

Aristotle on habit and moral character formation

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Abstract The habitual action is not only undertaken on a regular basis but also is personalized which has moral significance when we evaluate action and personality. For Aristotle, inculcating virtues through habitual action could develop a moral character. The naturalistic or behaviouristic perspective and the non-naturalistic perspective are two ways to interpret this Aristotelian theoretical position. The naturalistic thesis maintains that habit and character formation is inherently present in the form of disposition in human beings and could be causally related to the neurophysiological function of the brain process. On the other hand, the non-naturalistic thesis upholds a teleological account of the formation of moral character which is grounded in the power of will. This paper, which delves into Aristotle's notion of habit and its role in the formation of moral character, examines these two theoretical perspectives in order to substantiate the relationship between habits and moral character formation. It also analyses the logical relationship between habits and moral character to show how the moral character is developed by strengthening the power of will.

Keywords Habit · Moral character · Character formation · Naturalism and non-naturalism · Virtues · Power of will

Aristotle on stages of development of habit

In the history of Western Philosophy, perhaps the most enduring legacy of Aristotle's ethics and his theory of moral habits can largely be found in the opening chapters of Book II of the *Nicomachean Ethics* (henceforth *NE*). The notion of moral character, in Aristotle,

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is associated with virtuous life. A man of virtue represents a moral character. A person has to pursue virtues in everyday life as such the notion of habit comes to the discourse of its analysis. If we go back to the history of the term “habit”, the original connotation of the term refers to *hexis* that Aristotle used in his writings on moral character. The Latin word *habitus*, to which *hexis* has been translated, show that it maintains the original meaning of the concept of habit. The term *habitus* lost its use after the sixteenth century when Latin ceased to be the language of philosophy (Urmson 1988). Since then, *habitus* has generally been translated as ‘habit’ albeit with its conceptual limitation. In this regards, W. D. Ross rendered *hexis* as a *state of character* (Ross 2009 cf: Malikail 2003). Though a more accurate rendering of the term *habit*, for Aristotle is *hexis*, it refers still to *knowledge* and *moral character*. In this regard, both intellectual and moral virtues are analyzed through *hexis* or *habitus* and related to reason in different ways keeping in mind, what kind of habits are to be inculcated in order to develop moral character. Aristotle has mentioned in *NE* (Book I-II) about the development of habit, which can be divided into three stages: the origin of habit, the process of creating habit and the action produced by habit. These three stages of habits are interrelated and briefly explained in this section.

At the first stage, Aristotle brings out a certain set of good habits, which must be formed during youth. Habits, before they are learned, could be consciously chosen. In a discussion of the beneficiaries of an inquiry into the good life, he writes,

Anyone who is to listen intelligently to lectures about what is noble and just and, generally, about the subjects of political science must have been brought up in good habits (1999a, b: 1105a10-15).

Though nobility and justice are concerned with governance and politics, Aristotle still thought the citizen’s habits must be good. The citizens with their good habits contribute to the prosperity of the state. It might happen that some persons are already pursuing good habits to live a good life. Aristotle’s concern here is mainly to show that every person must *strive for* justice or have *a love of* being noble. Hence, there is a need for exercising choice followed by the inculcation of virtue and practice of good habits. Learning good habits during youth is essential and it is different from learning virtues during adulthood. There is virtue in learning good habits from childhood as one gradually improves in one’s personality. Moreover, as a person, everyone ought to have the scope to improve upon their character by adopting good habits. Institutions like family, schools, academia and state can only provide opportunities for learning virtues. Thus, good habit, by and large, is learned from society. A good constitution is, therefore, necessary to regulate everyday moral activity (Aristotle 1999a, b).

Aristotle, in the second stage, clarifies that a person’s good habits are mostly explained by referring to certain skills and knowledge. The development of skill and knowledge is important in order to perform a moral action. The habit of acting morally could be a skill and also a product of knowledge. On the contrary, it might also happen that the person would act morally *by chance* which means to act without any deliberation or understanding *why* one should behave the way one does. Aristotle connects the process of habituation to explicate the way in which one learns to behave. One can also learn to behave in a particular way. He states that,

the virtues we get first by exercising them, as also happens in the case of the arts as well. For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them, e.g., men become builders by building and lyre-players by playing the lyre; so too we become just by doing just acts, temperate by doing temperate acts, brave by doing brave acts (1999a, b:1103b30-35).

