

REVIEW

HABIT AS LOVE IN CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

In *Habit as Love in Christian Theology*, the author conducts a smooth account of habit through the whole piece. It is successful in touching on the important ethical and theological discussion on habit.

At the start of the article, the author begins the discussion by asking readers to recall daily habits and raises a crucial question about the accustomed nature of habit - whether accustomed actions, like habits, hold any moral significance. The author argues that habits indeed are morally relevant, as opposed to what Kant suggests. To do so, the author features Thomas Aquinas to argue that habit boils down to one's willed actions, which are intentional, thus cannot escape from being moral actions. Upon establishing this point, the author points out a critical theological understanding of Aquinas, that humans are oriented towards the end goal (in Aquinas's language, the ultimate Good) where our actions are sprung. With an end goal, the author argues, our habits become more than just accustomed actions but actions with moral relevance to guard us towards such ultimate end. One major flaw before the transition to the next section is that the author does not define the end goal. Instead, the author states that a goal is something one desires or loves without further elaboration. As a pointer, according to Aquinas, the man's end is to know God.

After showing that our habitual actions hold moral significance, the author moves on to argue for a central claim in the article, which is that such understanding of habit, "in terms of love and not pure mechanism", determines the way we perceive our actions. The author argues that our actions are powered by our desire for God and oriented towards what we love. Therefore, we need the right root to bear the right "fruit", lest we led ourselves astray with actions rooted in evil desires. Here, the author brings an ethical lens to habits, claiming that Christian habits are all moral actions, which implies that Christian teaching is essentially a moral standard. However, it is unclear here whether all that Christians practice (as habits) are morally correct. If so, it becomes ambiguous to say it is a standard when it is automatically assumed. Hence, the author's argument for habitual actions ought to be moral actions is weakened.

In the next section, the author moves on from the ethical lens to pursue a theological perspective of our habits. The author draws on an interesting debate: the distinct interpretation of habits for Aquinas and Augustine. The author fittingly captures the contrasting picture -

Aquinas's understanding of the nature of habit as virtues and Augustine's understanding of habit as bondage. While the author has maintained Aquinas's stance to explicate the moral and theological significance of habit, it is strange to see that the author also endorses Augustine's understanding before the final discussion on Christian freedom. To make it more straightforward for the reader, the author could borrow the concept of bondage from Augustine to suggest that habit is bondage in Paul's sense, instead of agreeing to Augustine first and then moving to Paul's alternative understanding without much implication to Christian habits.

In the end, the author reiterates that right actions, namely good habits, are precisely an example of Christian's bondage to righteousness, and they must be done in love. As much as the claim is impressive and shows traces of how the argument builds up, it is quite an abrupt conclusion with little coherence. The argument about Christian freedom to righteousness and not sin did little help in showing why Christian habits are love. On that note, a significant flaw of this piece is the ambiguity of "love". The author seems to use interchangeably between describing love as the same as desire and love as a Christian virtue. It is not wrong that Aquinas says love is one of the three theological virtues alongside faith and hope, but the author does not seem to have captured that accurately.

Similarly, there are few incidents in this article where the argument lacks reference. The author seems to have, rather impressively, grasped a theologically correct understanding of Aquinas. However, it would have aided the argument if the author could point readers to Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae* when claiming that humans act towards an end goal; virtue is a habit; love is a Christian habit manifested in human actions. All of these are readily available to strengthen the argument if adequately referenced.

Despite a quick jump to the conclusion for a somewhat dense topic on habit and Christian theology, the author has done a fantastic job to capture some of the most important theology of Aquinas and successfully compare it with that of Augustine. Understandably, the space constraint has limited the room to elaborate connections between different sub-arguments. If the author, at another attempt, could make clear the definition of love (whether as a desire, as a virtue, or as an action) and connect the dots with more substantial reference, it would be an exceptional work.