Habituation and Teaching Are Obsolete

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For contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics (VE), the flourishing life is the virtuous life, and the virtues are acquired through a combination of habituation and teaching.[i] However, when habituation, teaching, and certain features of contemporary society are taken seriously, it becomes clear that habituation and teaching are under-described and over-prescribed by VE. Unfortunately, contemporary society's rapid, unpredictable transformations impede habituation, and society's complex interrelatedness, misinformation campaigns, and multiple incompatible value systems impede teaching. Habituation and teaching just don't work very well, or very often these days. We need new strategies for virtue acquisition – strategies which take account of the conditions of the contemporary world.

I.   TAKING HABITUATION SERIOUSLY

I begin with some straightforward, precautionary distinctions between the sort of habituation that is part of the character improvement process and a few other practices. We show kids how to do things, and often walk them through some novel activity. "Hold your fork like this, Bartholomew." But getting kids started is not habituation. It is, at most, the bare beginning of habituation. We instruct kids on how to behave or feel in certain situations. "Give Calypso back her toy, and say you're sorry." "Don't be so angry, Calypso; Bartholomew didn't mean any harm." But one action does not a habit make. Sometimes we give kids scripts to follow in regularly recurring situations. "When grandma is napping, don't bang on your drum." But informing kids of what is appropriate is not habituation. In fact, it is teaching. Sometimes we unconsciously develop routines or automatically adopt rituals. I buckle my seatbelt before starting the car, and offer a hand or hug when greeting friends from afar. But slipping without thought into a routine or ritual is not habituation. Habitual actions are chosen.

A.   WHAT HABITS ARE TO BE INSTILLED?

Habituation is habit-building, but not just any habits will improve character. In certain ways, the process of virtue-acquisition is similar to the process of skill-acquisition.[ii] The skill analogy is a boon to VE, but only when used with caution. Taking hammering to be the relevant sort of skill might suggest that virtues are mechanical habits of action. For the skill analogy to work, one must use complex skills like cabinet-making rather than simple skills like hammering. The habits which constitute character are not *simple* habits of action.

Nor are they *simply* habits of action. Habituation consists not only in building good habits of action, but also in building good habits of perception, passion, desire, and choice. Each of these is complex. Virtuous perceptions properly frame situations, foreground relevant features, and classify what is perceived. Virtuous passions and desires feel and desire the right things, on the right occasions,

to the right degree, towards the right objects, and for the right duration. Virtuous choice begins with sound practical reasoning applied to a concrete situation, and either persuades passion and desire to buy in, or overrules recalcitrant passions and desires so that right action results. Habituation's goal is to produce firm, fine dispositions to do all of this. Virtuous people reliably react to situations in all of these ways. For example, to acquire the virtue of good-temper, Dogbert must come to recognize insults and injuries reliably when they occur, properly assess their level of severity, identify appropriately calibrated responses, desire to respond in these ways, and actually make these responses. He must reliably feel the appropriate level of anger (neither too much, nor too little), for the right duration (neither implacable nor yielding), toward the right people (neither taking his anger out on his kids, nor being overly forgiving toward wrongdoers), for the right things (neither touchy, nor laid-back).[iii]

B.   WHAT DOES HABITUATION TAKE?

Habituation is not a quick intervention to instill some simple reflex – a few brief remarks to a tyke over dinner plus a single trip to the park. Instead, another similarity between virtue-acquisition and skill-acquisition is that both take a very long time. Habituation requires repeating acts on many, many occasions. Moreover, this merely addresses the action component; habituating the other components of virtue is a further task. Sometimes VE talks as if habituation of action will magically produce the rest. But not so. In addition to repeatedly acting well, aspirants need to perceive, feel, desire, and choose well over and over and over again in order to replace bad habits. Instilling virtuous habits is a very protracted project addressing the multiple, complicated parts of virtue. Such long, tedious, campaigns with low-success rates are not undertaken lightly or frequently. Every bit of it is going to take work as well as time.

While there are many points of similarity, virtues are not skills. The most obvious difference is that skills are morally neutral while virtues are not, but I shall mention a pair of different differences. First, an insufficiently cautious appeal to the skill analogy might suggest that the process of habituation consists in instilling habits where there are none. But the acquisition of virtues and skills involve different baselines for habituation. When learning to build cabinets, aspiring carpenters are creating habits *ex nihilo*. However, aspiring virtue-possessors (aspirants) do not start from scratch, but rather swap one set of habits for another. Unlike skill-habituation, virtue-habituation generally replaces bad traits with better ones. People acquire and change character traits willy nilly without conscious planning or effort, but because habituation is such a big deal, we don't start the *cultivation* of virtue in children or adults from scratch. Instead, we adopt a hands-off approach at first. People develop a mix of good and bad habits on their own. We intervene to *redirect* development; to get it back on the rails, to fix a problem, to reform a proto-vice. Only when we see bad traits do we start trying to replace them with better traits.

