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Between Voluntariness and Good Choice: Habituation and Practical Authorship in Aristotle

Omid Souri

Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages, Allame Tabataba'i University, Tehran 14896-84511, Iran; omid_souri99@outlook.com

Abstract

Aristotle holds that character virtue is acquired through repeated action even though the learner does not yet possess the stable character and practical wisdom of the virtuous agent. Recent scholarship has shown that habituation involves guided practice, affective formation, and voluntary fine action. This article asks a narrower question: what does voluntariness secure in the learner's action, and what remains absent before good *prohairesis*? I argue that voluntariness secures causal-agential ownership—a minimal form of attribution grounded in the learner as source of movement with awareness of the relevant particulars—without yet securing practical authorship of the action's ethical orientation. Another person, law, or practice may still help specify an end, description, or pattern of attention that the learner cannot reliably assess. Distinguishing *hekousion* from *prohairesis* and from *praxis* in the strict context of EN VI.2 clarifies this developmental relation. Habituation can narrow the distance between ownership and authorship through first-personal practice, affective calibration, changes in evaluative salience, and socially structured judgement. Because the same mechanisms can also form compliance or vice, successful habituation culminates not merely in deliberative choice but in good choice, where true practical reasoning and right desire converge.

Keywords: Aristotle; habituation; voluntariness; *prohairesis*; practical authorship; moral education; *phronesis*

1. Introduction: Voluntariness and the Problem of Practical Authorship

References to Aristotle use standard Bekker numbers. Greek terms are transliterated except where wording is directly at issue. 'Fine' or 'noble' renders kalon in the relevant ethical contexts: what is ethically admirable and choiceworthy for its own sake. 'Good choice' is analytical shorthand for prohairesis satisfying EN VI.2's conditions of true practical reasoning and right desire directed towards the same object; it is not a separate Aristotelian technical category. The Greek text of the Nicomachean Ethics follows Bywater [1]. Reeve [2,3] has been consulted for the English translations; translations in the text are the author's unless otherwise stated.

Aristotle's account of moral habituation is often introduced through a familiar formula: people become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, and courageous by doing courageous actions (EN II.1, 1103a31–b2). The formula becomes difficult once one asks what kind of agent can perform the actions through which virtue is acquired. A learner does not yet possess the settled character and practical wisdom of the virtuous person. She cannot therefore act from the same stable appreciation of the noble, the same command of relevant particulars, or the same integration of desire and practical reasoning.

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Yet if her early conduct were merely imposed from outside, it would be unclear how it could exercise and transform capacities that belong to her. The interpretive problem is to explain how the learner can genuinely act before she can act from virtue.

Four Aristotelian terms organise the problem. *Hekousion*, the voluntary, applies when the source of movement is in the agent and the agent knows the relevant particulars (EN III.1, 1111a22–24). *Prohairesis*, choice, is narrower: Aristotle describes it as deliberative desire concerning things in our power (EN III.3, 1113a10–12), and he attributes voluntary action to children and non-rational animals while denying them *prohairesis* (EN III.2, 1111b6–10). In EN VI.2, *praxis* is discussed in the stricter setting of practical truth, where choice has its source in desire together with reasoning for an end (1139a21–b5). *Phronesis*, practical wisdom, is an intellectual virtue rather than a character virtue: it is a truth-attaining excellence of practical thought concerning what is good and bad for a human being in variable circumstances (EN VI.5, 1140b4–30). Aristotle nevertheless makes *phronesis* and full character virtue mutually dependent (EN VI.13, 1144b30–32). These distinctions are related, but they are not interchangeable stages or synonyms.

The problem is therefore not simply that the learner acts from imperfect motives. Aristotle distinguishes producing an action of the appropriate ethical type from acting as a virtuous person acts: correct performance does not constitute virtuous agency unless the agent acts knowingly, chooses the action for itself, and acts from a firm state (EN II.4, 1105a17–b9). The learner may thus satisfy the conditions of voluntariness while lacking the practical orientation required for good choice. A textually adequate interpretation must keep attribution, deliberative choice, correct performance, and full virtue distinct.

I describe this relation through two analytical terms. Causal-agential ownership is deliberately minimal: it tracks the conditions under which conduct is voluntary and attributable to the learner as its source; it is not a new theory of moral responsibility. Practical authorship is more demanding: the learner can identify ethically salient features, grasp and endorse an appropriate end, and deliberate from a sufficiently stable orientation towards the good. Parents, educators, laws, and practices may initially perform some of those practical functions without becoming the immediate source of the learner's movement.

