

Aquinas on Good Sense

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I was asked to contribute something about St Thomas Aquinas to this collection in honour of Kenelm—an activity rather like offering a short paper on Karl Marx in a *festschrift* for Lenin. Much of whatever understanding I have of Aquinas I owe to the insights and scholarly precision of Kenelm's writings and I shall not in this paper attempt to play in his league. This will be an elementary introduction to an important part of Aquinas's thinking which was neglected for some centuries and is only in our own receiving the attention it deserves. I am concerned with the virtue he calls *prudentia*. I have nothing original to contribute here (except perhaps some mistakes); what I will say will be new only to those to whom Aquinas is new, but there are perhaps, enough of these to justify yet another simple introduction.

Elizabeth, Anne and Emma

As is almost always the case with Aquinas's technical vocabulary, the nearest English word to the Latin one would be a mistranslation: *prudentia* does not mean what we call prudence. Prudence suggests to us a certain caution and canniness, whereas *prudentia* is much nearer to wisdom, practical wisdom.

Fortunately, however, we have a nearly perfect English equivalent in Jane Austen's phrase 'good sense'. I take Jane Austen to be centrally concerned not with presenting the ethos of the new respectable middle class but rather with the failure of the new bourgeoisie to live satisfactory lives because of the inability of the older 'aristocratic' tradition to transmit to them a certain outlook and way of behaving and education that came down to the author via the remains of a Christian morality. The eighteenth-century ideal of civilized living collapsed because it involved the loss of this tradition, a tradition which (as Gilbert Ryle and others have pointed out) is, broadly speaking, Aristotelean.

Of course, no novel is a philosophical treatise, but much of Jane Austen's writing can usefully be seen as an exploration of this tradition and in particular of the notion of *prudentia*. Elizabeth Bennett is shown as having and growing in good sense, in contrast both to the silliness of

her younger sisters, who think of nothing beyond present pleasures and, on the other hand, to the pedantry of her elder sister Mary, who thinks that book-learning is enough. She also stands in contrast to her witty and perceptive but almost purely voyeuristic father, who uses his intelligence to survey a life in which he refuses to become involved. Finally, there is a contrast with her friend Charlotte, who succumbs to worldly wisdom and marries the dreadful Mr Collins for 'prudential' reasons. All these people are presented as *morally* inferior (and thus ultimately unhappy) because they lack good sense. Anne Elliot is, of course, centrally concerned with what Aquinas regards as a major constituent of *prudentia*: making proper use of the counsel of others. And one aspect of the education of Emma is even more interesting, because this is not completed until at the end of the book Mr Knightley, who in part represents an alien imposed morality, is integrated into her life—he marries her and goes to live in *her* house together with the totally undisciplined father. The scuffles between the super-ego and the libido are being resolved in what begins to look more like virtue.

Conscience

Anyway, it is with good sense that we are concerned. A prominent part has been played in post-renaissance moral thinking by the notion of conscience, and people are often shocked to discover that this plays so small a part in Aquinas's moral teaching. Like the notion of the sheer individual in abstraction from social roles and community, and like the idea of 'human rights' attaching to such an abstract individual, it was a notion for which nobody had a word in either classical or post-classical antiquity or in the Middle Ages. Aquinas does use the word *conscientia*, but for him it is not a faculty or power which we exercise, nor a disposition of any power, nor an innate moral code, but simply the judgement we may come to on a piece of our behaviour in the light of various rational considerations. Usually it is a judgement we make on our past behaviour, but it can be extended to judgement on behaviour about which we are deliberating. Plainly such judgements happen and they are important when they do; but what is meant in modern talk by conscience is normally something quite different. Nowadays we speak of someone 'consulting her conscience', rather as one might consult a cookery-book or a railway timetable. Conscience is here seen as a private repository of answers to questions, or perhaps a set of rules of behaviour. Someone who 'has a conscience' about, say, abortion or betting is someone who detects in herself the belief that this activity is wrong or forbidden and who would therefore feel guilty were she to engage in it.

