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NATURALIZATION: HABITS, BODIES AND THEIR SUBJECTS

abstract

*The paper seeks to draw a preliminary map of the relations between the human body, habituation, and nature, in a lineage of questioning which should be referred to as Aristotelian in the wider sense of the term. The trail begins from Aristotle's articulations of *Hexis*, and reaches Bergson's definition of motoric *habitude*, through the two intermediary-stops of Thomas Aquinas and Félix Ravaisson. In all of the four "stations" of the trail, one finds intricate relations between habituation and nature that include the role that the human body plays in the process of coming-near of the two and the approximation between them. Habituation has a task to play in the bringing of a human-body as close as possible to its own natural reality. Yet by that process habituation effectively covers and wraps the body with a "second" nature, a supplementary nature including not only actions, operations, gestures and deeds but also things that participate in these. Finally, based on this basic structure of habituation, all the four "stops" in the presented conceptual genre conceive of the task of habituation as carrying a moral tenor, which the article seeks to portray.*

keywords

Habitude, habitus, Ravaisson, Bergson, naturalisation

The concept of the human body is still a difficult theme to approach in a philosophical manner. During the second half of the 20th century, continental philosophy has persistently returned to inquire into the problem of the reality of the body. Philosophical reflections on the body produced by thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Michel Henry, Michel Foucault, Deleuze and Guattari, Giorgio Agamben, and more recently Catharine Malabou, Graham Harman and Ray Brassier exemplify the centrality of the body as a philosophical issue in continental philosophical debates. Still, Jean-Luc Nancy was able to remark in 2000 that “All thoughts of the ‘body proper’, laborious efforts at re-appropriating what we used to consider, impatiently, as ‘objectified’ or ‘reified,’ all such thoughts about the body proper are [...] contorted: in the end, they only expel the thing we desired”¹. A central challenge regarding the status of the body regards its intermediate position between a subject-actor and a passive object, being enacted and moved by a subject-actor. In other words: Is the body a mechanical dispositive to be automatized as cleverly as possible, or is it rather an intimate layer of inner experience, escaping the rationalizing grip of the intellect and at the same moment being distinguished from the physical matter of nature? That is, is the body an organic part of nature, or is it somehow distinguished from nature qualitatively, by the fact of possessing of or being possessed by a human subject²? The concept of habit, contracting into itself a long tradition of discussion that will be portrayed in outline below, makes one of the possible apertures to approach this complex, ambivalent reality of the body. Habit merits this privileged position as its functioning, similarly to that of the body itself, takes place between activity and passivity and between actuality and potentiality. Most importantly, it is the position of habit as a second nature, or as a naturalized capacity, that places habit in the vicinity of the body itself. One therefore is called to pay attention to the manner in which the body makes itself a site for the activity of thought by processes of habituation. When the body is approached via the habitual framework, one is able to think of the human body in a manner which we recommend viewing as inherently *moral*, which is to say belonging to the domain of the human mastery of one’s actions.

1 Nancy, 2008: 5.

2 On this see Gontier, 2001.

We proceed now to the more reconstructive core of this essay, which will revolve around issues related to the rather popular maxim “habit is a second nature”. The philological origins of this expression are, in fact, quite complex³. We suggest examining central articulations of the relation between habit and nature at several central stations in the conceptual history of habit: Aristotle, Aquinas, Ravaisson and Bergson. We’d refer to nature here in the general sense of an organized matter, composed of things, bodies and movements. As we shall see, the core Aristotelian definitions are pertinent to the scholastic and to the modern formulations of habit, including habit’s relation to nature and to the body, so that one can detect here what could be called a conceptual genre. The present restoration of the conceptual genre of habit is done by comparing the three central historical moments of its *longue-durée*: the ancient, the medieval and the late modern. This will provide an introductory orientation for the question, preparing the groundwork for a fuller examination⁴.