Aristotle emphasizes that learning by doing is an important mode of habituation. In other words, just as we learn to write by involving ourselves in writing; similarly, we inculcate virtues by performing virtuous deeds on a habitual basis. Although this analogy gives Aristotle's description of the process of habituation a certain intuitive explanatory power, as Sarah Broadie points out, "it has almost nothing to say about how or why by acting in a certain way we acquire the corresponding moral dispositions" (Broadie 1991:104). The process of habituation is an internal intuitive power, which we cannot acquire only with the help of performing our physical activity.

In Chapter 4 (Book-II) of *NE*, Aristotle further addresses the issue of how habituation leads to virtue, in response to the objection that "if men do just and temperate acts, they are already just and temperate" (1999a, b:1105b5–10). In response, Aristotle argues that the moral "agent must be in a certain condition when he does [virtuous acts]" (1999a, b:1105b25–30). He cannot simply be acting "by chance or at the suggestion of another" (1999a, b: 1105b30). The virtuous man in the first place "must have the knowledge, secondly, he must choose the acts and choose them for their own sakes, and thirdly his action must proceed from a firm and unchangeable character" (1999a, b: 1105b25–30). Although this argument clarifies what Aristotle believes habituation achieves, it still does not specify precisely how habituation achieves those results. One interpretation of the process by which habits are created, and thereby, lead to virtue is that habitually acting to be just or brave, before one's character is actually just or brave is like performing warm-up exercises on the muscles before a workout; habit, like the warm-up, "softens up initial resistance" (Broadie 1991:108). In this regard, one can appeal to the distinction between activity occurring by nature (such as digestion), which signifies the physical ability and activity characterized by choice. As Aristotle illustrates with the following example,

the moral virtues arise in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature. For instance, the stone which by nature moves downwards cannot upwards, not even if one tries to train it by throwing up then thousand times (1999a, b: 1103b15-20).

The notion of *nature* in the case of human beings shows the ability to acquire moral virtues or good habits by using "virtues on the basis of our own understanding and in a self-directed way" (Annas 2011: 18).

These interpretations of the process of habituation allow us to extend and make more sense of Aristotle's analogy between habits and acquiring physical skills, such as piano and lyre-playing. The development of the skills of moral decision-making through habitual action is like learning how to play the piano. By repeatedly singing and checking our tone against a piano, we develop our own inner ear, such that we gradually become better judges of whether we have gone flat or sharp without the aid of a piano. 'The right way of playing and grasping'; all of these small skills are

gained through repetition and by comparing our results to external standards (such as a piano player or the man of practical wisdom); by developing them, we acquire a capacity for singing, playing, or virtue which we did not previously possess.

Finally, in the third stage, habit results in action. As we mentioned before, Aristotle emphasizes that “action must proceed to firm and unchangeable character” (1999a, b: 1105b25–30). That is, the process of habituation leads to actions that are ultimately end-directed. Every person is situated in a particular context and performs an action by understanding the situation. In this context, Aristotle refers to the notion of ‘function of man’ – *ergon* that stands for rational ability. He writes,

a certain kind of life, and this to be an activity or actions of the soul implying a rational principle, and the function of a good man to be the good and noble performance of these in accordance with the appropriate excellence (1999a, b: 1105b30).

An action is articulated rationally in order to be a good action, which defines the character of the agent. Someone is good because he functions in such a way that he performs a good action and that exhibits his character. In this regard, “human good turns out to be an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue” (1999a, b: 1105b20–25). Good habits are necessary elements of the virtuous person, such that good or bad habits help in determining whether life is, in the end, a happy one or not.

