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Cultivating Sentimental Dispositions Through Aristotelian Habituation

JAN STEUTEL AND BEN SPIECKER

The beliefs both that sentimental education is a vital part of moral education and that habituation is a vital part of sentimental education can be counted as being at the 'hard core' of the Aristotelian tradition of moral thought and action. On the basis of an explanation of the defining characteristics of Aristotelian habituation, this paper explores how and why habituation may be an effective way of cultivating the sentimental dispositions that are constitutive of the moral virtues. Taking Aristotle's explicit remarks on ethismos as a starting point, we present habituation as essentially involving (i) acting as virtue requires, (ii) both frequently and consistently, and (iii) under the supervision of a virtuous tutor. If the focus is on the first two characteristics, habituation seems to be a proper method for acquiring skills or inculcating habits, rather than an effective way of cultivating virtuous sentimental dispositions. It will be argued, however, that even if only the first two characteristics are taken into account, habituation may be an efficacious means of moderating, reducing or restricting the child's affective dispositions where these are somehow excessive. But contrary to Aristotle's view, the effectiveness of processes of habituation that are directed at strengthening, deepening or broadening the child's sentimental dispositions where these are somehow deficient seems to be a function of the third characteristic, especially of the affective responses of the virtuous tutor to the child's behaviour. At the end of the paper, this predominantly non-cognitive account of the workings of Aristotelian habituation will be compared with Nancy Sherman's primarily cognitive view.

I MORAL EDUCATION IMPLIES SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION

According to the Aristotelian tradition of moral thinking and acting, any parent or teacher who takes moral education seriously should be engaged in the practice of cultivating the child's feelings—his passions, inclinations, emotions, appetites, pains and pleasures. Special attention

to the development of the child's affective life in the context of moral education is not only typical of Aristotle himself, but also a salient feature of the educational writings of other representatives of the Aristotelian tradition, from the classical work of Aquinas to the recent work of Alasdair MacIntyre. To be sure, the Aristotelian tradition presents moral education as comprising much more than sentimental education alone. But the cultivation of affective dispositions is regarded as essential in three related but different senses—namely, as necessary (the proper aims of moral education cannot be achieved without sentimental education), as significant (a considerable part of our moral educational efforts should be devoted to cultivating the child's sentiments) and as basic (the settlement of proper sentimental dispositions is a prerequisite for effectively promoting other mental qualities, particularly those involved in the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom or critical deliberation). If we may assume that every evolving tradition of moral reflection and action has some 'hard core' of enduring beliefs and presuppositions, the claim that moral education essentially involves sentimental education certainly should be counted as belonging this 'hard core', as understood in the Aristotelian tradition.¹

But what exactly are the reasons for considering sentimental education such an important ingredient of moral education? Especially with regard to the necessity and significance of sentimental education, those reasons are basically located in two other claims, which may be taken to be part of this 'hard core' of the Aristotelian tradition as well. The first one is that the virtuous person should be taken as the general or comprehensive aim of moral education. And because being virtuous implies being a bearer of many different virtues, these individual traits should be regarded as the more specific or particular morally educational aims. The second claim is that moral virtues are not only dispositions for choice and action but also dispositions towards feelings. It is with respect to how one feels and not merely to how one chooses and acts that one may be said to be virtuous. To put it more precisely, a virtuous person is someone who will have and exhibit particular feelings on the right occasions, for the right reasons, towards the right people, with the right strength and in the right manner. Virtuousness implies having proper feelings—that is, having feelings as one should. It will be obvious that these two claims offer strong reasons for giving sentimental education a central role in the practice of moral education. For if the proper aim of moral education is the virtuous person, and if having proper feelings is partially constitutive of being virtuous, promoting proper sentimental dispositions will be an important task for moral educators.

A presupposition of this line of reasoning is that the affective life of the child is indeed educable. If the child's dispositions to feel in particular ways were resistant to all our educational interventions, taking the growth and settlement of virtuous affective dispositions as an educational aim would be senseless. It is for this reason that representatives of the Aristotelian tradition often try to convince us that affective dispositions are actually susceptible to cultivation. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* (NE)

Aristotle divides the human soul into rational and non-rational parts, and divides the non-rational part itself into the desiring part and the nutritive part (NE 1102a27–1103a3). Feelings (*pathē*) are located in the desiring part—or, perhaps better, the desiring part is composed of different types of feelings, such as appetite (*epithumia*) and emotion (*thumos*). But although feelings are located in the non-rational part of the soul, they can obey and listen to the rational part, not just in the sense that feelings can be kept under control if they are contrary to the precepts of reason (which is typical of continence), but also, and more importantly, in the sense that they can be harmonised with the voice of reason by their being transformed, moulded or reshaped (which is typical of virtuousness). Aquinas, in his *Summa Theologiae* (ST) (Ia2ae, q. 55–67), also maintains that the passions are susceptible to moderation and redirection in accordance with the good of reason. The reactions of the sensitive appetite, which is located in the non-rational part of the soul, are passions, feelings or emotions. And the moral virtues concerned with the passions, such as temperance, courage, meekness, chastity, gentleness and magnanimity, are perfections of the sensitive appetite. In contrast to the continent or persevering man, who has to suppress or restrain his unruly passions in order to act well, the sensitive appetite of the morally virtuous person is brought into full conformity with reason. MacIntyre, too, believes that the affective life is educable, even to the extent that it would not be an overstatement to call him an optimist regarding education. For example, in his *Dependent Rational Animals* he argues that our having feelings of affection and sympathy on certain occasions should never be taken as ‘a brute and unchangeable fact about us’ (MacIntyre, 1999, p. 115). On the contrary, it is up to us to decide what kinds and degrees of affection and sympathy we should cultivate in ourselves and encourage in our children. MacIntyre rightly points out that individuals may find it difficult to have the proper feelings of affection and sympathy towards other human beings and nonhuman animals, either because their feelings are excessive (‘too much’) or because their feelings are deficient (‘too little’). In his view, however, such deviations from the standards of appropriate feeling are ‘generally corrigible faults’ (p. 116).

