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Taking Nature Graciously: A Thomistic Perspective on Habits

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Abstract

When speaking of the odd behavior of a particular individual, it is common for people to say something like, "Well, I am just made that way," or, "He can't help it; that's the way he is." On the other hand, when considering future vistas for action, some suppose that that, everything in life can be a matter of choice, that we can choose our own gender, ethnicity, or identity. It seems to me that there are theological parallels to these anthropological positions. First, similar to mechanical determinism, some believe in a determined mechanism of sin that destroys human nature and makes free choice an illusion. Second, similar to views that human fulfillment is simply a matter of exercising our will, some argue that graced happiness is merely an extension of nature. To all of these positions, Aquinas has a response.

Keywords

Thomistic, Paul Churchland, Habits, Luther, De Chardin, Damasio, Grace

"Habit both *shows* and *makes* the man, for it is at once historic and prophetic, the mirror of the man as he is and the mold of the man as he is to be," unless new habits are made.[1] It follows that, in order to understand human behavior, a study of habit is practically indispensable.[2]

When speaking of the odd behavior of a particular individual, it is common for people to say something like, "Well, I am just made that way," or, "He can't help it; that's the way he is." On the other hand, when considering future vistas for action, some suppose that everything in life can be a matter of choice, that we can choose our own gender, ethnicity, or identity. It seems to me that there are

[1] This article is an adaptation of a talk given for the Aquinas Lecture Series, Blackfriars, Oxford, 18 Feb 2016.

[2] Arthur T. Pierson, *George Müller of Bristol* (London: James Nisbet & Co. Ltd., 1899), 137. Emphasis in the original.

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theological parallels to these anthropological positions. First, similar to mechanical determinism, some believe in a determined mechanism of sin that destroys human nature and makes free choice an illusion. Second, similar to views that human fulfillment is simply a matter of exercising our will, some argue that graced happiness is merely an extension of nature. To all of these positions, Aquinas has a response.

Here I will suggest that Aquinas's anthropology and theology of habit is a bridge concept that successfully unites the insights of these various opinions while simultaneously correcting and transcending them. The polyvalent meaning of habit helps one to identify the good inclinations of nature, and to articulate the radical newness of the movements of grace, which perfect and elevate our natural inclinations. In order to show the broad aspects of the habit-concept, I have limited my comments on neuroscience to the first section.

I. Anthropological level

A. Pessimism regarding human freedom: mechanical explanations

The Canadian "neurophilosopher" Paul Churchland favors what he calls "eliminative materialism."[3] Eliminative materialism is founded on a mechanistic view of the universe, which posits that "all of the properties of physical objects (living and nonliving, conscious and nonconscious, etc.), can be accounted for in terms of mass, motion, charge, and so on, and therefore the laws governing these properties can give a complete explanation of all physical occurrences that can be explained."[4] According to this account, one will be able to explain all human behavior simply by adverting to neuroscience alone, or else by showing how the insights of other sciences point toward neuroscience and are completed by it.[5] "If materialism, in the end, is true," Churchland says, "then it is the conceptual framework of a completed neuroscience that will embody the essential wisdom about our inner nature."[6] What is this wisdom? That our "common-sense psychological framework," such as our experience of free choice, consciousness, and other internal states, is a so-called "folk science" that is ultimately "false and radically misleading."[7]

[3] See Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 43-50.

[4] James D. Madden, *Mind, Matter and Nature: A Thomistic Proposal for the Philosophy of Mind* (Washington, DC: Catholic University Press, 2013), 219-220.

[5] Bickle, "Reducing Mind to Molecular Pathways," 432. This view is quite common; see, for example, Daniel Dennett, *Consciousness Explained* (Boston, MA: Little Brown, 1991), 33.

[6] Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness*, 179.

[7] Paul M. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness: A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind*, 2nd Ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1988), 43.

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The claims of eliminative materialism have extensive moral implications. For instance, the neurologist Antonio Damasio has shown that the brain is crucial to self-regulation. One of Damasio's patients lived normally up to his midlife, a successful accountant, a loving father, a devoted husband. But his behavior began to change after a tumor was removed from the ventromedial frontal part of his brain. His IQ remained the same, but within six months of the surgery, he was fired from his job for carelessness, made a series of fool-hardy financial decisions, was divorced by his wife, briefly married and then was left by a prostitute, and generally showed a grave lack of prudence. What had happened? When doctors removed the brain tumor, they also caused lesions in the frontal cortex and to the amygdala—the first is understood as an area crucial to planning, the second crucial to feelings of fear and disgust.[8] The theory is that, without his reason and emotions in communication with each other, he was incapable of making good practical decisions.

Granting the importance of the brain, many materialist scientists would deny that biology is destiny. "There is no suggestion," Churchland insists, "that all failures of moral character can be put down to structural deficits in the brain. A proper moral education [. . .] remains a necessary condition for acquiring a well-formed character." In sum, "the education process is thoroughly entwined with the developmental process and deeply dependent on the existence of normal brain structures to embody the desired matrix of skills."[9] Nature and nurture both have their place, but both are seemingly reducible to mechanical, material explanations.

What would Aquinas make of these conclusions? A Thomist might be tempted to strike directly at the problematic materialistic premise by showing that it is absurd, or by discussing a philosophy of form, or by arguing in favor of an immaterial soul. Such approaches, however, easily could obscure the insights of these scientists—including the fact that, in speaking about the importance of moral education, Churchland is pointing to the importance of habituation. Aquinas's anthropology of habit finds echoes here.

From Aquinas's perspective, human habit in its most basic philosophical level is *a stable disposition of possessing a potential or orientation toward action, whether as a reaction or a striving*.[10] "Habit" comes from *habitus*, which is derived from the Latin *habere*,

[8] See Churchland, *Neurophilosophy at Work*, 50.

[9] Churchland, *Neurophilosophy at Work*, 50.

[10] Aristotle *Categories* 15, 15b18-32. Ernst Wolff notes that, according to Aristotle, *hexis* "is characterized 1) as having a hold on something (this is the element of firmness, steadiness or stability), 2) as being possessed, rather than used (it is a potential that could remain hidden), and 3) as a persistent orientation or disposition that could be more passive (in the sense of being mere reaction) or more active (striving to realize an objective)."