Habit and instinct: a naturalistic interpretation

The naturalistic account of habits provides a scientific explanation of the source of habits and how habits are causally related to life. In recent times, this is one of the dominant versions of habits delved in neuroscience conceives habits as a routine, very similar to the releasing mechanism that ethnologists employ to analyze instinct (Bernacer and Murillo 2014:4). The main difference between the instinct and habit is that habits are not innate but acquired.¹ Habits refer to certain tendencies which one learns in order to react in a particular way. The reactive pattern of habit similar to the reactive pattern of the instinct, but instinct is basically about the reactive patterns, which are mainly about native or inherited tendencies. The manifestation of definite reaction is conditioned by disposition of the structure of the nervous system of an organism. The dispositional ability of an organism shows various behavioural patterns. One such ability is about the modification of reaction tendencies that comes through the forms of learning or acquired. After acquisition, the organism behaves similarly as in the case of instincts: inflexible, automatically and unconsciously. The reaction pattern of instinct is end-directed as a result it appears to be teleological. Here the *telos* of behaviour is construed without taking any ‘conscious purpose’ into consideration (Dunlap 1922:85).

Habits in “contemporary research in psychology show that it is actually people’s unthinking routines – or habits – that form the bedrock of everyday life. Without habits,

¹ Aristotle mentioned in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book II, (1103b20) that none of the moral virtues arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature, that is in his words, “Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do the virtues arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them and are made perfect by habit”. See, Aristotle, 1999a, b.

people would be doomed to plan, consciously guide, and monitor every action, from making the first cup of coffee in the morning to sequencing the finger movements in a Chopin piano concerto” (Neal et al. 2006:198). Most of our daily behaviours are basically habitual actions whether it is about coffee making or using chopstick during eating, as habits, they are developed over a period of daily practices. It is like *rule-following*; once you learn the rules of addition, one goes on adding all kinds of numbers. Rules become part of life and thus work like bedrock (Wittgenstein 1958). Similarly, habitual actions in that sense are bedrock actions which are unconsciously performed. In other words, habitual actions are performed spontaneously in a situation without any deliberation. The reactions *appear* instinctive. Though it is different, it still conceives the identity relation, Knight Dunlap writes,

All reactions are instinctive: All are acquired. If we consider instinct, we find it to be form and the method of habit formation: If we consider habit, we find it to be the way in which instinct exhibits itself (1922: 94).

In the analysis of habit and instinct relation, Dunlap’s interpretation shows that habitual reactions seem to be instinctive reactions only in terms of their manners. That is, instinctive reactions are unconscious and non-deliberative in nature. On the other hand, habitual reactions are acquired and transformative in nature. Thus, habit is an acquired tendency or a pattern of behaviour that is often repeated and is formed by one’s own experience or by one’s own learning, whereas instinct tends to be similar in nature to habit, but it is acquired naturally without any formal training, instruction or personal experience.

However, it is known to all that human behaviour is a mixture of emotions, patterns, habits and instincts. Many of us must be familiar with habits, but when we are asked to distinguish between habits and instincts, it becomes difficult for us to express the differences. They both are integral parts of behaviour. Humans as well as animals, both tend to possess habits and instincts (Cosmides and Tooby 1997:3). Habit is generally defined as ‘a settled or regular tendency or practice, especially one that is hard to give up.’ Thus, in simple words, any practice or activity can be termed as habit if it is often repeated. Let us understand with an example stated highlighting the psychological viewpoint. Supposing that *X* visited a restaurant to have her breakfast, for the first time because it was located nearby her house, and she liked the breakfast items very much. Eventually, before her office work, *X* becomes a frequent visitor to that restaurant. This has been a part of her routine. Can we call it a habit of having the same breakfast at the same restaurant? Yes, it is about habit. Now just imagine, one day her friend *Y* meets her and tells her to have a breakfast with her in some other restaurant, but *X* is reluctant to go to the other restaurant. Now, one can observe the tendency of a habit; a habit is usually hard to give up. One must have heard a proverb ‘old habits die hard.’ It means that if the habit was developed a long time back then it would be difficult to get over that particular habit and one’s behaviour could be changed by it.

