

Habit

INTRODUCTION

THE familiar word "habit" has a tremendous range of meaning. Some of its meanings in technical discourse are so divergent from one another—as well as from the popular understanding of the term—that it is difficult to find a common thread of derivation whereby to pass from one meaning to another.

We can eliminate at once the use of the word to designate apparel, as when we speak of a "riding habit." Yet even this sense contains a root of meaning which cannot be dismissed. Augustine points out that "the term 'habit' is derived from the verb 'to have,'" and Aristotle, considering the meanings of "to have," includes the sense in which a man may be said "to have a coat or tunic" along with the sense in which a man may be said to have a habit—"a piece of knowledge or a virtue." Just as clothes are something a person *has* or *possesses* in a manner more or less fitting to the body, so habits in the psychological sense are qualities which a person has or possesses, and they too can be judged for their fitness.

This understanding of habit is conveyed in the ancient remark which has become a common expression—that "habit is second nature." Habit is not *original* nature, but something added thereto as clothes are added to the body. But unlike clothes, which are added externally and merely by contact, habits as second nature are nature itself transformed or developed. In the words of an ancient poet, whom Aristotle quotes with approval, "habit's but long practice, and this becomes men's nature in the end."

Not all, as we shall see, would grant that practice is essential to habit. Nevertheless the word "practice" suggests one notion that is common to all theories of acquired habit,

namely, that habit is a *retained effect*—the result of something done or experienced. Within this common understanding, there are opposite views. According to one view, the acquisition of habits depends on activity. According to another, habits are modifications, passively, not actively, acquired.

The word "habit" is also used in a sense diametrically opposite to the meanings so far considered. It is the sense in which Aristotle, in the *History of Animals*, discusses the habits of animals, and differentiates species according to the differences in their habits. Here the word "habit" is used to signify not an acquired pattern of behavior, but an innate predisposition to act or react in a certain way. The difference between acquired habits and "the habits to which there is an innate tendency," William James tells us, is marked by the fact that the latter generally "are called instincts."

The opposition between these two meanings of "habit" is clear. On the one hand, habits represent what, in the case of living things at least, is added by nurture to nature—the results of experience, training, or activity. On the other hand, habits which are identical with instincts belong to original nature itself—part of the native endowment of the animal. Is there any common thread of meaning in the notions of acquired and innate habit which may explain the use of the word in such opposite senses?

The familiar statement that a person does what he is in the habit of doing indicates that a habit is a tendency to a particular sort of behavior. Knowledge of a person's habits enables us to predict what he is likely to do in any situation which elicits habitual conduct on his part. So, too, an animal's behavior in a partic-

ular situation may be predicted from a knowledge of its instincts. Instinct and habit—or innate and acquired habits—seem to have this common character, that they are tendencies to behavior of a specific or determinate sort. They are definitely not random behavior. In the one case, the tendency is preformed, a part of the inherited nature of the organism. In the other, the tendency is somehow a product of experience and learning. In neither case does “habit” refer to mere capacity for action, unformed and indeterminate, nor does it refer to the action, but rather to the tendency to act.

THE MODIFIABILITY OF instincts by experience indicates another and more dynamic connection between innate and acquired habits. James conceives innately determined behavior as if it were a plastic material out of which new patterns of conduct can be formed. The process of animal learning he thinks can be generally described as the replacement of instincts by habits. “Most instincts,” he writes, “are implanted for the sake of giving rise to habits, and this purpose once accomplished, the instincts themselves, as such, have no *raison d'être* in the psychical economy, and consequently fade away.”

Some years before the Russian physiologists Vladimir Bekhterev and Ivan Pavlov experimentally studied the conditioning of reflexes, James described animal learning in terms of the substitution of new for old responses to stimuli which had previously called forth an instinctive reaction, or in terms of the attachment of instinctive responses to new stimuli. “The actions we call instinctive,” James writes, “all conform to the general reflex type” and “are called forth by determinate sensory stimuli.” For example, a predatory animal, instinctively responsive to various perceptible signs of the whereabouts of its prey, may learn to hunt for its food in a particular locality, at a particular time, and in a particular way. Or, to take the example James gives, “if a child, in his first attempts to pat a dog, gets snapped at or bitten, so that the impulse of fear is strongly aroused, it may be that for years to come no dog will excite in him the impulse to fondle again.” Similarly, an animal which has no instinctive

fear of man may acquire a habitual tendency to flee at man’s approach, as the result of experiences in which the appearance of man is associated with instinctively recognized signs of danger.