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"to have."[11] *Habitus* in turn translates the Greek ἕξις, *hexis*. These related terms connote the idea of a person having something in addition to his basic properties and essential characteristics. "To have" is stronger than "to borrow" or "to use" but is weaker than "to be." Hence "habit" indicates a modification of a person that is not easily changed.[12]

On the lowest categorical level (1), "habit" indicates *a stable disposition toward action that comes from possessing something entirely extrinsic to oneself*, as in the case of clothing. Catholic religious terminology still employs this sense of "habit" when it refers to the special garments worn by religious persons who have been consecrated to God by special vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience. Accordingly, one speaks of a nun's *habit* as a kind of clothing. At the same time, one can speak of a nun's *habit* of keeping her vows. The two meanings are related: her exterior habit, her clothing, is a *sign* of her spiritual habit, but more than a sign: it facilitates a kind of habitual behavior that characterizes her as a nun. The specialized religious clothing is a *material disposition toward acting like a nun.* Furthermore, when wearing a habit (clothing) is required by religious law, it becomes a part of a nun's habit (religious observance). Therefore, in one way the habit does not make the nun, but in another way it does. The decisive point is that the English term "habit" contains different levels of interrelated signification.

On a deeper level than clothing, (2), one can speak of "habit" as *a stable disposition that comes from "general nature."* These sorts of habitual dispositions are concomitant with human nature in general and are directed toward particular kinds of activity. Here we find human instincts.

Aquinas lists speaks of what we might call a "happiness instinct": "*our will to be happy does not pertain to free choice, but to natural instinct*."[13] Thomas also identifies what could be called a "God instinct": "*man feels himself bound by some natural instinct to pay reverence to God*, from whom is the principle of his being and all good."[14] On the plane of the human community, Thomas acknowledges an "altruism instinct: "*man, by some natural instinct, helps any man in need, even those unknown to him*. For instance, he may call

Ernst Wolff, "Aspects of Technicity in Heidegger's Early Philosophy: Rereading Aristotle's Technè and Hexis," *Research in Phenomenology* Vol. 38, Issue 3 (2008): 317-357 at 337.

[11] See *Summa Theologia* (ST) I-II, q. 49, a. 1.

[12] See Roy DeFerrari et al., *A Latin-English Lexicon of St. Thomas Aquinas* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1949), "habitus" 477 ff. Thomas notes, "patet quod nomen habitus diuturnitatem quandam importat." *ST* I-II, q. 49, a. 2, ad 3.

[13] ST I, q. 19, a. 10. See also I-II, q. 17, a. 5.

[14] *Summa Contra Gentiles* (SCG) III.119.7. Emphasis added. See also *De regno*, lib. 1, cap. 13, c; *De perfectione*, cap. 13, c.

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him back from the wrong road, help him up from a fall, and other actions like that: as if every man were naturally the family and friend of every man."[15] Finally, Thomas also argues that man has a natural "morality instinct." He argues that the scope of natural instinct is so broad that it encompasses all of the moral precepts of the Old Law: "Some works of the Law were moral [. . .]; man is induced to them by natural instinct and by the natural law."[16]

In his *De Veritate*, Thomas took up the question of natural inclinations toward specific behaviors with a discussion of synderesis.[17] There he argues that humans have "a natural habit of [. . .] the universal principles of the natural law" which serves as a foundation of all human action.[18] Likewise, in the *Prima Pars* of his *Summa Theologiae*, Thomas calls synderesis a *special habit* of understanding certain concepts.[19] By means of this "first natural habit"[20], without any investigation on the part of reason, a person can know the first principles of action, such as the principle that no one should be harmed.[21] Aquinas describes the natural and habitual cognition of synderesis as a "nursery" or "seed-bed" of virtue.[22] It informs the practical reason that an acting person "must act in accord with the ends of the virtues, and that it must avoid acts that are contrary to such ends."[23] Thus, synderesis always inclines a person toward the good, and men are naturally capable of performing the good acts it suggests.[24]

Importantly Aquinas's account of synderesis helps him explain why not everyone follows or appears to know the basic principles of moral action: "truth or rectitude is the same for all, but it is not

[15] SCG III.117.6. Emphasis added.

[16] *Super Epistolam B. Pauli ad Galatas lectura*, cap. 2, l. 4: "Sciendum est ergo, quod opera legis quaedam erant moralia, quaedam vero caeremonialia. [. . .] Moralia autem licet continerentur in lege, non tamen poterant proprie dici opera legis, cum ex naturali instinctu, et ex lege naturali homo inducatur ad illa."

[17] See Tobias Hoffman, "Conscience and Synderesis," in *The Oxford Handbook of Aquinas*, 256-62. Also, Vernon J. Bourke, "The Background of Aquinas' Synderesis Principle," in Lloyd P. Gerson, ed., *Graceful Reason* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies, 1983), 345-60.

[18] *De Veritate*, q. 16, a. 1, c.

[19] ST I, q. 79, a. 12. Emphasis added.

[20] ST I, q. 79, a. 13.

[21] ST I, q. 79, a. 12.

[22] Ibid: "[P]rincipia iuris communis dicuntur esse seminalia virtutum."

[23] Ana Maria González, "*Depositum Gladius Non Debet Restituiti Furioso*: Precepts, *Synderesis*, and Virtues in Saint Thomas Aquinas," *The Thomist* 63 (1999): 217-40 at 224.

[24] *De Veritate,* q. 16, a. 1, ad 7: "[S]ynderesis ex habitu aliquo naturali habet quod semper ad bonum inclinet," and ad 12: "[A]utem huius habitus naturalis, quem synderesis nominat, est remurmurare malo, et inclinare ad bonum: et ideo ad hunc actum homo naturaliter potest."

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equally known by all."[25] To understand this, we must turn to the third meaning of habit for Aquinas.

