

Aquinas's 'Integral Parts of Prudence' as a Resource for Human Formation

John D. Love

Abstract

Aquinas's articulation of the eight 'integral parts' of prudence can serve as a manageable, practical focus for ongoing human development. Although Aquinas holds that there is an infused Prudence, this does not render acquired prudence redundant, because (1) God moves things in ways that befit their natures, and it is our nature to have dominion over our actions; (2) human beings have free will, characteristically exercised in *electio*, choice of means; (3) grace perfects nature; (4) some scholars have defended the complementarity of the acquired and infused virtues, and there is widespread agreement that the psychological structures needed by acquired virtue persist in the life of graced virtue.

The 'integral parts' of a Cardinal Virtue must concur for its perfect acts. Aquinas examines them in detail, and offers methods of building 'memory' through human effort; he leaves to our diligence the discernment of how to build other parts of prudence. He explains how the parts are deployed in the acts of deliberation, judgment and command.

Aquinas's consideration of the vices opposed to prudence and its parts enables him to warn us about what impedes prudence, and to help us distinguish false from legitimate concerns for bodily goods, superfluous from proportionate solicitude, etc.

Keywords

Aquinas, prudence, memory, deliberation, solicitude, formation

Introduction

For the past ten years with my students at Mount St Mary's Seminary in Maryland, we have read every article of every question in the *Secunda pars* of Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*. We have found this intense educational experience to be holistically formative, in each of the areas of formation identified by *Pastores Dabo Vobis*: the human,

intellectual, spiritual, and pastoral dimensions. One year, there was a very intelligent Deacon taking my II-II course in his last year of seminary. He marveled at the 'integral parts of Prudence', that is, the 'components' that make Prudence possible, and lamented that he had not seen this elucidation until his last months in seminary. He remarked that after losing a little weight and learning to keep a regular schedule, he had found it difficult to identify specific goals in 'human formation'. Aquinas's articulation of the eight 'components' of Prudential decision-making, and the vices that oppose them gave him a realistic and manageable agenda to identify and improve skills that he needed almost constantly in everyday life.

The foundational question for the value of the Integral Parts of Prudence for ongoing human formation is: whether, according to Aquinas, human effort can contribute anything to 'good human action' once a person has received infused Prudence with sanctifying grace? Answering this question requires some attention to Thomas's account of 1) Divine governance through primary and secondary causality, 2) the fact of human free-will, and 3) the collaborative relationship between God's grace and created rational natures. Based on these principles, it is clear that Aquinas affirms a contribution from human effort to good action in the state of grace. Given this pivotal point, investigation of the Integral Parts of Prudence (i.e. the 'necessary components' of the virtue's operation), and the vices opposed to Prudence, will yield specific focal points for ongoing formation.

Antecedent Principles, 1: Divine Government; Primary and Secondary Causality

According to Aquinas, God made the world, and guides it to its end, which is the universal good, that is, God himself.¹ In the execution of his providential plan, however, Aquinas maintains that God 'makes some of the things that he governs to be causes of others in government'.² He specifies that 'Some things, according to their nature, act of themselves, having dominion over their actions.' These agents who act 'freely' are moved interiorly by God, the 'Prime Mover', the 'principle of motion', because he is 'perfect act, without potency'.³ According to Aquinas, God also 'induces these free agents through precepts, prohibitions, rewards, and punishments to do good and avoid evil.'⁴ On the other hand, 'Creatures without

¹ I q. 103, aa. 1-3.

² I q. 103, a. 6.

³ I q. 2, a. 3; I-II q. 6, a.1 ad 3.

⁴ I q. 103, a. 5 ad 2.

rationality which do not act but are acted upon are not thus governed by God.'⁵

Thomas explains in the third reply of this Article that a rational creature 'governs itself by its intellect and will, [but] both of these must be perfected by the Divine intellect and will.'⁶ In a Question regarding the motion of the will, Thomas specifies that 'God move's a human being's will as the Universal Mover to the universal object of the will, which is good. Without this universal motion, a person cannot will anything. But human beings determine themselves by their reason to will this or that, which is true or apparent good. Nevertheless, sometimes God moves someone specially to the willing of something determinate, which is good, as in the case of those whom he moves by grace.'⁷

It seems to me that here there is an apparent tension in Aquinas's account of God's providential governance of the world. On the one hand, all motion must originate with the Prime Mover, who as 'pure act', is the only possible origin of motion. On the other hand, he affirms that 'human beings determine themselves'. Citing Pseudo-Dionysius, Aquinas explains that 'God does not destroy, but instead preserves the nature of things,'⁸ that is 'He moves things in a way that is fitting to the nature of that thing.'⁹ 'Since the will is not determinate to one thing, but has the possibility of moving to many things, God moves it so that its movement remains contingent and not necessary, except in those things to which it is moved naturally.'¹⁰ In other words, all motion does originate with God, but he moves creatures that are free such that they remain free, or 'self-determinative', even though he is moving them.