II SENTIMENTAL EDUCATION IMPLIES HABITUATION

One may expect of a tradition of moral thinking and acting that highlights the role of sentimental education that at least some indication is given of the ways in which the affective life of the child could be transformed and steered in the right direction. If the growth and establishment of virtuous affective dispositions are such important aims of moral education, what could be the means to achieve these aims?

In the Aristotelian tradition rather different types of educational interventions are presented as possibly effective, ranging from reading stories, taking the child to theatrical performances and stimulating mimetic enactment of poetry, song and dance, in such a way as to encourage

the child to emulate virtuous models and to refine the child's discriminatory capacities. However, a method of cultivating feelings that is brought to one's notice time and again, and that is generally presented as a vital aspect of effective sentimental education, is *habituation*. The central place of habituation in cultivating feelings is emphasised not only by Aristotle but also by other representatives of the Aristotelian tradition. In his taxonomy of the virtues Aquinas makes the well-known distinction between the infused and the acquired virtues (SM Ia2ae, q. 55, art. 4). The former group of moral virtues are caused in us by God without our action, and therefore cannot be the result of habituation, but any moral virtue that belongs to the latter group is caused in us by our becoming accustomed to its practice or acquired by us through our becoming habituated to its acts (SM Ia2ae, q. 51, art. 2; q. 63, art. 2). MacIntyre, too, stresses the important role of habituation in the growth and settlement of the moral virtues, as may be deduced, for instance, from his account of Aristotle's views on education into the virtue of justice (MacIntyre, 1988, pp. 113–115), as well as from his article on the educational views of Aquinas, in which he discusses sympathetically Aquinas's claim that 'the right kind of habituation . . . is indispensable to the acquisition of the virtues' (MacIntyre, 1998, p. 100). Indeed, the idea that habituation is a vital aspect of sentimental education is rightly seen as part of the 'hard core' of the Aristotelian tradition.

But what exactly *is* habituation if taken as a component of moral upbringing? What are the defining characteristics of this educational method? Aristotle's answer to these questions can be fairly clearly reconstructed on the basis of his explicit remarks on the nature of habituation (*ethismos*) and closely related educational issues. From an analytical perspective, the outstanding characteristics of Aristotelian habituation that can be discerned are the following.

First, habituation is essentially a form of learning by doing or, to put it more precisely, a process of cultivating virtuous affective dispositions by performing the corresponding virtuous actions. In a much-quoted passage, Aristotle says that the moral virtues are acquired by first having actually practised them, just as we acquire crafts or skills: 'we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it, becoming builders, e.g., by building and harpists by playing the harp; so also, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions' (NE 1103a32-b2). The child will not acquire virtuous affective dispositions if our educational activities are confined to verbal instruction or teaching moral lessons. We also, and primarily, have to make sure that the child performs the right actions, that is, does the things the virtuous person would do under the circumstances.

Second, in the acquisition of the moral virtues it will not be enough to practise the virtues only a couple of times or to act as virtue requires only occasionally. Habituation, or at least *effective* habituation, implies doing the virtuous things both frequently and consistently. Aristotle does not specify *how* frequently virtuous actions need to be performed in order that

the corresponding virtues should be acquired, but his use of the word *pollakis* (for example, NE 1103a29, 1105b4), which literally means ‘many times’, indicates that he assumes that they should be performed over and over again. Moreover, from other passages in his work it may be deduced that Aristotle also believes that virtuous actions should be performed consistently, which roughly means that one acts always (or at least on most occasions) as virtue requires and, consequently, never (or at least only exceptionally) in a manner contrary to virtue. Aristotle (NE 1103b7-22; 1104a10-28) points out that it is not only the moral virtues but also the moral vices that are produced by performing the corresponding activities. For example, someone who runs away from everything in fear and never endures anything becomes a coward, and someone who fears nothing and rushes in to face anything and everything becomes rash. Accordingly, the most reliable way to acquire the virtue of courage is always to act as the courageous person would do under the circumstances and, consequently, never to perform the activities that are expressive of the vices of cowardice and rashness.

It is important not to confuse frequency of behaviour with consistency of behaviour. One can imagine that a child has rather limited possibilities for practising a particular virtue, as, for example, when his parents are overprotective and give him little scope for practising the virtue of courage, in the broad sense of that term. Then the child may consistently act as courage requires but will perform these acts too infrequently to acquire the dispositions regarding fear, self-confidence and determination that are characteristic of the courageous person. The educational upshot is that parents should not only make sure that the child consistently acts as virtue requires but also give him ample opportunity for doing virtuous things.

Aristotle’s claim that consistent and frequent virtuous behaviour is needed for the growth and settlement of the affective dispositions that are constitutive of the moral virtues sounds like a paradox. For is not being morally virtuous precisely a precondition for acting virtuously? Aristotle is well aware of this possible objection to his doctrine. Somebody might wonder, he writes, what we mean by saying that people need to do virtuous things in order to become virtuous: ‘For if we do what is grammatical or musical, we must already be grammarians or musicians. In the same way, then, if we do what is just or temperate, we must already be just or temperate’ (NE 1105a19-22).