One can speak of a habit as (3) a *stable disposition from individual nature*.[26] In this case, the inclination would exist on account of an individual's personal and unique particularities, such as his genetic structure and epigenetic expression. Aquinas argues that there are significant individual differences of mental functioning, as well as innate physiological responses and emotional reactivity on account of what he called the *complexio* or temperament. The four temperaments entail emotional-actional dispositions, wholly attributable to physical causes, as Aquinas summarizes: "phlegmatics are naturally lazy; cholerics, irascible; melancholics, sad; sanguine [persons] jovial."[27] Natural temperaments, then, are not passions, but they can lead to passions, since they are stable, bodily inclinations to respond to sensory goods in particular and predictable ways.[28]

Aquinas argued that different temperaments incline individuals to various virtues or vices. For example, he says that some men have a "natural habit" toward anger that arises from their inborn choleric temperament.[29] Now an inclination toward anger entails ease and quickness in raising up things that are contrary to the good of oneself or one's companions. Thus, a person inclined to anger is thereby also inclined to fortitude, courage, and the like. At the same time, being inclined *toward* one virtue also entails being inclined *away from* the opposite virtue: those naturally brave are also less naturally patient, for patience involves restraining the irascible passions.[30] Along this line of thinking, Aquinas argues that some individuals therefore are naturally inclined to vice: "individual virtuous or vicious behaviors somehow exist in some people naturally."[31] Therefore, he says that,

[25] ST I-II, q. 94, a. 4,

[26] See ST I-II, q. 51, a.1: "Sed ex parte corporis, secundum naturam individui, sunt aliqui habitus appetitivi secundum inchoationes naturales. Sunt enim quidam dispositi ex propria corporis complexione ad castitatem vel mansuetudinem, vel ad aliquid huiusmodi."

[27] *Sent. Ethic.* lib. 3, l. 12, n. 1,

[28] A passion may be defined as, "a motion of the sensory appetite following the sensitive apprehension of a sensory good or evil with a corresponding bodily alteration." See Santiago Ramirez, *De Passionibus animae in I-II Summae Theologiae divi Thomae expositio (qq. 22-48)* (Madrid: Instituto de Filosofía Luis Vives, 1973), 33.

[29] ST I-II, q. 46, a. 5: "[I]ra naturalior est quam concupiscentia, quia scilicet habitudinem naturalem ad irascendum, quae est ex complexione."

[30] *Questiones de virtutibus*, q. 1, a. 8, ad 10: "[D]ispositio naturalis quae inclinat ad unam virtutem, inclinat ad contrarium alterius virtutis: puta, qui est dispositus secundum naturam ad fortitudinem, quae est in prosequendo ardua, est minus dispositus ad mansuetudinem, quae consistit in refrenando passiones irascibilis."

[31] *Sent. Ethic.* lib. 6, l. 11, n. 2: "quod sit aliqua virtus naturalis quae praesupponitur morali, patet per hoc quod singuli mores virtutum vel vitiorum videntur aliqualiter existere aliquibus hominibus naturaliter."

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> Of the unnatural pleasures, some [. . .] become delightful [to an individual] because of pernicious natures (*perniciosas naturas*), as happens when people have corrupt and perverse bodily temperaments; and, accordingly both the perceptions of their imagination and the affections of their sensitive appetite are most perverse. Likewise, since these powers are acts of bodily organs, they are necessarily proportionate to the temperament of the body.[32]

In addition to these inborn inclinations, Aquinas identifies (4), habit as a stable disposition *acquired in a non-volitional way*. Thomas repeatedly explains that an impulse can become connatural to a person when it is repeated and stabilized as behavior. During childhood, a person becomes accustomed to doing good or evil. These actions tend to shape the interior life of a person, putting him on a course that is increasingly difficult to change, for specific actions are followed by specific habits.[33] Thomas observes, "what is customary becomes pleasant insofar as it becomes 'natural', for custom is like a second nature."[34] This is especially true early in life, because we retain more firmly the things that are imprinted on us in our earliest days: regular childhood behaviors result in deeply rooted habits.[35] As he says, "Custom, especially that which is from childhood, comes to have the force of nature. Consequently, a soul strongly clings to those things in which it was imbued from childhood, as if they were naturally and per se known."[36]

Non-volitional acquired dispositions may be found throughout society. After terrorists attacked on 9/11, about one out of five persons who lived closest to the World Trade Center developed Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Pregnant women with this condition had chronically depleted levels of cortisol, the hormone that helps moderates stress. This directly affected their pre-born children. Infants born to mothers with PTSD had abnormally low cortisol (and accordingly more difficulty moderating stress) compared to infants whose mothers did not develop the syndrome

[32] *Sent. Ethic*., lib. 7, l. 5, n. 3: "[Q]uae sunt delectabilia non naturaliter [. . .]Quaedam vero fiunt delectabilia propter perniciosas naturas, puta cum aliqui homines habent corruptas et perversas complexiones corporis et secundum hoc sequitur quod in his sint perversissimae tam apprehensiones imaginationis quam etiam affectiones sensibilis appetitus, quas quidem vires, cum sint organorum corporalium actus, necesse est, quod sint corporali complexioni proportionatae."

[33] *Sent. Ethic*., lib. 2, l. 1, n. 10: "[S]ecundum harum differentiam sequuntur differentiae habituum. Et ideo ulterius concludit quod non parum differt, quod aliquis statim a iuventute assuescat vel bene vel male operari."

[34] ST I-II, q. 32, a. 2, ad 3: "[I]d quod est consuetum, efficitur delectabile, inquantum efficitur naturale, nam consuetudo est quasi altera natura."

[35] *Sent. Ethic*., lib. 2, l. 1, n. 10: "Nam ea quae nobis a pueritia imprimuntur, firmius retinemus."

[36] SCG I, c. 11.1: "Consuetudo autem, et praecipue quae est a puero, vim naturae obtinet."

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after witnessing the events of 9/11. As one researcher put it, the children of PTSD sufferers bore "the scar without the wound."[37] These findings agree with studies showing that a mother's stress can have long-term negative effects on her child's heartrate; that repeated maternal mood patterns (including depression) affect fetal neurobehavioral development; and that between 10–20% of cortisol in a mother's blood passes to the fetus, which, if continued over time, affects the blossoming brain.[38] Regarding post-birth effects, a well-known and distressing study followed over one hundred orphans, victims of the Communist Romanian government, who were born into horrible conditions. Without cuddling and much positive social interaction, these orphans had been left lying in their own excrement, fed like gerbils from bottles affixed to their cots, and washed by being hosed down with cold water.[39] Even if they were adopted at the young age of two, orphans who spent more than six months in the institution not develop entirely normally. Despite a decade to catch up, their brains were smaller compared to normal children.[40] Furthermore, disorders such as disinhibited attachment, cognitive impairment, and quasi-autistic patterns were frequent.[41]

We find, then, that Aquinas could largely agree with Churchland and other like-minded scientists when they point to physical and environmental factors that incline a person to virtue or vice.

