

**The Perfection of Powers and Integration of the Person:
St. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła on Virtue**

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Abstract

One of the main influences on Karol Wojtyła, or St. John Paul II, is St. Thomas Aquinas; at the very foundation of Wojtyła's philosophy is a profound understanding of St. Thomas's philosophy, which served as an anchor as Wojtyła navigated through the philosophy of phenomenology. One common notion or concept that both philosophers wrote extensively about is virtue, which is the focus of this paper. By relating and synthesizing their respective notions, a positive and more holistic understanding of virtue can be provided. While they have their respective notions of virtue, owing to their respective philosophical backgrounds, they both offer valuable insights into the nature and importance of virtue in achieving human flourishing, developing the moral well-being of individuals, and forming moral character. Generally, for St. Thomas, virtue is the perfection of power, which for Wojtyła or St. Pope John Paul II is moral proficiency expressed in the integration of the person. This paper is divided into four parts: the first is a general discussion on virtue, the second is a discussion of St. Thomas' notions of habit and virtue, the third is Wojtyła's notion of human act and virtue, the fourth is an attempt at synthesizing the thoughts of St. Thomas and Wojtyła on virtue.

Keywords

Karol Wojtyła, St. Thomas Aquinas, virtue, human person, reason

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Introduction

The moral decay we are experiencing in our society today can be traced to the lack or absence of moral character in our society. The increasing dishonesty, lack of integrity, decline in respect for human dignity and life, the breakdown of family and social structures and values, the rise in social injustice, prevalence of materialism and moral relativism, increasing crime and violence, normalization of corruption, and predominance of fake news are all indicative of moral decay—that is, the absence or decline in moral standards and values. While there are many reasons for this moral decay, it ultimately points to the absence of moral character in our society, and this very absence of moral character points to the absence of virtue. Virtue is the foundation of moral character, and when virtue is not rightly and fully developed, there is no foundation on which to build moral character.

Moral character is the individual's thought patterns, feelings, actions, and behavior, which reflect one's moral values; it manifests the individual's commitment to ethical principles and values and encompasses virtues such as honesty, integrity, respect, compassion, courage, self-control, and truthfulness. A person with strong moral character acts morally and ethically because they have developed the virtues that guide them in decision-making and actions in daily life and in various situations. A morally upright person is predisposed to act and behave in an ethical manner.

Virtue is the cornerstone of strong moral character. Generally, virtue is a developed habit—a permanent disposition that becomes part of the character of the person. However, there are various understandings of habit, which makes our understanding of virtue problematic. The modern understanding of habit is often framed more in the context of psychology, where it is considered as actions that are triggered automatically in response to contextual cues associated with performance.² In social psychology, it is understood as an “organized response to stimuli.” Through interstimulation, feeling, thinking, and learning, these actions become organized into habits, and habit-building modifies original human nature and gives acquired nature its characteristic forms and meanings.³ This understanding of habit reduces it to the level of the involuntary and nonrational. In the general understanding, the real meaning of virtue has lost its significance in modern times—to the point that being virtuous is often

² D.T. Neal, W. Wood, J.S. Labrecque, P. Lally, “How do habits guide behavior? Perceived and Actual Triggers of Habits in Daily Life,” *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* Vol. 48 (2012), 492–498.

³ E.S. Bogardus, *Fundamentals of Social Psychology* (New York: Century, 1924), 34–44 (Chapter 4: “Habitual Nature”).

interpreted as abstaining from joyful living. For example, a woman may be considered virtuous or may consider herself very virtuous because she neither drinks nor smokes; a man may consider himself virtuous if he abstains from sex. While these may be manifestations of a virtuous character, they represent a very narrow understanding of virtue. This can be attributed to a very rigid moral tradition or interpretation of morality. Being virtuous is often equated with a narrow moral attitude that is judgmental toward others. In the end, virtue has lost its real and true meaning, which, etymologically speaking, is more than the narrow understanding of being abstinent or temperate.

The motivation of this paper is to bring to the fore the philosophical meaning of virtue through the notions of St. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła. Through this, a positive and more holistic understanding of virtue can be provided. While each has their respective notions of virtue due to their respective philosophical backgrounds, both offer valuable insights into the nature and importance of virtue in achieving human flourishing, developing the moral well-being of individuals, and forming moral character. Generally, for St. Thomas, virtue is the perfection of power; for Wojtyła (St. Pope John Paul II), it is moral proficiency expressed in the integration of the person. This paper is divided into four parts: first, a general discussion on virtue; second, a discussion of St. Thomas's notions of habit and virtue; third, Wojtyła's notion of the human act and virtue; and fourth, a synthesis of the thoughts of St. Thomas and Wojtyła on virtue.

The term virtue comes from the Latin root *vir*, for man, and *virtus*, which originally meant manliness, strength, or valor, but over time this term came to mean moral excellence. Thus, virtue denotes moral excellence based on right action and right thinking, producing goodness of character. It is an essential quality of a person that defines the human goodness of the individual. Deeply rooted in human character, virtue is a capacity that can be developed.⁴ According to Alasdair MacIntyre, a virtuous practice is a complex form of socially established cooperative human activity that systematically extends, elevates, or amplifies human powers to achieve excellence.⁵

The first articulation of the nature of virtue can be traced to the Greek thinkers, who developed theories for evaluating conduct based on the excellence of an individual's character. For Socrates, the good life consists in the practice of the virtues; for him, virtue is knowledge. Plato, following his mentor Socrates, associated virtue with self-control and freedom from desires. In answering the question

⁴ D. Bright, B. Winn, J. Kanov, "Reconsidering Virtue: Differences of Perspectives in Virtue Ethics and the Positive Social Sciences," *Journal of Business Ethics* Vol. 119 (2014), 445-460.

⁵ A. MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory* (3rd Edition) (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007), 187.

“What is the good life?”, Plato, following Socrates’s dictum, affirmed that “virtue is knowledge.”⁶ He developed the thesis that a life of reason is the happiest and the best. Knowledge produces a harmonious person, and an orderly, well-balanced personality results when reason governs desires and passions. A virtuous person—that is, a rational individual—is one who is truly happy.⁷

Likewise, Aristotle relates virtue to happiness. For him, happiness is not a passive state to be achieved, but it characterizes what we do and how we do it.⁸ The way to happiness involves knowing the right principles to follow and applying them in real life. For Aristotle, the performance of an activity must accord with virtue or excellence. Virtue refers to the excellence of a thing or its disposition to perform its proper function effectively. Thus, virtue or excellence is attained through repeated action that perfects the function. In his two treatises on ethics, the *Nicomachean Ethics* and the *Eudemean Ethics*, Aristotle begins with a discussion of *eudaimonia*, which means “happiness” or “flourishing,”⁹ and then turns to an examination of the nature of *arête*—“virtue” or “excellence”—and the character traits that human beings need in order to live life to its fullest.

In the East, Chinese sages like Confucius also stressed the importance of cultivating virtues as the foundation of a good ethical and social life. Central to Confucian teaching is the cultivation of human virtues. Every normal human being cherishes the aspiration to become a superior man—a sage or *Jun Tzu*. The sage is more than a *literati* or a learned man; he is well rounded, not only literate but also useful to the state and to society. Personal development and cultivation take place in the context of human relationships—particularly within society. So, a fully developed person is one who maintains good relationships with others and is a contributing member of the community. Ritual and filial piety are manners that prescribe how one should act and relate with others, and these should be grounded in an attitude of benevolence or human-heartedness (or *Jen*).

⁶ Plato, “Meno,” in: *Plato: Five Dialogues. Euthyphro, Apology, Crito, Meno, Phaedo* (2nd ed.), trans. by G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis-Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 2002), 78-79.