In order to rebut this objection, it may be helpful to make a distinction between two dimensions of the paradox in question, which might be called the motivational and the epistemic dimensions. Focusing on the former dimension, one may wonder how acting virtuously (justly, temperately, etc.) can be a precondition for becoming a virtuous (just, temperate, etc.) person, when having the motivational constitution of the virtuous (just, temperate, etc.) person is a precondition for acting virtuously (justly, temperately, etc.). Aristotle himself seems to hold the view that for an action to be done virtuously the agent must have chosen the action for its own sake and be stably disposed to choose in that way (NE 1105a32-b1;

Hutchinson, 1986, pp. 89–92). How, then, could someone who is not yet virtuous act virtuously? If *this* is the objection, however, it can be easily refuted by making a distinction between two senses of acting virtuously (justly, temperately, etc.). On the one hand, we may use the word ‘virtuous’ in a ‘thicker’ or more substantial way, in such a manner that calling an action virtuous implies making the assumption that the action exhibits or springs from the choices and dispositional make-up that are typical of the virtuous person. If we use the term in this particular sense, it will be clear that someone who is not yet virtuous cannot act virtuously. But we can also use the word ‘virtuous’ in a ‘thinner’ or more formal way, that is, simply to register the fact that the action is the right or the proper one, or the thing to be done under the circumstances, without making any reference to the agent’s frame of mind. In this particular sense someone who is not yet virtuous, and even occasionally the vicious person, may act virtuously. If we keep the distinction between these two senses in mind, the motivational dimension of the paradox evaporates: the child becomes virtuous by acting virtuously, not in the ‘thicker’ or more substantial sense but only in the ‘thinner’ or more formal sense of that term (cf. Dunne, 1999, p. 58; Sherman, 1989, p. 187).

The objection could, however, also refer to the epistemic dimension of the paradox, which focuses on the person’s knowledge of or insight into the moral character of his options. The problem is this. Consistently acting virtuously, even in the ‘thinner’ or more formal sense of that term, requires that one has the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom, for only the individual who is practically wise will be able to determine which options are the virtuous ones under different circumstances. But if practical wisdom is a precondition of acting virtuously, and if Aristotle is right in claiming that being practically wise involves having all the moral virtues, how, then, can the growth and establishment of the virtues be dependent on consistently acting virtuously? In order to become practically wise one needs to act as virtue requires, but in order to know or see what virtue requires one needs to be practically wise. If *this* is how the objection should be read, it can be easily rebutted by introducing a third characteristic of Aristotelian habituation, namely, the supervision of the learner by one or more virtuous persons, in particular the parents or other guardians of the child (Sherman, 1989, pp. 160–162). It is true that the child is not yet able to determine which action should be performed under the circumstances, or is only able to do this in relatively simple or familiar situations. Nonetheless he is quite well able to act as virtue requires, given the coaching or guidance of his tutors, and given, of course, that his tutors have the wisdom involved in mature moral virtuousness.

To sum up, then, it can be stated that habituation, in the Aristotelian sense of the term, consists in (i) practising the virtues or, more precisely, performing those actions that correspond with virtuous sentimental dispositions, (ii) performing such actions frequently and consistently, and (iii) doing so under the guidance or authority of a virtuous tutor.

III DOUBTS ABOUT ARISTOTELIAN HABITUATION: SKILLS INSTEAD OF SENTIMENTAL DISPOSITIONS

Aristotle clearly believed that, given the natural capacity to acquire the virtues, proper habituation operates as an effective method of moral sentimental education. But is this true? Is the educational means (habituation) really an effective way of achieving the educational aim (the growth and entrenchment of virtuous affective dispositions)? Because this question is basically an empirical one, the best way to answer it is by consulting the results of relevant empirical research. To our knowledge, however, there has never been any systematic empirical investigation into the connection between habituation (as the independent variable) and the development of virtuous sentimental dispositions (as the dependent variable). But there are other, albeit less reliable ways of examining whether or not Aristotle's belief in the effectiveness of habituation is well-founded. We may, for example, refer to our own experiences with processes of habituation, or to the evidence other people give us about their experiences. Moreover, any plausible explanation of the way in which habituation might do the work it is supposed to do, in particular by introducing so-called mediating processes that help clarify how or why the relation between the indicated variables occurs (cf. Eisenberg, 1998, pp. 17–18), may also be regarded as giving some support for Aristotle's view.

At first blush habituation does not seem to be a suitable method for cultivating feelings. The educational means, habituation, and the educational aim, the growth and settlement of virtuous affective dispositions, seem to be ill-matched.

To begin with, the first characteristic of habituation, the fact that habituation is essentially a form of learning by doing seems to be indicative of learning *skills* rather than of acquiring affective dispositions. Skills, or at any rate paradigmatic examples of skills, cannot be acquired without practice, without repeatedly doing the things in question, whereas affective dispositions, if learned at all, can be acquired in quite different ways, for instance by classical conditioning or purely by affective contagion. Thus, it is hardly conceivable that one can become a skilled water-colourist without having practised painting in water colours, but a single experience with a snapping dog may lead to ineradicable feelings of distrust regarding this animal's nature.

