

“Habitual” Ordering

WILLIAM C. MATTISON III

University of Notre Dame

Notre Dame, IN

REINHARD HÜTTER’S *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* is an important and timely contribution to Catholic theology, and moral theology in particular.¹ Though we contributors to this symposium in this issue of *Nova et Vetera* (English) in celebration of Hütter’s book have been asked to present our own current research, only “springboarding” from Hütter’s *tour de force*, a few words on the book are warranted to situate it and to set up this essay.

Students of Fr. Servais Pinckaers, O.P., of whom there are many in this readership, find in *Bound for Beatitude* a thoroughly “Pinckaersian” contribution to moral theology. Hütter relies on *ressourcement* Thomism to do moral theology in a manner fully integrated with biblical, systematic, and spiritual theology, and additionally incorporates his impressive philosophical acumen. The book is utterly teleological, not simply in its metaphysical defense of the centrality of teleology (*contra* the modern repudiation of the same), or in its account of human action, but also in its narration of the entire human journey, individual and communal, toward participation in divine beatitude. Hütter thus contributes to the growing trend in Catholic theological scholarship toward eschatology.² Finally, Hütter’s book adopts a thoroughly Pinckaersian virtue-centered “morality of happiness,” including even a mini commentary in chapter 1 on Thomas’s

¹ Reinhard Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude: A Thomistic Study in Eschatology and Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019).

² For a comparable recent contribution to eschatology and moral theology, see Matthew Levering, *Aquinas’s Eschatological Ethics and the Virtue of Temperance* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

so-called treatise on happiness, a contribution that follows directly in the footsteps of Pinckaers.³

More pertinent for this essay, Hütter's *Bound for Beatitude* provides evidence that, in moral theology, the last end is back. One would think that the post-conciliar, Pinckaers-fueled resurgence in attention to virtue and happiness would include a focus on this bedrock Thomistic (and indeed all classical virtue ethics) feature of morality.⁴ Yet there is surprisingly little attention to the last end in recent Catholic moral theology.⁵ In his opening commentary on Aquinas's questions on happiness, Hütter rightly recognizes that the last end is crucial for a teleological account of human action as coherently unified, to greater or lesser degrees in this life.⁶ It provides occasion to delineate commonality and differences between people in the journey toward happiness.⁷ This topic also provides occasion to address our last end as both something "out there" to be sought, and the manner of our attaining it.⁸ In fact, Hütter not only begins but also ends his book with a focus on the last end, as significant portions of the epilogue on "Man's Beatitude" are devoted to defending Thomas's claim that "the ultimate end of the human being is God alone and that the beatific vision

³ See Servais Pinckaers, O.P., *La Béatitude: Ia IIae Qu. 1–5* (Paris: Cerf, 2001).

⁴ For Thomas treatment of the last end, see *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 1, aa. 4–6. For the centrality of this concept in ancient ethics of varying stripes, see Julia Annas, *Morality of Happiness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), esp. 27–46.

⁵ There are exceptions. Perhaps most well-known is the relatively recent debate over the repudiations of Aquinas's account of the last end by Germain Grisez and Peter Ryan, S.J., cited below. For the best recent account of the last end, see Steven Jensen, *Sin: A Thomistic Psychology* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018). From the field of theological ethics, David Decosimo offers an account of a "final end conception" that attempts to extend Thomas's thought in his *Ethics as a Work of Charity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014). See also William C. Mattison III, "A New Look at the Last End: Noun and Verb, Determinate Yet Capable of Growth," *Journal of Moral Theology* 8, no. 2 (2019): 95–113. For a penetrating recent philosophical treatment of the last end, see Alasdair MacIntyre, *Ethics in the Conflicts of Modernity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 227–31.

⁶ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 15–16; see also ST I-II, q. 1, aa. 5–6.

⁷ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 16–17; see also ST I-II, q. 1, a. 7.

⁸ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 18–19; see also ST I-II, q. 1, a. 8; q. 3, a. 1. This is actually a topic Pinckaers wrote on, and Hütter deploys his language of the "objective" and "subjective" last end of happiness (*Bound for Beatitude*, 18). See Servais Pinckaers, O.P. "Beatitude and the Beatitudes in Aquinas's *Summa Theologiae*," in *The Pinckaers Reader*, ed. John Berkman and Craig Steven Titus (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 115–29, esp. 121–22.

satisfies all human desires," against Germain Grisez's claim that it is the "Kingdom not God alone."⁹

This essay continues attention to the last end, though on a topic not addressed by Hütter, indeed a topic addressed even less frequently than the last end in recent scholarship on morality, despite its pertinence to the last end. The topic is habitual ordering, which Thomas distinguishes from actual ordering, of one's acts toward one's last end. It will help at the outset to contextualize that inquiry within the broader context of inquiry on the last end. Hütter rightly notes that there are "two prongs" to recent debate over the last end.¹⁰ One prong addresses what constitutes humanity's last end "out there," or more specifically, how to understand humanity's last end in relation to the myriad ends in a human person's life. Scholarship on Aristotle has addressed this topic by exploring whether or not humanity's last end is rightly understood as "inclusive."¹¹ In more recent Catholic scholarship on morality, this first prong has been centered on debate over whether or not God alone in the beatific vision, or instead the Kingdom of God as recently maintained by Grisez and Peter Ryan, S.J., constitutes humanity's last end.¹² To reference Pinckaers's label for the classic Thomistic distinction between "objective" happiness (the end "for which," or *cuius*¹³) and "subjective" happiness (i.e., the end "by which," or *quo*¹⁴), this prong of the debate concerns the former. There is excellent scholarship on this first prong of the debate, not only in response to Grisez and Ryan but on the topic more generally.¹⁵ This

⁹ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 388–89.

¹⁰ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 419–20. For further recognition of these two prongs in recent scholarship, see Thomas Osborne, "The Threefold Referral of Acts to the Ultimate End in Thomas Aquinas and His Commentators," *Angelicum* 85 (2008): 715–36, at 715. See also Jensen, *Sin*, 16.

¹¹ For a seminal treatment of this issue in Aristotle, see J. L. Ackrill, "Aristotle on Eudaimonia," *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics*, ed. Amélie Rorty (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1980), 15–33.

¹² The most developed version of this argument is Germain Grisez, "The Ultimate End of Human Beings: The Kingdom Not God Alone," *Theological Studies* 69, no. 1 (2008): 38–61. See also Grisez, "Natural Law, God, Religion, and Human Fulfillment," *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001): 3–36, and Peter Ryan, S.J., "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?," *Gregorianum* 82, no. 2 (2001): 325–56.

¹³ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 18.

¹⁴ Hütter, *Bound for Beatitude*, 18.

¹⁵ For an excellent rebuttal of Grisez focused on this prong of the debate, namely, whether or not the "ultimate end of the human being is God alone and the beatific vision satisfies all human desires" (as Hütter puts it in *Bound for Beatitude*, 388–89), see Ezra Sullivan, O.P., "Seek First the Kingdom: A Reply to Germain Grisez's Account of Man's Ultimate End," *Nova et Vetera* (English) 8, no. 4 (2010):

essay does not directly address that prong of the debate.

The second prong of recent scholarship on the last end concerns whether or how human activity is ordered toward one's last end.¹⁶ This is Pinckaers's "subjective" happiness, namely, how our activity is ordered toward and indeed constitutive of our last end. Our inquiry into habitual ordering addresses one sliver of this prong of inquiry. This prong also includes broader questions such as whether or not all human activity is ordered toward one's last end. Given Thomas's claim in *Summa theologiae* [ST] I-II, q. 1, aa. 4–6, that not only does every person have one and only one last end, but also that every act a person performs is indeed ordered toward her last end, much inquiry in this prong concerns how this could possibly be so when there seem to be so many obvious examples to the contrary.¹⁷ Another topic in this prong concerns the last end of the person who sins venially.¹⁸ These topics are indeed addressed in this exploration of habitual ordering. Yet there are other aspects of those inquiries that are not addressed here given the focus on habitual ordering.¹⁹

The purpose of this essay is to present a Thomistic account of habitual ordering of a person's actions.²⁰ Despite the term "habitual" ordering, and despite the consistent assumption in scholarship that the person who sins venially possesses the infused virtue of charity, there is strikingly little attention to the question of how the possession of a habit (e.g., charity) influences one's practical reasoning, that is, the "ordering" of one's actions toward a further end. Even when there is recognition that habitual

959–95. See also the various essays in response to Grisez in the *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46 (2001), as well as Jensen, *Sin*, 41–65.

¹⁶ The two prongs are of course related, which is one reason why the work of people like Grisez, Ryan, and Jensen addresses both topics.

¹⁷ For a helpful set of examples that consistently appear in this debate, see Grisez, "Ultimate End," 40.

¹⁸ For a helpful bibliography of treatment of this topic among Thomists before the twentieth century and in the early twentieth century, see P. DeLetter, S.J., "Venial Sin and Its Final Goal," *The Thomist* 16, no. 1 (1953): 32–70, esp. 32–33.

¹⁹ For a helpful example of five common responses by Thomas on the question of the last end of venial sin, only one of which is habitual ordering, see DeLetter, "Venial Sin," 39–68.

²⁰ I say "Thomistic account" because, if there is one constant in scholarship on habitual ordering or more broadly the last end of venial sin, it is that, despite certain clear texts and claims in Thomas's *corpus* on the topics, his thought is underdeveloped and requires further expansion. See for example Jensen, *Sin*, 21: "the relation between habitual order and action is far from clear." Osborne notes how later Thomistic commentators try to "bring into clarity problems that are raised and not solved by Thomas" ("Threefold Referral," 736).

ordering references possession of a habit, there is scarce attention to the dynamics whereby the possession of the habit influences particular actions. The account of habitual ordering offered here focuses precisely on this question. Indeed, by centering on this question of the relationship between habit and activity, we are able not only to offer a more cogent account of habitual ordering based on Thomas's thought, but also to apply the notion of habitual ordering more broadly than is normally assumed.

