IGNATIAN DISCERNMENT AND THOMISTIC PRUDENCE

Opposition or Harmony?

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WHEN SPIRITUAL DIRECTORS who employ St Ignatius' teaching on discernment engage in theological conversation, at some point a question is likely to arise. A brief and (not so) imaginary dialogue will present the issue. The first speaker has theological training and speaks from a Thomistic background. The second speaker is an Ignatian spiritual director and replies from this formation:

FIRST SPEAKER: I have significant reservations about Ignatian discernment. It relies on feelings, and feelings are notoriously unstable. It complicates things unnecessarily by introducing too many variables liable to misperceptions. Sometimes the 'discernment' just goes on and on, and never reaches clarity. It's because the approach is too unwieldy and too uncertain. I prefer the solid ground of Thomistic teaching on virtue, in this case, the virtue of prudence. The steps of prudence, as St Thomas outlines them, avoid these complexities and lead to clarity: deliberate well on the factors involved, judge wisely regarding the best means to the end in view—God's will for you in this choice, in view of eternal life—and then do it. When you follow this approach with prayer and under wise guidance, you have what you need to find God's will.

SECOND SPEAKER: I respect your view, but I must point out that Ignatian discernment, as we find it in the Spiritual Exercises, is solidly rooted in the Church's tradition. This began with the papal bull that approved Ignatius' book, an approval that subsequent popes have repeated to this day. Also, many holy men and women, among them great saints, have found God's will through these Spiritual Exercises. I've given the Ignatian Exercises for years and have offered spiritual direction in their light to many people. I've seen repeatedly how this approach helps people. Ignatian discernment brings clarity into confused spiritual experience, and people perceive where God is leading—they see God's will. Experience has shown me that Ignatian discernment, properly applied, far from complicating and confusing things, brings light and points the way forward.

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The conversation generally stops there. Neither has convinced the other. Neither has addressed the position of the other. Both remain unmoved in their opinions, the first speaker in mistrust of Ignatian discernment, and the second in conviction of its value.

Must the conversation end at this point? What if it were pursued with greater precision? What if the first speaker learnt more about Ignatian discernment, and the second engaged the first speaker's objections? Experience indicates that this dialogue matters, and particularly because the clash has pastoral consequences: help that could be offered may be denied to people in need of it. If this tension can be resolved, rich spiritual resources will be released for the People of God.

Clarifying the Question

The first step consists in clarifying the two terms: Ignatian discernment of God's will and the Thomistic virtue of prudence, both of which are concerned with finding the best way to choose and act in a given situation. It is this overarching similarity that leads us to ask about possible differences in their mode of arriving at a choice and whether they are at odds with each other.

Ignatian Discernment of God's Will

While Ignatian discernment of God's will may be applied broadly, it most directly concerns choices in which three qualities are found simultaneously. First, both options in the choice are good. Second, the person is free to choose either option; the choice is not governed by some law (divine, natural, ecclesiastical, civil) or by some aspect of the person's state in life that would make one of the options obligatory. Third, the choice is of some significance.[1] Such choices may include vocational discernment, choice or change of career, adoption of new ministries, decisions to relocate with the family, to adopt a child, to pursue advanced studies, to train for spiritual direction, or similar. In our discussion of Ignatian discernment, we will presume such choices.[2] Likewise, our focus is on Ignatian discernment *of God's will* in choices we face (Exx 169–189) and on Ignatian discernment *of spirits* (Exx 313–336) only as it is involved

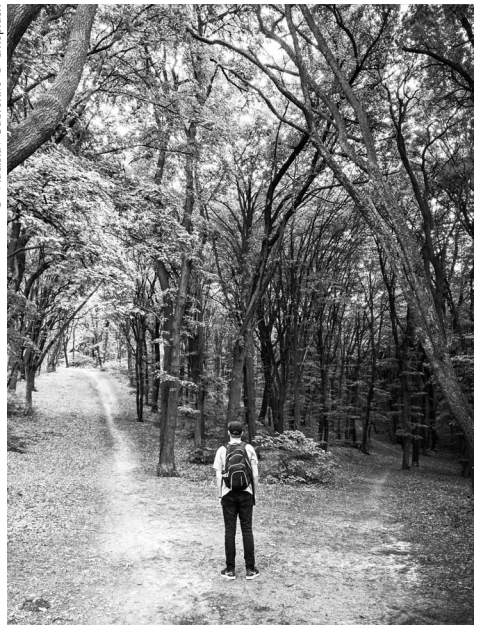
[1] See Timothy M. Gallagher, *A Handbook for Spiritual Directors: An Ignatian Guide for Accompanying Discernment of God's Will* (New York: Crossroad, 2017), as well as *Discerning the Will of God: An Ignatian Guide to Christian Decision Making* (New York: Crossroad, 2009), 16–17.

[2] In Exx 189 Ignatius also applies his Spiritual Exercises to situations in which no such choice is faced.

in discerning God's will.[3] We will also discuss only experiences of spiritual consolation genuinely given by the good spirit.[4]

Following Ignatius, a spiritual director first helps retreatants prepare for discernment. Ignatius clarifies the end of human life (Principle and Foundation, Exx 23), helps them remove disordered affections that might impede discernment (First Week, Exx 45–90), and then guides them to the availability of heart that permits discernment (Second Week, Exx 91–189). This preparation is pursued through the sacraments, abundant prayer and competent spiritual direction. When the requisite availability to God is present, Ignatius invites retreatants to enter the discernment proper.

