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Does Aristotle believe that habituation is only for children?

Wouter Sanderse | Fontys Hogescholen | July 2018 | w.sanderse@fontys.nl

Abstract

Full virtue and practical wisdom comprise the end of neo-Aristotelian moral development, but wisdom cannot be cultivated straight away through arguments and teaching. Wisdom is integrated with, and builds upon, habituation: the acquisition of virtuous character traits through the repeated practice of corresponding virtuous actions. Habit formation equips people with a taste for, and commitment to, the good life; furthermore it provides one with discriminatory and reflective capacities to know how to act in particular circumstances. Unfortunately, habituation is often understood primarily as a method suitable only for children. This paper examines whether Aristotle limited habituation to children and, if not, what the relationship between habituation and wisdom *beyond* childhood might look like. This paper concludes that wisdom-guided habituation is also possible for adults who continue and confirm their already established virtuous habits. The implications of this for professional moral education are subsequently discussed.

Keywords: practical wisdom, habituation, moral development, virtue ethics

Introduction

While full virtue and practical wisdom comprise the end of an Aristotelian approach to moral education, educational philosophers cannot avoid discussing ‘habituation’: a term often understood as acquiring virtuous character traits through the repeated practice of corresponding virtuous actions. Habituation is an important part of a neo-Aristotelian approach as virtue ethics understands it to be ‘the process whereby the development of virtue begins’ (Kerr, 2011, p. 643). Moreover, habituation is considered to be a relatively uncontroversial part of Aristotle’s approach to moral education (Sherman, 1989, p. 157). Nevertheless, there are several issues about the precise interpretation and justification of this method and its relationship to the education of wisdom.

A number of philosophers of education (Kupperman, 1999; Sherman, 1989; Spiecker, 1999) have treated habituation primarily as a method suitable for people in the ‘initial’ stages of moral development. To use Richard Peters’ (1981) metaphor, they believe that habituation is an activity for the ‘courtyard’, which later provides a passage to the ‘palace’ of reason. The bone of contention is, however, whether the view of habituation as a ‘first’, ‘early’ or ‘initial’ method also justifies limiting habituation to *children*. This interpretation seems to correspond with the importance that Aristotle attached to the training of virtuous habits right from childhood. Additionally, Aristotle argued that habituation should culminate in the

development of practical wisdom when one is morally mature. Thus, habituation seems to be a ladder that people must throw away after they have become practically wise.

But, upon closer inspection, can this interpretation be sustained? There are passages in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that hint at habituation as a lifelong process. For example, Aristotle wrote that people must 'confirm their habit, when they are grown up' (*Nicomachean Ethics* [NE] 1080a). A number of such remarks raise the question of whether habituation should be limited to those of young age. As there is already a sizeable body of literature on whether and how habituated reason is possible and desirable for adults (see e.g. Kristjánsson, 2006), this paper has the more humble goal to examine whether it is 'Aristotelian' to limit habituation to children and, if not, what the relationship between habituation and wisdom *beyond* childhood may be.

The article is outlined as follows: In the first section, I summarise the received wisdom about Aristotle's ideas on the relationship between wisdom and habituation. Subsequently, I examine in detail the ideas of three philosophers who have interpreted habituation primarily as a method suitable for children. I then revisit the *Nicomachean Ethics* and argue that habituation is not restricted to (but is particularly useful for) already virtuous and wise people who want to continue making moral progress. In the final section, I discuss some implications of Aristotle's stance on habituation for the formation of professional character.

Aristotelian on habituation

Before we can understand why habituation is sometimes interpreted as a moral educational method suitable for children, the received wisdom about the relationship between habituation and wisdom must first be summarised. As Aristotle did not provide a comprehensive account of habituation, this section offers a reconstruction of the method by drawing on a number of remarks on habituation found in the *Nicomachean Ethics*.