This essay proceeds as follows. In the first section, I present Thomas's texts on habitual ordering and distill from them claims about habitual ordering that are uncontested (in terms of interpreting Thomas) in scholarship on the topic. In a second, I examine recent scholarship on this topic, including scholars who neglect or misconstrue Thomas's thought on habitual ordering. I include a focused look at the work of Steven Jensen, whose work on the last end is the most important and accurate to be found in recent scholarship. Yet even his account has certain inadequacies that provide a springboard into the position offered here. Section Three offers my own account of habitual ordering. In the fourth section, I identify three conclusions about habitual ordering that defy common assumptions in scholarship on this topic.

Thomas's Texts on Habitual (and Virtual) Ordering

In his "mini-treatise" on the last end (*ST* I-II 1, qq. 4–6), Thomas Aquinas claims that one orders all of one's actions toward one's last end. Detailed inquiry into what exactly this claim means, why he makes it, and why it is indeed correct, is beyond the scope of this essay.²¹ Thomas is obviously aware of occasions where it does not seem a person orders proximate activity to her last end. Throughout his corpus, Thomas consistently offers two distinctions to nuance the claim that all of one's actions are further referred to one's last end. One of them is the distinction between habitual ordering and actual ordering. Another is the distinction between virtual ordering and actual ordering. Since Thomas addresses virtual ordering in this very mini-treatise on the last end, I consider it first. Additionally, though virtual ordering is not the focus of this essay, disentangling it from habitual ordering is one contribution here, and thus treatment of it is necessary.

In the very article where Thomas claims that a person orders all she does toward her last end, an objector claims, "whoever orders something to an end, thinks of that end. And since a person does not always think of the last end in all he desires or does, he does not do all for the sake of the last

²¹ In addition to Hütter's brief treatment of these articles as noted above (*Bound for Beatitude*, 15–27), see Mattison, "New Look," 99–107.

end.”²² Aquinas replies that one need not always be thinking of the last end when one is doing something toward it. He offers a distinction that has come to be known as the “virtual–actual” distinction:

One need not always be thinking of the last end, whenever one desires or does something. But the *virtue* of the first intention, which was in respect of the last end, remains in every desire to any object whatever, even though one’s thoughts not be *actually* directed to the last end. Thus while walking along a road one need not think of the end at every step.²³

The concrete example of the journey along a road is very helpful, since each step can be ordered toward the destination even if one is not thinking of that further end during each step. Thomas offers additional examples in other texts. He claims that a doctor may be picking herbs to make a potion for the further end of his patients’ health, but need not be thinking of health while doing so, even as that end is moving his activity.²⁴ In yet another text Thomas says “actual” acting for the last end might even impede the activity, as when a craftsman “virtually” acts for the sake of the last end even though all his attention must be focused on the immediate task at hand and not that further end.²⁵ These examples address easier cases of when an immediate activity is not consciously thought of in relation to a further end, but it could be and indeed previously has been from the perspective of the acting person. Such activities are said to be ordered toward the last end “virtually.”²⁶

Before turning to habitual ordering, it is worth pausing to define explicitly both terms in this first distinction. “Virtual” ordering occurs when the strength or power of a further end moves a person to act toward

²² *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 6, obj. 3 (translation mine; unless otherwise noted, as here, all quotations from the *ST* are from the English Dominicans translation).

²³ *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 6, ad 3 (emphasis added).

²⁴ Aquinas, *De caritate* (*De virtutibus*, q. 2), a. 11, ad 2 (quotations of *De car.* are taken from *Disputed Questions on the Virtues*, trans. Ralph McNerny [South Bend, IN: St. Augustine’s Press, 1999], modified and html-ed. Joseph Kenny, O.P., atisidore.co/aquinas/QDdeVirtutibus.htm).

²⁵ Aquinas, *In II sent.*, d. 40 q. 1 a. 5 ad 7. For a final example of *virtualiter* used in this manner, see *De perfectione*, ch. 5.

²⁶ Despite its being the dominant English translation of *in virtute* or *virtualiter*, “virtually” is an English cognate with unfortunate connotations of “not really” as in “virtual reality.” This is not at all the sense of the Latin. Etymologically related to virtue, the meaning of *virtus* here is more akin to strength or force. So the proximate act is done virtually, moved by the strength or power of the further end.

a more proximate end, yet without explicit thought about the further end while doing the proximate activity. To put this less mechanistically, since an end "moving the person" could suggest the end is not the agent's own, in virtual ordering it is the agent's own grasp of and pursuit of the further end that moves her to the immediate activity even while that further end is not consciously or explicitly on her mind. Thus, since the proximate act is prompted by and indeed ordered toward the further end, one is said to act *virtually* toward that end even while not thinking of it. Thomas distinguishes this virtual ordering from actual ordering. "Actual" here means that one is explicitly thinking of how the proximate end is prompted by and ordered toward the more remote end. In other words, what distinguishes actual from virtual is not whether or not an act is truly ordered toward the further end; that can be the case with both actual and virtual ordering. Rather it is whether or not one explicitly thinks about the further end.²⁷ This distinction is largely uncontested in scholarship on Aquinas.

What then, is habitual ordering? In the dozen or so texts where Thomas distinguishes habitual from actual ordering of one's activity toward a further end, he makes several consistent claims.²⁸ In every text (with one exception noted below) Thomas describes habitual ordering as something active that the person does.²⁹ In other words, habitual ordering is not a

²⁷ Contemporary virtue ethics seizes on the dynamic Thomas calls virtual ordering with various other names. Nancy Snow describes the "goal dependent automaticity" supplied by virtue (*Virtue as Social Intelligence: An Empirically Grounded Theory* [New York: Routledge, 2009], 39). Julia Annas describes this dynamic as the "effacing" of reasons for action in *Intelligent Virtue* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], 29, 161–62).

²⁸ The texts addressed here are: *In I sent.*, d. 1, q. 3, a. 1, ad 4; *In II sent.*, d. 42, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5; *De malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 4 and ad 9; a. 9; *ST I-II*, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2 and ad 3; *II-II*, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2; q. 44, a. 4, ad 2; *De perfectione*, ch. 5; *De car.* a. 11, ad 3; *Super Col* 3, lec. 3 (no. 170). Thomas obviously describes habit and habitual activity quite frequently in his corpus. The texts addressed here explicitly concern habitual as distinct from actual ordering of one's activity toward a further end. There are other ways that Thomas distinguishes *in actu* or *actualiter* from *in habitu* or *habitualiter*, as when he describes the possession of the infused virtues in infants (*ST III*, q. 69, a. 6) or the retention of propositions (*ST I-II*, q. 90, a. 1). These other uses are beyond the scope of this essay.

²⁹ See *De malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 4: "He who sins venially does not enjoy a created thing as an end but uses it as a means, for he refers it to God habitually though not actually" (quotations are from *On Evil*, trans. John Oesterle and Jean Oesterle [Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995]). See also *ST I-II*, q. 88, a. 1, ad 3: ("He that sins venially clings to a temporal good, not as enjoying it, because he does not fix his end in it, but as using it, by referring it to God, not actually but habitually");

state of affairs describing a person, but rather the person's ordering of an act. In every text in which Thomas deploys the distinction, the activity is habitually ordered toward God.³⁰ In nearly every text the habitually ordered act is a venial sin, and while venial sins are habitually ordered toward God, they are not *actually*, or in reality, ordered toward God.³¹ Here we see how Thomas distinguishes habitual ordering from actual ordering, since an act can be habitually ordered toward God even if not truly, or actually, so ordered. Finally, Thomas consistently claims that the person who habitually orders her acts to God, even if such acts are venially sinful, continues to be ordered to God as her last end.³² This ordering is of

II-II, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2 ("That which we love in venial sin is loved for God's sake habitually though not actually").

³⁰ In addition to the previous three citations, see *De perfectione*, ch. 5: "We love God with our whole heart . . . if there be nothing in us which is wanting to divine love, that is to say, if there is nothing which we do not, actually or habitually, refer to God" (quotations are taken from *The Perfection of the Spiritual Life*, trans. John Proctor, O.P., isidore.co/aquinas/PerfectVitaSpir.htm). See also *ST* II-II, q. 44, a. 4, ad 2: "To love God with one's whole heart has a twofold signification. First, actually, so that a man's whole heart be actually directed toward God. This is the perfection of heaven. Second, in the sense that man's whole heart be habitually directed toward God, so that it consent to nothing contrary to the love of God, and this is the perfection of the way. Venial sin is not contrary to this latter perfection, because it does not destroy the habit of charity, since it does not tend to a contrary object, but merely hinders the use of charity." See also *Super Col* 3, lec. 3 (no. 170): "It is not necessary that we refer everything to God in an actual way; it can be done habitually. Whoever acts against the glory of God and his commands, acts against this command [1 Cor 10:31]. But one who sins venially does not act against this command in an absolute way, even though he does not refer everything to God in an actual way, he does so habitually" (quotations taken from *Commentary on the Letters of Saint Paul to the Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, trans. F. R. Larcher, O.P. [Lander, WY: Aquinas Institute for the Study of Sacred Doctrine, 2012]).

³¹ In addition to what has been previously cited, see *ST* I-II, q. 88, a. 1, ad 2: "Every-one who does not actually refer all of his actions to the glory of God does not therefore act against this precept [1 Cor 10:31]. In order therefore to avoid mortal sin each time one fails actually to refer all of one's actions to the glory of God, it is enough to refer oneself and all that one has to God habitually. Now venial sin excludes only actual reference of the human act to God's glory, and not habitual reference, because it does not exclude charity, which refers man to God habitually."

