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## Aquinas on Virtue

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## CHAPTER 2

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# Virtue as a Habit

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Suggested reading: *Summa Theologiae* I.II 49.1–4,  
55.1–2; *On the Virtues* 1.1

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Thomas Aquinas prefaces his causal definition of virtue by characterizing virtue as a good operative habit: “Human virtue, which is an operative habit, is a good habit, and operative of the good” (I.II 55.3c).<sup>1</sup> In answer to the question, “What kind of thing is a virtue?” Aquinas, in effect, replies, “a habit.”

The concept of habit may seem commonplace and hardly mysterious. Yet the history of reflection on this idea, from Aristotle to the social theorist Pierre Bourdieu, is a complex and rich one. For theological ethics its importance lies in the fact that the good Christian life has to comprise more than a series of discrete actions; it must involve the formation and even transformation of the human agent. By habit our moral character is constituted. For Aquinas, the habitual formation of desire toward the good is of nothing less than ultimate importance; it is, he says, “necessary for the end of human life” (50.5 ad 1).<sup>2</sup>

What is a habit? Aquinas uses the Latin word *habitus*, from *habere*: to have or possess. While this term is often translated as “habit,” it will quickly become apparent that there is a great difference between our contemporary idea of habit and Aquinas’s *habitus*. For virtue theory this difference is not insignificant.

### THE PROBLEM WITH MODERN HABITS

There is an acute danger of misinterpreting Aquinas’s virtue theory as we read his understanding of habit through modern eyes. Even scholars who recognize some differences between modern and medieval accounts of habit are often unaware of how wide the gap really is. To simply substitute the modern idea of habit for Aquinas’s *habitus* would be a significant failure of exegetical accuracy and, more important, would obscure the riches of Aquinas’s helpful account.

We find the modern idea of habit expressed in the classic treatment by the philosopher and psychologist William James (1842–1910). James sees habits as potentially positive: virtues and vices are both habits. We are a “mass of habits,” and whichever habits we possess determines our well-being or otherwise.<sup>3</sup> Due to the “plasticity” of our nature we are capable of voluntarily forming habits in ourselves by repeated action in order to diminish the effort and fatigue required to attain certain goals.<sup>4</sup> James advises that the one who has carefully cultivated the right habits in life “will stand like a tower when everything rocks around him, and his softer fellow-mortals are winnowed like chaff in the blast.”<sup>5</sup>

Aquinas would likely agree, at least thus far. But we also find in James a strong emphasis on the “automatic” nature of habits. By his account, habit “*diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed.*”<sup>6</sup> Contemporary psychological treatments of habit carry on from where James began, analyzing habits into a “cue,” a “behavior,” and a “reward.” Once a habit is established, if given a particular trigger the behavior is automatic: “Contexts activate habitual responses directly, without the mediation of goal states.”<sup>7</sup> Indeed, contemporary psychological studies take *automaticity* as a key indicator of when a habit has been formed. Yet the more something is done automatically, the less it is done consciously and voluntarily. The modern concept of habit therefore picks out a mechanistic pattern of response, generated by multiple repetitions of identical actions. Habits, therefore, lead to unthinking and nonvoluntary action. As James puts it, habitual actions, like dressing, eating, or greeting friends, “are things of a type so fixed by repetition as almost to be classed as reflex actions. To each sort of impression we have an automatic, ready-made response.”<sup>8</sup> There are even hints of a neuro-physical determinism in James’s account, such as when he refers to habits being “grooved out” in the brain.<sup>9</sup>

It is easy to see why there is a modern ambivalence about habits, even “good” ones. Even if we agree with James about the need to develop good routines, a purely habitual life seems lacking in spontaneity. As one student of modern habits concedes, “As automaticity increases, our experience of being in the moment recedes; we feel less alive, fail to notice the world around us, and become disconnected from our experience.”<sup>10</sup> Indeed, habits can take control of us and “lock us into the same boring grooves.”<sup>11</sup> In the modern view, habits are a form of automatic pilot in which our free conscious agency is diminished or even nearly eliminated.

