was drawn on by Albert the Great in his *Summa de Bono* (1245). About the same time the Latin translation of Robert Grosseteste, *Lincolniensis*, was coming into circulation, to be commented on by Albert by 1252 when Thomas was finishing his studies under him at Cologne. In the 1260's Thomas was at the Papal Court with his friend and fellow-Dominican, the Flemish Hellenist, William of Moerbeke, who was then completing his translation of the Aristotelean corpus. Thomas composed his own commentary on this text of the *Ethics* before 1269, two years or so before he addressed himself to the present systematic exposition of the virtue of prudence. So he was already acquainted with Aristotle's teaching. He was, moreover, in instinctive sympathy with its meaning. Yet he was not himself familiar with Greek, and the Latin text he used, though justly esteemed, did not always convey the literal and historical sense of the original, and, as is to be expected, he

¹1a2æ. 55-67. Vol. 23 of this series, ed. W. D. Hughes

²1a2æ. 57, 4

³1a2æ. 65, 1; 66, 3 & 4

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sometimes read into it more developed implications than Aristotle explicitly intended.

The appeal to Aristotle shades off in the second half of the treatise, on counsel from the Spirit, the qualities inimical to prudence, and the Scriptural commands, where he has recourse to the teaching of the Fathers, principally Gregory. Stemming from the ethical philosophy of the Latin Stoics (though the Greek, Chrysippus, d. 207 B.C., is the underlying though unacknowledged authority) as found in Cicero, Seneca, and Macrobius, and not unaffected by Plotinus and the Pseudo-Andronicus, the school of Christian asceticism and monasticism stressed the need of being *kriiikos*, of discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart,⁴ and of exercising the Pauline *diakrisis*, Vulgate *discretio*, the ability and training to distinguish between spirits, and between good and evil.⁵ The note of discretion or discrimination was sounded by John Cassian (d. 435), by Benedict (d. 546), the father of Western monasticism, and was continued by Richard of St Victor (d. 1173). It was not diminished by the growth of interest in the Sapiential Books of the Bible during the 13th century.

The literature did more than transpose the lessons of Stoic reasonableness into a Christian setting. It issued from devout meditation on the Scriptures and on the documents of the Church joined to practical experience of the following of Christ. Accordingly it was strictly theological. Likewise the present treatise does more than insert Aristotle's moral philosophy into a Christian frame of reference. Without surrender of its proper evidences moral philosophy is lifted into moral theology, rather as without diminution of its proper qualities animal is taken into rational within the unity of the human organism, or as the natural moral virtues are charged with the moral virtues shed on us by grace.⁶ The prudence of the *Summa* is not just that of the *Ethics*; it is the practical good sense, not merely of citizens of the State, but of fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God.⁷ While the five intellectual virtues according to Aristotle, namely wisdom, understanding, scientific knowledge, prudence, and art, are discussed,⁸ it is as gifts of the Spirit that the first three are treated,⁹ and is by the gift of Counsel that the virtue of prudence is held to be most completely supported and fulfilled, *maxime perficitur et iuvatur*.¹⁰ The activity of the gifts is not confined to the objects and procedures of ethical conduct.

3. *The shape of the treatise.* This follows the model of the treatises on faith and hope, where the Questions on the corresponding gifts of the Spirit are

⁴Hebrews 4, 12⁶1a2ae. 63, 4⁹2a2ae. 8; 9; 45⁵1 Corinthians 12, 10. Hebrews 5, 14⁷Ephesians 2, 19¹⁰2a2ae. 52, 2⁸1a2ae. 57, 2-4

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brought forward to a position immediately after the positive expositions of what the virtues are, and not deferred, as in the treatises on charity, justice, and fortitude, until after the opposing vices have been discussed. The significance of this order should not be overloaded, nevertheless the fact that the variableness of its object does communicate some abstract insecurity to prudence,¹¹ which may be compared to the insecurity in the darkness of faith¹² and to the want in not yet fulfilled hope,¹³ so that these virtues especially call for assurance by an instinct of the Spirit.

