

Aquinas on the Virtue of Prudence



Graduate Reading Course

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Campion Hall

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Tuesdays 9am-10.30am

Course Description

Prudentia, for Thomas Aquinas, is the pre-eminent cardinal virtue. Since the mid-twentieth century, there has been a small but significant stream of authors who see in Aquinas's account of prudence the key to a Christian ethic, an attractive alternative to ethics based on consequentialist or deontological modern moral philosophy or on the legalistic Catholic moral manuals. Prudence is presented by Aquinas as the full development of the capacity of the human person to direct herself to true beatitude.

This reading course will focus on Aquinas's treatment of this virtue, especially in the *Summa Theologiae* IIae-IIa, 47-57 (the 'Treatise on Prudence'), but also examine texts throughout his corpus. Fundamentally, it will ask what a moral theology that is seen as a servant of prudential moral living would look like. To this end, it will seek to address some central questions and themes in the discussion about this virtue that arise from the texts and from contemporary discussion, such as:

- The nature of prudence as a virtue
- The relationship between human prudence and God's practical wisdom
- The relationship between ethics (whether philosophical or theological) and prudence
- The distinction between prudence, art, and the other intellectual virtues
- The relationship between knowledge of general moral principles (*synderesis*) and prudence
- The 'descent into particularity': prudence and knowledge of the particular
- The relationship between prudence and the moral virtues
- Its relationship to the gifts and other virtues, such as wisdom, counsel, charity
- The role of affective knowledge in prudence
- The distinction between infused and acquired prudence

Attention will also be given to hermeneutical questions. In recent years, driven by the recognition that the fullest reading of Aquinas is a theological one, reductively Aristotelian readings have been questioned, and the importance of the theological virtues, infused moral virtues, and gifts, has been accented. At the same time, there have been accusations of 'hyper-Augustinian' readings that fail to give due weight to the role of acquired virtues in Aquinas's virtue theory. What does a balanced and responsible reading of Aquinas on prudence look like?

The reading course will look at both primary and secondary texts. Latin is an advantage but not a pre-requisite.

Teaching and Learning

The course will involve:

- Reading assigned for each class, to be read *beforehand*
- Seminar discussion

A basic proficiency in Latin will be an advantage, but not required. Philosophers and theologians welcome.

Course Outline

Week	Topic	Primary Texts	Secondary Texts
1	Prudence itself	Ia-IIae, Q.47; Ia-IIae, Q.56, A.3;	Wood
2	Human prudence and God's practical reason	Ia, Q.1, A.6; Ia, Q.21.2 ad 2; Ia-IIae, Q.2, A.5; Ia-IIae, Q.19, A.4; Ia-IIae, Q.71, A.6; Ia-IIae, Q.90, A.1;	Discalced Carmelites of Salamanca (Salmanticenses), 'What is the rule of morality?'
3	Practical knowledge; Aquinas on Aristotelian prudence; Prudence in the active and contemplative lives	Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics: Book I: Lectures 1-3; Book II: Lecture 2, 256-258; Lecture 4; All of Book VI. Ia-IIae, Q.181, A.2	Maritain, Russell
4	The parts of prudence; The vices contrary to prudence	Ia-IIae, QQ.48-56	Saarinen
5	The gifts of counsel and wisdom; Infused prudence	Ia-IIae, Q.66, A.5; Ia-IIae, Q.68; Ia-IIae, QQ.45, 46, 52	Pinsent, ('gifts and fruits'), Miner
6	Knowledge by connaturality	Ia, Q.12 A 5-6 Ia, Q.81, A.3 Ia-IIae, Q.24, AA.1,3 Ia-IIae, Q.58, AA.4,5 Ia-IIae, Q.64, A.3 Ia-IIae, Q.45, A.2	Suto, Steel
7	Prudence in relation to other virtues; The mean	Ia-IIae, Q.57, AA.3-6; Ia-IIae, Q.58, AA.1-5; Ia-IIae, Q.60, A.1; Ia-IIae, Q.61, AA.1-5; Ia-IIae, Q.64 Ia-IIae, Q.65, A.1-2 Ia-IIae, Q.66, A. 3 ad 3	Pieper
8	Universal and Particular; prudence and conscience	Ia-IIae, Q.19, AA.3-6 Ia-IIae, Q.94., A.4; Ia-IIae, Q.66, A.7;	Pope Francis, Finnis ('absolute norms'), Hoffman

Bibliography

Primary texts – provided.