Fully virtuous people have a stable and firm commitment to the good over a lifetime and hit the mean with regard to actions and emotions in all spheres of human experience: this requires practical wisdom (Author, 2015, p. 393). Practical wisdom is of significance here as Aristotle did not see virtues as mindless habits that produce behaviour, but as intelligent dispositions that involve a choice to do or feel certain things in ways that observe a mean between two vicious extremes. What captures the notion of a practically wise person, then, is 'a virtuoso who is responsive in an excellent fashion to what reason perceives in particular and changing circumstances' (Lockwood, 2013, p. 30). For example, patient people do not always wait half an hour when someone is late but deliberate about what it means for them to be patient in a particular situation: waiting 30 minutes may be too long for (say) a first date, but not at all too long for an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to meet the queen.

While full virtue is impossible without practical wisdom, Aristotle did not think we could cultivate it straight away. In essence, he argued that people can make moral progress through habituation and teaching. Right at the start of Book II, Aristotle distinguished between moral and intellectual virtues and stated that intellectual virtues are stimulated through 'instruction' while moral virtues are the product of 'habit' (NE.1103a15-20). In a well-known passage, Aristotle explained that the acquisition of virtuous habits is like developing skills: 'Men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp. Similarly, we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts' (NE.1103a32-b2). Thus, the basic idea of habituation is that virtues are formed as a result of their corresponding virtuous activities. However, this is also true of vices. Therefore, the question is: how does repeatedly performing certain actions help someone to acquire *virtuous*

character traits? The answer is that children learn to associate virtue with pleasure and vice with pain through repeated praise or blame by more virtuous teachers, just as student builders and harp players need experts to show them how to build a house or play the harp *well*.

Habituation thus understood leads to what Bowditch (2008) has called the 'conditioned character': people taking pleasure in virtuous action. By emphasising the importance that one's affective responses hit the mean in every situation, which requires some practical wisdom, Bowditch (2008, p. 323) has argued that a conditioned character is not enough. First, discriminatory skills are needed in order to attend to morally relevant features of a situation: a process educators can stimulate by giving and asking for explanations and justifications. Second, he pointed out that being virtuous involves having some distance from one's emotions and being able to rationally assess whether one's action or emotional reaction actually hits the mean. This requires knowing *that* some emotions and actions are just, temperate, courageous and others not, but not yet *why* a virtuous act is virtuous; that is to say, how it is related to a happy life (Curzer, 2012, p. 304).

This distinction between knowing 'that' and knowing 'why' may explain why Aristotle believed that habituation and teaching do not occur simultaneously. Specifically, he wrote that teaching is preceded by habit formation (NE.1179b5-11; Pol.1338b). One way to make sense of this is by distinguishing between two kinds of 'teaching'. On the one hand, there is the more informal giving and asking of arguments as part of guided habituation, for instance when someone tells you that it is unjust to give a student a higher grade simply because you like him. On the other hand, there is the more formal 'teaching' when you follow, as the audience of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, lectures on moral and political philosophy, which deepens your conceptual understanding of virtue and vice on the basis of analysing and categorising moral experiences. Understood this way, habit formation precedes teaching, *not* in the sense that habituation is unguided by wisdom, but in the sense that wisdom-guided habituation precedes conceptualising virtue and happiness.

Annas (2016, p. 4) phrased it well when she wrote that 'I cannot choose to learn from scratch since I begin learning when very young, before I am in a position to learn critically. I learn from various sources in the culture: role models, books, in large part my parents and local peers'. She further observed that only later in life can we 'revise our positions as to whether these virtues do, in fact, aim at the good, or are merely conventional, or even deeply misguided' (Annas, 2016, p. 2). While habituation first equips people with a taste for, and commitment to, the good life, coupled with certain discriminatory and reflective capacities, they can later be taught to understand what makes this commitment worthwhile. Vasilou (1996) notes that 'the because' does not consist in extra-ethical proofs about why people should care about virtue. In the *Ethics*, Aristotle gives examples of our moral experiences, classifies them, and so deepens our understanding of virtue and vice. In this more circular reading of Aristotle, the 'that' and the 'why' of ethics go "hand in hand" (Vasilou, 1996, p. 790).