Antecedent Principles, 2: The Reality of Human Freedom

Aquinas steadfastly maintains the fact of human freedom. As mentioned above, this type of agency, under which the actor is a true (but not exclusive) source of their action, results from our rational nature. Through the human intellect, a person 'forms a judgment in the case of particular actions, which are not determined to one conclusion, but may follow opposite courses.'¹¹ Aquinas maintains this 'ability to follow one's own judgment' to a seemingly extreme point when

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ I q. 103, a. 5 ad 2.

⁷ I-II q. 9, a. 6 ad 3.

⁸ Pseudo-Dionysius, *Divine Names* iv, cited in I-II q. 10, a. 4.

⁹ I-II q. 10, a. 4 ad 1.

¹⁰ I-II q. 10, a. 4.

¹¹ I q. 83, a. 1.

he allows that, when we are offered 'an object which is universally good and [good] from every point of view [i.e., God himself],' it is possible that we may decline to 'will anything at all'.¹² Nevertheless, Aquinas affirms that if the will moves in response to the Divine Good, then it inclines towards that good necessarily, since it cannot will its opposite.¹³ The primordial sin of the Devil illustrates the rational creature's capacity to select alternatives, even without the prior influence of sin. Aquinas explains that, in a 'sin of pride', that is, 'an overestimation of his own excellence', the Devil chose, 'Either to have only that happiness which he could attain by his power [i.e. go only as far as his power could take him], or to attain by his power alone the likeness to God that is bestowed by grace [i.e., attain supernatural participation in God's life through his natural power].'¹⁴

Aquinas affirms that the 'one, last, ultimate good' that all human beings pursue necessarily is 'complete, perfect human fulfillment'.¹⁵ He observes, however, that people seek this happiness through the attainment of many different 'goods'. He registers common 'options' in which people seek happiness through the eight articles of I-II q. 2, namely: riches, honors, fame and glory, power, bodily endowments, sexual pleasure, endowments of the soul, and God. Unlike creaturely, limited goods, God, who is infinite Truth and infinite Goodness itself, can actually satisfy the 'restless heart' of our spiritual intellect and will, by which we desire infinite truth, and infinite goodness, respectively. Thus, in order for human freedom to contribute to human fulfillment, rather than function destructively, it must move towards the only good that can perfectly fulfill human beings, that is, God.¹⁶ St John Paul the Great affirms this truth in his encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, contrasting 'genuine', 'mature', or 'true' freedom that seeks God and cooperates with him, against 'absolute', or 'unlimited' freedom, which is 'the death of true freedom'.¹⁷ Pinckaers referred to these 'kinds' of freedom as 'freedom for excellence', and 'freedom of indifference', respectively.¹⁸ Fr Richard Conrad, OP, insightfully claims that the 'human friendship with God' that is the Virtue of Charity for Thomas, illuminates the true purpose of human freedom in the plan of God.¹⁹

¹² I-II q. 10, a. 2.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ I q. 63, a. 3

¹⁵ I-II q. 1, a. 7; q. 5, a. 8.

¹⁶ I-II q. 1, a. 8; q. 2, a. 8; q. 3, aa. 1, 8; q. 5, a. 8.

¹⁷ John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, Encyclical Letter, 1993, 31-50.

¹⁸ Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *Sources of Christian Ethics*, Trans. by Mary Noble (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1995), pp. 327-399.

¹⁹ Fr. Richard Conrad, O.P., "Human Practice and God's Making-Good in Aquinas' Virtue Ethics," in David Carr, James Arthur, and Kristjan Kristjansson, eds., *Varieties of Virtue Ethics* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), pp. 168-172.

The primary example in which we see freedom's characteristic 'selection among options' is the 'choice of "the means to the end"' (or '*electio*'), which is a 'useful good'.²⁰ Because '*electio*' tends toward a 'good', Aquinas identifies it as an act of the will, but one united to the intellect's 'judgment regarding the means to the end', as matter (the will's '*electio*') is united to its form (the intellect's 'judgment').²¹ Aquinas reaffirms the fact of human freedom consistently throughout his moral theology,²² while at the same time maintaining God as the 'source of all motion', or Primary Cause.²³ Thomas sustains the harmony between God's design for reality and his action in history, when he addresses the advent of supernatural grace into creation.

