

QUESTION 14

Deliberating or Taking Counsel, Which Precedes Choosing

Next, we have to consider the act of deliberating or taking counsel (*consilium*). On this topic there are six questions: (1) Does deliberating count as inquiry? (2) Does deliberating concern the end or only the means to an end? (3) Does deliberating concern only things that we do? (4) Is there deliberating about everything that we do? (5) Does deliberating proceed by way of analysis (*ordine resolutorio*)? (6) Does deliberating proceed *ad infinitum*?

Article 1

Does deliberating or taking counsel count as inquiry?

It seems that deliberating or taking counsel (*consilium*) does not count as inquiry (*inquisitio*):

Objection 1: Damascene says, “Deliberating (*consilium*) is desiring (*appetitus*).” But inquiring (*inquirere*) does not have anything to do with desiring. Therefore, deliberating does not count as inquiry.

Objection 2: Inquiring belongs to a discursive intellect (*intellectus discurrentis est*), and this is why it does not befit God, whose cognition is not discursive, as was established in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 14, a. 7). But taking counsel (*consilium*) is attributed to God; for Ephesians 1:11 says, “He does all things according to the counsel (*consilium*) of His will.” Therefore, deliberating (*consilium*) does not count as inquiry.

Objection 3: Inquiry (*inquisitio*) concerns things about which there is uncertainty (*de rebus dubiis*). But there is deliberation (*consilium*) about things that are undoubtedly goods (*certa bona*)—this according to the Apostle in 1 Corinthians 7:25 (“Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord, but instead I am giving counsel (*consilium*)”). Therefore, deliberating does not count as inquiry.

But contrary to this: Gregory of Nyssa says, “Every instance of deliberating (*omne consilium*) is an instance of inquiring (*quaestio*), but not every instance of inquiring is an instance of deliberating.”

I respond: As has been explained (q. 13, aa. 1 and 3), an act of choosing follows upon reason’s judgment (*iudicium rationis*) concerning things to be done. But in the case of things to be done there are many uncertainties, since actions involve contingent singular things, which are uncertain because of their variability. Now in matters that are doubtful and uncertain (*in rebus dubiis et incertis*) reason does not propose a judgment without having previously inquired (*absque inquisitione praevia*). And so there must be an inquiry on reason’s part before any judgment about things to be chosen, and this inquiry is called ‘deliberating’ or ‘taking counsel’ (*haec inquisitio consilium vocatur*). This is why, in *Ethics* 3, the Philosopher says that the act of choosing is “the desire for what has been deliberated about beforehand” (*appetitus praeconsiliati*).

Reply to objection 1: When acts belonging to two powers are ordered to one another, then in each of the acts there is something that belongs to the other power, and so both of the acts can have names taken from both powers (*uterque actus ab utraque potentia denominari potest*).

Now it is clear that (a) an act of directive reason (*actus rationis dirigentis*) with respect to the means to an end and (b) an act of the will that tends toward the means in accord with reason’s guidance (*secundum regimen rationis*) are ordered to one another. Hence, in the will’s act, i.e., the act of choosing, there is something that belongs to reason, viz., an ordering; and in the act of deliberating, which is reason’s act, there is something that belongs to the will—both (a) something that plays the role of the matter (*sicut materia*), since deliberating concerns what a man wills to do, and also (b) something that plays the role of a mover (*etiam sicut motivum*), since it is by reason of the fact that a man wills an end that he is moved to deliberate about the means to that end.

And so just as in *Ethics* 6 the Philosopher says, “Choosing is an appetitive understanding,” in order to show that both the intellect and the appetite come together for an act of choosing, so too Damascene

says, “Deliberating is an inquiring appetite,” in order to show that deliberating in some sense belongs both to the will, concerning which and because of which there is inquiry, and to inquiring reason.

Reply to objection 2: What is predicated of God must be understood without any of the defects that are found in us. For instance, it is by reasoning from causes to effects that we have scientific knowledge of conclusions, but ‘scientific knowledge’ as predicated of God signifies the certitude that the first cause has about all effects without any discursive reasoning.

Similarly, counsel (*consilium*) is attributed to God as regards the certitude of His determination or judgment. In us this certitude comes from deliberation’s inquiry (*ex inquisitione consilii*). But inquiry of this sort has no place in God, and so deliberating (*consilium*) is not attributed to God in this sense. Accordingly Damascene says, “God does not take counsel; instead, taking counsel (*consiliari*) is for those who are unsure.”