Put simply, a learner may act willingly and know what she is doing while still relying on others to understand what matters in the situation. Returning another person's property, for example, can be her own voluntary action before she can judge for herself why it is required here. The educational question is how such participation helps her develop that judgement.

The distinction is an interpretive reconstruction, not Aristotle's terminology and not a correction of Aristotle. Scholarship already establishes that habituation can involve guided practice, affective and perceptual formation, and voluntary fine action [4,5]. My narrower contribution is to clarify what voluntariness secures within that process and what it leaves unfinished. The broader implication is limited: attribution of an action to an agent and ethically mature authorship of its practical point are different achievements.

A brief modern comparison marks the scope of the issue. Libet and colleagues reported neural readiness potentials preceding subjects' reported awareness of an intention to move [6], while later work has challenged simple inferences from the readiness potential to the timing or causal role of conscious intention [7]. The present argument neither confirms nor refutes those findings. It only cautions against reducing agency to one reported moment of conscious decision; Aristotle's developmental framework concerns how perceptual, desiderative, bodily, and deliberative capacities are formed and integrated.

I use 'supported voluntary action' for cases in which the learner acts voluntarily while another person or practice helps specify an end, an ethically relevant description, or a pattern of attention that she cannot yet reliably supply or assess. 'Fine' or 'noble' action renders

kalon in the relevant ethical contexts. Voluntarily doing such an action is educationally important but not sufficient for virtuous agency if the learner still lacks choice for the action's own sake, a firm state, or adequate practical understanding.

Two opposed models are inadequate. Mechanical repetition cannot explain Aristotle's insistence that virtue concerns pleasure and pain, desire, choice, and stable character as well as outward conduct. Conversely, a model on which learners first acquire explicit rational explanations of why actions are good and only then discipline desire neglects Aristotle's claim that argument normally presupposes prior formation (EN X.9, 1179b23–1180a5). Law and education can shape conduct before the learner can give such explanations, but successful formation must produce more than conformity.

Habituation is therefore a socially organised transformation of capacities already active in the learner. Voluntary participation can train bodily and perceptual capacities, reshape pleasure and pain, alter salience, and support increasingly discriminating judgement. The same mechanisms can also form vice or stable compliance. The endpoint is more demanding than *prohairesis*, because deliberative choice can serve bad ends: EN VI.2 requires true practical reasoning and right desire for good choice, while EN VI.12–13 links full character virtue with *phronesis*.

Sections 2–5 locate the argument in the literature and establish its textual premises; Sections 6–8 explain developmental mechanisms, social conditions, and the endpoint in good choice; Section 9 addresses objections; Section 10 concludes.

2. Existing Accounts and the Revised Contribution

Recent scholarship has decisively displaced the picture of habituation as mindless drill. Burnyeat treats upbringing as the formation of starting points from which ethical understanding can proceed, Sherman emphasises the formation of perception, emotion, and practical discrimination, and Vasiliou stresses that repeated activities can generate good or bad states [8] (pp. 69–92); [9] (pp. 157–200); [10] (pp. 170–190). More recently, Vigani argues that habituation need not conflict with the development of intelligent and reflective capacities and can help explain how the virtuous come to see situations aright [11]. These accounts establish that habituation can educate cognition and affect; they do not by themselves identify the specific agential contribution made by voluntariness.

A second line of work places the learner's activity at the centre. Jimenez argues for a relatively strong form of motivational continuity: learners can perform virtuous actions for the sake of the noble before possessing the settled disposition of virtue [12]. Hampson argues that emulative imitation and first-personal practice can disclose the fineness of action and transform motivation [13] (pp. 292–320); [14] (pp. 1–26); [15] (pp. 415–447). Nielsen describes habituation into full virtue as guided practice, while Kamtekar argues that voluntary fine action, aided by descriptions supplied by law or an instructor, can enable discovery of the fine [4] (pp. 22–36); [5]. Masi's recent analysis of habit, choice, and action likewise stresses that habitual stability does not eliminate contingency or voluntariness [16]. Crisp's response to Kamtekar presses the further question of how learning by doing relates to actions performed before settled virtue [17]. These accounts differ over how closely the learner's motivation already approximates virtue, but they agree that the learner's own activity matters. The present paper therefore does not claim to discover guided voluntary practice anew; it asks what the voluntariness of such practice secures and what it does not.