Antecedent Principles, 3: 'Grace Perfects Nature'

Aquinas famously affirms in the first Question of the *Summa Theologiae*, that even when God gives supernatural grace, 'it does not destroy, but rather, perfects nature.'²⁴ Writing about infused *habitus* (that is, a 'mindful' disposition that makes its possessor to 'be a certain kind of person'), Aquinas affirms that God 'works in all according to their mode, and does nothing contrary to that which is suitable to nature, but this does not hinder God from doing what nature cannot do.'²⁵ In Thomas's explanation of the Isaian Gifts of the Holy Spirit, which 'perfect the operations of even the Theological Virtues, moving us sufficiently to our supernatural end,'²⁶ Aquinas clarifies that, 'Human beings are acted upon by the Holy Spirit such that the human beings also act themselves, insofar as they have a free-will.'²⁷

Antecedent Principles, 4: Debates about Acquired and Infused Virtue in Aquinas's Thought

For the purpose of this investigation of the usefulness of Aquinas's articulation of the Integral Parts of Prudence, it is important to understand his theory about the nature and function of acquired and infused virtue in the Christian moral life. The interlocutors in the

²⁰ I q. 83, a. 3.

²¹ I q. 83, a. 3 ad 2; I-II q. 13, a. 1.

²² cf. I-II q. 6, a. 1, establishing the 'voluntariness' of human acts.

²³ I-II q. 6, a. 1 ad 3.

²⁴ I q. 1, a. 8 ad 2.

²⁵ I-II q. 51, a. 4 ad 2.

²⁶ I-II q. 68, a. 2.

²⁷ I-II q. 68, a. 3 ad 2.

scholarly debate about the relationship between acquired and infused virtue in Aquinas's moral theology substantially agree on the antecedent principles of Christian moral life mentioned above: Divine government through primary and secondary causality, the reality of human freedom, and the idea that 'grace perfects nature'. Scholars disagree, however, about the application of these foundational principles regarding virtue and virtuous action, especially under the *habitus* of sanctifying grace, based on divergent interpretations of Thomistic texts.

Aquinas uses a definition of 'virtue' from Augustine, found in I-II q. 55, a. 4 obj. 1: Any virtue, whether acquired (by human effort) or infused (by God as a gift), is 'a good quality of mind, by which we live righteously, of which no one can make bad use,' and infused virtue, specifically, includes the additional phrase: 'that God works in us without us.' Thomas clarifies in the sixth reply to this article that: 'Infused virtue is caused in us by God without any action on our part, but not without our consent. This is the sense of the words, "which God works in us without us." As to those things which are done by us, God causes them in us, yet not without action on our part, for he works in every will and in every nature.'²⁸

Virtues that are caused in us only by God's operation, or gift,²⁹ that is, through sanctifying grace and the Theological Virtue of Charity,³⁰ direct us immediately to 'the good as defined by the Divine Law'. These are the 'infused virtues' that we receive from God with sanctifying grace. On the other hand, 'acquired virtues' are caused in us by repeated human acts, that is, 'through habituation', but these virtues operate according to human reason, which depends on God's Eternal Law for its goodness and right direction for action.³¹ Aquinas explains in I-II q. 63, a. 4, that acquired virtue and infused virtues are not of the same species. This is true because virtues derive their species from the formal aspect of their objects (the good to which they are directed), and the rule according to which a virtue guides a person who has it.³²

Bill Mattison argues that acquired cardinal virtues, because of their teleology in human nature, cannot exist in Christians living under grace, with its supernatural end and measure.³³ Angela McKay

²⁸ I-II q. 55, a. 4 ad 6, *Ad sextum dicendum quod virtus infusa causatur in nobis a Deo sine nobis agentibus, non tamen sine nobis consentientibus. Et sic est intelligendum quod dicitur, quam Deus in nobis sine nobis operatur. Quae vero per nos aguntur, Deus in nobis causat non sine nobis agentibus, ipse enim operatur in omni voluntate et natura.*

²⁹ I-II q. 63, a. 2.

³⁰ cf. II-II q. 47, a. 14.

³¹ I-II q. 63, a. 2; cf. I-II q. 19, a. 4.

³² I-II q. 63, aa. 2-4; a. 4 ad 1.

³³ Bill Mattison, III, 'Can Christians Possess the Acquired Cardinal Virtues?' *Theological Studies* 72 (2011), pp. 558-585.

Knobel argues to the contrary, that infused Prudence only directs decisions that regard 'that which is necessary for salvation', and thus we need acquired Prudence for all other decisions.³⁴ Tom Osborne shares McKay Knobel's view that Christians have acquired moral virtues, but pushes back on her critiques of him, clarifying that he thinks that there can be no 'perfect moral virtue' without grace.³⁵ With yet another interpretation, Fr. Richard Conrad, OP, argues against Mattison's reading of Aquinas, claiming a complementarity between infused and acquired moral virtues.