⁷ See J.J. Aguas, *The Good and Happy Life: An Introduction to Ethical Systems and Theories* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2019), 71.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 80

⁹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. by W.D. Ross, in: *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. R. McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2011), Book I, Chapters 4-7; Aristotle, *Eudemean Ethics*, trans. by P.L.P. Simpson (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2013), Book II.

St. Thomas on Habit and Virtue

The Nature of Habit

In the *Summa Theologiae* (First Part of the Second Part, Questions 49–67)¹⁰ and in his *Disputed Questions on the Virtues* (DQV),¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas discusses the nature of virtue. In the *Summa Theologiae*, he provides a causal definition of virtue and characterizes it as a good operative habit. But what is a habit? The term “habit” is derived from the Latin *habere*, meaning “to have” or possess; *habitus* means something that is truly *had* or possessed. To possess something is to have dominion over it and to be able to use it at will. St. Thomas makes the connection between habit and possession by comparing a habit to a possession insofar as we have the thing possessed “at our fingertips.” It is something that we practice until it becomes second nature to us. For example, when we possess the propensity to press the keys on our cellphones, it feels as though typing on the keyboard is literally at our fingertips. Following Averroes, Aquinas emphasizes that “A habit is that by which someone acts when he wills.”¹² Similarly, he quotes St. Augustine: “A habit is that whereby something is done when necessary.”¹³

When applied to the human body, a habit may mean a condition or state of being; when applied to human action, it may indicate a certain deportment or disposition. In the course of our physical development, our body develops certain dispositions, such as our manner of walking or other motor activities. However, St. Thomas clarifies that such operations proceed from the soul through the body. Thus, they belong principally to the soul, and secondarily to the body. Therefore, the dispositions for such operations are principally in the soul, but they can be secondarily in the body.¹⁴ Generally, a habit is an acquired mode of behavior that has become nearly or completely involuntary. It is an almost permanently fixed disposition to act or behave in a certain way. Habits are developed through repetition; thus, they are an effect of repeated acts and create a propensity to reproduce certain acts. This is why we say we possess a habit. Habits, once acquired, are difficult to change and cause an individual to act or behave easily and readily in one way or another. They are more or less stable and provide the facility to

¹⁰ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, trans. by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (Benziger Bros. Edition, 1947); henceforth, *ST*.

¹¹ St. Thomas Aquinas, *Disputed Question on the Virtues in General*, trans. by R. McNerny (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999); henceforth, *DQV*.

¹² Aquinas, *ST*, I.II, 50.5.

¹³ *Ibid.*, I.II, 49.3sc.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, *ST*, I.II, 50, 1.

act or operate. As a kind of disposition, habit refers to a quality that focuses on human capacities to operate in a specific way.

St. Thomas further elaborates on the nature of habit as a quality or disposition by stressing four specifying features: it is *stable*, *operative*, *valent*, and *nature-directed*. First, habit is a *stable* quality or disposition.¹⁵ St. Thomas regards habit as *difficile mobilis*—that is, a disposition that is difficult to change; it is not an easy-come, easy-go kind of quality. He says: “We call habits those qualities which, by reason of their very nature, are not easily changed, in that they have unchangeable causes.”¹⁶ Habits reside in the faculties as stable dispositions or qualities that dispose the faculties to act in a certain way, depending on the type of habit. A habit is not a “transient quality” but an “immanent quality” of its bearer. One does not become a chain smoker by smoking a single cigarette, nor does one become a generous person by one act of generosity. However, when one becomes a chain smoker, it is difficult to break the habit; similarly, a generous person will always act generously toward others.

Second, a habit is an *operative* quality. Habits are disposed toward acts or operations. By its very nature, habit is related both to an act and to the subject or bearer to which it belongs.¹⁷ Since habits are not directly observable, they can be known only through the acts to which they dispose their bearer.¹⁸ Following Aristotle, St. Thomas states that habits result from repeated acts. He says, “As neither does one swallow nor one day make spring, so neither does one day nor a short time make a man blessed and happy... Therefore, a habit of virtue, and for the same reason other habits, are not caused by one act.”¹⁹ Habits can grow or be diminished. “Repeated acts cause a habit to grow. But if the act falls short of the intensity of the habit, such an act does not dispose to an increase of that habit but rather to a lessening thereof.”²⁰ And since they increase through the same cause that engenders them, so too they diminish by the same cause that corrupts them.²¹ The habit of reading is increased by repeated acts of reading, but such a habit can also be decreased and corrupted by repeated acts of indolence or laziness.

Habits do not only give us the power to act but they give us the power to act readily and with dexterity. A faculty without a habit is the simple power to act; a faculty with a habit is the power to act with perfection. Thus, habits become—or are called—“second nature.” The faculty is like the first nature,

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, I.II 49; see also N. Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 29-31.

¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I.II, 49.2.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, I.II 49.3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, II.II, 4.1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, I.II, 51.3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, I.II, 52. 3.

²¹ *Ibid.*, I.II, 53.2.

and habit is the second. It is something that inclines or disposes us to act or perform our functions perfectly. Reading is a simple power or operation, but when we develop the habit of reading, even difficult texts become easier; and when we perfect the skill of reading, we become excellent readers. For example, the first assigned reading in philosophy may be daunting, but years of reading can make us adept at reading long and difficult texts. Similarly, when we develop the habit of playing online games, we perfect our skills. St. Thomas refers to habit as the “first actuality” of a capacity in that it begins to perfect a potential. But it is not itself the “second actuality” or its full completion in operation.²² Habit, then, is “halfway between pure potentiality and the complete act.”²³ Habits are operative because they are principles of operation. A habit is neither the pure potentiality of some subject nor its complete realization in operation; it is instead something intermediate between the two. “A habit lies midway between potentiality and actualization.”²⁴

Third, a habit has a *valent* quality—that is, one that is either good or bad. For St. Thomas, a habit is never value-neutral; it is “a disposition according to which something is disposed well or badly.”²⁵ Being good or bad belongs to the very concept of habit. Since a habit is a condition or disposition, it is either good or bad. Just as the condition of a body can either be healthy or unhealthy, a habit is either a good or a bad disposition, which belongs to habit’s rationale.²⁶ For St. Thomas, a habit is, by definition, a good or bad state to be in—that is, it is a valent quality. He further states that a good habit is contrary to a bad habit, just as a virtue is contrary to a vice. A good habit or virtue is disposed to an act that is appropriate to the agent’s nature, while a bad habit or a vice is disposed to an act that is inappropriate to the agent’s nature. For instance, acts of virtue, such as wisdom, are appropriate to human nature in that they are in conformity with reason, while acts of vice, such as indolence, are opposed to human nature since they do not conform to reason. Thus, it is clear that habits are distinguished in species according to the difference between good and evil.²⁷

Fourth, St. Thomas claims that habits are qualities that are *nature-directed*. It is important to understand what St. Thomas meant by nature—especially human nature. Nature is dynamic, not static; the nature of a thing is what that thing is, so, generally speaking, “the essence of anything, what its

²² *Ibid.*, I.II 49.3 ad 1.

²³ *Ibid.*, I.II, 50.4.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, I.II 73.1c.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, I.II, 49.2c.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, I.II, 49.2 ad 1.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, I.II, 54.3.

definition signifies, is called a nature.”²⁸ While essence signifies what a thing is as it can be defined and known by the human mind, nature signifies the essence of a thing insofar as it has an order to the proper operation of that thing, since nothing is without its characteristic operation.²⁹ Nature, therefore, refers to a telos—that is, the proper operation of a thing. St. Thomas, in this regard, follows Aristotle’s dictum: nature acts for an end. Human nature entails certain rational powers or capacities oriented to act. However, these powers, in and of themselves, are incomplete and indeterminate—potential, so to speak—and human nature alone is not an adequate principle for a human being’s characteristic operation and flourishing. These rational powers need to be completed by dispositions that complete and perfect them.³⁰ We have the rational power to understand complex ideas, such as philosophical ideas, but we need habits or dispositions to perfect this power. Thus, a human individual can reach his potential through acquiring and exercising human habits. This is what human habits are for: the realization of a human’s incomplete natural powers—that is, the perfection of those potentials or powers.

