

QUESTION 51

The Causes of Habits

Next we have to consider the cause of habits: first, with respect to their generation (question 51); second, with respect to their increase (question 52); third, with respect to their decrease and corruption (question 53).

On the first topic there are four questions: (1) Are any habits from nature? (2) Are any habits caused by acts? (3) Can a habit be generated by a single act? (4) Are any habits infused into men by God?

Article 1

Are there any habits from nature?

It seems that no habit is from nature:

Objection 1: What is from nature is not subject to the will's use. But as the Commentator says in *De Anima* 3, a habit is "that which someone uses when he wills to." Therefore, habits are not from nature.

Objection 2: Nature does not do through two things what it can do through one. But the powers of the soul are from nature. Therefore, if the habits that belong to the powers were from nature, then the habit and the power would be one.

Objection 3: Nature is not deficient in what is necessary. But as was explained above (q. 49, a. 4), habits are necessary in order to operate well. Therefore, if some habits were from nature, it seems that nature would be deficient if it did not cause all the necessary habits. But this is clearly false. Therefore, habits are not from nature.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 6 [the Philosopher] posits, among the habits, the intellectual understanding of principles (*intellectus principiorum*), which is from nature—that is why the first principles are said to be 'naturally known'.

I respond: There are two ways in which something can be 'natural to a thing' (*naturale alicui*): (a) with respect to the nature of the *species*, in the way that it is natural to a man to be risible and natural to fire to be borne upwards; and (b) with respect to the nature of the *individual*, in the way that it is natural to Socrates or Plato to be prone to sickness or inclined toward health in accord with his own proper makeup.

Again, corresponding to both these senses of 'nature', there are two ways in which something can be called 'natural': (a) because it is *wholly from nature* (*totum est a natura*); and (b) because it is *from nature in one respect and from an exterior principle in another respect* (*secundum aliquid est a natura et secundum aliquid est ab exteriori principio*). For instance, when someone is cured on his own (*per seipsum*), his health is wholly from nature, whereas when someone is cured with the aid of a medicine, his health is partly from nature and partly from an exterior principle.

So, then, if we are talking about a habit insofar as it is a subject's disposition with respect to a *form* or *nature*, then it is possible for a habit to be natural in any of the ways just mentioned. For instance, there are natural dispositions which are fitting for the human species and which no man is found outside of. And this sort of disposition is natural with respect to the nature of the species. But since a disposition in this sense has a certain latitude, it is possible for diverse degrees of this sort of disposition to belong to diverse men with respect to with the nature of the individual. Moreover, a disposition of this sort can be either wholly from nature or partly from nature and partly from an exterior principle, as was explained above with respect to those who are cured by art.

On the other hand, a habit which is a disposition toward an *operation* and whose subject is a power of the soul, can, as has been explained, be natural both with respect to the nature of the species and also

with respect to the nature of the individual: (a) with respect to the nature of the species insofar as it is had by the soul itself, which, since it is the form of the body, is the principle of the species (*principium specificum*), and (b) with respect to the nature of the individual, on the part of the body, which is the material principle. But in neither way is it possible for there to be in men natural habits of this sort that are *wholly* from nature. By contrast, this *is* possible in angels, since they have intelligible species that they are naturally endowed with—something that, as was explained in the First Part (*ST* 1, q. 55, a. 2 and q. 84, a. 4), does not belong to the human soul.

Thus, in men there are some natural habits that are partly from nature and partly from an exterior principle, though this occurs in one way in the apprehensive powers and in another way in the appetitive powers.

In the apprehensive powers there are natural habits by way of a their *beginnings* (*secundum inchoationem*), natural habits with respect to the *nature of the species*, and natural habits with respect to the *nature of the individual*:

With respect to the nature of the *species* and on the part of the soul itself, intellectual understanding of principles is said to be a natural habit. For by the very nature of the intellectual soul it belongs to a man that, upon having a cognition of what a whole is and what a part is, he understands that every whole is greater than its part—and similarly for other cases. But he cannot know what a whole is and what a part is except through intelligible species taken from phantasms. And for this reason, at the end of the *Posterior Analytics*, the Philosopher shows that the cognition of principles comes to us from the senses.

With respect to the nature of the *individual* there are some cognitive habits that are natural by way of their *beginnings*. For one man, because of the disposition of his organs, is more apt than another man to understand well, insofar as the intellect's operation needs the sentient powers.

On the other hand, in the appetitive powers, on the part of the soul itself, there are natural habits by way of their *beginnings* not with respect to the very *substance* of a habit, but only with respect to certain *principles* of a habit, in the way that the principles of common law (*principia iuris communis*) are said to be 'seminal virtues'. And the reason for this is that an inclination toward proper objects, which seems to be the beginning of a habit, belongs not to the habit but rather to the very character of the powers (*non pertinet ad habitum sed magis pertinet ad ipsam rationem potentiarum*). By contrast, on the part of the body there are certain appetitive habits that are natural by way of their *beginnings*. For some are disposed by the proper makeup of their bodies toward chastity or mildness or something else of this sort.

