

THE AUTHORITY OF THE FAMILIAR

The Familiarity-Authority Theory

Contingency, Model Lag, and the Duty of Revalidation

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"What is familiar may guide us, but familiarity alone can never justify us."

A philosophical framework for distinguishing earned continuity
from inherited continuation.

Abstract

Human beings could not function if every step, word, object, relationship, and social expectation had to be reconsidered from the beginning. Repetition allows successful movement, language, trust, skill, commitment, and cooperation to recede from deliberate attention into an operative background. Familiarity is therefore not an error to be eliminated. It is one of the conditions of competent life.

The same process, however, can grant repeated conditions more authority than repetition can justify. What is often encountered may begin to feel not merely actual but necessary; not merely common but normal; not merely familiar but true, safe, moral, permanent, or impossible to resist. A condition can cease to be an object being judged and become part of the standard by which other things are judged.

This work proposes the Familiarity-Authority Theory. Its central claim is that repeated experience can transfer practical authority to a condition by moving it from the foreground of judgment into the background that structures judgment. When that background remains accurate, it creates mastery and stability. When the person, relationship, institution, or world changes faster than the background model, model lag occurs: conduct remains adapted to an expired reality.

The theory unifies beneficial habit, learned helplessness, repetition-induced belief, status quo bias, social normalization, prejudice, institutional deviance, political inertia, destructive loyalty, and existential stagnation without reducing them to a single psychological mechanism. It culminates in a Proportional Revalidation Rule: the greater the consequence, changeability, contradictory evidence, coercive origin, entrenchment, and effect upon others of a familiar authority, the stronger the duty to require that authority to justify its continuation.

The central contribution

The same backgrounding process that creates competent freedom can also preserve obsolete captivity. Familiarity does not merely preserve answers; it can preserve the standards that prevent those answers from being questioned.

Status of the proposal

The whole account is best described as a philosophical theory or framework. Its descriptive components are principles and corollaries. Its normative conclusion is a rule or duty. It is not offered as a universal deterministic law: repetition does not always produce acceptance, and familiar conditions may be rationally trusted. The theory identifies a broad, defeasible tendency and explains when that tendency becomes epistemically or morally dangerous.

The seven-part architecture

1. The Familiarized Reality Principle: repeated experience moves conditions from deliberative foreground into operative background.
2. The Familiarity-Authority Transfer Principle: a backgrounded condition may become a standard of judgment and acquire authority not established by repetition alone.
3. The Model-Lag Corollary: when reality changes faster than the operative background, conduct may remain governed by expired conditions.
4. The Corrective-Experience Principle: models acquired through repeated experience may require safe contradictory experience, not information alone, to be revised.
5. The Proportional Revalidation Rule: the duty to reassess increases with consequence, change, contradiction, coercion, entrenchment, and effects upon others.
6. The Presumption of Earned Continuity: reliable, corrigible, and freely affirmable familiar arrangements may retain a provisional presumption in favor of continuation.

7. The Collective Revalidation Requirement: institutions must provide independent evidence, protected criticism, and participation by those subject to their familiar authority.

1. The Contingency of the Actual

The exact arrangement of a lived human life is not logically necessary as a whole. This statement is deliberately narrower than the claim that nothing whatsoever is necessary. Philosophers continue to dispute whether some logical, metaphysical, mathematical, or physical truths could not have been otherwise. The present argument needs no resolution of those disputes.

It is enough that coherent alternatives exist to this complete arrangement: another name, another birthplace, another meeting, another decision, another bodily characteristic, another profession, another sequence of losses and opportunities. If the whole arrangement can differ in even one coherent respect, then the arrangement as a whole is not logically necessary.

What is actual is not therefore necessary, and what has continued is not therefore guaranteed to continue.

Yet repeated actuality can create an appearance of necessity. A condition encountered from birth is not initially presented as one possibility among alternatives. It is presented as reality itself. A child is not shown several bodies and then assigned one. The child awakens through one body. A name is repeatedly spoken before it can be evaluated. A language supplies categories before its speaker can ask whether those categories divide the world well. A society displays customs and hierarchies before its members possess the concepts needed to judge them.

Normality is therefore often contingency made psychologically invisible by duration. The mind quietly changes the proposition "this is what has repeatedly occurred" into "this is how reality is." That transformation is not always irrational; it is frequently useful. The danger lies in allowing an expectation derived from recurrence to migrate into necessity, moral legitimacy, permanent impossibility, or immunity from review.