So, without a relationship to the realm of experience and action, further thinking about the good life may be interesting, but it will not lead to a change in attitude. In the opening sections of the *Ethics*, Aristotle explained that the young are not fit to study moral and political philosophy because they have no experience in life and are led by their feelings (NE. 1095a5-10). He even explicitly warned people against discussing virtue without actually doing virtuous things (NE.1105b15). He compared these charlatans with people who listen carefully to what the doctor says, but neglect to follow through on the prescribed advice. In a way, they know that the doctor is right, for example about exercising more, but they lack the motivation to

change their lives. Although Aristotle did not rule out the possibility, he was sceptical about the option that, once these less than virtuous character traits have become habitual, contemplation will have a practical effect (NE.1179b18).

Habituation as a childhood method?

The idea that the development of wisdom should be preceded by the cultivation of moral habits is often interpreted to mean that the formation of habits is appropriate for *children*. In this section, I locate this idea in the work of three contemporary authors. After that, I explain how the education of habits and wisdom are related, and why habituation is a suitable method for (some) adults as well.

For the last 25 years, there has been a growing interest among educational philosophers in the meaning of Aristotle's virtue ethics for the theory and practice of moral education (Author, 2012; Carr, 1991; Carr & Steutel, 1999, Kristjánsson, 2007, 2015). Habituation, often seen as one of the staples of an Aristotelian approach to moral education, has also received attention (Bowditch, 2008; Curzer, 2002; Kerr, 2011; Kristjánsson, 2006; Steutel & Spiecker, 2004). One much debated issue is the question of how, on an Aristotelian account, habituated reason is psychologically possible. The worry fuelling the debate is this: the habits of feeling acquired through habituation may be so strong that, once practical wisdom starts to emerge, they are beyond the reach of revision.

In this debate, a number of authors have made the (in my view problematic) assumption that habituation, as a method for moral education, is only suitable for children. There are two reasons to question this assumption. First, I do not think that the assumption is compatible with Aristotle's own ideas, and I argue that Aristotle recommended habituation as a training program beyond childhood as well. Second, I do not think that we are doing justice to our moral experience if we restrict habituation to children. Do we, as adults, not sometimes experience that moral progress is a real possibility for us, even though it may be more difficult for us than for children (De Ruyter & Schinkel, 2016)? Taken together, I would like to argue that 'lifelong habituation' make sense, both for Aristotle and for us living today.

Below, we examine three authors who take habituation to be an 'early' method for moral education suitable for children.¹ First, Kupperman (1999), who has followed the standard account of Aristotelian habituation described above and distinguished between moral development at an 'early' stage and a more 'advanced' one. In addition, he has assigned habit formation to the early stage and argued that it is necessary, but insufficient, for moral education, which also requires training in philosophy. What interests us here in particular is the assumption that these 'early stages' would correspond to childhood. Kupperman (1999, p. 210) has explicitly stated: 'The foundation, in childhood and presumably in early adolescence, requires good habits'. In his view, habits will become less useful when people are faced with less familiar circumstances as they grow up. Habits can 'never be entirely protective' of virtue (p. 212), as we may be overcome with strong new temptations. What is at stake for Kupperman is that relying on habituation makes us – in the long run – morally unreliable?

The second author, Spiecker (1999), has set out (often with Jan Steutel) to correct Kohlberg's cognitive development approach by paying more attention to the moral educational significance of emotions. From the work of Ryle and Scheffler, Spiecker (1999, p. 220) has derived the distinction between single-track and multi-track habits. Single-track habits, such as being toilet trained, help us behave under specific conditions in a rather uniform way. Spiecker calls these *closed* habits or 'routines': once they are acquired, they are

relatively closed to reflection. Multi-track habits, on the contrary, help us to act in variable circumstances. These habits are expressions of (dawning) moral character traits, which can be seen in how children express (among other things) pity or regret, or whether they comfort other children and return toys. Virtuous habits are relatively *open*: children can learn to examine and adjust their character traits on the basis of reasons that parents often use to explain or justify a rule or value. It is worth emphasising that Spiecker (1999, p. 220) has discussed *both* kinds of habits only in the context of early childhood upbringing, just like in other publications on the topic (Steutel & Spiecker, 2000, 2004).