But this is not the whole story. If we stop here, we will encounter the logic of materialism, when often operates in the background unconscious. It explains abnormal behavior by positing the passivity of the individual: "That's just the way he is." He could have been born that way, made that way by an illness, a surgery gone wrong, an injury, or some other force impinging on his person. Whatever the cause, he is hardly responsible for the effect. This explanation

[37] Rachel Yehuda et al., "Transgenerational Effects of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder in Babies of Mothers Exposed to the World Trade Center Attacks during Pregnancy," *The Journal of Clinical Endocrinology and Metabolism* 90, no. 7 (July 2005): 4115–18. https://doi.org/10.1210/jc.2005-0550.

[38] Michael T. Kinsella and Catherine Monk, "Impact of Maternal Stress, Depression & Anxiety on Fetal Neurobehavioral Development," *Clinical Obstetrics and Gynecology* 52, no. 3 (September 2009): 425–40. https://doi.org/10.1097/GRF.0b013e3181b52df1. See also, Janet A. DiPietro, "Maternal Influences on the Developing Fetus," in *Maternal Influences on Fetal Neurodevelopment: Clinical and Research Aspect*, ed. A.W. Zimmerman and S.L. Connors (New York: Springer Science & Business Media, 2010), 19-32.

[39] Michael Rutter, et al., "Effects of profound early institutional deprivation: An overview of findings from a UK longitudinal study of Romanian adoptees," *European Journal of Developmental Psychology* Vol. 4 No. 3 (2007): 332-50 at 335.

[40] Mitul A. Mehta et al., "Amygdala, Hippocampal and Corpus Callosum Size Following Severe Early Institutional Deprivation: The English and Romanian Adoptees Study Pilot," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry, and Allied Disciplines* 50, no. 8 (August 2009): 943–51. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1469-7610.2009.02084.x.

[41] Rutter, et al., "Effects of profound early institutional deprivation," 347.

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can quickly become justification. A person's past suffering not only provides a reason for why he performs some behavior; it also provides an excuse. He is excused from his behavior, barely blamable for it. If the evil he suffered seems particularly heinous and undeserved, he can become justified in his bad behavior because he is a victim. In this view, every victim is righteous, and the righteous can do no wrong. Therefore, victims not only cannot help themselves in doing evil, at times *they are justified* in doing evil and *ought* to "be transgressive" in order to counterbalance the evil that they endured. Thus there is a line from victim culture to revenge culture to tyranny.

In response, we come to habit in its most proper sense (5), according to Aquinas: habit signifies *an acquired and stable disposition of one's soul*, that is, of one's intellect and will. St. Thomas notes, "If habit is taken with respect to its operation, then habit is above all found in the soul," and he clarifies, "Even from the very nature of habit, it is apparent that it is principally related to the will."[42] In his view, all the habits discussed up to this point are non-determinative of human behavior. They are *inclinations*, deep-rooted dispositions, but they do not force the will to act.

To explain, Thomas says: "In non-rational animals the determination of the appetite to a particular thing is merely passive: whereas consent implies a determination of the appetite, which is active rather than merely passive."[43] Animals are determined by instincts, whereas humans are determined only by their own choice. A person has freedom of choice regarding particular things that confront him, things that lead toward his ultimate happiness or away from it. When he considers about what to do, or what to avoid, he takes counsel. When counsel convinces the man to choose, it has "determined" the person in a particular direction and thereby established in him the beginning of a stable character habit. In developing himself thusly, the human experiences himself as an *agent*.

In this regard, Aquinas makes a crucial distinction between "making" [*facere*] and "acting" [*agere*]. "'Making,'" he says, "is an action passing into outward matter, e.g. 'to build,' 'to saw,' and so forth; whereas 'acting' is an action abiding in the agent, e.g. 'to see,' 'to will,' and the like."[44] *Making*, then, is a primarily transitive action: it involves shaping a thing exterior to oneself. *Acting*, in contrast, is primarily an intransitive action: it is above all a shaping of the

[42] *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 2: "Si vero accipiatur habitus in ordine ad operationem sic maxime habitus inveniuntur in anima." *ST* I-II, q. 50, a. 5: "Ex ipsa etiam ratione habitus apparet quod habet quendam principalem ordinem ad voluntatem."

[43] ST I-II, q. 15, a. 2, ad 1.

[44] ST I-II, q. 57, a. 4: "factio est actus transiens in exteriorem materiam, sicut aedificare, secare, et huiusmodi; agere autem est actus permanens in ipso agente, sicut videre, velle, et huiusmodi."

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interior person, though exterior actions may be involved. The materialist sees the human being as an *object* of concern and something-to-be-acted-upon exteriorly. Whether on the macro- or microscopic level, for them, the human is purely material—a *lump of clay* that is to be shaped by our own hands, a collection of Lego parts ready to be assembled this way or that. In contrast, Aquinas argues that the person is primarily an agent, an acting person, who shapes himself through the acts that his will chooses. As Daniel De Haan has explained, "Through the efficacy of the will, the person transcends the natural determinations of the physical order and *becomes* the sort of person who chooses and performs certain axiologically specified activities," thereby becoming responsible for the activities that he wills and the shape they give to his person.[45]

Through living consciously and intelligently as a subject, by regularly performing patterned and intentional acts, with their inevitable reflexive quality, the human person determines his person through habituation. Aquinas therefore characterizes a human habit as a disposition toward action that is the result of one's conscious agency. "For him, a *properly human habit* is essentially a thing over which one has mastery, and which makes a person master of himself."[46] In his conception, a habit constitutes in the soul a sort of dispositive character over which one maintains his voluntariness, and of which one can adjust its flow and regulate its usage at one's own discretion: "It is with the inherent facility of a habit by which one comes to possess full mastery over oneself."[47]

When we consider the issue of self-mastery, we encounter the opposite error, namely, the "ideology of a limitless world."

B. Optimism regarding human abilities: "Ideology of a limitless world": be anything you want

A somewhat-benign version of human-potential optimism is when parents tell their children that they can be anything they want to be when they grow up. Less benign is when self-help gurus tell adults the same thing, as Zig Ziglar once said, "You can do anything you want to do, you can go anywhere you want to go, you can be anything

[45] Daniel De Haan, "Thomistic Hylomorphism, Self-Determination, Neuroplasticity, and Grace: The Case of Addiction," *Proceedings of the ACPA* Vol. 85 (2012): 99-120 at 100-101.