This comparison only shows, however, that affective dispositions, unlike skills, need not be the result of learning by doing. What it does *not* show is that learning by doing cannot result in affective dispositions, or that learning by practice cannot be an effective way of acquiring them. This, of course, is true, but the problem still remains that, while the relationship between practice and the learning of skills seems intelligible enough and even natural, the idea of a similar relationship between practice and the establishment of affective dispositions is rather obscure and hard to accept without some convincing explanation. Suppose, for example, that we want our students to acquire the intellectual virtue of clarity of thought and expression, and that we try to achieve this aim by

systematically encouraging them to expound their views as clearly as possible, to construct their arguments in a well-organised way, to avoid obscure language, to give lucid definitions of terms that may give rise to misunderstandings and to perform many other relevant activities that are expressive of this virtue. Doing such things, and doing them repeatedly, is, without doubt, the most effective way of acquiring the skills of clear thinking and writing. But why should the very same practice *itself* also be an effective way of producing the sentimental dispositions that are constitutive of the virtue of clarity, dispositions such as a heart-felt aversion towards woolly language and an enjoyment of the lucidity of neatly arranged and well-presented arguments? It is evident that all those exercises in clear thinking and writing might just as well *not* have any influence on the student's feelings whatsoever or even lead to unfavourable affective attitudes towards clarity. The same seems to be true of the typically moral virtues. Helping people in all kinds of different circumstances in the context of service-learning² is most likely to make students more skilled in solving complex helping problems and in offering effective assistance. But why should helping behaviour *as such* necessarily lead to the growth and settlement of the affective dispositions involved in the virtue of helpfulness, such as concern, sympathy and feelings of responsibility? Perhaps the impact of service-learning projects will be that students develop an aversion to the standard forms of community support.

It is interesting to note that even Gilbert Ryle, in his pioneering paper 'Can virtue be taught?' (1972), associates habituation, as explained by Aristotle, with acquiring skills rather than with cultivating feelings. After having shown that the acquisition of skills comes, if at all, only with practice, Ryle raises the question of whether the virtues may be the result of similar learning processes. At first he is inclined to answer this question in the affirmative (pp. 436–437), but the striking thing is that in this context he merely refers to virtuous activities that may be performed more or less skilfully, especially to forms of self-control, such as curbing one's greediness and keeping one's temper. As we have argued elsewhere (Steutel, 1999, pp. 126–131), certain virtues, especially the virtues of will-power, are partly composed of capacities of self-control, and having such capacities roughly consists in being skilled in using appropriate techniques of self-intervention. Immediately after defending the view that virtues may be the result of learning by doing, however, Ryle begins to attack it by pointing out that skills and virtues are different in important respects. He shows that being virtuous, unlike being skilled, implies having particular wants and aversions, attitudes and feelings, cares and preferences—in short, the things we call virtuous sentimental dispositions. And because of this, he maintains, virtues cannot just be the result of repeated practical exercises. In other words, so long as Ryle focuses on the skills that are part of the virtues of will-power, this tends to support Aristotle's claim that virtues are learned by practice; but for Ryle this claim seems completely to lose its plausibility as soon as he recognises that moral virtues, unlike skills, are constituted by affective dispositions.

IV DOUBTS ABOUT ARISTOTELIAN HABITUATION: HABITS INSTEAD OF SENTIMENTAL DISPOSITIONS

If we focus on the second characteristic of habituation, the condition of frequency and consistency, habituation seems to be a proper method for establishing *habits*, rather than a suitable method of cultivating affective dispositions. To explain why this is the case, a brief exposition of the defining characteristics of habits may be helpful.

If we elaborate on the analyses of John Passmore (1980, pp. 120–126) and R. S. Peters (1981, pp. 55–56, 97–98), a first characteristic that should be pointed out is that habits are dispositions to perform particular *actions* or *activities*, such as getting up early, going to the pub after office hours or reading a story to the children at bedtime. Perhaps linking habits with intentional behaviour makes the definition too narrow, as some habits seem to be dispositions towards mental acts (for example, thinking of objections to our moral claims) or towards non-intentional behaviour (for example, nail-biting). But in any case habits are dispositions to *do* certain kinds of things, and not, for example, dispositions to be affected in certain ways under particular circumstances. Second, habits are relatively *settled* or *permanent* dispositions to do certain kinds of things. For example, when we say that checking our email before going to bed is one of our habits, the clear implication is that this is something that we have been doing for quite some time now and, most probably, that it is something we shall continue to do. Habits do, of course, change, but to call some rather unstable or temporary feature of someone's behaviour a habit would be a misapplication of the term. Third, habits are dispositions towards actions or activities that are performed *regularly*. For example, having the habit of looking at an evening news programme implies doing this not incidentally but on a regular basis. This does not mean that a habit cannot be a disposition towards actions or activities that are performed only rarely or infrequently. One may have a habit of eating turkey only on Thanksgiving Day or a habit of going to church only on Christmas Eve. The point is that having a habit implies always or at least usually doing certain things when the moment has come or the circumstances occur—*not* necessarily that the moment comes often or the circumstances occur frequently, although this may be the case with respect to most of our habits. Fourth, habits are dispositions to do certain things *automatically*, without reflection, deliberation, planning or choice. This does not mean, as Peters suggests, that having a habit implies being able to perform the corresponding actions or activities while thinking about quite different matters or while concentrating on something else (Peters, 1981, p. 55). A person may have the habit of studying at the university library, or the habit of playing chess on Monday evening, or the habit of giving reasons for taking a particular ethical standpoint, and obviously such activities often require much reflection and great concentration. But what the person does not need to do is deliberately decide on each separate occasion to perform these activities. On the contrary, if the activities are expressive of habits, the person will normally perform them without first pondering on their value or weighing up the pros and cons.