This is what St. Thomas meant by habits as nature-directed dispositions. He states, “Habit implies a certain disposition in order to a being’s nature, and to its operation or end, according to which disposition it is well or badly disposed to this nature and operation.”³¹ All qualities are “modes” or “determinations” of a subject, and a habit is that specific kind of quality that modifies or determines its subject “in order to the nature of a thing.”³² It is this fourth feature that brings together all the specifying features of habits. Habits are not just a conglomeration of properties; there is an essential core from which the other features flow. It is because habit is a nature-directed disposition that it is stable, operative, and valent.

The Nature of Virtue

With respect to our bodies, we have some powers in common with animals, such as biological powers like nutrition and growth, which are based on our being and not on our acts. But only those powers that are proper to the rational soul—the rational powers—belong to man alone. Hence, human virtue cannot pertain to the body but only to that which is proper to the rational soul. Accordingly, human virtue does not imply an ordering to being but rather to act. It therefore belongs to the very notion of human virtue

²⁸ *Ibid.*, I,II, 29.1 ad 4.

²⁹ Austin, *Aquinas on Virtue*, 38.

³⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, I,II, 55.2c.

³¹ *Ibid.*, I,II, 49.4.

³² *Ibid.*, I,II, 49.2c.

that it be a habit. St. Thomas elaborates: “Virtue denotes a certain perfection of a power. Now, a thing’s perfection is considered chiefly in regard to its end. But the end of power is the act. Wherefore power is said to be perfect insofar as it is determined toward its act.”³³

However, since some powers are determined by their acts to their nature, like the active natural powers—for example, biological powers—they are also called virtues in themselves. On the other hand, the rational powers, which are proper to man, are not determined to one thing but are related indeterminately to many, and they are determined to their acts, so, properly speaking, our rational powers are also virtues. As mentioned already, our rational powers are not determined by one act but by the repetition of acts and so are subject to habits that provide them with perfecting “second natures.” Following Aristotle, St. Thomas says, “Activities cause us to be skilled. But this is through virtue. Therefore, virtue is caused in us by acts.”³⁴

Since habits are value-laden and never value-neutral; they are either good or bad. As previously mentioned, good habits are called virtues, and bad habits are vices. St. Thomas states, “Human virtue, which is an operative habit, is a good habit, and operative of the good.”³⁵ But in what sense is virtue a good habit? According to St. Thomas, “A good habit is one that disposes to an act fitting to the nature of the agent.”³⁶ As human beings, our nature is based on our rational nature. Thus, anything against the order of our rational nature is properly against our nature as human beings, and anything that is in accordance with our rational nature is in accordance with our nature as human beings. St. Thomas concludes, “human virtue, which makes a human being good and his work good, is in accordance with the nature of a human being in as much as it agrees with reason, whereas vice is against the nature of a human being insofar as it is against the order of reason.”³⁷ Hence, “a moral habit has the rationale of human virtue, insofar as it is conformed to reason,”³⁸ while “vice is opposed to virtue because it implies a disposition by which a thing is disposed to that which does not benefit its nature.”³⁹ Hence, virtues are not good because they are in accord with certain external norms of goodness; they are good because they are in accordance with our rational nature as human beings.

³³ *Ibid.*, I.II, 55, 1; *QDV*, 1.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 9, ad.

³⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, I.II 55.3c.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, I.II, 54.3c.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, I.II, 54.3c.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, I.II, 58.2.

³⁹ Aquinas, *QDV*, 2, ad 10.

Moreover, virtues are not only good habits because they are in accordance with our rational nature: they are good because they imply the perfection of a power. As habits, they enhance and perfect our natural powers. The virtue of temperance enhances or perfects our natural capacity for restraint, and justice enhances our capacity to be fair to others. Now, the virtue of a thing is determined by the maximum that its power is capable of, and the maximum of any power must be what is good because evil implies a defect; thus, vice cannot maximize our power. Human virtue, which is an operative habit, is a good habit and productive of good works,⁴⁰ and vice is not. A virtue improves and perfects a rational faculty, inclining it toward the good—the good of the faculty, of the will, and of the whole man in terms of his ultimate destiny. St. Thomas explains:

Virtue perfects a power with respect to a perfect act. But a perfect act is the end of the power or of the one acting. Hence, virtue makes both the power and the agent good, as was said earlier. Thus, in the definition of virtue, there is something that pertains to the perfection of the act and something that pertains to the perfection of the power or agent.⁴¹

Now, there are two requirements for an act to be perfect: first is that the act be right; second is that the habit cannot be the principle of the contrary act. Hence, a principle of a good and a bad act cannot be a perfect principle of a good act because habit is the perfection of a power. That is why it must be the principle only of a good act and in no way of a bad.⁴²

Virtue is not called good because it itself is a good but because by it, something else is good.⁴³ The moral good refers to the act, the habit, and the object of the act. Similarly, moral evil is said of a bad act, which is a sin, and of a bad habit, which is a vice. Hence, virtue is that which makes the one having it good and makes his act good with moral goodness, while vice is what makes the one having it evil and makes his act evil with moral badness.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Aquinas, *ST*, I.II, 54.3.

⁴¹ Aquinas, *QDV*, 2.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 2, ad 1.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 2, ad 10.

Types of Virtues

For St. Thomas, there are three kinds of virtues: the intellectual virtues, the moral virtues, and the theological virtues. Following Aristotle, St. Thomas enumerates three intellectual virtues: wisdom, which is the knowledge of the highest causes of reality; understanding, which is the capacity to grasp the first principles of demonstration; and science, which is the systematic, demonstrative knowledge of a certain subject matter.⁴⁵ The moral virtues—also referred to as the “cardinal” virtues—are prudence, justice, temperance, and courage.⁴⁶ Prudence is the ability to judge between actions with regard to what is appropriate at a given time—that is, doing the right thing at the right moment and in the right place. Justice is the virtue of giving what is due and is the most extensive virtue. Temperance, also known as restraint, is the practice of self-control, abstention, and moderation, and tempering the appetites. Courage, or fortitude, is forbearance, strength, endurance, and the ability to confront fear, uncertainty, and intimidation.⁴⁷

The theological virtues are faith, hope, and charity. They are theological because they direct us to God.⁴⁸ Faith is the belief in God and in the truth of His revelation, as well as obedience to Him. Hope is the expectation of and desire to receive, refraining from despair, and the capability of not giving up. It is the belief that God will be eternally present in every human’s life and never give up on His love. Charity is a supernatural virtue that helps us love God and our neighbors the same way as we love ourselves.

St. Thomas distinguishes the intellectual and moral virtues from the theological virtues. He states: “The object of the theological virtues is God Himself, Who is the last end of all, as surpassing the knowledge of our reason. On the other hand, the object of intellectual and moral virtues is something comprehensible to human reason. Therefore, the theological virtues are specifically distinct from the moral and intellectual virtues.”⁴⁹ St. Thomas recognizes that theological virtues are infused in man by God.⁵⁰ The infused virtues are independent of human operation; they are directly produced by God in the operative faculties of a man and differ mainly from the acquired because they do not imply the human effort that determines the faculty toward a particular kind of activity, namely, the facility induced by repetition. God Himself pours in the infused virtues. While the habits of virtue are acquired through man’s effort and for his natural perfection in a manner that is connatural to him, man has acquired, by divine

⁴⁵ Aquinas, *ST*, I.II, 57.2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, I.II, 61.2.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, I.II, 61.3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, I.II, 62.1.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, I.I, 62.2.