To have a conscience, then, in this way of thinking is to be equipped

with a personal set of guide-lines to good behaviour, and to stifle your conscience is not to pay attention to these guide-lines. Since following the guide-lines is often inconvenient or difficult, it is necessary to exert our will-power to do so. So the moral life, for this way of thinking, is an awareness of your rules of behaviour coupled with a strong will which enables you to follow these rules.

For most of those who think in this way, the verdict of conscience is ultimately unarguable. If someone says honestly: 'My conscience tells me this is wrong' she is thought to be giving an infallible report on the delivery of her inner source of principles which must call a halt to argument. It is believed that the reason why violating the consciences of others—i.e. coercing them to do what is contrary to their conscience—is a very grave evil, is that there can be no rational appeal beyond conscience. For this reason there are 'conscience clauses', and for this reason a tribunal for conscientious objectors to war-service is essentially concerned to determine whether a person who claims to have a conscientious objection is telling the truth about the delivery of his conscience. Such a tribunal is not expected directly to consider the validity or otherwise of the objector's position: what matters is simply that it *is* the decision of his conscience. This concern for conscience *as such* is admirably expressed in Robert Bolt's play about Thomas More, *A Man for All Seasons*; though it is not an attitude that would have been shared by an old-fashioned thinker like St Thomas More himself. For this modern way of thinking there exists a *prima facie* right for individuals to follow their consciences, and hence societies in which, for example, there is no such provision for conscientious objection are seen as necessarily unjust and tyrannous.

In the tradition with which I am concerned, there exists no such right; for rights have a quite different foundation. On the other hand there is a principle of good sense in legal matters that even activities thought to be anti-social are not to be prohibited by the apparatus of the law if this will cause more social harm than tolerating them. A society that legally tolerates any number of devious and peculiar sexual or financial practices is not proclaiming its belief that these are harmless (still less that they are possible options for the good life); it is proclaiming its belief that, whatever harm they may do, sending in the police or opening the way for blackmail would be immensely more disruptive and dangerous to the general good. Similarly, much more harm would be done by imprisoning or forcibly conscripting people who genuinely believe that war (or *this* war) is unjust than by tolerating them. It is for this reason, and not because of the alleged absolute rights of conscience, that it is a bad thing not to respect conscientious objectors. It is not the strength and sincerity of my conviction that the use of nuclear weapons must always be evil, but rather the grounds for this conviction that make

it morally right for me to refuse any co-operation with such use. Obviously, no tribunal could accept these grounds without becoming conscientious objectors themselves; short of this they can only make a sensible, and therefore just, decision to tolerate me.

The truth of this can be seen, I think, if we ask ourselves whether there should be tribunals to judge whether a man really holds as a matter of conscience that he should strangle all Jewish babies at birth or that his children's moral education is best served by starving them or burning them with cigarette ends. It is, I think, a mark of the confusion that has prevailed in moral thinking that intelligent people can find it quite hard to give a reasoned answer to such questions. So let us turn from this to the Aristotelean tradition as developed by Aquinas.

Prudentia

In this view we come to decisions, the 'deliveries of conscience', by practical thinking, and such thinking, like so many human activities, can be done well or badly, 'conscientiously' or sloppily, honestly or with self-deception. The virtue which disposes us to think well about what to do is *prudentia*, good sense.

We should notice that, like most thinking, this would normally be a communal activity; we would ordinarily try to get the thing right by discussing the matter with others, by asking advice or arguing a case; we would have a background of reading books or watching Channel Four, of listening to preachers or parents or children, of criticizing the views and behaviour of others; and all these are things that can be done well or badly. One may foolishly accept advice from strong-minded friends, credulously follow the preacher or stubbornly resist a good argument—these are all things for which we could appropriately be blamed, and this shows that to be disposed *not* to behave like that is to have a virtue. We may on particular occasions pity the credulous, foolish or stubbornly unreasonable person, just as we might pity the coward or drug-addict, but ordinarily we would think it also proper to blame such people (and therefore, of course, proper to forgive them).