It is particularly the third characteristic, the fact that habits are dispositions to do certain things on a regular basis, that makes a connection with processes of habituation almost self-evident. Not all habits are the result of habituation, and a habit, unlike habituation, is not necessarily related to frequent behaviour. But the kind of regularity that is typical of having a habit implies the kind of consistency that is characteristic of habituation. It is this similarity that seems to make the process of habituation particularly apt for cultivating habits. Many parents want their children to acquire the habit of washing their hands before dinner. And what would be a more natural way to achieve their aim than consistently inciting or urging them to wash their hands before sitting down at the table? By consistently doing the proper things at the proper moment, the odds are that the child will acquire a settled disposition to do those things at the right time.

Of course, the fact that doing the proper things regularly, and therefore consistently, seems to be an effective way of acquiring habits does not exclude the possibility that the same method may also effectively stimulate the growth and settlement of affective dispositions. But just like the relation between practice and learning skills, the relation between consistently doing the proper things and the establishment of corresponding habits is quite easy to grasp, whereas a relationship between such a way of learning and acquiring sentimental dispositions is difficult to fathom. Doing virtuous things on a regular basis is likely to result in virtuous habits, but how could such a practice also result in dispositions to be affected in virtuous ways? Suppose, for example, that cultivating the virtue of charity is part of our educational programme. With reference to Aristotle's view on habituation, we consistently incite the child to perform particular acts of charity, like putting aside a small part of his pocket money for a good cause, doing some shopping for invalid neighbours and standing up for senior citizens on the bus. It is easy to understand how always doing such things when the moment has come will make these activities habitual. But it is hard to grasp how performing charitable acts on a regular basis will *itself* also result in the firmly settled affective dispositions that are constitutive of the virtue of charity, such as the disposition to feel compassion, pity, distress or relief under the proper circumstances.

We might be criticised for overlooking the fact that the term 'habit' also stands for a broad range of mental qualities, including dispositions to have particular feelings or to feel particular emotions under certain conditions. Authoritative English dictionaries tell us that the term 'habit', in its most current sense, refers to a settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way (*The Oxford English Dictionary*) or to something that one does often or regularly (*Collins Cobuild*). This prevalent use of 'habit' is the one we explained above. But we seem to have failed to notice that the term is also used in the sense of 'habit of mind' (Spiecker, 1999, p. 214). In this instance, the term does not stand for a pattern of action, but refers to the way in which a person is mentally or morally constituted, to the sum of the individual's mental and moral qualities (*The Oxford English Dictionary*),

or to a particular mental constitution or the kind of thought, feeling or attitude someone generally has (*Collins Cobuild*). Moreover, sometimes, especially in authoritative translations of Aquinas's writings, the term 'habit' refers to a class of states or dispositions that includes the virtues and vices. In his classical definition of virtue Aristotle uses the term *hexis* to denote the *genus proximum* of the virtues (NE 1106b36-1107a3; 1105b19-1106a14). As the Latin equivalent of *hexis*, Aquinas uses the term *habitus*, and this term is normally translated into English with the term 'habit'. So this use of the term, just like the use of 'habit' in the sense of 'habit of mind', also covers the sentimental dispositions that are constitutive of the moral virtues.

This objection, however, is beside the point. We do not want to deny that sentimental dispositions are habits in the technical sense of *hexeis* or *habitus*, nor that the term 'habit' does have the indicated different senses in ordinary language. The only point we are making is that the relationship between regularly behaving well and acquiring habits in the *former* sense (habits of *behaviour*) is readily intelligible, while a similar relationship between doing the proper things on a regular basis and acquiring habits in the *latter* sense (habits of *affection*) is difficult to comprehend.

At the end of the previous section we noted that Ryle tends to identify habituation, as explained by Aristotle, with the training of skills rather than with the cultivation of sentimental dispositions. Here it may be instructive to point out that Peters interprets Aristotelian habituation neither as a method of cultivating feelings nor as a form of training in skills, but rather as a way of inculcating *habits*. In his theory of moral education Peters makes a distinction between different types of virtue, including highly specific virtues, such as punctuality, thrift and politeness, and motivational virtues, such as compassion, gratitude and concern for others (Peters, 1981, pp. 93–95). In discussing whether or not virtues may be regarded as habits, he argues that the highly specific virtues seem to be the most obvious candidates, in particular because these virtues are connected with specific types of acts that can be performed automatically. In his view, however, it would be wrong to regard the motivational virtues as habits, since exercising them essentially involves the arousal of feelings and the active employment of one's mind (p. 98). Whatever one may think of this distinction, it is striking that Peters interprets Aristotle's remarks on habituation as a pointed description of the way in which habits are acquired, and therefore also of the growth and establishment of the highly specific virtues (p. 96). Because Aristotle stresses the importance of habituation for cultivating virtuous affective dispositions, making a connection between habituation and the development of the motivational virtues would have been in line with Aristotle's views. But in fact Peters only sees an educational link between habituation and the highly specific virtues because he considers Aristotelian habituation essentially to be a process of acquiring habits, in the sense we explained above. And is not this a quite natural interpretation of Aristotelian habituation?