God may, Ignatius tells us, reveal his will to retreatants facing a choice in one or more of three 'times' or 'modes'.[5] An order holds among the modes: if the retreatants do not discern God's will by the first mode (most often they will not), they then move to the second; and if they are unable to discern by the second mode, they will move to the third. This process is carried out with the guidance of a spiritual director.



The first mode is 'when God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that, without doubting or being able to doubt, the devout soul follows what is shown to it'

[3] Ignatius' second mode of discerning God's will is exercised precisely through discernment of spirits, as we shall show. See Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors,* 18–24, 67–109; *Discerning the Will of God,* 83–101. Ignatius provides two sets of rules for the discernment of spirits (Exx 313–327; 328–336). For reasons of space, here we will confine ourselves to the first set. For the second, see Timothy M. Gallagher, *Spiritual Consolation: An Ignatian Guide for the Greater Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2007). And for the second set as applied to the discernment of God's will, see Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors*, 101–107.

[4] In the second set of rules Ignatius provides clear guidelines for distinguishing spiritual consolation given by the good spirit from deceptive spiritual consolation given by the enemy. See Gallagher, *Spiritual Consolation* and *Handbook for Spiritual Directors* for a full treatment of this issue.

[5] Ignatius employs both 'times' (Exx 175–178; Dir 1: 6) and 'modes' (Exx 189; Dir 1: 18–19) to describe the three ways 'for making a good and sound election [*elección*, choice]' (Exx 175). We will adopt the word 'mode' here, and speak of 'discernment' rather than 'election'. For a discussion of these two words, see Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors*, 176 note 3.

(Exx 175). In this case, God simply makes his will so clear that the discernment is complete: retreatants know with surety God's will in the choice and need only carry it out.

The second mode is 'when the person receives sufficient clarity and understanding through the experience of consolations and desolations, and through the experience of discernment of spirits' (Exx 176). By consolation, Ignatius intends an affectively uplifting experience (joy, hope, gratitude, love, peace and similar) on the spiritual level, the level of our relationship with God; by desolation, an affectively heavy experience (sadness, anxiety, hopelessness, discouragement and similar) on the spiritual level.[6] When, over time, a person is consistently drawn to one option in times of spiritual consolation, it becomes clear that God wills that option. The discernment is clearer still if that attraction is attacked in time of spiritual desolation when the enemy is at work (Exx 318).

The third mode is employed when God has not given clarity by the first or the second. In a time of affective peace, Ignatius writes, retreatants consider 'by way of reasoning' the 'advantages or benefits', 'purely for the praise of God and the salvation of my soul', that accrue to the one option and the other, as well as any 'disadvantages or dangers' from the same perspective (Exx 181). They thus perceive which option will serve God's greater glory. In this way, as grace mingles with the retreatants' calm and faith-guided reasoning, God's will is shown.

The Thomistic Virtue of Prudence

For Thomas, prudence is the chief of the four cardinal virtues. Human persons are rational agents who direct their actions by reason or thinking. This is *practical reason*—thinking directed to action of some sort—and for actions to be good, practical reason needs to be perfected by a virtue. When reason aims at some partial goal, the virtue that perfects it is called art or skill.[7] Medicine, which aims at health, would be such an art. But when practical reason is directing actions to the end of life as a whole, that is, when it is directing them precisely as *moral* actions, then the virtue

[6] Dir 1: 18: 'A full explanation should be given of what consolation is, i.e. spiritual joy, love, hope for things above, tears and every interior movement which leaves the soul consoled in our Lord. The opposite of this is desolation: sadness, lack of confidence, lack of love, dryness, and so on.' In theological terms, spiritual consolation is an actual grace: see Timothy M. Gallagher, *Setting Captives Free: Personal Reflections on Ignatian Discernment of Spirits* (New York: Crossroad, 2018), 52–54. Ignatius' rules for discernment of spirits, speak of specifically *spiritual* consolation and desolation. For the difference between spiritual and nonspiritual (natural) consolation and desolation, see Timothy M. Gallagher, *The Discernment of Spirits: An Ignatian Guide to Everyday Living* (New York: Crossroad, 2005), 48–51, 60–61; *Setting Captives Free,* 46–54, 68–71.