Reply to objection 1: This objection has to do with nature insofar as nature is divided off from reason and will, even though reason and will themselves belong to a man's nature.

Reply to objection 2: Something can be added, even naturally, to a power and yet not be able to belong to the power in its own right (*ad ipsam potentiam*). For instance, in angels one cannot add to the intellectual power itself that it should know all things *per se*, since then it would have to be an act with respect to all things—something that belongs only to God. For that by which something is known has to be an actual likeness of that which is known. Hence, it would follow that if an angel's intellectual power knew all things in its own right (*per seipsam*), then it would be a likeness and actuality with respect to all things. Hence, what must be added to an angel's intellectual power are intelligible species that are likenesses of the things understood, since it is by a participation in God's wisdom, and not through their own essence, that the angels' intellects can in actuality be the things that they understand. And in this way it is clear that not everything that belongs to a natural habit can belong to the relevant power.

Reply to objection 3: Nature is not equally positioned with respect to causing all the diversity in habits, since, as was explained above, some habits can be caused by nature and some cannot be. And so it does not follow that if some habits are natural, then all habits are natural.

Article 2

Can a habit be caused by an act?

It seems that no habit can be caused by an act:

Objection 1: As has been explained (q. 49, a. 1), a habit is a type of quality. But every quality is caused in a subject insofar as that subject is receptive to something. Therefore, since an agent, by the fact that it is acting, does not receive anything but rather emits something from itself, it seems that no habit can be generated in an agent by its own acts.

Objection 2: That in which a quality is caused is moved toward that quality, as is clear in the case of a thing that is being heated or cooled, whereas that which produces the act that causes a quality effects movement, as is clear in the case of that which effects heating or cooling. Therefore, if a habit were caused in a thing by the thing's own act, it would follow that the same thing is mover and moved, an agent and a patient. But as *Physics 7* says, this is impossible.

Objection 3: An effect cannot be more noble than its cause. But a habit is more noble than an act that precedes it; this is clear from the fact that a habit renders acts more noble. Therefore, a habit cannot be caused by any act that precedes the habit.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics 2* the Philosopher teaches that the habits of virtues and vices are caused by acts.

I respond: Within an agent there is sometimes just an active principle with respect to its act, in the way that within fire there is just the active principle for effecting heat. And in the case of this sort of agent there cannot be any habit that is caused by its own act; this is why, as *Ethics 2* says, natural entities cannot be habituated to anything or dishabituated from anything.

However, there are some agents within which there is both an active principle and a passive principle with respect to its own act; this is clear in the case of human acts. For acts of an appetitive power proceed from the appetitive power insofar as it is moved by an apprehensive power that is presenting an object; and, further, the intellective power, insofar as it is reasoning about conclusions, has as an active principle a proposition that is known in its own right (*per se notam*). Hence, habits can be caused in agents by acts such as these—not, to be sure, habits with respect to the first active principle, but rather habits with respect to the principle of the act that effects movement while being moved. For everything that is acted upon and moved by another is disposed by the agent's act, and from repeated acts (*ex multiplicatis actibus*) a certain quality is generated in the power that is passive and moved, and this quality is called a habit. For instance, habits of the moral virtues are caused in the appetitive powers insofar as those powers are moved by reason, and habits of scientific knowledge are caused in the intellect insofar as it is moved by the first propositions.

Reply to objection 1: An agent does not receive anything insofar as it is an agent. But insofar as it acts while being moved by another, it receives something from what moves it; and this is how a habit is caused.

Reply to objection 2: The same thing, in the same respect, cannot be both mover and moved. But as *Physics 7* proves, nothing prevents the same thing from being moved by itself in diverse respects.

Reply to objection 3: An act that precedes the habit, insofar as it proceeds from an active principle, proceeds from a principle that is more noble than the generated habit. For instance, reason itself is a more noble principle than is the habit of a moral virtue generated in the appetitive power by a series of acts (*per actuum consuetudines*), and the understanding of principles is a more noble principle than the scientific knowledge of conclusions.

Article 3

Can a habit be generated by just a single act?

It seems that a habit can be generated by just a single act:

Objection 1: A demonstration is an act of reason. But scientific knowledge (*scientia*), which is a habit with respect to the conclusion, is caused by a single demonstration. Therefore, a habit can be caused by a single act.

Objection 2: Just as an act can increase by being multiplied (*per multiplicationem*), so, too, an act can increase by becoming more intense (*per intensionem*). But when acts are multiplied, a habit is generated. Therefore, likewise, if a single act is greatly intensified, then it will be able to be a cause that generates a habit.

Objection 3: Health and sickness are certain sorts of habit. But a man can either be healed or made sick by a single act. Therefore, a single act can cause a habit.

But contrary to this: In *Ethics* 1 the Philosopher says, “Just as a single swallow or a single day does not make a spring, so neither does a single day or a short time make a man blessed or happy.” But as *Ethics* 1 says, beatitude is an operation in accord with the habit of perfect virtue. Therefore, the habit of a virtue is not caused by just a single act—nor, for the same reason, is any other habit.