VI HOW ARISTOTELIAN HABITUATION MIGHT WORK: GEWOONTEVORMING AND GEWENNING

Up to this point the results of our exploration of Aristotelian habituation are rather disappointing. If we focus on the first two characteristics of habituation, it seems to be a form of training in skills or inculcating habits, rather than a form of cultivating sentimental dispositions. However, one of the reasons why we were unable to reveal a positive relationship between habituation and the cultivation of the sentiments might be that we paid attention only to the *growth* or *settlement* of affective dispositions. We have not introduced any example in which habituation is intended to *mitigate* or even to *remove* affective dispositions, instead of strengthening or inculcating them. Aristotle holds the view that our feelings and emotions may deviate from the mean either because they are deficient ('too little') or because they are excessive ('too much'). Thus far we have focused almost exclusively on aspects of people's inner lives that may be considered somehow deficient. But it may well be that habituation is particularly pertinent to the fashioning of an emotional life that is in some way excessive.

At this point it may be interesting to note that both the Greek term '*ethismos*' and the English term 'habituation' can be translated into Dutch with two different terms that have slightly different meanings—namely, '*gewoontevorming*' and '*gewenning*'. Literally translated, the term '*gewoontevorming*' means 'the formation of habits', and it is this term that is used as the Dutch equivalent of '*ethismos*' in a recent, well-received Dutch translation of the *Ethica Nicomachea* (Aristotle, 1999). The term '*gewenning*', however, roughly means the same as 'being accustomed to' or 'becoming or being made used to'.³ This is the meaning that Peters seems to have in mind when he defines 'habituation' as 'a wide class of learning processes in which people learn by familiarising themselves with, or getting used to, things, and by repetition' (Peters, 1981, p. 102). Now the important thing is that the term '*gewenning*', unlike the term '*gewoontevorming*', usually refers to learning processes in which our feelings are *tempered*, *mitigated*, or in some way *reduced*. As an illustration of his own definition of 'habituation', Peters gives the example of a boy who 'might learn not to be afraid of dogs . . . by being constantly in their presence and getting used to their ways' (pp. 102–103). This is a clear case of *gewenning*: excessive feelings of anxiety may gradually lose their strength and even disappear by means of repeated confrontation with their object.

So by shifting our attention from compensating for sentimental deficit to tempering sentimental excess, we seem to have found forms of habituation that may be reasonably effective. Although *gewenning* normally implies learning processes in which particular feelings are tempered or even fade away, it is not necessarily a way of making our inner life more virtuous. In many cases getting used to things involves some kind of blunting, which often means that the strength or scope of valuable feelings becomes deficient. For that reason, Peters denies that habituation, in the sense of

gewenning, is a proper method of cultivating motivational virtues, such as a concern for others. Habituation, he says, seems to be the wrong sort of term for stimulating children to be sensitive to the plight of others, 'for the last thing we want is to habituate children to the sight of suffering' (p. 107). But cases of *gewenning* could also be pointed out that clearly work in the right direction. For example, by getting used to regulating immoderate sense-desires or inhibiting inordinate appetites, the frequency, intensity or persistence of such desires and appetites may become less excessive or more appropriate, which may be seen as an important step in acquiring the virtue of temperance. Or by getting used to dangerous situations or threatening circumstances, we may become less frightened and therefore more courageous.

To sum up, then, some forms of habituation, in particular forms that are called '*gewenning*', do not merely consist in training skills or acquiring habits of behaviour, but are genuine ways of modifying our affective life as well. From a moral educational viewpoint, however, the importance of *gewenning* should not be overestimated. The centre piece of moral sentimental education seems to be much more a matter of strengthening or inculcating proper affective dispositions than a matter of mitigating or getting rid of improper ones. According to Philippa Foot (1978, pp. 8–10), the virtues are to be understood as corrective, in the sense either of moderating excessive temptation or of compensating for deficiency of motivation. Virtues such as persistence, industriousness, diligence, patience and temperance, which may loosely be called the virtues of will-power, seem to belong to the former group, as they can be understood as corresponding to natural feelings and inclinations that have to be kept in check (Steutel, 1999, pp. 126–127). Consequently, insofar as promoting the virtues of will-power implies sentimental education, it will largely be a matter of *gewenning*. For example, cultivating the proper sentimental dispositions that are constitutive of the virtue of patience will be a matter of moderating the child's liability to respond with excessive feelings of impetuosity, irritation and boredom by accustoming him to situations in which patient behaviour is required. This developmental relationship with *gewenning* may be the reason why Aristotle illustrates his view on habituation by merely giving examples of virtues of will-power, especially temperance and courage (NE 1104a20-b4).

The corrective function of cardinal moral virtues such as justice and benevolence, however, seems to be quite different. Unlike the virtues of will-power, these do not correspond to particular natural inclinations that have to be kept in check, but rather to deficiencies of motivation that have to be made good, deficiencies such as a limited concern for other people's needs or a lack of respect for the rights of one's fellow citizens. Accordingly, a central part of moral sentimental education will consist in strengthening or promoting the growth of virtuous affective dispositions, in particular the concerns, cares and commitments that are constitutive of benevolence and justice. And we still have not found an answer to the question as to how habituation could be a way of establishing, intensifying, deepening or broadening such virtuous sentimental dispositions.

According to L. A. Kosman, acting in ways that are naturally associated with a certain range of feelings ‘will “bring about” those very feelings, and eventually . . . one develops states of character that dispose one to have the right feelings at the right time’ (Kosman, 1980, p. 112). Although we do not deny that this observation may be true, we have not yet found any convincing example or plausible explanation of such a ‘positive’ relationship between acting and affective dispositions.

VII HOW ARISTOTELIAN HABITUATION MIGHT WORK: THE ROLE OF THE TUTOR

But what about the third defining feature of habituation, the fact that habituation is impossible without the supervision of a virtuous tutor, usually a parent or a teacher? Does this characteristic point us towards what we need for a plausible interpretation of the relationship between habituation and the growth and settlement of virtuous sentimental dispositions?