Reply to objection 3: Nothing prevents some things from being absolutely indubitable goods (*certissima bona*) in the judgment of wise and spiritual men and yet uncertain goods in the judgment of the many or of carnal men. And this is why counsels (*consilia*) are given concerning such things.

Article 2

Does deliberating concern the end or just the means to an end?

It seems that deliberating concerns the end as well as the means to an end:

Objection 1: Whatever involves uncertainty (*dubitationem habet*) is such that there can be inquiry concerning it. But as regards human actions, the end, and not just the means to an end, can involve uncertainty. Therefore, since deliberating is inquiry concerning actions, it seems that one can deliberate concerning the end (*consilium possit esse de fine*).

Objection 2: Human operations constitute the subject matter for deliberating. But as *Ethics* 1 points out, certain human operations are ends. Therefore, one can deliberate concerning the end.

But contrary to this: Gregory of Nyssa says, “Deliberating concerns the means to the end and not the end.”

I respond: In actions (*in operabilibus*) the end has the character of a principle, since ideas about the means to an end are taken from the end. Now a principle is not put into question (*non cadit sub quaestione*); instead, principles must be presupposed in every inquiry. Hence, since deliberating counts as inquiry (*cum consilium sit consilium*), deliberating concerns only the means to an end and not the end.

However, what serves as an end with respect to some things can itself be ordered toward some other end, in the same way that what serves as a principle in one demonstration can be a conclusion in another demonstration. And so what is taken as the end in one inquiry can be taken as a means to the end in some other inquiry. And in this way one will deliberate concerning it.

Reply to objection 1: What is taken as an end is already fixed (*determinata*). Hence, as long as something involves uncertainty, it is not being taken as an end. And so if one deliberates concerning it, he will be deliberating about a means to an end and not about an end.

Reply to objection 2: Deliberating concerns actions insofar as those actions are ordered toward an end. Hence, if some human operation is itself an end, then one will not deliberate concerning it as an end.

Article 3

Does deliberating or taking counsel concern only things that are done by us?

It seems that deliberating or taking counsel (*consilium*) does not concern only things that are done by us:

Objection 1: ‘Taking counsel’ (*consilium*) implies a certain sort of consultation (*collationem quandam importat*). But a consultation involving many individuals can also be made concerning immutable things that are not done by us, e.g., the natures of things. Therefore, taking counsel does not concern only things that are done by us.

Objection 2: Men sometimes take counsel about things that are ordained by law, and thus these men are called ‘legal counselors’. And yet it is not the role of those who take counsel in this way to make laws. Therefore, taking counsel does not concern only things that are done by us.

Objection 3: Some are said to make consultations about future events, and yet those future events are not within our power. Therefore, taking counsel does not concern only things that are done by us.

Objection 4: If taking counsel concerned only things that are done by us, then no one would take counsel about things that are to be done by someone else. But this is obviously false. Therefore, taking counsel does not concern only things that are done by us.

But contrary to this: Gregory of Nyssa says, “We take counsel about things that are within our power and that can be done by us.”

I respond: ‘Taking counsel’ (*consilium*) properly implies a consultation (*collatio*) that is made by several men. This is what the very name ‘counsel’ designates, since it is called ‘counsel’ in the sense of a ‘sitting down with’ (*considium*), because many men sit down together to confer at one time (*multi consistent ad simul conferendum*).

Now notice that in the case of particular contingent matters, in order for something to be grasped with certitude, it is necessary to take into account many conditions or circumstances which are not easily thought of by just one individual, but are seen with more certainty by many; for what the one thinks of does not occur to another. By contrast, in the case of necessary and universal matters, the consideration is more absolute and more simple, so that a single individual is more able to be sufficient by himself for a consideration of this sort. And the inquiry associated with taking counsel properly pertains to contingent singular matters.

Now in such matters the cognition of the truth does not have anything great that makes it desirable in itself, like the cognition of universal and necessary matters does. Instead, it is desired to the extent that it is useful for action, since actions have to do with singular contingent things. And so one should reply that taking counsel, properly speaking, concerns things that are done by us.

Reply to objection 1: For the reason already explained, ‘taking counsel’ implies not just any sort of consultation, but one that concerns things to be done,.

Reply to objection 2: Even if what has been laid down by law does not have its source in the action of someone who is taking counsel, it nonetheless directs him in his action, since one reason for doing something is that it has been mandated by law.

