

Efforts Attempted by Adults to Correct Vices

The Problem of Habituation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 2

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is the meaning and significance of habit formation, or habituation, in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*. According to Aristotle, ethics is an intellectual activity that helps an individual become a good person. Moreover, habituation is essential for becoming a good person. Aristotle believes that habituation, which helps us become good people, is possible by making "actions in accordance with virtues" our habits. Habituation is a keystone concept in Aristotle's ethics.

However, contrary to the importance given to the concept of habituation, Aristotle's remarks on habituation are curiously poor and fragmentary. Several researchers have been baffled by this contradiction and have produced different perplexing interpretations.

This paper attempts to shed light on Aristotle's views on the path to virtue from a new perspective by clarifying three points:

1. According to Aristotle, habituation is something that adults with life experience should attempt to overcome their vices.
2. The "action" that constitutes the substance of habituation is the trial and error through which the learner achieves his or her own "middle point" (i.e., virtue), without following ready-made examples.
3. The reason Aristotle did not offer an in-depth explanation of this issue is that the hard work of habituation is already a "virtuous" and "noble" action in and of itself.

Keywords: Aristotle, habituation, habit, virtue, ethics

1. Ethics as a theory of the acquisition of states

Aristotle gives ethics the status of a branch of political science. According to him, political science is “the most authoritative science, the highest master science” (1094a30) because it “lays down which of the sciences there should be in cities, and which each class of person should learn and up to what level”^[1]. Political science not only includes “legislative science” as knowledge about the law but also includes “deliberative (science)” as the art of deciding individual and concrete policies and “juridical science” as the art of trial (1141b27-35). It further includes “military science,” “domestic economy,” and “rhetoric” (1094b1-3). According to Aristotle, “Since political science employs the other sciences, and also lays down laws about what we should do and refrain from, its end will include the end of the others, and will therefore be the human good” (1094b4-7).

Ethics is a field of study that thematizes the “human good,” which political science deals with in the context of the life of the individual; in this sense, ethics is “a kind of political science” (1094b12).

According to Aristotle, the goal of ethics is not to elucidate the meaning of virtue but to help people become good: for him, moral philosophy must essentially serve a practical agenda (1095a5). He says:

The branch of philosophy we are dealing with at present is not purely theoretical like the others because it is not to acquire knowledge that we are considering what virtue is, but to become good people – otherwise, there would be no point in it. So we must consider the matter of our actions, and in particular how they should be performed, since, as we have said, they are responsible for our states developing in one way or another. (1103b27)

The above passage not only explains that the search for moral philosophy should proceed from the distant view of becoming a good person but also reveals three crucial facts: (a), (b), and (c).

First, (a), the task of becoming a good person leads us to consider the “actions” that are “responsible for our states developing.” According to *Categories*, “state”

(*hexis*) is the species of “quality” as a category. Moreover, “state” is a persistent attribute, distinct from “disposition” (*diathesis*), which is a temporary property (8b25-9a15), and the representative of the human state is “virtue” (and, its opposite, “vice”). For Aristotle, virtue is the best state reflected in the action to be performed.

Second, (b), being a good person is nothing more than the “state” acquiring a certain character. Furthermore, what is “responsible for” that is the actions, which are to be explored in considering “how they should be performed.” Of course, when Aristotle uses the word “state,” he has virtue in mind as the best state, not state in general.

Note that (b.1) in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of virtues: “intellectual” virtues and virtues “of character.” The former is states related to thought or judgment, such as “wisdom,” “judgment,” and “practical wisdom;” on the other hand, virtues “of character” refer to virtues in the everyday sense of the word, such as “generosity” and “temperance” (1103a4-11)^[2].

Thus, (b.2), it follows that the states developed “in one way or another” are virtues of character.

Third, (c), if we follow the passage quoted above, it is the action that is “responsible for” acquiring virtues of character, and it is the task of ethics to question this type of action.

Moreover, (c.1), we acquire intellectual virtues by “teaching,” while virtues of character are attained as “a result of habituation” (1103a15).