From our brief description of the authoritative role of the tutor in the second section, one might easily get the impression that the tutor’s only task is to tell the child what to do under the circumstances. The child should act as virtue requires, but because he is not yet able to determine which action is the right or the virtuous one under the circumstances in question, he should follow the instructions of someone who is practically wise. To be sure, this *is* an important element of habituation. But to reduce the role of the tutor to the giving of instructions would be to caricature Aristotle’s views.

To begin with, at many places in his work Aristotle maintains that virtue and vice have to do with pleasure and pain. Virtues include dispositions to like or to enjoy the things that are just or noble, and to dislike or to be pained by the things that are unjust or bad. Such affective dispositions, says Aristotle, are the result of upbringing: ‘we need to have had the appropriate upbringing—right from early youth, as Plato says—to make us find enjoyment or pain in the right things’ (NE 1104b11-13). And he depicts the kind of upbringing he is referring to as a form of habituation by means of pleasure and pain. To put it differently, the virtuous dispositions towards pleasure and pain are cultivated by the application of pleasure and pain (NE 1104b16-18; 1172a21-22). Accordingly, the task of the tutor does not merely consist in giving the child instructions. If the tutor wants to bring up the child properly, the tutor must reward or praise the child when he is acting as virtue requires and punish or blame the child when he is acting contrary to virtue. In modern jargon we might say that habituation is a form of conditioning in which virtuous affective dispositions are inculcated by connecting the child’s behaviour with different reinforcing and punishing stimuli (Kupperman, 1999, p. 205; Peláez-Nogueras and Gewirtz, 1995, pp. 182–183).

The role of pleasure and pain in Aristotelian habituation can be elaborated by spelling out the implications of Aristotle’s thesis that the tutor must be a virtuous person. As indicated before, one of the reasons

why the tutor must be virtuous is that practical wisdom is required for giving the child the proper instructions. But being a virtuous person not only implies having the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom: it also implies having essentially moral virtues, and these virtues might best be construed in terms of particular *cares* or *concerns* (Carr, 1991, pp. 200–208; Jackson, 1978, pp. 235–236; Ryle, 1972, pp. 440–441). For example, a person of benevolence has a concern for the well-being of others or cares about their happiness; and a person of justice has a concern for justice or an attachment to ideals in respect of how people should be treated. Such virtuous cares and concerns are not merely dispositions to act in certain ways, or dispositions that generate action tendencies under certain conditions, but also dispositions to have and exhibit particular feelings or to feel and exhibit particular emotions, such as compassion, sympathy, respect, indignation, distress, relief, admiration and gratitude. A virtuous concern is not itself a feeling or emotion but a disposition that is manifested in having and exhibiting feelings or feeling and exhibiting emotions. To put it more technically, it is a disposition that can be explained by subjunctive conditionals that relate the disposition to observable phenomena, including different kinds of affective response (Brandt, 1970, pp. 29–30).

Given the fact that the tutor is a person with virtuous cares and concerns, we can sketch a more sophisticated picture of the role of pleasure and pain in habituating the child. As a reaction to the child's behaviour, the tutor will not merely give the child a reward when he is acting rightly, or confront him with unpleasant things when he is acting wrongly, but also show in word or deed all kinds of feelings and emotions. If the child is acting as virtue requires, the tutor will respond with positive feelings and emotions, showing joy, delight, elation, relief or pride, and if the child is acting contrary to virtue, the tutor will exhibit negative feelings and emotions, such as distress, sorrow, anger, sadness or disappointment. These positive and negative sentimental responses to the child's behaviour, which are all manifestations of virtuous concerns, will also function as reinforcing or punishing stimuli. In particular if there is a mutual loving relationship between the child and his tutor, which will normally be the case if the tutor is his parent, the child will experience the tutor's positive affective responses as pleasurable and the negative affective responses as painful.

Moreover, and in more general terms, the tutor will function as a model (Carr and Steutel, 1999, p. 253; Peláez-Nogueras and Gewirtz, 1995, pp. 183–185). The tutor's virtuous cares and concerns will be manifested in virtuous deeds and appropriate affective responses, and given a good relationship of love and trust between the tutor and the child, the child will be inclined to imitate those actions and responses (cf. NE 1180b3-8). Part of this process of imitation will be some kind of self-reinforcement or self-punishment. Because the child sees the tutor as a model or as representing an ideal, his affective responses to his own behaviour will resemble those of his tutor. If he recognises that his behaviour is contrary to the ideal set by his tutor, he will feel ashamed or be angry with himself, and when he

succeeds in approximating the ideal, he will feel pleased or respond with feelings of pride, which may stimulate further moral growth.

We believe that the learning processes indicated here do plausibly show how and why habituation may be an effective way of stimulating the development and settlement of virtuous sentimental dispositions. On the basis of the first two characteristics of Aristotelian habituation—acting as virtue requires and doing so frequently and consistently—our attempt to reveal the workings of habituation has been only partially successful. Although the form of habituation that we called *gewenning* might be presented as possibly effective, it is only a ‘negative’ method of sentimental education in the sense that it is merely directed at moderating or limiting the scope of the child’s affective dispositions where these are somehow excessive. However, on the basis of the third defining feature of Aristotelian habituation—the authoritative role of the virtuous tutor—a plausible account can also be given of ‘positive’ methods of sentimental education that may be effective. Given the presence of a virtuous tutor, forms of pervasive identification and imitation, backed up by different forms of conditioning, are likely to result in building up, strengthening or broadening the scope of cares and concerns where these are in some way deficient.

