

## QUESTION 49

### The Substance of Habits

After acts and passions, we have to consider the principles of human acts: first, the intrinsic principles (questions 49-89) and, second, the extrinsic principles (questions 90-114).

Now the intrinsic principles are *power* and *habit*. But since we considered the powers in the First Part (*ST* 1, questions 77-89), it remains now to consider habits (questions 49-89). First, we will consider them in general (questions 49-54), and, second, we will consider virtues and vices and other habits of this sort that are principles of human acts (questions 55-89).

Concerning habits in general, there are four things to be considered: (a) the very substance of habits (question 49), (b) the subject of habits (question 50), (c) the cause of their generation, increase, and corruption (questions 51-53), and (d) the distinctions among them (question 54).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Is a habit a quality? (2) Is habit a determinate species of quality? (3) Does *habit* imply an ordering toward an act (*utrum habitus importet ordinem ad actum*)? (4) Are habits necessary?

### Article 1

#### Is a habit a quality?

It seems that a habit is not a quality:

**Objection 1:** In 83 *Quaestiones* Augustine says, “The name ‘habit’ (*habitus*) comes from the verb ‘to have’ (*habere*).” But ‘to have’ belongs not just to *quality*, but to other categories (*ad alia genera*) as well. For we are said to have quantity and money and other such things. Therefore, a habit is not a quality.

**Objection 2:** As is clear from the *Categories*, *habit* is posited as one of the categories (*unum praedicamentum*), But it is not the case that one category is contained under another. Therefore, a habit is not a quality.

**Objection 3:** As it says in the *Categories*, “Every habit is a disposition.” But as *Metaphysics* 4 says, a disposition is “an ordering of that which has parts.” But this has to do with the category *position* (*situs*). Therefore, a habit is not a quality.

**But contrary to this:** In the *Categories* the Philosopher says, “A habit is a quality that is hard to change” (*qualitas de difficili mobilis*).

**I respond:** The name ‘habit’ (*habitus*) is taken from *having* (*ab habendo*). There are two senses in which the name ‘habit’ is derived from having: (a) insofar as a man, or any other entity, is said to have something, and (b) insofar as a given thing has or bears itself in some way, either in its own right or with respect to something else (*secundum quod aliqua res aliquo modo se habet in seipsa vel ad aliquid aliud*).

As for the first sense, notice that *having*, insofar as it is said with respect to anything whatsoever that is had, is common to diverse genera (*commune est ad diversa genera*). This is why the Philosopher places *having* among the post-predicaments (*inter post praedicamenta*) that follow upon the different genera of things, just like *opposites* and like *prior* and *posterior*, etc.

But among the things that are had there seems to be a distinction, so that (a) in the case of some of them there is no medium between *that which has* and *that which is had*; for instance, there is no medium between a subject and its quality or between a subject and its quantity.

By contrast, (b) in the case of others of them there is some medium between the two, but it is only a relation, in the way that someone is said to have a partner or a friend.

On the other hand, (c) in the case of some of them there is a medium—not, to be sure, an action or passion, but rather something like an action or passion (*aliquid per modum actionis vel passionis*); for

instance, there is one thing that adorns or covers and another that is adorned or covered. Hence, in *Metaphysics 5* the Philosopher says that *having* bespeaks a sort of action of *having* and *being had*, as with the clothes that we have on. And so in the case of these things there is a special genus of things that is called the category *having* (*habitus*), which is a having that lies between (*habitus medius*) the one who has clothes on and the clothes that are had.

However, if *having* (*habitus*) is taken in the sense in which a thing is said to have or bear itself in some way, either in its own right or with respect to another, then in this sense a habit is a certain quality that the Philosopher is talking about in *Metaphysics 5* when he says, “A habit is a disposition in accord with which what is disposed is disposed either well or badly, and this either in its own right or with respect to another (*aut secundum se aut ad aliud*), in the way that health is a certain habit.” This is the sense in which we are talking about habits in the present context. Hence, one should claim that a habit is a quality.

**Reply to objection 1:** This objection proceeds from *having* taken in the general sense. For as has been explained, in this sense *having* is common to many genera.

**Reply to objection 2:** This argument proceeds from habit insofar as it is understood to be a medium between *that which has* and *that which is had*. For as has been explained, in this sense *habit* is a one of the categories (*est quoddam praedicamentum*).