Thus, (c.2), the task of ethics is to ask “the matter of our actions,” that is, “how they should be performed.” To ask this question is to ask about the means of acquiring virtues of character, and to ask the means of acquiring virtues of character is to ask about the substance of habituation.

The above passage reveals that for Aristotle, ethics is not a description of unqualified “actions” in general; instead, it has as its mission the description of actions that belong to habituation, which targets the acquisition of states.

Therefore, regardless of the nature of actions, they are the subject of ethics only insofar as they share the same essence as actions that are supposed to belong to habituation. In other words, we can think of Aristotle’s ethics as, first and foremost, an attempt to elucidate the meaning of habituation to be a good person.

2. Aporia in interpretation

Habituation is the process of acquiring virtues as states, and Aristotle's ethics is an attempt to elucidate its meaning. Insofar as Aristotle's ethics is an attempt to elucidate the meaning of habituation, the reader of *Nicomachean Ethics* is left with the question of under whom, on what basis, toward what, and in what manner habituation is performed, and one must not expect Aristotle to offer a detailed explanation.

Although habituation is the keystone of ethics, strangely enough, no in-depth account of it can be found in Aristotle's work. Considering the importance he ascribes to this concept, the reader can only find a comically disproportionate number of references to this concept, at least in terms of quantity.

Moreover, in terms of quality, none of these mentions seem to give the reader sufficient clues to an understanding of the meaning of habituation. This is because they are, on the surface, merely tedious repetitions of the same assertion as the following: "What is necessary to acquire virtues of character and to become a virtuous person is first and foremost habituation, and habituation is the practical repetition of similar actions on the basis of virtue." One gets the impression that Aristotle's text merely expresses this view repeatedly using similar language. In Aristotle's statements concerning the habituation necessary for acquiring virtue and becoming a good person, it is not easy to find insight unique to him.

Is Aristotle's view on the theme of habituation all about the fact that repetition of actions is a necessary and sufficient condition for acquiring virtues? Indeed, those who have acquired a certain state as "a result of habituation" will always repeat actions of a similar nature based on this state. As Aristotle points out, this is what the word "habit" (*ethos*) means.

However, just because this is true, it does not mean that the opposite is also true. In other words, performing the same action repeatedly on every occasion is not a necessary condition (*conditio sine qua non*) for acquiring a certain state.

Aristotle only emphasizes, again and again, that repetition of the same type of action creates habits, which in turn form states. This fact has puzzled researchers and has given birth to different perplexing interpretations that take their cue from fragmentary statements.

Indeed, suppose Aristotle's final view on the matter is that habituation is the

repeated effort of simple practice and is a necessary and sufficient condition for acquiring virtues. In that case, the following aporia ((1) (2)), which is evident to all, is admitted here. It is this aporia that has been confusing readers of *Nicomachean Ethics*.

- (1) The specific situations we face in everyday life are very different; therefore, how we demonstrate virtues in each situation is also different ^[3].
- (2) Thus, it is difficult for those who do not have virtue to repeat actions that produce virtue in accordance with specific situations. In fact, it must be impossible even to properly recognize any action as being in accordance with any virtues ^[4].
A few researchers have pointed out the following points ((3) and (4)) based on this aporia.
- (3) On the one hand, it is impossible for one who has not acquired any virtues beforehand, or one who does not know what courage, justice, and temperance are, to be able to define what he or she should aim for. Therefore, it is impossible to carry out an action based on virtue; naturally, it is impossible even to begin repetitive practice.
- (4) On the other hand, those who know what they should aim for and are therefore capable of performing virtue-based actions do not need to make an effort to establish the habit from the beginning because they already have the virtue. Such an expectation is also relatively easy to make.

Researchers have repeatedly tried to resolve or avoid the “chicken or the egg” aporia concerning the Aristotelian concept of habituation.

In the past, researchers have generally shared roughly the same assumption while thematically addressing the issue of Aristotle’s concept of habituation and interpreting Aristotle’s texts based on these assumptions to resolve or avoid the aporia. The dominant assumption in their interpretations has been that action in accordance with virtues produces the ability or the desire to learn. The assumption on which their interpretations are based is as follows.