[7] Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q. 57, a. 4, ad3. All translations are the authors' own.

that perfects it is prudence.[8] Thomas refers to prudence as right reason regarding actions (*recta ratio agibilium*), having in mind moral actions.[9]

Because prudence aims at the end of life as whole—the highest end—it comes into play whenever there is a choice that has a bearing on that end. In other words, it is exercised in every moral act and there can be no good moral act that is not also a prudent act.[10] Prudence always works with the other moral virtues. These virtues (justice, fortitude, temperance, and so on) dispose the person rightly towards the end of life, and prudence perfects practical reason as it finds the right means to achieve this end. Thomas says repeatedly that prudence deals with the means, and presupposes a right ordination towards the end.[11]

Practical reason, when it is perfected by prudence in moral action, has three distinct acts. The first is *counsel*, by which the person considers or investigates the possible means to achieve the end. Having considered the possible options with their advantages and disadvantages, the person arrives at a *judgment* as to which is best. But with the judgment alone prudence is not perfected. It can happen that persons judge what would be best to do, but fail actually to choose, often because they are pulled away from the judgment by some form of passion (desire, fear, and so on). Hence Thomas points to a third act, *command*, by which the judgment actually informs the will's choice and the person carries out the good action. Since prudence is directed to the act of choice, Thomas says that command is the principal act of prudence.[12]

Let us take an example. A parish is struggling economically, and the pastor asks a parishioner who is skilled in such matters to join the parish finance council. This man loves the Lord and wants to do what the Lord is asking of him. He meets the pastor to learn what kind of help and how

[8] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.21, a.2, ad 2.
[9] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.56, a.3; 1.2, q.57, a.4.
[10] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.57, a.5.
[11] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.58, a.5.
[12] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2.2, q.47, a.8; 'Prudence is right reason concerning things to be done [*recta ratio agibilium*], as was said above. Whence it follows that the principal act of prudence will be that act which is the principal act of reason concerning things to be done. This kind of reason has three acts. The first of these is counsel, which pertains to discovery, for to take counsel is to seek something, as was said earlier [1.2, q.14, a.1]. The second act is to judge the things that have been discovered, and with this act speculative [non-practical] reason is finished. But practical reason, which is ordered to action, goes further, and its third act is to command [*praecipere*]. This act consists in the application to action of the things discovered in counsel and then judged. And since this act is closer to the goal of practical reason, it follows that it is the principal act of practical reason and hence of prudence as well.' (See also 1.2, q.57, a.6.) For a treatment of Thomas's understanding of choice and its relationship to other acts of the will and intellect, see David Gallagher, 'The Will and its Acts', in *Essays on the Ethics of Thomas Aquinas*, edited by Stephen Pope (Washington, DC: Georgetown U, 2002), 78–83.

much time are involved. He discusses this with his wife, considering whether this further service is compatible with his existing commitments at home and at work. They examine the parish's need and whether or not others might help. The man then reflects and prays. In Thomistic terms, he has taken wise *counsel*. After consultation, prayer and reflection, and with his wife's support, he concludes that he can say yes. He has made a sound *judgment*. He accepts the position, sets a time to begin, and does so. He has exercised efficacious *command* by putting his decision into practice.

Thomas distinguishes between the natural moral virtues and the infused moral virtues. The natural virtues are habits acquired by means of repeated actions and operate at the level of nature. The infused virtues are infused by God into the soul and are found whenever a person is in the state of grace, that is, they accompany the sanctifying grace (*gratia gratum faciens*) poured into the soul at baptism.[13] Also infused into the soul at baptism are the theological virtues of faith, hope and charity, the highest being charity. By means of this virtue a person is able to love God above all things, and particularly God as seen in the beatific vision that constitutes the end of human life.[14] The moral virtues are perfected when they are directed by charity to this highest end. Hence infused prudence—the form of the virtue with which we are concerned here—seeks to find the best means for achieving this supernatural end.[15] And at this supernatural level, especially when it is a question of helping others to achieve salvation or serving the common good of the Church, prudence will be assisted by actual graces (*gratiae gratis datae*) as needed and as given by God.[16]

In addition, this infused virtue of prudence will be assisted by the gift of *counsel*, one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.[17] Thomas teaches that these gifts, qualities infused into the soul by God, render a person well disposed to be moved by the Holy Spirit at the supernatural level, in order to achieve his or her own and others' salvation.[18] Thomas specifically relates the gift of counsel to the virtue of prudence. As we have seen, counsel is the first of the three acts of prudence, and it enables people to carry out that act at a level beyond their merely natural powers.[19]

[13] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q. 63, a. 3; 1. 2, q. 110, a. 3–4.
[14] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2. 2, q. 23, a. 4–5.
[15] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q. 65, a. 2.
[16] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q.111, a.1–2.
[17] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2. 2, q. 52, a. 1–2.
[18] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q.68, a.1.
[19] See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2. 2, q. 52, a. 1.

> Because human reason cannot comprehend all the individual and contingent things that can occur, it comes about that *the thoughts of mortals are timid and our providence is uncertain*, as is said in *Wisdom*, 9:14. Consequently, man, in the investigation of counsel, needs to be directed by God, who comprehends all things. This happens through the gift of counsel which is received from God.[20]

By this gift God will also quiet the anxiety of doubt when we are faced by choices.[21] As we will see, it is important to keep in mind that the Thomistic virtue of prudence, especially infused prudence, is perfected by motions of the Holy Spirit working through the gift of counsel.