This concept of habit leads to problems in virtue theory. A virtue, following Aristotle and Aquinas, is both a habit and a principle of rational operation, in that it incorporates practical reasoning about how to act. Yet how can a habit of unthinking, nonvoluntary response also be rational?

Bill Pollard attempts to square the circle by offering an account of rational action that makes room for automaticity. He argues that an action can

be rational even though free from deliberation. How could this be possible? Pollard claims that, insofar as someone can *construct* an account of how her action makes sense rationally, her action can be considered rational.<sup>12</sup> He therefore takes the rationality of virtuous action out of the action itself and sees it merely as something the agent devises to make sense of what she does habitually. Post hoc rationalization substitutes for action that flows from a deliberative process. With this dubious move Pollard saves the idea that virtuous action can be habitual, but this move comes at a cost: virtuous action is no longer deliberate. That Pollard does not question the idea that habitual action is automatic—a more promising way of reconciling virtuous and habitual actions—shows the grip that the modern idea of habit has.

In the psychological literature there is an awareness that modern models of habit may need to be revised. Wendy Wood and David T. Neale offer the following definition: “Habits are learned dispositions to repeat past responses.”<sup>13</sup> By their account, contexts have the power to “trigger” habitual responses without any behavioral goal guiding performance. They rightly worry, therefore, that habitual action falls outside of the sphere of responsibility: “‘I can’t help it, it’s just a habit,’ is an excuse that people might offer for such cued behaviors as bad habits (e.g., chronic overeating) and action slips (e.g., accidentally driving to work when intending to go to the store). By offering such accounts, people perhaps are acknowledging that their responses are cued by performance contexts independently of what they intended to accomplish.”<sup>14</sup> To reintroduce some degree of intentionality into habit, Wood and Neale propose that “habits interface with goals.” For example, goals can motivate repetition and lead to the intentional formation of habits that serve one’s goals. In other words, while habitual action as such is unintentional, there can be a kind of voluntariness in choosing which habits to cultivate in oneself.

While this is some progress in trying to reconcile intention and action, the solution remains within a largely mechanistic understanding of habit as a reflex response to a cue or trigger. The only acknowledged intentionality in habits is the extrinsic one of choosing which habits to cultivate; there is no sense that the exercise of habit itself could be intrinsically voluntary. Once again, virtuous and habitual action seem incompatible. Does Aquinas offer a way forward?

## HUMAN AGENCY

In the prologue to the *Treatise of Habits*, Aquinas begins: “After considering acts and passions, we now consider the principles of human acts” (I.II 49 pr).<sup>15</sup>

A habit, for Aquinas, is the principle of a human act. This is why ethics needs to look at habits: it is interested in the good human acts that lead us toward beatitude and the bad ones that lead us away; it needs also to look at habits (that is, virtues and vices) as their intrinsic principles (ibid.; I.II 6 pr). If a habit is an intrinsic principle of a human act, what is a human act?

Aquinas's ethics takes human acts seriously. In the prologue to the *Treatise on Morals* Aquinas transitions from the first part of the *Summa Theologiae*, about God and what proceeds from God, to the image of God: "We now must consider God's image, that is, the human being, insofar as he also is the principle of his works, as having freewill and power over his works" (I.II pr).<sup>16</sup> Aquinas's ethics begins with the human agent.

Aquinas lays out a way of understanding human action in the three articles immediately following. His definition proceeds by means of a famous contrast: the distinction between a human act, *actus humanus*, and the act of a human, *actus hominis* (I.II 1).<sup>17</sup> A human act, as the term implies, is an act that is proper to a human insofar as she is human; a human being, as he has just stated, is a being with intellect and free will and therefore having control over her own acts. He concludes, therefore, that strictly so-called human actions are those that proceed from a will that has been disposed and directed by practical reason through a process of deliberation: "Those actions properly termed 'human' are those that proceed from a deliberate will" (1.1c).<sup>18</sup> These *human actions* are distinguished from mere *actions of a human*, such as moving a hand or foot while intent on something else, or absentmindedly scratching one's beard (cf. I.II 1 arg 2). As David M. Gallagher puts it, blinking (an act of a human) is different from winking (a human act).<sup>19</sup>

Human action is the action proper, not to an *intellectual* but a *rational* nature (1.2). As Aquinas explains, "The intellect knows by a simple intuition, whereas reason [knows] by a process of discourse from one thing to another" (I 59.1 ad 1).<sup>20</sup> Human beings are not angels: they arrive at the truth by a discursive process rather than through direct apprehension. Since in ethics we are in the realm of the practical rather than the speculative, arriving at the truth is in particular the process of counsel, judgment, and decision that is being singled out as characteristically human: human action is deliberate action.

