

# THOMISTIC PSYCHOLOGY: HUMAN HABITS AND EXPERIENCE OF THE WORLD

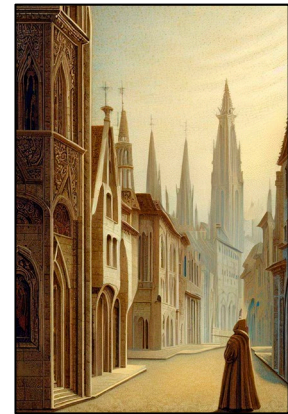
SEMINAR SYLLABUS

[FALL 2023]



## DESCRIPTION

While the essential structure for human action consists in our faculties—apprehensive and appetitive, sensitive and intellectual—it is our habits that constitute how we exist in the relational world of actual experience. But what is a habit? The common contemporary vernacular use of the term gives only a thin resemblance to the scholastic and specifically Thomistic conception: that is, the modern notion presents habit as an unconscious and automatic reactivity. By contrast, Thomas Aquinas treats of habit as a coalescent actuality that disposes the human being well or ill, either with respect to itself or with respect to others, that is, with respect to the world; as the development of disposition; as necessary to the fulfillment of every human faculty; as grown or diminished through our action—and therefore under the ambit of our moral responsibility; and as the genus for virtues and vices alike. Most importantly (even though themselves reflexively shaped by action), our habits are the principles of our acts; not as such, but as to those acts' manner.



The importance of habit's influence on action has been well noted by Saint Thomas and his followers (as, indeed, by all thoughtful followers of Aristotle) with respect to virtue and vice. This influence will be only as it were, however, an incidental object of our study. For, of particular importance in this seminar will be not only a consideration of habits as developing the individual, but as constituting the intersubjective reality of environment, community, and culture: of habits not only as they cause a coalescence of actuality in the human being (*secundum se*) but between human beings and the world (*ad aliud*).

Put otherwise, if we are to understand the full importance of habit, we cannot see it merely as something *within* ourselves as individuals but must recognize its influence on how we relate *amongst* ourselves. This will require us to approach the texts of the Thomistic tradition with a critical eye, for few of its authors have drawn out this theme explicitly. In consequence, other traditions—such as those of semiotics and phenomenology, wherein the environment (the world, culture, etc.) has been more explicitly made a theme, as might authors such as Félix Ravaisson, who have written extensively on the notion of habit—may be invoked.

## METHOD

The seminar is 8 weeks long, with one recorded lecture and one discussion session each week. Each discussion session is structured around readings from Thomas Aquinas and authors in both the Thomistic and related traditions. Participants are expected to have read the assigned required reading and listened to the lecture prior to the session, so that they may engage in a semi-structured discussion directed and moderated by the instructor. Supplemental texts are recommended reading and will pertain to specific issues raised in the lectures. *This advanced course requires prior study of and familiarity with the principles of Thomistic Psychology.*

It is expected that **participation in this seminar will require up to 8 hours per week** (reading + listening to lecture + participating in the discussion session).

## READING

The primary text for this seminar is Thomas Aquinas' *Summa theologiae, prima secundae* (ST Ia-IIae). Participants may use any translation, though it is recommended to have at least some experience in Latin. A good critical edition of Saint Thomas' work may be found at <https://aquinas.cc>, which shows the text in side-by-side Latin-English. Additional readings, taken from elsewhere in Aquinas' oeuvre will also be used, as will a variety of a secondary sources, as well as a few key readings from other traditions. All of these will be provided in PDF by the instructor. **Readings are subject to change.**

## LECTURE

Each week there will be a 40-60+ minute audio lecture, posted to Teams at the beginning of the week. This lecture will be based upon the assigned reading, but will also stray into related topics, or may use the reading as a launching point for addressing some related issue (perhaps one more general, or perhaps one more specific). The primary (but not sole) purpose of these lectures is to help clarify some of the more difficult concepts and arguments contained within the reading, as well as to raise specific questions that should help structure and guide our discussion sessions. As an advanced seminar, the secondary purpose of these lectures is to explore potential developments that may come from within the tradition.

## DISCUSSION

The heart of the seminar is the discussion session (**Saturdays at 1:00-2:00pm ET**): where all the thoughts emergent and encountered throughout the week—via the reading, lecture, and on-going conversations in the Teams channel—are brought into explicit conversation. This allows us to attempt a concerted effort at bringing resolution to our difficulties, and—failing such a resolution—to direct our inquiry further. It is worth noting that **discussion sessions often run longer than the allotted time.** Participants are not obliged to stay.

Each discussion session will begin with a brief synopsis of the week's material and a focusing on whichever aspects of that material seem most pressing. Beyond the direction provided by the instructor, participants are encouraged to bring their own concerns explicitly into view and to engage with the instructor and one another in civil debate and collective inquiry. These discussions are recorded **primarily** for the purpose of revisiting our conversations and recalling statements—and only, in a distant second, for the sake of allowing missed sessions to be viewed asynchronously.

## AUDITS OR COMPLETES

All Lyceum Institute seminar participants will be able to either *audit* the seminar or *complete* the seminar. To complete the seminar, the participant **must** submit an essay of 2000—5000 words pertaining to the subject. This essay may be evaluated for publication in *Reality* and will be included in each Lyceum Institute member's profile, along with the mark of auditing or completing.

## SESSION SCHEDULE

September 23	The Nature of Habit Lecture: Paradigms of Habit Readings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.49.</li><li>• Supplement: Selections from neuroscientific and psychological writings.</li></ul>
September 30	The Being of Habits Lecture: <i>Locus Habituum</i>

	<p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.50.</li> <li>• Supplement: Robert Brennan, “The Habits of Man” in <i>Thomistic Psychology</i>.</li> </ul>
October 7	<p>Formation and Increase of Habits</p> <p>Lecture: Determining the Indeterminate</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.51-52.</li> <li>• Supplement: Selections from C.S. Peirce.</li> </ul>
October 14	<p>The Unity of Habits</p> <p>Lecture: Order and Union</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.53-54.</li> <li>• Supplement: Notes on feedback loops and neuroplasticity.</li> </ul>
October 21	BREAK
October 28	<p>Virtues as Habits</p> <p>Lecture: Holding the Self Well</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.55-56.</li> <li>• Supplement: Yves Simon, “Work and Culture”.</li> </ul>
November 4	<p>Moral and Intellectual Virtue</p> <p>Lecture: Holding toward the World</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.57-58.</li> <li>• Supplement: Yves Simon, “Work and Culture”.</li> </ul>
November 11	<p>Habituation toward Virtue or Vice</p> <p>Lecture: Struggle within the World</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: <i>ST Ia-IIae</i>, q.63, a.1-2, 4; q.71, a.1-4.</li> <li>• Supplement: Josef Pieper, “Doing and Signifying”.</li> </ul>
November 18	<p>The Habit of Responsibility</p> <p>Lecture: Culture and Habit</p> <p>Readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Required: Selections from Thomas Aquinas.</li> <li>• Supplement: John Deely, “Philosophy and Experience”.</li> </ul>