In the classification of animals, from Aristotle on, the instincts peculiar to each species have been used in their differentiation. In addition, the degree to which the instincts of an animal are either relatively inflexible at one extreme or easily modifiable at the other has been thought to indicate that animal’s rank in the scale of intelligence. The higher animals seem to have a greater capacity to form habits and to be capable, therefore, of modifying their instinctive patterns of behavior as the result of experience. In consequence, their behavior is both more adaptive and more variable than that of animals which always follow the lines of action laid down by instinct.

Species whose instincts are largely unmodifiable are at a disadvantage in a changing environment or in one to which they are not innately adapted. In the struggle for existence, Darwin observes, it is the organism that “varies ever so little, either in habits or structure” which “gains an advantage over some other inhabitant of the same country.” Though for the most part instincts seem to be directed toward the animal’s survival, intelligence, or the power of modifying instincts by learning, may sometimes be needed to save the animal from his own instincts.

If the lower animals are most dependent on their instincts and least able to modify them, that would seem to indicate a kind of opposition between instinct and intelligence. Darwin quotes Georges Cuvier to the effect that “instinct and intelligence stand in an inverse ratio to each other,” but he himself does not wholly accept this view. He thinks that the behavior of beavers, for example, or of certain classes of insects, shows that “a high degree of intelligence is certainly compatible with complex instincts.” Yet he admits that “it is not improbable that there is a certain amount of interference between the development of free intelligence and of instinct.”

On this subject of instinct in relation to intelligence or reason, James seems to take

a less equivocal position. According to him, "man possesses all the impulses that [animals] have, and a great many more besides." After enumerating what he considers to be the instinctive tendencies of the human species, he concludes by saying that "no other mammal, not even the monkey, shows so large an array." But since James also thinks that man has the keenest intelligence and may even be the only reasoning animal, he cannot believe that there is any "material antagonism between instinct and reason." On the contrary, a high development of the faculties of memory, of associating ideas, and of making inferences implies not the absence of instinct, but the modifiability of instinct by experience and learning. "Though the animal richest in reason might be also the animal richest in the instinctive impulses too," James writes, "he would never seem the fatal automaton which a *merely* instinctive animal would be."

The opposite position is taken by those who, like Cuvier, hold that the more adequate an animal's instinctive equipment is for its survival, the less it needs free intelligence for adaptive purposes, and the less important is the role of learning and habit formation. Some writers, like Aquinas, go further than this and maintain that in the case of man, the power of reason as an instrument of learning and of solving life's problems supplants instinct almost entirely, or needs to be supplemented by instinctive impulses of an extremely rudimentary sort—hardly more complex than simple reflexes.

What other animals do by instinct man does by reason. "Brute animals," Aquinas writes, "do not act at the command of reason," but "if they are left to themselves, such animals act from natural instinct." Since in his opinion habits can be formed only by acts which involve reason as a factor, he does not think that, strictly speaking, habits are to be found in brutes. But, he adds, to the extent that man's reason may influence brutes "by a sort of conditioning to do things in this or that way, so in this sense to a certain extent we can admit the existence of habits in brute animals."

THE MODIFICATION of instincts in the course of individual life raises a question about their

modifiability from generation to generation. The question has obvious significance for the theory of evolution.

It is thought by some that an animal's instincts represent the past experience of the race. In a passage quoted by James, Herbert Spencer, for example, maintains that "reflex actions and instincts . . . result from the registration of experience continued for numberless generations." Freud appears to hold much the same opinion. "All organic instincts are conservative," he writes. They are "historically acquired, and are directed towards regressions, towards reinstatement of something earlier." Indeed, he claims that the instincts of living things revert back *beyond* ancestral history to the inorganic. They go back to "an ancient starting point, which the living being left long ago." They are an "imprint" left upon the development of the organism by the "evolution of our earth and its relation to the sun."

James, on the other hand, claims that there is "perhaps not one single unequivocal item of positive proof" in favor of the view that "adaptive changes are inherited." He thinks the variability of instincts from generation to generation must be accounted for by some other means than the inheritance of acquired characteristics, according to which the habits *acquired* by earlier generations gradually become, through hereditary transmission, the *innate* habits of later generations.

The question of their origin aside, what is the structure of instincts? In the chapter on EMOTION, where this matter is considered, instinctive behavior is described as having three components. It involves, first, an innate ability to recognize certain objects; second, an emotional reaction to them which includes an impulse to act in a certain way; and, third, the ability to execute that impulse without benefit of learning.