⁵⁰ Aquinas, *QDV*, 10, respo. 10.

influence beyond the supernatural principles, certain infused virtues by which he is perfected in operations ordered to the end of eternal life.⁵¹

Since habits can be increased and nourished, so can virtues. Acquired virtues are increased and nourished by the acts that cause them. According to Aristotle, a habit is a good virtue—that is, the proper or right way of doing something.⁵² When we repeatedly perform good acts, we develop virtues: human excellences or dispositions to perform or act in a proper manner or way. By consistent efforts to concentrate on a good act and by doing it repeatedly over a long period of time, one gradually develops a permanent disposition to perform such an act, thereby acquiring the virtue. In the case of infused virtues, they are increased by the act of God, by whom they are caused. St. Thomas states: “Our acts dispose for an increase of charity and the infused virtues, as a man at the outset, by doing what is natural to him, prepares and disposes himself to receive charity from God. Subsequent acts can merit an increase in charity because they presuppose charity, which is the principle of merit.”⁵³

Wojtyła’s Notion of Human Act and Virtue

One of the main influences on Karol Wojtyła, or St. John Paul II, was St. Thomas Aquinas; at the very foundation of Wojtyła’s philosophy lies a profound understanding of St. Thomas’s philosophy, which served as an anchor as Wojtyła navigated through the philosophy of phenomenology. However, despite the significant influence of St. Thomas, Wojtyła developed his own notion of virtue as a rich and complex concept that emphasizes the importance of habitual disposition based on the human act, self-determination, reason, and integration. His discussion on virtue offers a deeper understanding of the nature of human action and the importance of moral character. From his thoughts, it is evident that virtue is the foundation of moral life and the source of all moral goodness. Virtue is not something abstract or detached from life; on the contrary, it has deep “roots” in life itself, it springs from life and forms it. Virtue has an impact on a person’s life, actions, and behavior. It follows that, in all these reflections of ours, we are speaking not so much of virtue as of man living and acting “virtuously”; we are speaking

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10, respo. 10.

⁵² Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1, Chapter 13.

⁵³ Aquinas, *DQV*, 10.

of the prudent, just, and courageous man, and finally, precisely today, we are speaking of the “temperate” (or “sober”) man.⁵⁴

The Human Act

Wojtyła notes the slight difference in his use of the term “act” (*czyn*), which he takes exclusively as man’s conscious action, and the term *actus humanus*. The notion of the human act in the traditional sense places more emphasis on deliberateness or voluntariness. In the Aristotelian tradition, human action is primarily an “ethical” category, and the basic considerations are the voluntariness and culpability of the human agent and the ethical character of the action. Hence, human acts must be distinguished from the acts of man, which are involuntary actions. While Wojtyła stresses that “act” (*czyn*) in the Scholastic sense is defined as *actus humanus* or, more specifically, as *actus voluntarius*, his emphasis is on the anthropological importance of the act, that is, the act as revealing the nature of the person. The act (*czyn*) is a concretization of the dynamism proper to the human person because it is accomplished in a manner proper to the free will.⁵⁵ Hence, it is only a man’s deliberate or voluntary act that can be called an “act” or “action.” Furthermore, human action also means conscious action; voluntary action must also be regarded as a conscious act because it is accompanied by consciousness. When we say “voluntary act,” we implicitly refer to the kind of act that is related to the power of free will.⁵⁶ Hence, the phrase “conscious acting” to some extent corresponds to the *actus voluntarius* of Aristotelian and Thomistic philosophy because any action pertaining to the human will must also be conscious.

Wojtyła emphasizes that a man acts or performs an action, which is a fact that is given to us in experience; he adds that the fact that “I act” is an experiential datum. However, this experiential fact is not an isolated fact but must be understood in relation to or in the context of the entire human dynamism, which refers to the totality of man’s experience.⁵⁷ The entire human dynamism includes all of man’s functions, powers, and faculties. However, not all that belongs to human dynamism is reflected in consciousness.⁵⁸ Some functions or powers are not accompanied by consciousness; there are functions

⁵⁴ John Paul II, *General Audience*, Wednesday, 22 November 1978 (https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/audiences/1978/documents/hf_jp-ii_aud_19781122.html).

⁵⁵ K. Wojtyła, *Person and Act and Related Essays*, “The English Critical Edition of the Works of Karol Wojtyła/John Paul II,” Vol. I, ed. Antonio Lopez, trans. by G. Ignatik (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2021), 122; henceforth, *PA*.

⁵⁶ Wojtyła, *PA*, 122.

⁵⁷ See J.J. Aguas, *Person, Action and Love: The Philosophical Thoughts of Karol Wojtyła (John Paul II)* (Manila: UST Publishing House, 2014), 70; henceforth *PAL*.

⁵⁸ Wojtyła, *PA*, 125.

or powers that operate without us being conscious of them. For example, my writing this paper is an act accompanied by my consciousness; I am aware of what I am writing and the fact that I am writing. When I take my meals, I am conscious as I eat, but the way the food is digested by my body is something that is no longer accompanied by my consciousness. Thus, while there are those functions or powers that are accompanied by consciousness, there are also those that happen or manifest without the accompaniment of consciousness.⁵⁹ This is one of the bases for the distinction between an “act” and a “happening.”

The person himself causes human action; it proceeds from him and comes about in him through his own agency. In this sense, the self, or the “I,” is at the center of the total lived experience of “I act.” When the person acts, it is the self that brings about the act, and not anybody else; the person experiences himself as the agent of the act. This is the moment of efficacy, the lived experience of being the agent of the act.⁶⁰ When a person acts, he experiences himself as the cause of his actions; he knows that it is he who brings the action into existence and sustains its existence. By experiencing himself as the efficient cause of the action, “man discovers that he is completely immanent in the action and simultaneously transcends it.”⁶¹ In “happening,” on the other hand, there is no efficacious participation of man. Although the function happens in him, he does not really consciously bring it into existence. The experience of “something happens” comes to the self regardless of the self, and sometimes even despite or in spite of the self. When something happens to me, the dynamization has occurred without the efficacious contribution of my “I.”⁶²

The human act is a self-determined act. Self-determination is the very basis of freedom. We are free when we can determine not only our actions, but also ourselves. Thus, conscious and voluntary action is related to freedom. This freedom is manifested in the lived experience when man can move from the “I can” and “I need not” to “I want” or “I will.”⁶³ Since the act is the self’s own and it is experienced as such, it is also something that the self *may* or *need not* do. But the self can say, “*I will.*” This means that there are some things that a person can do but need not do. One can just sit in one corner and do nothing, or one can take a book and read. It is in this instance that the person experiences the moment of freedom, the moment of efficacy, the moment of the will, the moment of self-determination. Since the self

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 168.

⁶¹ R. Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła: The Thoughts of the Man Who Became Pope John Paul II* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: WB. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997), 135.

⁶² Wojtyła, *PA*, 168.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 203.

is the agent of his actions, he determines the act and, in the process, determines himself. The first subject of the self-determination of man is himself, his own self, so that when deciding about anything, the person decides about himself.⁶⁴ This is something that is not present in those occurrences that merely happen in man. When I eat and my body digests the food that I eat, this happens without my voluntary action or determination. Wojtyła further explains,

This first definition of self-determination in the experience of human action involves a sense of efficacy on the part of the personal self: “I act” means “I am the efficient cause” of my action and of my self-actualization as a subject, which is not the case when something merely “happens” in me, for then I do not experience the efficacy of my personal self.⁶⁵

The will,⁶⁶ which is regarded as one of the essential constitutive elements of man, a faculty through which the person realizes himself, is at the center of the self-determination of the human person.⁶⁷ Wojtyła points out that it is through the decision of the person’s will that he becomes the agent of his action; hence, it cannot be considered as something that happens in man.⁶⁸ When I decide to read a book or write an article, I manifest my will and myself; I determine the course of my action. The relation between the person and his will, wherein the will manifests itself in the person’s action, is what Wojtyła calls self-determination.⁶⁹ The power of self-determination is free will. As discussed in the preceding section, St. Thomas Aquinas explains that by a power man is as if empowered to act, and by a habit he is apt to act well or ill.