2. Why Familiarity Is Necessary

A finite mind cannot reassess every feature of reality before every action. Life requires conclusions to be carried forward. The floor supported me before. These movements allowed me to walk. This word refers to that object. This person has usually been reliable. This road has repeatedly led home. The future is approached through a model accumulated from the past.

David Hume placed custom or habit at the center of human expectation. Repeated experience produces the propensity to expect similar outcomes even though reason alone cannot prove that the future must resemble the past. [1] John Dewey treated habit not as mindless repetition but as an acquired disposition that structures perception, action, emotion, and social conduct. Habit permits intelligence to operate without beginning from nothing each time. [2]

The clearest example is walking. A practiced walker repeatedly transfers weight, permits forward motion, places the next foot, and stabilizes the body without reconstructing the act as a sequence of risks. The popular description of walking as "controlled falling" is incomplete, but it captures a useful feature: the next step is performed without terror because the body has acquired a practical expectation of successful continuation.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty helps explain this embodied familiarity. The body is not ordinarily encountered merely as an anatomical object. It is a practical orientation toward the world, a sedimented system of capacities - an experienced "I can." [3] Repetition has not imprisoned the walker. It has liberated attention. The person can attend to the destination because the body no longer requires conscious reconstruction of every movement.

The same applies to being on the thirty-eighth floor of a secure building. A person may feel little more fear than on the third floor because solid floors, walls, windows, engineering practices, and repeated safe experience provide genuine reasons for confidence. Calm is not merely numbness. It is calibrated trust - provided the supporting conditions remain present.

First qualification

Reduced scrutiny is not inherently harmful. It is often the price of mastery, trust, commitment, and coordinated life. A theory that condemns familiarity itself would condemn the conditions that make agency possible.

3. From Familiarity to Authority

The central philosophical event occurs when familiarity moves beyond efficient expectation and becomes authority. A repeated condition can pass through a sequence of transformations:

- This has happened repeatedly.
- Therefore, I expect it to happen again.
- Therefore, it feels normal.
- Therefore, it seems safe, inevitable, permissible, or natural.
- Therefore, alternatives feel abnormal, dangerous, immoral, or impossible.
- Therefore, the familiar condition no longer appears to require justification.

Only the early movement from repetition to expectation is directly supported by recurrence. The later movements require further evidence or argument. Longevity is not proof of justice. Previous survival is not proof of safety. Earlier weakness is not proof of permanent incapacity. Repeated speech is not evidence of truth. Continued possession of power is not evidence of entitlement to power.

The Familiarity-Authority Transfer Principle

When a repeatedly encountered condition ceases to be treated as an object of judgment and begins functioning as a standard of judgment, familiarity has transferred practical authority to it without necessarily supplying corresponding evidence, necessity, or moral justification.

This is stronger than saying that people become accustomed to things. A custom first appears as something a person could evaluate. Later it may become the measure by which different behavior is called strange. A social hierarchy first appears as an arrangement. Later it may become the background from which equality is described as disruption. Familiarity does not merely answer questions. It helps determine which questions occur and which alternatives appear psychologically available.

4. A Taxonomy of Borrowed Authority

The theory becomes more precise by distinguishing the forms of authority that familiarity can acquire. These forms share a structure but need not share a single psychological mechanism.

Form of authority	Implicit judgment	Typical example
Epistemic	This seems true or credible.	A repeated statement gains perceived truth without new evidence.
Modal	This seems necessary, permanent, or impossible to change.	A former inability remains represented as a permanent limit.

Form of authority	Implicit judgment	Typical example
Practical	This is simply what I do.	A routine continues after its purpose disappears.
Moral	This seems right, permissible, or deserved.	A longstanding hierarchy is treated as legitimate because it is longstanding.
Affective	This still deserves my love, fear, loyalty, or hatred.	An emotional model remains fixed after a person or conflict has changed.
Political	This person or institution naturally belongs in authority.	An incumbent becomes the default occupant of an office.
Institutional	This practice is acceptable because it has repeatedly been survived.	An unsafe deviation becomes normalized after no immediate disaster.

The taxonomy prevents overreach. The illusory-truth effect, learned helplessness, status quo bias, and institutional normalization are not identical. The theory does not claim they are produced by one neural circuit or one cognitive bias. It proposes that different mechanisms can converge upon a common philosophical outcome: a repeated condition is granted authority beyond the warrant repetition can supply.

5. Model Lag: When the Background Outlives Its World

Every operative model is built from earlier reality. No one has direct experience of the future. The problem arises when a body, relationship, institution, or environment changes more rapidly than the model used to navigate it.

The Model-Lag Corollary

Model lag occurs when judgment, emotion, or conduct remains adapted to conditions that have weakened, disappeared, or materially changed.