[46] Aquinas, *Somme Théologique: La Vertue*, tome premier, trans. R. Bernard (Paris: Desclèe, 1933), 385.

[47] Ibid. Note that for Aquinas the presence of a habit does not necessarily induce action, for habits are subject to the will of their possessor. See ST I-II, q. 78, a. 2. Also, ST I-II, q. 50. a. 1, a habit is "something we use when we will to do so."

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you want to be!" This mantra becomes downright pernicious as the spirit of the age.

"Couldn't everyone's life become a work of art? Why should the lamp or the house be an art object, but not our life?"[48] Paul-Michel Foucault asked this question in part because he was confronted with the disgrace of his contemporaries who sanctioned Nazism and later latched on to de Gaulle. Like many of the intelligentsia, he strove to free himself from the limits of his context. As he later said: "we wanted a world and a society that were not only different but that would be an alternative version of ourselves: we wanted to be *completely other* in a completely different world."[49] To understand how humans might escape their historical circumstances, especially the inevitability suggested by forms of Hegelianism, Foucault saw Nietzsche's *übermensch* as useful leverage. For Foucault, the *übermensch* stands as something which "breaks with the tradition of metaphysical humanism," serving as the death of the "last man" and opening the door to a new humanity.[50] From this perspective, a destabilized subject goes through a process of "construction" and "deconstruction" through a limit-experience that "has the function of wrenching the subject from itself."[51] Foucault therefore adopted the idea that humans craft their own identities.[52] For him, the acting subject is best understood as an object, a work of art separated from nature.

Transhumanists might agree with Foucault's sentiment but argue that he stops short of a full insight. Moving beyond an image of the individual as a self-conscious, self-shaping *artiste,* transhumanists seem to favor the image of the modern individual as a prophecy-fulfilling scientist-god. In his seminal 1957 article, "Transhumanism," Julian Huxley argued that humans not only *can*, nor even *must*, but *inevitably will be* "engineers of our own evolution."[53] He wrote: "Whether [man] wants to or not, whether he is conscious of what he is doing or not, he is in point of fact determining the future direction of evolution on this earth. That is his inescapable destiny, and the sooner

[48] Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: An Overview of Work in Progress," in *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 340-73 at 350.

[49] Michel Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," in *Essential Works, 1954-1984, vol. 3: Power*, ed. James D. Faubion, trans. Robert Hurley et al. (New York: New Press, 2000), 248.

[50] Alan D. Schrift, "Nietzsche's French Legacy," in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen Higgins, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* (Cambridge England; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 323-355 at 328.

[51] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," 241.

[52] See Foucault, "What is Enlightenment?" in *The Foucault Reader*, 32-50 at 41.

[53] The phrase is taken from Abigail Tucker, who summarizes the transhumanist movement in, "How to Become the Engineers of Our Own Evolution," *Smithsonian Magazine* (April 2012). http://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-to-become-the-engineers-of-our-own-evolution-122588963/?no-ist

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he realizes it and starts believing in it, the better for all concerned."[54] Huxley's idea is founded on the fact that humans can consciously shape their development through their own intelligence and power. Instead of being subject to the forces of blind evolution, humans are self-wise movers whose choices direct a global process. Huxley continues, "The human species can, if it wishes, transcend itself—not just sporadically, an individual here in one way, an individual there in another way, but in its entirety, as humanity." Armed with this idea, transhumanists are concerned not only with transforming the exterior shape of the body, but even more the cellular and genetic structures that undergird the living person.

Foucault seems to advocate that man is somehow powerful enough to annihilate himself and make himself anew *ex nihilo*. Transhumanists, meanwhile, recognize that we humans have a past, but they hold that our future is limited only by our imagination and material powers.

"You can do anything you want," taken as a claim of unqualified possibility, is a falsehood. Our desires may extend beyond our capacities to fulfill them. An American President may wish to be the Queen of England, but he cannot actually in fact be so. One might answer, "Of course, dear, you should be able to be the Queen if you like, but cosmic injustice and class-warfare are against you." In other words, although in fact he *does not have the ability* to be what he desires, he has *the moral right* to be so. So it becomes a moral statement: "You *should be able* to do anything you want." In this way, "You may do anything you want," is an expression of pride, for it supposes that each thinking being should be able to will contradictories, absurdities, and impossibilities, and still have his desire fulfilled. It holds that humans are mere manipulable material, that human nature is not an integral given, that, in the words of Milton's Satan, we are "self-begot, self rais'd by our own quick'ning power."[55]

This devilish impulse, when widespread, becomes a moral principle for society: "We *should* help others achieve what they want." It morphs into an imperative for scientists and government: "We *must* help others achieve their desires." Finally, tyranny unmasks itself when the deranged compel the sane to do their bidding, saying, "You *must* help me achieve my desires." Thus the principle that desires may and ought to be fulfilled, for any reason whatsoever, leads to a push for an ever-increasing license to manipulate and tyrannize one's neighbor.

Now the "trans" in trans-humanism indicates a transition from something human to something more, something better, crossing over

[54] Julian Huxley, "Transhumanism", in *New Bottles for New Wine* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), 13-17.

[55] *Paradise Lost* V, l. 860.

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from the product of evolution to a new possibility that arises from human ingenuity. This can be evaluated from Aquinas's understanding of habit as the perfection of a power.[56] Aquinas would agree with Foucault and Huxley that the human can consciously engage in self-shaping but for the friar, it is more than the mere exercise of self-will. The presence of a habitus indicates that the person has acquired a sort of "second nature," which is the result of the individual's choice put into action over time, with effort, toward a definite end.[57] This "new nature" has its own dynamism, inclining the person to act in a particular way. A habit, understood in the wide Thomistic sense, is the result of a person's conscious efforts in repeated choice and action, such that she may have shaped her *desires*, her *emotions*, and even her own powers of *choosing* and *thinking*. Insofar as these desires and behaviors, etc., are the results of one's free choice, they are new and they transcend the inclinations and limitations of instincts and reflexes—indeed, they transform those lower movements into something qualitatively different, which is the result of the individual's self-shaping.