³² See *De malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 9: "Since the precept of the Apostle [1 or 10:31] is positive . . . it is always observed habitually as long as man is habitually ordered to God as his ultimate end, which is not excluded by venial sin." See further a. 9 of the same question: "In us there can be a deordination about those things that are for the end, owing to venial sin, though our mind is habitually fixed on the end, and therefore in man there can be venial sin without mortal sin, not however in the

course through the infused virtue of charity. Habitually ordered activity is thus distinguished from not only actually ordered activity on the one side, but also mortally sinful activity on the other side, since the latter severs one's ordering toward God as last end. Thus any particular mortal sin is not accurately described as habitually ordered toward God. It should now be clear why the topic of habitual ordering is so commonly addressed in the context of inquiry into the relationship between venial sin and a person's last end. As noted above, Thomas offers other arguments not treated here about why venial sin, unlike mortal sin, does not sever a person from God as one's last end.³³ Yet one of those arguments is that venial sin is indeed habitually ordered to God.³⁴

Among scholars trying to interpret Thomas's thought on habitual ordering, none of the above claims are contested. Yet it should be clear why these claims present a problem. After all, Thomas insists that a person orders all of his actions toward his final end. He also grants that venial sins are not in reality ordered to God, hence their being sins. Yet Thomas claims both

angels." See also *In I sent.*, d. 1, q. 3, a. 1, ad 4, and *In II sent.*, d. 42, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5.

³³ See DeLetter, "Venial Sin," 39–68.

³⁴ Note should be made of an influential but puzzling text that does not accord with certain of the features noted in the previous paragraph. Thomas claims in *De car.*, a. 11, ad 3: "Habitually one orders to God who does nothing, nor does he actually intend anything, as sleeping." Despite all other texts conveying an active sense of habitual ordering, this text claims one can habitually refer something to God even when inactive, or acting for no purpose. This text surely gives rise to what is called below the concomitance approach to habitual ordering. This quixotic text likely prompts scholars like A. J. McNicholl to discuss two types of acts in the context of habitual ordering, namely, deliberative and non-deliberative acts (see "The Ultimate End of Venial Sin," *The Thomist* 2 [1940]: 373–409, at 378). Presumably the habitually ordered activity in this text would be the latter. Other authors have noted the difference between this *De car.* text and other, more active, Thomistic texts on habitual ordering. Osborne claims this non-deliberate usage soon falls away after Thomas ("Threefold Referral," 719). He even references Sherwin's case for an earlier dating of *De car* than J.-P. Torrell assumes (1270–1271), presumably suggesting this out of the ordinary usage of habitual ordering is incongruous with other, later texts; See Michael Sherwin, O.P., *By Knowledge and by Love* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2005), 199n192. Given those important differences, one could conclude this text reveals an inconsistency in Thomas's account of habitual ordering. Or Thomas could be using the concept to refer both to deliberate acts and to non-deliberate acts in service to God as last end, in which case the account offered here would address only the former, or render the latter to be imperfect cases of habitual ordering, much as Thomas adduces actions that are not properly human or dispositions that do not attain the perfection of habit. I offer no firm conclusion about the relation of this text to the other references to habitual ordering.

that it is possible to possess the habit of charity whereby one is ordered to God as one's last end *and* that the person with charity can sin venially without losing charity. Therefore, he must claim that somehow one's venial sin is ordered toward God, which seems impossible. His solution is that venial sins are habitually (though not actually) ordered toward God. What exactly does this mean?³⁵ Furthermore, how to relate the habitual–actual distinction, on the one hand, to the virtual–actual distinction, on the other? Given that the term “actual” appears in both distinctions, do the terms “actual,” “virtual,” and habitual serve as three distinct points on the same continuum? Or does “actual” mean something when distinguished from “virtual” that is different from what it means when distinguished from “habitual”? How various scholars have approached these questions in relation to Thomas's texts is the task of the following section.

Recent Interpretations of Thomas on Habitual Ordering

This section examines a sample of scholarship on habitual ordering in Thomas for a variety of “solutions” to this problem. I use scare quotes because in at least one case, rather than offer a solution to how Thomas's seemingly contradictory claims can be reconciled, there is a rejection of Thomas's position. I begin with a recent prominent rejection of Thomas's account of habitual ordering in the work of Ryan, an approach we also see in certain early-twentieth-century scholarship. I then briefly treat another recent scholar who addresses this problem, one who claims to be true to Thomas's thought even as he extends beyond Thomas, but in fact is not consistent with Thomas's claims. Finally, I will address the work of Jensen on this topic, since he offers the best available account of habitual ordering. Yet even his view has inadequacies. Treatment of these recent scholars paves the way for the account of habitual ordering offered in the ensuing section.

As noted above, recent scholarship by Grisez and Ryan is in no small part responsible for renewed attention to the last end in recent Thomistic studies. Their focus is on the first “prong” of study of the last end (*cuius*), namely, how the last end “out there” is related to other ends in a person's life. Yet they also address the second prong of study of the last end (*quo*), namely, how human activity is ordered toward one's last end. This is especially true of Ryan, who takes on this topic in his aptly named “Must the Acting Person have a Single Ultimate End?” In the end, his answer is no, and his treatment of venial sin is one linchpin in his argument. Along the

³⁵ DeLetter claims that many approaches have been taken to this issue and none found satisfactory (“Venial Sin,” 32).

way, he addresses Thomas's treatment of the problem of venial sin through the concept of habitual ordering. Unfortunately, what Ryan describes as habitual ordering is in fact what Thomas calls virtual ordering. So while Ryan's claims that such ordering does not solve the problem of how venial sin can be ordered to one's last end, Thomas does not purport it to do so.

Ryan rightly identifies the problem posed by Thomas's claim that all one's actions are ordered to one's last end. Ryan's response is to reject this claim, and that entails dismissing Thomas's actual-habitual ordering distinction. After quoting Thomas's claim that in venial sin a person refers that sin to God not actually but habitually (*ST* I-II, q. 88, a. 1, ad 3), Ryan interprets this text in the following manner:

For an act to be ordered to an ultimate end, even if only habitually and not actually, it must be ordered to it *per se*. Such an act must be done for the sake of that end even if one does not consciously advert to it.³⁶

Ryan suggests two features of habitually ordered venial sins here, both of which are inaccurate. First, he claims venial sins as habitually ordered acts must be truly ordered to God. He is right that they are not, but Thomas never says they always are. That is why they are sinful. If such acts were truly ordered toward God, they would be actually ordered toward God rather than merely habitually ordered toward God. Second, Ryan connects habitual ordering with non-conscious acting for an end. Yet as seen above, non-conscious acting for an end is what Thomas describes as virtual ordering. In nearly every text on habitual ordering (including the one Ryan quotes), Thomas describes habitual ordering as a quite active referral of action toward God. Therefore, Ryan is incorrect in claiming that habitually ordered actions must be truly ordered, even if not consciously so, toward God. Ryan wrongly equates habitual ordering with what Thomas calls virtual ordering.³⁷

³⁶ Ryan, "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?," 350. Ryan makes this same argument in disagreeing with T. C. O'Brien's account of venial sin in Aquinas ("Venial Sin (Ia2as. 89)," in the New Blackfriars ed. of *ST*, 27:118–24). Ryan claims "God can be, even habitually, an act's ultimate end only if the act's immediate end and intervening ends, if any, are *per se* ordered to him" (353).

³⁷ Despite the importance of the term "virtual" as distinct from "actual" in addressing Thomas's various ways of ordering actions to God, Ryan inexplicably never uses the term in his own voice in his article. It appears three times, always in quotations, once in Latin and twice in English. For another critique of Ryan as mixing up virtual and habitual, see Jensen, *Sin*, 18.

This misinterpretation of Thomas leads Ryan to reject Thomas's claim that a person has one last end and does all she does for the sake of that last end (ST I-II 1,4-6). Ryan does not deny that human actions have a last end.³⁸ Yet he thinks venial sin proves that a person can have more than one last end, and therefore "Aquinas's position" is wrong. We see here that a failure to grasp Thomas's account of habitual ordering leaves a person bereft of the unifying role of the last end on human action.³⁹ A similar misinterpretation occurs in the recent work of David Decosimo, whose *Ethics as a Work of Charity* offers an excellent Thomistic account of habit, and defense of "pagan virtue." He also rightly recognizes the moral importance of the last end, or what he calls a person's "final end conception" (FEC).⁴⁰ Decosimo's main concern in his treatment of the last end, which he acknowledges extends beyond Thomas's thought, is to explain what could be understood as the "flip side" of the case of the venial sinner, namely, the person oriented away from God as last end who nonetheless performs a truly good act.⁴¹

I cannot offer a complete assessment of Decosimo's broader account of the last end here. But two points are relevant for this essay on habitual ordering. First, Decosimo offers no significant treatment of Thomas's account of habitual ordering.⁴² Given that the main thrust of Decosimo's chapter concerns incongruity between particular actions and one's last end, and that Thomas consistently deploys the habitual-actual distinction in precisely that context, this is a stunning omission.

³⁸ See Ryan, "Must the Acting Person Have a Single Ultimate End?," 354. Though Ryan agrees with DeLetter that venial sins are not toward God as last end, he disagrees with DeLetter's claim that such sins are not toward any last end ("Venial Sin," 39, 69).

³⁹ For a more in-depth account of this role, see Mattison, "New Look," 99–107.

⁴⁰ See Decosimo, *Ethics*, 198–235.