A third group of studies explains why such practice can alter more than behaviour. Jimenez treats shame as a transitional responsiveness to praise, blame, honour, and the noble [18] (pp. 160–184). Fiecconi argues that practical reason must direct attention and engage a non-rational part capable of evaluative cognition [19] (pp. 79–102, 149–172). Marechal shows how passions can shape evaluative appearances and thereby support or

undermine the convictions involved in *phronesis* [20]. Callard's positive-feedback model explains reciprocal improvement between affect and ethical cognition [21] (pp. 42–61), while Jagannathan characterises *phronesis* through practical understanding and ethical knowledge [22]. Athanassoulis, finally, emphasises that habituation concerns emotions, reasons, and actions and can go wrong in different ways [23]. These accounts supply mechanisms of formation; the ownership/authorship distinction specifies their agential target.

Political formation adds a further constraint. Hitz shows that law can produce virtue-like states ordered to defective ends, while Scott emphasises both early receptivity to reason and the formative role of education [24] (pp. 263–306); [25] (pp. 164–177, 208–223). Pires de Oliveira also cautions against identifying habituation simply with childhood upbringing; character remains open, at least in principle, to further habituation beyond childhood [26] (pp. 169–183). These studies make clear why successful development cannot be measured by conformity, stability, or social approval alone.

The remaining question is therefore narrow but substantive: how should we characterise a learner who is genuinely the source of what she does but does not yet reliably organise the action through a truthful and stable practical orientation? I answer by distinguishing causal-agential ownership from practical authorship. Ownership tracks voluntariness and attribution; authorship tracks the developing capacity to apprehend, desire, deliberate about, and endorse the ethically relevant point of action. The distinction abbreviates relations among Aristotle's explicit distinctions rather than adding a faculty, a developmental stage, or an external moral theory.

3. Receptivity to Logos Without Full Rational Possession

For this distinction to illuminate habituation, the learner must be capable of rational responsiveness before possessing mature practical judgement. A subject wholly inaccessible to rational direction could be moved only by force, appetite, or non-rational conditioning; a subject who already possessed the evaluative and deliberative capacities of the practically wise person would no longer need the support under investigation. EN I.13 supplies a position between these extremes.

In this section, *logos* means rational account or rational direction, including speech insofar as it expresses such direction; it does not mean language in general. Aristotle distinguishes the nutritive element of the soul, which has no ethical participation in *logos*, from the desiderative element. The latter is non-rational in one respect but participates in reason 'in a way' because it is *katēkoon* and *peitharchikon*—capable of listening and obeying (1102b30–1103a1). The vocabulary of hearing, persuasion, and agreement marks receptive participation in rational direction rather than possession of a second independent reasoning faculty.

Aristotle supports this claim by appealing to advice, reproof, and exhortation. These practices do not operate only by transmitting propositions. Advice can direct attention and recommend action; reproof can mark a desire or response as defective; exhortation can sustain movement toward a difficult or noble act. Their force may involve authority, affection, shame, imagination, and established attachments as well as articulated reasons. A learner can therefore be responsive to rational direction without already being able to generate or assess the full practical account for herself.

Fiecconi's account helps explain this possibility. Perception and *phantasia* can register evaluative features without universal explanatory accounts or calculation in the strict sense; desire can therefore be cognitively directed before the learner possesses the structure of *phronesis* [19] (pp. 79–102). Marechal's account of the dependence of practical conviction on affective appearance reinforces the same point from the side of mature *phronesis* [20].

A learner can understand enough of a situation to be redirected—for example, that this is an occasion to return another's property or restrain an appetite—without yet commanding a general account of justice or temperance.

The paternal analogy in EN I.13 must nevertheless be limited. Aristotle is classifying parts of the soul, not narrating a fixed sequence of childhood development. Listening to a father illustrates the difference between possessing an account and participating through hearing; it does not make verbal instruction the exclusive mechanism of education or mature reason an internalized paternal voice. Scott's broader study of 'listening to reason' likewise shows why education matters to later susceptibility to argument without reducing habituation to argument itself [25] (pp. 164–177).

The conclusion is modest: a desiderative subject can be genuinely affected by rational direction before possessing practical reason in its mature form. This makes guided participation psychologically possible, but it does not establish either voluntariness or virtue. EN II.4 therefore supplies a distinct premise for the argument: producing an action of the appropriate ethical type is not the same as acting from the corresponding excellence.

4. Correct Performance Without Virtuous Agency

Aristotle's habituation principle is value-neutral in the sense stressed by Vasiliou: corresponding activities can produce good or bad states [10] (pp. 170–190). EN II.4 addresses a different problem. Its analogy with grammatical production shows that a correct product does not prove possession of the excellence that normally explains such production. Someone can produce something grammatically correct by chance or ἄλλου ὑποθεμένου—'when prompted or instructed by another' (1105a22–26). The example belongs to the craft analogy and should not be treated as direct evidence for guided moral action. Its contribution is narrower: correct output can be separated from the state of the producer.