Unreasonableness, pig-headedness, bigotry and self-deception are all in themselves blameworthy, and they are constitutive of the kind of stupidity that is a vice. That is why no stupid person can be good. In case anyone should think that this gives academics and intellectuals a moral advantage over ignorant peasants, let us remember that what is in question is not theoretical thinking and the handling of concepts and words, but practical shrewdness and common sense in matters of human behaviour. In this matter I think the 'ignorant' peasant may often have the edge over the professor. One of the hindrances to acquiring the virtue of good sense is living too sheltered a life. There is, of course, a sense of

'education' (rather different from the one in common use) in which the educated person does indeed have a moral advantage over the uneducated; if this were not so, education would not be a serious human activity.

It will be clear that in this Aristotelean view, conscience, the moral judgment I have come to, is in no sense infallible. For what I have called the modern position, the delivery of conscience is a base-line: moral questions concern simply whether and to what extent you follow your conscience. For the older point of view you can be praised or blamed for the moral principles you hold. People who have come to the conclusion (who have convinced themselves) that torture can be a good and necessary thing and who thus carry it out cheerfully without a qualm of conscience would, in accordance with the older view, be not less but more to blame than those who recognize that torture is evil, who do not want to do it, but nevertheless do it out of fear of reprisals should they fail in their 'duty'.

Concerning judgements of conscience, Aquinas asks two interesting questions in succession. Is it always wrong, he asks, not to do what you mistakenly think is right? (Is it always wrong to go against your conscience?) He says that it *is* always wrong to flout your judgement of conscience in this way—he holds, for example, that someone who had come to the conclusion that Christianity was erroneous would be wrong not to leave the Church. But then he asks the following question: Is it always right to do what you mistakenly think is right? (Is it always good to follow your conscience?) This is where he departs from the modern view: he says it is not necessarily right for you to do what you think is right, for you may have come to your decision of conscience carelessly, dishonestly or by self-deception. He holds, in fact, the disturbing view that you can be in the position of being wrong if you do *not* follow your conscience and also being wrong if you *do*. But, he argues, you can only have got yourself into this position through your own fault. It is only by *continual failure in virtue, by the cultivation of excuses and rationalisations*, that you have blinded yourself to reality. It is not at all uncommon for individuals through their own fault to have put themselves in positions in which the only courses left open to them are all bad. Then they simply have to choose the lesser evil, which does not on that account become good. Suppose, for example, that a government has established in a remote and desolate area a large set of factories for the wicked purpose of manufacturing nuclear weapons. Unemployed people from distant parts of the country get on their bikes and flock to this place to get jobs. Once this has happened the government may continue its genocidal activity or else it may throw these thousands of people out of work with no hope of work. It has put itself in the position where all its options, for which it would rightly be held responsible, are bad.

Thus, for Aquinas, a clear conscience is no guarantee of virtue. We should always, he says, fear that we may be wrong. We should have what he calls *sollicitudo* about this. As Oliver Cromwell (not always an assiduous disciple of St Thomas) said to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland: 'I beseech you, gentlemen, in the bowels of Christ, to bethink you that you may be mistaken.'

Good sense is the virtue that disposes us to deliberate well, to exercise our practical reasoning well, and it presupposes that we have some good intention, that we intend an end that is in itself reasonable. The *intentio finis*, intending the end, is an *actus voluntatis*, a realisation or actualisation of the power we call the will, the power to be attracted by what we intellectually apprehend as good. (We should be on our guard against translating '*actus voluntatis*' as an 'action' or performance of the will: that primrose path leads to the dualistic notion of an interior performance of the will, an intention, accompanying the exterior action. The *actus voluntatis* here is the condition or state of being attracted to some good, which is *actus* in that it fulfills the potentiality of the will as the oak fulfills the potentiality of an acorn, not as the kick fulfills the potentiality of the leg. It must be said that Aquinas's own language is not always as guarded as it might be on this important point.)