The most dominant interpretation of the problem of habituation in Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* is the one proposed by Miles Burnyeat. He understands that an individual’s learning capacity is activated within the habit-acquirer, inspired by practice. Burnyeat opines that within the habit-acquirer, some learning capacities are activated, inspired by practice, and names these “cognitive power” (Burnyeat 1980 72).

Aristotle states that “mechanical and repetitive practice is a necessary and sufficient condition for the acquisition of virtue.” If one dismisses this as a bankrupt doctrine, then it is a different story. Otherwise, the prevailing interpretation of Aristotle’s concept of habituation is of the type that can be named, to borrow Burnyeat’s expression, “cognitive powers theory,”^[5] and its development as “imitation theory”^[6].

Indeed, from a superficial point of view, unless this aporia is resolved, the attempt of ethics to explain the habituation required to be a good person becomes invalid. Unfortunately, attempts to resolve this aporia have not always succeeded fundamentally.

3. The distinction between actions “in accordance with virtues” and those “which produce” virtue

If we eliminate our preconceptions and truly understand Aristotle’s words, we can see that there is no such thing as an aporia in Aristotle’s view of the problem of habituation. Specifically, the following three points (3.1., 3.2., and 3.3.) become apparent by taking Aristotle’s text as a clue and working to ascertain under whom, on what basis, toward what, and in what manner habituation is performed.

3.1. Aristotle had in mind not the education of children and youth lacking life experience but the cure for the vices that afflict adults.

3.1.1. Habituation is the task of adults with life experience.

In thematizing habituation as a topic of ethics, Aristotle envisioned treating or correcting the vices afflicting adults with life experience.

Many attempts to find and resolve the circularity in Aristotle’s description of habituation have since been made. Burnyeat implicitly shared the common assumption that Aristotle had the education of children and youth in mind when he addressed this issue^[7]. Despite the conflicting details in their interpretations, there is no significant difference between the various interpretations of Aristotle’s views on habituation because of his position on the moral education of children and youth.

However, such interpretations, which presuppose an implicit understanding, are not only unnatural and inappropriate but also the initial cause of the emergence of the aporia discussed above. Suppose we ignore for the moment the unqualified

“imposition of behavior,” including “discipline”^[8]. In such a case, we must consider that, for Aristotle, habituation as an issue of ethics is a task undertaken by adults who have already gained a certain amount of experience to cure or correct their vices. The situation in which a child or a young person with no life experience acquires virtues through habituation, especially those of character, is not envisioned from the outset^[9]. The child or the young person with no life experience is not the only one who can be trained in moral virtues.

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Vol. 1, Chapter 3, we find the following passage:

This is why a young person is not fitted to hear lectures on political science, since our discussions begin from and concern the actions of life, and of these he has no experience. (1095a3–4)

The readers or learners Aristotle has in mind for *Nicomachean Ethics*, where habituation is discussed with the scheme of ethics, are not children or youth but adults who have already gained a certain amount of life experience and who have encountered various problems in life and have outgrown juvenility in character, that is, “those who follow reason both shaping their desires and in acting” (1095a10). This point is made clear by the fact that Aristotle does not recognize “reason” in children and animals.

Furthermore, Aristotle says:

This is why anyone who is going to be a competent student in the spheres of what is noble and what is just – in a word, politics – must be brought up well in his habits. For the first principle is the belief *that*^[10] something is the case, and if this is sufficiently clear, he will not need to the reason *why* as well. (1095b3-5)

According to Aristotle, the “brought up well” are those who already have such a starting point or who can easily acquire it (1095b8)^[11]. To reiterate, it is only adults with a certain amount of experience concerning the actions in their lives that require habituation and who can acquire and demonstrate their states as virtues through habit^[12].