We will read through all the texts in the *Summa Theologiae* and the *Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics*. The other texts are optional reading.

Summa Theologiae:

Prima Pars:

- 1a, Q.1, A.6 (wisdom and prudence)
- 1a, Q.12 A 5-6 (love and knowledge)
- 1a, Q.22, A.1 (Providence)
- 1a, Q.23, A.4 (prudence and the will of the end)
- 1a, Q.81, A.3 (passions and reason)

Prima Secundae:

- 1a-IIae, Q.2, A.5 (the human being is governed by reason and will)
- 1a-IIae, Q.19, AA.3-6 (the human will and the eternal law)
- 1a-IIae, Q.22, A.2 ad 2 (prudence versus art)
- 1a-IIae, Q.24, AA.1,3 (reason and the passions)
- 1a-IIae, Q.56, A.3 (the subject of prudence)
- 1a-IIae, Q.57, AA.3-6 (prudence and the intellectual virtues)
- 1a-IIae, Q.58, AA.1-5 (moral versus intellectual virtue)
- 1a-IIae, Q.60, A.1 (unity of prudence)
- 1a-IIae, Q.61, AA.1-5 (cardinal virtues)
- 1a-IIae, Q.64 (the mean)
- 1a-IIae, Q.65, A.1-2 (interconnection of moral virtues and prudence and charity)
- 1a-IIae, Q.66, A. 3 ad 3 (a puzzle: prudence and the end)
- 1a-IIae, Q.66, A.5 (wisdom and prudence)
- 1a-IIae, Q.68 (gifts)
- 1a-IIae, Q.71, A.6 (definition of sin/the twofold rule of the human will)
- 1a-IIae, Q.90, A.1 (reason and law)
- 1a-IIae, Q.94, A.4 (particularity)

Secunda Secundae:

Ila-IIae, QQ.45-6 (the gift of wisdom; folly)

Ila-IIae, QQ.47-56: The Treatise on Prudence

Ila-IIae, Q.66, A.7 (theft in cases of necessity?)

Ila-IIae, Q.181, A.2 (active and contemplative)

Disputed Questions on the Virtues

Q.1, AA.6,7,12

Q.5, AA.2,3,5

Commentary on the Nicomachean Ethics:

Book I: Lectures 1-3

Book II: Lecture 2, 256-258; Lecture 4

Book VI

Commentary on the Sentences

Book III, d.33, q. 1 a. 1 qc. 2 (prudence vs moral virtues)

q. 2 a. 2 qc. 1 (special matter of prudence)

q. 2 a. 3 (special act of prudence)

q. 2 a. 4 qc. 4 (subject of prudence)

q. 2 a. 5 (prudence in relation to the moral virtues)

q.3, qc. 1-4 (parts of prudence)

Scriptural Works

Catena in Mt., cap. 10 l. 5 (prudent as serpents)

Catena in Mt., cap. 24 l. 13. (faithful and prudent servant)

Catena in Mt., cap. 25 l. 1. (prudent virgins)

Super Tit., cap. 2 l. 1.