Pierre Bourdieu developed a close social precursor in the concepts of habitus and hysteresis. Habitus consists of durable dispositions formed within social conditions; hysteresis describes a mismatch when those dispositions continue after the field has changed. The present theory generalizes this temporal mismatch beyond social class and social fields. Model lag can affect bodily confidence, fear, belief, identity, love, hatred, institutional safety, political legitimacy, and the architecture of an entire life.

The past continues issuing instructions after losing jurisdiction.

Model lag explains why growth may occur without the discovery of growth. A person can become stronger while continuing to act according to an earlier measurement of strength. A community can become safer while inherited hostility continues. A partner can repeatedly reveal harmful character while loyalty remains attached to an earlier representation. An institution can become more dangerous while previous success continues to reassure it.

6. The Remembered Rope and Learned Helplessness

A familiar story describes a young elephant tied to a deeply planted stake. While small, it cannot escape. After repeated failure it stops pulling. When fully grown, it may possess the strength to overcome a comparable restraint yet allegedly fails to test it. The exact popular story should be treated as a parable rather than as the empirical foundation of the theory. Its structure, however, represents a well-established concern: organisms do not always recognize when control has become possible.

Research on learned helplessness began with failures to escape after exposure to uncontrollable aversive events. Modern neuroscience has revised the earliest interpretation: passivity may be a default response to severe uncontrollability, while learning that one has control can be protective. The central insight remains that previous uncontrollability can shape later behavior even when effective action becomes available.[4]

Human equivalents are common. A child repeatedly ignored may become an adult who remains silent among people willing to listen. A person whose early efforts failed may stop trying after acquiring the knowledge necessary for success. Someone controlled by a parent, partner, employer, institution, or government may continue seeking permission after the former authority has disappeared.

The Retained Constraint Principle

A limitation repeatedly learned under earlier conditions may continue governing behavior after the limitation has weakened, disappeared, or become surmountable.

The theory must also resist a cruel simplification: not every apparent rope is imaginary. Some barriers remain physical, economic, legal, relational, or coercive. A person may know that a situation is unjust and still lack a safe path out. Continuation can be a rational response to danger or dependency rather than cognitive captivity.

Five kinds of constraint

- Real constraint: the barrier remains materially present.
- Remembered constraint: the barrier has weakened or vanished, but the old model persists.
- Socially enforced constraint: other people or institutions continue punishing departure.
- Self-reinforcing constraint: continued non-action prevents the evidence that would reveal new capacity.
- Mixed constraint: psychological, material, and social barriers interact.

The moral remedy must fit the type. Remembered constraints may require safe experimentation. Socially enforced constraints may require protection, collective action, resources, or institutional reform. The theory should never blame people for failing to "awaken" when their danger remains real.

7. Repetition and the Appearance of Truth

Familiarity can also become epistemic authority. The illusory-truth effect is the tendency for repeated statements to receive higher truth judgments than comparable new statements. Repetition increases processing fluency - the ease with which a statement is recognized or understood - and that ease can be mistaken for evidence. The effect is probabilistic rather than absolute, but it can persist over time and can influence implausible or false claims.[5][6]

Repetition can increase credibility without adding evidence.

This corrects the stronger but unsupported claim that a prisoner, or anyone else, will inevitably believe any outlandish assertion repeated every day. Repetition alone does not guarantee belief. In coercive settings, however, it can combine with authority, fear, isolation, punishment, exhaustion, restricted information, and the suppression of safe contradiction.

Michel Foucault analyzed how disciplinary institutions do more than prohibit actions. Through surveillance, classification, examination, and normalization, they help produce standards of normal and abnormal conduct.[7] A repeated institutional interpretation can become part of the room itself: always present, rarely reintroduced as a proposition requiring proof.

8. Social Reality as Silent Instruction

Environments teach without speaking. Graffiti, neglect, cleanliness, cruelty, generosity, corruption, cooperation, and prejudice communicate what people do, what authorities tolerate, and what a place treats as ordinary. The environment is not merely where behavior occurs; it helps define the behavioral reality into which the next person enters.

Broken-windows theory, introduced by James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling in 1982, proposed that visible disorder can signal weakened informal control and invite further disorder.[8] The theory later influenced policing under New York City leaders, but strong claims that aggressive broken-windows policing alone caused the citywide crime decline remain contested. The present theory does not depend on that causal claim.

Its narrower philosophical lesson is more defensible: visible conditions can communicate descriptive norms. A damaged environment can signal that damage is ordinary or unattended. A maintained environment can signal that standards remain active. These signals do not compel conduct, but they alter what appears exceptional and what appears permitted.