3.1.2. Habituation as a cure for/correction of vice and “the actions which produce” virtue

The acquisition of new states through habituation becomes problematic with adults who have gained experience concerning actions in life, which is not the case with children and youth. In other words, with adults, the acquisition of favorable states does not start from a “tabula rasa:” habituation must be considered as a task undertaken by an adult who is already trapped in some vice to cure or correct the biased state that he or she has.

Aristotle names the actions that constitute the habitual effort to acquire a state as “actions which produce it (i.e., virtue)” (1105a15) and distinguishes them from “actions done in accordance with virtues” (1105a28) that reflect virtue as a state. Thus, by ascertaining the “action which produce” virtue, the reality of habituation should also consequently become clear.

Then, what are the “actions which produce” virtue?

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Vol. 2, Chapter 9, Aristotle argues that “in each case,” it is “hard to find the middle point” (1109a24). In other words, it is difficult to behave appropriately under concrete circumstances. He further adds:

So the person who is aiming at the mean must first steer away from the extreme that is in greater opposition to it, as Calypso advised:

Beyond this spray and swell keep your ship.

For one of the extremes is a greater missing of the mark, the other less so; and since hitting the mean is extremely hard, we must take the next best course, as they say, and choose the lesser of two evils. This will be done best in the way we are suggesting. (1109a30-36)

It would be wrong to assume that Aristotle’s advice to keep away from extremes is directed toward children and youth. Instead, it is appropriate to regard it as directed toward adults who are already trapped in one of the two extremes that oppose virtue as intermediate.

As mentioned previously, of the interpretations that have been put forward on the question of habituation, the most standard is arguably that of Burnyeat, who believes that the goal of habituation is to be able to enjoy actions in accordance with virtues (Burnyeat1980, 78ff.). Burnyeat even claims that habituation is a kind of

enjoyment for those who practice it.

He (= Aristotle) is addressing to someone who already wants and enjoys virtuous action and needs to see this aspect of his life in a deeper perspective. (Burnyeat 1980, 81)

Indeed, an audience of ethics needs to understand that actions in accordance with virtues are worthy of being enjoyed as such and are admirable and desirable. Otherwise, no one would be motivated to correct his or her little tendencies. In this sense, Burnyeat's understanding seems to be accurate. However, it can also be argued that habit formation itself, as a path to virtue, is not pleasurable. The effort to acquire a new state does not give us present enjoyment but, at best, the anticipation of future enjoyment or the pleasure of being closer to a state in which we can enjoy the action.

While an adult afflicted with a vice may be guided toward the acquisition of a state by the anticipation of future enjoyment that should follow when the new state is acquired, it is natural to think of habituation as the opposite of enjoyment, that is, as essentially painful. This is because insofar as habit formation is a cure for vice, it must be a painful process of struggling against one's current undesirable states, overcoming them, and acquiring the opposite states anew. In other words, habituation is voluntary hard work performed with the longing for future pleasure and enjoyment^[13]. Aristotle says:

Again, if the virtues are to do with actions and situations of being affected, and pleasure and pain follow from every action and situation of being affected, then this is another reason why virtue will be concerned with pleasures and pains.

The fact that punishment is based on pleasure and pain is further evidence of their relevance; for punishment is a kind of cure, and cures by their nature are effected by contraries. (1104b15)

As envisioned by Aristotle, habituation is a process of "self-treatment," "self-overcoming," and possibly "self-punishment," in which we individually eliminate the bias in our actions or views and replace it with a new state. In this process, we

cannot avoid inflicting pain on ourselves. Here is a concrete example:

Suppose a person has been indiscriminately choosing associates based on their wealth for many years, and as a result, this has become his/her state. (This means that the person only favors wealthy acquaintances and shuns poor ones.) Of course, this state must be classified as a vice in the Aristotelian sense. According to the common sense of a modern mature and stable society, the value of a person is not determined by his or her property (alone), and therefore, it is morally repugnant to openly estimate the value of an individual based only on his or her property.

This person must have this particular vice and be aware that it is a vice. In other words, he/she must be well aware that his/her viewpoint is biased, and this awareness must cause him/her pain or discomfort. This person can assume various causes for his/her distress or discomfort, but the biggest one would be that he/she has to hide this vice from an unspecified number of people and disguise his/her state each time he/she does so.