James covers two of these three points when he defines an instinct as "the faculty of acting in such a way as to produce certain ends, without foresight of the ends, and without previous education in the performance"; and he touches on the remaining one when he declares that "instinctive reactions and emotional expressions shade imperceptibly into each other. Ev-

ery object that excites an instinct," he goes on to say, "excites an emotion as well," but emotions "fall short of instincts in that the emotional reaction usually terminates in the subject's own body, whilst the instinctive reaction is apt to go further and enter into practical relations with the exciting object."

In the discussion of instincts from Aristotle to Freud, the emphasis on one or another of these components has varied from time to time. Medieval psychologists, if we take Aquinas as an example, seem to stress the cognitive aspect. He speaks of the sheep running away "when it sees the wolf, not because of its color or shape, but as a natural enemy." The point which he thinks notable here is not the fact that the sheep runs away, but rather the fact that without any previous experience of wolves, the sheep recognizes the wolf as dangerous. "The sheep, seeing the wolf, judges it a thing to be shunned . . . not from deliberation, but from natural instinct." This instinctive power of recognizing what is to the animal's advantage or peril Aquinas calls "the estimative power" and assigns it, along with memory and imagination, to the sensitive faculty.

Later writers stress the emotional and conative aspects of instinct—feeling and impulse. James, for example, indicates this emphasis when he says that "every instinct is an impulse"; and Freud makes desire central rather than perception or action. An instinct, he says, may be described as a stimulus, but it would be more exact to speak of "a stimulus of instinctual origin" as a "need." The instincts are the basic cravings or needs, and these instinctual needs are the primary unconscious determinants of behavior and thought.

What Freud calls "instinctual needs" seem to be the counterpart of what, in an earlier phase of the tradition, are called "natural desires." These two notions are far from being strictly interchangeable, but they do have a certain similarity in their reference to desires which are not conscious or acquired through experience. This matter is further discussed in the chapter on DESIRE.

IF WE TURN NOW to the consideration of habit as something acquired by the individual, we

find two major issues. The first of these has already been mentioned in connection with the conception of habit as a *retained effect*.

According to James, the capacity for habit formation is a general property of nature, found in inanimate matter as well as in living things. "The moment one tries to define what habit is," he writes, "one is led to the fundamental properties of matter." He regards the laws of nature, for example, as "nothing but the immutable habits which the different elementary sorts of matter follow in their actions and reactions upon each other. In the organic world, however, the habits are more variable than this."

James attributes this universal capacity for habit formation to what he calls the "plasticity" of matter, which consists in "the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once. Each relatively stable phase of equilibrium in such a structure is marked by what we may call a new set of habits." He cites as examples of habit formation in inorganic matter such things as the magnetizing of an iron bar, the setting of plaster, scratches on a polished surface or creases in a piece of cloth. The matter in each of these cases is not only plastic and yielding, but retentive through its inertia. "When the structure has yielded," he writes, "the same inertia becomes the condition of its comparative permanence in the new form, and of the new habits the body then manifests."

The habits of living things or of the human mind are to be regarded only as special cases of nature's general plasticity and retentiveness. James does not fail to observe the difference between the magnetized bar, the scratched surface, or the creased cloth, and the habits of a trained animal or a skilled workman. The latter are acquired by activity—by practicing the same act repeatedly. Furthermore, they are not merely passive relics of a past impression, but are themselves tendencies to action. They erupt into action almost spontaneously when the occasion for performance arises.

It may be questioned whether the word "habit" should be used so broadly. Unlike James, most writers restrict its application to

living things, and even there they limit habit formation to the sphere of learning. If the capacity to learn from experience is not a property of plant life, then plants cannot form habits. The same may be said of certain species of animals whose activity is entirely and inflexibly instinctive. Habits are possessed only by those organisms—animals or men—whose future conduct can be determined by their own past behavior. Aquinas, as we have seen, goes further than this, and limits habit formation in a strict sense to man alone.

This leads at once to the second issue. For those who believe that man is not specifically different from all other animals, man's habits and his habit formation require no special distinction or analysis. They hold that human intelligence differs from animal intelligence only in degree, not in kind. No other factors, they think, are present in human learning than those which operate when animals somehow profit from experience or acquire new models of behavior. In the great books there is to be found, however, a very special theory of habit which is part of the doctrine that man is specifically different from all other animals in that he alone is rational and has free will.