**Reply to objection 3:** A disposition does, to be sure, always involve an ordering of something that has parts, but, as the Philosopher immediately adds, there are three ways in which this happens, viz., either (a) with respect to *place* or (b) with respect to *potentiality* or (c) with respect to *species*. In this, as Simplicius remarks in his commentary on the *Categories*, he includes all dispositions. He includes *corporeal* dispositions in saying “with respect to place,” and this pertains to the category of *position* (*situs*), which is an ordering of parts in a place. In saying “with respect to potentiality” he includes all dispositions that are preparatory and not yet perfectly fit—as, for instance, inchoate scientific knowledge and virtue. And in saying “with respect to species” he includes perfect dispositions, which are called habits—as, for instance, completed scientific knowledge and virtue (*scientia et virtus complete*).

## Article 2

### Is *habit* a determinate species of quality?

It seems that *habit* is not a determinate species of quality:

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 1), insofar as a habit is a quality, it is a disposition according to which what is disposed is disposed either well or badly. But this is the case with every quality whatsoever. For it is possible for something to be well disposed or badly disposed with respect to shape (*secundum figuram*) and, again, with respect to heat and cold, and with respect to all qualities of this sort. Therefore, *habit* is not a determinate species of quality.

**Objection 2:** In the *Categories* the Philosopher says that heat and cold are dispositions or habits in the same way that sickness and health are. But heat and cold are in the *third* species of quality. Therefore, *habit* or *disposition* is not distinct from the other species of quality.

**Objection 3:** *Hard to change* is a difference that belongs not to the genus *quality* but instead to the genus *movement* (*motus*) or *being acted upon* (*passio*). But no genus is determined to its species by a difference that belongs to some other genus; instead, as the Philosopher says in *Metaphysics 7*, the differences must belong *per se* to a genus. Therefore, since a habit is a quality “that is hard to change,” it seems that *habit* is not a determinate species of quality.

**But contrary to this:** In the *Categories* the Philosopher says, “One species of quality is *habit and disposition*.”

**I respond:** In the *Categories* the Philosopher posits *disposition and habit* as the *first* among the four species of *quality*.

In his commentary on the *Categories* Simplicius assigns the differences among these species by claiming the following: “Some qualities are *natural*, and these exist in a thing always and according to its nature, whereas some qualities are *adventitious*, and these are effected from without and can be lost. The latter” — i.e., the adventitious ones — “are the *habits and dispositions*, which differ from one another by the differences *hard to lose* and *easy to lose* (*secundum facile et difficile amissibile differentes*). On the other hand, among the natural qualities, some exist insofar as something exists in potentiality, and this is the *second* species of quality. By contrast, some of them exist insofar as something exists in actuality, and this either in the depths or on the surface (*vel in profundum vel secundum superficiem*). If in the depths, then this is the *third* species of quality, whereas if they are on the surface, this is *fourth* species of quality, e.g., shape (*figura*) and form (*forma*), where form is the shape of a living thing.”

However, this division of the species of quality seems incorrect. For there are many shapes and passive qualities (*multae figurae et qualitates passibiles*) that are adventitious and not natural, e.g., health and beauty and others of this sort. Furthermore, this division does not accord with the ordering of the species, since what is more natural is always prior.

And so the distinction of dispositions and habits from the other qualities has to be thought of along different lines. For *quality*, properly speaking, expresses a certain mode of a substance (*modum substantiae*). But as Augustine says in *Super Genesim ad Litteram*, a mode “is what is fixed by a measure” and hence involves a certain determination in accord with some measure. And so just as that by which a matter’s potentiality is determined with respect to substantial *esse* is called the quality which is the substance’s *specific difference*, so, too, that by which a subject’s potentiality is determined with respect to accidental *esse* is called an *accidental quality*, which is likewise a sort of *difference*, as is clear from the Philosopher in *Metaphysics* 5.

Now a mode, i.e., the determination of a subject with respect to accidental *esse*, can be thought of either (a) in relation to the subject’s very *nature* or (b) with respect to the *acting and being acted on* that follow upon the principles of the nature (*secundum actionem et passionem quae consequuntur principia naturae*), i.e., the matter and the form, or (c) with respect to the *quantity*.