In this case, the person decides to change his/her framework of value evaluation in order to escape the pain or discomfort of pretending for the time being; this is the beginning of self-treatment as habituation.

On the one hand, the ultimate goal of his/her efforts, generally speaking, seems to be to have the ability to treat the person in front of him/her fairly, regardless of whether the person is rich or poor. This is because, in today's society, virtue as the "middle point" demands this kind of behavior from every person.

On the other hand, however, he/she has not yet discovered the middle point that is appropriate for him/her at the beginning: that is, at this point, although he/she understands the general principle described above (i.e., approximately what behavior is praiseworthy in society), he/she has not yet found the right middle point in terms of how to behave. Therefore, he/she will continue trying to find his/her middle point by gradually closing the gap between his/her current situation and the example in each concrete situation. However, he/she still needs to learn how to properly reflect this principle into reality.

Such efforts are the substance of habituation, or what Aristotle expresses as "like states arise like activities" (1103b21).

Of course, engaging in such an endeavor implies a total denial of the given particular states that have been shaped in his/her life. When he/she meets someone face to face and exchanges words with the person, he/she must find the appropriate

way to treat the person, always paying attention to what he/she says and does so that his/her attitude does not change depending on whether the person is rich or poor and so that he/she does not look down on the poor^[14]. This will be an excruciating effort for the person even though it is done with a longing for the pleasures that the new state may offer in the future. It is this kind of effort that Aristotle seems to envision when he speaks of habituation. It is appropriate to understand Aristotle's words on habituation as a reference to the painful self-medication of overcoming vices acquired through life experience.

If we assume the above understanding, it seems clear that it is the "pseudo-problem" that has been the focus of traditional interpretations, such as "how to go from the repetition of a simple practice to the understanding of the reason for that practice."

Aristotle's conception of the individual making the effort to acquire virtue through habituation is an adult who fulfills the following criteria: adults who have had several experiences in their lives, who are aware of their own bias (being trapped in a vice), who understand that overcoming this bias is inevitable to live well, and who are prepared to treat and correct this bias. What Aristotle has in mind when he speaks of habituation is the self-treatment effort of such an adult to overcome vices and discover in individual situations the virtue as the middle point.

3.2. The need for exemplars is suggested.

Aristotle does not advocate a haphazard practice of acquiring virtue. Aristotle's text indicates that some sort of example is necessary for habituation. There are many possible exemplars, but the one that most certainly plays the role of an exemplar—if nothing else—is the law. Aristotle believes that the legislator and the law in the hands of the legislator provide an example for adults attempting to overcome vice. Aristotle offers the following formulation:

What happens in cities bears this out as well, because legislators make the citizens good by habituating them, and this is what every legislator intends. Those who do not do it well miss their target; and it is in this respect that a good political system differs from a bad one. (1103b3-5)

The law exemplifies, in a very general way, what a praiseworthy act looks like.

Aristotle says:

... since from building well, people will be good builders, from building badly, bad builders. If this were not so, there would have been no need of a person to teach them, but they would all have been born good or bad at their skill. (1103b15) ^[15]

At the beginning of the first chapter of the second volume of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle argues that the virtues of character arise through “a result of habituation” (1103a18) and, therefore, do not arise “in us by nature” (1103a19). Aristotle further adds:

For nothing natural can be made to behave differently by habituation. For example, a stone that naturally falls downwards could not be made by habituation to rise upwards, not even if one tried to habituate it by throwing it up ten thousand times; nor can fire be habituated to burn downwards, nor anything else that naturally behaves in one way be habituated to behave differently. So virtues arise in us neither by nature nor contrary to nature, but nature gives us the capacity to acquire them, and completion comes through habituation. (1103a25)

Many scholars cite this passage as evidence of Aristotle’s belief that the virtues of character as a kind of state are acquired by simple repetition. However, such an interpretation of the above passage is incorrect. In the above passage, Aristotle is trying to convey that, unlike the movement of stones, certain aspects of human behavior (i.e., those based on “reason”) can be habituated and that there is room for the formation of states according to one’s own “choice” and “in our power” (*eph’hemin*, 1111b30 et passim). To read this passage to mean that repetitive imitation is a necessary and sufficient condition for the formation of states seems like a forced interpretation.