Ignatian Discernment and Thomistic Prudence: Similarities and Differences

Both Ignatian discernment and Thomistic prudence are concerned with finding the right way to choose and act in given situations. Both assume that love and service of God are the proper end of action. In Ignatian terms, this is the 'principle and foundation' of all discernment: 'Man is created to praise, reverence, and serve God our Lord, and by this means to save his soul' (Exx 23). For Thomas, the acts of all the other virtues are aimed at the love of God (and neighbour) that is caused by the virtue of charity. Hence the willing (loving) of that end is required for all perfectly virtuous actions and, without charity, prudence will not exist or at best only imperfectly. Both assume the working of supernatural grace in the soul; neither operates on the purely natural plane. In Ignatian terms,

> The love that moves me and causes me to choose this thing must descend from above, from the love of God; so that the one who chooses should first of all feel in himself that the love, greater or lesser, that he has for the thing he chooses, is solely for the sake of his Creator and Lord (Exx 184).[22]

Both involve the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Finally, both presume that the advice of others is sought. In Ignatian discernment, the one discerning meets regularly—daily, in the context of the Spiritual Exercises as a thirty-day retreat, and weekly when they are made over several months in daily life—with a well-prepared spiritual director (Exx 6–10, 15, 17).[23] Thomas also points to the need for advice.

[20] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2.2, q.52, a.1, ad 1.
[21] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2.2, q.52, a.3.
[22] Ignatius returns repeatedly to this understanding of the end: Exx 46, 169, 177, 179. See Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors*, 26–28.
[23] See Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors*, 15–16.

Among the integral parts of prudence—the different elements that together form the virtue—he includes the sub-virtue of docility, a fixed disposition to seek advice when it is needed. Choosing and acting without seeking advice from others more experienced or more expert than oneself, especially in a serious matter, will constitute a lack of prudence.[24]

In terms of differences, from what we have seen thus far it appears that Ignatian discernment is more restricted in scope than Thomistic prudence. Thomistic prudence applies to the entire range of moral choices and every virtuous act is a prudent act. Ignatian discernment is primarily concerned with choices of significance, in which both options are good, and the person is free to choose either. Consequently, if a harmony exists between the two, Ignatian discernment will be an exercise of the broader Thomistic virtue of prudence as applied to its specific realm.

Specifying the Question

We can now return to the original objection raised by the Thomist and attempt to state it more precisely. The heart of the objection was the following: *Ignatian discernment relies on feelings, and feelings are notoriously unstable. It complicates things unnecessarily by introducing too many variables liable to misperceptions. Sometimes the 'discernment' just goes on and on, and never comes to clarity.*

If we consider Thomas's three acts of prudence, the objection appears to bear on the first act, the act of *counsel*. Ignatius and Thomas would seem to agree that the person needs to come to a (good) judgment, and both would say that the person should act on that judgment (command). But for the Thomist, the process of discernment described by Ignatius does not seem to fit with the act of counsel. Counsel is an act of reason; it should proceed in a rational way. It should be an exercise of thought and not just a matter of feelings. The whole idea of prudence is that a person acts as a *rational* agent, that actions are directed by *thought*. Thus the objection, in the end, seems to be that Ignatian discernment lacks the act of counsel, and replaces it with something not quite rational.

Counsel is ... an exercise of thought and not just a matter of feelings

The basic issue, then, comes down to this: can we understand Ignatian discernment in a way that fits within Thomas's understanding of counsel? We will examine Ignatius' three modes to see whether and how they might be understood in this way.

[24] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 2. 2, q.49, a.3.

The Third Mode of Discernment

Although the third mode of discernment is practised when a person has been unable to discern by the first two modes, we discuss it first, since it fits most easily into the Thomistic understanding of counsel. We can use an example to show this.

'It Seemed Like the Reasons for Taking the Position Were More Solid'

The following is from a conversation with 'Patrick' and is shared with his permission:

> *When I was downsized by my company, I began my own business. Around the same time, I had begun to get involved as a volunteer in prison ministry, and this ministry was very rewarding. After a time, the person who ran prison ministry for the diocese had to move, and I was offered the position. It was a full-time position. I said no. I didn't want a full-time job with prison ministry. I just wanted to stay as a volunteer.*
>
> *A few days passed and I was unsettled, not sure about this, still fighting the new position. I sought a spiritual director and told him that I've prayed but I've never discerned.*
>
> *He suggested that I spend an hour a day in prayer and gave me scriptures for the prayer. So, each day I went to the Adoration chapel in the parish and prayed with a scripture. But I didn't get any clarity yet.*
>
> *Then he suggested looking at the advantages and disadvantages of taking the position and of not taking it. I did that. First, I looked at the advantages. There were a number of them. I knew the ministry well from my experience. I had the administrative skills from my career. I had a good background in theology, and that would help in directing the ministry in the diocese. I also knew that, if I took the position, I would be giving more of myself to the Lord. The disadvantages were that I would lose time for myself, time for the gym, for my grandkids, really, time to be lazy and not have to push myself. When I thought about not taking the position, all of this reversed.*
>
> *I went through this exercise, but also continued with the Blessed Sacrament and scripture. The whole process took about three weeks. That didn't matter to me; I wanted to do it well. About a week and a half into it, I found that all the selfish motives for not taking the position were gone. And it seemed like the reasons for taking the position were more solid.*
>
> *Then the director gave me the passage about Bartimaeus [Mark 10:46–52]. It was a passage I knew well, and I was sitting there reading it. When*

Jesus asked Bartimaeus, 'What do you want me to do for you?' he answered, 'I want to see'. That's what I wanted, too. Then the last five words of the passage really hit me: Bartimaeus 'followed him on the way'. I felt something of what Bartimaeus must have felt because I too had started to lose sight in one eye a few years before, and the eye healed. It seemed to me that the Lord was asking me to follow him, too, through the prison ministry. It hit me like a ton of bricks. It was amazingly clear what the Lord wanted ….