Super Rom., cap. 8 l. 1,2 (prudence of the spirit vs of the flesh)

Secondary Texts: Extended Bibliography

Austin, Nicholas, 'The Virtue of Ecophronesis: An Ecological Adaptation of Practical Wisdom', *The Heythrop Journal*, 59.6 (2018), 1009–21

Austin, Nicholas, *Aquinas on Virtue: A Causal Reading*, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), available at: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1t89k5h>

Cajetan (Tommaso de Vio). "Commentary on the Summa Theologiae." In Sancti Thomae de Aquinas Opera Omnia Iussu Impensaue Leonis XIII (Leonine), vols. 4–12. Rome: Editori di San Tommaso, 1882. Available at <https://archive.org/details/operaomniaiussui08thom/page/v>

Discalced Carmelites of Salamanca (Salmanticenses), *Tomus VI, De Actibus et Virtutibus Collegii Salmanticensis* (Paris: V. Palme, 1878 [originally 1679]), various passages, e.g. Disputation 1, Dubium 5, 'What is the rule of morality?' (translation supplied), also pp.431-7 (intellectual virtues), pp.437-442 (prudence)

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Finnis, John, 'Prudence about Ends', in *Reason in Action: Collected Essays Volume I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), pp.173-86

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Francis, Pope, *Amoris Laetitia*, especially 1-7, and Chapter 8

Garrigou-Lagrange, Réginald, and Matthew K. Miner, 'Remarks Concerning the Metaphysical Character of St. Thomas's Moral Theology, in Particular as It Is Related to Prudence and Conscience', *Nova et Vetera*, 17 (2019), 245–70

Haas, John M. "Prudence in St. Thomas Aquinas: Certitude in Ambiguity." In *Ambiguity in the Western Mind*, edited by Craig J. N. De Paulo, Patrick A. Messina, and Marc Stier. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.

Hain, Raymond, 'Consilium and the Foundations of Ethics', *The Thomist: A Speculative Quarterly Review*, 79.1 (2015), 43–74

Hoffmann, Tobias, 'Conscience and Synderesis', *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 2012
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0020>>

Irwin, Terence, 'Aquinas: Practical Reason and Prudence', in *The Development of Ethics: A Historical and Critical Study. Volume I: From Socrates to the Reformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 571–87 (see also pp.588-594)

Keenan, James, 'The Virtue of Prudence (Ila Ilae, Qq. 47-56)', in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. by Stephen J. Pope, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2002), pp. 259–71

Keenan, James F., *Goodness and Rightness in Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologiae* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 1992)

Kemple, Brian, 'The Preeminent Necessity of Prudence', *Studia Gilsoniana*, 6.4 (2017), 549–72

Lottin, Odon, *Morale Fondamentale* (Belgium: Tournai, 1954)

Maritain, Jacques, 'Appendix VII: "Speculative" and "Practical"', in *Distinguish to Unite, or, The Degrees of Knowledge*, The Collected Works of Jacques Maritain, v. 7 (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995), pp. 481–89

Miner, Robert C., 'Non-Aristotelian Prudence in the Prima Secundae', *The Thomist*, 64.3 (2000), 401–422

- McCabe, Herbert, 'Aquinas on Good Sense', in *Thomas Aquinas: Contemporary Philosophical Perspectives*, ed. by Brian Davies (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 339–51
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<<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0022>>
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- Pinsent, Andrew, 'The Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit', *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 2012
<<https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780195326093.013.0037>>
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- Zagzebski, Linda Trinkaus. *Virtues of the Mind: An Inquiry into the Nature of Virtue and the Ethical Foundations of Knowledge*. Cambridge: University Press, 1996. Available online at <https://ezproxy-prd.bodleian.ox.ac.uk/login?url=http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781139174763>. See especially, Ch.5 on *phronesis*: pp.211-31

6 Essential Digital Resources

St Thomas's Aquinas' Works in English: <https://dhspriority.org/thomas/>

Aquinas, Opera Omnia: <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/iopera.html>

Electronic Concordance for Aquinas: <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/it/index.age>

Thomistic Bibliography: <http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/bt/index.html>

Deferrari, Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas:

<https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015011488064&view=1up&seq=10>

Leonine Edition of Aquinas (including Cajetan's commentary on the ST):

<http://www.sydneypenner.ca/os/aquinas.shtml>