The same structure contributes to prejudice. A child repeatedly observes who is interrupted, obeyed, feared, trusted, mocked, represented as competent, and permitted to lead. A historical arrangement may then be internalized as a natural difference. The invalid inference is rarely spoken aloud: "this hierarchy repeatedly exists; therefore this hierarchy expresses the natural order." It may be learned before it is ever presented as an argument.

Theories of ideology already examine how contingent social arrangements can be naturalized and how beliefs may sustain illegitimate power.[9] System-justification research examines motivations to view prevailing social arrangements as fair, legitimate, or inevitable, including when those arrangements disadvantage the person defending them. Status quo bias demonstrates a disproportionate preference for established options merely because they occupy the default position.[10]

The repeated is not necessarily believed because it has won an argument. It may be believed because it has ceased to be experienced as an argument at all.

9. Institutional Survival and the Normalization of Deviance

Familiarity can transform risk into institutional authority. Diane Vaughan used the phrase normalization of deviance in analyzing the Challenger disaster: departures from proper safety standards became increasingly acceptable after they were repeatedly survived without catastrophe. Later safety research has applied the concept across medicine and other high-risk organizations.[11]

The reasoning becomes: "we did this before and nothing terrible happened; therefore the practice is acceptable." But previous survival may represent luck rather than safety. The absence of catastrophe is evidence, but it is not conclusive evidence, especially when risks accumulate or when failure requires several conditions to align.

This case displays the authority transfer with unusual clarity. A practice begins as a deviation requiring explanation. Repetition without immediate loss gradually converts the deviation into the new standard. The institution no longer asks why the practice should be permitted. Critics are asked why the familiar practice should be disturbed.

Institutional danger

An institution becomes especially dangerous when familiarity gives its practices authority while the institution controls the evidence, vocabulary, incentives, and procedures by which that authority may be questioned.

10. Political and Affective Model Lag

Political incumbency has many causes: performance, fundraising, party structure, media exposure, constituent service, electoral rules, and the weakness of challengers. Familiarity is not a complete explanation. It nevertheless creates a revealing asymmetry. The incumbent can become the default occupant of an office, while the challenger is treated as a proposed alteration that must justify itself.

The familiar question is, "why should we replace this officeholder?" An equally legitimate question is, "why should this person continue exercising authority?" Status quo bias helps explain why established options receive a presumption that alternatives do not.[10] Familiar possession of power can appear as entitlement even when office is only temporary custody.

Affective authority operates similarly in relationships and inherited conflicts. A person may continue loving, fearing, excusing, defending, or hating according to an earlier model after substantial evidence has changed. The object of attachment may no longer be the person or group presently encountered; it may be the person first known, the promise once made, the injury once inflicted, or the identity one needs the other to retain.

Love may justify endurance. It does not justify refusing to update one's knowledge of the beloved.

The same applies to hatred after war. Historical memory may preserve justified caution, responsibility, and mourning. But descendants can inherit an emotional model whose original targets, conditions, and power relations have changed. Revalidation does not require forgetting. It requires distinguishing what remains morally relevant from what familiarity alone continues to animate.

11. Existential Inertia and the Repeated Life

The theory reaches its broadest form when the familiar object is an entire life-pattern. A person awakens at a familiar time, enters familiar rooms, performs familiar work, responds to familiar obligations, and returns to sleep. None of these actions is necessarily harmful. Repeated care, study, worship, exercise, craft, and service may be profoundly meaningful.

The danger begins when continuation no longer depends upon present endorsement. Yesterday supplies the script, and today follows it without conducting a new hearing.

Existential inertia

Existential inertia is the continuation of a life-pattern primarily because repetition has removed it from active judgment, rather than because the person has freshly or reflectively affirmed its value.

Heidegger's analysis of everydayness and "the they" explored how people commonly understand and choose themselves through socially available interpretations - doing what one does, values, fears, and pursues.[12] The present theory adds a mechanism: repeated arrangements move from examined foreground to authoritative background, and that background may continue governing after it ceases to fit the person's capacities, values, or finite time.

The claim is not that similar days are evil. Stability may preserve what is best in a life. The corrupting form is unexamined similarity that suppresses awareness, agency, or valuable possibility. Adventure without purpose can be as empty as repetition without reflection. Constant novelty can itself become a habit that protects a person from depth, fidelity, and completion.