Second, habituation requires much more luck than even quite complex skills. The absence of severe disease, and the presence of adequate levels of the goods of fortune are prerequisites for habituation. One sort of luck is having habituation coaches. Whether the coaches be parents, friends, therapists, parole officers, or the aspirants themselves, they will need alertness, perceptiveness, and knowledge to spot the problem, motivation, means, and skill to handle the problem effectively, time, concentration, and commitment to address the problem for as long as it takes, etc. Similarly, the aspirant needs various goods and resources to begin, follow through, and succeed at the process.

I shall focus on a different sort of luck. Aristotle says that the weather in northern Europe is too cold for virtues to develop, and the weather in Persia is too warm (*Politics* 1327b18-31). Although his example is not creditable, his general point is correct. Aspirants need to dwell within an environment conducive to virtue acquisition. Having clarified what habituation involves, I shall present a pair of typical examples in order to bring forward some of the environmental prerequisites for character improvement.

Egbert is currently stingy. His sister, Henrietta, urges him to become generous. But Egbert cannot begin by developing the habits of across-the-board generosity. That would be overly ambitious. Instead, Henrietta urges Egbert to start with a manageable change; develop the habit of giving spare change to beggars. Egbert replies, "Why should I do that? Helping others people is for suckers, and anyway beggars are lazy losers." Henrietta cannot *persuade* Egbert that giving to beggars is a good thing to do because Egbert has not only all of the wrong habits of perceptions, passions, desire, choice, and action, but also a witch's brew of bad values and mistaken beliefs. Egbert *is* stingy; he doesn't just *act* stingily. Therefore Henrietta replies, "Trust me; generous people lead better lives than stingy people. Just do it until it becomes a habit." She believes that repeated acts of giving plus the remarks she plans to make from day to day will eventually transform Egbert's mindset.

Now how long is that process going to take? Egbert's short-term goal is habitually to *give* to beggars when he encounters them. Together with his sister, Egbert works out a plan specifying how much to give, what to say, etc. He aims to get to the point of reaching into his pocket almost automatically when he sees a beggar. Moreover, this choice and action is not the only part, or even the main part of habituation. Egbert needs to habituate his perceptions, reasoning, and passions too. He needs to come to *see* beggars as victims of misfortune or oppression rather than lazy losers. He needs to *feel* more than a fleeting twinge of sympathy for each beggar, and *desire* to help them. (He also needs to *believe* that the social world allows, or even causes poverty; that individuals should contribute to the alleviation of poverty; that giving spare change to beggars is an effective contribution; and so on. But instilling these beliefs is a task for teaching rather than habituation.) Since Egbert begins the project stingy and prejudiced against poor people, all of this will be particularly difficult. It will take months or years.

Moreover, this process alone will be insufficient. Eventually, he will have to generalize to other sorts of generosity. Otherwise, he will merely gain the micro-virtue of generosity-to-beggars. To become across-the-board generous, Egbert must either develop hundreds of micro-virtues of generosity, and combine them in order to form the virtue of generosity, simpliciter, or generalize the micro-virtue of generosity-to-beggars to cover the working poor, friends with first-world problems, cancer researchers … a significant portion of the huge sphere of generosity. Of course, the first option is not feasible. Thus, Egbert must develop the component of practical wisdom which enables him to grasp the similarity among different sorts of expressions of the virtue of generosity. But since this is a bit of practical wisdom, it is acquired by teaching. Hence it is one of the last acquisitions of aspirants. That is one reason why micro-virtues are common, but virtues are rare.

People are invested in their bad habits, even if they are also invested in changing their habits. A resolution to change does not, by itself, produce change. It is strongly resisted by rationalizations which erode the motivation of the resolution, and the ambivalent individual takes no action. Moreover, people with bad habits of action generally also have bad habits of passion and perception that support those

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habits. These spring into play when situations calling for action arise. Even if the aspirant is wholeheartedly committed to changing bad habits, the support structure of passions, and desires lingers. It remains as a powerful undertow countering the aspirant's struggles to improve.

C. WHO IS TO BE HABITUATED?

Picturing habituation as beginning with blank slates and instilling simple traits might tempt VE to take the targets of habituation to be small children. We do sometimes habituate kids, but recognizing that habituation is a long, large project reveals that kids are not the main targets of habituation.