The Ambiguities of the Relation Between *Hexis* and Nature in Aristotle

In Aristotle, corporeal habit (ἕξις, *hexis*) is an evident member of the family of habits. In the *Metaphysics*⁵ Aristotle refers to bodily health as a *hexis* which is responsible for the well-balanced maintenance of living-beings. Yet the general structure of habit in Aristotle, by itself, is somewhat ambiguous. A basic structural ambiguity to be found in the term “*hexis*” is that it is brought by Aristotle as a central example for three important categories: Relation (πρός τι, *pros ti*), Quality (ποιότης, *poiotes*) and Possession (ἔχειν, *echein*)⁶. *Hexis* is therefore conceived by Aristotle as exemplifying these three categories: relation, quality and possession, and it is not quite decided to which of the three it most essentially pertains. It should be underlined that *Hexis* in itself is not a category, but rather a state of affairs participating in these three central categories. We further learn from the *Categories* that as a (first kind of) quality, *hexis* should be differentiated from διάθεσις (*diathesis*, disposition). Both *hexis* and *diathesis* are qualities belonging to a substantial reality (οὐσία, *ousia*), and any *hexis* is also primarily a *diathesis*. Yet, in as much as disposition is fleeting and unstable, *hexis* is a disposition which “has been naturalized” (πεφυσιωμένα, *phepusiomene*) over a period of time⁷. *Hexis* is then established by a process of appropriation between an acting

3 This known maxim is not to be found in Aristotle. In Augustine, one finds the expression “*secunda natura*” together with “*consuetudino*”, not with “*habitus*.” (De musica, lib. 6, 19). Augustine himself points to Cicero as the origin of this expression.

4 I am thankful to the Gerda Henkel Foundation for the support of the present project as well as to the community of the Thomas Institute for hosting my work.

5 Aristotle, 2003: 272-273 (1022b13).

6 Aristotle, 1962b: 46-47 (6b1), 62-63 (8b27), 106-107 (15b19).

7 Aristotle, 1962b: 64-65 (9a1-5).

subject and that which she possesses. This can also happen between living organisms and the things that pertain to them: In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle writes that between he who has a garment and the garment which is being had, exists a *hexis*⁸. That is to say: *hexis* mediates between the “owner” and that which is “being-had”, or property. We will return to this point later.

**The Scholastic
Challenge:
Between a
Virtue and a
Genre of Things**

In the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle differentiates between habit, affect (πάθος, *pathos*) and potency (δύναμις, *dunamis*); and out of these three state of the soul, only habit serve as the foundation of virtue⁹. Both potencies and affects could be viewed as participating in the natural pace of things: Potency exists in the thing by the latter’s very nature and could not be eradicated, and affects are exterior movements causing a corresponding movement in the body, according to causal natural laws. *Hexis*, in its turn, exists between the two former states of the soul: As a process of naturalization, *hexis* is the human capability to react properly or improperly to the affects¹⁰, that is to say to all that which changes the human-being from the outside. And when a habit is established, it behaves *like* a potency, that is to say like something belonging to human nature. From this we induce that *hexis* has a complicated relation to nature: *hexis* is a *naturalizing* process. It goes *towards* nature, working to achieve a situation which is nature-like. And even if ethical virtues belong first and foremost to the soul, φύσις (*phusis*, nature) has an integral part to play in them. In the ethical context, a distinction should be made between *hexis* and ἦθος (*ethos*), which are both translated occasionally as “habit”. Whereas *hexis* does not necessarily belong to the ethical domain, *ethos* refers exclusively to habits pertaining to the ethical domain which is arranged by the soul. Moreover, if *hexis* signifies a state of possession in a general manner, then the meaning of *ethos* goes in the more specific direction of a “custom” or “character”¹¹. Yet every “habit” effectuates a process which is related to nature and affected by it. In *Memory and reminiscence*, Aristotle writes: “ὥσπερ γὰρ φύσις τό ἦθος”¹², “character comes after nature”. Therefore, it is useful to differentiate between *ethos* as character, which belongs to the ethical domain of praxis, and *hexis* which should be regarded as belonging to a *proto-practical* domain: *Hexis* is certainly *capable* of participating in ethico-practical processes, but by itself and in its elementary form, *hexis* concerns the fundamental, general human ability to master and dispose of his own

8 Aristotle, 2003: 272-273 (1022b9).

9 Aristotle, 1962a: 86-89 (1105b20-1106a14).

10 Nickl, 2001: 19-35.

11 On the difference between *hexis*, *ethos* and *hutos* in Aristotle, see Miller, 1974.

12 Aristotle, 1957: 304-305 (452a27)

actions and reactions to the affects, in regard to its potencies. Even if rigorously intermingled with natural elements and movements, virtue is *not a natural quality*. Virtue is constituted *neither from nature nor against nature*¹³; virtue is rather determined, stabilized and naturalized through a process necessitating experience and time-lapse, establishing its own regulations. This structure necessitates a body and an area which is its exterior. It necessitates the sensitivity and responsiveness of the body to outside influences. Finally a habit in the ethical framework necessitates a process of commerce between the acting-subject and its surrounding, determining the manner in which the acting-subject is actualized in its affecting environment.