Virtue differs from craft because the ethical quality of action depends on the agent's condition. The agent must act knowingly, choose the action and choose it for itself, and act from a firm and unchanging state (1105a31-b1). The knowledge requirement should not be inflated into possession of a complete ethical theory; Aristotle assigns greater weight to choice and stability. A learner may know that she is returning another's property or enduring a danger while lacking a complete account of justice or courage. Transitional motives can also be mixed: praise, affection, fear of blame, and an emerging attraction to the noble may all contribute.

EN II.4 therefore permits developmental continuity without equivalence. The learner can perform an action of the relevant ethical type and exercise capacities that later belong to virtue without already acting from the same knowledge, choice, and stable character as the virtuous agent. Hampson's rereading rightly emphasises that the passage defends the necessity of practice rather than a simple sequence of externally correct outputs [14] (pp. 1–26). Kamtekar's account strengthens the role of voluntariness: the learner is better positioned to discover the fineness of action when she knowingly contributes to what occurs [5]. Yet voluntary fine action remains compatible with incomplete motivation and unstable character; Masi's analysis likewise helps separate the stabilising effect of habit from the claim that habituated action ceases to be voluntary or contingent [16].

The phrase 'prompted by another' thus remains evidence only within the craft analogy. Direct evidence for socially organized moral practice comes instead from legislators in EN II.1, education through pleasure and pain in EN II.3, rational receptivity in EN I.13, voluntary action by children in EN III.2, and the roles of law and education in EN X.9 and the Politics. EN II.4 contributes the narrower proposition that correct external performance does not establish virtuous agency. The next question is what voluntariness itself adds.

5. Voluntariness, Praxis, and the Ownership-Authorship Gap

5.1. Voluntariness and Deliberative Choice

At the end of EN III.1, Aristotle characterises the voluntary by an internal source of movement and knowledge of the relevant particulars (1111a22–24). A movement imposed by an external cause to which the person contributes nothing is forced, whereas external influence, pressure, or an unattractive choice does not by itself remove voluntariness. The knowledge condition is likewise modest: it concerns what the agent is doing, to whom, with what, and in what circumstances, not possession of a complete account of the action's moral character.

Charles's process-based account helps clarify why this internal origination matters: voluntary actions exercise goal-directed capacities of the agent as a psychophysical whole rather than being merely events caused by an isolated inner item [27]. Cooper similarly emphasises causal attribution across adults, children, and some animals [28] (pp. 265–312). I call this minimal achievement causal-agential ownership. The label marks the learner as the source of a voluntary process guided by awareness of relevant particulars. It should not be read as a claim about property-like ownership, a complete account of moral responsibility, or the full ethical description under which the action is good or bad.

EN III.2 makes the gap from choice explicit. Although *prohairesis* is voluntary, the voluntary has a wider range: children and other animals share in voluntary action but not in *prohairesis*, and sudden actions can be voluntary without prior deliberation (1111b6–10). In EN III.3 *prohairesis* is deliberative desire concerning things in our power (1113a10–12). The claim that children lack *prohairesis* need not impose a rigid age boundary or deny elementary planning; it establishes only that Aristotle recognises voluntary agency before mature deliberative choice. Bobzien's analysis also cautions against importing a modern libertarian theory of free will into EN III.1–5 [29] (pp. 51–76).

5.2. Hekousion Is Not Yet Praxis in the Strict EN VI.2 Sense

The animal example sets a lower boundary but cannot provide a complete model of human practical agency. In EN VI.2 Aristotle says that perception as such is not a source of *praxis*, since non-rational animals possess perception but have no share in *praxis* (1139a17–20). The safest reading is contextual: the breadth of *hekousion* in EN III.2 should not be equated with the structure of *praxis* under discussion in EN VI.2, where practical truth, choice, thought, and desire are explicitly integrated.

In that context, the source of *praxis* is *prohairesis*, while the sources of *prohairesis* are desire and reasoning for an end (1139a31-b5). Aristotle sometimes uses verbs for 'doing' or 'acting' more broadly elsewhere, so I do not claim a single technical sense of *praxis* across the corpus. The limited point is contextual: the animal extension of voluntariness cannot bear the full weight of a theory of ethical action. Human learners can progressively acquire *prohairesis* and *phronesis* and become answerable to practical truth; their voluntary conduct can therefore provide material for the development of practical authorship without already constituting it.

5.3. Supported Voluntary Action

The preceding distinctions allow a simple description of supported voluntary action. The learner is the internal source of movement and knows the relevant particulars, but another person or an established practice may perform an immediate practical function that she cannot yet reliably perform: identifying a salient feature, describing the action under an ethically relevant aspect, fixing a prohibition, or directing attention towards an end. This support can shape the practical orientation of what the learner does without making the movement involuntary.

