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Ars Disputandi

Ordnung der Gefühle: Studien zum Begriff des habitus

2/2002

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This book is the author's habilitation at the Philosophical Faculty of the University of Regensburg. The author is Privatdozent at that university and teaches philosophical anthropology at the Forschungsinstitut für Philosphie in Hannover. His dissertation - examined by Robert Spaemann at the University of München - is: *Jacques Maritain. Eine Einführung in Leben und Werk*, (Politik- und kommunikationswissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der Görres-Gesellschaft 10), Paderborn/München/Wien/Zürich: Schöningh, 1992. The background and tradition Nickl comes from is so called 'Neo-Aristotelianism' as represented by Spaemann.

Nickl's study *Ordnung der Gefühle: Studien zum Begriff des habitus* consists of seven parts: first, an introduction (1ff), secondly, the theory of 'habitus' in Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas (19ff), thirdly, the downplay of the 'habitus'-concept in Scotus and Ockham (55ff), fourthly, its critique and vain leave-taking in Luther and Descartes (117ff), fifthly, the renaissance of the idea of 'habitus' in Schiller and Kierkegaard (145ff), sixthly, an outlook on the twentieth century (i.e., Gehlen and Bourdieu) (207ff), seventhly and lastly, a short résumé (221f).

A preliminary remark is in order: Nickl insists on the distinction between 'habitus' and 'habit' (Gewohnheit) (1ff, 214), to distinguish for example the musician (habitus) from mere routines in everyday-life (habits). The marking difference may be that the concept of 'habitus' stands for actions performed by routine and 'with the soul' ('mit ganzer Seele'), whereas 'habit' stands for a gradually increasing tendency of behaviour—even if in the end the disctinction remains somewhat unclear. Perhaps it could be better explained in pragmatistic categories (i.e. by Peirce and James etc., see 17).

1. The introduction addresses the contemporary critique of any concept of 'habitus', for example in consequentialism or Habermas, and gives a rough sketch of the revival of 'virtue' and 'passion' as background of the recent tendency towards a rehabilitation of the concept of 'habitus'.

2a. The second part discusses Aristotle's concept of 'habitus' as 'that, what makes us, to behave right or wrong in regard to our passions' (NE 1105b), i.e. as an attitude of the soul toward its passions and its body (23). That is why in his interpretation of Aristotle, Nickl concentrates on the practical, not the technical aspect of 'habitus' (on the musician, not on the architect, 30, 32). The practical aspect is interpreted as 'disposition' ('Stimmung', 44f: dispositio has not the endurance of habitus) of the whole of body and soul or passion and spirit, acquired by practice. In spite of the question of passions and non-intentionality of habitus, Nickl accepts Aristotle's principle of 'being is accomplished in activity' (31, 33, by 'energeia'). That is why the passive affects are to be transformed into active ones (34)—which is not beyond dispute. At least, 'habitus' as *hexis* is always a *methexis* of God, to become one with oneself.

2b. This is exactly the issue at stake when Nickl discusses Aquinas' ethics of 'habitus'. The 'habitus' is the perfection of human nature (s.th. $I^{ae}II^{ae}$ q. 49-54) and implies an integration of passions as the aim of virtues (q. 22-48). If one is acting 'cum passione' (not 'ex passione', 39f), the virtue will be coextensive with the passion. The theological example is the passion of Christ, including the Aristotelian stress on the free activity behind his pain (because passion is - Nickl says, following Aquinas - not passivity). Nickl's shorthand for this correlation is: 'Nihil est in virtute, quod non fuerit in passionibus, vel quod non redundet in passiones' (43). Consequently, if and only if the passions (and sensibility) are controlled and governed by reason, they are fruitful and part of the virtue. Hence, the title of the study *Ordnung der Gefühle* originates in Nickl's interpretation of Aquinas. But this strong hierachy of passions is a reduction to an order of rational activity, which divides the passions in 'good' and 'bad' ones according to their rationality. Here, questions arise, for example about the division of passions in Christ or about the primacy of activity as such.

Beyond Aristotle, Aquinas asks for a substantial quality of the habitus, in order to be able to conceptualise the habitual participation in divine grace (44ff). There, Aquinas leaves his philosophical presuppositions and traces out an order of habitus: of the body (health and beauty), of virtues, and finally of grace, and in correspondence of virtues (moral, the cardinal virtues, the infused moral and the theological ones) with the connexio virtutum (by the habitus of prudentia). The final stability of habitus is coming from God's infusion of grace. Habitus becomes the main medium or integrative form of passions and reason like between nature and grace or time and eternity (51ff).