Again when we look into instinct, ‘it is defined as an innate quality of an individual, typically a fixed pattern of behaviour in animals in response to certain stimuli’ (Hancock et al. 1948). An instinct is a fixed type of behaviour that appears naturally and has not learned by anyone’s instructions or previous experiences. For instance, the honeybees are perfect examples to define the term *instinct*. The honeybee comb is an important source of honey. Honeybees are neither trained to produce honey nor do they learn by watching the other bees producing honey. Still, they exhibit this complex pattern of behaviour

about manufacturing honeycomb, collecting honey and safely storing it. Each of them is a manifestation of various complex dispositions inherited by this species (Cosmides and Tooby 1997). The tendencies of the bees are instinctive. They do it naturally having their own means of protection and technique to maintain the optimum temperature inside the comb.

Habit and instinct are similar in nature, but the only difference between them is that both differ in their origin. A habit exhibits a learned type of behaviour, one that has been acquired after undergoing through repetitive encounters of various phases of learning experiences, whereas instinct is related to the naturally inherited type of behaviour. Another important difference between them is that a habit is not innate, that is, something inborn or inherited from previous generations, whereas instinct is based on the evolving behaviour patterns of the previous generations. A habit can differ from one individual to the other. For example, *X* and *Y* are two brothers; *X* has the habit of rubbing his hands, whereas *Y* has the habit of rubbing his eyes. On the other hand, same instincts tend to be acquired by similar animals. For example, every deer is scared of a tiger and runs to escape from the tiger.²

Many psychologists maintain that the habit formation is physical in nature. The basis of this characterization is related to our cognition and emotion, which play a greater role in performing cognitive activities, rather than repetition of mere physical acts. The psychological explanation of habit formation is connected with the function of neurons in the brain. Jeanette Kennett is of the opinion that “moral cognition is causally related to cognitive and affective processes of the brain. Experiments have shown that patients with damage to the ventromedial prefrontal cortex and orbitofrontal cortex are *adversely* affected by the effective process of learning to develop moral attitude” (Kennett and Gerrans 2010: 586). In general terms, on the basis of experimental research in neuroscience, a habit is being defined as a motor or cognitive routine. That is, ‘repeated neural representations are built up in basal ganglia during the acquisition of habits. And, with the damage in the different parts of the brain due to neurodegenerative disorder affects not only the procedural memory that helps in developing habits and skill but also the episodic memory’ (Jog et al. 1995:1745). The analysis of habits in terms of neural representation or brain process is triggered on a certain condition, which acts like the stimulus and the process is being carried out without conscious supervision (Bernacer and Murillo 2014:1). It shows that as if the entire process is characterized by “unconscious,” “rigid,” “automatic,” and more importantly, “non-teleological” factors. In other words, developing habits oppose to the goal-directed behaviour (Bernacer and Murillo 2014:1). However, the original and most elegant description of habits, which goes back to Aristotle, defines them as acquired dispositions that improve the agent’s performance, making him/her more successful in the quest to achieve a goal and that goal is called happiness or *eudaimonia*.

Understanding habitual action: a non-naturalistic viewpoint

Although understanding the usefulness of habit with reference to the neurophysiological functions of the brain processes is a scientific account, it still provides a *narrow*

² See, the Archive Article, 2015. “Difference between Habit and Instinct”, *N.D.* Retrieved January 1, 2015 from <http://www.differencebetween.info/difference-between-habit-and-instinct>.

description of habit. The epistemic concern of scientific explanation results in making an objective claim about the nature of habits. Nevertheless, this epistemology of habit does not involve the intentional, reflective attitude of the agency that could intervene in the very process of performing a habitual action and also the *teleological articulation* of the virtue of inculcating moral habits in human life. This unfolds a *wider* meaning of the notion of habit. For example, in cricket, some batsmen hold the bat in their left hand and some use their right hand. In this case, no conscious choice is made. It might be a spontaneous act to hold the bat in right hand, rather than in the left hand, depending only on how one is aptly conducting the act. That is, one is naturally disposed to act in a particular way. Gradually one becomes habituated to hold the bat perfectly while batting. This is due to the kind of habituation that the person has undergone.