But Thomas would not agree that self-shaping is, in the words of Foucault, "the destruction of what we are as well as the creation of a completely different thing, a total innovation."[58] Instead, Thomas maintains that, "a habit is *like* a second nature, and yet it falls short of it." This is because, whereas the nature of a thing cannot in any way be taken away from a thing, a habit may be removed, though with difficulty.[59] As Shakespeare's Hamlet said, "Use *almost* can change the stamp of nature."[60] In other words, the presence of a "second nature" assumes the existence of a prior and more fundamental "first nature" characterized by a bounded plasticity. If one attempts completely to transcend "first nature," or if one ignores its fundamental laws, the person will not survive. A human body can never be adapted to assimilate sulfuric acid as its only nourishment: any attempt would lead to physical death. "The life of nature involves self-modification," Félix Ravaisson argued, but the change that a thing undergoes from an exterior force becomes more and more foreign to it, whereas the change it has brought upon itself becomes more and more proper to it.[61] To the extent that the "first nature" of a thing is respected, that far will the person flourish. It follows that,

[56] ST I-II, q. 49, a. 2: "[H]abitibus animae et corporis [. . .] sunt dispositiones quaedam perfecti ad optimum."

[57] See *De Veritate*, q. 20, a. 2, c.

[58] Foucault, "Interview with Michel Foucault," 275.

[59] ST I-II, q. 53, a. 1, ad 1.

[60] *Hamlet*, 3.4.168.

[61] Editors' Commentary in Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. and ed. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Group, 2008), 84.

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"habit does not simply presuppose nature, but develops in the very direction of nature, and concurs with it."[62] Hence, the human agent is one who acts within a *freedom of self-being* and by fully living engages himself by developing the best habits. Every "determination" of the self is always in relation to reason, which is "right" insofar as it enacts "first nature's" laws of authentic human flourishing. This is precisely what Aquinas means by "virtue," which is the perfect of the habits of the intellect and will that in turn affect the entire person.

Aquinas observed that on its deepest level, "Virtue designates the completion of a power."[63] For humans, the greatest power is in developing the "skill" of doing what is most natural to us, that is, to being authentically human. The most perfect way a person determines or shapes himself is by mastery over one's *entire* self, which exists as a whole unified and enlivened by a single principle: the soul. The person is not just a heap of parts. Because the human is a living unity-within-diversity, human self-mastery comes only when a person determines his entire self, for self-determination is inseparable from *integration with one's fundamental nature*.[64] Personal directedness, mastery, determination: this cannot be an exclusive focus on some good of the body, but requires a deep recognition of man's curious and mixed nature.

The human is a microcosm, having something of a beast within him, but also something of the angel, though the human is neither beast nor angel. The full range of human capacities includes not just physical beauty or prowess or strength, but even more a capacity for interior beauty, for creativity, for spirituality transcending the material that he touches and sees. Aristotle said, "The excellence [or virtue] we must study is *human* excellence; for the good we are seeking is human good and the happiness human happiness. By human excellence we mean not that of the body [primarily] but that of the soul."[65] In this way, self-determination achieves its perfection "with the fulfillment of freedom through truth."[66] Such perfection necessitates habits that coordinate the intellect and the emotions through a habit of the will whereby the proper thing is desired, because the will moves all powers that are in some way rational.[67] These habits have enormous effects on the human person—making him excellent not just in *making* something, but excellent in choosing what is right, that

[62] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 31.

[63] *Quaestiones Disputatae de Virtutibus* (QDV), q. 1, a. 1, c.

[64] Karol Cardinal Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, trans. Andrzej Potocki, ed. Anna-Teresa Tymieniecka (Dordrecht, Holland/Boston, USA: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1979), 73.

[65] *Nicomachean Ethics*, I.13, 1102a15.

[66] Wojtyła, *The Acting Person*, 275.

[67] ST I-II, q. 56, a. 3.

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is, excellent in a moral sense and therefore becoming not *trans*human but *fully* human. Good habits of choosing and feeling "are called virtuous simply: because they make the work to be actually good, and the subject good simply."[68] It follows that, "virtue makes the one having it good and makes his work good [. . .] and thus it is evident that it is the disposition of the perfected for the best."[69]

Aquinas shows that, when we take human agency seriously, we can no longer speak of self-*construction* but only of self-*determination*. In our hands is the project not only of world-construction but also of self-shaping, according to intrinsic plasticity of nature. Habit shows us not only the limits of our powers of self-shaping, it shows us that we have a self, a person different from God, for whom to think and to will is to be; He has not the possibility of perfecting a power. He is perfect in all His ways. Nor are we like the angels, who do not develop habits of thought, and act upon matter extrinsically. Nor like rocks, which cannot gain habits of flight, no matter how many times we throw them upwards. Rather, there is a core nature that belongs to us: we are persons who act through our bodies, even when acting upon ourselves. Hence, habit indicates our nature as a body-soul composite. A habit is a manifestation of the historicity of the human being, one who has a past, a context, a future that provide an ontological home for his perfectibility. Ultimately, the way to transcend our earthly confines is not through some unrealizable autopoesis, but to recalibrate our limits with the measure of a potential infinity insofar as we can touch the eternal through our exercise of true excellence, that is, through virtue. Now virtue is perfected when God, the master artist, gives us a new nature in Christ. The details of that divine project are contained in a theology of the infused virtues.

II. Theological level

A. Pessimism about human nature

As we turn to the theological realm, we will find that that there are erroneous tendencies that resemble those in anthropological realm.

The first I would like to highlight is a pessimism about human nature. Similar to downgrading human free choice on account of the mechanism of physical movement, the theological position degrades human nature on account of the debilitating mechanism of sin. In this regard, Martin Luther's theology often illustrates this tendency. Here I am more interested in depicting a particular *way of thinking* rather

[68] Ibid.
[69] QDV, q. 1, a. 1, c.

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than demonstrating that this was his consistent position throughout his life. In doing so, I would like to illustrate how a theology of sin without a theology of habit has difficulty bridging the gap between nature and grace.