Here is what instilling courageous habits in a kid looks like. Her daddy considers Gardenia to be a timid kid. He has offered suggestions and encouragement, pointed out age-appropriate courageous role models, etc. But nothing has worked. Now Gardenia's daddy sets out to instill courage by habituation. Gardenia is afraid of climbing on the jungle gym, so Daddy says, "Try it while I stand under you. If you fall, I'll catch you." Gardenia tries it. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again. Again.… Fifty reps later, Daddy has established a bridgehead. Of course, Daddy does more than merely stand ready to catch her. He selects and structures her outings so that she learns to perceive risks correctly, and feels appropriate fear. He ensures that Gardenia enjoys the outings so that she will desire to repeat them. But the flourishing life is the life of virtue rather than playground-virtue. Daddy wants to instill the virtue of courage rather than the micro-virtue of courage-on-jungle-gyms. The virtue of courage is a disposition to react well to a substantial percentage of the situations involving physical risk. Thus, Daddy goes through a similar process with respect to climbing trees, bicycle riding, swimming, patting puppies,… Months later, Daddy has made significant progress. But Gardenia still does not automatically generalize from a few types of cases to situations that she has not yet encountered. She will not be ready to generalize to the whole sphere of courage – to all situations involving physical risk – for a long time.

If we don't generally habituate kids, who do we habituate? In general, the targets of habituation are teens and adults with bad habits. Habituation is self-improvement, rehabilitation of prisoners, therapy for patients, counseling for clients, boot camp for soldiers, on-the-job-training for interns, etc.

D. HABITUATION IMPEDED

Since overcoming bad habits is a non-trivial struggle, habituation requires lots of time and luck. I don't deny that the process of habituation sometimes reaches its end. But I maintain that it is often impeded by the frequent changes and complexity of the modern world. To illustrate …

Egbert resolves to become generous. He forces himself to give spare change to beggars on day #1, day #2, day #3, … He begins to make progress, but then an unrelated trend intervenes. Egbert starts using his credit cards and PayPal to pay for small as well as large purchases, so he ceases carrying and receiving change. He reminds himself to carry change for the purpose of donating to beggars, but remembering is an extra step. He forgets. Remembers. Forgets. Forgets. Remembers. Forgets. Forgets. Finally, remembering proves to be too much of a stumbling block, and the whole project sputters to halt. Although it seems trivial to the already-generous, small obstacles often suffice to derail large character improvement projects.

In response to his sister's renewed urging, Egbert adopts a different path to generosity – kindness toward his colleagues. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, generalizing is an advanced skill, so Egbert cannot transfer his improved perceptions, passions, desires, choices, and actions from beggars to colleagues. He was able to progress by focusing on beggars' blatant neediness, but his colleagues look prosperous. Their problems are first-world problems. Egbert must start from scratch. Again, he makes progress, but one day Egbert tells a sexist joke. A few years ago it would have been acceptable, but Egbert missed the memo when standards changed. His colleague shouts; Egbert shouts; everyone shouts. An already-generous person could have overcome this setback, apologized for his/her words, forgiven others for their words, and moved on. But Egbert is still far from generous, so the conflict torpedoes Egbert's relationship with his colleagues.

Undaunted, Egbert seeks a third path to generosity. Egbert's accountant points out that charitable donations would provide significant tax benefits. Thus incentivized, Egbert decides to build the micro-virtue of writing large checks to NGOs. Unfortunately, his progress on giving to beggars and colleagues doesn't help him with the checks. He hasn't yet developed his sympathy to the point where it extends to people who are not physically present. Similarly for habits of choice, perception, and action. Thus, he is unable to transfer his marginally improvements from beggars and colleagues to NGO's. So he must start over from scratch. Egbert writes checks on day #1, day #2, day #3, ... Again, he makes some progress, but before he can form a habit, his kid takes a fall, and medical bills soak up all of Egbert's spare money. Again, he must start over.

Consider a different example. Henrietta thinks she is timid, and seeks to become more courageous. She realizes that going on dates is risky, but also potentially rewarding. Dating thus presents an opportunity to develop the virtue of courage. Henrietta begins to date. She strives to be alert to dangers and opportunities, take appropriate risks and precautions, acquire the right habits of reasoning, feel attraction for the right people, etc. In junior high school, she "dates" in groups for safety and shared decision-making. But as she gets older, she must change her approach to dating for various reasons. Pairwise dating becomes the norm; the possibility of pregnancy transforms the risks; etc. Henrietta must now exercise a different sort judgment about who to date, where to go, how to behave in various different contexts. Her perceptions and emotions must also change. When she goes to college, she must change her patterns of action, perception, passion, and choice, again. Henrietta must now be alert to the possibility of date-rape drugs in her drink at fraternity parties, increasing likelihood of marriage (and thus marriage to an abuser), etc. After she graduates from college, dating looks very different. She must develop new practices, yet again. And again when she moves to a different area of the country, or becomes a single parent, etc. Even if she makes progress toward developing virtuous habits each time, she must begin again upon each change in circumstances. At no point is she able to spend enough time to develop a full-fledged set of courageous habits of action, passion, perception, and choice. She can't even acquire the micro-virtue of courageous-dating, let alone generalize to across-the-board courage.