⁴¹ Decosimo claims to make "Thomas more capacious . . . without betraying his basic commitments" (*Ethics*, 220), a laudable endeavor even though he does not succeed in the latter. Note that despite the book's valuable work on the classic topic of the "virtuous pagan," whose last end is presumably the natural common good, Decosimo explores how it might be the case that an unbeliever, whose last end is contrary to God, can perform a good act in relation to that last end. Though Decosimo's explanation of it is problematic, the fact that such a person could commit a good act is indeed affirmed by Aquinas (see *ST* II-II, q. 10, a. 4).

⁴² See Decosimo, *Ethics*, 316nn35–36. In neither note does Decosimo define habitual ordering or explain its relevance for the ordering of acts toward one's last end. Though in the latter he claims "it's tempting to use Thomas's notion of habitual ordering to make my points, but habitual ordering is not the ordering of particular acts." As may already be evident from the texts in n. 29, and will be clear by the end of this section, this claim is not true.

Second, deprived of this concept to explain how acts not actually ordered toward one's last end can be habitually ordered, Decosimo is forced to make a move akin to Ryan and break apart the unity of one's last end. Whereas Ryan had done so by speaking of venial sins as ordered toward different final ends, Decosimo affirms the existence of one final end conception for a person, but claims it is an assemblage of various beliefs, such that different actions can be ordered toward different "portions" of it.⁴³ For Decosimo, a person's last end is a conglomerate of "pre-approved reasons for acting," and therefore "we ought not to understand an agent who ordains an act to his final end to be referring his act to each and every belief that constitutes his FEC."⁴⁴ As noted, extended treatment of why this position is incompatible with Thomas's understanding of a person's last end, and how one's actions are ordered to it, is beyond the scope of this essay. Yet it is noted here as a consequence, reminiscent of Ryan, of inattention to (or in Ryan's case misconstrual of) Thomas's account of habitual ordering. Bereft of an account of habitual ordering, these scholars cannot offer an account of the last end that integrates people's actions in the manner Thomas affirms.⁴⁵ We now turn to the most common interpretation of habitual ordering in Thomistic scholarship.

With regard to habitual ordering, all who write on Thomas's account agree both that a venial sin habitually ordered toward God is not actually so ordered, and that nevertheless the person remains so ordered since venial sin does not entail the loss of charity. Therefore, an obvious interpretation of habitual ordering is that it concerns not the person's actions, but rather the person himself. This has been called a "concomitance" view, namely, that a person can venially sin concomitant with the possession the virtue of charity which orders the person (not act) toward God.⁴⁶ Though all agree that this is possible, it is not nearly so obvious that this is

⁴³ For this language of "portions," see Decosimo, *Ethics*, 211, where he also claims: "While we can understand the final end as a monolithic whole, we need not so understand it when it comes to understanding how it guides particular acts." The claim is not true, as is evident in Thomas's texts on habitually ordered acts being actively referred to God.

⁴⁴ Decosimo, *Ethics*, 212 and 213, respectively. See also 211: "Not all of one's beliefs about the final end, therefore, are necessarily implicated or actively engaged in one's acts directed to the final end."

⁴⁵ We also see the inherent connectivity between what Hütter calls the two prongs of scholarship on the last end. The lack of an adequate conception of habitual ordering correlates with an account of the last end as an assemblage.

⁴⁶ See McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 385. He ascribes this view to Cajetan, Sylvius, and Billuart.

what Thomas means by habitual ordering. This concomitance view, in its starkest form, entails an excessive separation between the person (or more precisely his habits) and his activity. This excessive separation is evident in one early-twentieth-century Thomist who states baldly, “the mere presence of the habitus of grace in a man does not affect his moral activity.”⁴⁷ But even into more subtle accounts of habitual ordering, the danger of concomitance can seep.

Consider Jensen’s recent work, which in many ways is the best available account of the last end and human action. Jensen claims that, “strictly speaking, habitual order is applied to persons and only secondarily to actions.” He grants that “habitual orders must have something to do with actions,” but he repeatedly affirms that “habitual order is *incidental* in relation to an action . . . insofar as it is performed by someone who is ordered” habitually.⁴⁸ For Jensen habitual order applies primarily to a person.⁴⁹ Jensen claims habitual ordering suggests a “staying power” and “a kind of plan a person has” with only “incidental” relation to a particular action. It is this ascription of habitually ordering primarily to the person rather than to the act that characterizes the concomitance view of habitual ordering.

How is one’s habitual order to the last end related to actions according to Jensen? He claims that, once one has an end (any end, not just the last end) that is a “kind of plan,” any activity done prior to that goal may be said to be done habitually for that goal since the person doing the more proximate activity still retains that goal. He uses an example of someone deciding to go purchase milk later in the day. Not only more obviously related acts (e.g., driving to the store where milk is sold) but any prior act (e.g., exercising), according to Jensen, may be said to be done for the sake of getting milk:

If Anna decides in the morning that she will later that day go get

⁴⁷ DeLetter, “Venial Sin,” 37. DeLetter is of course correct that the presence of any habitus neither necessitates nor determines activity. Yet to claim it does not influence activity drives a wedge between habit and activity. For a comparable concomitance view of habitual ordering, see Gérard Gilleman, S.J., *The Primacy of Charity in Moral Theology* (Westminster, MD: The Newman Press, 1961), 20: “Habitual intention in the strict sense is the simple presence of a habit at the moment of the act, without any actual or virtual influence of a preceding act of this habit.”

⁴⁸ See Jensen, *Sin*, 20–21 (emphasis added).

⁴⁹ This is even more surprising since Jensen rightly claims habitual ordering should not be confused with habits, and rightly notes that “Habits belong only to persons, not to actions. Orders [including habitual ordering] belong both to persons and to actions” (*Sin*, 21n19).

milk, and in the meantime she exercises and reads a novel, then she is still ordered to the end of getting milk, even while performing these actions. We can even say that the act of exercising is ordered to getting milk, insofar as the one who exercises is also ordered to getting milk.⁵⁰

Note how Jensen first claims the *person* is "still ordered to the end of getting milk," though he then claims "the *act* of exercising is ordered to getting milk," though the latter only "insofar as the one who exercises is also ordered to getting milk." In an article on this topic (from which his book draws), Jensen claims an act could "have nothing to do with" the further end and yet be habitually ordered because the person is so ordered.⁵¹ This is a perfect statement of concomitance. Jensen uses an example of someone (named Kenny) who decides to attend a concert that night at 8 pm, and is deciding whether or not to go to dinner (at Tony's restaurant) at 5 pm.

Because Kenny himself is related to the goal of going to the concert, all of his actions are also related to this goal of going to the concert, simply by association with him. . . . Going to Tony's restaurant is ordered habitually to going to the concert, because the person who goes to the concert happens to be ordered to go to the concert.⁵²

One could easily imagine how the choice to go to Tony's restaurant could indeed be done for the sake of, and thus informed by, the further goal of the concert. But Jensen claims that choice is habitually ordered to the concert simply "by association" through being performed by the same person who "happens to be" going to the concert.

Jensen applies this depiction of habitual ordering to one's actions in relation to his last end, God:

When Aquinas says that all the actions of a person in the state of grace are habitually ordered to God as to an ultimate end, . . . Thomas means that the person has previously ordered *himself* (rather than *this action*) to the ultimate end of God, which order remains through

⁵⁰ Jensen, *Sin*, 22.

⁵¹ Steven Jensen, "Venial Sin and the Ultimate End," in *Aquinas's Disputed Questions on Evil: A Critical Guide*, ed. M. V. Dougherty (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 75–100, at 79.

⁵² Jensen, "Venial Sin," 84.

all his actions unless he changes his mind through mortal sin.⁵³

This connection between person and action is too “incidental.” It is true that Thomas’s texts are few and open to interpretation, and thus as Jensen himself notes, “the relation between habitual order and action is far from clear.”⁵⁴ Nevertheless, claims that habitual ordering refers to the person “rather than *this action*,” and that the proximate act is habitually ordered simply because the person “happens to be ordered” to the further end, are characteristic features of a concomitance account of habitual ordering where there is no causal influence between the more remote end and the proximate act habitually ordered to it.

Before turning to Jensen’s attempt to provide a closer connection between the end to which the person is habitually ordered and more proximate ends/action, note that Jensen describes the dynamic of habitual ordering with regard to not only the last end but also other stable ends in a person’s life. This is not common, but as I will argue in the final section, I believe he is correct. Had he simply focused on the last end (rather than getting milk or going to concerts) his argument would have been easier to make, given his rightful support of Thomas’s claim that all one does is ordered to one’s last end. Thomas makes no such claim about ends that are not one’s last end. Though I will argue that incidental or happenstance relations to getting milk or going to a concert are not occasions of habitual ordering, I do argue below that stable ends possessed by a person (including through possession of a habit, and not only the habit of charity) can indeed provide occasions for habitual ordering. Yet a fuller account is needed of how the end influences the more proximate act.

Despite the strong affirmations in the above quotations about habitual ordering primarily concerning persons, and the proximate acts having “nothing to do” with the further end—all representative of a concomitance approach to habitual ordering—Jensen himself recognizes at times that there must be some sort of relation between the two other than “by association” as possessed by the same person. He claims that “clearly habitual orders must have something to do with actions.”⁵⁵ He considers first a “negative causality” solution to this problem of the causal relationship between ends held habitually and proximate acts, though it does not play a significant role in his position on this topic. He then considers a “positive causality,” and though he deploys a Thomistic distinction

⁵³ Jensen, *Sin*, 22 (emphasis in original).

⁵⁴ Jensen, *Sin*, 21.

⁵⁵ Jensen, *Sin*, 21.

regarding the final end to explain how venial sins may be habitually ordered to God, his account of habitual ordering retains deficiencies characteristic of concomitance.