A synthesis of the above mentioned Aristotelian text-locations suggests that the Aristotelian *hexis* is an active relation of possession, being stabilized between a living actor and something that she possesses. In the ethical framework, that which is possessed in *hexis* is a capacity to react to the affects, in a manner which serves first and foremost the form or the soul of the subject-actor.

The Scholastic Challenge: Between a Virtue and a Genre of Things

In its medieval scholastic version, *habitus*, which is the Latin translation of the Greek *hexis*, belongs first and foremost to the soul. Yet one has to emphasize that Thomas Aquinas *did not exclude* physical *habitus* from the list of habits¹⁴. Instead, Aquinas accepted Aristotle's determination that both beauty and health are habits, but he specified that they are "as habits", that is to say, closer to a disposition than to habit in the full sense of the word. The reason Aquinas provides for this differentiation is that, whereas habits are taken as stable and difficult to change, the body, according to the scholastic understanding, is viewed as a non-permanent, fleeting reality, always susceptible to be changed and mutated. *Habitus* of the body is therefore "as" a habit, in as much as *habitus* of the soul is properly a habit¹⁵. *Habitus* in the proper sense of the word, according to Aquinas, belongs exclusively to the moral domain and is, as in Aristotle, the foundation of virtue. Only habit that is directed to a form (rather than to an operation), that is to say, to the soul (or the reality) of the subject, could have its "seat" in the body and therefore have the body as its subject¹⁶. Therefore *habitus* of the body, in the Thomistic framework is directed to the actualization of the reality (the "form") of the actor, rather than to a specific operation that

13 Aristotle, 1962a, 70-71 (1103a25).

14 Aquinas, 1920: 797-799 (Quaest. 50 Art. 1).

15 Ibid., Reply to 2.

16 Aquinas, 1920: 798 (Quaest. 50, art 1, answer).

the actor performs. Finally, *habitus* could reside in the body in a *secondary manner*, when it *participates* in the general habit ordered and directed by the soul. Therefore in the scholastic framework bodily habits are acknowledged, though they are submerged in the habits of the soul and are subordinate to them. In a second step, as we are going to see, Aquinas raises the possibility of including material things in the kingdom of habit.

In the opening of the discussion of *habitus* in the *Summa Theologiæ*, and following Aristotle in the *Categories*, Aquinas differentiates between *habitus* as “relation” and *habitus* as “having”, and it is the latter that Aquinas links with physical usage. Aquinas returns to the examples of the garment and its wearer given by Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*. Aquinas sharpens and radicalizes Aristotle’s suggestion by saying that habits are situations *involving things*, i.e., those things that “we have about ourselves”¹⁷. Therefore here *habitus* is designed not only as a relation but also as including the material thing itself, having an actual relation with a body and being carried by a body. Habits are, therefore, *inter alia*, also bodily accessories which are found in a relation to a body, adorning and covering it: “Thus, for instance, something adorns or covers, and something else is adorned or covered [*ornans vel tegens, et aliud ornatum aut tectum*]: wherefore the Philosopher says (Metaph. v, text. 25) that ‘a habit is said to be, as it were, an action or a passion of the haver and that which is had’; as is the case in those things which we have about ourselves [*quæ circa nos habemus*]. And therefore these constitute a special genus of things [*speciale genus rerum*], which are comprised under the predicament of ‘habit’: of which the Philosopher says that ‘there is a habit between clothing and the man who is clothed’ [*inter habentem indumentum, et indumentum quod habetur, est habitus medius*]”.