John Poinsett notices a problem with this equation of "human" and "deliberate."<sup>21</sup> Some uniquely human acts are not deliberate, and some deliberate acts are not uniquely human. For example, only humans cry, laugh, are overcome by wonder, recognize that the whole is greater than any part, and sing and shout drunkenly. But all these uniquely human acts are usually indeliberate. Moreover, humans also perform many actions from deliberation that are not uniquely human, such as running and eating.

Poinsot clarifies, then, that the equation of human with deliberate action is not intended to identify a set of actions that humans, and only humans, perform; rather, it identifies the manner of acting that is proper to humans.<sup>22</sup> Indeliberate actions, such as crying and laughing, being overcome by wonder, and so on are unique to humans, but they are not done in a human way: they happen by impulse rather than through reasoned choice. As Poinsot puts it, the *substance* of these indeliberate actions is human since they depend on human intelligence, but since they are not done from deliberation, their *manner of agency* is not. Similarly, what can make running and eating properly human is not that they are done only by humans but rather that they are done in a human way—that is, deliberately. A properly human action is one that is performed in a manner proper to or characteristic of humans and proceeding from reason and will.

### THE DEFINITION OF HABIT

Having looked at human action, we are ready to turn to Aquinas's concept of habit as a *principle* of human action.<sup>23</sup> How may one go about defining habit? One could consider including various elements in the definition. Habits are often acquired by *repetition*, are more or less *stable*, are *disposed* toward some object or act, are *good or bad*, and add *facility* to operation. Different definitions emphasize different elements. For example, contemporary psychology defines habits as “learned dispositions to repeat past responses,” showing an emphasis on their repetitive nature.

One element conspicuously lacking in Aquinas's account of the essence of habit is acquisition by repetition. Why this lacuna? Theologically, Aquinas recognizes that some habits are “infused” by God; that is, they come as divine gifts rather than by human achievement (51.4). A definition that includes “generation by repetition” would therefore fail by being too narrow in extension and apply to only some habits.<sup>24</sup>

There is a more fundamental reason for the omission. Aquinas does recognize, following Aristotle, that repeated action may generate a habit. Just as one becomes a good or bad builder by customarily building well or building badly, so by acting well or acting badly one becomes just or unjust. “Generally, as one may put it in a word, like habits come about from like operations.”<sup>25</sup> Yet this important principle identifies at best the efficient, not the formal cause of habits; that is, it explains what brings them into *existence* rather than saying anything about their *essence* (I.II 51–53). It is notable, then, that Aquinas's questions on the efficient cause of habits (51–53) come after his treatment of the habit's “substance” or essence (49). Before one

looks at *how* habits come about, one must say *what* a habit is. What, then, does Aquinas say?

### Quality, Disposition, Habit

Aquinas's theory of habit is a causal one. He offers an account of the nature of habits from its four causes: formal (I.II 49.1–2), final (49.3–4), material (50), and efficient (51–53).<sup>26</sup> Here we will focus mainly on the formal cause since of all the causes this is the most definitional; the others will be considered when we examine virtue.

To characterize habit, Aquinas initially follows the method of definition from Aristotelian logic. The first step is to identify habit's "category," or its most general kind (*summum genus*). A habit, Aquinas argues, is neither a substance nor a relation nor a quantity but only a *quality* (49.1). This is hardly surprising. A habit must be a quality since when we acquire or lose a habit such as wisdom, beauty, or knowledge, a real change takes place within us. Furthermore, when we describe a person as wise or beautiful or knowledgeable, we are genuinely describing what they are like. Habits are not essential qualities; rather, they are accidental qualities that come genuinely to modify and qualify the subject.