It is in and by the will that we are in a state of intending an end; it is by the will, that is, that we find this end attractive *as an end*. The will is being actualised or exercised because we present the end to ourselves rationally (in language or other symbols). This is to be distinguished from being attracted to some good that presents itself to us simply as sensually apprehended. The latter attractions and appetites we share, more or less, with other non-linguistic animals. Such animals can, of course, in Aquinas's view be moved by an end or purpose in what they do, they can act willingly (*voluntarie*), they cannot be said in his technical language (which I believe he invented) to *intend* that end. In modern English I think we would say that the dog intended to chase the rabbit, but all that we would mean is that the dog's seeing of the rabbit, its sensual apprehension of it as desirable, is the reason why it is chasing. We do not mean that the dog *has* this reason, for this would only be possible if the dog were able to *analyse* its situation in language, to see, as Aquinas puts it, 'the *end as end* to be pursued by these or those means'. So while we may certainly say the dog is willingly (*voluntarie*) chasing (as opposed to unwillingly, *involuntarie*, or without willing, *non-voluntarie*) we cannot say that the dog has the intention, *intentio*, of chasing it. Although it is acting willingly, *voluntarie*, it is not acting in terms of a state or condition of willing. Because it has no language it can have no will.

Synderesis

So, for Aquinas, good sense, good deliberation, does not concern itself with the *intentio finis*, the wanting of the end, but with the adjustment of the means to the end. The intellectual presentation of the end that we find attractive (which we want or intend) is not in the field of practical reasoning but of an intellectual disposition that Aquinas calls *synderesis*. This is a very peculiar word for a very peculiar and interesting concept. It is, for one thing, a piece of fake Greek that seems to have been invented by Latin-speaking medieval philosophers and does not occur in any classical Greek text. The clue to understanding it, I believe, is to see that, for Aquinas, in the sphere of practical action *synderesis* is related to deliberation in the way that, in the theoretical sphere, *intellectus* is related to reasoning.

Aquinas thought that in any kind of true knowledge, any *scientia*, there must be certain first principles that are simply taken for granted; they are not part of the subject of the *scientia* itself. Keynesians do not argue with Milton Friedmanites about whether $1 + 1 = 2$; economists take for granted truths that are argued to by philosophers of mathematics. The statistical study of economics is permeated by the truths of arithmetic but it is not about them. Economics is done *in terms of* arithmetic, it does not seek to establish these truths. The economist needs the arithmetical *habitus* or skill, but what he is engaged in is something different. Now, as I understand him, Aquinas would think of the economist as having *intellectus* with regard to the arithmetical principles he takes for granted but exercising his *ratio*, reasoning, about his own particular topic. We should notice that the arithmetical truths are not *premisses* from which truths of economics are deduced; they are terms within which, in the light of which (to use Aquinas's own metaphor), the argument is conducted. Aquinas frequently says that *intellectus* is the *habitus* of first principles, while reason, *ratio*, is concerned with how to draw conclusions in the light of these principles in some particular field.

'First principles' must be a relative term, for what are the first principles of one science (economics or chemistry) will be the conclusions of another (mathematics). Aquinas did not think there could be an infinite regress of sciences, each treating as arguable what the one below it took for granted. We must, he thought, eventually arrive at some first principles that nobody could think of as arguable, as the conclusion of a reasoned argument. He instances the principle of non-contradiction: that the same proposition cannot simultaneously be *both* true and false. And indeed this cannot be argued since any argument, to be an argument at all, must take this for granted; it must be conducted in terms of, in the light of, this. (This principle must not be confused with the principle called the 'excluded middle', which says that a proposition must be *either*

true or false: this can be rationally denied and all multi-valued logics start from rejecting it.) So the absolutely ultimate first principle in theoretical reasoning, the principle in terms of which any reasoning whatever must take place, is something like the principle of non-contradiction, and *intellectus* in its ultimate sense is the *habitus* or settled disposition to conduct argument in terms of this principle: that is, the disposition simply to conduct argument, to use definite meaningful symbols, at all.

Now Aquinas sees *synderesis* as parallel in practical reasoning to *intellectus* in theoretical reasoning. Practical reasoning begins with something you want; it takes for granted that this is wanted and deliberates about the means of achieving it. The intellectual grasp of the aim as aim (not the attraction to it and intention of it, which is the actualisation of will, but the understanding of it) is *synderesis*. The deliberation takes place in terms of this end presented to us as understood by *synderesis* and found attractive as an end, intended by us in virtue of our being able to want rationally (because we have a reason), and it concludes to an action or decision to act.