To conclude this all-too-brief account, in the scholastic version, *habitus* of the body should be understood as a quasi-*habitus* closer to a disposition (because its subject could be easily changed), which is directed to the form of the subject, that is to say, to the actualization of the natural form of the actor. Corporeal *habitus* maintains the ambiguous status of the Aristotelian *hexis*: on the one hand, it is contingent and artificial, but on the other hand it adheres and conforms to the form of its actor and is integrated in the actor’s operations. Hence, Aquinas maintains both the elements and the ambiguity of the Aristotelian definitions: He maintains the dispersal of *hexis* between the various categories (relation, quality and having), as well as

17 Aquinas, 1920: 793 (Quaest. 49, art 1, answer).

the distinction between habits, potencies and affects. Yet Aquinas enlarges the Aristotelian model by adding to it this “*speciale genus rerum*”, the habit understood as a “*res*”. One has indeed to remember that in the Romance languages, “habit” also denotes simply a cloth, a garment, dress and custom, this genre of things that cover the body and serve as its “second skin”. In as much as Aquinas distinguished between the possessive-material kind of *habitus* and the properly moral one, in the 19th century the two parts of *habitus* re-unite to create the modern “*habitude*” In this later formulation of habit, the bodily possession of habit is considered not only as an element but as a constitutive part of the moral domain.

The Organic Habitual Domain in Ravaisson

In 1802, Maine de Biran has located the notion of *habitude* as the center of his treatment of the human psyche and its faculty of thought (*pensée*), to which corporeal reality itself, according to Biran, is immanent¹⁸. A treatment of the peculiar immanence of the body in Biran and of the place of *habitude* in its construction will require a separate study¹⁹. Yet it is important to note that Biran differentiates between passive and active *habitudes*: those habits which are “forced” on the organism from its surrounding, and those which are initiated or developed by the conscious organism itself. This Biranian differentiation, as we shall see, will be elaborated by Bergson.

Ravaisson’s *De l’habitude* of 1838 condenses several traditions of discussion of habit, of which the prominent ones are the Aristotelian and the Biranian²⁰. The scholastic model, on the other hand, is not explicitly named as a direct source for Ravaisson’s inquiry. Nevertheless, Ravaisson’s attitude towards *habitude* shares notable affinities with that of Aquinas, affinities regarding the spiritual, theological horizon and beginning of habits. Ravaisson opens his inquiry with the quote from Aristotle mentioned above, “character comes after nature”²¹. Hence the relation between *habitude* and nature is posed as the *leitmotif* of the essay. The second quote from Aristotle Ravaisson brings at the opening pages of his essay is a known sentence from the opening of the second book of the *Ethics*²² in which Aristotle maintains that inanimate things could not acquire a virtue: “for not even if you throw a stone upwards ten thousand times will it ever rise upward unless under the operation of force”²³. The Aristotelian ethical framework of Ravaisson’s discussion is therefore evident, and one

18 De Biran, 1953.

19 For such an examination see Henry, 1965: 71-105.

20 Janicaud, 1997: 15-35.

21 Ravaisson, 2008: 24-25.

22 Aristotle, 1962a : 70-71 (1103a20).

23 Aristotle, 1961: 246-247 (1220b4-5).

of the central conceptual operations of Ravaisson's essay is the synthesis between ethics and physics, a synthesis extending between will and nature, a synthesis that, according to Ravaisson, makes the work that *habitude* has to accomplish.

Differently from the Thomistic version which proceeds from the presentation of *habitus* to the discussion of moral virtue, Ravaisson begins his essay with an extensive discussion of the *physical world* and the manner in which *habitude* participates in its construction. The discussion begins by questioning the place of habit in nature, in spatiotemporal reality, in material things and in bodies. From an Aristotelian point of view this method is acceptable as in fact this order of discussion searches to understand *habitus'* foundation in natural disposition (diathesis), conforming with the discussion in the *Categories* that was mentioned above, stating that habit begins as a disposition. Also in agreement with Aristotle, Ravaisson's conclusion is that in the inorganic domain, which is immediate and homogenous (according to Ravaisson), *habitude* as such *does not exist*²⁴. Therefore, *habitude* does not belong essentially to nature. Instead, *habitude* begins where human action begins, that is to say, where an ethical organization (in the Aristotelian sense) is enabled. Even if the habitual dynamics are not natural, Ravaisson demonstrates that the depths of the habitual architectonics come infinitesimally close to nature in its pure physical reality. *Habitude* acts like a membrane prolonging the movement between the moral and the natural domains.