Now if the subject’s mode or determination is taken with respect to the *quantity*, then this is the *fourth* species of quality. And since by its nature quantity exists without movement and without the notions of *good* and *bad*, it follows that the fourth species of quality is irrelevant to whether the thing is doing well or badly (*sit bene vel male*), or whether it passes quickly or slowly (*cito vel tarde transiens*).

By contrast, the determination of the subject with respect to acting and being acted upon (*secundum actionem et passionem*) is considered in the *second* and *third* species of quality. And so in both cases one takes into account whether something is done easily or instead with difficulty, or whether it passes quickly or is long-lasting. However, one does not consider in these cases anything relevant to the notions *good* or *bad*; for movements and passions do not have the character of an end, whereas *good* and *bad* are said in relation to an end.

On the other hand, the subject’s mode and determination in relation to the nature of the thing is relevant to the *first* species of quality, which is *habit and disposition*; for in *Physics* 7 the Philosopher, in speaking of the habits of the soul and the body, says that they are certain “dispositions of the perfect with respect to the best, and I say ‘of the perfect’ in the sense that they are disposed in accord with the nature.” And since, as *Physics* 2 says, the very form and nature of a thing is its end and that for the sake of which the thing comes to be, it follows that *good* and *bad* are considered in the first species of quality—as well as *easy to change* and *hard to change* (*facile et difficile mobile*) insofar as a nature is the end of generation and of change. Hence, in *Metaphysics* 5 the Philosopher defines a habit as “a disposition according to which someone is well disposed or badly disposed.” And in *Ethics* 2 he says,

“Habits are that according to which we have or bear ourselves (*nos habemus*) well or badly with respect to the passions.” For when a mode befits a thing’s nature, then it has the character of something good, whereas when it does not befit the nature, it has the character of something bad. And since the nature is what is considered first in an entity, habit is posited as the *first* species of quality.

**Reply to objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 1), *disposition* implies a certain ordering. Hence, one is said to be disposed through a quality only in relation to something. And if one adds *well* or *badly*, which pertain to the nature of *habit*, then the ordering has to be with respect to the nature, which is an end.

Hence, one is not said to be disposed well or badly by a shape, or by heat or cold, except in relation to the thing’s nature, insofar as [the quality] is fitting or unfitting for the nature. Hence, insofar as they are considered fitting or unfitting for the nature of the thing, shapes and passive qualities themselves pertain to habits or dispositions. For insofar as shape and color befit the nature of the thing, they pertain to comeliness, whereas insofar as heat and cold befit the nature of the thing, they pertain to health. And it is in this sense that the Philosopher places heat and cold in the *first* species of quality.

**Reply to objection 2:** This makes the reply to the second objection clear—even though, as Simplicius points out in his commentary on the *Categories*, some answer this objection in a different way.

**Reply to objection 3:** The specific difference *hard to change* does not distinguish *habit* from the other species of quality, but instead distinguishes *habit* from *disposition*.

Now *disposition* is taken in two ways: (a) insofar as it is the genus of *habit*, given that in *Metaphysics 5* *disposition* is posited in the definition of *habit*, and (b) insofar as it is something divided off from *habit*.

And there are two ways in which *disposition*, properly speaking, can be understood to be divided off from *habit*:

In the first way, they are divided as what is perfect and what is imperfect within the same species, so that [the quality] is called a *disposition* (retaining the common name) when it is in the thing imperfectly (*quando imperfecte inest*), so that it is easily lost, whereas it is called a *habit* when it is in the thing perfectly, so that it is not easily lost. And in this sense a disposition becomes a habit in the way that a boy becomes a man.

In the second way, they can be distinguished as diverse species under a single subalternate genus. In this sense, *dispositions* are those qualities of the first species to which it is fitting, according to their proper natures, to be easily lost, since they have changeable causes, e.g., sickness and health, whereas *habits* are those qualities which, according to their nature, are such that they are not easily changed, since they have unchanging causes, e.g., types of scientific knowledge (*scientiae*) and the virtues. And in this sense a disposition does not become a habit.