Aristotle alerts us to another sort of problem. He says that magnificence is a virtue concerned with the tasteful expenditure of large sums of money (1107b17-19, 1122a20-23). Now most people spend large sums of money only rarely, if at all. (Perhaps one $30,000 wedding, and nothing else of that magnitude.) Magnificence cannot be acquired by most people via habituation. This problem doesn't exercise Aristotle because his students are privileged, and it doesn't exercise VE because magnificence is not currently considered to be a virtue. However, in the contemporary world, a parallel problem arises

for several character traits which are clearly virtues, but like magnificence, are exercised in rare situations for certain groups of people. One example is courage. As my example of Henrietta illustrates courage is clearly virtue of women in the modern world. However, while women confront situations of physical risk quite frequently, men outside of certain careers do not. Courage is a role virtue for policemen, firemen, soldier, etc., but ironically, courage is a woman's virtue in the contemporary world, for men generally lack the opportunity to develop courageous habits.

To summarize, habituation is an extremely long process of eliminating complex, bad habits and replacing them with complex, good habits. The typical targets are not young children, but rather teens and adults. Because time and consistency are necessary, habituation is hindered, and often foiled by the frequent, unpredictable changes of circumstance that constitute the human condition in the contemporary world. I do not maintain that habituation always fails, but that it succeeds so rarely that it should not be central to the VE account of character improvement. VE needs strategies better suited to the contemporary world.

II.   TAKING TEACHING SERIOUSLY

Again, I begin with a few preliminaries. As with habituation, I shall not be talking about all sorts of teaching, but only the sort of teaching considered to be a component of virtue-acquisition. Moreover, I don't deny that one can teach a tidbit of virtue here and there. But I shall maintain that the tidbits seldom add up to an adequate, sustained virtue education.

A. WHO IS TO BE TAUGHT?

Some may picture the Aristotelian process of character improvement in the following way. First, a virtue is described to the aspirant at a high level of generality, and also in significant detail. Big pictures and broad principles are presented. Exemplars are invoked, examples offered, applications worked out, and demonstrations provided. For example, courageous action is described as taking one's fair share of risks that are worth it. Aspirants are told that in firefights, courage means this sort of thing, while in firefighting it means that sort of thing. Courageous people don't take large pointless risks, but they also don't hang back when lives can easily be saved with a low risk of mild injury. Aspirants are enjoined to feel fear in proportion to the severity and degree of risk. Fear falling beams in flaming houses, but not falling leaves in the Fall. After being told what to do and how to do it, and when, and why, and with what passions and desires, the aspirant sallies forth to practice until the actions, passions, desires, choices, perceptions, and rationales become routine.

This may be a common-sense approach to character improvement, but it is *not* Aristotelian habituation. In this approach, teaching comes first, and habituation second, but Aristotle quite explicitly and frequently rules out this talk-first-act-later ordering. He won't even allow simultaneous habituation and teaching. He not only asserts that habituation must *precede* teaching, but also argues for his sequence by explaining how teaching *presupposes* habituation. Aristotle says,

> 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. (1095b3-6, see also 1095a2-7, 1103a31-b2, 1179b23-31, *Politics* 1338b4-5)

One does not grasp a virtue at a theoretical level, and then apply this theoretical understanding to particular situations so as to practice it and form habits of virtuous action. Teaching enables aspirants to *generalize* their habits; they do not apply what they have learned from their teachers to *form* habits. Aristotle's insight is not that mere principles, unsupplemented by habits, are insufficiently motivating and/or automatic. *Every* reasonable theory of character improvement acknowledges the importance of repetition. *Every* theory allows that practice makes perfect. The distinctive feature of Aristotle's account of character improvement is that habituation provides some of the preconditions for the uptake of teaching.

One reason that teaching must generally build on good habits is familiar to all teachers. Suppose that a teacher tries to teach something pertaining to a certain sphere to aspirants with bad habits of perception, passion, desire, choice, and action in that sphere. These habits will be triggered, even as the aspirants struggle to accept the teaching. And the bad habits will hinder teaching just as they hinder habituation.

Good habits must precede successful teaching for another reason, too. Aristotle correctly observes that virtuous action is pleasant for the virtuous, but painful for the non-virtuous. Donating the right amount of money is unpleasant for people who overvalue or undervalue money. Drinking the right amount of alcohol is unpleasant for people who desire too much or too little alcohol. And so on. "One cannot get the pleasures of a just man without being just" (1173b29-30, see also 1104b3-7). Thus, telling people with bad habits to change their habits is enjoining them to do painful things. Such urging has a low success rate.[iv]

Thus, the target audience of teaching consists of people who already have good habits. Young children don't have many habits; they do not respond reliably to situations. Thus, they are not ready for teaching. Teaching generally targets adolescents and adults.