3.3. The goal of habituation is to experientially “learn” what is good for the community.

When Aristotle speaks of habituation as a means to acquire virtue, he envisions

a self-healing effort by an adult who is aware of his or her vices to eliminate them and acquire a new state. In this effort, he/she refers to the law and other examples of what is desirable under specific circumstances (i.e., the community). In this endeavor, the person must find what he/she considers desirable (i.e., the middle point) in each case by looking for it under specific circumstances, referring to various examples, including the law.

In the first chapter of the second volume of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle, overlapping technology with virtue, says:

Virtues, however, we acquire by first exercising them. The same is true with skills, since what we need to learn before doing, we learn by doing; for example, we become builders by building, and lyre-players by playing the lyre. So too we become just by doing just actions, temperate by temperate actions, and courageous by courageous actions. (1103a31-33)

The goal of habituation is the acquisition of virtue, which is a necessary trait for being a good person. The goal for one who undertakes the hard work of habituation is not merely to “do” something but be able to do something through it, that is, to “learn,” and to “learn” is to discover the middle point. In other words, it is to empirically understand how to behave in a specific situation to demonstrate virtue.

More concretely, it is as follows: to learn is (a) to predict, in one’s experience within the community, under what circumstances and in what manner others will evaluate one as a person who possesses the virtue that one seeks to acquire, (b) to test this prediction courageously in the field, and (c) to discover his/her own “right” middle point that is just right for him/her and for the community to which he/she belongs, while being praised, criticized, or embarrassed by those around him/her.

Acquiring virtue does not mean that a person possessing virtue is perfectly capable of behaving in the same way. It also does not mean that everyone in the same situation can make the same moral judgment all’ unisono. Virtue, as a state acquired through habituation, should be thought of as something that enables each person to freely shoot for the middle point that he or she has discovered in his or her own way, based on his or her social position, experience, and character, and thereby realize “the human good” or the good for the community. In this sense, we can conclude that the reach of habituation for realizing action in accordance with virtues is not fixed.

4. Why Aristotle does not say much about habituation: conclusion

4.1. Habituation as a search for the next best

In *Nicomachean Ethics*, Vol. 2, Chapter 4, Aristotle identifies three signs that distinguish “actions in accordance with virtues” from others. They are: “with knowledge,” “from rational choice, and rational choice of the actions for their own sake,” and “from a firm and unshakable character” (1105a30-33).

Regarding the first of these three signs, Aristotle acknowledges that it is difficult to distinguish an action in accordance with virtues from others on this basis alone (1105b5). Indeed, even if a person carries out something with the awareness that he/she is performing a virtuous action, this awareness alone would make it difficult to recognize his/her action as being in accordance with virtues (i.e., if the specific means he/she employs are foolish and nonsensical).

On the contrary, concerning the two remaining signs, Aristotle emphasizes that they are “all-important” for being endowed with virtue. He further says that these conditions are “the ones that result from often doing just and temperate actions” (1105b4-5). In other words, habituation is effective in two ways: it enables us to choose and carry out some action as itself, and it helps us to be firm when acting.

For Aristotle, virtues such as justice, courage, and moderation are virtues and states (of character) in themselves. However, in addition to these, Aristotle also refers to the three “signs” mentioned above as a “certain state” in which the virtuous agent should act. He says these states are “the basis for just or moderate actions.”

According to Aristotle (1103b3-5), while the ultimate goal of habituation, as a whole, is to acquire virtue and become a “good person,” what it specifically targets—or rather, what is necessary for action in accordance with virtues to become possible—are the two states mentioned above.