Conrad grounds this complementarity on the difference between the ways in which, according to Aquinas, infused and acquired virtues are established and destroyed in the human person. Infused virtues are given as perfect gifts all at once, flowing out of sanctifying grace (i.e. *gratia gratum faciens*), while acquired virtues are established in us by repeated action and study.³⁶ On the other hand, infused virtues are removed from us when we reject and lose sanctifying grace through a mortal sin, but, according to Aquinas, acquired virtues are not removed by a single action.³⁷ Given these features of infused and acquired virtues, Conrad argues that before we have formed acquired moral virtues, the infused virtues direct us well, and if we lose the infused virtues through mortal sin, the acquired virtues offer us a way forward.³⁸

There are numerous statements from Aquinas that demonstrate the fact that, in his view, human effort remains necessary under grace. Jean-Pierre Torrell writes, 'The gift of grace always calls for human collaboration.'³⁹ With incisive clarity, Thomas identifies the problem or incongruity in the 'sin of presumption that is against Hope' as 'holding that there can be pardon without repentance, or glory without merits.'⁴⁰ Looking farther into II-II, where Aquinas investigates the Isaian Gift of Counsel, which he connects to the virtue of Prudence, he claims, 'God moves everything according to its mode, and so rational creatures are moved according to the research of reason, and this is Counsel.'⁴¹ He clarifies the interaction of God's motion and human free-will in the third reply of the same article, 'God moves

³⁴ Angela McKay Knobel, 'Prudence and Acquired Moral Virtue', *The Thomist* 69 (2005), pp. 535-555.

³⁵ Tom Osborne, Jr., 'Perfect and Imperfect Virtue in Aquinas', *The Thomist* 71 (2007), pp. 39-64.

³⁶ I-II q. 55, a. 4; q. 63, aa. 2-3; q. 110, a. 3.

³⁷ I-II q. 65, a. 2 ad 2; cf. I-II q. 49, a. 3.

³⁸ Richard Conrad, O.P., 'Human Practice and God's Making-Good', pp. 163-179.

³⁹ Jean-Pierre Torrell, O.P., *St. Thomas Aquinas*, Volume 2, *Spiritual Master*, Trans. by Benedict Guevin, O.S.B. (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), p. 274.

⁴⁰ II-II q. 21, a. 1.

⁴¹ II-II q. 52, a. 1.

human beings according to their mode, that is without prejudice to their free-will, and thus the Holy Spirit counsels us about what we have to do.'⁴²

Despite these and other arguments about acquired and infused virtue in Aquinas's moral theology, it seems that every participant in this conversation agrees with this statement that Mattison quoted from John Inglis, 'The requisite psychological structures of acquired virtue persist in the life of graced virtue.'⁴³ Aquinas's definition of the 'integral parts' of a cardinal virtue supplies specific content to this common principle.

I. The 'Integral Parts' of Prudence

At the beginning of his study of the Cardinal virtues in II-II, Thomas explains that each one has three types of 'parts': Subjective, Potential, and Integral Parts. The 'integral parts' of a cardinal virtue are '[Those things which] must concur for the perfect act of the virtue.'⁴⁴ In other words, the 'integral parts' are the necessary components without which a Cardinal virtue, like Prudence, cannot function properly. Aquinas explains the eight integral parts of Prudence in II-II q. 49.

He begins in Article 1 with 'memory'. Setting the stage, he explains that Prudence is about contingent matters of action, in which we are guided, not by 'things that are simply and necessarily true', but by 'things which are true in the majority of cases.' In order to discover the latter, we need 'experience and time, because this is how intellectual virtue is gained' (quoting Aristotle, *Ethics* ii, 1). We have access to 'experience' through many memories, and so 'memory' is a part of Prudence.⁴⁵

With this integral part, Aquinas offers both its definition, and methods of building memory through human effort. In the second reply, he states, 'Prudence is gained through practice or grace, and memory is gained through art and diligence (*industriae*),' for example:

1. Through the formation of 'suitable but somewhat unwonted images.' Their being 'unwonted' makes them more memorable to us, and images are helpful to us because the human mind has a better hold of sensible realities than simple, spiritual ones.

⁴² II-II q. 52, a. 1 ad 3.

⁴³ Mattison, 'Acquired Cardinal Virtues?' p. 570. Cf. John Inglis, 'Aquinas's Replication of the Acquired Moral Virtues: Rethinking the Standard Philosophical Interpretation of Moral Virtue in Aquinas', *Journal of Religious Ethics* 27 (1999), p. 22, cited in Mattison, p. 577.

⁴⁴ II-II q. 48.

⁴⁵ II-II q. 49, a. 1.

2. Consider and put things in order, so that we may pass from one thing to another (e.g., a particular place can spur the memory of a particular thing)
3. Be 'anxious and earnest' about what we want to remember, keeping it 'at hand'.
4. Repetition⁴⁶

Aquinas does not offer practical strategies for building up the other integral parts of Prudence. Given the emphasis medieval people put on committing things to memory, it is perhaps not surprising that Aquinas has instructions for this component of prudential decision-making.