A habit is a quality: that is its "category." The next step is to determine the specific kind of quality a habit is. According to Aristotle's *Categories*, there are four species of quality, each of which is denominated by a binary pair: disposition and habit, potency and impotency, passion and passible quality, and form and figure. Thus "habit" falls into the first species of quality, alongside "disposition."

A terminological nicety needs to be noted. The word "Holland" can be used generically to refer to the whole of the Netherlands or specifically to a particular region of that country. Similarly, for Aquinas "disposition" is ambiguous and lies somewhere between a generic sense that names the first species of quality and a specific sense that names a particular kind of this species (and which is contradistinguished from habit). A habit is a disposition when "disposition" is taken in its generic sense; it is not disposition when "disposition" is taken in its more specific sense.

As Aquinas gleans from Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, "a disposition is an order of that which has parts" (49.1 arg 3).<sup>27</sup> This is what disposition refers to in its general sense. Admittedly, when we refer to a habit as a kind of disposition, we do not mean it is a physical arrangement of a thing's parts. Nevertheless, by a kind of analogy from the physical ordering of parts, a habit reduces complexity

to unity and orders a power or capacity of the soul to a single act, object, or end; by itself a power is indifferent to many different acts and objects (49.1 arg 3, c. and ad 3).

Thus a habit is a kind of disposition, where “disposition” is taken in its generic sense to refer to a quality that focuses human capacities to operate in a specific way, like the software of a computer that enables the hardware to perform some specific task. At the same time, a habit is *contrasted* with a disposition, if “disposition” is taken in its more specific and proper sense. We can call the former a “generic” disposition and the latter a “mere” disposition since for Aquinas it does not possess the stability that characterizes habit (49.2 ad 3). A mere disposition is a tenuous version of the more firmly rooted habit. Given that a habit is a quality, and more specifically a disposition (although not a mere disposition), what is the feature that ultimately defines habit as habit?

#### Four Candidates for the Defining Feature

There are four candidates for the specifying difference that makes a disposition into a habit. A habit, Aquinas claims, is a quality or disposition that is *stable, operative, valent, and nature-directed*. First, a habit is a *stable* quality or disposition (I.II 49.2). Aquinas’s preferred term is *difficile mobilis*: changeable with difficulty. A habit is not an easy-come, easy-go kind of quality, since then it would not be a *habitus* or something truly *had* or possessed. (*Habitus* derives from *habere*: to have or possess.) In some instances I may temporarily be inclined to kindness, and even on occasion act kindly, but that does not make me a kind person; only a more stable disposition can do that. A habit is not a “transient quality,” like the blush of someone who has become embarrassed, but is an “immanent quality” of its bearer.<sup>28</sup>

Second, a habit is an *operative* quality. Habits are disposed toward acts or operations (49.3). Indeed, since habits are not directly observable, they can be known only through the acts to which they dispose their bearer (II.II 4.1). A habit, then, is neither the pure potentiality of some subject nor its complete realization in operation; it is something intermediate between the two. “A habit lies midway between potentiality and actualization” (I.II 73.1c).<sup>29</sup> Before learning to play the piano a child has the capacity to do so; yet if she presses random keys, only noise emerges. After years of practice the child becomes a musician and has acquired a quality: a habit that enables her to play the works of Chopin and Liszt when she chooses. This habit is something actual that goes beyond the bare capacity (*potentia nuda*) that the child initially possessed; yet



it is still a potential of some sort since it is actualized only on those occasions when the musician sits at the piano and plays (II.II 171.2 ad 1). The habit of piano playing is already actual in relation to the potential she possessed by nature, but it is merely potential in relation to the act of performing.<sup>30</sup> A habit is what Aquinas calls the “first actuality” of a capacity, in that it does begin to perfect a potential. But it is not itself the “second actuality,” or its full completion in operation (I.II 49.3 ad 1). Habit, then, is “halfway between pure potentiality and the complete act” (50.4).<sup>31</sup> Habits are operative because they are principles of operation.