The following points summarize what has been discussed so far:

- (1) On the one hand, habituation is a process of trial and error through which adults suffering from vice can correct their “bias” by relying on their concrete daily life experiences and thus discover their middle point. This can be achieved mainly by looking away from the moral “virtues” that the law prescribes in a general way.
- (2) On the other hand, by discovering the middle point, one can get rid of the “awkwardness” and “unreliability” that inevitably appear in the process

of trial and error and can act freely. In other words, it is the realization of “actions in accordance with virtues.”

Habituation is not a simple practice or imitation that aims to hit the middle point from the start. Instead, it is something like Odysseus' second sailing (1109a30), so to speak, a training in which one draws attention to one's weaknesses and overcomes them while moving in the opposite direction to which one's vices point.

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Notes

[1] All quotations from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* are from the version edited by Roger Crisp (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, Revised Edition, 2014). All quotations from Aristotle's other works are from *The Complete Works of Aristotle* (edited by Jonathan Barnes, The Revised Oxford Translation, two vols, Princeton, Bollingen Foundation 1984).

[2] At the end of the first volume of *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle makes a clear distinction

between “intellectual” virtues and virtues “of character.” However, actions in real life are not performed with the support of a single virtue. Instead, we must consider that virtuous actions are formed through the complex cooperation of a wide variety of customs, including virtues. At the very least, Aristotle believes that for virtues of character to be reflected in action and for action in accordance with virtues to be possible, one of the intellectual virtues, “practical wisdom,” must be united with it (1144b35).

- [3] Indeed, those who are said to be “of bad character” in the ordinary sense of the word are united in their state to improperly interpret behavior that, in many people’s eyes, is based on virtue. They assume, sometimes consciously and sometimes unconsciously, some other motive behind the individual’s behavior besides moral excellence.
- [4] Aristotle should have introduced the concept of “practical wisdom” as a state for “orienting,” that is, to explain the situation of exercising virtue in the right way under the right circumstances, and emphasized the necessity of this practical wisdom working together with virtues of character.

For example, he/she might interpret the courageous behavior of a heroic person in utilitarian terms as “a strategy to gain fame” or a “camouflage to conceal some unjust advantage.”

Of course, he/she would understand that this behavior is generally recognized as being based on “courage” (a virtue); in this sense, we can say that he/she knows what courage means.

Nevertheless, he/she dares to deny moral excellence and trivializes every heroic act he/she sees. He/she is trapped in a state where he/she cannot correctly discern individual concrete actions based on the virtues behind them.

Furthermore, as detailed in Aristotle’s text, it is such a person who is fit to engage in the exploration of moral philosophy: Aristotle’s supposed audience for ethics is the adult who has developed a fixed “custom” of being against virtue (i.e., vice), who is aware of the unfavorable effects of this state on his/her life and his/her way of looking at things, who is troubled by it, and who is determined to correct this distortion or bias.

- [5] If we limit our scope to the context of Aristotle’s politics and ethics, as we do in the text, it seems complicated to maintain such a position: first, the acquisition of habits through habituation is indeed realized through the performance of actions, but this is not realized by directly imitating the *virtue-based actions* of a person endowed with virtue; second, the person who attempts to acquire a habit does not become able to perform a corrective action based on his/her own “inner autonomy” but must rather gradually “tune” his/her action by observing the reactions of others around him/her, such as praise, blame, and embarrassment.

- [6] See note 15.