Before offering his own solution as to whether or not a further end exerts causality on the more proximate act, Jensen considers the notion of "negative causality" of the last end on venial sin, a concept he claims originates in John of St. Thomas.⁵⁶ According to this approach, in the venial sinner who is habitually ordering acts toward God, her last end "continues to exert a negative influence on the other goods," to "assure" that one's act does not exclude the final end or "interfere" with God as one's final end.⁵⁷ It is certainly correct that, in habitual ordering, one's act does not dislodge one's last end, a feature of habitual ordering noted above. Yet this account of negative causality fails in an important respect. Venial sins do indeed interfere with God as one's last end even as they do not sever one from that end.⁵⁸ Furthermore, the possession of charity does not "assure" that one's

⁵⁶ Jensen, "Venial Sin," 81–82. Odon Lottin identifies predecessors to John of St. Thomas on this approach; see *Principes de Morale*, vol. 2 (Louvain: Editions de L'Abbaye du Mont César, 1946), 246, naming "Curiel et Martinez." Jensen says there are texts in Thomas that support such a notion, citing *ST* II-II 24,8 as an example. He cites McNicholl ("Ultimate End," 384) and Th. Deman ("Péché," in *Dictionnaire de théologie catholique* 12/1: 237–44, at 240) as affirming the same. He also recognizes Thomists such as DeLetter who claim there is no basis for this notion in Aquinas (DeLetter, "Venial Sin," 351–53). Lottin rather decisively rejects the existence of this notion in Aquinas (*Principes de Morale*, 2:247–48).

⁵⁷ Jensen, *Sin*, 75–76.

⁵⁸ Recall *ST* II-II, q. 44, a. 4, ad 2, above, where Thomas claims that though venial sin does not destroy charity, it does "hinder the use of charity." Though Jensen does not end up affirming the negative causality position, he does not adequately recognize here the extent to which venial sin hinders the use of charity. He describes venial sin as "possible," presumably meaning possible to commit without severing charity. On that fact, all agree. But by describing a class of acts that are "not inconsistent" with the end ("Venial Sin," 83; cf. 95 on "not ordered against" the end) or that "do not interfere with the end" (*Sin*, 70), and placing venial sins in this category ("Venial Sin," 85), Jensen fails to recognize Thomas's claim that venial sins do indeed interfere with (even while not dislodging) our order toward God as last end. This is all the more surprising because Jensen repeatedly cites Thomas's text at *De malo*, q. 7, a. 5, which says "Deliberation can also concern that which does not exclude the end but nevertheless the end can be attained better without it, since it impedes progress to the end or disposes to a contrary end; these actions are venial sins" ("Venial Sin," 85; see also *Sin*, 72). Jensen's foray into this third class of "indifferent acts" not only represents an excessively "neutral" view of venial sin, but also represents an approach to this issue decried by Lottin as metaphysical not moral, where acts stand on their own as good, bad, or indifferent regardless of how they are chosen by the person (*Principes de Morale*, 2:245–47). See also Osborne,

act not exclude God as final end, since one may sin mortally. Depicting the causal influence of the last end “negatively” in this way is more of an after-the-fact assessment of whether the person sinned venially, rather than an account of how that immediate act is habitually ordered toward God as one’s last end.

Jensen rightly gropes for some “positive final causality” that is missing in the standard negative causality account of habitual ordering.⁵⁹ Here Jensen supplies an account that has precedents but is developed particularly clearly by him, namely, the distinction between the last end understood more generally as one’s overall good, and the last end understood more determinately as the specification of one’s overall good.⁶⁰ On this argument, habitual ordering occurs when a venial sin is chosen since it appears from the perspective of the acting person (albeit wrongly, and thus not actually) to be ordered to one’s happiness in general. Yet in reality it is not ordered to the specific determination of one’s overall good, namely, God in the beatific vision. The distinction enables Jensen to explain habitual ordering, in a manner that seemingly gives it more than incidental relation to the person’s actions. An action such as a venial sin is habitually ordered to one’s last end understood as one’s overall goodness, happiness formally or generally understood. Yet venial sin is not ordered to one’s last end understood as the specific determination of one’s last end, in this case God in the beatific vision. The allure of this solution is that it guards Thomas’s claims that all actions are ordered to one’s last end, and that even sins while not actually so ordered are habitually so ordered. Problem solved!

Not quite. While this solution succeeds in differentiating between good acts and venial sins, and explaining in what way each is ordered to one’s last end, it does not explain why it is the case that mortal sins are not habitually ordered. Thomas is quite clear that mortal sins are *not* habitually ordered

“Threefold Referral,” 729, 731. This is surprising since Jensen in the same article recognizes the importance of the perspective of the acting person (“Venial Sin,” 87), not as determining the morality of a chosen act but as a necessary component of its analysis.

⁵⁹ See Jensen, *Sin*, 73n15, for this terminology.

⁶⁰ See Jensen, “Venial Sin,” 83–87 and 98–100, and *Sin*, 30–40 and 69–75. In both texts Jensen argues forcefully—and accurately—against new natural law proponents Ryan and Grisez. For another helpful rejoinder to Ryan and Grisez that also relies on this distinction, see Fulvio Di Blasi, “Ultimate End, Human Freedom and Beatitude,” *American Journal of Jurisprudence* 46, no. 1 (2001):113–35. For a position in line with Jensen’s though with a slight complexification, see McNicholl, “Ultimate End,” 398–406. For an examination of the origins of this argument, see Osborne, “Threefold Referral,” 733–35, which focuses on Banez.

to one's last end. Thus any account of habitual ordering must be capacious enough to explain how a venial sin is ordered to one's last end, but not so capacious as to allow that mortal sin meets the conditions of habitual ordering. If habitual ordering is understood as the exercise of positive causality by the last end on a more proximate act by doing the latter for the sake of happiness, or one's overall good in general, then true as this may be, it does not depict what Thomas describes as habitual ordering. That account of habitual ordering would make even mortal sins so ordered.

Jensen concludes one of his treatments of venial sin with a jarring comment that is easily misunderstood. But even when clarified, it betrays a consistent problem in his and others' accounts of habitual ordering. He claims, "We have reached the conclusion that venial sin is ordered to no final end, as we have defined the term, but it is nevertheless ordered to an ultimate end."⁶¹ Though the claim that "venial sin is ordered to no final end" initially seems jarring, it is comprehensible given Jensen's distinctive use of the term "final end" here to refer to the determination of one's "overall good," whereas he uses "ultimate end" for both the final end and its formality as one's overall good.⁶² Thus the initially jarring quote is really a re-statement of his position above. But it is suggestive of a problem with this strategy and others similar to it of distinguishing between the last end as the formality of one's overall good and its specific determination, at least as an account of habitual ordering.⁶³ We saw in two earlier approaches an eventual rupture of the last end, either in Ryan's claim that venial sins are toward a different last end, or in Decosimo's fragmentation of the last end into portions. There is a hint of similar fragmentation here. Jensen acknowledges that scholars have criticized excessive separation between these understandings of the last end, and he himself claims: "The difference between the formality and determination is not stark. It is not as if the former refers to a mere abstraction and the later to something entirely concrete."⁶⁴ But as he goes on to describe how a person can act toward the formality of one's overall good before specifying it, he evidences the problem with using this distinction to explain habitual ordering. For examples

⁶¹ Jensen, "Venial Sin," 99.

⁶² Jensen, "Venial Sin," 90–91.

⁶³ Thomas does indeed reference a distinction like this. But it is adduced not as an explanation of habitual ordering, but rather as an explanation of the sense in which all persons have the same last end even if some find it in riches, some pleasure, etc. See *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7.

⁶⁴ Jensen "Venial Sin," 92. For his treatment of various twentieth-century scholars who have variously opined on this distinction regarding the last end, see 91nn51–52.

of distinguishing general and determinate ends, he claims one can be hungry and then desire pizza, or seek a high paying job and then choose to be an accountant, or seek an enjoyable night out and then choose a particular concert.⁶⁵ All of this is absolutely true of how persons reason practically. However, it is not an adequate account of habitual ordering, since Thomas clearly claims that a person who habitually orders an act is *already ordered* to God as one's last end (not ordered to an overall good and seeking its specification), and who nonetheless chooses a venial sin *as ordered to God* (not just toward one's overall good).

So in the end, Jensen's and others' reference to Thomas's distinction in *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7, between the formality of the last end as one's overall good, and its specific determination (God, riches, pleasure, etc.) is not adequate for explaining what habitual ordering means. First, the person who habitually orders a venial sin to God is already habitually ordered to her last end understood as a specific determination; she possesses charity and is thus ordered toward God. Thomas clearly states she orders her particular act (e.g., venial sin) toward God.⁶⁶ Second, any human act is done for the sake of one's overall goodness (even if wrongly so), and so that depiction of how venial sins are habitually ordered fails to distinguish them from mortal sins.

Toward a More Adequate Thomistic Account of Habitual Ordering

The previous section focused especially on Jensen's work on habitual ordering because of how much he gets right. Consider three features of his account. First, there is something about habitual ordering that refers to persons rather than acts. Second, with regard to acts, the further end toward which one is ordered appears to exert a negative causality in dissuading one from sinning mortally and dislodging one's last end. Third, there is some sort of positive causality in habitual ordering, such that one's act is rightly said to be ordered to the further end. Each of these is true, despite certain shortcomings in Jensen's account. The task of this section is to offer a Thomistic vision of habitual ordering that incorporates these insights into a more adequate account.

To start with the conclusion, I argue here that habitual ordering represents Thomas's (admittedly underdeveloped) account of how the activities of a person with a habit are influenced by that habit, even when

⁶⁵ See Jensen, "Venial Sin," 91–92.