I've been doing the prison ministry for four years now, and I'm still sure that the discernment was clear.[25]

In third-mode discernment, a person chooses a time of calm, when he or she can reflect well. Recalling the end of our life—to love and serve God, and so enter eternal joy—the person prayerfully reviews the advantages and disadvantages for God's greater glory of each option. God's greater glory, in Ignatian terms, signifies that which more effectively serves to make God known and loved in human hearts, in this life and unto eternal life. This approach is sometimes called the method of the 'four columns': an open notebook, with a line down the centre of each of two facing pages, each page representing one option, and at the head of the two columns on each page, 'Advantages' and 'Disadvantages'.

Having prayed, the person notes the advantages and disadvantages for God's greater glory of each option. This may require one or more times of prayer. When the columns are complete, the person looks to see which option presents a preponderance of reasons. The option that does present a preponderance of reasons is shown to be God's will. In this mode of discernment, God calls a person,

> … to the free and peaceful exercise of his natural powers, so that with the help of ordinary grace, without special consolations, illuminations, or directly given movements, he may choose that which he finds to be more pleasing to God, with the single purpose of seeking God's greater service and praise.[26]

This is to say that when God does not give first-mode or second-mode discernment, God calls the person to discern by the light of reason fortified by grace.

[25] See Gallagher, *Discerning the Will of God*, 110–13, for a slightly different version of this experience.
[26] Manuel Ruiz Jurado, *A la luz del carisma ignaciano. Estudios sobre san Ignacio de Loyola y al Compañía de Jesús* (Villatuerta: Mensajero, Sal Terrae and Universidad Pontifica Comillas, 2015), 107.

Turning to the Thomistic conception of prudence, we can see that this third Ignatian mode fits within it very well, especially in terms of the act of counsel. Patrick has a clear end—the glory of God—and is looking for the best means for him to achieve it at this particular point in his life. He has various options and reflectively examines them to see which will better achieve that end. He compares the options in terms of their respective advantages and disadvantages. In short, his counsel is very rational and contains the investigation (*inquisitio*) proper to the act of counsel. Having taken counsel, he proceeds to make a judgment as to what would be best and then chooses to do it (command). From a Thomistic point of view, he has clearly exercised the virtue of prudence, and particularly in the act of counsel.[27]

The First Mode of Discernment

It is less immediately clear that Ignatius' first mode of discernment fits into the Thomistic understanding of prudence. As we saw earlier, in this mode 'God our Lord so moves and attracts the will that, without doubting or being able to doubt, the devout soul follows what is shown to it' (Exx 175). The suddenness that may characterize this mode can easily lead one to think that the act of counsel is hardly present, if at all. Let us look at an example of this of discernment in practice.

Pauline, Sister of St Thérèse of Lisieux

Pauline, Thérèse's 'second mother', cared for her sister until Thérèse, at eight years old, began studies as a day student at the Benedictine abbey in Lisieux. Pauline, now twenty, considered her task finished and prepared to enter religious life according to her long-felt desire. For many reasons, her thoughts turned to the Visitation Sisters of Le Mans. Her mother, Zélie, had loved them and often visited her sister Élisa there. Pauline had spent ten years with her aunt in the school attached to the Visitation monastery. Now she was free to enter religious life, she planned to enter that monastery and had already spoken with the superior.

In a moment, however, her plans changed completely. On 16 February 1882, she attended Mass in the parish church of Saint-Jacques in Lisieux. She recounts what followed:

[27] For reasons of space,we have not discussed Ignatius's second way of doing third-mode discernment, which adds three questions to the first way to assist greater objectivity in reasoning. See Gallagher, *Handbook of Spiritual Direction*, 129–139, and *Discerning the Will of God*, 113–118.

> I assisted at the 6.00 a.m. Mass in Saint-Jacques, in the chapel of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. Suddenly, a most vivid light shone in my soul, and the good God showed me clearly that it was not in the Visitation that he wanted me, but with the Carmelites …. I remember that I felt myself flushed with emotion, and when going forward to receive Communion and returning, I was afraid that this emotion would be evident to others. *I had never thought about Carmel*, and, in an instant, there it was, that I felt myself impelled to Carmel by an irresistible attraction.[28]

Once at home, Pauline confided her experience to her older sister Marie. Her father, the wider family, her confessor and the superior of the Carmel of Lisieux, all supported her Carmelite vocation. Eight months later, Pauline entered the Carmel of Lisieux, where she passed 69 years of fruitful religious life, many of them as prioress. This lovely experience of grace perfectly illustrates Ignatius' first mode of discernment. Something is shown to a person: her call to Carmelite religious life. Her will is strongly drawn to this call; and the experience is so clear that she cannot doubt, then or ever, that God's will for her is to become a Carmelite.