VII SOME FINAL REMARKS

When one investigates Aristotelian habituation, a careful distinction should be made between explicating its defining features (What are the central characteristics of Aristotelian habituation?) and explaining how or why it works (Is Aristotelian habituation an effective way of cultivating sentimental dispositions?). Regarding the latter aspect we must, of course, make the further distinction between Aristotle’s explanation of the workings of habituation and our own account of how or why Aristotelian habituation may be effective. As may be deduced from our inquiry so far, our own view differs from Aristotle’s account in at least one important respect. According to Aristotle, doing the virtuous things frequently and consistently is *in itself* an effective way of cultivating virtuous sentimental dispositions. We have argued, however, that although such practices may result in more moderate or less excessive feelings and desires (*gewenning*), it is hard to conceive how acting as virtue requires on a regular and consistent basis could in itself be an effective way of boosting the growth of affective dispositions where these are somehow deficient. For that reason, we have stressed the importance of the role of the tutor, probably much more than Aristotle would be inclined to do.

The most obvious and direct way of reconstructing Aristotle’s account of how habituation might do the work it is supposed to do is to consult his own explicit remarks about this matter. This is *grosso modo* the strategy we have followed in our investigation. Both our analytic mapping of the defining features of Aristotelian habituation and our interpretation of his explanation of how such a practice might be effective are based largely on

Aristotle's own explicit account, especially on the things he says about cultivating the moral virtues in Book II.1-3 of his *Nicomachean Ethics*. Another, more indirect way of reconstructing Aristotle's views regarding the effectiveness of habituation is to spell out the implications of his texts that are clearly not intended to address the subject of habituation but pertain to other issues. A major example of this approach is Nancy Sherman's analysis of habituation in the final chapter of her book, *The Fabric of Character* (1989). Under traditional interpretations of Aristotle's explicit remarks, she argues, habituation is seen primarily as a non-cognitive or mechanical training of desires towards appropriate objects (pp. 157–158, 162). This interpretation, however, does not do justice to Aristotle's conception, for if we bring to bear 'a broader range of texts' (p. 158), or if we extrapolate from other parts of his work 'in a way that is consistent with its spirit' (p. 171), we can see that it would be much more in line with Aristotle's views to construe habituation as a critical practice in which various cognitive capacities are cultivated. It is especially on the basis of Aristotle's account of the emotions in his *Rhetoric*, according to which emotions should be seen as essentially involving specific beliefs, evaluations or judgements, that Sherman tries to show that an indispensable part of Aristotelian habituation consists in cultivating the child's perceptual and discriminatory abilities, particularly by correcting and refining his reading or interpretation of the particular circumstances (pp. 166–173).

We do not want to deny that emotional responses are dependent on the way in which the situation is construed and, consequently, that instructing the child in how to perceive or discern the circumstances that warrant these responses is an important aspect of cultivating his affective life (Spiecker, 1999, pp. 216–217). Indeed, exhorting the child to perform certain actions in the context of *gewenning*, as well as responding to the child's behaviour with reinforcing or punishing stimuli, should go hand in hand with giving the child some explanation, not only to confirm or criticise his interpretation of the situation and his corresponding emotional reactions but also to promote the intellectual virtue of practical wisdom by initiating the child into habitual practices of giving and accepting reasons (Curren, 2000, pp. 211–212). Neither do we want to deny that interpreting habituation in terms of such a critical practice may be in line with Aristotle's texts that deal with other issues. What is striking, however, is that Sherman considers the cultivation of discriminatory abilities to be central to Aristotelian habituation (1989, p. 172) and, consequently, tends to marginalise the formative role of the characteristics of habituation highlighted by Aristotle himself. To be sure, she recognises that, according to Aristotle, habituation 'involves essentially practice and repetition' (p. 177), and she also admits that the use of rewards and the threat of punishment will have a place in habituating the child (pp. 164, 171, 190). But she nowhere acknowledges that these characteristics of Aristotelian habituation may play an important role in cultivating sentimental dispositions—for example, by pointing out the mitigating effects of *gewenning*, or by recognising that having the right feelings

at the right time not only is dependent on having well-developed discriminatory abilities, but also requires the settlement of virtuous cares and concerns by means of forms of conditioning and modelling. And, what is more important, by rejecting the mechanical interpretation of Aristotelian habituation, she tends to downplay the extent to which Aristotle sees habituation as essentially involving the establishment of virtuous sentimental dispositions through acting frequently and consistently as the virtuous person would do under the circumstances. Nonetheless, this is exactly what Aristotle explicitly claims, not only once, but frequently and consistently!

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NOTES

1. How exactly traditions of moral enquiry and practice are (or should be) differentiated, and also on what basis someone is (or could be) considered a representative of a moral tradition, are complicated questions (cf. Vokey, 2001, pp. 66–73). Here we simply assume that every moral tradition has its own distinctive core of shared beliefs and that those who embrace and defend these beliefs are its representatives.
2. Service-learning, which is rather popular in the United States, may be defined as the active participation of students in thoughtfully organised service that is conducted in and meets the needs of communities. Examples of service-learning projects vary from testing the local water quality to preparing food for the homeless.
3. Two of the definitions of the term ‘habit’ that are given in *The Oxford English Dictionary*—namely, ‘A settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way’ and ‘The condition of being accustomed to something through having constantly to do with it’—can be regarded as descriptions of the successful result of *gewoontevorming* and *gewenning* respectively.

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