Third, a habit has a *valent* quality—that is, one that it is either good or bad. For Aquinas, a habit is never value-neutral. Indeed, as he tells us, a habit is “a disposition according to which something is disposed well or badly” (49.2c).<sup>32</sup> Being good or bad belongs to the very concept of habit (*ibid.*). Compare the word “habit” with that of “state.” If we ask about the state of a violin, say, we are not merely interested in just any of its characteristics, such as shape, size, and so on, but whether it is in *good* or *bad* condition. The state of a violin is a good or bad state; it is never a value-neutral one. It is the same with habit: to dispose well or badly belongs to habit’s rationale (49.2 ad 1). For Aquinas, a habit is by definition a good or bad state to be in; that is, it is a *valent* quality.

So far we are moving toward a definition of habit as a quality or, more precisely, a disposition that is *stable*, *operative*, and *valent*. Finally, Aquinas claims that habits are qualities that are *nature-directed*. Summarizing, he states: “As has been said, habit implies a certain disposition in order to a being’s nature, and to its operation or end, according to which [disposition] it is well or badly disposed to this [nature and operation]” (49.4).<sup>33</sup> This characterization includes both valence and being operative, although it leaves out stability. And an additional element is included: habit is a disposition *in order to a being’s nature*. All qualities, Aquinas says, are “modes” or “determinations” of a subject; a habit is that specific kind of quality that modifies or determines its subject “in order to the nature of a thing” (49.2c).<sup>34</sup>

This final of the four marks of habit is the most opaque yet the most fundamental. Aquinas does not simply identify a conglomeration of properties; rather, he attempts to identify the essential core from which the others flow. It is *because* habit is a nature-directed disposition that it is also stable, operative, and valent.

It is not necessary to see the link immediately: the derivation of the other characteristics from this one will be left to the next chapter. For the moment, armed with Aquinas’s understanding of habit as a disposition that is stable, operative, valent, and nature-directed, we return to our current question: Does it make sense to see virtue as a habit, as Aquinas does?

## VIRTUE AS A HABIT

Defining a virtue as a kind of habit is problematic. In the modern view, habits are marked by automaticity because they are reflex responses that bypass the rational and volitional faculties. If virtuous action is voluntary and rational, and habitual action is not, it is difficult to see virtue as a habit.

In contrast to this dominant modern view, for Aquinas the relationship between habit and deliberate agency is not one of competition. Merely to state the noncontradiction of the habitual and the voluntary does not remotely get to the heart of the matter: for Aquinas, habits, far from undermining voluntariness, actually perfect it. Let us examine this in more depth.

### Is Virtue a Habit?

Aquinas's *habitus* is derived from the reflexive use of the Latin verb *habere*: to have or to possess (49.1c). For example, a person with an earache might say in Latin, "*Male se habet auris mea!*" literally, "My ear has itself badly!" This makes little sense in English, so such a phrase might be translated as "My ear is in a bad state!" But the Latin is informative: it links *habitus* to the reflexive verb *habere se* and therefore to the idea of self-possession.

To possess something is to have dominion over it and to be able to use it when one wants. Aquinas makes the connection with habit: "A habit is compared to a possession, insofar as we have the thing possessed at our fingertips."<sup>35</sup> Aquinas never tires of repeating a thesis derived from "the Commentator" Averroes (Ibn Rushd): "A habit is that by which someone acts when he wills" (I.II 5).<sup>36</sup> Similarly, he likes to quote Saint Augustine: "A habit is that by which we act when there is need" (49.3sc).<sup>37</sup> Something akin to this idea survives in contemporary English usage, as when we admire the "self-possession" of a person who does not behave in a reactive manner but is calm, confident, and in control of her feelings and actions. Aquinas's *habitus* is something one possesses, or even a form of self-possession, in contrast to a modern habit, which is something that possesses me.

It may sensibly be objected that if a habit is that by which we act whenever we want, like a possession we can use at will, then a virtue can hardly be habit. A virtuous person is not inclined to be virtuous only when she chooses, but all the time.