⁶⁶ Recall Thomas uses language of one habitually ordering doing his act "referring it to God" (*De malo* VII., q. 7, a. 1, ad 4; *ST* I-II, q. 88, a. 1, ad 3) and loving it "for God's sake" (*ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2). See note 29 above.

they do not in fact serve the end of that habit (e.g., venial sin). As with any habit, possession of the habit neither necessitates nor specifically determines the activity of the habituated person. Nonetheless, the end of the habit does indeed causally influence the person's activity. This dynamic is true of habits more generally. It occurs not primarily negatively (though we see below why it is easy to describe it as such), and not mainly by the activity being ordered to one's further end more generally considered (as Jensen claims). Rather, in the case of deliberate human acts such as venial sins, the person actively orders the acts toward God by "narrating" them as ordered to God, that is, undertaking them under a description as ordered to God. Of course, as in the case of venial sins, they need not be so ordered. And given that a mortal sin could presumably be done under such a description (obviously wrongly), we will have to attend to why mortal sins are not habitually ordered. We begin with the influence of a habit on a person's activity.

A grasp of the relationship between a person's habits and activity goes a long way toward understanding habitual ordering. Thomas consistently claims that habits, as qualities of a person's powers, are related both to the person's nature on the one hand, and activity on the other.⁶⁷ The ends of certain sorts of activities are possessed by a person by nature, albeit inchoately. This potentiality issues forth in actions, which are particular specifications of ends supplied by nature. "In between" a person's nature and activity are habits that qualify, or stably specify, the person's ends supplied by nature so one's powers can be more readily actualized in (even further specified) activity.⁶⁸ We might imagine three "levels" of ordering toward ends in a person, with increasing specificity. At a first level a person by nature is ordered toward certain sorts of activity, ends which are inchoate though not wholly undetermined. At a second level, a person's natural powers (that is, those that may be subjects of habits in the properly human sense of the term) are stably specified by habits, which supply to the person an ordering toward more particular ends. The purpose of habits is to aid the person to act more readily to actualize her ordering toward natural ends in specific activity. That activity is the third level, where the person's activities toward ends are most specific. In the approach offered here,

⁶⁷ For clear statements of this see *ST* I-II, q. 49, a. 4, q. 54, a. 2. The following draws on the forthcoming William C. Mattison III, *Growth in Virtue: A Thomistic Account*.

⁶⁸ For more on this account of habits as supplying more particular ends than nature, yet still requiring instantiation in specific activity, see Angela Knobel, *Aquinas and the Infused Moral Virtues* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2021).

Thomas's habitual ordering is an account of how habits at the second level causally influence activity at the third. Though recent renewed attention to virtue offers a new angle on this question, it has been traditionally addressed by exploring the relationship between venial sins (third level) and one's ongoing possession of charity (second level).

A. J. McNicholl addresses precisely this causal influence of charity (at the second level) on a person's actions, including venial sin (on the third). He recognizes that Thomas describes two sorts of acts as habitually ordered toward God, namely, deliberate venial sins and what McNicholl calls "abortive," or non-fully deliberate, acts.⁶⁹ Habitually ordered deliberate acts are actively referred to God. McNicholl quotes Thomas: "That which we love in venial sin is loved for [*propter*] God's sake habitually though not actually."⁷⁰ Referencing the active sense of *propter*, McNicholl claims "this is a very explicit statement that the venial sin is ordered to God," since the "the word 'for' (*propter*) expresses real causality and not mere concomitance."⁷¹ He claims the habitually ordered venial sin is "somehow drawn by charity to God, attracted by the vital magnetism of charity to this virtue's last end."⁷² He claims charity "draws it [the venial sin] to its own last end."⁷³ He offers a powerful image of a river to depict the overall flow of charity and its relation to venial sin:

We may liken this universal impulse of charity toward God to the sweeping flow of a broad river, whose waters glide ever on to the limitless ocean from which they came. Where these waters meet the banks, there will be numerous eddies and counter-currents; but this contact with the earth will only slow up the flow of the river and impede its progress for a time; the varying counter-currents and swirling eddies of disturbed water, though not caused by the river, are caught in the broad strong flow of the hurrying stream, and are swept on with it and in it, to be embraced in the bosom of the mighty sea. We have to explain the mysterious and powerful influence of charity on all our acts in dry and technical formulae. These should not be permitted to blind us to the real significance of the deep working of charity in our souls.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ See McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 378.

⁷⁰ *ST* II-II, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2.

⁷¹ McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 385.

⁷² McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 386.

⁷³ McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 387.

⁷⁴ McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 387.

McNicholl's beautiful prose here, a style reminiscent of Hütter's own in *Bound for Beatitude*, reminds readers of this journal of the importance of combining technical precision with spiritual inspiration.⁷⁵

Notwithstanding the beauty of McNicholl's image of the relationship between the general thrust of the river (loving all things for God's sake habitually) and the countercurrents or eddies (venial sins not actually moving toward God), the metaphor's weakness is a rather mechanical or at least non-personal image of both the overall thrust of the river and the countercurrents. In charity a person refers all his acts (of course only with God's grace) toward God, and this same person deliberately chooses venial sins for the sake of God, albeit wrongly. The image suffers from what Odon Lottin describes as the early modern shift in understanding habitual ordering more metaphysically than morally.⁷⁶ Or, as we might say after *Veritatis splendor* and the late-twentieth-century shift toward recognizing the importance of the first-person perspective, more from an observer perspective rather than the perspective of the acting person.⁷⁷

The person who habitually orders action to God loves God above all

⁷⁵ For another inspirational passage that should give pause to readers of this journal, McNicholl notes in the context of explaining the inability of angels to sin venially that "the more intellectual a man is . . . the greater is the danger of falling into mortal sin. . . . To be highly intellectual is to approach more nearly to the condition of angels and hence to be less capable of deliberate venial sin: this consideration should inspire humility in those who are gifted with acute intelligences, or who are well-instructed in the nature of sin, or the precepts of divine law" ("Ultimate End," 389–90). See a comparably inspiring passage in Jensen, *Sin*, 38–39: "If everyone in a state of grace did indeed order all of his actions virtually toward the divine good, then there might be little room for spiritual growth. As it is, not everyone in a state of grace does order all of his actions virtually to the divine good. Those in a state of grace are themselves ordered habitually to the divine good, but not all of their actions have a virtual order to this good. As such, they often lead disjointed lives; they often pursue a multiplicity of goods, independent of the divine good. They are ready to curb these pursuits when the goods exclude the divine good (else they would commit a mortal sin), but as long as these independent goods do not eliminate the divine good, they are often pleased to pursue them. Eliminating these independent goods, ultimately seeking to subordinate everything virtually to the divine good, is the work of the spiritual life."

⁷⁶ Lottin, *Principes de Morale*, 2:245–47. See also Osborne, "Threefold Referral," 729, 731.

⁷⁷ See Pope John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor* (1993), §78. In addition to the seminal Elizabeth Anscombe, *Intention*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), see Servais Pinckaers, O.P. *Sources of Christian Ethics* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of American Press, 1995), whose third chapter (47–94) addresses this topic in an illuminating manner cloaked by the chapter's title, "The Human Aspect of Christian Ethics."

else and yet can deliberately choose acts for the sake of God that in fact impede one's love of God. That love of God above all else parameters the immediate act, causally influencing it to help keep one from sinning mortally. This is what McNicholl describes as the "vital magnetism of charity," which draws it [the person's act] toward its own end [God].⁷⁸ Yet it is less some "magnetic" force acting on the person's immediate act, but the person herself both loving God above all else and yet loving the venial sin (for the sake of God, wrongly) in a way that impedes her journey on the road toward God.⁷⁹ When McNicholl claims that "the virtue of charity would forbid them [the proximate acts] if they were gravely sinful," we hear echoes of what the previous section described as the "negative causality" of charity. Yet there is less a negative causality than a person actively loving God above all else and actively referring a proximate act (even if wrongly, as in venial sin) to God. What we have is a lack of full coherence and integration of the person's actions toward God in this life, a lack that is not (only) suffered but (also) perpetuated actively by the person in venial sin.

How is the account of habitual ordering offered here different from ones offered in the previous section? First, it is clearly not a concomitance account. Habitual ordering does not primarily refer to the person who possesses a habit, with only "incidental" connection to her action. In habitual ordering, the person is ordering her more proximate actions in a manner reflecting her possession of a habit. That habit has an object, and its possession (since it is her possession, her end) has real causal influence on her proximate actions, such that she refers her proximate act to the end supplied by the (relevant) habit. In the case of charity which refers her to God as last end, she even refers to God acts that are not actually toward God (i.e., venial sins). Thus the fact that the person is habituated is important, because from the perspective of the acting person all of his habitually ordered acts are for the sake of God.

Who cannot empathize with an account of a person loving God above all else, and yet at times actively narrating his particular choices as part of his journey toward God when in fact they impede progress toward God? Perhaps some concrete examples of this dynamic might help. Consider a person ordered to God through the graced virtue of charity, yet who narrates his harsh demeanor toward his wife or kids as insisting on what is right for everyone's good, rather than as the impatience or self-centered-

⁷⁸ McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 386 and 387, respectively.

⁷⁹ For a vivid image of venial sin as akin to a person on a road to God not abandoning his destination but delaying too much or loitering on the road (see *In II sent.*, d. 42, q. 1, a. 3, ad 5 and *In I sent.*, d. 1, q. 3, a. 1, ad 4.

ness that it is. Or consider the person ordered toward God in charity who narrates venially sinful alcohol consumption as a way to relax or enjoy the company of others, rather than the self-centered focus on pleasure that it is. Or consider the person whose career represents a commitment to the Church, and who narrates political scheming at work as pursuit of that mission rather than the manipulation or prideful ambition that it is. In each of these cases, the person's ordering to God as last end is not merely concomitant to the venial sinful activity, but that venial sin is actively (though wrongly) ordered to the person's last end.