One particular act of the will is volition, that is, an intentional act directed toward a proper object, which could be an end or a value. Volition is a general term that may be applied to all the desires, wishes, and intentions of the person. Some kinds of volition can only be considered as “happenings,” since they do not really proceed from the will; they appear already as wants or desires. Some of our desires are influenced by our emotions, so that we blindly desire any object, like wanting expensive clothes and

⁶⁴ G. Hołub, T. Biesaga, J. Merecki, M. Kostur, *Karol Wojtyła* (Kraków: Ignatianum University Press, 2019), 57.

⁶⁵ K. Wojtyła, “The Personal Structure of Self-Determination,” in: K. Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, trans. by Th. Sandok (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 189.

⁶⁶ The will is also described as “rational appetite,” particularly by St. Thomas. Wojtyła explained that the term “appetite” has the element of directed striving towards an end and at the same time has the element of desire, which, for Wojtyła, points to the direction of what happens in man. So, the term “rational appetite” is almost a contradiction. Hence, Wojtyła used the term “intentionality” to refer to an act of the will. See Wojtyła, *PA*, 228.

⁶⁷ Aguas, *PAL*, 70.

⁶⁸ See Buttiglione, *Karol Wojtyła*, 142.

⁶⁹ Wojtyła, *PA*, 207.

pieces of jewelry. Wojtyła clarifies, however, that “I want” is different from “I will.” Wanting is directed towards a definite external object, like wanting wealth or food. But what is significant in Wojtyła’s analysis is the clear distinction between the intentionality of human volition, which consists in the will’s directing itself toward its objects, and the non-intentional self-determination which objectivizes the human self. In this sense, volition has an intentional object, whereas self-determination has no intentional object but the self. Intentionality and self-determination are intimately related because, without the intentionality of the will, moral action is impossible, whether the object intended is internal or external. However, the person, before directing his will toward those objects, influences himself, since the person is a primary object of himself, which results in self-determination.⁷⁰ And when both self-determination and intentionality are present in an act of the will, such an act reveals human causal efficacy and human transcendence most completely.⁷¹

The notion of self-determination presupposes the complex structure of the human person. It points to man’s specific complexity and to two aspects of human action, namely, self-possession and self-governance.⁷² According to Wojtyła, only the one who has possession of himself and is simultaneously his own sole and exclusive possession can be a person.⁷³ Self-determination is possible only on the ground of self-possession; only the person who really possesses himself, the one who really owns himself, can determine and decide for himself. Thus, because “I will” is an act of self-determination at a particular moment, it presupposes structural self-possession. Only the things that are man’s actual possessions can be determined by him. Since I possess myself, I can determine myself.⁷⁴

As a consequence, self-possession has another relation within the very structure of the human person, one that relates to the will and is indispensable for understanding self-determination. This is the relation of self-governance, which states that the person who possesses himself can govern himself. Wojtyła clarifies that self-governance implies not only self-control but also the power of man to govern himself. Because of self-determination, every man actually governs himself; he actually exercises a specific power over himself that nobody else can exercise or execute.⁷⁵ Self-governance differs from

⁷⁰ G. Hołub, “Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics in the Thought of Karol Wojtyła,” *Studia Gilsoniana* Vol. 11, No. 1 (January–March 2022), 157.

⁷¹ See J. Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2000), 117.

⁷² Aguas, *PAL*, 85.

⁷³ Wojtyła, *PA*, 209.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

self-control in that it is something far more fundamental and far more strictly related to the inner personal structure of man. It refers to man's power to govern himself, and not merely to control himself.

Wojtyła further explains that the full experience and lived realization of the human self's personal subjectivity are manifested and actualized in self-possession and self-governance. This is because one can experience oneself as a personal subject only to the extent that one becomes aware that one possesses and governs oneself.⁷⁶ Consciousness, or more precisely, self-consciousness, which is connected with action and with efficacy as self-determination, conditions the lived experience of self-possession and self-governance. The self is not just self-conscious but also self-possessed and self-governed, something proper to a concrete human *suppositum*.⁷⁷ The self cannot be reduced to self-consciousness alone; the full dimension of the human self includes self-possession and self-governance, and is conditioned by self-consciousness. This dimension is also the basis for the full relation of the self to the personal subjectivity that is proper to a human being.⁷⁸

Virtue: Habitual Disposition of the Will and the Role of Reason

For Wojtyła, virtue is a habitual disposition of the will that enables individuals to act in accordance with reason and to achieve their fullest human potential. Virtue, as a habitual disposition of the will, is a stable and lasting quality that is developed through practice and repetition. In his analysis of chastity as a virtue, Wojtyła explains that habit is more than an ability or a provisional control over something; rather, it is mastery or power over something. Since virtue is a habit, it is a permanent and constant mastery. He writes,

Habit (*sprawność*) means more than “ability” (*zdolność*), and virtue is a habit—and a “constant” habit at that. For if a habit were merely provisional, it would not be a habit properly speaking; it would be possible to say that the given man “managed” to master a movement, whereas a virtue should give the assurance that this man will master it for certain.⁷⁹

Thus, in the case of chastity, virtue assists the will, and above all, the concupiscible power itself (*appetitus concupiscibilis*), in mastering sensual movements. If the proficiency in mastering the concupiscent

⁷⁶ K. Wojtyła, “The Person: Subject and Community,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 231.

⁷⁷ Aguas, *PAL*, 86.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁷⁹ K. Wojtyła, *Love and Responsibility*, trans. by G. Ignatik (Boston: Pauline Books & Media, 2013), 153; henceforth *LR*.

movement from sensuality is only provisional, even if one is able to manage it for some time, then it is not a fully matured virtue. The “fully mature virtue is a habit that consists in keeping constantly in balance the concupiscent power by the habitual relation to the true good (*bonum honestum*), which is defined by reason.”⁸⁰

Wojtyła also emphasizes that virtue is guided by reason, which means that virtue involves the use of intellect and wisdom to discern what is good and right. This habitual disposition is not simply a matter of external behavior, but rather, it involves a deep-seated transformation of the person, enabling him to act in accordance with his values and principles. In speaking about sexual desires and man’s objective ends, for example, Wojtyła stresses that “the correct development of the relation to the objective ends of his being remains in him in the power of reason, which directs the will, and therefore this development acquires a moral value—it is morally good or evil.”⁸¹ Reason also distinguishes among the different kinds of goods, namely: *bonum honestum*—the good that conforms to the nature of a rational being because it is in keeping with what that being desires for itself; *bonum utile*—a good that is a means to an end; and *bonum delectabile*—the subjective good of satisfaction or pleasure.⁸²

Following St. Thomas, Wojtyła stresses the directive role of reason in human action. Such a directive role is determined mainly by a holistic view of the human being, a faculty of which is reason. Reason is part of the whole human person and performs its practical functions within this whole.⁸³ The superior and directive character of the function of reason is determined in a fundamental way by the fact that reason defines the good, which is the end of the human being and his action—the *bonum honestum*. This, according to Wojtyła, is what guarantees that reason has a directive role in human life. Reason sees to it that the good desired by the will is the real and true good and not just a delectable or useful good. Even the value perceived by the will must be a real and true value of the object which is desired by the will.⁸⁴ Following St. Thomas, Wojtyła again asserts:

The moral life consists in attaining the truth in all our actions and behavior, and activity by nature always aims at some good. Consequently, the essence of moral life is the lived experience of

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 153.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁸² See J.J. Aguas, “Ethics and Moral Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła,” *Kritike: An Online Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 7, No. 1, (June 2013), 122.

⁸³ K. Wojtyła, “On the Directive or Subserving Role of Reason in Ethics,” in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 67.