Ravaisson's *habitude* is an instrument of prolongation. Two levels of *prolongation* characterize the Ravaissonian *habitude*. First, as we have seen, like in Aristotle (and in Aquinas), the work of *habitude* needs an enduring process of acquisition and contraction (these are Ravaisson's terms). Secondly, *habitude* necessitates the existence of an element of a domain which is *exterior* to the active organism. In other words, a primary condition for the formation of a *habitude* is a situation of *heterogeneity* existing between a thinking-active body and its natural surroundings²⁵. This fundamental *heterogeneity* is the reason for the fact that habituation is a process demanding a time-span, a *duration*, in order to gradually (and never fully) bridge-up this abyss between the soul and exterior nature. In the inorganic world, where cause and effect are established and immediate as the rules of nature, there is neither a need nor a place for a process of habituation. This

24 Ravaisson, 2008: 28-29.

25 On heterogeneity in Ravaisson see Montebello, 2003: 82, 89, 91.

lapse of time characteristic of human reality and its *habitudes*, as we shall shortly see was captured and underlined by Henri Bergson. Moreover, for Bergson, the domain of *habitude* extends, in principle, also to the inorganic world, that is to say, to matter itself²⁶.

For Ravaisson, with the help of *habitude*, liberty and consciousness could re-unite with the natural tendency for repetition and rehearsal, which is spontaneous and unconscious (otherwise referred to in physical terms as “inertia”). In order to describe the architectonics of *habitude*, Ravaisson introduces the model of a spiral, which has its deep roots in the very beginning of organic life, whereas its upper bounds dwell in the light of consciousness. “Habit comes back down this spiral, teaching us of its origin and genesis”²⁷. This “spiral” movement of *habitude* is established only in the domain of organized life; but organization of life, as in Aristotle and in Aquinas, is always a result of the morphologies of the soul, and therefore: “It is in consciousness alone that we can find the archetype of habit; it is only in consciousness that we can aspire not just to establish its apparent law but to learn its how and its why, to illuminate its generation and, finally to understand its cause”²⁸. Yet when arriving to the pure formal level of the organization by the soul, one is no longer in the domain of nature: “As soon as the spiral arrives at self-consciousness, it is no longer merely the form, the end or even the principle of organization: a world opens within it that increasingly separates and detaches itself from the life of the body, and in which the soul has its own life, its own destiny and its own end to accomplish”²⁹. Godly grace and the Spirit’s freedom are transcendent both to nature and to the habitual domain. And both Godly grace and the Spirit’s freedom are, according to Ravaisson’s understanding, the beginning and principle (*arché*) of *habitude*. The beginning of *habitude* is generated by a gesture of grace enacted upon human reality from its outside. On this issue, Ravaisson is closer to Aquinas than to Aristotle. As we are going to see, for Bergson, who also strolled down the paths of the Aristotelian formulations, *habitude* is generated by nature and from within nature, and, in a certain sense, *habitude is nature itself*.

Motoric Habitude in Bergson

Bergson radicalized the affiliation of *habitude*³⁰ with corporeal reality and to nature itself. In this, as Bergson clarified in his course notes of 1892-1893, he

26 “A vrai dire, la matière est susceptible d’habitudes”, Bergson, 1992: 272.

27 Ravaisson, 2008: 76-77.

28 Ravaisson, 2008: 38-39.

29 Ravaisson, 2008: 66-67.

30 I am following the translation of Mabelle L. Andison in Bergson, 1946.

followed what he called “the naturalist thinkers of *habitude*”³¹. Yet, Bergson’s explorations of *habitude* refer explicitly as well to the Aristotelian and the Ravaissonian sources. Dominique Janicaud, an eminent researcher of the relation between Ravaisson and Bergson, has determined that Bergson’s reading of Ravaisson on the subject of *habitude* is an “optical error”³² that fails to serve as a true reflection of Ravaisson’s model. Bergson’s reading of Ravaisson is erroneous, according to Janicaud, as the former emphasized the mechanical nature of *habitude* and even reduced *habitude* to a mechanical activity, whereas as for Ravaisson *habitude* has an extra-natural, spiritual and godly source. The approach taken in the present paper, though, neither over-emphasizes the idealistic character of Ravaisson’s work nor over-materializes the mechanical character of *habitude* in Bergson. Both Spiritualist thinkers pursued what Pierre Montebello called “a movement towards profundity” [*Le mouvement vers la profondeur*]³³. And for both Ravaisson and Bergson, it is *habitude* which opens the door to the descent inwards, though by two different methods.