This objection misses the way that moral habits, for Aquinas, are unique: they form desire itself, by perfecting the will (50.3 ad 3; 4): "It is necessary to posit some habit in the will, by which it is well disposed to its act. For, from the very rationale of habit, it appears that it has a certain principal order to

the will, insofar as a habit is that which one uses when one wills” (50.5c).<sup>38</sup> Whereas modern habit is a substitute for conscious agency, putting a person on cruise control, Thomistic moral habits engage rather than bypass the human will. The moral virtues are dispositions to *choose* to act in certain ways: moral virtue is a habit that chooses, an elective habit (58.1 ad 2). Habits, rather than bypassing human agency, are perfective of it.

For this reason Aquinas denies that animals can possess habits in the full and proper sense. One may train a dog, for example, to do certain things from custom, by using punishments and treats. However, these are not fully habitual: “The rationale of a habit [in animals] is lacking as regards the use of the will, because they do not have dominion of using or not using, which seems to belong to the rationale of habit” (50.3 ad 2).<sup>39</sup> Note the difference between modern habit and Aquinas’s *habitus*: where modern habit is antithetical to will, Aquinas’s *habitus* requires it. Where modern habit is a principle of an act of a human (*actus hominis*), a *habitus* is a principle of a human act (*actus humanus*).

This enables Aquinas to argue that virtue is a habit: “Virtue names a certain perfection of a power” (55.1c).<sup>40</sup> A power is perfected by being determined to its end. Nothing can fulfill this role except a habit, which, as we have seen, focuses the rational powers on a specific object: “Rational powers, those that are properly human, are not determinate to one [*ad unum*], but stand indeterminately to many things [*ad multa*]. However, they may be determined to act by habits, as is evident from what has been said [49.4]. And therefore human virtues are habits” (55.1c).<sup>41</sup> Again, a virtue is like a piece of software that builds on a computer’s basic but indiscriminate capacity and enables it to accomplish definite tasks.

How does this resolve the paradox of virtuous action being habitual action? The key is the idea that the habit of virtue is a perfection of a power (*perfectio potentiae*). Virtuous habits do not diminish but improve our capacity to act from reason and will. A virtue cannot be a modern habit, since the more something is done from modern habit the less it is done from reason and will; it must be a *habitus* since virtue, as a principle of a *human* act, is nothing other than a perfection of the rational powers of agency.

### Habit versus Habitus

Is there any truth in the modern understanding of habit? Psychological enquiry into habit is informative but often concerns something different from Aquinas’s *habitus*. It is true that we can program ourselves to react to certain triggers in predictable ways. This is morally relevant information because just as we need to be wary of acquiring bad habits, there are advantages to cultivating

good ones.<sup>42</sup> Habits can be relatively banal, such as brushing teeth in the morning, or morally significant, such as sitting in prayer once one's teeth have been brushed. Yet while it is valuable to acquire a habitual time, place, and method of prayer, it is crucial that the practice does not remain on the level of the "habitual" (in the modern sense). It should be exercised with one's full heart and mind. Modern habits are useful, but limited.

There is nothing to prevent psychological inquiry being motivated by a richer concept of habit. As Julia Annas points out, a responsible empirical study of virtue "would require close cooperation of philosophers and psychologists, since it is crucial that virtue be understood properly, and not in terms of routine or automaticity."<sup>43</sup> Before that day comes, modern habit must be seen as a pale imitation of its ancient and medieval ancestor. First, there is a remnant of earlier accounts in the idea of that there is a *uniformity* to habitual action (*On the Virtues* 1.1c). Habits simplify and dispose the complex subject to one thing (*ad unum*) (49.4c). However, although a virtuous person reliably acts justly and temperately, this reliability is not a matter of rote repetition of materially identical actions, since what it means to be just or temperate will differ from situation to situation (*On the Virtues* 1.6c).<sup>44</sup> Virtue can never be a "ready-made response."