From a Thomistic point of view, what seems problematic here is a seeming absence of the act of counsel. Without any investigation Pauline comes to the judgment that she should enter the Carmelites, and she proceeds similarly to choose (command) this course of action. It seems that this would not be an act of the Thomistic virtue of prudence, or at least it would be a defective act, lacking the essential element of counsel.

Here we should note first that Thomas, in his discussion of counsel, recognises that some actions are not preceded by the normal investigation of counsel. This happens when it is immediately obvious which course of action should be taken. As he puts it: 'In things that are manifest, reason does not inquire but rather immediately judges. And hence it is not necessary that there be the investigation of counsel in all the things that are done by reason.'[29] This teaching also appears in Thomas's understanding of divine and angelic choice. In both cases he says that the intellect grasps things immediately without any discursive motion and so God and the angels make their judgments immediately without the sort of investigation that normally precedes human judgment and command.[30] Ignatius' first

[28] Jean Vinatier, *Mère Agnès de Jésus: Pauline Martin, soeur aînée et 'Petite Mère' de Sainte Thérèse de l'Enfant-Jèsus* (Paris: Cerf, 1993), 45–46 (emphasis original).
[29] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1. 2, q. 14, a. 4, ad 2.
[30] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q.22, a.1, ad 1; 1, q. 58, a. 3.

mode, then, could be understood as a case in which the act of counsel is immediate, and the person moves straight to the act of judgment.

How might we explain this in a Thomistic framework? In his treatise on God's providence, Thomas addresses the question of whether angels can move a human will. He says that they can do this, by presenting a good object to the person's intellect. The will, attracted by that object, for example a possible good action, moves itself freely towards it. Angels are said to move the will 'exteriorly', in a way that preserves the will's freedom, and Thomas says that they 'persuade' the human person. God also can and does move the will in this way, presenting the intellect with an attractive good which the person then freely chooses.[31] Either way, either directly or through the mediation of an angel, God can move a person to consider a good object and can make it immediately attractive—so much so, in fact, that Pauline could experience, suddenly and without having deliberated, an 'irresistible attraction' to becoming a Carmelite. This would clearly seem to be a case where the gift of counsel is operative and Pauline is following an 'interior impulse' and is 'being moved by a principle better than the human mind'.[32]

Pauline Martin, Mother Agnes of Jesus

Here, then, we seem to have a way to explain, within Thomas's own teaching, the apparent lack of

[31] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1, q.111, a.2.

[32] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.68, a.1. It does not seem, for Thomas at least, that Pauline's experience of an 'irresistible attraction' would signify a lack of freedom in her decision to enter Carmel. He teaches that there are certain good objects—specifically happiness considered in general and God seen in the beatific vision—that can in no way be taken to be evil and so the will is not free to reject them (this would be God moving the will 'efficaciously'). It is possible, however, for the will to reject all other goods, including something such as entering Carmel, because it is always possible somehow to see them in a negative light (1.2, q.10, a.2, 4). Nevertheless, Thomas holds that the will can be subject to a qualified kind of necessity, the 'necessity of the end'. This occurs when a person wills some end and there is only one means to accomplish it. For example, if a river can be crossed only by using a boat, a person who wills to cross the river necessarily wills to use a boat (1, q.82, a.1). In the case of someone such as Pauline, who would take as her highest end or goal to do the will of God, if an action were presented as what God willed, she would feel this kind of necessity in choosing it. This might explain her experience of an 'irresistible attraction'.

counsel, especially the lack of an investigation, that seems to characterize Ignatius' first mode.

The Second Mode of Discernment

In the second mode the person observes how an option appears when he or she considers it in times of consolation and in times of desolation. Ignatius describes this mode as follows:

> Among the three modes of making a choice, if God does not move a person in the first mode, one should dwell persistently on the second, that of recognizing his vocation by the experience of consolations and desolations; in such manner that, as he continues with his meditations on Christ our Lord, he observes, when he finds himself in consolation, to which part God moves him, and likewise when he finds himself in desolation. (Dir 1:18)

The basic principle is that if in times of spiritual consolation a possible choice or action consistently appears good or attractive and its consideration brings peace and joy, while producing the opposite reaction in times of desolation, these experiences allow a person to judge that this choice is God's will and that he or she should pursue it.

Unlike the first mode, which may occur in an instant, the second mode entails a more or less extended period of prayer and reflection. In addition, there is a kind of weighing up or investigation (*inquisitio*) that can be understood to play the role of Thomistic counsel. Nevertheless, as we will see, this process of reflection can seem to be more a matter of emotions or feelings than the rational process that Thomas seems to describe. It seems to be very 'subjective' and lacking the kind of objectivity characteristic of prudence.

Let us turn to an example from Ignatius' own life.

'With a Great Abundance of Devotion and Tears'

Ignatius is 52, living in Rome, and writing the Jesuit *Constitutions*. He faces a significant discernment regarding poverty: does God will that the Jesuits live a completely radical poverty, with no fixed income? Or does God will a mitigation of this poverty for the proper maintenance of the churches entrusted to them? As he pursues this discernment, Ignatius notes his experience in his *Spiritual Diary*.