Aquinas calls the second integral part, 'understanding' or 'insight'. He writes that Prudence, as a determination of reason with regard to some particular action, "has its source in the intellectual virtue of 'understanding', which is 'the right estimate of some final principle'.⁴⁷

Thomas clarifies in the first reply, however, that the integral part of Prudence called 'understanding' or 'insight', is instead, 'a right estimate of some particular end ... a singular and contingent practical matter ... which is the "minor premise" of the syllogism of Prudence.'⁴⁸ In the second reply, Thomas distinguishes this part of Prudence from the Isaian Gift of Understanding, which he had assigned to Faith in II-II q. 8. That Gift confers 'a quick insight into Divine things,' which is not an integral part of Prudence.⁴⁹

Aquinas explains that the third integral part, 'Docility', relates to learning from others. 'Particular matters of action' are infinite in variety, and therefore Aquinas holds that people should, according to Docility, 'allow themselves to be taught, particularly by the aged, wise, and prudent people around us. Not just from their demonstrations (logical arguments), but from their "undemonstrated" experience.'⁵⁰ He adds in his second reply that natural aptitude makes people docile, but our own efforts count much towards the development of Docility. Therefore, we should carefully, frequently, reverently apply our minds to the teachings of the learned, neither neglecting them through laziness, nor despising them through pride.⁵¹ Finally, he claims that everyone should be docile to the teaching of others because no one is self-sufficient in matters of Prudence.⁵²

⁴⁶ II-II q. 49, a. 1 ad 2.

⁴⁷ II-II q. 49, a. 2.

⁴⁸ II-II q. 49, a. 2 ad 1.

⁴⁹ II-II q. 49, a. 2 ad 3.

⁵⁰ II-II q. 49, a. 3.

⁵¹ II-II q. 49, a. 3 ad 2.

⁵² II-II q. 49, a. 3 ad 3.

The fourth Integral Part is 'Shrewdness' (*solertia*). Where Docility enables us to be taught by others, Shrewdness equips us to discover something for ourselves. It is 'A happy conjecture about any matter' (*eustochia*), or 'an easy and rapid conjecture in finding the middle term.'⁵³ A 'conjecture' here means any 'conjecture of the truth',⁵⁴ which can be important, for example, when quick action is required.⁵⁵

Next, we find 'Reasoning'. Aquinas explains that 'taking counsel' or 'deliberation' requires moving from one point to another, and this is 'reasoning'.⁵⁶ It is discursive (point to point),⁵⁷ and applies universals to particular matters.⁵⁸

The sixth Integral Part is called 'foresight' or 'farsightedness', from the Latin *Providentia*. Reiterating the foundations, Aquinas states that Prudence is about ordering the means to the end. The things under 'human providence' are the contingent matters of an action that can be done by a human being for an end. These 'contingent matters' are future contingents because both the past and the present are fixed. Thus, '*providentia*', 'farsightedness', is a part of Prudence.⁵⁹ Farsightedness is about 'the right order to the end', and so it requires good counsel, decision/judgment, and command.⁶⁰ Aquinas claims that Farsightedness is the primary (Integral) part of Prudence because whatever else is necessary for Prudence is necessary precisely as it contributes to 'the right direction of some particular thing towards its end.'⁶¹

Aquinas lists 'circumspection' as the seventh Integral Part of Prudence. He recalls that good action requires both good ends and good means. Means that are 'good in themselves' may be corrupted by the circumstances that surround them. In Circumspection, we consider and direct the circumstances of an action.⁶² By contrast, Farsightedness considers the means to the end. The means and the circumstances each present their own difficulty, and so these two parts of Prudence are distinct.⁶³

Aquinas names the eighth and final Integral Part, 'caution'. Caution is avoiding evil while performing good actions. 'In contingent matters of action, the false is found with the true and evil is mingled with the good, such that the good is often hindered by evil and evil has the

⁵³ II-II q. 49, a. 4.

⁵⁴ II-II q. 49, a. 4 ad 3.

⁵⁵ II-II q. 49, a. 4 ad 2.

⁵⁶ II-II q. 49, a. 5.

⁵⁷ II-II q. 49, a. 5 ad 3.

⁵⁸ II-II q. 49, a. 5 ad 2.

⁵⁹ II-II q. 49, a. 6.

⁶⁰ II-II q. 49, a. 6 ad 3.

⁶¹ II-II q. 49, a. 6 ad 1.

⁶² II-II q. 49, a. 7.

⁶³ II-II q. 49, a. 7 ad 3.

appearance of good.' Caution gives us 'such a grasp on good that we avoid evil.'⁶⁴ Aquinas identifies a limitation on our ability to avoid evil through Caution in his third reply.

He explains that human reason can grasp evils that are of frequent occurrence, and Caution guards against these so that we avoid them altogether or reduce the harm that they inflict. Evils that occur rarely, or by chance, are infinite in number and so reason cannot grasp them. Thus, no precaution can be taken against them, but exercising Prudence can reduce the harm that the surprises of chance inflict.⁶⁵

Having elucidated Aquinas's individual definitions of the eight integral parts of Prudence, we should consider how they contribute to the operation of Prudence in the three acts of the intellect that regard the means to the end, namely, *consilium* ('counsel' or 'deliberation'), *iudicium* ('judgment' or 'decision') and *imperium* ('command').