12. Midlife Crisis as Compressed Revalidation

The phrase "mid-life crisis" was introduced by Elliott Jaques in 1965 in connection with mortality and adult development.[13] Later research does not support the idea that a dramatic crisis is universal or biologically inevitable. Midlife is better understood as a pivotal period in which gains, losses, health, generational responsibilities, completed projects, and awareness of finite time may converge.[14]

Within this framework, some midlife crises can be understood as episodes of compressed or global revalidation. Questions postponed while life remained familiar arrive together once mortality, regret, bodily change, loss, or exhaustion makes the old background difficult to preserve.

- Is this career still leading toward something I value?
- Is this relationship still what my loyalty assumes?
- Are my deferred ambitions genuinely available later?
- Does the identity built by an earlier self still describe the person living now?
- Would I choose this arrangement today if I had not inherited it yesterday?

A crisis is not automatically wisdom. It may produce panic, destructive abandonment, consumerism, infidelity, reckless danger, or attempts to deny aging. Novelty does not prove authorship. The constructive form distinguishes what remains valuable, what has changed, what was never justified, what is painful but morally binding, and what survives only through familiarity.

Careful formulation

Some midlife crises are episodes of compressed revalidation: questions that were postponed while life remained familiar arrive together once finite time becomes psychologically undeniable.

This formulation explains why regular, proportionate revalidation may reduce the need for catastrophic awakening. A life reviewed in smaller intervals is less likely to require total reconstruction under crisis conditions.

13. The Moral Foundation of Revalidation

The movement from model lag to a duty of revalidation requires an explicit moral bridge. Why should familiarity ever be required to justify itself? The answer rests upon several values.

- Truth: beliefs should respond to evidence rather than mere repetition.
- Autonomy: people should be capable of governing themselves through reasons they can recognize as their own.
- Non-domination: authorities should not escape scrutiny merely because obedience has become habitual.
- Justice: historical duration does not convert inequality into legitimacy.
- Flourishing: capacities and possibilities should not be needlessly abandoned to obsolete models.
- Safety: previous survival should not be confused with proof that a practice remains acceptable.
- Responsibility to others: familiar arrangements affecting others require more than private comfort for justification.

Philosophical accounts of autonomy emphasize self-government, deliberative competence, and responsiveness to reasons.[15] Reflection alone, however, is insufficient. A person can sincerely endorse a preference that was produced by oppression, fear, restricted alternatives, or misinformation. Familiarity may shape both the belief and the standards by which the person endorses it.

Meaningful revalidation therefore requires more than asking, "do I still feel comfortable with this?" It requires evidence, access to alternatives, freedom from coercion, attention to affected people, and a fair opportunity for contradiction to be heard.

14. Corrective Experience and the Updating Problem

New evidence does not automatically revise an established model. Contradiction may be unnoticed, dismissed as exceptional, explained away, punished, emotionally intolerable, or outweighed by years of embodied learning. The most important practical question is therefore not simply whether reality has changed, but what allows a person or institution to grant the change enough weight to revise familiar authority.

The Corrective-Experience Principle

When a model was formed through repeated experience, corrective information may be insufficient. Safe, intelligible, and successful contradictory experience may be necessary to revise the model.

A person shaped by repeated failure may not be changed by being told, "you can do it now." One successful, supported act of control may carry more revising force than many reassurances. A prejudiced community may not change through abstract instruction alone if daily institutions continue reenacting the hierarchy. An organization may not correct normalized danger if reporting creates no visible consequence and dissenters are punished.

Corrective experience must be safe enough to attempt, clear enough to interpret, and repeated enough to compete with the authority of the old model. Otherwise failure may strengthen the remembered rope rather than weaken it.

15. The Proportional Revalidation Rule

Universal and continuous doubt would be disabling. A person should not test the floor before every step, reconstruct language before every sentence, or demand daily proof of every friendship. Revalidation must be proportional rather than total.

The Proportional Revalidation Rule

The greater the consequence, changeability, contradictory evidence, coercive origin, self-protective entrenchment, and effect upon others of a familiar authority, the stronger the duty to require that authority to justify its continuation.

Six triggers for increased scrutiny

1. Consequence: how serious would the harm be if the familiar model were false?
2. Change: how likely is the relevant body, person, environment, institution, or capacity to have changed?
3. Contradiction: what significant evidence conflicts with the familiar model?
4. Coercive origin: was the belief or behavior formed through fear, punishment, deprivation, manipulation, or repeated failure?
5. Entrenchment: does the condition suppress, punish, or redefine criticism so that it protects itself from examination?
6. Effects upon others: does the familiar arrangement impose serious costs upon people who did not freely choose it?