The issue about man's nature is discussed in other chapters (*ANIMAL, EVOLUTION, MAN, MIND*). Here we must examine the consequences for the theory of habit of these opposing views. Do animals and men form habits *in the same sense* of that term? The use of the word is not at stake, for "habit" may be used in a different sense for the acquired dispositions of animals. Those who hold that brute animals and men do not have habits in the same sense acknowledge that men may have, in addition to their specifically human habits, the sort of modified instincts or conditioned reflexes which are typical of animal habit formation. Furthermore, it is recognized that human and animal habits are alike in certain respects. Both are acquired by activity and both are tendencies to activity of a determinate sort.

The question, therefore, is simply this: Does one conception of habit apply to men and animals, or does human nature require a special conception applicable to man alone? To clar-

ify this issue, it is necessary to summarize the analysis of human habits which Aristotle and Aquinas develop more fully than other writers, even than those who share their view of the rationality and freedom of man.

THAT ARISTOTLE and Aquinas should be the authors of an elaborate theory of human habits becomes intelligible in terms of two facts.

In the first place, they consider habit in the context of moral theory. For them the virtues, moral or intellectual, are habits, and so necessarily are the opposite vices. Virtues are good habits, vices bad habits; hence, good or bad, human habits must be so formed and constituted that they can have the moral quality connoted by virtue or vice. Since virtue is praiseworthy and vice blameworthy only if their possessor is responsible, human habit is conceived as arising from freely chosen acts.

In the second place, their understanding of habit is affected by their psychological doctrine of faculties, and especially by their analysis of the powers and activities which they think belong peculiarly to man. This in turn gives a metaphysical meaning to habit, for they treat human powers and human acts as special cases of potentiality and actualization.

Aquinas bases much of his discussion of habit on Aristotle's definition of it as "a disposition whereby that which is disposed is disposed well or ill, and this, either in regard to itself or in regard to another." In calling a habit a disposition, Aristotle goes on to say that all "dispositions are not necessarily habits," for while dispositions are unstable or ephemeral, habits "are permanent" or at least "difficult to alter."

For a disposition to be a habit, certain other conditions must be present, according to Aquinas. "That which is disposed should be distinct from that to which it is disposed," he writes, and hence "should be related to it as potentiality is to act." If there is a being which lacks all potentiality, he points out, "we can find no room in such a thing for habit . . . as is clearly the case in God."

It is also necessary that "that which is in a state of potentiality in regard to something

else be capable of determination in several ways and to various things." If there were a potentiality which could be actualized in one way and one way only, then such a power of operation could not be determined by habits. Some of man's powers seem to be of this sort. His faculty of sensation, for example, functions perfectly when the sense organs have normally matured. A man does not learn to *see* colors or to *hear* tones, and so the simple use of his senses—apart from aesthetic perceptions and trained discriminations—does not lead to sensory habits. "The exterior apprehensive powers, as sight, hearing, and the like," Aquinas maintains, "are not susceptible of habits but are ordained to their fixed acts, according to the disposition of their nature."

In contrast, man's faculty of thinking and knowing can be improved or perfected by activity and exercise. The words "improved" and "perfected" are misleading if they are thought to exclude bad habits, for a bad habit is no less a habit than a good one. The definition of habit, Aquinas points out, includes dispositions which "dispose the subject well or ill to its form or to its operation." Hence when we say that a power of operation is "improved" or "perfected" by being exercised, we must mean only that after a number of particular acts, the individual has a *more determinate* capacity for definite operation than he had before.

A man may have at birth the mere capacity for knowing grammar or geometry, but after he has learned these subjects he has the habit of such knowledge. This, according to Aristotle and Aquinas, means that his original capacity has been rendered more determinate in its activity. It would be so even if he had learned errors, that is, even if the intellectual habits he had formed disposed his mind in a manner which would be called "ill" rather than "well."

The difference between a man who has learned grammar and one who has not is a difference in their capacity for a certain intellectual performance, a difference resulting from the intellectual work which has been done by the man who has learned grammar. That difference is an intellectual habit. The man who has not learned grammar has the same unde-

veloped capacity for knowing grammar with which he was born. The man who has learned grammar has had his native capacity for grammatical knowledge developed. That developed capacity is a habit of knowledge or skill which manifests itself in the way in which he writes and speaks. But even when he is not actually exercising his grammatical skill, the fact that he has formed this particular habit means that he will be able, whenever the occasion arises, to do correctly with speed and facility what the man who does not have the habit cannot do readily or easily if he can do it at all.