The action remains the learner's in the voluntary sense. If an adult physically moves the child's body or controls the event so completely that the learner contributes no relevant perception or desire, the event cannot have the same habituating role as voluntary participation. Learning by doing requires the exercise of the learner's own capacities. Yet voluntary ownership does not by itself amount to practical authorship. The learner may still be unable to identify all relevant features, determine the appropriate mean, rank competing goods, or understand why one consideration should govern the case.

Guidance can therefore have different functions without creating a new category between voluntary and involuntary action. Early in development it may substitute for a practical judgement that the learner cannot yet make; later it can become advice, testimony, or criticism that an agent with developed capacities can assess. The difference is domain-specific rather than a global measure of maturity: an otherwise practically competent adult may still need guidance in an unfamiliar domain. Voluntariness is thus a threshold of attribution, not a sufficient condition of virtue or practical authorship.

6. How Habituation Transforms the Learner

6.1. Practice and Capacity Formation

Aristotle does not isolate a single mechanism by which habituation produces virtue. EN II.1 instead describes a reciprocal relation between activity and *hexis*: human beings are naturally capable of receiving the virtues, repeated activities form corresponding states, and formed states in turn support more reliable activity. The same kinds of activity can generate good or bad states, so repetition is not inherently virtuous. Vigani's recent treatment is useful here because it rejects the supposed opposition between habituation and intelligent, reflective development [11]. The developmental question is not whether practice changes the learner, but how practice can form capacities that later support truthful judgement and right desire.

Hampson's work identifies why first-personal doing matters. Emulative imitation can position the learner to see a situation from the virtuous agent's perspective, while practice exposes effort, resistance, consequence, and satisfaction unavailable through observation alone [13] (pp. 292–320); [15] (pp. 415–447). Leunissen adds a psychophysical dimension: habituation perfects embodied perceptual and desiderative capacities rather than merely adding explicit representations [30] (pp. 105–138). Athanassoulis further stresses that habituation involves emotions, reasons, and actions and can proceed unevenly or badly [23]. Together these accounts explain how voluntary ownership can be causally transformative before full practical authorship is present.

6.2. Pleasure, Pain, and Shame

EN II.3 makes pleasure and pain central to moral formation. They motivate pursuit and avoidance, reveal the state from which action proceeds, and are themselves objects of education. Good upbringing teaches agents to enjoy and dislike the right things (1104b3–13). This is more than reward conditioning: pleasure in praise is not identical with pleasure in noble action, and fear of punishment is not appropriate aversion to the base. External motives can sustain practice while also stabilizing pseudo-virtue.

Jimenez's account of shame illustrates the transition [18] (pp. 160–184). Shame makes the learner responsive to the judgements of others and can connect concern for honour with an emerging attraction to the noble. Its relevance to the present argument is precise: shame can motivate voluntary action while the learner still depends on another's evaluation of what deserves approval. It aids the development of practical authorship only if that dependence gradually gives way to appreciation of the value of the action itself rather than becoming a permanent concern with reputation.

This broader process can be called affective calibration. Successful habituation reorganises what the learner finds attractive, burdensome, shameful, frightening, or satisfying, so that desire becomes increasingly responsive to appropriate objects, occasions, and degrees. Such change narrows the ownership-authorship gap by helping the learner desire under a more adequate practical description rather than merely reproduce externally rewarded conduct. The point is developmental, not sequential: affect, perception, and deliberation can change together and can also reinforce defective patterns.

6.3. Evaluative Appearance and Salience

EN III.4 distinguishes the good without qualification from what appears good to a particular agent (1113a15-b2). Ethical development therefore concerns not only explicit judgement but also how situations appear as practically significant. Two agents can assent to the same general rule while noticing and feeling the force of different features. Appetite, fear, or concern for status can obscure what should guide action; a well-formed disposition can make the noble consideration salient without requiring explicit reconstruction of the entire situation on each occasion.

Moss offers a strong interpretation on which the apparent good is mediated by evaluative *phantasia* and character supplies ends through non-rational cognition [31] (pp. 137–152). Fiecconi gives a psychologically plural account in which desire can arise from perception, *phantasia*, or thought [19] (pp. 79–102). Marechal's recent interpretation of *phronesis* as conviction in the goodness of one's goals gives a complementary account of why appropriate passions matter: passions influence how situations appear and which evaluative features become salient [20]. The present argument need not choose among all details of these views. It relies on the shared and more modest point that ethical formation reshapes evaluative orientation at levels not exhausted by explicit propositions.