Both versions of *habitude*, adhering to the *Spiritualist* decree³⁴, reserve for it the privileged status of *servicing as a starting platform of philosophical inquiries*. Moreover Bergson returned to an issue which was addressed by de Biran but was not prominent in Ravaisson’s model, which is the relation between *habitude* and memory³⁵. Much more than an optical error, this observation by Bergson in fact drew a reasonably poignant conclusion from Ravaisson’s habitual spiral, and bounded Ravaisson’s discussion more strongly with its Biranian, and therefore Spiritualist, roots.

It is true though that for Bergson all *habitudes* are essentially *motoric*. In numerous places in his writings, the word “*habitude*” appears together with the word “*motrice*”, creating the expression of “*motoric habitude*”. *Habitude* is therefore connected in Bergson’s thought to the movements of the organism. This is how Bergson presents Ravaisson’s concept of *habitude*, in an honorary essay from 1904:

For motor habit [*une habitude motrice*], once contracted, is a mechanism, a series of movements which determine one another: it is that part of us which is inserted into nature and which coincides

31 Bergson, 1992: 265-273.

32 Janicaud, 1997: 50.

33 Montebello, 2003: 97.

34 Janicaud, 1997: 126-161.

35 Biran, 1953: 130-163.

with nature; it is nature itself. Now, our inner experience shows us in habit an activity which has passed, by imperceptible degrees, from consciousness to unconsciousness and from will to automatism. Should we not then imagine nature, in this form, as an obscured consciousness and a dormant will? Habit thus gives us the living demonstration of this truth, that mechanism is not sufficient to itself: it is, so to speak, only the fossilized residue of a spiritual activity³⁶.

Bergson's version of the concept of *habitude* is indeed different from that of Ravaisson. For Bergson, *habitude* is immanent to the mechanical nature of practical life. Motoric *habitude*, Bergson emphasizes, has its cause not so much in the spirit but rather in the *utility* of the organism. *Habitude* guaranties that the same gesture would be ready to respond to future situations belonging to the same genre³⁷. Thus, *habitude* engenders and installs in the body a motoric apparatus³⁸, whose own effect, Bergson clarifies, is either to construe the automatic machinery in the organism, or to produce a *need* in the organism³⁹. As in all conceptions of habit discussed in this essay thus far, so also for Bergson the acquisition ("contraction") of a *habitude* is achieved through repetition and rehearsal. The rehearsal of gestures by habituation orders and organizes the activity of the organism.⁴⁰ Moreover, for Bergson, this establishing and ordering of gestures is of a *mnemonic* kind⁴¹. Every gesture which is performed by motoric *habitudes* realizes a virtual reservoir of movements, perceptions and memories, already performed by the organism as a reaction to a similar movement, cause, or image⁴². We note *in passim* that this still stands in agreement with the Aristotelian determination of *hexis* as a capacity to react to the affections.

Therefore, according to this Bergsonian understanding, from any rehearsed gesture of the body one could draw enormous amount of data regarding the history of the organism. The habitual spiral of Ravaisson mentioned above, therefore, was brought by Bergson to a radical conceptual consequence, in Bergson's view that the roots of habit lie not only deep in the body but also in the very past of the organism.

36 Bergson, 1946: 275; Bergson, 2009: 267.

37 Bergson, 2012: 186.

38 Bergson, 2012: 267.

39 Bergson, 1992: 266.

40 Bergson, 2012: 88-89.

41 Bergson, 1992: 270.

42 Bergson, 2009: 182.

Motoric Habitude as Memory

The decisive character making Bergson's *habitude* a concept in its own right is its relation with memory. This aspect of the relation between *habitude* and memory is not to be found in the Ravaissonian version, but is rather to be found earlier, in de Biran⁴³. Bergson understood the core-activity of memory as operated by motoric *habitudes*. For Bergson, motoric *habitudes are memory* in its mechanic, automatic, un-reflective aspect, taking place in the body as *well as in* in the soul.