- [7] As far as I know, researchers, without exception, have interpreted Aristotle's words on habituation within the context of moral education, cf. Kerr 2011; Sherman 1999. I could not find any researcher who has thematized habituation without relating it to the moral education of children and youth.
- [8] Aristotle, in his *Politics*, Vol. I, Chapter 3, emphasizes that even if virtue is imprinted on the child by discipline, it is "not relative to himself alone" but "to the perfect man and to his teacher" (1260a30).
- [9] Since children have no "reason," they have nothing to do with the effort to acquire virtue or happiness (1100a3).
- [10] Traditionally, the meaning of the substantive clause "that something is the case" used by Aristotle in this passage has been understood to refer to the immediately preceding expression "the spheres of what is noble and what is just." In this paper, however, I do not limit the meaning of the clause to this but interpret it as an experience concerning "the actions of life" (1095a3), that is, life experience in general.
- [11] Burnyeat assumes that the starting point for this "that" clause is the knowledge of "what is noble and what is just" (Burnyeat 1980, 75ff.); however, this does not always seem appropriate. Yes, the learner has a vague understanding of what is noble and just; nevertheless, it is appropriate to assume that what he/she holds keenly and acutely is an awareness that he/she is neither noble nor just and that this must be corrected.
- [12] The expression "brought up well in his habits" can be understood as follows: One who has not acquired any good habits would naturally not think of becoming a good person by examining ethics and acquiring virtues or erasing vices. In this sense, it is necessary to have a variety of favorable states as a general framework. (That is, on the whole, it is at least necessary to be a "better person" beforehand.) However, a person who has acquired desirable states in all areas, that is, a morally perfect person, does not need to attend to ethics, so it is not incompatible with the claim that habituation is the correction of vice. Note that I do not go further into this issue, although I believe that the "human being who is perfect in terms of virtue" is a limited concept in the composition of Aristotle's ethics and cannot be real.
- [13] An attempt to reject Burnyeat's interpretation and show that habituation is distressing as such has already been made by Howard J. Curzer (Curzer 2002, 143-157). Curzer thinks that not only "actions which produce" virtue but also actions "in accordance with virtues" are painful; however, I disagree with him on this point: if Curzer's view that even actions "in accordance with virtues" are painful is valid, it would be incompatible with Aristotle's views on happiness and self-sufficiency in *Nicomachean Ethics*.
- [14] The essence of "the mean" is to behave "at the right time," "about the right things,"

“toward the right people,” “for the right end,” and “in the right way” (1106b20-23). The habituation that Aristotle envisages means the effort to search for this “right” in each case by looking for it under specific circumstances.

As noted in the text, this effort is also an effort to eradicate the undesirable states that have attached themselves to him/her and to override them with opposite states.

Of course, the person will have an intuitive choice based on his/her given state, but it is the erasure of this state that he/she is aiming for. Therefore, he/she should not trust his/her intuition: that is, at the beginning of his/her habituation effort, he/she is at a loss, without a guide to point him/her in the right direction. All he/she has is the principle, “Do not look down on the poor because they are poor.” He/she has no clue to determine what he/she should do to avoid looking down on the poor because of their poverty. Therefore, his/her behavior in the process of habituation is awkward and even in danger of being misguided.

Aristotle, taking “anger” as an example, says, “Admittedly, however, hitting it is difficult, especially in particular cases, since it is not easy to determine how one should be angry, with whom, for what reasons, and for how long; ...” (1109b14-16).

When he/she walks down the street and finds a vagrant sitting on the street, he/she learns that he is his/her classmate who is not allowed to participate in a school trip because he has “no money.” When some charitable organization asks him/her for a donation, he/she ponders each time and decides what to do. Then, as his/her choices are lauded by those around him/her or cause consternation, he/she checks to see if he/she has hit the middle point for him/her and adjusts his/her course as necessary.

- [15] Several researchers point out that there is an aspect of the effort to acquire virtue as a kind of “imitation,” and together, they emphasize that there is always an example to be assumed, an example to be imitated (Hampson 2019, Broadie 2020).

This point is significant since the effort to form a state cannot be realized by a person who exists in complete isolation, and the existence of “others” is built into the structure from the very beginning.

However, it does not necessarily follow that the exemplar of action in accordance with virtues, that is, the imitator, must be a “flesh-and-blood” moral agent, nor is it necessary to assume the vertical relationship that Hampson assumes between the habit-former and this exemplar.

Unlike *poiesis*, action (*praxis*) is not obedience to some rule. Even if we leave aside the question of what it means to “imitate” another person’s action, there is at least one problem with the framework of imitation that presupposes a vertical relationship. If we accept this framework, we must now answer a new question: How does one who seeks to acquire a state depart from this vertical ‘imitate-imitated’ relationship and become an

independent moral agent him- or herself?

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