7. The Social and Political Architecture of Habituation

7.1. Law, Family, Custom, and Education

The transformations just described do not occur within practices selected by an already independent agent. Parents, educators, laws, customs, stories, music, and institutions organise the learner's practical environment before she can organise it adequately for herself. In speaking of a social environment, I do not attribute to Aristotle a modern theoretical concept of 'culture'. The relevant Aristotelian categories are more specific: *nomos* and law, *ethos* and custom or character, *paideia* and education, household relations, and constitutional forms. These structures establish opportunities, prohibitions, exemplars, descriptions, rewards, and penalties through which voluntary conduct is shaped.

EN X.9 argues that teaching alone is insufficient because the soul must first be prepared through habits to enjoy and hate appropriately (1179b23–31). Law supplies continuity and force where occasional exhortation is weak: it can organize nurture, occupations, institutions, permissions, and penalties across a lifetime without thereby becoming the immediate source of every voluntary movement. Aristotle also recognizes the importance of personal instruction. Paternal commands and customs can work through affection and benefaction, while private education can be adapted to the particular learner, as medicine is adapted to a patient (1180b3–13).

7.2. Constitution, Public Education, and the Problem of a Bad Community

Politics VII-VIII extends the problem from personal guidance to political formation. Children's games, stories, and companions are to be supervised; rhythm and melody can affect emotion and character; and education should be public because the *ethos* of a constitution forms and preserves the corresponding kind of citizen (Pol. VII.17, 1336a23–b12; VIII.1,

1337a11–21; VIII.5, 1340a14–b19). The musical case is illustrative rather than a complete model of moral learning: it shows how structured participation can exercise discrimination and pleasure before mature judgement, while behavioural habituation remains more directly relevant to the virtues of character [24,25].

Aristotle's political texts also prevent a simple equation between social conformity and moral success. Politics III.4 distinguishes the virtue of the good citizen from the virtue of the good person and allows them to diverge except under appropriately ordered conditions (1276b16–1277b32). Correct constitutions are distinguished from deviant ones by orientation towards the common advantage (Pol. III.6–7, 1279a17–b10), while the best political order is assessed by reference to the good life. Politics VII.13 then asks how citizens become good through nature, habit, and reason (1332a38-b11). The lawgiver's educational task is therefore normative as well as causal: law and education should form citizens for a good life, not merely reproduce whatever a regime happens to reward.

This does not remove the circular pressure in Aristotle's account. Good formation requires well-ordered institutions, while good institutions themselves depend on political judgement and character. Hitz's analysis of Spartan education makes the danger concrete: law can reliably form courage-like states ordered to defective incentives [24] (pp. 263–306). The point does not depend on a secure chronology of the Nicomachean Ethics and Politics. It rests on the substantive connection Aristotle draws among constitution, education, habit, pleasure, and character.

7.3. Compliance and the Criterion of Successful Support

Law combines rational ordering with compulsion. It can prevent destructive conduct and maintain participation before argument becomes effective, but coercion can regulate behaviour without changing what the agent finds choiceworthy. The transition from legal compliance to good choice therefore cannot consist merely in making surveillance psychologically internal. Permanent inner policing is not the same as love of the noble.

A learner remains merely compliant when the absence of surveillance removes the motive, when she cannot recognise relevant goods without immediate instruction, or when she reproduces norms without discriminating between just and defective demands. Support has contributed to practical authorship when she can identify salient features with less prompting, adapt what she has learned to new cases, and assess or resist a defective command by reference to a more adequate conception of the good. Mature agents remain socially dependent on law, friendship, expertise, and shared institutions; the change lies in the function of guidance, which becomes material for judgement rather than a substitute for the capacity to judge in ordinary familiar cases.

Consider a learner whose companions routinely exclude another person from a shared activity. She may initially join in because she trusts their judgement and values their acceptance. As her understanding develops, she may come to recognise the exclusion as unjust. Progress then involves judging both the practice and how to challenge it: what to say, when to speak, and how to respond to those involved. Preserving acceptance cannot by itself determine the right response, and sound judgement may sometimes require risking disapproval. The example illustrates why belonging to a community and learning to assess its practices are distinct achievements. Practical wisdom concerns how to act well within these relationships, including when their established expectations deserve criticism.

8. From Prohairesis to Good Choice

The expression 'good choice' is shorthand for the condition Aristotle assigns to good *prohairesis* in EN VI.2; it is not a separate technical category. *Prohairesis* is already more demanding than voluntariness because it integrates desire with deliberation about what

is in the agent's power. Yet it remains normatively indeterminate: a vicious agent can deliberate consistently from a corrupt conception of the good.