In the operation of *habitudes*, the actor constantly re-enacts, re-realizes its past deeds, willingly or unwillingly, consciously or unconsciously. For Bergson, this *not only* includes a physical aspect but *is the physical aspect* of the organism. The body is a lump of conglomerated, better or worse organized *habitudes*, and the part of the soul directing mental or corporeal *habitudes* is already conceived as spatial in its very nature, and therefore belonging to material reality, not to spirit's domain. Yet the memory of the body, constituted by the ensemble of the sensorial-motoric system that *habitude* has organized⁴⁴, condenses the entire past of the organism into momentary actions, which can be transfigured into moments of intuition. Bergsonian intuition therefore should be considered as working along with and within the architecture of *habitudes*, rather than as a transgression beyond them altogether. Bergsonian intuition, understood literally, should be conceived as a grasping of the manner in which an intensive-compressed network of habits and memories are realized in a certain momentary act of a particular apprehension (of an idea, of an object etc.): "In concrete perception memory intervenes, and the subjectivity of sensible qualities is due precisely to the fact that our consciousness, which begins by being only memory, prolongs a plurality of moments into each other, contracting them into a single intuition⁴⁵". Intuition, in this sense, is a *configuration of habitudes*. *Furthermore a pure intuition*, the productive intuition that one finds in philosophy and art, is enacted as the un-making (*défaire*) of *habitudes*, in order to "recover contact with the real"⁴⁶. Bergsonian intuition therefore is a two-layered mental act (literal and pure), and both layers involve the working with *habitudes*: At the literal level, intuition configures a reservoir of *habitudes* into a point of contact with reality; and at its pure level, intuition un-makes this virtual reservoir in order to restore something that was missed or contorted in the literal moment of apprehension.

43 Biran, 1953: 117-145.

44 Bergson, 2012: 169.

45 Bergson, 1911: 292; Bergson, 2012: 246.

46 Bergson, 1911: 241; Bergson, 2012: 205.

Therefore we learn that *habitude* has the capacity to register knowledge of the history of the habituated organism in an orderly and *extended* manner, *partes extra partes*. This capacity of *habitude* has also its pedagogical aspect:

The memory of the lesson, which is remembered in the sense of learnt by heart, has *all* the marks of a habit. Like a habit, it is acquired by the repetition of the same effort. Like a habit, it demands first a decomposition and then a re-composition of the whole action. Lastly, like every habitual bodily exercise, it is stored up [*emmagasiné*] in a mechanism which is set in motion as a whole by an initial impulse, in a closed system of automatic movement which succeed each other in the same order and, together, take the same length of time⁴⁷.

Therefore, learning by heart, appropriating a poem, a language, a style, being acquainted and truly familiar with some object, embodies the core structure of *habitude*.

Habitude is acquired by the repetition of effort; but when effort is repeated automatically, it tends to diminish and to evaporate. Yet repetition itself holds the capacity to de-compose a movement and to re-compose it again. And this, according to Bergson, is already a supplementary effort which keeps *habitudes* alert and intelligent⁴⁸. Therefore *habitual* repetition holds the capacity to become innovative when it involves the de-composition of gestures, actions and deeds. Without repetition and rehearsal one could neither begin nor continue to perform the task of understanding a poem. Yet the *habitual* activity, for example like of literature reading or wine-tasting, is being enhanced by attention and effort, thereby producing an ever-growing subtlety, that is to say, taste⁴⁹.

The motoric gestures of the body, by their rehearsal, create a mechanical *habitude* and establish the movements that automatically follow certain perceptions. This is the basis of the *survival* of the organism in its adaptation to its milieu. This process registers the past of the organism in the figures of its *habitudes*⁵⁰: “The body retains motor habits capable of acting the past over again [*jouer à nouveau le passé*]; it can resume attitudes in which the past will insert itself; or, again, by the repetition of certain cerebral phenomena which have prolonged former perception, it can furnish to remembrance a point

47 Bergson, 1911: 89-90; Bergson, 2012: 84.

48 Bergson, 2012: 122.

49 Bergson, 1992: 244.

50 Bergson, 2012: 89.

of attachment [*point d'attache*] with the actual, a means of recovering its lost influence upon present reality"⁵¹.

In our view, then, Bergson's reading of Ravaisson's *habitude* distinguished an important aspect of *habitude* which was latent in Ravaisson's account. Moreover, we suggest that one should assign to *habitude* a decisive place in Bergson's philosophy at large, a more important place indeed than the one which is usually admitted. Bergsonian *habitude* is not only a reservoir of the past of the organism; it also constitutes the primary subject-matter of philosophical inquiry.