Finally, Sherman (1989) offers the most complete and detailed account of what she has understood to be Aristotle's notion of habituation. She has taken up arms against Burnyeat (1980), who sees habituation as the combination of a non-rational process, followed by an essentially different rational one. One of the problems with this account, she has pointed out, is that it becomes 'mysterious' as to how the transition can be made from childhood to moral maturity (Sherman, 1989, p. 158). In Sherman's view, this mystery disappears once we recognise that Aristotle's conception of habituation is critical from beginning to end. By 'critical', she means that habit formation is about the formation of perceptual and discriminatory capacities in the way described by Bowditch above. Sherman (1989, p. 159) has argued that if practical wisdom is part of the *end* of habituation, it must be reflected in the whole *process* too. Consequently, Sherman does not think that habituation is (mindlessly) repeating the same piece of behaviour: if we are to *learn from* repeated practice, we should see habituation as a number of successive attempts to reach a goal, reflecting on what went wrong, and subsequently adjusting one's behaviour to reach the goal with greater success next time (Sherman, 1989, pp. 178-179). Sherman's ideas about the reflective formation of habits are important and may well extend beyond childhood; however, she has only written (for instance) about how the *child* can move from habituated to full virtue (p. 158) and only proposed an Aristotelian model of the *child's* ethical growth (p. 160).

In sum, the assumption that habituation is basically a moral educational method for children is well-documented in the literature and exemplified by these three authors. What is not entirely clear, however, is what concepts of childhood are being used. Spiecker (1999, p. 212) has written in the context of 'early childhood upbringing', by which he refers to the first three years. Alternately, Kupperman (1999, p. 204) has noted that habituation is suitable for 'childhood and presumably early adolescence'. Sherman simply referred to 'children' without explaining what age group she had in mind. Despite the differences, what the authors have in common is that they try to link a moral educational method to a specific age group that somehow can be delineated, whether psychologically, biologically or legally. Thus, when we examine whether Aristotle thought that habituation is possible beyond childhood, it seems safe to use 'childhood' for describing toddlerhood, preschool and preadolescence up to 12 years. This means that we do *not* characterise 'childhood' in a normative way, which could imply – for example – that people who legally count as adults can still be 'childish' or morally immature.

Indeed, some of the authors mention the possible use of habituation beyond childhood. For Kupperman (1999, p. 211) this is not the case as he associates habituation with a Pavlovian conditioning process. Spiecker, however, does make room for different kinds of open, multi-track habits that can be critically evaluated and adjusted on the basis of reasons. Sherman goes even one step further: she does not distinguish between two kinds of habits but sees *all* habits as reflective dispositions open for revision. Of the three, Sherman's account is the most comprehensive, detailed and cognitive. Its disadvantage is, however, that it

becomes a mystery as to why the formation of wisdom-guided habits would (have to) cease at the end of childhood. Although I think that she has stretched the meaning of 'being critical' when describing the kind of 'knowledge that', I am broadly sympathetic to her account and my goal is to improve it by showing that it also holds beyond childhood.

I have three possible reasons for why philosophers have not taken the idea of habit formation beyond childhood seriously (for exceptions, see: Pollard, 2002; Sparrow & Hutchinson, 2013). First, contrary to a great deal of new psychological and neuroscientific research on habit formation (see Snow, 2006), it might be the orthodoxy among philosophers to view moral progress as not *possible* after adolescence. It has been assumed for a long time that the brain only develops during a critical period in early childhood and then remains relatively unchanged, being closed to the influence of repetitive habitual behaviour (Sparrow & Hutchinson, 2013, p. 12). Second, even if habit formation turns out to be possible beyond childhood, many philosophers and educationalists probably do not consider it to be *desirable*. For instance, American-style character education was criticised in the 1990s because a combination of habituation, storytelling and role modelling would be essentially authoritarian and uncritical (Kohn, 1997; Nash, 1997). A third reason for why philosophers hardly discuss habituation beyond childhood might be that Aristotle, who is taken (in particular by Sherman) to be the authority, has been misinterpreted in saying that habituation is a childhood method. In what follows, I examine whether it is justified to read Aristotle in this way.

Aristotelian habituation revisited

In this section, we examine whether Aristotle limited habituation to children. If not, we may have to change our picture of how, on an Aristotelian account, habits and wisdom are related beyond childhood.