Second, there is, from a Thomistic perspective, some truth in the idea that habits are *automatic*. Aquinas claims that habits are characterized by facility (*facilitas*)—namely, the ability to exercise a capacity with promptness and without inner resistance.<sup>45</sup> There is a difference between *facility* and *automaticity*: facility is akin not so much to the unthinking automaticity of lighting up a cigarette as to the full engagement of an athlete or musician. To observe the snooker player Ding Junhui secure a clearance with apparent effortlessness is to see someone who is focused, thinking, and fully invested—not someone on automatic pilot, no matter how much his skill derives from repetitive practice. Automaticity diminishes conscious agency; facility increases it.

Finally, there is a grain of truth in the thought that habitual actions happen unthinkingly. Aquinas notes that one reason we need habits is "so that we may perform perfect operation promptly. For unless the rational power is in some way inclined to one [act or object] by habit, it would be necessary always to perform some inquiry about operation before operating, as happens in the case of those who want to act virtuously, but lack the habit of virtue" (*On the Virtues* 1.1c).<sup>46</sup> However, promptness in deciding is not the same as not deciding. Moral habits may bypass the need for inquiry; they do not eliminate the need for choice. While morally virtuous action can happen without *forethought*, it does not happen without *thought*.

What accounts for the contemporary demoralized conception of habit? Consider this hypothesis: the dominant mechanistic, impersonal model of

causation bequeathed to us by the modern natural philosophers leaves little room for intentional human agency. When the reductionistic acid of naturalism is applied to the rich moral concept of *habitus*, it is no wonder that all that remains is the empty shell of a Pavlovian automaticity. The exploration of habit is the first major sign that the virtue theorist does well to consider a richer account of causation and agency. Virtue is a habit, not because it generates automatic reactions but because it is a stable quality that perfects our capacity for rational agency and disposes us to deliberate, intentional, human action.

## NOTES

1. I.II 55.3c: “virtus humana, quae est habitus operativus, est bonus habitus, et boni operativus.”
2. 50.5 ad 1: “necessarium est ad finem humanae vitae.”
3. William James, *Talks to Teachers on Psychology, and to Students on Some of Life’s Ideals* (Rockville, MD: Arc Manor, 2008), 42.
4. William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, vol. 1 (New York: Cosimo, 2007), 105, 112–14.
5. James, *Talks to Teachers*, 47.
6. *Principles of Psychology*, 1:114. Italics in the original.
7. Wendy Wood and David T. Neal, “A New Look at Habits and the Habit-Goal Interface,” *Psychological Review* 114, no. 4 (2007): 843.
8. James, *Talks to Teachers*, 66.
9. James, *Principles of Psychology*, 126.
10. Jeremy Dean, *Making Habits, Breaking Habits: Why We Do Things, Why We Don’t, and How to Make Any Change Stick* (Philadelphia: Da Capo, 2013), 225.
11. *Ibid.*, 228.
12. Bill Pollard, “Can Virtuous Actions Be Both Habitual and Rational?,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 6, no. 4 (2003): 411–25; and Julia Peters, “On Automaticity as a Constituent of Virtue,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 18, no. 1 (February 2015): 165–75.
13. Wood and Neal, “New Look,” 843.
14. *Ibid.*, 844.
15. I.II 49 pr: “Post actus et passiones, considerandum est de principiis humanorum actuum.”
16. I.II pr: “restat ut consideremus de eius imagine, idest de homine, secundum quod et ipse est suorum operum principium, quasi liberum arbitrium habens et suorum operum potestatem.”
17. I.II 1.1; cf. III 19.2; *On the Virtues* 1.4c; and *Comm. Ethic.*, lib. 1 l. 1 n.3.
18. 1.1c: “Illae ergo actiones proprie humanae dicuntur, quae ex voluntate deliberata procedunt.”

19. David M. Gallagher, *Thomas Aquinas and His Legacy* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 1994), 47.

20. I 59.1 ad 1: “intellectus cognoscit simplici intuitu, ratio vero discurrendo de uno in aliud.”

21. *Cursus Theologicus*, in I.II, Disp.1, *De fine morali et ultimo*, nn.57–65 (Solesmes 5:18–19).

22. *Ibid.*, paragraphs 66–81 (Solesmes 5:20–24).