⁸⁴ J.J. Aguas, “Ethics and Moral Philosophy of Karol Wojtyła,” 123.

the truth of the good realized in action and the realization in that action of the good subjected to the criterion of reason and thus placed in the light of that truth.⁸⁵

This emphasis on reason is important because it highlights the fact that virtue is not simply a matter of emotional or instinctual response but rather involves a thoughtful and reflective approach to human action. Through conscious and free acts, the individual shapes their own being and develops stable dispositions, which constitute virtues. Virtuous action is not merely the performance of externally good deeds, but flows from an interiorized orientation toward the good, reflecting the person's authentic self-determination. Virtue enables individuals to self-determine their actions, making them responsible and free.

Virtue and the Integration of the Human Person

Wojtyła stresses that virtue involves the integration of the human person, which means that it involves the harmonization of the individual's emotions, desires, and actions. This integration is important because it enables individuals to act in a way that is consistent with their values and principles and to achieve their fullest human potential. Virtue integrates human faculties, such as intellect, will, and emotions, to achieve a unified and harmonious action.

Emotions belong to psychic dynamism, which refers to emotional experiences like stirring emotions or excitement; and particular emotions and passions only happen in man as a subject. Their happening or occurrence is spontaneous, which means that they are not a product of personal efficacy and self-determination. Wojtyła stresses that spontaneity means the dynamic independence of emotions from the proper efficacy of the person, that is, from his self-determination. It is possible that emotions take over from the will and freedom in the determination of action, creating a tension between these two dynamisms.

The tension between the person's efficacy or self-determination and spontaneous emotivity arises when emotional dynamism introduces a spontaneous turn toward specific values. This turn may be directed toward something attractive or a positive value, or away from something repulsive or a negative value. The fact that man is emotionally *dynamized*—which means oriented to the good and against the evil—is not so much a function of an emotional stirring or of emotions. This inclination toward

⁸⁵ K. Wojtyła, "On the Metaphysical and Phenomenological Basis of the Moral Norm," in: Wojtyła, *Person and Community: Selected Essays*, 91.

something attractive and away from something repulsive reaches the deeper roots of man's nature.⁸⁶ Man has a natural inclination toward anything perceived to be good and away from anything perceived to be evil. On the level of the psyche, emotions follow the orientation of nature, and instincts express this natural inclination. Wojtyła writes,

On the basis of precisely this orientation, at whose root inheres a deep urge of nature itself, lies the main tension between the spontaneous emotivity of nature and personal efficacy, that is, self-determination.⁸⁷

However, the experience of value is not just a matter of being inclined to a value or just a spontaneous turn toward a value; it is closely related to morality. For Wojtyła, the experience of value is not merely a spontaneous inclination toward anything perceived to be valuable; the inclination must also be under the norms of morality. There are many goods that man may be inclined to, but only the moral good perfects the very humanity of man; only the moral good can make man a better man and actualize himself.⁸⁸ The experience of value is not confined only to the psychical; it is related to the higher dynamism of the human subject, that of self-determination and transcendence. Wojtyła stresses that morality intrinsically determines man's humanity and personal nature. Hence, the experience of morality is an integral component of man's experience. Without this experience, it is impossible to build an adequate theory of person and act.⁸⁹

Now, the key element in relieving the tension between emotivity and efficacy is virtue or moral proficiency. Wojtyła explains,

The integration of the person in the act on the basis of the emotivity (emotionality and emotivity) proper to the human psyche is accomplished through habits, which, from the viewpoint of ethics, warrant the term "virtues." Essential to the concept of virtue are both the element of moral value and, with it, a relation to the norm."⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Wojtyła, *PA*, 363.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 364.

⁸⁸ Hołub, "Philosophical Anthropology and Ethics," 150.

⁸⁹ Wojtyła, *PA*, 364.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 364.

According to Wojtyła, the problem of integration consists in realizing the personal structure of self-governance and self-possession on the basis of psychical subjectivity, which is molded by various emotive events that cause spontaneous attraction or repulsion on the part of the subject.⁹¹ A person may feel sexually attracted spontaneously toward the opposite sex, and the challenge is to keep one's spontaneous feelings under control, thus keeping the personal structure of self-governance and self-possession intact. In this case, it is one's moral proficiency or virtue that will enable him or her to harmonize or integrate properly the personal structure and emotive subjectivity. Thus, Wojtyła asserts that this personal structure is realized through different moral proficiencies or skills. "It is precisely here that the proper function of habit is manifested—the integrative function."⁹²

Now, skills are formed by constant repetition, so when a good act is constantly repeated, it becomes a good habit or a virtue. When a person is able to restrain or channel his emotive energies into something that will not compromise his personal structure repeatedly, then he develops a good habit or virtue. It goes without saying that the realization of the personal structure of self-governance and self-possession in the context of relieving the tension between the spontaneous emotivity and efficacy or self-determination is the result of constant repetition of good acts that result in good moral habits or virtues. The personal structure of self-governance and self-possession is realized by means of different moral proficiencies or virtues.⁹³

It is in the nature of habits or virtues to subordinate the spontaneous emotivity of the subjective ego to its self-determination. They tend to subordinate the psychical subjectivity to the transcendent efficacy of the person. They do this, however, in such a way as to take maximum advantage of emotive energy instead of merely suppressing it.⁹⁴ To subordinate the emotion or the psychic inclination to transcendence or efficacy does not mean suppressing the emotive energy. The person, through his will, must, to some extent, restrain the spontaneous burst of emotive energy and must even assimilate some of it. When properly assimilated, this emotive energy fortifies the energy of the will itself considerably, and that is precisely the task of virtue. Through the exercise of these moral proficiencies, the will, without risking itself, can adopt as its own the spontaneity of emotions, but this time it is already a transformed spontaneity. This transformed spontaneity is a trait of moral proficiencies or virtues. Wojtyła writes,

⁹¹ Aguas, *PAL*, 155.

⁹² Wojtyła, *PA*, 364.

⁹³ Aguas, *PAL*, 155.

⁹⁴ Wojtyła, *PA*, 365.

To a certain extent, spontaneity is also a feature of habit—not original spontaneity, however, but one transformed by a steadfast process of so-called work on oneself. If, however, the relation to value is concerned, then the integrative process of improving one’s own psyche gradually leads to the situation in which the will—guided by the light of intellectual cognition—knows how to appropriate, in the spontaneous relation of emotion, in spontaneous attraction or repulsion, what is truly good and to choose it. It also knows how to reject what is truly evil.⁹⁵

Thus, the integrating process of developing and improving the psyche gradually produces a will which is guided by the light of reason and reference to truth and energized by a transformed spontaneity of the emotions: a will that learns how to choose and adopt the real good and reject the real bad. All these are possible through a steadfast process of character formation.

Wojtyła also stresses the crucial role of freedom in the acquisition and exercise of virtue. Genuine virtue cannot be coerced; it must be freely chosen and embraced by the individual. This freedom is inseparable from responsibility. The virtuous person is accountable for their actions and consciously directs their freedom towards the realization of objective good. Responsibility is directly related to efficacy for the simple reason that if a person is the doer of an act, then he is responsible for that act. Once again, we see here the complexity of the performance of an action. Wojtyła points out that since we relate responsibility directly to efficacy, the statement “man as the doer of X is responsible for X” reveals how complex, cohesive, and condensed are the elements that constitute when a man performs an action.⁹⁶ Not only is he responsible for the act, but he also fulfills or actualizes himself when he performs it.

The Virtue of Love and Chastity

Wojtyła highlights the inherently relational dimension of human existence and, consequently, of virtue. Virtuous actions are not performed in isolation but have an impact on others and contribute to the building of a community. This relational dimension of virtue is expressed in the virtue of love. Wojtyła places a strong emphasis on the virtue of love, which he sees as the foundation of all other virtues. According to Wojtyła, love is a virtue that involves the intentional and deliberate choice to will the good of another person. He argues that virtue is a form of love that enables individuals to act responsibly and selflessly.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 365.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 271.