Corresponding to this, there is a psychophysical correlation which not only shows the neurological simulation but also is defined in terms of habitual memory. Henri Bergson took this as the model when he described habit as somatic (Malikail 2003). To describe a habitual action as spontaneous action diminishes the force of the *voluntary action*. It gives an impression that such an expression of habitual action is just instinctive. The instinctive reactions are *unconscious* (Dunlap 1922:88) and in that sense mechanical action. To do something *mechanically* implies an absence of reference to the *freedom of will* and the *purpose* of performing. The notion of *will* and *purpose* are intrinsically associated with the notion of agency. They help in explaining the moral attitude of the agent.

As we mentioned about the notion of *holding*, the normative teleological dimension of the habit of holding could be further illustrated with reference to a batsman's hold of the bat while playing cricket. For instance, a batsman in cricket does hold the bat in a particular way where the holding position is very important. Little change in the manner of holding would affect his ways of playing the desirable stroke. The habit of holding bat cannot be merely spontaneous or an *unconscious act*. Had it been always so, a batsman could have retained his form on a regular basis. Seeing the frequent change in their form of batting it is noticed that many times the batsman fails to retain the habitual action. As it is desirable to maintain the form, there is a scope for freedom of exercising the *will* to improve upon habitual action. In this connection, the batsman should reflectively cultivate the habit of holding the bat in the right position as it is one of the key determinants of the loss and gain in the *form* of batting. Thus, holding the bat during the practice sessions are to be reflectively carried out so that while playing the real matches the purposive character of habit is exhibited. Such is not a mechanical expression of batting. Rather, a cricketer inculcates the habit *consciously* or willfully in order to improve upon his skill of batting. Thus, the notion of habitual action is not merely about the bodily processes, but also has to do with choice and effort. This form of developing habit thus involves normative and teleological elements, which are reflected in the behaviour of the agent. The agential control, in the case of a batsman, overperforming and regulating his stroke shows the capacity of direct intervention. By "act of will one can intervene and can stop oneself from exercising a given habit" (Pollard 2006:59). On the contrary, suppose that one has the habit of drinking shows how one is addicted to alcohol. To refrain from this habit or at least to put some sincere effort to bring this habit of regular drinking to an end is an indication of the act of *will*. As an agent, one has the responsibility to overcome the addictive attitude by rationalizing and understanding this fact that such a habit is not *good* for health as *well-being* is

essential for life. Aristotle construes this attitude as the attitude of will that exhibits courage – moral strength in performing an action that brings *well-being*. It is in this connection, “virtuous deeds are a determination of good will. So far as the development of moral character is concerned this strength is derived from the virtue of willpower” (Roberts 1998: 228).

The lack of intervention and control over one’s own habitual action may lead to an unhappy situation. Particularly, when someone is a victim of addiction or certain compulsion he/she loses moral willpower or authority. The power of will shows the possibility of doing otherwise where one retains one individuality or authority. The agent is an author of his/her actions, which are intended, planned, and deliberated which show the intellectual ability. Many times, the agent is inclined to do something, but that may not have a good consequence to one’s life. In this regard, habitual actions *ought to* be connected with the *telos* of life. One must act consistently in order to realize this that his/her actions are adding up to fulfil the purpose. In this regard, Aristotle emphasizes on the habitual action, a teleological account of understanding. It is because the purpose of performing any activities on a regular basis as a habitual action must have moral a significance. The manner in which good habits are pursued shows the way of constituting moral character.