Second, what is described above as the negative causality of habitual ordering is not some mechanical influence on the person's proximate acts as if from the outside. It is the limiting of the person's sin to be only venial and not mortal because the person himself is still clinging to God as last end and referring all his proximate acts toward God.⁸⁰ Of course habitual ordering does not prevent the possibility of mortal sin. But when a person does choose mortal sin, it is not that some negative causal influence has ceased being effective. Rather it is that the person himself has relinquished the gifted grasp of God as his final end and instead taken on a temporal good as his final end. From the first-person perspective, he may think he still holds God as last end, and that he does the immediate act for God's sake. But his narrating the act for the sake of God in a manner whereby it is compatible with holding God as last end does not make it so. In actuality, he does not hold God as his final end through charity in doing the proximate act (a mortal sin), and thus his act is not habitually ordered toward God. He has relinquished the habit of charity. This is not simply an after-the-fact assessment of an act as mortal not venial. In his choice of the proximate end, he ceases to will God as his last end, and thus the mortal sin is not habitually ordered.

Third, this account of habitual ordering explains how a person habitually orders acts toward God without relying on a distinction between the formality of the last end and its specificity, despite how common this move is made in the tradition. Thomas's reference to some such distinction (*ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7) immediately after his article claiming one does all one does for one's last end (*ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 6) makes it understandable people appeal

⁸⁰ For a powerful description of this with more of a first-person perspective, despite his holding on to the language of negative causality, see J. Aumann, O.P., "The Theology of Venial Sin," *Proceedings of the Catholic Theological Society of America* 10 (1955): 74–94, at 81: "The Christian in a state of grace, even as he commits a venial sin, preserves his resolution not to admit any other ultimate end but God, and in this sense, at least, the ultimate end exerts a negative influence on the commission of venial sin. Therefore it is not an empty gesture to ask whether the just Christian in any way directs his venial sinful acts to the ultimate end."

to the relevance of this distinction.⁸¹ However, that distinction is Thomas's explanation for how people can hold different last ends, not how they can habitually order proximate acts (wrongly in the case of venial sins) toward God as last end. Furthermore, appeal to the general–determinate distinction does not explain why mortal sins are not habitually ordered toward God, as presumably even mortal sins are indeed done for the sake of one's overall happiness (albeit drastically wrongly).⁸² Identification of mortal sin always requires analysis of an act beyond the person's own perspective. The account offered here claims mortal sins are not habitually ordered to God even if one narrates them as referred to God, because in reality one has relinquished God as last end in doing the proximate act, and thus the act ceases to be parametered by that end, regardless of whether the person narrates it as such.

In short, habitual ordering is ordering a proximate act toward a further end toward which one is habitually inclined, so that the choice of that proximate act is from the perspective of the acting person actively and deliberately done for the sake of that further end. It may not in reality (actually) be ordered toward that further end, but one's clinging to that further end while choosing the proximate act parameters that act so one's further end is not lost even if the immediate act one chooses is not conducive to it.

Assumption-Defying Conclusions about Habitual Ordering Brought into Relief by This Account

The previous section argues that habitual ordering is Thomas's device to explain how a person's referral (due to the possession of a habit) to a further end influences more proximate ends chosen by that person. That account leads to certain further conclusions about habitual ordering that defy assumptions commonly held in scholarship on the topic. I offer three here, and state them at the outset. First, contrary to the common assumption that actual, virtual, and habitual ordering are three points on one continuum regarding the further referral of one's acts, I argue that when "actual" is distinguished from "virtual," it has a meaning different from the one it has when distinguished from "habitual." Second, contrary to the assumption that an act must be *either* habitually *or* actually ordered, I

⁸¹ In another article I make a different case for why *ST* I-II, q. 1, a. 7, is indeed relevant, namely, by interpreting it more akin to the distinction in q. 1, a. 8, than commonly supposed ("New Look," 103–7). Though I stand by that case, the current argument on habitual ordering does not depend on the success of that case.

⁸² For an attempt to cordon off mortal sins from habitual ordering by creating a trifold distinction regarding the last end, an approach to habitual ordering similar to Jensen's, see McNicholl, "Ultimate End," 398–405.

argue that a good act actually ordered toward the further end of God can also be habitually ordered. Third, scholarship on habitual ordering focuses on venial sin and habitual ordering toward God in charity, but I argue that Thomas's account of habitual ordering applies also to habits other than charity. Each of these claims is brought into clearer relief by the account of habitual ordering offered here. However, despite assumptions to the contrary in scholarship on habitual ordering, each of these conclusions holds true even if one holds a concomitance view of habitual ordering, or an account such as that offered by Jensen.

My first conclusion is that "actual" ordering as distinguished from "virtual" ordering has a meaning different from when it is distinguished from "habitual" ordering. Since habitual and virtual ordering are both distinguished by Thomas from actual ordering, there is an assumption in Thomistic scholarship that these three terms exist as distinct points on one and the same continuum. The best recent article on the history of these types of ordering refers to the "threefold" referral of acts in Thomas's thought.⁸³ This assumption is evident in the work of Jensen, as well as earlier twentieth-century scholarship.⁸⁴ That continuum presumably looks something like this:

-actually ordered to God—good acts truly ordered to God as further end and consciously so

-virtually ordered to God—good acts truly ordered to God as further end but not consciously so

-habitually ordered to God—venial sins not truly ordered toward God but not dislodging God as last end

-mortal sins—not ordered toward God, and dislodging God as last end

The "threefold referral" (the three above the line in the spectrum list just above) references the fact that the first three sorts of actions, unlike the fourth (mortal sin), all are referred to God in some way, and that is true. Yet the threefold ordering on a continuum approach is based on

⁸³ See Osborne, "Threefold Referral," 717.

⁸⁴ Jensen describes a "tripartite division between habitual, virtual, and actual order to an end," and further on a "threefold division of orders to an end: actual virtual, and habitual" ("Venial Sin," 77). See also Maurice de la Taille, S.J., "La Pêché véniale dans la théologie de S. Thomas," *Gregorianum* 7 (1926): 28–43, at 32.

two assumptions, the dislodging of which correspond with the first two conclusions about habitual ordering addressed here. The first assumption is that “actual” means the same thing when distinguished from virtual and from habitual. However, despite the same term “actual” being used as distinct from both virtual and habitual, and despite the common topic of referring acts toward further ends, I argue here that “actual” means something when distinguished from “virtual” that differs from what it means when distinguished from “habitual.” If that is the case, we will have four, not three, different ways of ordering acts toward ends.

It is relatively uncontested that “virtual” means the further end is not consciously thought about while doing the proximate act, and that “actual” ordering—when distinguished from “virtual”—means a person is actively thinking of that further end, explicitly or consciously. Let us label the “actual” distinguished from “virtual” as “actual-1.” Yet though actual-1 means “explicitly or consciously thought of,” this cannot be the meaning of “actual” when distinguished from “habitual.” Rather, if distinguished from “habitual,” then “actual” means something like “done in a manner influenced by and truly in accord with one’s habit.”

Let us label “actual” when distinguished from “habitual” as “actual-2.” According to Thomas, venial sins are actively referred to God, and done for the sake of God.⁸⁵ So a venial sin is habitually ordered toward God because an end held by the person habitually (e.g., God in charity) causally influences the person’s choice of the proximate act, even though the immediate act is not truly in accord with one’s habitual order to God, since the act is not truly conducive to God as last end. Actual-2 ordering means an act is done not only in a manner influenced by, but also truly in accord with, one’s habit. Thus a venial sin is habitually but not actually-2 ordered. This is not the same as actual-1 ordering; indeed, an act such as venial sin being done while possessing a habit yet not truly in accord with one’s habit is possibly true of both actual-1 and virtual ordering. Thus actually-2 ordered acts can be actually-1 or virtually ordered. Conversely, given that venial sins are deliberate acts referred to God, they can be actually-1 ordered even while not actually-2 ordered. This means venial sins can be habitually *and* actually-1 ordered to God. But they are not actually-2 ordered to God. Therefore actual-1, distinguished from virtual, must mean something different from actual-2, distinguished from habitual.⁸⁶

⁸⁵ See: *De malo*, q. 7, a. 1, ad 4; *ST* I-II, q. 88, a. 1, ad 3; II-II, q. 24, a. 10, ad 2. See also n. 29 above.

⁸⁶ Assuming “actual” means the same thing when distinguished from “virtual” as when from “habitual” is a possible explanation for why someone like Ryan could

Given this distinction between actual-1 and actual-2, there is really a fourfold referral of acts to further ends. Rather than a continuum, these two distinctions result in four possible permutations, as seen on this chart:

	Actual-2 (=truly in accord with habit)	Habitual (=influenced by habit)
Actual-1 (=explicitly)	truly in accord with habit and explicitly further ordered Actual-1 Actual-2 ordering	causally influenced by habit and explicitly further ordered Actual-1 Habitual ordering
Virtual (=implicitly)	truly in accord with habit but implicitly further ordered Virtual Actual-2 ordering	causally influenced by habit but implicitly further ordered Virtual Habitual ordering

Though the account of habitual ordering offered here makes these four types of ordering more obvious, the above chart is actually not dependent upon the account in the previous section of this essay. In support of the chart rather than continuum, consider whether or not venial sins must be always either actually-1 ordered or always virtually ordered. It is claimed here they are sometimes actually-1 ordered and sometimes virtually ordered. Ask yourself whether venial sin, which is not actually-2 (truly) ordered to God, can at times be referred actually-1 (explicitly) to God. All grant that venial sins are deliberate acts, and Thomas is quite clear that they can be consciously referred to one's last end. Anyone has done this who has rationalized a venial sin, who has convinced himself that an act conduces to a life integrated by love of God above all even though in reality the act is not conducive to that end. Clearly venial sin can be habitually and actually-1 ordered. Additionally, ask yourself if venial sin can be done without the further end of God explicitly on one's mind, in other words virtually ordered. Venial sin can be virtually ordered if one had earlier consciously referred it (erroneously) to God, and then continues to do the act without that connection to the further end explicitly on one's mind. If either of these is the case (and I claim both are), the threefold referral continuum cannot stand. It is not supple enough to distinguish the various ways a person orders his acts toward a further end.