Virtue integrates love and reason, enabling individuals to make responsible decisions that respect the dignity of others.

For Wojtyła, the human person is the most perfect being in the visible world and, therefore, has the highest value.⁹⁷ As a being with the highest value in the world because of his being created in the image of God, man has an inherent dignity that must be preserved and respected at all times. “The value of the person is, in turn, the basis of the norm that should govern actions that have a person as their object.”⁹⁸ This is the personalistic norm that demands that every person should be treated as a person. This norm is related to love. Love demands that we treat each person as a person, as an end in himself, and we are commanded to love each one.⁹⁹

One form of love that Wojtyła discusses at length is the love between a man and a woman in the context of marriage. The growth of such human love consists “in integrating the different processes that spontaneously occur in the human person, e.g., sensual attraction and sexual emotions into a conscious act of the whole person that also involves his rational faculties.”¹⁰⁰ True love does not just happen in the person but involves an experience of being an efficient cause of the act of love; it involves the act of the will; it springs from the human spirit.

Wojtyła analyzed different levels and types of love. One aspect of love that relates to our present study is love in the ethical sense. While love can be analyzed in the psychological sense, it must be subordinated to love in the ethical sense because it is in the ethical sense that love can be integrated. We can look at love as a concrete situation or as a whole series of situations, but this situation or series of situations can only be psychologically integrated and complete if the ethical value of love is present within them.¹⁰¹ Hence, Wojtyła stresses that love as an experience should be subordinated to love as a virtue because without virtue there can be no fullness in the experience of love.¹⁰² Love as a virtue is based on the affirmation of the value and dignity of the person. The person differs from a thing in structure and degree of perfection because, in the person, there is an ‘interior,’ an inner life where we find the elements of spiritual life. Wojtyła further stresses,

⁹⁷ K. Wojtyła, “The Problem of Catholic Sexual Ethics: Reflections and Postulates,” in: Wojtyła, *Person, Subject and Community: Selected Essays*, 287.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Aguas, *PAL*, 206.

¹⁰⁰ Kupczak, *Destined for Liberty*, 46.

¹⁰¹ Aguas, *PAL*, 240.

¹⁰² Wojtyła, *LR*, 103.

The person possesses spiritual perfection that is proper for him. This perfection determines his value. In no way may a person be treated on par with a thing (nor even on par with an individual animal), since he possesses spiritual perfection, since he is in a sense an (embodied) spirit, and not merely a “body,” even if splendidly enlivened.¹⁰³

The value of the person must then be clearly distinguished from the value present or inherent in a person.¹⁰⁴ Psychologically, love between a man and a woman is an experience related to a reaction to a sexual value. Love may be initiated by sensual or sexual attraction. Still, our consciousness is also aware that the individual of the other sex is a person. Since the other “person” is not the content of impression but the object of conceptual knowledge, the reaction to the value of a person is not as immediate as the reaction to a sexual value connected with the “body.” Nevertheless, the human being of the other sex is a person.¹⁰⁵

The affirmation of the true value of the person is the proper attitude of love. This is the fullness of love. Love in its full sense is a virtue; it is not just an emotion, much less a mere excitement of the senses. As a virtue, love is developed in the will; it is an authentic commitment of the free will of one person (the subject), resulting from the truth about another person (the object).¹⁰⁶ The will orients love as a virtue toward the value of the person, the beloved, so that the will is the source of the affirmation of the value of the person that permeates all the reactions, emotions, and the entire behavior of the subject or person in love.

Still, love as a virtue relates to affective love and to the love contained in sensual desire; love as a virtue does not eliminate sensual desire or sexual attraction. Hence, the affirmation of the value of the person, which reflects the full truth about the beloved, must be allowed to take its place among the sexual experiences that originate in man’s sensuality. Sexual attraction and falling in love are emotions that belong to “what happens in man.” In the Thomistic and Aristotelian sense, they are “acts of man,” but love as a virtue is an act of the will; it is a “human act.” Hence, there must be an integration or harmonization of love as an emotion and love as a virtue.

In explicating the nature of chastity and concupiscence, Wojtyła follows St. Thomas’s distinction between the two passions of the soul, or appetites of the soul: the irascible and the concupiscible.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Aguas, *PAL*, 241.

¹⁰⁶ Wojtyła, *LR*, 106.

Temperance is a virtue that regulates and restrains the concupiscible appetite, while chastity is the virtue that regulates and restrains the concupiscible appetite insofar as it is directed toward sexual objects.¹⁰⁷

There are certain problems that can undermine love as a virtue; these are carnal concupiscence and subjectivism. Carnal concupiscence has as its object the body and sex; it arises in the subject from the body and seeks an outlet in carnal love. For Wojtyła, it is vital to contain carnal desire within the bounds of the senses and the emotions because once it gets out of control, it can communicate itself to the will, where it can impose its own attitude towards its object. It can orient the person first toward the “body and sex” and then toward enjoyment. Subjectivism is a problem in the sense that it distorts the true nature of love when the subjective elements, that is, the elements of emotion, dominate the decision of the will. In such cases, the objective value of love is either partially or totally lost. One form of subjectivism is emotional subjectivism, in which emotions play an enormous part in the development of the subjective aspect of love,¹⁰⁸ thus undermining the objective value of love.

To counter this problem of subjectivism and the excess of concupiscence, Wojtyła proposes the virtue of chastity. For Wojtyła, the full sense of the virtue of chastity cannot be fully comprehended without understanding love as the function of relating one person to another and being disposed toward the union of persons. Love should possess an ethical wholeness and fullness (integrity); the psychological dimension is not enough to fully experience love. Love in its psychological dimension or aspect can only be completed when it possesses an ethical value, when it becomes a virtue. In this way, love attains psychological maturity precisely when it takes on ethical value, that is, when it becomes the virtue of love. Wojtyła stresses, “Only in the virtue of love are the objective demands of the personalistic norm realized, the norm that commands ‘loving’ the person and rejects any ‘use’ of him.”¹⁰⁹

Chastity is linked to the virtue of temperance, which restrains the instinctive appetites for the various material and bodily goods that attach themselves to the senses. The virtue of temperance enables the will and the appetite to subdue the sensual impulses that accompany sensual reactions. As a virtue of temperance, chastity is the efficient control of the concupiscent impulses set up by the sensual and emotional reactions. Chastity does not eliminate sensual desires and emotional impulses; rather, it not only subdues the impulses originating from the senses and emotions but also keeps the sensual appetites permanently in equilibrium by means of its habitual attitude to the true good

¹⁰⁷ Cf. Aquinas, *ST*, II-III, q.143, a.1.

¹⁰⁸ Aguas, *PAL*, 252

¹⁰⁹ Wojtyła, *LR*, 151.

determined by reason.¹¹⁰ Chastity, then, as a virtue of temperance, is in the first sense the capacity to moderate the appetites on particular occasions, and in the second and fuller sense, the efficient and consistent moderation of the appetites that ensures the natural equilibrium of the sensual appetites.¹¹¹ In this sense, chastity becomes a virtue of love for it frees love from the utilitarian attitude and subjectivism. It has “the function of making love possible as love of the person.”¹¹² Wojtyła further says:

The virtue of chastity, whose task is to liberate love from the attitude to use, must grasp not only sensuality and the concupiscence of the flesh themselves, but, in a sense even more so, those interior centers in man from which the attitude to use emerges and spreads.¹¹³

Finally, for Wojtyła, chastity is not a blind inhibition to sensuality and the physical impulses, such that the values of the body and sex are relegated to the subconscious, where they are suppressed until they explode. The essence of chastity is in the readiness “to affirm the value of the person in every situation and in raising to the personal level all reactions to the value of ‘the body and sex’.” This entails a special spiritual effort to affirm the value of the person, which can only come from within the person, from his or her spirit.¹¹⁴

The Relevance of Virtue: A Synthesis

The insights of both St. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła on virtue remain profoundly relevant for contemporary ethical discourse. Virtue theorists stress the importance of developing good habits of character or virtues. Virtue as a state of character means that a morally good or virtuous person is not just one who performs morally right actions, but one who has developed a habit or disposition to do what is right. Such a person has learned to control or moderate his emotions, desires, and appetites, subordinating them to reason and the will. A well-formed character not only tells the truth but does so readily, happily, and easily; such a character is manifested in one’s motives, desires, and intentions. Hence, the virtuous person delights in virtuous actions and dislikes vicious or immoral ones.¹¹⁵ By analogy, a good musician

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 154.