Correspondence to the Acts Guided by Prudence

For Aquinas, *Consilium*, or 'Deliberation', is 'consideration of possible means, in a perplexing case.'⁶⁶ Minute matters, or those 'which have a fixed way of being done' (e.g. forming letters when writing) do not invoke 'deliberation'.⁶⁷ It seems that this action requires the operation of all eight integral parts according to their particular roles.

Iudicium, or 'Judgment', as a step in rational, 'human' action is selection of a particular means to the intended end.⁶⁸ For Aquinas, 'judgment' in the intellect is united in a single act with 'election' in the will as form to its matter.⁶⁹ The previous step of 'deliberation' has made the preparations and presented the possible options for the definitive moment of judgment-election, and thus, at this stage, Farsightedness orders those preparations towards accomplishing the intended end through the means that have been deliberated.⁷⁰

For Aquinas, *Imperium*, or 'Command', refers to 'execution of the "selected means" to the intended end'.⁷¹ As with 'judgment', Aquinas unites 'command' in the intellect to 'active use' in the will, again, as form and matter of a single act.⁷² Based on the previous judgment,

⁶⁴ II-II q. 49, a. 8.

⁶⁵ II-II q. 49, a. 8 ad 3.

⁶⁶ I-II q. 14, a. 4.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ I-II q. 13, a.1.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ cf. II-II q. 49, a. 6.

⁷¹ I-II q. 17, a. 1.

⁷² I-II q. 17, a. 3 ad 3, a 4.

execution of the action seems to rely particularly on three integral parts: Farsightedness (ordering to the end), Circumspection (considering circumstances), and Caution (avoiding foreseeable evil). In the progression from the 'decision' (judgment-election) about 'what to do' to the 'execution' (command-active use) of that decision, a person could encounter circumstances or obstacles that complicate this enactment. Thus, in addition to Farsightedness, ordering things to their ends, there could be need for Circumspection and Caution at this point.⁷³

At an earlier stage in his explanation of the parts of Prudence, Aquinas also organizes several of the Integral Parts according to their relationship to knowledge. He connects Prudence's Integral Parts to acts that comprise knowledge as follows⁷⁴:

1. 'Acquiring Knowledge'
 - a. Docility
 - b. Shrewdness
2. 'Knowing'
 - a. Memory
 - b. Particular Understanding, i.e., Insight
3. 'The Use of Knowledge'
 - a. Reasoning
4. 'The act of Command' (i.e., the 'use of knowledge' that puts it into action)
 - a. Farsightedness
 - b. Circumspection
 - c. Caution

Vices Opposed to Prudence, Illuminating the Integral Parts

Aquinas invariably enriches his explanation of virtues and their parts when he considers the vices that oppose them. With that in mind, we now turn to the vices opposed to Prudence, with the purpose of illuminating further Prudence's integral parts.

Aquinas first examines Imprudence, which opposes Prudence as a deficiency of the virtue. He explains that Imprudence is not simply an absence of Prudence, but either: 1) a 'lack of the Prudence that a person can and ought to have,' or 2) 'opposition to the movement of Prudence,' for example, 'despising counsel' rather than 'taking it'.⁷⁵

⁷³ cf. II-II q. 48, a. 1.

⁷⁴ II-II q. 48, a. 1.

⁷⁵ II-II q. 53, a. 1.

Aquinas affirms, 'The same applies to the other conditions which require consideration in the act of Prudence.'⁷⁶ He adds in the third reply that 'Repentance restores infused Prudence . . . and removes the contrary act, but it does not restore a *habitus* of acquired Prudence (which might have been lost or weakened through sin).'

As if to emphasize the centrality of Prudence in the moral life, Aquinas affirms in the following article that every sinful act includes a defect in an act of the directing reason. Aquinas specifies the following opposition between the specific defects of Imprudence and the Integral Parts of Prudence as follows:

1. 'Hastiness' (*praecipitatio*)
against Memory, Docility, and Reasoning
2. 'Thoughtlessness' (*inconsideratio*)
against Circumspection, and Caution
3. 'Improvvidence'
against Particular Understanding/Insight
4. 'Inconstancy' and 'Carelessness' (*negligencia*)
against Shrewdness⁷⁷

In the following Question, Aquinas explains that 'Negligence' can be opposed to Farsightedness as well.

In the third Article of Question 53, Thomas explains that the vice of 'hastiness' interrupts the orderly movement of 'taking counsel' from:

1. 'Memory of the past' to
2. 'Understanding of the present' to
3. 'Shrewdness in considering the future outcome' to
4. 'Reasoning which compares one thing with another' to
5. 'Docility in accepting the opinions of others'

'Thoughtlessness' is 'a lack of right judgment (*iudicium*) through contempt or neglect of the things on which a right judgment depends,'⁷⁸ which includes 'those things of which counsel takes cognizance.'⁷⁹

'Inconstancy' is a failure to 'command' what has been 'counseled' and 'judged', rejecting what was rightly accepted before, because

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Cf. II-II q. 54; q. 54, a. 2 ad 3, respectively.