3a. Scotus (55ff) locates the passions not in the sensible but in the rational appetitive part of the soul, in the will, because the angels as well are full of passions. Consequently, sensibility becomes less important and the mediating function of habitus is lost. Instead it is no longer the integration of sensibility and virtue, but it is virtue itself located in the will, and moral virtue lacks sensibility. So sin is not a question of sensibility, but it is without relevance for the good as well. Nickl suggests that Scotus' concept of freedom forces him to an underestimation of the habitus, because the willing will (regulated by habitus) is not free and habitus is not a principle of freedom. Virtue is no longer a way of integration of reason and sensibility, but 'operari per conformitatem ad rationem rectam' (65). Habitus becomes a mere instrument of reason, and no way of mediation between nature and grace (68f). Only as a second cause its relevance is accepted, but its significance is played down. Theologically however, a change of perspectives occurs: in the meritorious act humans are accepted by God primarily because of their habitus of caritas and only secondly because of their free will and act (72). However, that is not necessary given God's potentia absoluta (acceptance is not a matter of necessity). Nickl's attitude is clear, when he summarizes: that may be beautiful for God's freedom, but not for humans becoming crazy about this freedom (74). The missing link between grace and acceptation means a hiatus between creation and salvation (76), against Aquinas and Nickl. The dominance of freedom and act over habitus provokes the question, whether habitus could be a (also theologically) relevant antagonist, but Nickl does not enter into that discussion.

Although Nickl's Scotus-interpretation deals with only a small part of Scotus' thought, he tries to alleviate this problem with an excursus about highest habitus and highest act (77ff) showing how the theme of Aristotelian and Thomistic habitus is transformed beyond the concept 'habitus' itself: in the Augustinian-franciscan tradition the fruitio is a model of human wholeness. While in Aquinas man is always sensibly participating in freedom, in Scotus it is just freedom letting sensibility

participate in it. It is the integration of intellectus and voluntas paradigmatically (in heaven) in the fruitio (95f).

3b. In his discussion of Ockham Nickl shows how the concept of habitus gradually disappeared (96ff). The change of the (with 'habitus' connected) concepts of time, movement, and nature may be held responsible for this process, or in general the disappearance of Aristotelian (meta)physics. In combination with the razor, the habitus seems to be an unnecessary concept (with strong and strange critique by Nickl: 'The virtue-pill substitutes the habitus', 111). Even if he uses parts of traditional habitus-theory, theologically it is obsolete (112f).

4a. Out of question is - for Nickl - the irrelevance of habitus in Luther's theology, which rejects it polemically (118ff) along with all Aristotelianism and scholasticism. Nevertheless, Nickl - in a philosophical habilitation! - asks, what changes in man by justification, or what is meant by 'simul iustus et peccator' (121ff, 177). The crucial 'paradigm shift' is, that justification (and faith) are no longer a quality (with habitus) but a new relation (due to Luther's maxim 'fides facit personam'). That is why grace is not only a habitus infusus but much more, entirely renewing the human personality. Here, Nickl's interpretation, according to which the sinner is not really changed by its new relationship, underestimates the relation of being both sinner and justified. Moreover, he criticises Luther's theology for being dominated by the idea of potentia absoluta, being constructed from a God's eye point of view and for rendering a real relation to God unthinkable (123, 126, 131). These topics, already known since the council of Trent, underestimate the theologia crucis, dominated by a loving God, constructed by the experience of iustitia passiva in a real relation of faith. But in the question of effects or manifestations of justification in Christian life, Nickl feels at home again, especially when discussing the relevance of 'love' and the question of Christian ethics in Luther (130ff). In this regard he recommends the use of the 'habitus'-concept—that this would be quite incompatible with an ontology, anthropology and theology founded upon the notion of relationship.

4b. Descartes avoids the concept of habitus (133ff, 142) and replaces it by the 'mathesis universalis', because he is interested in the distinctio of spirit and body, not in the connection. In his ethics, Descartes focusses on the development of a moral technique. Nickl reports the critique of the theologians Gisbert Voetius (137f) and Jacob Revius (138f) on Descartes and the rediscovery of 'habitude' (i.e. more the habit than the habitus, 139ff) in the later Descartes of 'Les Passions de l'Âme'.

5a. In his discussion of modernity Nickl no longer looks for the concept but for the theme or problem of 'habitus'—and finds it in Schiller and Kierkegaard as a 'renaissance of the idea of habitus' (145ff). Schiller's main idea of 'kalokagathia' motivates his critique of Kant and reconceptualizes the idea of habitus as freedom. Nickl explores the background behind this idea in Schiller, i.e. Aristotle's concept of 'physis' as freedom (as an antique solution of the problem of nature and freedom, against Kant). Furthermore, Nickl shows the 'desincarnation' of reason in Kant, in order to locate Schiller's concept of morality in the 'Kallias-letters' (151ff), where he gives a variation of the parable of the Samaritan (Lk 10,29ff) to show how duty becomes nature, and morality and freedom are reconciled with beauty. This antique or renaissance harmony of reason and sensibility avoids any Kantian dualism (or pretends so). This idea is already to be found in Schiller's medical dissertation (157f) and is explained at greater length in 'About grace and dignity' (159ff) and 'About the aesthetical education of man' (164ff). The 'beautiful soul' is the ground of an anti-Kantian anthropology, by which Schiller intends to undo the estrangement of reason and sensibility (finally in the mediation of the forces of matter and form in the force of play, 167). Nickl sees a secularisation of the habitus of grace in the beautiful soul (with reference to Hegel's burial of the Romantics, 170ff), but he seems to see a living option in Schiller's anthropology against the 'desincarnation of reason' in Kant (179).