In his *Commentary on the 51st Psalm*, which states (v. 5), *I know my iniquity, and my sin is always before me* [. . .] *Behold, I was shapen in iniquity*, Luther says,

> [I]t is great wisdom to know that we are nothing but sin. [. . .] the whole nature corrupted by sin. [. . .] We say that the natural powers are corrupt in the extreme [. . .].
> [I]t is clear how we become righteous, namely, by the mere imputation of righteousness. [. . .] [N]either the tree nor the fruit of human nature is good, but everything has been so deformed and destroyed by sin that there is nothing sound left in all of human nature.[70]

In his treatise, *The Bondage of the Will*, Luther states: "[I]f man has lost his freedom, and is forced to serve sin, and cannot will good, what conclusion can more justly be drawn concerning him, than that he sins and wills evil necessarily?"[71] In many of his writings, Luther spoke of Christ's righteousness as the only true and authentic righteous, so that we should regard "our righteousness as dung."[72] One of his strongest statements in this regard is the following: "I said before that our righteousness is dung in the sight of God. Now if God chooses to adorn dung, he can do so. It does not hurt the sun to send its rays into the sewer."[73]

These expressions give voice to a tendency that downplays the place of nature in redemption. It emphasizes those passages in St Paul that speak of humans as being corrupt from sin and needing a new life in Christ.

Here we may note that, just as Aquinas recognizes the valid observations of scientists that human freedom is shaped and constrained by non-voluntary habits from general nature, from individual nature, and from the environment, so he recognizes that our habits of sin prevent the full flourishing of human nature.

Original sin, according to Aquinas, is a sort of habit: "For it is an inordinate disposition, arising from the destruction of the harmony

[70] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 12, *Selected Psalms* I, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 307, 308, 326, 327.

[71] Luther, *The Bondage of the Will* (Grand Rapids: Revell, 1957), 149.

[72] See *Luther's Works*, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan et al.: vol. 20, *Lectures on the minor prophets: Zechariah,* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1986), 110; vol. 26, *Lectures on Galatians*/Chapters 5-6 (1535) Chapters 1-6 (1519) (Concordia, 1986), 219; vol. 44, *The Christian in Society I*, "The Judgment of Martin Luther on Monastic Vows, 1521," (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1966), 300; etc.

[73] Martin Luther, *Luther's Works*, vol. 34, ed. and trans. Jaroslav Pelikan (St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 1956), 184

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which was essential to original justice, even as bodily sickness is an inordinate disposition of the body."[74] Similarly, our personal sins lead to habits that are incompatible with habits of friendship with God and our personal good. Our natural inclination toward virtue is, "diminished by sin. Because human acts produce an inclination to like acts. [. . .] Wherefore as sin is opposed to virtue, from the very fact that a man sins, there results a diminution of that good of nature, which is the inclination to virtue."[75] Furthermore, "through sin, the reason is obscured, especially in practical matters, the will hardened to evil, good actions become more difficult and concupiscence more impetuous."[76] Man naturally loves God above himself, but sin turns humans in on themselves. Sin therefore makes friendship with God impossible, even though friendship with God is the highest good: "through every mortal sin which is contrary to God's commandments, an obstacle is placed to the outpouring of charity, since from the very fact that a man chooses to prefer sin to God's friendship, which requires that we should obey His will, it follows that the habit of charity is lost at once through one mortal sin."[77]

Nevertheless, Aquinas argues that *nature is not destroyed by sin*. "Obstacles can be placed indefinitely, inasmuch as man can go on indefinitely adding sin to sin: and yet [human nature] cannot be destroyed entirely."[78] Here, too, an understanding of habit explains why: a habit is an accidental quality, a form that is added to the soul that gives it an inclination or disposition toward action. As an accidental form, a habit is distinct from a substantial form, which makes a thing to be what it is. Precisely as accidental, a habit can only have an influence on a substance: it does not transform the substance from one thing into another. Therefore, the non-voluntary habit of original sin, and the acquired habit of personal sin, is something that can qualify a person as "sinful" but does not change the essence of a person as such: human nature remains. Because human nature naturally has the power of virtue, or, to put it another way, because natural acquired virtue is simply the excellence of human nature in habit-form, imperfect virtue is always possible, even for a person in the state of sin.

We should recall, however, that imperfect virtue cannot bring a person to everlasting happiness, nor unite one ultimately with the Holy Trinity. It achieves only human ends. To be able to perform acts that of themselves conduce to eternal life, we need supernatural habits. Nevertheless, a foundation of natural virtue is enormously

[74] ST I-II, q. 82, a. 1.
[75] ST I-II, q. 85, a. 1.
[76] ST I-II, q. 85, a. 3.
[77] ST II-II, q. 24, a. 12.
[78] ST I-II, q. 85, a. 2.

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helpful once sanctifying grace is present in the soul. This is because sanctifying grace destroys *sin* but it does not destroy *nature as such*.[79] Clare Carlisle points out, "In rejecting the idea that grace is given in the form of *habitus*, Luther seems to suggest that even when we receive the Gift of grace, it never properly belongs to us," for imputed righteousness is wholly extrinsic and foreign to our nature.[80] Furthermore, "According to Luther, the change that is brought about when divine grace is bestowed is not the infusion of a new capacity or inclination," only a new relation to God.[81]

In contrast, Aquinas continually insists that Christ *redeems* nature through infused grace and virtues, which is habit-type number six (6). "As the acquired virtues enable a man to walk, in accordance with the natural light of reason, so do the infused virtues enable a man to walk as befits the light of grace."[82] Nature has its own movement toward perfection, and this movement is not taken away by grace. Rather, when supernatural habits (including the "theological virtues") are infused into a person's soul directly by God, these infused habits elevate, purify, and vivify our natural habits. Thus, Aquinas argues that "grace perfects nature according to the manner of nature."[83] One indication of this is that those who manifest grace and supernatural virtues such as faith and charity retain their human habits. In fact, the infused supernatural virtues are grafted on to those habits, as it were, and elevate and perfect them. The personality of the saints remain, but that personality is directed toward a higher goal, with a new motive, impelled by an interior force that enlivens every part of their nature.

II B. Undue expressions of optimism: grace is merely an extension of nature

We now come to the fourth kind of position under consideration, and this is to see grace as a mere extension of nature. It has parallels to the positon of Foucault and Huxley insofar as it considers human excellence to be continuous with natural power, but it goes beyond them by admitting some form of the supernatural. The Jesuit Teilhard de Chardin expressed thoughts that are representative of this theological tendency.

[79] ST I, q. 1, a.8, ad 2.

[80] Clare Carlisle, "The Question of Habit in Theology and Philosophy: From Hexis to Plasticity," *Body & Society* 19, no. 2–3 (June 1, 2013): 30–57 at 39-40.