Moral habit and virtue: an Aristotelian perspective

Aristotle’s ethics offers us a realistic hope of his moral ideal about habit and virtue by elucidating not only the requirements of virtue but also the methods by which we develop virtue. He argues that happiness or well-being is “the chief good” of human life, as it alone is “always desirable in itself and never for the sake of something else” (1999a, b: 1097b25–30). Virtue is an intrinsic value. Human happiness or well-being is necessarily connected with virtue which stands for itself as the ultimate *end* of life. Although external goods such as noble birth, children, and wealth are necessary “equipment” or *means* of the good life, the most basic requirement of such a life is “activity of the soul in accordance with complete excellence” (1999a, b: 1097b25–30). Then in the opening lines of Book II of *NE*, Aristotle intimately connects habits to virtue by stating that “moral excellence [i.e., virtue] comes about as a *result* of habit” (1999a, b: 1103b15–20). As we have discussed the last stage of habit in the first section of the paper, the practising moral habits not only shows virtue is intrinsically connected with habitual action but also shows that the moral character of a virtuous person is expressed in his/her behaviour. The precise nature of this relationship between virtue and habit is principally explicated through a partial analogy between virtue and the arts.

Aristotle presents his analogy of virtue referring to the notion of arts largely in order to argue for virtues as a set of skills, which gradually develops over time through practice. Then in Chapter IV of *NE*, Aristotle notes the incompleteness of his earlier analogy and maintains that virtues require a person to be in a particular internal state, while the arts do not. The internal state of a moral agent refers to practical wisdom or practical reason that also unfolds the virtue of the willpower. On the other hand, the art refers to the external dimension of action, which the agent performs as an outcome of virtuous thought. This partial analogy, thus, explains both the external and internal elements of habituated virtues. Regular practice is the only a way to earn virtuous

action. By regular practice, we can inculcate virtues which help in building moral character.

Although Aristotle is clear about the necessary connection between habit and virtue in *NE*, he, unfortunately, reveals little of his understanding of the habituation (Hsieh 2002). Precisely how, we might ask, does the practice of virtuous actions over time create a virtuous character? How does repetition cultivate skills and shape affect? Despite the lack of a direct answer to these questions, Aristotle does offer us some clues. Given our modern understanding of habits, there are two conceptions of moral habits, one mechanistic, and the other emotionalistic, might at first glance seem a plausible understanding of Aristotelian moral habits. However, as we will see later, it makes no good sense of the entirety of Aristotle's commentary on habits.

In contrast, Nancy Sherman's view of habits as grounded in discernment appears far more promising. As she has discussed in her book, *The Fabric of Character* (2014), it is essentially in agreement with this account of the process of habituation. She writes:

A more plausible conception [than rote blindness] of repeating the same action will involve trying to approximate some ideal action type that has been set as one's goal. Learning through repetition will then be a matter of successive trials that vary from one another as they approach this ideal way of acting. The practice is more a refinement of actions through successive trials than a sheer mechanical repetition of any one action (2014:178).

There is a scope for improvement, as we relate to the teleological interpretation of learning good habits. The naturalistic construal of habits seems to be mechanistic and does not provide a broad or holistic account of the development of moral character. A cursory reading of Aristotle might tempt us to endorse such a mechanistic or naturalistic view of habits as Aristotle's, particularly in light of his occasional comments on the installation of habits in others. Teaching virtue to a fellow citizen is a collective institutional responsibility. Teachers, parents and legislators of the state are responsible for educating the youth. As Aristotle suggests, "make the citizens good by forming habits in them" (1999a, b: 1103b25–30). Similarly, parents must instill good habits in their children so that those children feel the appropriate pleasures and pains. For example, in *Politics*, Aristotle recommends that parents "accustom children to the cold from their earliest years" on the general principle that "human nature should be early but gradually habituated to endure all which by habit it can be made to endure" (1999a, b: 1115b20–25). Such comments are appeared right through in Aristotle's writings, seem to indicate that a process of habituation could be imposed upon others from without, perhaps even without their knowledge or consent.

Referring to the nature of the habitual action, John Dryden remarks that "first we make our habits, then our habits make us".³ Habituated thinking in a particular pattern creates psychological tendencies path that affects our attitude and behaviour. Habits, thus, are reflected in character. In other words, habitual actions determine the character of a person, which could decide his destiny. Every individual is morally responsible for the kind of habitual action he/she performs. We do plan action, and in this regard, a teleological account of construing habitual action is essential unfeigned with the moral character.