The latter seems more consonant with Aristotle’s meaning. Hence, in order to prove this distinction he adduces ordinary ways of speaking, according to which qualities that are easily changeable by their nature are called habits if they are rendered difficult to change by some accident, whereas the opposite holds for qualities that are by their nature difficult to change. For instance, if someone possesses a piece of scientific knowledge imperfectly, so that he is easily able to lose it, then he is said *to be disposed toward* (*disponi ad*) the knowledge rather than *to have* (*habere*) the knowledge. From this it is clear that the name ‘habit’ implies a sort of long-lastingness, whereas the name ‘disposition’ does not.

Nor is it a problem that on this account *easy to change* and *hard to change* are specific differences, given that they pertain to movement and being acted upon, and not to the genus of quality. For even though these specific differences seem to be related incidentally to quality, they nonetheless designate proper and *per se* differences among qualities. In the same way, even in the genus of *substance* accidental differences are often used in place of substantial differences, insofar as they designate essential principles.

### Article 3

#### Does *habit* imply an ordering toward an act?

It seems that *habit* does not imply an ordering toward an act (*ordinem ad actum*):

**Objection 1:** Each thing acts insofar as it actual. But in *De Anima* 3 the Philosopher says, “When someone has knowledge in accord with a habit (*fit sciens secundum habitum*), then he is likewise in potentiality at that time, yet in a way different from the way he was in potentiality before he learned.” Therefore, *habit* does not imply a relation to an act (*habitudinem ad actum*).

**Objection 2:** What is posited in a thing’s definition belongs to that thing *per se*. But as is clear from *Metaphysics* 5, *being a principle of action* is posited in the definition of *power* (*in definitione potentiae*). Therefore, *being a principle of an act* belongs *per se* to a power, and that which exists *per se* is first in any given genus. Therefore, if a habit is likewise a principle of an act, then it follows that it is posterior to the power. And so *habit and disposition* will not be the *first* species of quality.

**Objection 3:** Health is sometimes a habit, and so are leanness and beauty. But none of them is said in relation to an act. Therefore, it is not part of the nature of a habit to be the principle of an act.

**But contrary to this:** In *De Bono Coniugali* Augustine says, “A habit is that by which something is done when there is a work (*cum opus est*).” And in *De Anima* 3 the Commentator says, “A habit is that by which someone acts when he so wills.”

**I respond:** *Having a relation to an act* can belong to a habit both (a) in accord with the nature of the habit and (b) in accord with the nature of the subject in which the habit exists.

As for the nature of the habit, it belongs to every habit to have in some way an ordering toward an act. For it belongs to the nature of a habit that it implies a certain condition in relation to a thing’s nature, insofar as the habit either befits the nature or does not befit it. But a thing’s nature, which is the end of generation, is likewise further ordered to another end, which is either an operation or something which is done and which one arrives at through an operation (*vel operatio vel aliquid operatum quod quis pervenit per operationem*). Hence, a habit implies an ordering not only to the thing’s very nature but also, as a consequence, to an operation, insofar as that operation is the end of the nature or something that leads to that end. Hence, *Metaphysics* 5 says, in the definition of a habit, that a habit is “a disposition according to which what is disposed is disposed either well or badly either in its own right (*secundum se*), i.e., according to its own nature, or with respect to something else, i.e., in relation to its end.

On the other hand, there are some habits that, even on the part of the subject in which they exist, primarily and principally imply an ordering toward an act. For, as has been explained, *habit* primarily and *per se* implies a relation to a thing’s nature. Therefore, if the nature of the thing in which the habit exists consists in the ordering itself to an act, then it follows that the habit principally implies an ordering to an act. Now it is clear that the nature and character of a power is that it is the principle of an act. Hence, every habit which has a power as the subject in which it exists principally implies an ordering to an act.

**Reply to objection 1:** A habit is itself a certain act insofar as it is a quality, and it can accordingly be the principle of an operation. But it is in potentiality in relation to its operation. Hence, as is clear from *De Anima* 2, a habit is called a *first act* and the operation is called a *second act*.

**Reply to objection 2:** It is not part of the notion of a habit that it be related to a power; instead, it is part of its notion that it be related to a nature. And since *nature* precedes *action*, it follows that *habit* is posited as a species of quality prior to *power* being posited as a species of quality.