We all know folks (perhaps some of us are folks) who have eventually accepted teaching despite bad habits and the accompanying rationalizations. Ninety two out of a hundred people fail to follow through on their New Year's Resolutions. Marrying with the plan to change changing one's spouse via remonstration is not a best practice. Aristotle's claim that the vicious are incorrigible (1114a15-21) is not much of an exaggeration. Talking people out of bad habits is hard and rare, though not impossible.

B. WHAT IS TO BE TAUGHT?

Some teaching consists in explanations, but I shall focus on teaching that is action-guiding – statements of what we should do rather than why we should do it. VE takes the combination of habituation and teaching to equip aspirants with the virtues. In most situations, successful habituation would be enough to guide action. What to do in most situations is blindingly obvious. Should I pay for dinner, or just walk out of the restaurant without paying? However, in two sorts of situations, mere successful habituation would be insufficient.

First, habituation is limited to the sorts of situations already experienced by the aspirant. (A further limitation is that habits sometimes fail to form, or are badly formed.) Habituation produces virtuous micro-habits, but will not enable aspirants to generalize from these to the rest of the sphere, let alone to other spheres. After Gardenia forms habits of playground courage, and puppy-patting courage,

and standing-up-to-bullies-courage, and 27 other bits of courage, she still needs to be taught about courage because she does not yet have habits suitable for dealing with the rest of the courage sphere.

Second, although habituation enables aspirants to handle ordinary cases well, it does not equip aspirants to handle hard cases. Now sometimes situations are initially challenging, but they merely *seem* to be hard cases; they are *pseudo-dilemmas*. After uncovering further facts and further alternatives, rethinking and reframing, consulting others and comparing alternatives, the issues turn out to be straightforward. Such techniques dissolve most problems without appealing to complex practical reasoning, but *actual dilemmas* remain.

Some dilemmas occur within a single sphere. That is, they involve a single sort of value. Suppose option A offers more sensual pleasure than option B, but the pleasure is less certain. Which option should a temperate person choose? Suppose suppliant A is more needy, but less likely to be helped than suppliant B. Which suppliant should a benevolent person aid? Consider a concrete example. How should Jocko vote on Iocane's application for tenure? On paper, Iocane doesn't meet the tenure standards, but as usual the standards are vague, and mention only some of the relevant factors. Iocane has various accomplishments in teaching, research, and service which are somewhat non-standard, and thus arguably undervalued by the tenure policy. Moreover, Iocane has been held back by sexism within the university, although it is hard to say how much she has been hindered. So looked at merely as a question of justice, the vote is a dilemma.

When Jocko looks at the situation from the perspectives of friendship and benevolence as well as justice, his vote is further complicated by the facts that Iocane is his friend, and that she is a single mom. It is now revealed to be a dilemma involving incommensurable goods, a situation lying within the intersection of multiple spheres. Habits of impartial justice pull Jocko in one direction; habits of friendship and benevolence pull him in another direction. Good habits of perception portray the situation in different ways. Good habits of passion and desire motivate Jocko to act in different ways; good habits of choice and action dispose Jocko to act in different ways. I don't mean to suggest that there is no right answer, but only that getting to the right answer requires practical wisdom rather than mere habituation (and there will be a remainder no matter what Jocko chooses).[v]

Even if habituation were able to handle all intra-sphere dilemmas, habituation alone would be insufficient to handle inter-sphere dilemmas because virtuous habits pull in different directions. Aspirants need practical reasoning techniques for adjudicating hard cases within, and especially between spheres. These techniques enable aspirants to move soundly from facts and good values to appropriate choices. The facts, values, and techniques are to be provided by teaching rather than habituation.

Alas, this is not the end of the story. Good choices don't automatically yield good actions. Plenty of folks reliably fail to implement their fine choices. Incontinence is epidemic. Implementation is often the hardest part, even when what should be done is obvious. Teaching must step in where habituation does not tread in order to provide strategies.

C. WHAT DOES IT TAKE?
To make good choices, aspirants need (1) good values, (2) correct beliefs about situations, and (3) effective practical reasoning techniques enabling them to draw valid conclusions from beliefs and

values to choices. Of course, aspirants will also need to act on their choices, so they need (4) effective implementation strategies in cases where their habits are insufficiently motivating. Teaching will need to instill these things.

Now aspirants do not make it to adolescence without absorbing various values, beliefs, techniques, and strategies. So the task of teachers is not to imprint values, facts, techniques, and strategies onto black slates, but rather to replace substitute facts for misconceptions, good values for bad, sound reasoning techniques for fallacious ones, and effective strategies for fruitless fads.

1. Values

One reason that teaching values is difficult is that values, like habits, do not exist in isolation from each other. They are intertwined and mutually supporting. To change a value (or even to add a value), a teacher must change many.