It may be helpful to illustrate the same points by reference to a bodily habit, such as a gymnastic or athletic skill which, being an art, is a habit not of body alone, but of mind as well. If two men are born with normal bodies equally capable of certain muscular coordinations, they stand in the same relation to performing on the tennis court. Both are equally able to learn the game. But when one of them has learned to play, his acquired skill consists in the trained capacity for the required acts or motions. The other man may be able to perform all these acts or go through all these motions, but not with the same facility and grace, or as pleasantly, as the man whose mastery of the game lies in a habit formed by much practice in doing what is required. As the habit gradually grows, awkwardness is overcome, speed increases, and pleasure in performance replaces pain or difficulty.

Clearly, then, the habit exists even when it is not in operation. It may even develop during periods of inactivity. As James remarks, there is a sense in which "we learn to swim during the winter and to skate during the summer" when we are not actually engaging in these sports. This would seem to be inconsistent with the general insight, common to all observers, that habits are strengthened by exercise and weakened or broken by disuse or by the performance of contrary acts. But James explains that his point, stated less paradoxically, means only that during periods of rest the effects of prior activity seem to consolidate and build up a habit.

The dynamism of habit formation and habitual activity is summarized, in the language

of Aristotle and Aquinas, by the statement that "habit is a kind of medium between mere power and mere act." On the one hand, a habit is like a power or capacity, for though it is an improvement on native ability, it is still only an ability to perform certain acts; it is *not* the actual performance of them. On the other hand, habit is like operation or activity, for it represents an actualization or development of capacity, even as a particular operation is an actualization of the power to act. That is why habit is sometimes called a second grade of potentiality (compared to natural capacity as first potentiality) and also "a first grade of actuality" (compared to operation as complete act).

ACCORDING TO THE theory of specifically human habits, habits are situated only in man's powers of reason and will. Habits are formed in the other powers only to the extent that they are subject to direction by his reason and will. Specifically human habits can be formed only in that area of activity in which men are free to act or not to act; and, when they act, free to act this way or that. Habit, the product of freedom, is not thought of as abolishing freedom. However difficult it may be to exert a free choice against a strong habit, even the strongest habit is not conceived as unbreakable; and if it is breakable, it must permit action contrary to itself. Habitual behavior only seems to lack freedom because a man does habitually, without conscious attention to details, what he would be forced to do by conscious choice at every step if he lacked the habit.

In the theory under consideration habits are classified according to the faculty which they determine or perfect, on the ground that "every power which may be variously directed to act needs a habit whereby it is well disposed to its act." Consequently there are intellectual habits, or habits of thinking and knowing; and appetitive habits, or habits of desire which involve the emotions and the will, and usually entail specific types of conduct. Within a single faculty, such as the intellect, habits are further differentiated by reference to their objects or to the end to which their characteristic operation is directed. For example, the habit

of knowing which consists in a science like geometry and the habit of artistic performance such as skill in grammar both belong to the intellect, but they are distinct habits according to their objects or ends.

All of these distinctions have moral as well as psychological significance. They are used in formulating the criteria of *good* and *bad* habits which are more appropriately discussed in the chapter on VIRTUE AND VICE. But here one further psychological distinction deserves comment. Some of man's acquired habits are regarded as natural in a special sense—not in the sense in which instincts are called "natural" or "innate" habits. The distinction is drawn from the supposition that certain habits develop in *all* men because, since human nature is the same for all, men will inevitably form these habits if they act at all. This word "natural" here applied to a habit simply means that it is common to all having the same nature.

For example, the understanding of the law of contradiction—that *the same thing cannot be affirmed and denied at the same time*—and other simple axioms of theoretical knowledge are said to be possessed by the human mind as a matter of natural habit. If a man thinks at all he will come to know these truths. "It is owing to the very nature of the intellectual soul," Aquinas writes, "that man, having once grasped what is a whole and what is a part, should at once perceive that every whole is larger than its part."

The sense in which Aquinas says that "*the understanding of first principles* is called a natural habit" applies to the first principles of the practical reason as well as to the axioms of theoretical knowledge. Just as no man who makes theoretical judgments about the true and the false can be, in his opinion, without habitual knowledge of the principle of contradiction, so he thinks no man who makes practical judgments about good and evil can be without habitual knowledge of the natural moral law, the first principle of which is that *the good is to be sought and evil avoided*. "Since the precepts of the natural law are sometimes considered by reason actually," Aquinas writes, "while sometimes they are in the reason only

habitually, in this way the natural law may be called a habit."