The treatise falls into two parts, a study, first, of the virtue and of its associated gift of Counsel,¹⁴ and, next, of its opposed vices, to which is appended a Question on the relevant divine commandments.¹⁵

It starts by determining its specific psychological location and its specific function of executive command following choice:¹⁶ the grid of reference here is supplied in the discussions on the distinction of human powers or abilities¹⁷ and on the analysis of the partial acts which combine to form a complete human act.¹⁸ Then, confronted with the somewhat untidy field of prudence as described by received authorities, it sets about bringing order by applying distinctions about parts in a whole already drawn in another context:¹⁹ this extension by analogy to a cardinal virtue is an original and useful methodic contribution to moral science.²⁰ The qualities composing prudence can be considered as components, thus many of its characteristics noted by Stoics and Aristoteleans,²¹ or as species of the genus, thus the accepted types of prudence,²² or as closely allied virtues, thus well-advisedness and sound practical judgment, even on cases out of the ordinary run of things.²³ This positive section concludes with the associated Gift of the Spirit, which complements the activity of the virtue of prudence. It transcends the limits of rational deliberation, and to that extent goes beyond ethical and ascetical discipline and reaches to contemplation and mysticism.²⁴

The negative section takes the vices contrary to prudence, whether by defect²⁵ or excess.²⁶ It ends by relating the virtue to the precepts of the Law, which, as is somewhat curtly noted, deals rather with matters of justice.²⁷ We shall draw some inferences from this later.²⁸

¹¹2a2ae. 47, 4 & 5¹²2a2ae. 4, 5 & 8¹³2a2ae. 17, 1 ad 3¹⁴2a2ae. 47-52¹⁵2a2ae. 53-56¹⁶2a2ae. 47, 2 & 8¹⁷1a. 77-83, particularly 79, 11-13. Vol. 11, ed. T. Suttor¹⁸1a2ae. 8-17, particularly 16-17. Vol. 17, ed. T. Gilby¹⁹1a. 76, 8²⁰2a2ae. 48²¹2a2ae. 49²²2a2ae. 50²³2a2ae. 51²⁴2a2ae. 52. cf. 1a2ae. 68-70. Vol. 24, ed. E. O'Connor²⁵2a2ae. 53, 54²⁶2a2ae. 55²⁷2a2ae. 56²⁸Appendices 1 & 2

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4. *The spirit of the treatise.* It belongs to a spacious *Summa* for theologians, not a practical handbook for spiritual plumbers, and is not burdened by the anxieties of later moralists when addressing themselves to the right adaptation of human conduct amid the uncertainties and vicissitudes of life. To say that it displays a Viennese temper, that things are too serious to be taken solemnly, would be going too far, perhaps, yet it never countenances the view that God's friendship all depends on our own grave and earnest efforts. Carelessness is not commended, indeed is severely condemned,²⁹ nevertheless the discourse is relatively carefree compared with most works of spiritual training and edification. It is unembarrassed by the imbroglios of the casuists: we shall return to the point later.³⁰ Historically the devotional culture is pre-Tridentine; philosophically it is backed by an eudemonism which refuses to accept the antitheses of ethical formalism, of law and freedom, and of obligation and happiness;³¹ theologically by the doctrine of efficacious grace and of human 'abandon' in charity to the will of God.³² Some attack the naturalism of a Christian theology acknowledging the place of our psychological processes *within* the life of friendship with God: if that be to breathe a Pelagian climate, Thomas could equably endure the charge, for the conclusions he draws are not even Semi-Pelagian.

²⁹2a2ae. 54, 3³⁰Appendices 1-4 below³¹Vol. 18, ed. T. Gilby, Appendices 4, 8-10³² cf Vol. 30, ed. C. Ernst