Another reason is that instructors seldom get anywhere with students who begin with apathy or antipathy to the project of learning whatever the instructor is teaching. If students are indifferent or have already rejected it – if they begin with the belief that the lesson is mistaken or unimportant – then teaching will not go well. Teachers of virtue usually won't get far with aspirants who disdain virtue.

Values can be changed, but because of these and other difficulties, value-transformation is not typically accomplished in a single, solo leap. Success takes lots of time, and committed, talented teachers.

2. Facts

Aristotle's claim that experience is a precondition of teaching (1095a2-7) is an exaggeration.[vi] People *can* learn things without experience. His claim is also misleading. *Mere* experience is insufficient. Situations must teach the right lessons. Moreover, they must be experienced through the right lens. Otherwise, aspirants learn nothing, or the wrong things. The aspirant must painstakingly pick out the relevant factors and grasp them in the right way in order to be ready to comprehend what is taught about them. The fact that the targets of teaching are people with false beliefs makes the task of teaching the relevant facts daunting.

Certain facts about the world are, indeed, difficult to understand, accept, and/or appreciate without having learned the right lessons from experience. First, some things are virtually impossible to explain to those who have never experienced them. For example, consider how hard it is to explain to new faculty members why you want to strangle the guy who pontificates at faculty meetings.

Acceptance is a second hurdle. For example, many believe, naively, that talented people who work hard always eventually succeed in life. From here, it is a quick jump to the dark contrapositive: since things always work out for talented, hardworking people, those who do not succeed must be incompetent or lazy. Experience is no silver bullet, but the right experiences, rightly appropriated tend to disabuse people of destructive beliefs like this one.

A third hurdle is appreciation. It is one thing to understand intellectually, but only after experience does one *really* understand. For example, everyone agrees that war is terrible, but those with combat experience will have a vivid, concrete understanding.

For these reasons, learning the facts thoroughly and deeply through teaching built upon bad experiences, badly appropriated experiences, or no experience is difficult. Again, time and teachers are necessary.

3. Reasoning

Aspirants will also need practical reasoning techniques. Alas, identifying techniques for resolving hard cases is a hard task beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, these techniques and strategies are things which must be identified, and then taught.

4. Implementation

The appropriate response to incontinence is not to grit one's teeth and try harder to resist temptation and distraction. Diverting power from the warp engines to the will sometimes works, but there is a better way. Reason selects a set of strategies for implementing choices: avoid situations of temptation, prepare a script for occasions when temptation is unavoidable, set manageable goals, forgive oneself for one's setbacks and then recommit, etc. Failure to implement good choices results from ineffective strategies for persuading or forcing oneself to do what reason enjoins.

Now inventing strategies which enable people to act upon their choices when their habits are insufficient is a task for psychology rather than philosophy. But people are very different. A crucial task of teaching is to identify effective strategies suited to each pupil. And then, of course, they must be taught to the pupils.

D. TEACHING IMPEDED

For the reasons sketched above, a person's beliefs, values, practical reasoning techniques, and implementation strategies all have inertia. Mere incontrovertible evidence, unanswerable arguments, logic classes, and life-coaching are usually insufficient to change them (not to mention the fact that aspirants are likely to engage powerful defense mechanisms). Teaching faces grave obstacles in the best of circumstances. Here I focus on certain additional obstacles thrown up by the contemporary world.

Listening to teaching and then digesting it takes tremendous amounts of concentration and time. The absence of long stretches of distraction-free time hinders teaching. Unfortunately, the pace of life has quickened, so aspirants must now *make* time in their busy lives for ethics instruction. Whereas an hour-long buggy ride home from a lesson used to provide an opportunity to meditate upon what one had learned, contemporary commutes are hardly conducive to contemplation.

The fact that the contemporary world is constantly changing is an obstacle for teaching as well as for habituation. Last year's teaching is already outdated.

The range of situations aspirants need to master has also increased. Successful habituation used to cover most situations, leaving comparatively little for teaching to do. But because of the diversity of the contemporary world, as well as its frequent transformations, aspirants are constantly encountering novel situations. Habituation covers less and less, leaving increasingly huge gaps for teaching to fill.

1. Values

When trying to teach values, teachers must cope with competition from numerous sources (media, movies, ministers, peers, posts, policies, etc.), all bombarding aspirants with conflicting value hierarchies.[vii] Cacophony ensues. For example, suppose Kabbage, a new faculty member, catches a student cheating. He happens to know that the student is a single mom, working 35 hours/week, and also going to college. When Kabbage confronts her, she confesses that she plagiarized, and explains that she did so because her child was sick, and she didn't have the time to do the assignment, herself. Kabbage seeks your advice about what to do. It is a teaching moment. But too many teachers spoils the stew. While you are thinking, Kabbage says,

> University policy is to report her to the student judiciary office. They will suspend her. My wife says working single moms deserve a break. Don't report her; just scold her, instead. The newspaper editorials say that people need to take responsibility for their own actions. On the other hand, Jesus and Gandalf say that mercy trumps justice.[viii] But in Sunday school, my teacher laid great emphasis on the Biblical passage, "The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat."[ix] When I was in the army, the sergeant didn't listen to excuses. You broke the rule; you did the pushups. My faculty mentor mentioned that in order to report her, I'll have to spend time and energy documenting her plagiarism, and I may get stuck attending a disciplinary hearing. So reporting her is not to my advantage. Pretty much everyone in the Teaching Philosophy FB group thinks I should give her a failing grade for the essay, and leave it at that. What do you think?