In a different phase of the tradition Hume regards it as an inevitable tendency of the human mind to interpret any repeated sequence of events in terms of cause and effect. If one thing has preceded another a certain number of times in our experience, we are likely to infer that if the first occurs, the second will follow. The principle which determines us "to form such a conclusion" is, Hume says, "Custom or Habit." All our inferences from experience are "effects of custom, not of reasoning"; and since the habit of inferring a future connection between things which have been customarily conjoined in the past is, in his opinion, universally present in human nature, Hume refers to it as "a species of natural instinct which no reasoning or process of thought and understanding is able either to produce or prevent."

Even Kant's synthetic judgments *a priori* have a certain similarity to the thing called "natural habit." They comprise judgments the mind will make because of its own nature or, in Kant's terms, its transcendental structure. Though *a priori*, the judgment itself is not innate, for it arises only when actual experience provides its subject matter. So, too, the natural habit of first principles, of which Aquinas speaks, is not innate, but a result of experience.

THERE IS STILL ONE other traditional meaning of the phrase "natural habit." It occurs in Christian theology. Habits are there distinguished according as they are acquired by man's own efforts or are a gift of God's grace, which adds to or elevates human nature. The former are natural, the latter supernatural.

In the sphere of supernatural habits the theologian makes a distinction between grace itself and the special habits which accompany grace. Aquinas, for example, writes that "just as the natural light of reason is something different from the acquired virtues, which are ordained to this natural light, so also the light of grace, which is a participation of the divine nature, is something different from the infused virtues which are derived from and are or-

derained to this light." These "infused virtues," like the natural virtues, are good habits—principles of operation, determining acts of thought or desire. They are either the specifically theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, or the supernatural counterparts of the acquired intellectual and moral virtues—the habits which are called "the infused virtues" and "the moral and intellectual gifts."

Grace, taken in itself rather than in its consequences, is not an *operative* habit, that is, it is not a habit of performing certain acts. Nevertheless, regarded as something added to and perfecting nature, it is considered under the aspect of habit. But rather than "a habit whereby power is inclined to an act," Aquinas includes it among those habits by which "the nature is well or ill disposed to something, and chiefly when such a disposition has become a sort of nature." Through the habit of grace, man's nature is elevated by becoming "a partaker . . . of the divine nature."

To distinguish this kind of habit from those in the operative order, it is sometimes called an "entitative habit"—a habit of the very *being* of man's personality. On the purely natural plane, health may be thought of in the same way as a habit which is entitative rather than operative. It is a habit not of thought, desire, or conduct, but of man's physical being.

THE WORD "CUSTOM" is sometimes a synonym for "habit" and sometimes a variant with special connotations. What a man does habitually is customary for him to do. So far as the single individual is concerned, there seems to be no difference between habit and custom. But we usually think of customs in terms of the group or community rather than the individual. As indicated in the chapter on CUSTOM AND CONVENTION, the prevailing modes of behavior in a society and its widely shared beliefs represent common habits of thought and action on the part of its members. Apart from the habits of individuals social customs have no existence whatsoever. But social customs and individual habits cannot be equated because, with respect to any customary practice or opinion, there may be nonconforming individuals—men of divergent habit. The prevalent or pre-

dominant customs are the habits of the majority. It is in this sense that Veblen regards an accepted standard of living as customary or habitual.

No society endures for long or functions peacefully unless common habits generate the ties of custom. To perpetuate itself, the state necessarily attempts to mold the habits of each growing generation—by every means of education, by tradition, by law. So important is the stability of custom in the life of society, according to Montaigne, that it is “very iniquitous . . . to subject public and immutable institutions and observances to the instability of a private fancy.” He doubts “whether there can be such evident profit in changing an accepted law, of whatever sort it be, as there is harm in disturbing it.” His extreme caution with regard to changing the law comes from a preference for the stability of settled customs and from the recognition that “government is

like a structure of different parts joined together in such a relation that it is impossible to budge one without the whole body feeling it.”

Without habits of action, at least, neither the individual nor society can avoid chaos. Habits bind day to day in a continuity which would be lost if the recurring problems of conduct or thought had to be solved anew each time they arose. Without habits life would become unbearably burdensome; it would bog down under the weight of making decisions. Without habits men could not live with themselves, much less with one another. Habits are, as James remarks, “the fly-wheel of society.” As Dewey observes, habit “covers the formation of attitudes . . . our basic sensitivities and ways of meeting and responding to all the conditions which we meet in living.” In this view, “the principle of continuity of experience” rests upon “the fact of habit.”