But, of course, what might be the starting point of one deliberation may be a conclusion come to in a previous one. We do not, says Aristotle, deliberate about aims; but what we aim at, what we have *synderesis* of intellectually and intend as a matter of will, may be the result of a previous deliberation. In each bit of practical reasoning, if we take them separately, it is by *synderesis* that we intellectually grasp what by the will we intend, find attractive (i.e. good), and it is by practical reasoning (preferably disposed by good sense) that we decide what we will do about it.

Now, just as with an hierarchy of sciences in theoretical reasoning we get back to some ultimate first principles that we simply grasp by *intellectus* (principles which cannot be the conclusion of any previous reasoning) like the principle of non-contradiction, so in practical reasoning there is *synderesis* not only of relative first principles but also of some ultimate first principle such as that the good is what is to be wanted (which could not itself be the conclusion of some previous practical reasoning). Just as all theoretical reasoning is conducted in terms of, in the light of, the principle of non-contradiction (which lies at the root of all symbolism, or language) so all practical reasoning is conducted in terms of, in the light of, the practical principle of seeking what is in some respect good (which lies at the root of all meaningful human action—what Aquinas calls an *actus humanus* as distinct from a mere *actus hominis*). Practical reasoning *is* practical reasoning because it is conducted in this light, just as theoretical reasoning *is* theoretical reasoning because it is conducted in the light of non-contradiction.

Synderesis, then, in its ultimate sense is the natural dispositional

grasp of this ultimate practical principle; and we should remember that in neither the theoretical nor the practical case is the principle a premiss of some syllogism, although it can be stated as a proposition. It is rather the principle in virtue of which there is any syllogism at all.

Practical Reasoning

Another way of putting this is to say that just as the *intellectus* of the ultimate first theoretical principle is the natural (and unacquired) disposition to be 'truth-preserving' in reasoning so the *synderesis* of the ultimate first practical principle is the natural (and unacquired) disposition to be 'satisfactoriness-preserving' in deliberation. I owe these terms to Dr Anthony Kenny and what follows draws heavily on his *Will, Freedom and Power* (Oxford, 1975), especially chapter 5. Kenny notes that theoretical argument has a truth-preserving logic: its concern is that we should not move from true premisses to a false conclusion. Now he suggests that practical thinking is to be governed by a satisfactoriness-preserving logic which will ensure that we do not move from a satisfactory premiss to an unsatisfactory conclusion. Take the thinking: 'I want to get this carpet clean; the Hoover will do it; so, to the Hoover!' We should notice that the first clause expresses an intention (the *intentio finis*) and the last, in the optative mood, may be replaced simply by the action of using the Hoover. This action taken as the conclusion of a piece of practical reasoning (that is, done for a reason) is itself meaningful. It has become an act of cleaning the carpet because of the intention with which it is being done. What, to a less informed observer, might seem to be the same act, might have had other meanings and been a different human action: if, for instance, I used the Hoover because I wanted its noise to irritate my hated neighbour. In that case there would be a different piece of practical reasoning exhibiting the meaning of my action, exhibiting, that is the intention with which it is being done.

The intention with which it is done centrally defines a human act as the sort of human act it is. Thus, if you accidentally drop a five pound note and I pick it up, I may do so with the intention of keeping it for myself or with the intention of giving it back to you. The first intention specifies my action as one of stealing, and the second as one of restitution. My intention or motive in picking up the note is not an occurrence inside my head which causes me to pick up the money in the way that an agent brings about an event (as 'efficient cause'); it is what Aquinas calls a 'final cause' in virtue of which I, the agent, do the action and in virtue of which the action has its 'form', its specification. It is the practical reasoning, exhibiting the intention with which the action is done, that shows what, in human terms, the action *counts as* or is. Nobody, of course, suggests that whenever you act meaningfully you go

through some particular chain of reasoning in your mind. That would be no more true of practical thinking than it is of theoretical thinking. We can act or think quite reasonably without going through syllogisms or other arguments. But in both cases it is possible to spell out the thought in some such way in order to show whether it is really a valid piece of reasoning or a muddle. A muddle in theoretical thinking can lead to your being mistaken; a muddle in practical thinking can lead to your not doing or getting what you want, what you intended.