I respond: As has already been explained (a. 2), a habit is generated by an act insofar as a passive power is moved by some active principle. Now in order for a quality to be caused in a passive principle, the active principle must totally overcome the passive principle (*totaliter vincat passivum*). Hence, we see that because a given fire cannot immediately overcome something combustible, it does not immediately make it burst into flame; instead, it drives the contrary dispositions away little by little, so that by totally overcoming the combustible thing in this way, it impresses its likeness on it.

Now it is clear that the active principle which is reason cannot totally overcome an appetitive power in a single act. For an appetitive power is related in diverse ways to many things, whereas through reason one judges in a single act that something is to be desired with respect to determinate characteristics and circumstances. Hence, the appetitive power is not totally overcome by this judgment in such a way as to be borne toward the same thing in most cases in the manner of a nature (*ut in pluribus per modum naturae*)—which is what belongs to the habit of a virtue. And so the habit of a virtue cannot be caused by just a single act, but is instead caused by many acts.

Notice, however, that in the apprehensive powers there are two passive principles—one is the possible or passive intellect itself (*intellectus possibilis*) and the other is what Aristotle calls the ‘passive intellect’, viz., particular reason, i.e., the cogitative power along with the powers of memory and imagination. With respect to the first passive principle, there can be an active principle that totally overcomes its corresponding passive power in a single act; for instance, a single proposition that is known in its own right (*una propositio per se nota*) convinces the intellect to assent firmly to a conclusion—something that a probable proposition cannot do. Hence, as far as the possible or passive intellect is concerned, a habit with respect to an opinion has to be caused by many acts of reason, even on the part of the possible or passive intellect, whereas a habit of scientific knowledge can be caused by just a single act of reason. By contrast, as regards the lower apprehensive powers, it is necessary for the same acts to be repeated many times in order to imprint something firmly in the memory. This is why, in *De Memoria et Remiscentia*, the Philosopher says, “Meditation (*meditatio*) strengthens memory.”

On the other hand, it is possible for corporeal habits to be caused by a single act, if the active principle has great power; for instance, sometimes a strong medicine induces health immediately.

Reply to objection 1 and objection 2 and objection 3: The replies to the objections are clear from what has been said.

Article 4

Are any habits infused into men by God?

It seems that no habits are infused into men by God:

Objection 1: God is related equally to everyone. Therefore, if He infused certain habits into some men, He would infuse them into all men. But this is obviously false.

Objection 2: God works in all things according to the mode that is fitting for their natures, since, as Dionysius says in *De Divinis Nominibus*, chap. 4, “It belongs to God’s providence to preserve the nature.” But as has been explained (a. 2), habits are caused in a man by his acts. Therefore, God does not cause any habits in a man without acts.

Objection 3: If a habit is infused by God, then by means of that habit a man is able to produce many acts. But a similar habit is caused by those acts, as *Ethics 2* claims. Therefore, it follows that two habits of the same species exist in the same man, the one acquired and the other infused. But this seems impossible, since two forms of a single species cannot exist in the same subject. Therefore, it is not the case that any habit is infused into a man by God.

But contrary to this: Ecclesiasticus 15:5 says, “The Lord filled him with the spirit of wisdom and understanding.” But wisdom and understanding are certain habits. Therefore, some habits are infused into a man by God.

I respond: There are two reasons why some habits are infused into a man by God.

The first reason is that there are some habits by which a man is well disposed toward an end that exceeds the power of human nature, and, as was explained above (q. 5, a. 5), this end is man’s ultimate and perfect beatitude. And since habits have to be proportioned to that toward which a man is disposed by them, it follows that there have to be habits that dispose him toward an end of the sort that exceeds the power of human nature. Hence, such habits can never exist in a man except by divine infusion, as is the case with all the virtues associated with grace (*sicut est de omnibus gratuitis virtutibus*).

The second reason is that, as was explained in the First Part (*ST 1*, q. 105, a. 6), God is able to produce the effects of secondary causes in the absence of those causes themselves. Thus, just as, in order to show His power, He sometimes produces health without a natural cause, so, too, in order to show His power, He sometimes infuses in a man even such habits as can be caused by his natural power. For instance, He gave to the Apostles knowledge of the Scriptures and of all languages—a knowledge that men can acquire through study and habituation, though not as perfectly.

Reply to objection 1: As regards His nature, God is equally related to everyone, but for a fixed reason, in accord with the order of His wisdom, He gives to some what He does not give to others.

Reply to objection 2: The fact that God works in all things according to their own mode does not rule out God’s doing certain things that their nature is unable to do. Rather, from fact in question it follows that He does nothing that is contrary to what is fitting for their nature.

Reply to objection 3: The acts that are produced by an infused habit do not cause any habit but instead strengthen the pre-existing habit, in the same way that medicine given to a man who is through his nature healthy does not cause health but instead strengthens the health that was had beforehand.