Now Kabbage may already have decided. He may merely be looking for confirmation of, or cover for his choice. But even if he is sincerely asking for advice, your "teaching" will just be one more bit of advice to be considered along with all of the others. You may hope to provide a knock-down argument, but that is a philosopher fantasy. Strategies such as reframing can transform the way in which situations are perceived in decisive ways, thus resolving pseudo-dilemmas. However, arguing for a certain decision in competition with the arguments of others in a real dilemma is very seldom decisive.[x]

2. Facts

With respect to beliefs about the world, systematic campaigns of deception are widespread, well-organized, well-funded, and quite effective. Fake news and false advertising are, perhaps the most visible of these campaigns, but there are many other sorts. Spins can be as effective as lies. Kabbage continues,

> I'm inclined to report her. She told me that she used to be on welfare, and I heard on the news that 90% of the people on welfare are lazy. They are sponging off of the government rather than getting a job. In fact, I know a guy

doing just that. So her plagiarism probably isn't the first time she cheated
rather than doing the work.

Now you know that Kabbage's belief about welfare recipients is false. But talking him out of it is going to be tough because he has seen some doctored, or deliberately misinterpreted statistics, several detailed articles describing a couple of cases of real welfare fraud, and his own observations of his neighbor to back up his view. You can present competing statistics, articles, and personal observations, but the likelihood of success is low.

A further problem is that crucial information is often unavailable in the contemporary world. Many of our encounters are with strangers, unaccustomed practices, and novel institutions rather than with acquaintances, traditions, and familiar organizations. For example, Kabbage knows nothing about his student, and so is in no position to verify the truth of her claims. As a new faculty member, he lacks local knowledge about this university's student body, and may have never encountered a case like this. We also need detailed knowledge about huge, complex organizations (e.g. Exxon, London) and disciplines (e.g. Econ, Law). Such knowledge is available, but mastering enough of it to solve dilemmas is a challenge surmountable only by experts.

Perhaps in times past, some of people's problematic beliefs and values could be delicately disentangled from the rest of their mental states, and changed one-by-one. Of course, it is still sometimes possible. However, these days aspirants don't generally have a set of mostly fine beliefs and values with a few, correctable glitches. Instead, beliefs and values form clusters. Rather than challenging and changing values and facts here and there, teachers must expunge and replace entire worldviews. Contemporary teaching is not belief-tweaking and value-tweaking, but rather consciousness-raising and cult-deprograming. Teachers must unchain the prisoners in Plato's cave, turn them toward excruciatingly bright firelight, and drag them kicking and screaming up a steep slope towards the truth. Teachers must convince aspirants that much of what they have hitherto believed is false, and much of what they have hitherto treasured is worthless. Pain will be plentiful, and resistance tremendous. This noble endeavor has a low success rate.

3. Reasoning

As with teaching values and facts, teaching practical reasoning techniques for dilemma-resolution encounters competition. Many techniques are assiduously recommended to everyone. Most of these are awful. Kabbage is told to trust his gut, follow community standards, split the difference, flip a coin, do whatever pays, etc.

An additional obstacle is that the contemporary world confronts people with dilemmas of ever-increasing number and complexity. Teaching cannot consist in merely sketching the simple outlines of moral theories, leaving the rest as an assignment for the reader. It must address the numerous moral complexities of the contemporary world. To resolve these hard cases, aspirants must learn how to think about complicity, conflicts of interest, dirty hands, collective responsibility, etc.

The life trajectory of most people currently contains no time set aside for formal ethics instruction. Ethics is not required in high school or college. Occasional sermons, training sessions, and memos are, at best, only a sporadic sprinkling of ethics. Consider your fellow faculty members across the university. By comparison to the rest of the population, they are very well educated, intelligent,

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thoughtful people. They have PhD's and read widely. But almost none of them has had a course, or even read a single book on ethics. Thus, they are generally confused by, or even oblivious to dilemmas all around them.