He begins on 2 February 1544: 'Great devotion during mass, with tears, with increased trust in Our Lady, and more inclined both then and during the whole day to choose complete poverty'. Here Ignatius

describes a rich experience of spiritual consolation during the Mass, and in this time of consolation his heart is more drawn towards radical poverty. The same drawing continues throughout the day. Something similar appears in the following days:

> Sunday [3 Feb.]—The same; and more inclined both then and during the whole day to choose complete poverty.
>
> Monday [4 Feb.]—The same; also other feelings and a greater inclination to complete poverty ….
>
> Tuesday [5 Feb.]—Great devotion before, during and after mass, with tears so abundant that my eyes ached … both then and during the day I was set on poverty and still more moved to it ….
>
> Wednesday [6 Feb.]—Devotion, not without tears, before and during mass, and more inclined to complete poverty ….
>
> 6th. Thursday [7 Feb.]—Very great devotion and tears before mass; I felt throughout the day a warmth and a remarkable devotion, remaining myself ever more convinced and moved to poverty.

The pattern repeats day after day: in time of spiritual consolation, Ignatius feels drawn towards one option in the discernment—radical poverty. As the pattern grows 'ever more firm', he increasingly understands that God wills the radical poverty.

Weeks pass, and Ignatius is further confirmed in this discernment. On the final day of discernment, however, spiritual desolation enters, and his clarity is attacked:

> After mass and later in my room, I found myself completely bereft of all help, unable to find delight in the mediators, or in the Divine Persons; I felt as remote and separated from them as if I had never felt their influence in the past, or was ever to feel any of it in the future. Instead I was beset by thoughts, now against Jesus, now against another, and quite bewildered with a variety of schemes, to leave the house and hire a room to escape the noise, to fast, to begin more masses, to place an altar upstairs: nothing satisfied me and yet I wanted to put an end to the affair with my soul in a state of consolation and complete satisfaction. (Diary, 12 March 1544)

Classical signs of spiritual desolation appear in this experience: a feeling of distance from God, darkness, a sense of confusion; and in this desolation the clarity given in spiritual consolation is attacked. From the desolation the thought 'to begin the Masses over again' arises, that is: *This discernment that you thought so clear is not clear at all. See how confused everything is. You must dismiss the experience of the earlier days and begin the process again.*

Here, then, we witness a classic second-mode discernment: a repeatedly confirmed attraction to one option in time of spiritual consolation that is attacked in time of spiritual desolation. Ignatius supplies the interpretative key in his rules for discernment: 'As in consolation the good spirit guides and counsels us more, so in desolation the bad spirit, with whose counsels we cannot find the way to a right decision' (Exx 318). Hence, Ignatius' discernment that God wills the radical poverty is doubly confirmed: when the good spirit is counselling, he is consistently drawn to the radical poverty; when the bad spirit is counselling, that attraction is attacked. A few hours later that same day, Ignatius concludes the discernment, arriving at the judgment that God wills the radical poverty.

In what way might we see in this process an act of counsel? How might it be reasonable, from a Thomistic point of view, to base a judgment of how one should act on the experiences Ignatius has described? Here we can draw attention to an important principle of Thomas's moral psychology. He teaches that how a potential object of choice appears to a person depends on that person's affective state or condition and will vary as that state or condition varies. As Thomas expresses it (quoting Aristotle), 'depending on the sort of person one is, ends will appear differently to him' (*qualis unusquisque est, talis finis videtur ei*).[33]

Thomas applies this principle at two levels, that of (stable) moral virtue and that of (transient) passion. At the level of the moral virtues, he says that what appears as a good end to be pursued by one's actions depends on possessing a given virtue or its opposed vice. For example, to a glutton, maximising the pleasures of eating appears to be a good thing and the glutton directs his or her actions to that end. To temperate persons, on the other hand, the chief end pursued in eating will be health, and they will not eat to maximise pleasure, but rather to satisfy their objective bodily needs (enjoying such pleasures as this involves). To the temperate person, overeating does not appear as a good end to be pursued.

Similarly, what seems good to a coward—avoiding pain or death—is very different from what seems good to the courageous person—facing dangers as required by justice or charity. The moral virtues make a person capable of seeing the true ends of human life. And since prudence, to be truly a virtue (and not just some sort of cunning), has to find means to the *true* end of human life, only a person who is affectively well disposed by the moral virtues can be prudent.[34]

[33] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.9, a.2.
[34] See Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.58.

Thomas also invokes the principle, at the level of the passions, when he is explaining how it is that passions can move the will. In a state of heightened passion, he says, the person perceives goods differently from how he or she perceives them in a calm state. A thing will look appetising to a person who is hungry and has a strong desire to eat, but not when the person is not hungry. Likewise, a person who would normally think that lying or stealing is a bad thing to be avoided might, in a state of fear, start to see it as something it would be good to choose. So too, striking someone looks good while a person is angry, but once the person cools down he or she regrets it. As Thomas puts it, 'what seems good to an angry man does not seem good to a calm man'.[35] Thomas's point is that passions can move the will—rational appetite—precisely by changing how a possible action appears to the person's reason, such that a person will choose in a state of passion what he or she would not choose otherwise.

Thomas adds another important point to his analysis. Not only do persons in different affective states see things differently, but it is the one who is in the good or proper affective state who sees goods and evils as they truly are. For example, although the glutton sees eating excessively as something good, it is not truly or objectively good for him or her. The temperate person, on the other hand, will judge accurately—objectively—the amount he or she needs to eat in any given situation.