Habitude as Philosophical Subject-Matter

According to Bergson, *habitudes* of all kinds (material, mental and intellectual) divert our spirit from capturing reality, as they construe an architecture of assumed relations between situations and actions. Yet the reversibility of *habitudes*, that is, the fact that they are not natural, but rather constituted and artificial (again in full conformity with the Aristotelian formulation), makes *habitudes* capable of being disintegrated, so that a momentary contact with reality would be enabled: "Intelligence has contracted habits necessary for everyday living; these habits, transferred to the domain of speculation, bring us face to face with a reality, distorted or made over, or at any rate, arranged; but the arrangement does not force itself upon us irresistibly; it comes from ourselves; what we have done we can undo; and we enter then into direct contact with reality"⁵². *Habitudes* are formed by the practical necessities of man and it is the task of metaphysics, according to Bergson, to begin its inquiries by dissipating and questioning those *habitudes*, the artificial obscurities that diverted mind's connection with reality⁵³. In other words, Bergson assigns to philosophy the task of (re-)beginning by a deconstruction of the synthetic reality, in which utility constructs motoric habit. This habitual reality should be referred to as a moral reality in the Aristotelian sense of being occupied with the managing of human actions, gestures and deeds. Any metaphysical inquiry should begin by a questioning of the habitual domain of human reality which is simultaneously moral and physical, beginning by examining the philosopher's own mental-habits, decomposing them and recomposing them anew. Returning to the Aristotelian vocabulary, we'd say that Philosophy, according to Bergson, should begin with a *naturalized* reality, with the extended habit that has been established in some subject who is under consideration. The inquiry then should proceed by dismantling, undressing, deconstructing, going down the spiral of habit and *denaturalizing* it in order to uncover its beginning, its *arché*, which is, in

51 Bergson, 1911: 299; Bergson, 2012: 253.

52 Bergson, 1946: 30-31; Bergson, 2009: 22.

53 Bergson, 2012: 9.

all versions that we have examined (Aristotle, Aquinas, Ravaissou and Bergson), an affect arriving to the subject from an outside (Nature, movement, godly grace, necessity, etc.). This kind of metaphysical questioning will neither be “materialist” nor “idealist”, but it would be at any rate an incorporated process of inquiry, in which thought would have to pierce through its own incorporated, inhabited habits, in order to achieve moments of contact with nature.

Pending Questions

Could one think of the 19th century French chapter of dealing with *habitude* of the body as a response to the Aristotelian and Thomistic challenges and ambiguities? In the Spiritualist version suggested by Ravaissou and Bergson, *habitude* is not anymore a quality laid upon the surface of the organism: rather it is a reality installing the interior and the depth of the organism itself, up until the point of the lodge of the spirit, the latter remaining always free and self-constituting. Habit in this version is seen more as *prosthesis* rather than as ornament, it is an ornament becoming prosthesis, being anchored in the organisms' reality.

The two most crucial questions arising out of this state of affairs are (a) what could be the conceptual consequences of the late 19th century mixture between *habitude* and corporeality to the understanding of spatiality and extension in general; and (b) returning to the Aristotelian and Thomistic formulations, locating *hexis* and *habitus* between an actor and the habits that wrap it, one should ask what could be the consequences of Ravaissou's and Bergson's elaborations of *habitude* not only for the actor-subject, but rather for *the cloth itself*, that is to say for the accessories accompanying the bodily actor. In the last couple of decades, within the framework of what is known as the Speculative-realist turn, one finds a tendency to talk about an “object oriented ontology”, aiming to put in the center of philosophy not the human subject but rather the things and instruments surrounding it.⁵⁴ Here, on the other hand is suggested an equally realist manner of approaching the accessories and the habits of the human body as naturalizing instruments, while nevertheless maintaining the primacy of the subject: Habits *participate in the subject*, they generate and re-generate it, covering the actor and simultaneously endowing the actor with profundity. The subject, embracing both the human actor and its habits, must be conceived as a moral, acting reality⁵⁵, in which the rehearsal, realization and actualization of past actions literally produce the body, consisting of accessories, covers, containers, and the locks that hold all these together. Denaturalizing habits meaning finding the keys to unlock these various habitual cases, yet not doing away with habit altogether.

54 Harman, 2010: 93-104.

55 Badiou, 1982.

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