8.1. Practical Truth, Right Desire, and Phronesis

EN VI.2 states that good choice requires truth on the side of reasoning and rightness on the side of desire: desire must pursue what reasoning affirms (1139a21–31). *Phronesis* is the intellectual virtue that enables truthful practical judgement concerning what is good for a human being in variable and particular circumstances (EN VI.5). It is therefore not a character virtue, although full character virtue and *phronesis* are mutually dependent in EN VI.13. Recent interpretations sharpen this relation in different ways. Fiecconi stresses the engagement of practical reason with a well-formed non-rational part [19], Marechal argues that appropriate passions help sustain justified conviction in the goodness of practical ends [20], and Jagannathan situates *phronesis* within a wider account of practical understanding and ethical knowledge [22]. These debates reinforce the point needed here: mature practical judgement cannot be reduced either to affect alone or to value-neutral calculation.

The contrast with cleverness shows why deliberative efficiency is not enough. Cleverness can identify effective means to an adopted target; when the target is bad, the same capacity makes vice more effective (EN VI.12, 1144a23–36). This echoes but does not duplicate the contrast with craft in Section 4. EN II.4 distinguishes correct performance from the state of the agent; EN VI.12 distinguishes instrumental effectiveness from practical wisdom ordered to a right end. For that reason the cleverness contrast belongs at the endpoint of the argument rather than in the earlier discussion of craft.

8.2. Practical Authorship at the Endpoint

Practical authorship at the endpoint is therefore a qualified capacity for ethically informed judgement, not social self-sufficiency. Fiecconi describes *phronesis* as both authoritative and persuasive: it must grasp practical truth, direct attention, and engage a non-rational part formed into an excellent listener [19] (pp. 149–172). Jagannathan's account of practical understanding likewise helps explain how an agent can pursue practical truth through her own understanding rather than only under another's direction [22]. Friends, laws, and experts can still supply information, criticism, and advice. What changes is that such guidance normally enters a practical capacity the agent possesses and can assess rather than replacing that capacity.

Successful habituation can therefore yield importantly different outcomes: external compliance; stable but defective choice; reliable right conduct without adequate understanding; or good choice informed by *phronesis*. The endpoint is not the disappearance of social influence. It is the integration of voluntary ownership, right desire, truthful practical judgement, and a sufficiently stable character from which the action is chosen for its own sake.

9. Objections and Clarifications

9.1. Are Ownership and Practical Authorship Anachronistic Categories?

Aristotle does not use 'causal-agential ownership' or 'practical authorship'. The terms reconstruct relations among explicit distinctions: internal source and knowledge in the voluntary; the extension of the voluntary beyond *prohairesis*; correct performance without virtue; and EN VI.2's conditions for good choice. Contemporary vocabulary is legitimate only if it does not import a theory of an isolated will that creates its own norms or requires freedom from social causation [29] (pp. 51–76). Here 'authorship' means only that the ethical orientation of action increasingly proceeds through the agent's formed desire and practical understanding; the agent remains socially formed and does not create the value of the end.

9.2. Does the Account Duplicate Nielsen or Kamtekar?

The overlap with Nielsen and Kamtekar is substantial: guided practice, voluntary fine action, instructor-supplied descriptions, attention, and discovery of fineness are already in the literature [4] (pp. 22–36); [5]. Masi's recent analysis also connects habituation with choice while preserving the voluntariness and contingency of action [16], and Crisp's response confirms that the relation between learning by doing and action before settled virtue remains contested [17]. A novelty claim about guided voluntary practice itself would therefore be indefensible. The narrower contribution concerns its internal structure: voluntariness explains why the activity can be genuinely the learner's, but it does not establish stable choice, correct ends, or practical understanding.

9.3. Why Does Voluntariness Not Guarantee Practical Authorship?

The two notions answer different questions. Voluntariness asks whether the source of movement is in the agent and whether she knows the relevant particulars. Practical authorship asks whether she can recognise and assess the ethically relevant point of what she is doing through developed desire and understanding. A learner can therefore return another's property voluntarily while relying on a parent or law to identify why returning it is required here. This is not an intermediate category between voluntary and involuntary action. Mature agents also accept guidance; the developmental difference is whether guidance supplies a practical judgement the agent cannot yet make or offers considerations to a capacity for judgement already in operation.

9.4. Can Good Support Be Distinguished from Ideological Formation?

Communities can form bad character as effectively as good. A modern reconstruction such as Marín's interprets Aristotelian human nature through socio-cultural formation and the relation of psyche to polis [32], but 'culture' in that modern sense is not an Aristotelian technical category. Aristotle cannot simply appeal to whatever a community approves: Politics III.4 allows the virtue of the good citizen to diverge from the virtue of the good person, correct constitutions are judged by the common advantage, and the ethical works appeal to the human good, the fine, practical truth, and the *phronimos*. These standards explain how defective formation can be criticised, but they do not give an unformed learner an institution-neutral test for a just community. Supported voluntary action is therefore a causal-developmental description, not a moral endorsement; the same architecture can produce virtue, pseudo-virtue, or vice.