One might expect moral theories to be the primary subject matter of teaching. However, the moral theories currently on offer do not offer much help in decision-making. They are not action-guiding. As we all know, but seldom admit, "applying" consequentialism, deontology, and VE to real-life moral problems does not work very well. Moral theories are … well … theoretical. The application of these moral theories is generally otiose, inconclusive, or incorrect. They supply trivial answers, no answers, or wrong answers. So the dirty secret of applied ethics is that ethicists don't actually apply moral theories. Instead, ethicists first decide upon the right answers, and then tweak or twist their moral theories until they yield these answers.[xi]

Even if ethics courses were effective, aspirants would need more than a semester of ethics instruction to become adequately prepped for the contemporary world. As anyone who has tried to squeeze sufficient ethics into a one-semester syllabus knows, "covering" the material in sufficient depth and breadth is impossible.

4. Implementation

Temptations and distractions are much more numerous, powerful, and available than they used to be. Every forbidden pleasure is just a few clicks and/or an Uber ride away. Of course, this makes the task of implementing one's choices significantly more difficult. Leonardo greatly desires porn, but would like to rid himself of this desire. In former days, he would have had to make a shameful trip to a brick-and-mortar store to purchase porn, but now it is only a few clicks away which makes it harder to resist.

Like beliefs, values, and practical reasoning techniques, many ineffective implementation strategies are now forcefully thrust upon aspirants. Are you overweight? Ads for twenty fad diet regimens magically appear whenever you surf the web. Do you surf the web too much? Fear not! Your FB friends are eager to offer (bad) advice. Teachers of effective strategies must compete with hordes of fraudsters and well-meaning, but misinformed folks.

III.   CONCLUSION

To summarize, habituation is valorized, but trivialized by contemporary VE. Habituation aims to replace entrenched bad habits with virtuous habits of perception, passion, desire, choice, and action. Because habituation is a long, multifaceted process, people in the complex, constantly changing, contemporary world typically lack sufficient time and predictive ability to habituate before the next major change erases their progress, requiring them to start over from scratch. Habituation is typically derailed before it can gain traction.

While habituation is supposed to get aspirants through familiar and straightforward situations, teaching is necessary to cope with hard cases as well as situations about which habit has taught no lessons or the wrong lessons. Unfortunately, the contemporary world is replete with advice, change,

complexity, deceit, dilemmas, distractions, diversity, inconsistency, interconnections, and temptations. Moral mastery via teaching is for the gods, and maybe a few sages. Even ethical adequacy is beyond the ability of almost everyone to garner through teaching.

I have focused upon the obstacles facing aspirants, but parallel barriers confront habituation coaches and teachers. Like aspirants, their coaches and teachers are not up to meeting these challenges. They lack the necessary fund of knowledge, critical thinking skills, rhetorical skills, etc. to cope with all of this.

Perhaps habituation and teaching were suitable strategies for slower, simpler societies, but they are mostly futile in the contemporary world. As Aristotle says, virtue is rare (1109a29-30). But this doesn't imply that VE should content itself with old-fashioned, ineffective strategies for virtue-acquisition. To guide people effectively to flourishing, virtuous lives, virtue ethics must offer better character improvement strategies than habituation and teaching.

You might be inclined to reject my claims as too extreme. "Come on! Things aren't that bad. I was able to reform myself, my kids, and even my no-good brother-in-law." However, you are likely to be exceptions to the rule. You are the sort of people who attend academic conferences and read papers on VE. To evaluate my claims, think of people who are not laser-focused virtue ethicists. How successful have your friends and relatives been at habituation and teaching?

IV.   WORKS CITED

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[i] By "habituation" and "teaching," I shall mean the inculcation of the dispositions and beliefs that constitute virtues.

[ii] Annas 2011.

[iii] When Aristotle says that teaching presuppose habituation, he spells out additional things that habituation is supposed to produce. See below.

[iv] Curzer 2012, 326-327.

[v] The official answer is that the justice perspective is the right perspective here; friendship and benevolence have no role in tenure votes. I suspect that this view is more often espoused than accepted, and more often accepted than implemented.

[vi] Books, movies, plays, etc. provide vicarious experience, but not enough.

[vii] Some people are brought up with only one set of values. Indoctrinated effectively, they are insulated against competing values. However, such a one-sided upbringing often instills radically incomplete or mistaken values, or misinterpretations and misapplications of reasonable values.

[viii] Tolkien 70-71.

[ix] 2 *Thessalonians* 3:10.

[x] Deploying and defending my recommended ways of dealing with dilemmas is beyond the scope of this paper.

[xi] Think back to your last dilemma. Perhaps you had to decide whether to reveal a damaging truth (Appiah 2015), steal for the sake of a loved one (Kohlberg 1981), side unjustly with your desperately needy child, student, or friend (---), vote for an unsavory candidate who is the lesser evil (Curzer 2016), accept a donation or salary from a tainted source (---), etc. Think of a real-life dilemma rather than the ones cooked up and under-described by philosophers. I'll wager that you didn't use moral theory at all.