Aristotle's point of departure was that moral philosophy is a practical science that should not result in knowledge about what virtue is. Instead, we should 'carry out our theories in action' and 'endeavour to possess and to practise' virtue (NE.1179b1-4). Does practicing virtue, then, only apply to children? In Book II, Aristotle compared virtue with bodily strength and health, and argued that virtues such as temperance and courage can, just as health, be 'destroyed by excess and by deficiency' and 'preserved by the observance of the mean' (NE.1104a12-26). Aristotle gave examples of people who, through the decisions they make when they experience fear, tend towards rashness or cowardice or who, through the way they deal with feelings of pleasure, become either more profligate or insensible. This applies equally to actions. Aristotle wrote that it is 'by taking part in transactions with our fellow-men that some of us become just and others unjust' (NE.1103b14-15). In addition, when virtuous people encounter new situations, they will have to deliberate about what is appropriate to do and feel, towards whom, on which moment, in what way and for what reason. When they hit the mean, virtue is preserved; when they do not, they deviate slightly from the virtuous path, which, if this new path is followed, might ultimately result in vice. Furthermore, because virtue is difficult to realise, Aristotle gave several tips on how to hit the mean in every situation (NE.1109a20-b12).

There is no hint in these passages that Aristotle referred only to children. Quite the contrary, he seemed to have responsible adults in mind, whose virtues are reinforced or weakened through how they feel and act in all kinds of situations. Indeed, there are two specific passages in Book X where Aristotle explicitly talked about adults practising the virtues. First, Aristotle acknowledged that good men must be disciplined in youth, but adds that 'they must also practise the lessons they have learnt, and confirm them by habit, when they are

grown up' (NE.1180a1). This message is repeated a few paragraphs later, when he writes that a good education and its resulting good habits are not enough for a good life. After that, he 'must subsequently continue to follow virtuous habits of life, and to do nothing base whether voluntarily or involuntarily' (NE.1180a15-17).

Two things are worth emphasising here. First, Aristotle seems to distinguish between being 'disciplined' or 'educated' *by others* on ways in which people can habituate *themselves* by observing the mean in all circumstances, leading to 'habits of life'. Although he did not elaborate on how this works, there is a place for moral self-cultivation in an Aristotelian reading of habituation. Second, with regard to the relationship between habituation of others and self, Aristotle clearly stated that the virtues we acquire through childhood habituation are necessary, but not sufficient for leading a good life. This does not mean, however, that adult moral development is *only* a matter of becoming practically wise. Being practically wise involves the active exercise of our rational faculties in all kinds of situations throughout our lives and, depending on our choices, our educated habits will be weakened or strengthened further. On the basis of this textual evidence, I think it is safe to conclude that Aristotle believed that people can and have to practise practical wisdom and the moral virtues once they are grown up. We will return to this conclusion below, because it needs to be qualified.

This possibility of habituation beyond childhood is relevant for several reasons. One may argue that adult habituation, understood as a form of self-cultivation, is necessary for a character trait to be called a virtue at all. We can only be praised for our virtues if we assume that we have some freedom and can at least partly be responsible for the development of our character traits (see Battaly, 2016). Another argument is that 'being virtuous' does not mean that one has reached a certain state, after which we can sit back, relax and enjoy the fruits of our childhood upbringing. The 'last' stage of moral development is an 'indeterminate and open-ended level': even for the virtuous person there is room for improvement (Author, 2015, p. 393). This point has been developed by Annas (2011) on the basis of the analogy between virtue and skill acquisition. She concluded that we should see moral habit as 'dynamic' conditions that enable us to respond to new challenges and need 'constant monitoring for improvement or worsening' (pp. 14-15). Although Annas did not work within one type of ethical framework, our Aristotelian account of habit formation reinforces her idea of virtues as being a work in progress.

However, there is a problem lurking in the background. In the previous section, we saw Aristotle stressing the point that 'it is of very great, or rather of supreme, importance' whether we are trained in virtuous habits right from childhood (NE.1103b21-25). This suggests that he was not very optimistic about the possibility that people who lack this training could still work their way towards virtue and wisdom when they are older. Does this mean that habituation is only suitable for adults who are already virtuous and who can *continue* and *confirm* their already established virtuous habits? Does it not work for adults who never developed virtuous habits in childhood? And if this is the case, what does Aristotle have to offer these less virtuous adults? One option is proposed by Kristjánsson (2014), who argued that, despite Aristotle's remark that this is 'difficult if not impossible' to 'dislodge by argument habits long firmly rooted in their characters' (1179b16-17), philosophical contemplation could lead to radical self-transformation by bypassing *phronesis*-guided acquisition of new habits. However, Kristjánsson (2014, p. 480) admitted that this route is 'elitist' in the sense that it requires high levels of intelligence.