Some philosophers, Alasdair MacIntyre, for example (*After Virtue* London, 1981, Chapter 12), hold that the conclusion of a practical syllogism is *always* a meaningful action (or meaningful inaction) rather than a proposition, but this seems unnecessarily restrictive. It is clear that the conclusion is not a theoretical proposition (in the indicative mood) but it may well be not simply an action but (in the optative mood) a plan of action or, as Aquinas prefers to see it, a command addressed (in the imperative mood) either to others or to oneself.

The logic of practical reasoning differs from that of theoretical reasoning most evidently in being based not on necessity but on sufficiency. Its conclusion is an action or proposal of action which will be sufficient to attain the aim expressed in the major premiss; one that will sufficiently preserve the satisfactoriness of the original aim; what will be excluded are practical conclusions which do not thus preserve satisfactoriness. In theoretical reasoning, on the other hand, the conclusion will be what is necessarily entailed by the premisses; what will be excluded will be conclusions which are not thus necessarily entailed, which may be false when the premisses are true.

Thus one common form of theoretical reasoning goes like this: 'If p then q; but p; therefore q.' 'If he's from Blackburn then he's from the north; but he is from Blackburn; so he's from the north.' One form which would be excluded would be: 'if p then q; but q; therefore p'. 'If he's from Blackburn, he's from the north; but he's from the north; so he's from Blackburn.' Plainly this is not necessary, for he may be from Stockton or Carlisle.

Now contrast this with a piece of practical reasoning: 'If I use the Hoover the carpet will be cleaned; but I want the carpet clean; so I'll use the Hoover.' This provides a practical conclusion sufficient for my purposes. It is not however necessitated. There may be many other practical conclusions which would attain my aim, which would preserve the satisfactoriness of getting the carpet clean. The shape of this valid practical reasoning resembles, however, the shape of invalid theoretical reasoning. We seem to be arguing: 'if p then q; but q; therefore p.' But such a form of reasoning is only invalid if we are seeking a necessitated conclusion; in practical reasoning we are never doing this; we look simply for an action which will be sufficient for our purposes.

One very important contrast between theoretical and practical reasoning is that if we have a valid piece of theoretical reasoning no number of extra premisses will render it invalid. Thus I may argue as follows: 'All clergymen are wrong about the meaning of life; but all bishops are clergymen; therefore all bishops are wrong about the meaning of life.' This conclusion remains valid however many other things I may find to say about clergymen or bishops: it makes no difference whether or not they play the piano nicely or have long furry ears and prehensile tails or are (some of them) my best friends or whatever. In this argument, so long as the original premisses are true the conclusion is necessarily true. This does not go for practical reasoning. Take the argument: 'If I take this train it will get me to London; but I want to get to London; so I'll take the train.' This conclusion is practically valid so far as it goes but it ceases to be so if we add: 'I am always sick in trains' or 'This train is about to be blown up by crazed fascists'. In such a case the meaning of the action of boarding the train is no longer to be seen simply as going to London but also as becoming sick or being killed, which I may not want at all.

Thus the logic of theoretical reasoning can provide us with formulae which tell us what it is reasonable and what it is unreasonable to *think*, given certain premisses. Practical reasoning, concerned with what it is reasonable to *do*, is not closed off by any such formulae. If we are to think well practically we must have an eye to all the relevant additional premisses which may serve to invalidate a conclusion. Actions done for reasons can be done for an indefinite number of reasons. And no single reason necessarily compels you to the action; there could be others dissuading you. It is just this multi-facetedness of actions done for reasons that, in St Thomas's view, lies at the root of our freedom. No particular reason, no particular good that is sought, can necessitate our action; only the vision of the ultimate infinite good, God, can thus necessitate us.