The second assumption in the "continuum" or "threefold order" approach relates to the second conclusion regarding habitual ordering. In

conflate virtual and habitual.

the threefold continuum approach, it is assumed that habitually ordered acts *are always* venially sinful and are never mortally sinful. Or at the very least, in the concomitance approach to habitual ordering, there is no relation between the habitually ordered act and the further end held by habit, other than “by association” as it is the same person who does both. According to the account of habitual ordering here, habitually ordered acts *can be* venially sinful and are never mortally sinful. But habitually ordered acts can also be good. In other words, while it is true that acts are *either* actually-1 *or* virtually ordered, and that a habitually ordered act need not be actually-2 ordered, it is also true that a habitually ordered act can also be actually-2 ordered.

Habitual ordering is a claim about the causal influence of an end held by habit on a person’s proximate act. The contexts where Thomas deploys habitual ordering are his treatments of venial sin and adherence to the precept in 1 Corinthians 10:31. These contexts lead Thomas to adduce habitual ordering to explain how venial sins are ordered to God by a person with charity, since they are causally influenced by the habit even though the proximate act is not conducive to God and thus not truly in accord with one’s habit. In these contexts, habitual ordering also helps him explain why mortal sins are not so ordered to God, because the chosen act is not causally influenced by the habit (and obviously not conducive to God). Given these contexts, “habitually ordering” is used to describe venial sin. But if “habitual ordering” means causally influenced by the end supplied by one’s habit, then habitual ordering occurs also with good acts that are conducive to the end a person holds by habit.

In fact, this claim about habitually ordered action also applying to good acts is not dependent on the account of habitual ordering here, even if this account makes the possibility of good habitual action more clear. Consider other accounts of habitual ordering noted above. A concomitance account claims that an act is habitually ordered when performed by one with charity. Stated as such, it is not clear why only venially sinful acts would count as habitually ordered, unless by “habitually ordered” is understood “*merely* habitually ordered.” So, surely “habitually ordered” also describes good acts of the person with charity. Or consider Jensen’s account. He claims an act is habitually ordered when performed by one with charity, and done for one’s overall good so as not to dislodge charity, even if it is not ordered toward one’s specific determination of one’s overall good, such as the beatific vision. Though he is right, and all agree, that a habitually ordered act may not be truly in accord with the end of one’s habit, why is it necessarily not so?

That Jensen thinks habitually ordered acts cannot be good is clear when

he claims that a habitually ordered act is only good for the end one holds "by association." If it is truly good (actually-2) for that end "it becomes virtually ordered to his good."⁸⁷ But this does not at all necessarily follow. First of all, what makes something virtually ordered to an end is not that it is truly so ordered (though that can be true too), but that it is not on one's mind.⁸⁸ Second, in what way does the now-good act fail to meet Jensen's conditions for habitual ordering, even if it is now also truly conducive to the person's end (actually-2 ordered)?⁸⁹ Therefore, there appears nothing in these accounts of habitual ordering that disqualifies good acts from being habitually ordered. It is certainly true that habitually ordered acts can be (venially) sinful. It is also true that Thomas treats habitual ordering almost always with regard to venial sin. This seems to have led scholars to assume that acts can only be either habitually or actually-2 ordered.⁹⁰ But if we approach Thomas's thought on habitual ordering not simply through the topic of venial sin, but also on the topic of the relationship between habits and acts, suddenly a host of other texts come into play.⁹¹ Therefore, my contention is that Thomas's actual-habitual distinction is not an either-or distinction as is the case with virtual-actual-1 ordering. Rather, an act can be "merely" habitually (and not actually-2) ordered or habitually *and* actually-2 ordered. The account of habitual ordering offered here makes this possibility more evident.

Note the impact that this second conclusion would have on the above

⁸⁷ Jensen, "Venial Sin," 79.

⁸⁸ Recall venial sins can be virtually ordered by not having their further end consciously on one's mind.

⁸⁹ I suspect this is one reason that Jensen unfortunately defaults his three categories of acts as good, bad, indifferent, and labels habitually ordered acts the latter. This is unfortunate since, as noted above in n. 58, venial sins are not indifferent.

⁹⁰ Of course, one can simply stipulate that acts are either actually-2 ordered or habitually ordered. But if one did so, it would seem to be merely stipulative, since an account of habitual ordering could not be offered that both distinguished it from both actual-2 ordering on the one side, and mortal sin on the other.

⁹¹ Such texts would obviously include explicit mentions of the relationship between habit and act, including *ST* I-II, q. 49, a. 4, and q. 54, a. 2, noted above. It would also bring into play texts such as *De virtutibus*, a. 1, on what habits supply to powers amenable to habituation, and *De car.*, a. 12, on why one need not act in accordance with charity even if it is possessed. In both of his treatments of this topic, Jensen gives extended attention to the different ways a person with a habit (such as charity) can sin, namely, from passion, ignorance, or malice (referencing Thomas's internal causes of sin from *ST* I-II, qq. 76–78). This reflects exactly the right intuition that a crucial topic here is the relationship between a person's habit and his action, and how causal influences other than the habit can prompt an action. See Jensen, "Venial Sin," 93–98, and *Sin*, 124–211.

chart. If actual-2 ordered acts can be also habitually ordered (assuming the possession of a habit), the chart would have to look something like this:

	Habitual and Actual-2 (=influenced by, and truly in accord with, one's habit)	Merely Habitual (=influenced by, though not in accord with, one's habit)
Actual-1 (=explicitly)	influenced by and truly in accord w/ habit and explicitly further ordered Actual-1 and Habitual / Actual-2 order	influenced by but not in accord w/ habit and explicitly further ordered Actual-1 and Mere Habitual order
Virtual (=implicitly)	influenced by and truly in accord with habit but implicitly further ordered Virtual and Habitual / Actual-2 order	influenced by but not in accord w/ habit but implicitly further ordered Virtual and Mere Habitual order

The third conclusion offered here concerns the applicability of habitual ordering to other ends besides the habitual ordering of a person toward God as last end through charity. I noted above that Jensen’s analysis offers examples of habitual ordering to non-ultimate ends.⁹² He also considers whether habitual ordering applies in cases of people ordered away from God, in other words, with a different last end.⁹³ These instincts seem to me exactly right, and reflective of an intuition that Thomas’s account of habitual ordering is at root an account of the relationship between a person’s habits (by which one is stably ordered toward certain ends of activity) and one’s proximate actions which may or may not conduce to those ends.⁹⁴

⁹² In addition to the examples noted above, Jensen explicitly affirms this dynamic with regard to non-ultimate (“lesser”) ends (“Venial Sin,” 78).
⁹³ See Jensen, *Sin*, 83, for a description of habitual ordering of a person in mortal sin.
⁹⁴ Though certain features of Jensen’s work evidence this intuition, it must be noted that the account of habitual ordering offered here concerns ends held habitually. When Jensen references a “standing plan” with “staying power” (*Sin*, 20) such as a decision to go get milk later, he addresses the relation between proximate ends and further ends, including when the latter need not be reflective of a habit. I argue that Thomas’s account of habitual ordering addresses the relationship between a further end a person holds habitually and a proximate action. Perhaps that shares features of more generally acting proximately while holding a more remote end,

If this is the case, and I believe that it is, then we can speak of habitual ordering not only to God but also to other habitually held ends. Consider a person who could habitually order a choice of meal toward the further end of good eating to which he is ordered by temperance, when in fact the meal at hand is not actually-2 temperate. The act would be habitually ordered in that the person still holds the end of temperance and it causally influences his choice of meal, even if the proximate act is not actually-2 ordered. It would parameter the act, in a manner appearing like negative causality. In his brief discussion of decrease in habit, which (reminiscent of Jensen's work) can happen through "ignorance, passion, or choice," Thomas notes that a habit can diminish in several ways.⁹⁵ One can act against the habit, or cease to act in accord with the habit.⁹⁶ One can also act in a manner that is still virtuous but with less intensity.⁹⁷ Any of these ways of acting could be habitually ordered.

The reference here to Thomas's work on growth or decrease in habit indicates a major benefit of the account of habitual ordering offered here. A whole slew of texts previously not discussed in the context of habitual ordering, since Thomas mainly uses that term with venial sin or in reference to 1 Corinthians 10:31, come into play. This observation is a fitting way to conclude, since it indicates how much further work there is to be done based on this account of habitual ordering. Rather than some sly distinction to accommodate a seeming inconsistency in Thomas's various claims on acting toward one's last end and the possibility of venial sin, habitual ordering is way to address the real causal impact of charity on the actions of a person in a state of grace, as well as possibly other virtues, while also recognizing a person's freedom to act in a manner not conducive to the end held in habit. Much work is left to be done to assess this account of habitual ordering and, in light of that assessment, to address these three conclusions regarding habitual ordering. N.V

but those are not addressed here.

⁹⁵ For these internal causes of decrease in virtue, see *ST* I-II, q. 53, a. 1. For Jensen's extensive analysis of these internal causes of sin, see *Sin*, 142–93.

⁹⁶ *ST* I-II, q. 53, a. 1, and q. 53, a. 3, respectively.

⁹⁷ See *ST* I-II, q. 52, a. 3.