A useful decision rule is comparative: a familiar authority should be revalidated when the expected harm of allowing an obsolete, false, or unjust model to continue exceeds the reasonable cost of reopening it to examination. This avoids two opposite failures: existential sleep, in which nothing is reconsidered, and existential paralysis, in which nothing is allowed to become settled enough to guide action.

16. The Presumption of Earned Continuity

A mature theory must explain when familiarity deserves to remain authoritative. Longstanding arrangements sometimes contain accumulated wisdom no single person fully understands. Trust, loyalty, identity, and skill can be damaged by obsessive review. Constant self-monitoring can produce rumination rather than freedom.

The Presumption of Earned Continuity

A familiar condition that remains reliable, corrigible, freely affirmable, proportionate in its effects, and responsive to evidence may retain a provisional presumption in favor of continuation.

This presumption is earned, not inherited merely through age. It remains defeasible. Familiarity is legitimate evidence when the conditions relevant to reliability remain sufficiently similar: a well-maintained floor that has repeatedly supported weight deserves confidence. But the presumption weakens when maintenance stops, cracks appear, loads change, or the institution conceals inspection.

Revalidation is therefore not a trial in which everything familiar is presumed guilty. It is an appeal process through which familiarity can lose authority when the reasons supporting it have expired.

17. Collective Revalidation

Many normalities cannot be adequately reviewed by isolated individuals. Institutions shape available evidence, vocabulary, incentives, risks, and access to alternatives. A worker may recognize an unsafe practice yet remain unable to challenge it. A voter may distrust an incumbent yet encounter no credible alternative. A subordinated group may understand injustice while lacking the power to make the dominant standard answerable.

The Collective Revalidation Requirement

Where familiar authority governs a group or institution, meaningful review requires independent evidence, protected criticism, transparent standards, and participation by those subject to its consequences.

Institutional mechanisms of revalidation

- independent audits and external review;
- sunset clauses for rules created under temporary conditions;
- protected dissent, whistleblowing, and incident reporting;
- leadership rotation and genuinely competitive selection;
- representation of people who bear the costs of the policy;
- transparent evidence standards and access to contrary findings;
- adversarial review by people rewarded for finding failure rather than preserving consensus;
- scheduled reassessment after technological, demographic, legal, or social change.

Collective revalidation prevents a powerful institution from serving simultaneously as actor, witness, judge, and historian of its own success.

18. Counterarguments and Limits

Objection 1: Familiarity is often rational evidence

Correct. The theory does not claim that recurrence is evidentially worthless. Repeated reliable performance can justify confidence. The objection supports the Presumption of Earned Continuity. The error occurs when evidence of recurrence is treated as sufficient proof of necessity, justice, permanent safety, or immunity from changed conditions.

Objection 2: Revalidation destroys loyalty and stability

Poorly designed revalidation can. The theory therefore rejects universal constant review. Valuable commitments deserve stability and may become meaningful precisely through duration. Revalidation asks whether the reasons for commitment remain recognizable, not whether every commitment must be abandoned whenever difficulty appears.

Objection 3: People sometimes react against repetition

Yes. Repetition can produce boredom, irritation, sensitization, reactance, or rebellion rather than acceptance. The theory is a defeasible tendency, not a deterministic law. Its claims should be framed probabilistically and contextually.

Objection 4: The theory reduces structural injustice to psychology

It must not. Structural constraint is often materially real. Psychological model lag is only one component. The theory becomes politically serious only when it distinguishes remembered ropes from enforced ropes and includes collective revalidation, resources, institutional reform, and protection from retaliation.

Objection 5: Some traditions contain knowledge their members cannot fully articulate

True. The inability to provide a complete theory for a practice does not prove that the practice lacks value. Revalidation may consider historical evidence, communal knowledge, long-term consequences, and tacit skill. But obscurity cannot become unlimited immunity, especially when the practice causes serious harm or punishes inquiry.

Objection 6: Midlife dissatisfaction may be illness or loss, not awakening

Correct. The theory offers one interpretation of some midlife crises, not a universal diagnosis. Depression, bereavement, financial pressure, illness, caregiving, divorce, and other conditions require their own explanations and may require professional support. The concept of compressed revalidation should never be used to romanticize suffering.