¹¹² Buttiglione, 107.

¹¹³ Wojtyła, *LR*, 154.

¹¹⁴ Aguas, *PAL*, 257.

¹¹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 9, Chapter 9.

enjoys beautiful music but is pained by bad tunes. Once a person has acquired the virtue of charity, he will then habitually act in a charitable manner; once a person has developed the virtue of moderating his appetites and sexual desires, he will be able to subordinate such appetites and desires to reason and will.

Since Wojtyła followed the thoughts of St. Thomas, there are apparent similarities between their concepts; for example, both consider virtue as a good habit, that is, a habitual disposition that enables the individual to act in a moral way, based on reason and will. However, we can also see that St. Thomas and Wojtyła have contrasting philosophical focuses. First, St. Thomas Aquinas employs a metaphysical approach, drawing heavily on Aristotelian categories; he places his discussion of the virtues within the parameters of ethics and moral philosophy. Wojtyła, on the other hand, utilizes a phenomenological method, focusing on the lived experience of the person and on the emotive and personal dimensions of moral action. Second, while Aquinas acknowledges the importance of reason and the will, Wojtyła's analysis, aside from highlighting the role of these two rational faculties, delves deeper into the experiential aspects of moral action. He places a greater emphasis on the subjective agency of the person in the exercise of virtue, highlighting the role of consciousness, freedom, and self-determination. Lastly, St. Thomas is more focused on the perfection of rational power, highlighting the cardinal and theological virtues. Wojtyła, on the other hand, is more focused on the integration of the human person, emphasizing the relational dimension of virtue, expressed in the virtue of love that affirms the personhood of others.

Beyond these contrasts, we can see the complementarity of their thoughts on virtue. St. Thomas Aquinas and Karol Wojtyła, in their respective notions of virtue, focused not only on the goodness of particular action but also on perfecting the human powers and capacities and on developing the character of the person, ensuring that the person consistently acts in accordance with norms or moral standards and ultimately develops good moral character. A morally good person will be disposed to obey the law, relate ethically and harmoniously with others based on respect for the dignity of the person, perform his duties, and consider the welfare and happiness of other people. In the end, however, it is always the person who decides how to act and what course of action he or she will take, and his character that determines his actions and decisions.

St. Thomas points out that virtue, as a habit, implies the perfection of a power and, consequently, the perfection of the person. By relating virtue to human powers and emphasizing the wholly positive character of virtue as the perfection of the activity of human powers, he provided a complete definition of virtue. Virtue as a habit is something that we possess; it is not something that possesses us. A habit, in

this sense, is not an automatic and unconscious disposition that we cannot control. For Wojtyła, virtue is a habitual disposition of the will which enables the person to act in accordance with reason and to achieve his fullest human potential. He emphasizes the integration of the person's efficacy or self-determination and the spontaneous emotional dynamism of the person, as well as the relational aspect of virtue, expressed in the virtue of love. The modern understanding of habit is that it is something we do unconsciously, which therefore can sometimes drive us into doing things that are not under our control. But, for St. Thomas and Wojtyła, however, since habits can be developed in accord with our rational powers, they perfect us rather than putting us in compromising situations.

Furthermore, according to St. Thomas and Wojtyła, in perfecting our powers, virtues as habits do not bypass the will. This notion is different from the modern understanding of habit as an automatic disposition, where habits are seen as the unmindful activities of the individual. Virtues, by contrast, are moral habits that perfect the will. In the modern sense, a habit is a substitute for conscious agency, putting a person on "auto drive," so to speak. However, for St. Thomas and Wojtyła, moral habits engage and perfect rather than bypass the human will. For St. Thomas, moral virtues are dispositions that allow one to *choose* to act in certain ways: moral virtue is a habit that chooses; it is an elective habit.¹¹⁶ So, the virtues do not diminish but improve our capacity to act from reason and will. For Wojtyła, the integrating function of virtue develops and enhances the psyche, thus producing a will which is guided by reason and reference to truth. Ultimately, one who develops the virtues is able to choose and adopt the real good while rejecting the real bad. All these are possible through a steadfast process of character formation.

While St. Thomas describes habits as having the facility to perform certain acts, facility does not mean automaticity. Facility (*facilitas*) is the ability to exercise a capacity with promptness and without inner resistance, while *automaticity* is doing something without thinking. It may appear that a habit "contains a notion of something that works automatically, without participation of our consciousness, and so independently of our will, and signifies some mechanization of activity that results from a longer repetition of the same activity," different from skill, which has "no feature of mechanization in itself" but enhances "the ability to consciously do something, to do it better, faster, without hesitation or a second thought, but not without consideration and participation of higher mental functions."¹¹⁷ However, as

¹¹⁶ Aquinas, *ST*, I,II, 58.1 ad 2.

¹¹⁷ See J. Woroniecki, "Habit or Skill," in: *Jacek Woroniecki: The Polish Christian Philosophy in the 20th Century*, ed. P.S. Mazur, B. Kiereś, R. Skrzyniarz, A. Płazińska (Kraków: Ignatianum University Press, 2019), 169.

discussed, there is a difference between a habit and an automatic movement of a part of the body, some of which we can consider mannerisms. A habit is also a skill, and both are different from bodily movements characterized by *automaticity* or *mechanization*. There is a difference between the automatic and almost unconscious lighting of a cigarette and the full engagement of a pianist at the keyboard. The facility of a habit is shown in the effortless movements of athletes and in the seamless and harmonious playing of musicians. These are the product of conscious repetitive acts, and they do not diminish conscious agency. In moral decision-making, one who has acquired the virtue of prudence seems to make the right decision instantaneously, as if without forethought and bypassing rational deliberation. But in reality, the virtuous person has already developed the virtue of prudence so that his deliberation appears to be without thought. Wojtyła, for his part, stresses the harmonization of the individual's emotions, desires, and actions. The virtues enable individuals to act in a way that is consistent with their values and principles and to achieve their fullest human potential. Virtue integrates human faculties, such as intellect, will, and emotions, to achieve a unified and harmonious action. Thus, a man of virtue finds it easy, and as if without deliberation, to moderate or control his appetites and desires, having already integrated or harmonized his emotions and desires with his will and reason.

St. Thomas's framework provides a comprehensive understanding of the nature and classification of virtues, offering a clear guide for moral formation. His emphasis on the cardinal, or natural, virtues as foundational for a well-ordered life, together with the theological virtues as essential for ultimate human fulfillment, continues to offer a valuable framework for moral decision and action. Wojtyła's phenomenological approach complements Aquinas's framework by highlighting the subjective dimension of virtuous action. His emphasis on consciousness, self-determination, responsibility, love, emotions, and desires provides a richer understanding of the interiority of the human person. In a world often characterized by moral decay and absence of moral character and virtue, manifested in moral relativism, disrespect for the human person and life, and many moral illnesses mentioned at the beginning of this paper, St. Thomas's teachings underscore the importance of cultivating stable dispositions towards the good. Further, Wojtyła's insights remind us that genuine virtue stems from a free and responsible embrace of the good, rooted in truth, and resulting in the total integration of the person. Their combined perspectives offer a richer, more positive understanding of virtue that not only serves as an antidote to the moral decay in our society but also reminds us that true human flourishing is inextricably linked to the cultivation of virtue.

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