⁷⁸ II-II q. 53, a. 4.

⁷⁹ II-II q. 53, a. 4 ad 2

of the intervention of something that is inordinately pleasing.⁸⁰ In the final Article of this Question, Thomas explains that 'Hastiness', 'Thoughtlessness', and 'Inconstancy' arise above all from delight (*delectatio*), 'and chiefly from sexual pleasure, which absorbs the mind and draws it to sensible delight.'⁸¹ In the first reply, he observes that envy and anger can cause Inconstancy, by drawing the reason away to something else, but lust destroys the judgment of reason entirely. Because of this, as Aristotle observed, "someone who lacks rational control in the face of some good (*incontinens*)⁸² through anger" listens to reason somewhat, but someone who "lacks rational control in the face of some good through lust" does not listen to reason at all.⁸³

'Negligence' is a sin against Shrewdness, also called 'solicitude'.⁸⁴ 'Negligence' opposes the internal act of 'election', which, as noted above, is united in a single act to the intellect's judgment about the means to the end.⁸⁵ Where Inconstancy fails in the act of Command, 'Negligence' fails through lack of a prompt will.⁸⁶ "Idleness" or "Sluggishness" denotes slowness in setting about the execution, and "Laziness" denotes slowness in the execution itself.⁸⁷ Thomas explains that 'Laziness' results from '*acedia*', i.e., spiritual sloth that tires of divine things, and hinders the mind from action.⁸⁸

On the other end of the spectrum, 'false' or 'misdirected' prudence opposes the virtue by a kind of excess. This can take several forms, including 'Prudence of the flesh'. In II-II q. 55, a. 1, Aquinas explains that 'Prudence of the flesh' looks upon bodily goods as the last end of the person's life, which is a sin because bodily goods are not the last end of human beings.⁸⁹ Directing the love of the goods of the body to the good of the soul, however, is not sinful.⁹⁰ Aquinas continues in the following article, stating that pursuing an inordinate affection for a bodily good without turning away from God is a venial sin. Referring the care of the body to a good end, for example being careful about one's food in order to sustain one's body, is not (sinful) 'Prudence of the flesh', but rather 'are of the flesh as a means

⁸⁰ II-II q. 54, a. 5, cf. a. 2 ad 3. The Deferrari Aquinas dictionary defines *inconstans* as 'fickle, changeable, irregular, or variable,' (Deferrari, Barry, McGuinness, 2004, p. 533).

⁸¹ II-II q. 54, a. 6.

⁸² De Ferrari, Barry, McGuinness, 2004, p. 533.

⁸³ Aristotle, *Ethics* vii, 6, cited in II-II q. 54, a. 6 ad 1.

⁸⁴ II-II q. 54, a. 1, cf. II-II q. 47, a. 9.

⁸⁵ II-II q. 54, a. 2, ad 1.

⁸⁶ II-II q. 54, a. 2 ad 3.

⁸⁷ II-II q. 54, a. 2 ad 1.

⁸⁸ cf. II-II q. 35, a. 1, I-II q. 35, a. 8.

⁸⁹ cf. I-II q. 2, a. 5.

⁹⁰ II-II q. 54, a. 1 ad 2.

to a (good) end.'⁹¹ Aquinas devotes the following three articles to different forms of 'Craftiness'.

Aquinas explains that when the purpose of the reason is directed to an 'apparent good', which is not a true good, this is 'Prudence of the flesh'. Using fictitious or counterfeit means to an end, whether good or evil, is the sin of 'craftiness' (*astutia*).⁹² 'Craftiness' is 'the process of thinking out counterfeit and apparently true means to any end,' whereas Prudence is 'thinking out right ways to a good end.'⁹³ 'Guile' (*dolus*) is the actual execution of 'crafty' thinking. Guile is ascribed chiefly to speech, because the execution of craftiness with the purpose of deceiving is effected first and foremost by words.⁹⁴ However, 'guile' can refer to the execution of craftiness whether by words or by deeds, while 'Fraud' or 'Cheating' refers only to the execution of craftiness by deeds.⁹⁵ Thomas takes the next two articles to distinguish rightful 'solicitude'⁹⁶ from 'superfluous solicitude' or 'worry'.