19. The Formal Argument

1. Finite agents cannot consciously reassess every feature of reality before every action.
2. Repeated experience, successful prediction, social reinforcement, and the absence of salient contradiction move many conditions from deliberative foreground into operative background.
3. Conditions in the operative background shape what appears normal, credible, safe, possible, permissible, and worth questioning.
4. Repetition alone does not establish logical necessity, permanent impossibility, moral legitimacy, or immunity from changing evidence.
5. Bodies, capacities, relationships, environments, institutions, and social arrangements can change more rapidly than operative backgrounds update.
6. Therefore, familiar conditions can continue exercising authority after their original evidential, causal, or moral basis has weakened or disappeared.
7. Such obsolete authority can preserve false beliefs, retained helplessness, prejudice, institutional danger, political inertia, destructive loyalty, or an unchosen life-pattern.
8. Truth, autonomy, non-domination, justice, safety, flourishing, and responsibility to others provide reasons to correct serious obsolete authority.
9. Continuous universal reassessment would impair competent action, trust, and durable commitment.
10. Therefore, familiar authority should receive neither automatic obedience nor automatic rejection, but proportional revalidation combined with a defeasible presumption of earned continuity.

20. Testable Implications

The theory becomes more than an evocative synthesis when it generates distinguishable predictions. It predicts that:

- Repeated exposure will increase not only expectations of recurrence but, under some conditions, judgments that an arrangement is natural, inevitable, justified, or difficult to change.
- The migration from "common" to "right" or "necessary" will be stronger when the origin of the arrangement is hidden and alternatives are rarely encountered.
- Models formed through repeated failure will be revised more effectively by safe experiences of control than by verbal reassurance alone.
- Gradual or ambiguous changes will produce more model lag than abrupt, salient changes.
- Environments that punish contradiction or monopolize information will produce stronger familiarity-authority transfer.
- Institutions relying on previous survival as their principal safety evidence will underestimate accumulating risk.
- Regular, low-cost revalidation will produce less impulsive disruption than rare, crisis-driven global revalidation.
- People will allow answers to "how often does this happen?" to improperly influence answers to "is it true, just, safe, necessary, or still applicable?"

A particularly useful experimental design would separately ask participants: How frequently does this occur? How likely is it to continue? How difficult would it be to change? How justified is it? The theory predicts that repetition will sometimes cause the first judgment to contaminate the other three even when no new evidence of necessity, difficulty, or moral legitimacy has been supplied.

21. Historical Comparison and Originality

The theory should not claim to have discovered habit, social normalization, learned helplessness, ideology, or status quo bias. Its historical credibility depends upon acknowledging close predecessors and stating its contribution precisely.

Predecessor	Central contribution	Overlap	Distinctive extension here
Hume	Custom produces expectation from repeated experience.	The past becomes the practical guide to the future.	Shows how expectation can migrate into epistemic, modal, moral, and political authority.
Dewey	Habits organize conduct and can be intelligently reconstructed.	Habit is necessary, social, and reformable.	Adds authority transfer, model lag, proportional triggers, and institutional review.
Merleau-Ponty	Embodied skill creates a pre-reflective practical "I can."	Backgrounded experience enables competent freedom.	Places the embodied "I can" beside the retained "I cannot" as dual outcomes of background learning.
Heidegger	Everydayness and social interpretation can obscure ownership of possibilities.	Unexamined normality may diminish authorship.	Specifies a cross-domain mechanism and a calibrated method of revalidation.
Foucault	Discipline and normalization produce standards and self-regulating subjects.	Power shapes what counts as normal.	Extends beyond institutions and domination to beneficial skill, relationships, safety, and private model lag.
Bourdieu	Habitus endures; hysteresis occurs when dispositions no longer fit a changed field.	Durable models can lag behind social reality.	Generalizes lag across epistemic, bodily, affective, institutional, political, and existential domains.
Ideology critique	Contingent orders may be naturalized and used to sustain domination.	The established can appear necessary or legitimate.	Explains a broader dual-use process beginning in ordinary competence, not only social domination.

Predecessor	Central contribution	Overlap	Distinctive extension here
Learned helplessness	Past uncontrollability can preserve later passivity.	Former limits can govern after control becomes possible.	Integrates retained constraints into a general theory of familiar authority and corrective experience.
Status quo bias	Established options receive disproportionate preference.	Defaults receive an advantage merely by being established.	Explains how the default may become a standard of judgment and links it to other authority forms.
Normalization of deviance	Repeated survival can make dangerous departures seem acceptable.	Absence of immediate loss changes standards.	Places institutional risk within a general theory of borrowed authority and collective revalidation.

The originality claim

The individual ingredients are not wholly new. The defensible originality lies in the architecture of the synthesis and extension. The framework identifies a common philosophical form across domains generally studied separately; distinguishes several kinds of borrowed authority; treats beneficial mastery and obsolete captivity as dual uses of background learning; generalizes model lag beyond Bourdieu's social field; adds corrective experience as an updating requirement; balances revalidation with earned continuity; and extends review from the individual to institutional design.