23. As well as the *Treatise on Habits* in the *Summa Theologiae* (I.II 49–54), Aquinas also deals with habits in III Sent. dist 23, q.1, a.1–3; in V Metaphy. Lect. 16, 20; in *On the Virtues* 1.1; and in *De Veritate*, q.22, a.2. John Poinsett discusses the nature of habit in two places: *Cursus Philosophicus, Ars Logica (Secunda Pars)*, Q.23, (1:609–21) and *Cursus Theologicus*, Disp.13, Art.1–3. Jacobus Ramírez’s two-volume treatise on habits is the most thorough Thomistic treatment. Also worth consulting is G. P. Klubertanz, *Habits and Virtues* (Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1965).

24. Bonnie Kent, “Habits and Virtues (Ia IIae, qq.49–70),” in *The Ethics of Aquinas*, ed. Stephen J. Pope, Moral Traditions Series (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2002), 117.

25. *Comm. Ethic.*, lib. 2 l. 1 n.9: “Et universaliter, ut uno sermone dicatur, ex similibus operationibus fiunt similes habitus.”

26. Aquinas also adds a final question on how, given this account of habit, one may distinguish different habits into those that are good or bad (54).

27. 49.1 arg 3: “dispositio est ordo habentis partes.”

28. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 23 q. 1 a. 1c; *De Veritate*, q. 20 a. 2c.

29. I.II 73.1c: “habitus medio modo se habet inter potentiam et actum.”

30. See *Comm. De Anima*, lib. 2 l. 11 n.4; I.II 49.3 ad 1. See also Robert Pasnau, *Thomas Aquinas on Human Nature: A Philosophical Study of Summa Theologiae 1a*, 75–89 (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 426.

31. 50.4: “medius inter puram potentiam et actum perfectum.”

32. 49.2c: “Unde in V Metaphys. philosophus definit habitum, quod est dispositio secundum quam aliquis disponitur bene vel male.”

33. 49.4: “sicut supra dictum est, habitus importat dispositionem quandam in ordine ad naturam rei, et ad operationem vel finem eius, secundum quam bene vel male aliquid ad hoc disponitur.”

34. 49.2c: “modus et determinatio subiecti in ordine ad naturam rei, pertinet ad primam speciem qualitatis, quae est habitus et dispositio.”

35. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 23 q. 1 a. 1c: “habitus possessioni comparatur in 1 Ethic. secundum quam res possessa ad nutum habetur.”

36. I.II 5: “habitus est quo quis agit cum voluerit.”

37. 49.3sc: “habitus est quo aliquid agitur cum opus est.”

38. 50.5c: “oportet in voluntate aliquem habitum ponere, quo bene disponatur ad suum actum. Ex ipsa etiam ratione habitus apparet quod habet quandam principalem ordinem ad voluntatem, prout habitus est quo quis utitur cum voluerit.”

39. 50.3 ad 2: “Deficit tamen ratio habitus quantum ad usum voluntatis, quia non habent dominium utendi vel non utendi, quod videtur ad rationem habitus pertinere.”

40. 55.1c: “virtus nominat quandam potentiae perfectionem.”

41. 55.1c: “Potentiae autem rationales, quae sunt propriae hominis, non sunt determinatae ad unum, sed se habent indeterminate ad multa, determinantur autem ad actus per habitus, sicut ex supradictis patet. Et ideo virtutes humanae habitus sunt.”

42. Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why We Do What We Do in Life and Business* (London: William Heinemann, 2012).

43. Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 175.

44. Compare Servais Pinckaers, “Virtue Is Not a Habit,” *Cross Currents* 12 (1962): 77–79.

45. *Super Sent.*, lib. 3 d. 23 q. 1 a. 1 ad 4.

46. *On the Virtues* 1.1c: “ut operatio perfecta in promptu habeatur. Nisi enim potentia rationalis per habitum aliquo modo inclinetur ad unum, oportebit semper, cum necesse fuerit operari, praecedere inquisitionem de operatione; sicut patet de eo qui vult considerare nondum habens scientiae habitum, et qui vult secundum virtutem agere habitu virtutis carens.”