Similarly, in a state of anger it is very likely that persons will take something to be a good thing to do which, in fact, is very harmful, often even for themselves. It is almost a commonplace that you need to be calm to judge what is truly good.[36] As is well known, Thomas distinguishes between the apparent good—what seems good to any given person at any given time—and the true good, what is objectively good for a person whether or not the person perceives it to be such.[37] In sum, for someone in a bad affective state the two will be different, while for a person in a good affective state the two will line up together.

Let us now take Thomas's principle and apply it to Ignatius' distinction between spiritual consolation and spiritual desolation. It seems we can say that a person in a state of spiritual consolation is in a good or

[35] Aquinas, *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.9, a.2.

[36] Although very often the passion of anger distorts one's perception of the good, it is important to note that this is not always the case and that it is appropriate to become angry when the situation objectively calls for it. Thomas deals with the proper control of one's anger while treating the virtue of meekness (*Summa theologiae*, 2.2, q.157).

[37] A few examples of the distinction can be found at: *Summa theologiae*, 1.2, q.8, a.1; 1.2, q.9, a.6, ad 3; 1.2, q.19, a.1, ad 1.

healthy affective state. This is a state which arises from the good spirit through God's grace. The opposite is true for the state of desolation, in which the soul is being attacked by the bad spirit. Consequently, it would seem to be expected that a person in a state of consolation will see what is the good thing to do more accurately than a person who is in a state of desolation.

Working with Thomas's principle, then, it seems that the fact that a certain option consistently seems good in times of consolation can serve as an indication that it is truly good. And this is confirmed by the experience of its seeming to be bad in times of desolation. Given this consideration, it may well seem 'rational' to take this consistent experience in consolations and desolations as a sign that one should judge that the option should be chosen. In this way we could see it as an instance of the act of counsel that leads to a (good) judgment.[38]

This process of examining over time how things appear to oneself in different states may not seem to fit our expectation of a virtuous act of counsel, certainly not as the third mode does. In this regard, it may be helpful to recall that Ignatian discernment applies in cases where the usual 'objective' measures are not found: cases where the choice is between two good actions and where it is not governed by some law or by obligations arising from one's state in life. In other words, there is already something quite 'subjective' about the choice that requires a special attention to how the Spirit may be moving the person. In the second mode this is precisely what the person does in order to make the proper judgment. Also, this mode does not necessarily have to yield a judgment; if after some time the person, along with the spiritual director, understands that he or she will not discover the will of God in this way, they move on to the third mode. We might note that the initial critique of discernment as being interminable may arise, in terms of second-mode discernment, from a failure in the spiritual director to recognise the need to take this step.[39]

[38] In this example and analysis of the second mode, the person examines how a possibility appears to him or her in periods of spiritual consolation or desolation. But the consideration of the possible course of action may also give rise to the consolation; see Ignacio Casanovas, *Comentario y explanación de los Ejercicios Espirituales de San Ignacio de Loyola* (Barcelona: Balmes, 1945), volume 2, 97. Here we might appeal to Thomas's teaching that the object of love and joy is something suitable or fitting (*conveniens*) to the subject to help explain why a person might rely on such experience (given that Ignatian consolation is a form of joy: Exx 317). On the nature of love and joy and their relationship, see David Gallagher, 'Desire for Beatitude and Love of Friendship in Thomas Aquinas', *Mediaeval Studies*, 58 (1996), 8–11.

[39] See Gallagher, *Handbook for Spiritual Directors*. More generally, unduly protracted discernments may arise from various factors: debilitating psychological wounds in the discerner, imperfect spiritual

Thomistic Prudence and Ignatian Discernment: A Mutual Benefit

From what we have seen, it appears that if Thomistic prudence and Ignatian discernment are well understood on their own terms, there does not seem to be any opposition between them. We can fit Ignatian discernment, in its restricted sphere, within the larger, all-encompassing virtue of prudence. Moreover, we might say that Ignatius' modes of discernment, which he learnt from his spirit-guided experience, receive a solid theological underpinning from Thomas's broader and highly developed synthesis of the moral and spiritual life. On the one hand, this underpinning offers the Ignatian director a deeper theological understanding of the modes, which in turn fosters a richer and more fruitful pastoral application. On the other hand, Ignatius supplies the Thomistic theologian with a broad grasp, from experience, of the varied ways in which God may give counsel. The theologian's understanding of how prudence is exercised in practice is thereby amplified.

Returning to our initial speakers, if both can perceive the harmony between Thomistic prudence and Ignatian discernment, pastoral blessings follow. The first ceases to mistrust, and possibly cause others to mistrust, an effective spiritual tool for seeking God's will. A pastoral door opens more widely. The second, who now understands discernment more solidly, will reverence it more, exercise it with more precision, and may avoid errors to which he might otherwise be exposed. Again, God's people benefit. Our hope is that this article contributes to that harmony and that benefit.

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formation in the discerner or director, lack of the requisite spiritual preparation for discernment, deficient understanding or application of Ignatius' modes by the director, and the like. A properly formed director will avoid these pitfalls.