**Reply to objection 3:** As has been explained, health is called a habit, or habitual disposition, in relation to the nature. Yet insofar as the nature is a principle of an act, health implies as a result an

ordering to an act. Hence, in *De Historia Animalium* 10 the Philosopher says that a man—or one of his members—is called healthy “when he is able to carry out the operations of a healthy man.” And something similar holds for the other cases.

#### Article 4

##### Is it necessary for there to be habits?

It seems that it is unnecessary for there to be habits:

**Objection 1:** As has been explained (a. 3), habits are that by which a thing is disposed well or badly with respect to something. But a thing is disposed well or badly through its form, since it is through its form that a thing is good, just as it is through its form that a thing is a being. Therefore, there is no necessity for habits.

**Objection 2:** *Habit* implies an ordering to an act. But *power* sufficiently implies the principle of acting (*principium actus*), since natural powers are principles of acting even in the absence of habits. Therefore, it was not necessary for there to be habits.

**Objection 3:** *Habit* is related to *good* and *bad* in the same way that *power* is. And just as a power does not always act, so neither does a habit. Therefore, given that the powers exist, it was superfluous for there to be a habit.

**But contrary to this:** As *Physics* 7 says, habits are certain perfections. But perfection is especially necessary for a thing, since perfection has the character of an end. Therefore, it was necessary for there to be habits.

**I respond:** As was explained above (a. 3), *habit* implies a certain disposition in relation to a thing’s nature and to its operation or end, in accord with which the thing is either well disposed or badly disposed toward this. Now there are three things required in order for it to be the case that something needs to be disposed with respect to something else:

First, it is required that what is disposed be different from that toward which it is disposed, and so it is related to the latter as potentiality is related to actuality. Hence, if there is something whose nature is not composed of potentiality and actuality and whose substance is its own operation and which exists for the sake of itself, then in such a thing there is no place for a habit or disposition—as is clear in the case of God.

Second, it is required that what is in potentiality with respect to another be able to be determined in more than one way and to diverse things (*possit pluribus modis determinari et ad diversa*). Hence, if a thing is in potentiality with respect to another but is such that it is in potentiality only to that very thing, then in such a thing there is no place for a habit or disposition. For a subject of this sort has by its nature a set relation to such-and-such an act (*habet debitam habitudinem ad talem actum*). Hence, if a celestial body is composed of matter and form, then since, as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 56, a. 2), the matter in question is not in potentiality with respect to any other form, there is no place in such a thing for a disposition or habit with respect to [substantial] form or even to operation, since the nature of a celestial body is in potentiality only with respect to a single determinate movement.

Third, it is required that many things come together in order to dispose the subject to one of the things with respect to which it is in potentiality; these things can be measured together in diverse ways (*diversis modis commensurari possunt*) in order for the subject to be disposed well or badly with respect to a form or with respect to an operation. Hence, we do not call the simple qualities of the elements, which come together in a single mode that is determined by the natures of the elements, dispositions or habits; instead, we call them simple qualities. On the other hand, we call health, comeliness, and other things of this sort dispositions or habits, since they involve a particular commensuration of many things

that can be measured together in diverse ways. As was pointed out above (a. 1), this is why, in *Metaphysics 5*, the Philosopher says that “a habit is a disposition” and that “a disposition is an ordering, within a thing that has parts, either with respect to place or with respect to power or with respect to species.” Therefore, since there are many entities such that it is necessary for their natures and operations that many things concur which can be measured together in various ways, it follows that it is necessary for there to be habits.

**Reply to objection 1:** A thing’s nature is perfected by its form, but the subject has to be disposed toward the form itself by some disposition.

Yet the form itself is further ordered toward operation, which is either the end or a path to the end. To be sure, if the form has determinately just a single determinate operation, then no disposition is required for operation beyond the form itself. However, if it is the sort of form, like a soul, that can operate in diverse ways, then it has to be disposed toward its operations by certain habits.

**Reply to objection 2:** A power is sometimes related to many things, and so it has to be determined in some way. However, if there is a power that is not related to many things, then, as has been explained, it does not need a determining habit. And for this reason, natural powers do not perform their operations by means of any habits; for they are determined to a single act in their own right.

**Reply to objection 3:** As will be explained below (q. 54, a. 3), a habit is not related in the same way to *good* and *bad*. But it is the same power that is related to both *good* and *bad*. And so habits are necessary in order for powers to be determined to *good*.