In I-II q. 55, a. 6, Aquinas asks, "Is it lawful to be solicitous about temporal matters?" He answers, that it is unlawful (i.e. sinful) to make temporal matters your last end, and it is sinful to be so earnest about temporal things that you are drawn away from spiritual things which ought to be the principal object of our striving (cf. Mt. 13:22). We may also be solicitous about temporal things through having too much fear that we will lack what we need if we do 'what we ought to do.'⁹⁷ 'Superfluous solicitude' which unsettles the mind must be banished, but 'the solicitude of a person who gains their daily bread by bodily labor is proportionate.'⁹⁸ Furthermore, in the works of Mercy, 'solicitude about temporal things' is directed to Charity as its end, which is not sinful, unless the solicitude is superfluous (i.e. more than is necessary to accomplish the good work, or 'unsettling the mind').

In the following article, regarding 'solicitude about the future', Aquinas explains that 'solicitude' should focus on the task at hand, for example, about the growing of crops in the summer, and about the making of wine in the autumn. It is wrong to focus on and strive for something (i.e. 'have solicitude') before it is time to focus on that thing, just as it is wrong to make temporal things your last end,

⁹¹ II-II q. 55, a. 2.

⁹² II-II q. 55, a. 3.

⁹³ II-II q. 55, a. 4.

⁹⁴ II-II q. 55, a. 4 ad 2.

⁹⁵ II-II q. 55, a. 5.

⁹⁶ cf. II-II q. 47, a. 9.

⁹⁷ II-II q. 55, a. 6 ad 2.

⁹⁸ cf. II-II q. 55, a. 6 ad 3.

seek them in excess of the needs of the present life,⁹⁹ or oppose yourself to God for the sake of these things.¹⁰⁰

In the final article of his Question about the 'vices that have some resemblance to Prudence,' Aquinas considers their source. He concludes that 'Prudence of the flesh', Craftiness, Guile, Fraud, and 'Inappropriate solicitude/worry about temporal and future things' stem from covetousness, which seeks gain secretly, and thoughtfully.¹⁰¹

Conclusion

The following table illustrates the operation of Prudence according to Aquinas, including the correspondence of the Integral Parts of Prudence to the intellectual acts that fall under the direction of Prudence with its subordinate virtues, and the vices that oppose these virtues with respect to each action.

For Aquinas, human effort in collaboration with God remains necessary after receiving the gift of sanctifying grace. Because of this, the Integral Parts, or "components" of Prudence as Aquinas explains them, provide a manageable, practical focus for ongoing human development. In his explanation of the Integral Parts of Prudence, Aquinas identified each of these Integral Parts, and described their roles in Prudential decision-making. But, he only offered concrete strategies for building up one of them, namely Memory. Neither does he offer a detailed account of how to avoid the vices opposed to these parts of Prudence, or how to break down these vices if they have already been acquired. The quick answer to these dilemmas is, in the first case, 'practice the Integral Parts of Prudence under the coordination of the virtue.' In the second case, these vices, like all vices, are combatted through actions that are directly contrary to them (i.e., specific virtuous actions), and the infusion of grace, perhaps through the reception of Sacraments, like Confession, or the Eucharist. A more specific guide or instruction in these areas falls to our diligence, building on the concise wisdom of Aquinas. It seems that this is a fitting tribute to Aquinas, as it is an imitation of his insatiable quest for Truth, in which he was ready to use every resource, even the 'scientific', or perhaps 'profane' thought of Aristotle to understand and explain Christian theology.

⁹⁹ II-II q. 55, a. 7 ad 2.

¹⁰⁰ II-II q. 55, a. 7 ad 3.

¹⁰¹ II-II q. 55, a. 8. Cf. ad 1-3.

The Operation of Prudence According to Aquinas

Prudence properly so called, for directing oneself			
Other species of Prudence		For families	For families
For government officials	For the military	For families	For families
For citizens	For the military	For families	For families
Intellectual acts that employ the integral parts of Prudence	Deliberation	Judgment	Command
Integral parts of Prudence employed	All: Memory Insight Docility Shrewdness Reasoning Farsightedness Circumspection Caution	Farsightedness ordering the considerations that have been deliberated towards the action Virtue of Synthesis for ordinary cases (II-II q. 51, a. 3) Virtue of <i>Gnome</i> for exceptions to the letter of the law (II-II q. 51, a. 4)	Farsightedness Circumspection considering the circumstances Caution avoiding foreseeable evil
Virtues and Gifts directing the acts	Virtue of Thoroughness (II-II q. 51, aa. 1-2) Isaian Gift of Counsel (II-II q. 52)	Thoughtlessness (II-II q. 53)	Inconstancy Sluggishness Laziness (II-II q. 54)
Vices related to imprudence that oppose these acts of virtue	Hastiness opposing Memory, Insight, Shrewdness, Reasoning, Docility (II-II q. 53)	Inappropriate worry about temporal and future things (II-II q. 55, a. 6-7)	Misdirected Prudence (II-II q. 55, aa. 1-2)
Vices related to Misdirected Prudence that oppose these acts of virtue	Craftiness working by Guile and Fraud (II-II q. 55, aa. 3-5)		

John D. Love
 Mount St. Mary's University
 16300 Old Emmitsburg Road
 USA

jlove@msmary.edu