I believe that Aristotle also had less elitist solutions, which brings me to a third point worth emphasising about the passages on habituation in Book X. We may have a better

comprehension as to why Aristotle was rather optimistic about adults following virtuous habits throughout life when we take the context into account. Both passages about adult habituation occur in a context in which Aristotle discussed the relevance of *laws* for the development of virtue. For example, he wrote that ‘we shall need laws to regulate the discipline of adults as well, and in fact the whole life of the people generally’ (NE.1180a1-3). He also added that doing virtuous things throughout life is ‘secured if men’s lives are regulated by a certain intelligence, and by a right system, invested with adequate sanctions’. This makes clear that, when writing about adult habituation, Aristotle was not (only) thinking about individuals who, completely detached from community expectations and rules, succeed on their own in refining their actions (see Battaly, 2016, p. 220). So, a less elitist way for adults to learn how to act virtuously is to live as a citizen in a state under just laws.

Aristotle believed that laws have particular authority over ‘the many’ (*hoi polloi*), a term which can be translated as ‘the common people’. This group may often be (but is not necessarily) the statistical majority of people (Garrett, 1993, p. 171). In Aristotle’s view, most people are situated somewhere between the level of ‘a lack of self-control’ (*akrasia*) and ‘self-control’ (*enkrateia*), which means that they already care about virtue (Pakaluk, 2005, p. 235). The common people have, in Aristotle’s view, no taste that can be considered truly fine and pleasant, because their souls have not been habituated to it (NE.1179b11-17). Adults in this group take happiness to consist in things such as bodily pleasure, honour or money, but not in virtue (NE.1095a22-23). Even if they do not care about virtue, they can and sometimes do *act* virtuously, if only because they want to avoid punishment. Hence, they obey laws or rules, not because they see their purpose, but because they fear that adverse consequences will follow (Author, 2015, p. 389). Even people who do not care about virtue can gradually internalise judgments or punishments, and learn to refrain from doing bad things even when they are not likely to get caught. This internalisation of other people’s judgments makes it possible for them to start cultivating their own character (Bowditch, 2008; Curzer, 2002).

If one assumes that habituation is the acquisition of virtuous character traits through the repeated practice of corresponding virtuous actions *under the supervision of a virtuous tutor* (Steutel & Spiecker, 2004), habituation cannot be a kind of self-cultivation. Understood this way, habituation is appropriate for children and the common people who need others to set rules, and praise and blame them so they learn to act in accordance with virtue. However, if we drop the condition of there having to be a virtuous tutor, habituation can also be a way for practically wise people who aspire to become even more so, which is more in line with Aristotle’s position in the *Ethics*. In fact, the Aristotelian picture is more complex than this, as he recognises that there are various groups of people situated between the *hoi polloi* and the *phronimoi*. In a neo-Aristotelian developmental model, there are also those who care about virtue and, with varying degrees of self-control, certainly have a chance of becoming virtuous (Author, 2015). For these people, habituation will neither be completely cultivation by others, nor completely self-cultivation, but a mix of both ideal types. This interpretation does also justice to the idea that people can still undergo significant changes in their moral outlooks later in life (Sherblom, 2015), even though it may be more difficult for them (De Ruyter & Schinkel, 2016) and depend on the support of others (Slote, 2016).

Implications for professional character education

An account of wisdom-guided habituation beyond childhood may help philosophers of education, educationalists and teachers in tertiary education to better understand how adults can morally develop and how this process may be guided. Armed with this Aristotelian account

of how habituation and the education of wisdom are related, I would finally like to draw out some implications for the moral education of professionals.