Most distinctive proposition

Familiarity can transform a condition from an object being judged into part of the standard by which other things are judged. When that authority survives the reasons that produced it, the familiar becomes an obsolete governor of reality.

This is sufficiently different to justify publication as an original philosophical synthesis, provided the work is presented with historical modesty. It should claim neither discovery of every phenomenon nor a single empirical mechanism. Its contribution is a unified theory of authority transfer, temporal mismatch, and calibrated correction.

22. A Practical Revalidation Protocol

The theory can be applied through a structured review. The following protocol is intended for serious personal, relational, political, or institutional questions - not for obsessive daily checking of ordinary functioning.

Stage 1: Identify the authority

- What familiar belief, limit, loyalty, routine, hierarchy, or practice is guiding conduct?
- What form of authority is it exercising: epistemic, modal, practical, moral, affective, political, or institutional?
- When did it stop appearing as a choice and begin appearing as reality itself?

Stage 2: Recover the origin

- What evidence, need, danger, custom, authority, success, failure, or coercion originally established it?
- Did the origin justify the authority at the time?
- Was the model learned through information, repeated experience, punishment, social conformity, or structural dependency?

Stage 3: Test for model lag

- What has changed in the person, world, evidence, relationship, institution, or available alternatives?

- What contradictory evidence has been minimized or explained away?
- Is the constraint real, remembered, socially enforced, self-reinforcing, or mixed?

Stage 4: Revalidate proportionally

- What is the consequence of being wrong?
- What is the cost and risk of testing the model?
- Can a safe corrective experience be designed?
- Who bears the consequences and therefore deserves a voice?
- What independent evidence or protected critic is needed?

Stage 5: Decide the status of continuity

- Preserve it because its authority remains earned.
- Revise it because part of the model remains useful but part has expired.
- Suspend it while evidence is gathered.
- Abandon it because its authority no longer has adequate factual or moral support.
- Change the surrounding structure because individual insight alone cannot remove the constraint.

Conclusion

Human beings survive by carrying the past forward. We walk because the body preserves successful movement. We speak because language preserves established meaning. We trust because structures and people have supported us before. We acquire character because worthy actions become dispositions rather than isolated decisions. This is familiarity's gift.

But familiarity does not independently know why a pattern has continued. It cannot by itself distinguish success from luck, truth from repetition, justice from custom, love from attachment, safety from previous survival, or impossibility from former weakness. It carries the past forward even when the past has become false. This is familiarity's danger.

The answer is not constant novelty. Adventure without judgment can become another form of sleep. Nor is the answer universal suspicion. A life without trust, habit, loyalty, or continuity could accomplish almost nothing. The answer is proportionate revalidation: preserving the familiar where its authority remains deserved and withdrawing that authority where its reasons have expired.

The deepest danger is not that two days resemble one another. It is that resemblance may prevent us from noticing when a different day has become possible.

Every serious familiar authority should therefore face the appropriate questions: Is this belief supported, or merely repeated? Is this limitation present, or merely remembered? Is this hierarchy justified, or merely established? Is this practice safe, or merely survived? Is this person still who my loyalty assumes? Is this routine serving a value I presently affirm? Would I choose this arrangement now if I had not inherited it yesterday?

Final principle

What is familiar may guide us, but familiarity alone can never justify us. Whenever familiarity exercises serious authority over a human life, it must occasionally be required to prove that its authority is still deserved.

The Theory in Seven Maxims

What is actual is not therefore necessary.

What is repeated is not therefore true.

What is normal is not therefore just.

What has been survived is not therefore safe.

What once restrained us does not therefore restrain us now.

What has endured may deserve continuity, but endurance alone cannot earn it.

Every serious normality should occasionally be required to justify the authority it exercises.

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Note on scope and evidence

The elephant-and-stake account is retained as a philosophical parable, not as the empirical proof of the theory. Broken-windows policing is treated as contested; only the narrower proposition that visible conditions can communicate norms is used. The theory is explicitly probabilistic and multi-mechanistic: different psychological and social processes can produce the common philosophical outcome of borrowed authority.

Author

Michael Richard Haimés is an independent philosopher and the creator of the Haimesian System, an interdisciplinary project addressing ethics, metaphysics, religion, governance, psychology, and applied decision-making. This paper develops an original synthesis concerning how familiarity becomes practical authority, how that authority can lag behind changing reality, and how persons and institutions can revalidate it without destroying the benefits of habit and continuity.