Good sense, then, for St Thomas the disposition to do our practical reasoning well, involves a sensitive awareness of a multitude of factors which may be relevant to our decision. It involves, he says, bringing into play not merely our purely intellectual (symbol-using) powers but our sensuous apprehension of the concrete individual circumstances of our action. In his view, since our rather limited form of intelligence can only deal in the meanings of words and other symbols (for him our thinking is conceived on the model of our talking), and since no concrete individual can be the meaning of a symbol, we grasp the particular individual not by our intelligence but only by our sense powers. Thus, for him, you cannot identify a particular individual simply by describing it in words (any such words *could* be referring to another individual); in the end you have to point at it or single it out by some such bodily act. He concludes from

this that if we are to be good at practical decision-making, if we are to have good sense, we need to exercise well our sensual, bodily apprehension of the world; so we need to be in good bodily health as well as clear in our ideas. The depression (*tristitia*) which for him comes principally from not getting enough fun out of life is likely to impede the virtue of good sense just as it impedes the sensual virtues of courage or chastity.

Aquinas's treatment of the ancillary dispositions that attend on the virtue of *prudentia* is one of the most interesting and, I think, original parts of his treatment, but I cannot discuss it here. I will conclude with a glance at one important topic: what is the difference between good sense and cunning?

Cunning and good sense

The *logic* of practical reasoning is neutral as between good and bad ends; the same canons of argument apply to thinking about how to get your uncle his Christmas present and thinking about how to murder him. But, in Aquinas's view, practical reasoning itself is not thus neutral. Good sense, which perfects our practical reasoning, directs it towards good ends. The cunning practised by the one seeking apparently good but actually evil ends is not misdirected prudence but a degenerate form of practical reasoning, a false prudence. There are more ways of being unreasonable than being illogical.

Aquinas gives us a clue to the difference between cunning and good sense in one of his many comparisons between practical and theoretical reasoning. It is like the difference between dialectical argumentation and *scientia*. By true *scientia* we know that something is true and really why it is true. The characteristic cry of the one with *scientia* is: 'Yes, I see, of course, that has to be so'. *Scientia* traces facts back to their first principles by argumentation. Now consider this argument: 'All slow-witted people are subjects of the Queen of England; all the British are slow-witted; so all the British are subjects of the Queen of England'. This is a perfectly valid argument and it comes to a true conclusion although both its premisses are manifestly false. It is not true that all slow-witted people are subjects of the Queen (think of President Reagan); nor is it true that all the British are slow-witted (think of Ken Livingstone). There is nothing logically odd about deriving a true conclusion from false premisses; as we have seen, it is deriving false conclusions from true premisses that has to be excluded by a 'truth-preserving' logic. But although the falsity of the premisses does not make the argument illogical it does make the argument unscientific. We would be misled to say: 'Yes, I see, the British must necessarily be subjects of the Queen because they are slow-witted.' We would be using the wrong middle term

to connect being British and being subject to the Queen. What the correct middle term would be it is a little hard to say—one would need to know something about how the House of Hanover established its legitimacy in Britain.

It is not merely false premisses but also ‘improper’ or irrelevant premisses that render an argument unscientific. Thus if we were to substitute going out in the midday sun for slow-wittedness you might, for all I know, have true premisses but none the less you will not have truly explained the matter since it is not because of this propensity that the British (or at least Englishmen) are subject to the Queen. If your premisses are either untrue or irrelevant or both but your argument is logically valid and your conclusion true, you have what Aquinas would call a piece of merely dialectical reasoning. *Scientia* is distinguished from dialectical argument by its aim, which is a *true* comprehension of the order of the world, one the premisses of which are both true and ‘proper’. Now, in a similar way, good sense is distinguished from cunning by its aim, which is acting well, pursuing ends which constitute or contribute to what is *in fact* the good life for a human being.

Thus good sense, for Aquinas, is not mere cleverness but presupposes the moral virtues, the dispositions that govern our appetites and intentions, for it is concerned not merely with what seems good to me but with what is in fact good for me; and it is the lynch-pin of humane and reasonable living because without it none of these goods will be attained.