9.5. Is the Developmental Model Too Linear?

The model is not a fixed stage theory in which every learner passes through discrete phases called voluntariness, *prohairesis*, and virtue. These are conceptual distinctions whose acquisition and integration can overlap. Affective, perceptual, bodily, and deliberative capacities interact recursively; adults remain corrigible; progress is uneven; and vice can stabilise as effectively as virtue [19,21,23]. The reconstruction is structural rather than chronological: voluntary action can occur without deliberative choice, deliberative choice without moral correctness, and correct conduct without stable virtue. The ownership/authorship distinction marks a relation among criteria, not a universal psychological timetable.

Contemporary research provides several comparative contexts for examining the distinction between voluntary conduct and good choice, without directly establishing an interpretation of Aristotle. Safizadeh's review of global environmental politics offers a context for asking how individual choices relate to collective goods and sustainable ways of life [33]. Research on vegan consumption and future-self connectedness invites comparison with the question of how evaluative commitments and temporal perspectives inform choice,

although consumer preferences should not be equated with virtuous dispositions [34]. The investigation of neighborhood conditions, life events, and vehicle acquisition provides a setting for considering how circumstances influence decisions without, by themselves, settling questions of voluntariness or responsibility [35]. Work on VR-based risk detection suggests a further distinction between access to situational information and the practical wisdom required to judge what ought to be done [36]. The analysis of retail service and return policies offers an analogous distinction between strategically effective decisions and ethically good choices [37]. Human-centered learning environments provide a contemporary educational context for discussing how institutions might support the development of reflective agency alongside skills [38]. Coaches' responsibilities similarly invite consideration of how guidance and professional authority can shape conduct, raising questions relevant to moral education [39]. A trustworthy AI framework creates a setting for asking how technological assistance should relate to human judgment and practical authorship [40]. Research on social comparison and digital engagement offers a context for examining whether socially influenced preferences are reflectively endorsed, a question relevant to distinguishing conformity from considered choice [41]. The study of AI-based library application use likewise invites reflection on the difference between explaining technology adoption and evaluating the quality of the purposes it serves [42]. Finally, research on behavioral biases in entrepreneurial financing provides a comparative setting for distinguishing the prediction of decisions from the normative assessment of deliberation [43]. These connections identify possible applications of the manuscript's questions concerning habituation, prohairesis, and phronesis; they do not replace engagement with Aristotle's texts or specialist scholarship.

10. Conclusions

Aristotle's theory of habituation must explain how learners participate in forming virtues they do not yet possess. If relevant activity required good *prohairesis* from the outset, habituation would be circular; if early conduct were merely imposed, it would be unclear how it could exercise the learner's capacities. The distinction between causal-agential ownership and practical authorship clarifies the alternative: *hekousion* secures a threshold of attribution, but not, by itself, an adequate end, stable character, or the practical truth required for good choice. Social guidance can therefore organise voluntary action without making the learner a passive instrument.

Repeated participation can narrow this developmental distance because it transforms more than outward behaviour. First-personal practice exercises embodied capacities; pleasure and pain are recalibrated; shame and social feedback redirect motivation; evaluative appearance and salience change; and law, education, and shared practices structure opportunities for judgement. Recent work by Hampson, Vigani, Leunissen, Jimenez, Fiecconi, Marechal, Athanassoulis, and others clarifies complementary parts of this process. The political evidence adds an essential qualification: formation is only as ethically reliable as the ends and practices that organise it.

Learning to choose well does not mean learning to manage without others. Nor is the ability to deliberate sufficient: deliberation can serve corrupt ends, and cleverness can make vice more effective. Successful formation brings right desire and truthful practical judgement together within a stable character. A mature agent can still learn from others while judging whether their advice and expectations deserve acceptance. Where an established practice is defective, this may require questioning it despite the prospect of disapproval. Social formation can thus support the capacity to assess the very practices through which the agent was educated.

The contribution is therefore modest but substantive. The article proposes neither a new Aristotelian faculty nor a universal stage theory or general theory of free will. It

reconstructs a distinction that explains the educability of agency: an agent can own what she does before she fully authors its practical point. Attribution and ethical maturity are different achievements; habituation, affect, judgement, social formation, and *phronesis* help determine whether voluntary agency develops into good choice.

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