Originally, many universities and colleges were virtue-based in the sense that, as a whole, they offered students experience and exercise in character development. Throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, universities gradually abandoned the mission to cultivate professionals' character. In the medical profession, this could be explained by the rise of the modern hospital, which offered a more impersonal environment in which the competing ideas of good character were 'inadequate to ensure ethical practice' (Kenny, Mann & MacLeod, 2003, p. 1205). Codes of ethics emerged and moral education became more principle-based, focusing on enabling professionals to know, discuss and apply such principles to relevant cases. Throughout the twentieth century, a large part of what used to be the moral education of professionals disappeared from college and university curricula. However, it was rediscovered in medical, law and business schools during an 'ethics boom' in the 1970s (Glanzer & Raum, 2007). A decade later, a virtue approach reappeared in the professional discourse through Alasdair MacIntyre's (1981) influential ideas on virtues, social practices and institutions. Since then, much work has been done in philosophy to specify virtue ethical approaches to professionalism in general (e.g. Oakley & Cocking, 2001; Walker & Ivanhoe, 2007) and specific professional settings, such as in nursing, social work and teaching. In the early 1990s, Pellegrino and Thomasma (1993), described a number of virtues for doctors, focusing in particular on the 'indispensable' virtue of practical wisdom. Today, each profession has its own lists of virtues, with practical wisdom often treated as the master virtue (Bondi, Carr, Clark & Clegg, 2011; Kinsella & Pitman, 2012).

Surprisingly, within these virtue ethical approaches, the habituation of professional character has received very little serious attention. In medical education, the importance of habituation is sometimes mentioned (Bryan & Babelay, 2009; Radden & Sadler, 2008, p. 379). For example, Rhodes and Smith (2006, p. 109) have argued that 'molding the necessary and distinctive habits of a physician requires repetition'. They also called a separate short course on moral philosophy or professional ethics a 'decorous appendage' and suggested that professional moral education should tie into the emotional experiences that students have in clinical settings and the social learning that occurs between peers. In a military context, Cook (2008) has contended that Aristotle should be seen as the 'intellectual father' of basic cadet training and the entire four years of Academy experience. Nevertheless, Cook (2008, p. 58) observed that in the habituation of reliable and well-disciplined officers, the role of practical wisdom is 'largely, if not entirely, neglected'.

The Aristotelian account of wisdom-guided habituation developed in this paper can contribute to our understanding of professional character education in several ways. First, while practically wise habits become enduring, permanent, or well-entrenched, they are at the same time 'dynamic' conditions that enable us to respond to new challenges; therefore, they need, to cite Annas (2011, pp. 14-15), 'constant monitoring' to check whether they improve or weaken. In line with this, the formation of habits should be conceived of as an intelligent practice that includes the giving and asking of reasons. Contrary to perceived wisdom, practice alone does *not* make perfect. On a neo-Aristotelian account, habituation refers to a series of attempts to act and feel virtuously, a reflection after each try on what went well and wrong, and the adjustment of our future actions to enhance the realisation of virtue in the future. Second, understood in this way, wisdom-guided habituation may well continue beyond childhood into adolescence and adulthood, although it may look rather different. As De Ruyter & Schinkel (2016, p. 133) have pointed out, moral progress for adults

is more of an individual 'project' that requires effort: a project that is often slow and hard-won, if it occurs at all. Aristotle too, was rather pessimistic about the possibility that all adults can (re)form their habits effectively on their own. Habituation can be a kind of moral self-cultivation for grown-ups who aspire to improve morally, but for those that do not care about virtue at all, laws or professional codes will be needed to stimulate them to behave well. Third, this means that the development of professional character should not be taken for granted or left to a separate course on professional ethics, whether it focuses on applying a professional code of conduct, learning about ethical theories, or discussing moral dilemmas. Aristotle would have recommended colleges and universities to focus on the ways in which curricula – as a whole – offer students opportunities to put their moral character into practice. One may argue that colleges always habituate students in one way or another, even if the message is that they should get their diploma as soon as possible. Thus, the task is not to habituate more, but to change existing habituation practices so that they become wiser.

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ⁱ Others who see habituation as a moral educational method for children are Kristjánsson (2014, p. 349), Silverstein & Trombetti (2013, p. 236), Kerr (2010, p. 644) and Peters (1981, p. 52).