Reply to objection 3: Taking counsel concerns not only things to be done, but also things that are ordered toward operations. Because of this, it is called a consultation concerning things that will occur in the future, since a man is directed in doing or avoiding things by what he thinks will happen in the future.

Reply to objection 4: We take counsel concerning the works of others to the extent that those others are in some way united with us—either (a) through an affective union, as when a friend is solicitous about affairs that concern his friend just as he is about his own affairs, or (b) in the manner of an instrument, since a principal agent and an instrumental agent are like a single cause, given that the one acts through the other. It is in this latter sense that a master takes counsel about the things to be done by his servant.

Article 4

Is there deliberating or taking counsel with respect to everything that is done by us?

It seems that there is deliberating or taking counsel (*consilium*) with respect to everything that is done by us:

Objection 1: As has been explained (a. 1), an act of choosing is “a desire for what has been deliberated about beforehand.” But there is an act of choosing with respect to everything that is done by us. Therefore, there is an act of deliberating, too.

Objection 2: ‘Deliberating’ implies an inquiry on the part of reason. But whenever we do something without doing it through an impulse of passion, we proceed from reason’s inquiry. Therefore, there is deliberating with respect to everything that is done by us.

Objection 3: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, “If something can be done by more than one means, one takes counsel by inquiring into how it might be done most easily and optimally; but if it can be accomplished by just one means, then one takes counsel by inquiring how it should be done via that means.” But everything that is done [can be] done either through just one means or through many. Therefore, there is deliberating with respect to everything that is done by us.

But contrary to this: Gregory of Nyssa says, “There is no deliberating about things that are done by rote or by art (*secundum disciplinam vel artem*).”

I respond: As has been explained (a. 1), deliberating is a sort of inquiry. Now we normally inquire into things that involve uncertainty (*quae in dubium veniunt*), and thus inquiring reason (*ratio inquisitiva*), which is called ‘clarification’ (*argumentum*), “makes for faith in what is uncertain.”

Now in the case of human acts there are two possible ways for something not to be uncertain:

The first is when one proceeds by fixed means to fixed ends (*per determinatas vias proceditur ad determinatos fines*), as happens in the arts that have set ways of operating. For instance, someone who is writing does not deliberate about how he ought to make the letters, since this is determined by the art [of writing].

The second is when it does not matter much whether a given thing is done in this way or that way. And these are trivial matters (*minima*) that do not much help or hinder the attainment of the end, since reason counts as nothing what is of little importance.

And so, as the Philosopher points out, there are two sorts of things that we do not deliberate about even though they are ordered toward the end, viz., (a) trivial things and (b) things that are such that how they are to be done is fixed, as happens with works of the arts—“except in the case of those arts that involve conjecture,” as Gregory of Nyssa says, “for instance, the medicinal arts, business practices, etc.”

Reply to objection 1: Choosing presupposes deliberation because of deliberation’s judgment or determination (*ratione iudicii vel sententiae*). Hence, when the judgment or determination in question is clear without inquiry, then deliberation’s inquiry is not needed.

Reply to objection 2: Reason does not inquire into matters that are obvious; instead, it judges immediately in such matters. And so deliberation’s inquiry is not necessary for each thing that is done by means of reason.

Reply to objection 3: When something can be done by one means but in diverse ways, then there can be uncertainty in the same way that there is uncertainty when something can be done by more than one means. And so in such a case it is necessary to deliberate. But when both the thing itself and the mode are fixed, then there is no need to deliberate.

Article 5

Does deliberating proceed by way of analysis?

It seems that deliberating does not proceed by way of analysis (*non procedat modo resolutorio*):

Objection 1: Deliberating concerns things that are done by us. But our actions proceed not by way of analysis but rather by way of composition, i.e., from simple elements to composites. Therefore, deliberating does not always proceed by way of analysis.

Objection 2: Deliberating is reason's inquiry. But reason begins with what is prior and arrives at what is posterior, in accord with the more appropriate ordering. Therefore, since (a) what is past is prior to what is present and (b) what is present is prior to what is future, it seems that in deliberating one ought to proceed from the present and the past to the future—which is not the order of analysis (*quod non pertinet ad ordinem resolutorium*). Therefore, the order of analysis is not preserved in deliberating.

Objection 3: As *Ethics* 3 says, deliberating concerns only what is possible for us. But whether something is possible for us depends on whether we are [now] capable or incapable of bringing it about that we attain to that thing. Therefore, in deliberation's inquiry one ought to begin from what is present.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 3 the Philosopher says, "One who deliberates seems to inquire and to analyze (*videtur quaerere et resolvere*)."