[81] Carlisle, "The Question of Habit in Theology and Philosophy," 41.

[82] ST I-II, q. 110, a. 3.

[83] ST I, q. 62, a. 5.

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Evolution was central to Teilhard's vision of the universe. "Evolution," he writes in *The Phenomenon of Man*, "is a light illuminating all facts, a curve that every line must follow."[84] Elsewhere he writes that "transformism," a broader movement in evolution, is "no longer a hypothesis but a condition to which henceforth all hypotheses must conform."[85] What seem to be fundamental distinctions are, in this view, are part of a continuum. For example, matter is seen as, "the matrix of spirit. Spirit is the higher state of matter. [. . .] Matter was the matrix of Consciousness; and, wherever we looked, Consciousness, born of Matter, was always advancing towards some Ultra-Human."[86] Therefore, the entire universe is undergoing a state of gradual transformation: "Creation, incarnation and redemption are to be seen as no more than three complementary aspects of one and the same process."[87] Teilhard summarized his views in a miniature "credo":

> *I believe the universe is an evolution;*
> *I believe evolution proceeds towards spirit;*
> *I believe spirit, in human beings, completes itself in the personal;*
> *I believe the supreme personal is the Universal Christ.*[88]

This is the vision that takes final shape in his claim: "[T]he *Christ of Revelation* is none other than the *Omega of Evolution*."[89] In other words, "All around us, and within our own selves, God is in the process of 'changing' as a result of the coincidence of his magnetic power and our own Thought."[90] Consequently, there is no substantial difference between the natural and supernatural, between nature and grace, between creature and Creator.

In response to this, we must admit that Thomas embraces the concept of deification. As ably shown by Anna Williams in her significant work, *The Ground of Union: Deification in Aquinas and* [Gregory] *Palamas*, Thomas not infrequently states that the final stage of human perfection is divinization. Quoting 2 Peter 1:4, Aquinas states, "it is written that by Christ we are made *partakers*

[84] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man* (New York: Harper, 2008, rprt 1961), 219.

[85] *The Vision of the Past*, trans. J.M. Cohen (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 87.

[86] *The Heart of Matter*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Brace & Co., 2002), 35, 45.

[87] "Reflections on Original Sin" in *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harvest/Harcourt Inc., 1971), 198.

[88] "How I Believe" in *Christianity and Evolution*, trans. René Hague (New York: Harvest Books/Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1962), 96.

[89] *The Heart of Matter*, 92.

[90] Ibid., 53.

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of the Divine nature."[91] Furthermore, in the light of God's glory "the rational creature is made deiform."[92]

Here the analogous meanings of "habit" comes a full circle, for the last kind of habit Aquinas identifies is (7) that of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. He calls that sort of Gift an infused *instinctum divinum* (divine instinct) in humans.[93] The Gifts are supernatural habits because they enable us to operate with a certain connaturality "toward things divine," and that we can be rendered connatural to divine things only if we are "properly disposed by a permanent and habitual inclination." Therefore, the Gifts of the Holy Spirit are habitual possessions that prepare us to know the mystery of God in a way that cannot be achieved by natural capacities alone, but which are nonetheless fitting to us as persons made in the image of God and transformed by grace. Insofar as grace is rooted in the very essence of the soul, the Gifts become "connatural" to us, giving us a *taste* for the divine, a spiritual *sense* of God's will, a spontaneous *inclination* to act in a supernatural manner.

On the level of the theological virtues, charity as a *habitus* gives a person a relationship to God as if God were another self. "God is effectively the life both of the soul by charity, and of the body by the soul."[94] Furthermore, through charity, one wills good to another person "even as he wills good to himself," thereby showing, that one person apprehends the other as "another self."[95] God wills what *His friends* will: "God loves His creature, and the more that any one of them participates in His goodness which is the first and chief object of His love, the more does He love it. So, *He wills the desires of a rational creature to be satisfied*, for, compared to other creatures, it participates most perfectly in divine providence." In this way, the will of the friend of God is so conformed with God's will that, because one knows the other so well, their wills coincide.

This is about as far as Aquinas can meet Teilhard. Aquinas does not blur the distinction between persons or natures. Aquinas's theology of habit would point out that Teilhard's view of the universe would eliminate the personal and the individual, and it could reduce a human's relationship with God to something less than the friendship of charity. Charity is a form of friendship, he says, which unites two persons in the closest way possible according to their natures—without obliterating one or the other. In contrast, Aquinas never compromises

[91] ST I-II, q. 62, a. 1.

[92] ST I, q. 12, a. 5 ad 3.

[93] See ST I-II, q. 68, a. 1: "his qui moventur per instinctum divinum, non expedit consiliari secundum rationem humanam … Et hoc est quod quidam dicunt, quod dona perficiunt hominem ad altiores actus quam sint actus virtutum."

[94] ST II-II, q. 23, a. 2 ad 2.

[95] ST I-II, q. 28, a. 1.

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the uniqueness of the divine nature as Being Itself, while creatures only participate in that nature to different degrees. Furthermore, Teilhard's impersonal "Cosmic Christ" blurs the distinction between the natural and the supernatural. Aquinas writes that "The Gift of grace surpasses every capability of created nature, since it is nothing short of a partaking of divine Nature, which exceeds every other nature."[96] Consequently, he explains, "charity can be in us neither naturally, nor through acquisition by the natural powers, but by the infusion of the Holy Spirit, Who is the love of the Father and the Son, and the participation of Whom in us is created charity."[97]

> [T]he human person participates in Christ's grace and sonship and so is conformed "to the image of the Son" in his visible mission by the "Spirit of adoption." … God's adopted children are deified by personal conformation to God through grace, charity, and wisdom. … The Father shares himself generously with those who are "called the children of God" in a self-offering of wisdom and love poured out in them through the Gift of grace, which grows to its full flood in glory when they have become "like him" for they "see him as he is."[98]

That will only come to perfection in the beatific vision. And *that*, Thomas insists, is not a habit, but an act, an act in the presence of which all merely human speech must fall silent.

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[96] ST I-II, q. 112, a. 1.
[97] ST II-II, q. 24, a. 2.
[98] Daria Spezzano, *The Glory of God's Grace: Deification According to St. Thomas Aquinas* (Ave Maria, FL: Sapientia Press, 2015), 338

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