³ See, the quote of John Dryden (fifteenth century English poet, literary critics) which is published in <http://www.healingphilosophy.com>, *Archive Healing Philosophy: Harness your inner strength*, 2008.

In a society, not everyone gets the equal opportunity to educate oneself and develop oneself morally. But human nature is such that they would be naturally inclined towards virtues. Rightful inculcation of virtue would act as a guiding principle of action and would influence in such a way that one learns to become good. Referring to the notion of character change, Aristotle articulates the point citing a quote from the poet Evenus (1999a, b: 1152a30). After noting that incontinence (*akrasia*) comes about both by nature and through ethos which is easier to change than nature, Aristotle then blurs the distinction and claims this is why ethos itself is hard to change—because it resembles nature. As Evenus puts it, “Ethos comes, my friend, by practice year on year—and see: At last this thing we practice our own nature is” (quoted Evenus in Aristotle 1999a, b: 1116a5–15). The process, Aristotle has in mind has several developmental stages, but he is also clear that it never ceases at any point of time – character development is a continuous process. Aristotle presents ethos as a mode of human development in contrast to other forms of human development. For instance, Aristotle considers that *eudaimonia* comes about in one’s life through learning, the performance of a right action, fortune, divine dispensation, and “ethos or some other form of training” (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013:21-1148b27–31, 1152a27–33). He also considers people become good by right involvement that includes nature, ethos and teaching (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013). Several character traits that show pleasure-seeking attitude or express weakness of will, can come either through ethos or nature (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013). Therefore, there is a need to overcome the weakness of will the inculcation of virtues in habitual action.

The *ethos of askêsis* captures the standard notion of “habituation” expressed by Aristotle. Though he repeatedly mentions that an agent develops ethical virtue through the repetition of virtuous actions, (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013) still *askêsis* reveals simplicity in the *way of living* while inculcating virtue. On the other hand, *hexis* signifies a kind of moral virtue that is not derived from nature, rather formed and possessed by a practitioner of virtue. For example, the behaviour of a moral exemplar, whose character trait is formed not only by following virtues emotionally, but also cultivating virtues intelligently which consequently deliver in transforming the *ethos* into *hexis*. Although *ethos* clearly includes the notion of “habituation,” Aristotle also uses *ethos* to describe an aspect of character development, which includes a cognitive component. Such “habituation” produces what Aristotle calls “the knowledge that” rather than “the knowledge why.” Knowledge consists of a broad array of learned and cultivated virtues that defines ‘what is noble and shameful, about what one should take pleasure in and what one should be repulsed by or abstain from’ (Sparrow and Hutchinson 2013) is a necessary element for the development of moral character. The moral agent ought to draw the limit of his/her intervention rationally. So far as the knowledge of virtues is concerned, it is acquired from very deep level habituation undertaking earnest persuasion and exhortation because the ethical part of the soul stands in relationship to reason like a child stands in relation to parents.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have discussed two aspects: whether Aristotle’s notions of habits are naturalistic or non-naturalistic, and can good habit help to form a moral character. Following the discussion, we find that the naturalistic construal of habit has been

behaviouristic by associating habit with innate, instinctive nature of life. The development of moral character goes beyond the naturalistic construal of habit in the form of physical skill. Rather the non-naturalistic perspective shows how Aristotle's notion of virtue and its inculcation in everyday life that results in developing moral character is grounded in the normative power of the freedom of will. That is to say, the moral character is developed by strengthening the power of will. To behave morally, there is a need to follow virtue in everyday life. The process of habituation refines the skill of performing good action. To regulate the habits and formation of right judgment in the right situation, Aristotle brings in the notion of practical wisdom defined in terms of rational ability to deliberate and exercise the power of will to realize *eudemonia*. The Aristotelian conceptualization of moral agency is grounded in rational ability to inculcate virtue in everyday life. Virtue as a guiding principle of moral action is construed delving into the teleological explanation of life. The non-naturalistic interpretation, in this regard, provides a teleological account of the role of virtue and its intrinsic relation in building moral character – that is, “a reasoned and true state of capacity to act with regard to the human goods” (Aristotle 1999a, b: 1140b20–25).

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