I respond: In every inquiry it is necessary to begin with some principle. If this principle is prior in being (*prius in esse*) as well as prior in cognition (*prius in cognitione*), then the process is *compositional* rather than analytic (*non est processus resolutorius sed magis compositivus*). For proceeding from causes to effects is a compositional process, since causes are more simple than their effects.

On the other hand, if what is prior in cognition is posterior in being, then the process is *analytic*, since we make judgments about manifest effects by analyzing them into their simple causes.

Now in the case of deliberation's inquiry, the principle is the end, which is prior in thought but posterior in being (*prius in intentione, posterior tamen in esse*). Accordingly, deliberation's inquiry has to be analytic, beginning from what is intended in the future and proceeding until it arrives at what is to be done right now.

Reply to objection 1: Deliberating does, to be sure, concern actions. But the nature of an action is taken from its end, and so the ordering involved in reasoning about actions is the opposite of the ordering involved in acting.

Reply to objection 2: Reason begins from what is prior in thought (*prius secundum rationem*), but not always from what is prior in time.

Reply to objection 3: As regards what is to be done for the sake of an end, we do not seek to know whether something is possible if it is not congruous with the end. And so prior to considering whether the thing in question is possible, we must first inquire whether it appropriately leads to the end.

Article 6

Does deliberation's inquiry go on *ad infinitum*?

It seems that deliberation's inquiry proceeds *ad infinitum*:

Objection 1: Deliberating is inquiry concerning the particulars, among which are actions. But there are infinitely many singulars. Therefore, deliberation's inquiry is infinite.

Objection 2: Deliberation's inquiry includes consideration not only of what is to be done, but also of how obstacles are to be removed. But every human action is able to be impeded, and any obstacle is able to be removed through some sort of human reasoning. Therefore, inquiry concerning the removal of obstacles goes on *ad infinitum*.

Objection 3: Demonstrative science's inquiry does not go on *ad infinitum* because it arrives at principles which are known *per se* (*per se nota*) and which have absolute certitude (*quae omnimodam certitudinem habent*). But this sort of certitude cannot be found in singular contingent matters, which are variable and uncertain. Therefore, deliberation's inquiry goes on *ad infinitum*.

But contrary to this: As *De Caelo* 1 says, "No one is moved to attain what is impossible." But it is impossible to traverse something infinite. Therefore, if deliberation's inquiry were infinite, then no one would begin to deliberate. But this is clearly false.

I respond: Deliberation's inquiry is finite in actuality and on both sides, viz., (a) with respect to its beginning (*ex parte principii*) and (b) with respect to its terminus (*ex parte termini*). For there are two sorts of principles involved in deliberation's inquiry.

The one sort of principle is proper to deliberation's inquiry and is derived from the very genus of actions, and this is *the end*. As has been explained (a. 2), there is no deliberation concerning the end, but it is presupposed as a principle in deliberation.

The other sort of principle is taken, as it were, from a different genus—just as in the demonstrative sciences, where one science presupposes something which comes from another science and which it itself does not inquire into. Principles of this sort that are presupposed in deliberation's inquiry include (a) whatever is received through the sensory power, e.g., that this is bread or iron, and (b) whatever is generally known (*in universali cognita*) through some speculative or practical science, e.g., that committing adultery is forbidden by God, or that man cannot live without being nourished by the right sort of food. Someone who takes counsel does not deliberate about these things.

Now the terminus of inquiry is that which is *immediately* within our power to do. For just as the end has the character of a principle, so too what is done for the sake of the end has the character of a conclusion. Hence, what turns out to be the first thing to be done has the character of an ultimate conclusion, and inquiry terminates with it.

However, nothing prevents deliberation from being *potentially* infinite, in the sense that the number of things that can come up for consideration in deliberation is infinite.

Reply to objection 1: It is only in potentiality, and not in actuality, that there are infinitely many singulars.

Reply to objection 2: Even though a human action can be impeded, it is nonetheless not always the case that the action in question has an imminent obstacle (*impedimentum paratum*). And so it is not always necessary to deliberate about removing obstacles.

Reply to objection 3: In the case of contingent singular things, there can be something taken as fixed *for now* because it is being assumed in the action, even if it is not fixed *absolutely speaking*. For instance, it is not necessary that Socrates is sitting, but it is necessary that he is sitting for as long as he is sitting. And his sitting can be taken as fixed (*per certitudinem*).