5b. In Kierkegaard Nickl finds a further development of the theme of habitus in conversation with modernity (178ff). Far from a conceptual approach (like 'Begriffsgeschichte') Nickl asks for a functional (and semantic) equivalent, similar to his interpretation of Schiller. In 'Either-Or', Kierkegaard develops his reconciliation of reason and passions on the example of form of life or wedlock (180ff). To become a self needs a choice by which the initially negated aesthetics comes back as 'brightness of the good'. In this way (in the 'Closed unscientific Postscript', 187ff) the passions are transformed by reflection, while reflection itself is deeply affected by them. The guiding example for Kierkegaard is the religious passion and his thesis 'that Christianity wants to magnify passion to its extremes; but passion really is subjectivity' (190). Nickl himself sees Kierkegaard's theory of passions nearer to Scotus than to Thomas (as passiones spirituales). The magnification of reflection by passion culminates in the paradox of religiosity, i.e. beyond Nickl's (moral-)philosophical horizon. But he is of the opinion that in Kierkegaard passions function parallel to the habitus as acquired qualities—not as mere immediacy (198ff). The way of life of this (Christian!) passion according to Kierkegaard looks just like 'Philistine' ('spießbürgerlich', 200ff). But this ordinary appearance of christian everyday-life is the surface of the existential and basic

tension of the finite and the infinite. In this way the concept of habitus is transformed into a tension (hence it becomes a relation in the self and to the infinite). But of course this interpretation of Kierkegaard's analysis of the self in regard to the concept of habitus is only one possible way in which this relation could be constructed. It shows how illuminating Nickl's focus upon the history of a 'problem' and not only a mere 'concept' can be—he works 'problemgeschichtlich' and not only 'begriffsgeschichtlich'.

6. Finally, Nickl gives an outlook on the 20th century with a discussion of Arnold Gehlen and Pierre Bourdieu (207ff). Nickl holds the view that the question behind the habitus-concept and behind the theory of institutions in Gehlen is the same, namely, how man, in spite of the lack of instincts and their irrational presence may perform stable actions (207ff). Man finds relief for this difficulty by creating institutions as 'Systems of distributed habits' (207, not habitus!). Because habits are a reductive version of habitus, Nickl says that institutions cannot replace the latter. But in modern times it is replaced by technology. While habits are conducive to survival, habitus aims at success in life (or good life); while the former is just extrinsic the latter is intrinsic (motivation). That is why the danger of Gehlen's theory is that institutions receive man. Only in asceticism human beings come to themselves with all their passions.

Bourdieu ('Habitus as mediation between structure and practice' in: To the sociology of symbolic forms) reconceptualizes habitus with Chomsky as 'System of internal models', which is acquired by the individual and mediates his practice with the 'outer' structures. By this concept Bourdieu analyses the 'styles of life' for example in 'La distinction'.

7. Nickl provides a short recapitulation of his investigation: No human practise can do without 'habitus'—especially in relation to ethics. While 'the good' is not well defined by universalisation, there is the need for a concept with the aspect of 'beauty' and the respect to 'the whole human being' with all its passions. That is the rough problem that motivated Nickl to go back to the Aristotelian and Thomistic concept of 'habitus'. His idea is that even today, 'habitus' could function as a mediation and transformation of sensibility (Sinnlichkeit) and reason (Vernunft), participating in one another on the one hand, and as incarnation of spirit on the other. But the problem of the approach (like the practical problem) remains: such an incarnation and participation of sensibility and reason cannot be intended, but 'just happens' indirectly.

One may doubt whether a Neo-Aristotelian approach to ethics is a fruitful endeavour, especially in catholic moral philosophy. However, beyond this 'struggle of schools' the problem of a correlation or mediation of reason and sensibility is quite up to date, for example even in the critical ethics of Ernst Tugendhat, in the revival of Cassirer's theory of culture, in the renaissance of renaissance-philosophy or in the 'new' or 'radical' phenomenology. Even if the question remains how plausible the recourse to Aristotle, Thomas and Schiller may be today and despite of the danger of mere retrogression, the awareness of the indicated problem and the renewed 'work on anthropology' is quite convincing. It is remarkable as well that in Nickl's perspective, theological anthropology is worth to be discussed and respected, although he tends to underestimate the relevance of the theological ground of Christian anthropology and interprets it more or less 'remoto deo'—which is a failure. Only his too superficial treatment of nominalism and protestant theology is a bit disappointing.