

Just like Nature: Habit and the Art of Life

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Abstract

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In this dissertation, I will examine the conceptions of philosophy of the 19th and 20th Century thinkers Félix Ravaisson, Henri Bergson, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and their implications for contemporary theories of religious ethics and philosophical practice, especially that of Pierre Hadot. In doing so, I will elucidate their understanding of both the goals of philosophical practice and the means by which they are achieved, focusing in particular on the importance of the body in their respective theories of philosophical practice. Specifically, I argue that Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of philosophical practice are grounded in an understanding of habit as a dynamic process of producing and transforming bodily dispositions that problematizes distinctions between self and world and limits attempts to achieve conscious self-mastery. As a result, their work calls into question the extent to which self-conscious cultivation of intellectual and bodily habits that conform to an ideal self-conception is either possible or desirable, and instead affirms a conception of philosophical practice as what I term "indefinite self-cultivation."

In chapter one, I examine Félix Ravaisson's conception of philosophical practice in relationship to his theory of habit, which he claims originates as a principle of desire that gives rise to bodily spontaneity. This theory of habit underlies a conception of philosophical practice as imitation of models of ideal conduct through which habits of inventive conduct that outstrip capacities for rational deliberation are produced. In chapter two, I contrast Ravaisson's conception of habit with Henri Bergson's, who regards habit as a form of bodily memory that produces automaticity. Philosophical practice for Bergson resists the effects of habit on thought and action by engaging in philosophical intuition, an application of mental effort to processes of change and

movement that generates new ideas and new forms of life. In chapter three, I examine Merleau-Ponty's intermediate position between these theories of habit, and his argument that the fluid nature of habituation as a process of social interaction makes living according to a determinate way of life possible only at the risk of doing violence to oneself. For Merleau-Ponty, philosophy entails critical practice of interrogating and expressing affects and immediate responses to events that serves as a way to question consciously-held values and uncover new personal and social possibilities. Finally, in chapter four, I conceptualize Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of philosophical practice as forms of indefinite self-transformation by putting their work in critical conversation with Pierre Hadot's theory of philosophy as a way of life.

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Introduction

“Plato scolded a boy for playing knuckle-bones. He replied, ‘You are scolding me over a small matter.’ ‘Habit,’ Plato said, ‘is not a small matter.’”

- Montaigne, *On Habit: And on Never Easily Changing a Traditional Law*¹

If the interest in conceiving of philosophy as both a theoretical and a lived practice has blossomed over the past two decades, it is not simply because doing so unearths marginalized traditions within the history of philosophy. Rather, many of those who have turned to studying Greco-Roman conceptions of philosophy as therapy or as an art of life have done so from a sense that linking philosophy to one’s life is, in the words of Pierre Hadot, the scholar and philosopher whose work first gave insight into these traditions, an “elementary human need.”² In Hadot’s now famous interpretation, philosophy in antiquity was not practiced simply as a theoretical discipline but as a way of shaping and transforming one’s subjectivity.³ Philosophical theories, doctrines, and arguments had the goal not simply or even primarily of *informing* people of particular truths but of *forming* them according to an ideal state of existence he refers to as “wisdom.” Hadot argues moreover that his model of lived philosophy is not simply a historical artifact of the ancient world but, to use William James’ term, a “live option” for the present.⁴ Hadot believes that his conception of a philosophical life transcends the divisions between “ancient” and “modern” and can still be

¹ Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M.A. Screech (New York: Penguin, [1991] 2003), p. 124.

² Pierre Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), p. 365.

³ For the most important and general statements of Hadot’s theory of philosophy as a way of life and his interpretation of ancient philosophy see especially Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Malden: Blackwell, 1995), Pierre Hadot *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002), and for a helpful introduction to his thought see Arnold Davidson, “Spiritual Exercises and Ancient Philosophy: An Introduction to Pierre Hadot,” *Critical Inquiry*, 16 (3), 1990: 475-482.

⁴ William James “The Will to Believe,” in *The Will to Believe and Other Essays in Popular Philosophy* (New York: Longmans, Green, & Co., 1912), p. 3.

practiced, even if the content of particular theories has radically changed.⁵ The philosophical search for wisdom, clarity, and tranquility is not merely a historical curiosity but is in fact permanently available.

Though many have criticized particular aspects of his conception of philosophy as a way of life, the majority of the theorists who have responded to Hadot's work agree with his basic assertion that philosophy can be practiced not just in the classroom or in the text, but in one's life.⁶ In making these claims, these theorists in no way argue that philosophy *must* be conceived as a practical activity, even less exclusively so. What the past two decades has seen is instead a continual attempt to open both the theoretical and the practical space for understanding what philosophy practiced as a way of life has been, and what it could potentially become. In attempting to open this space, scholars, often with different and even conflicting theoretical commitments, have articulated a number of different conceptions of philosophy as a lived practice. In this dissertation, I add to this discussion by articulating and defending a conception of philosophical practice as what I will call "indefinite self-cultivation." I will do so through an examination of the concepts of philosophy of three 19th and 20th Century thinkers, Félix Ravaisson, Henri Bergson, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Each of these thinkers treats philosophy as not merely a theoretical activity but as a lived practice, something that affects one's overall conduct along with one's ways

⁵ Pierre Hadot "La philosophie est-elle un luxe?", in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 365, Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, pp. 392-407.

⁶ See for instance Michel Foucault, "On the Genealogy of Ethics: Overview of a Work in Progress," in *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1997: 253-280), p. 260, Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 1, Richard Shusterman, *Practicing Philosophy: Pragmatism and the Philosophical Life* (New York: Routledge, 1997), p. 3, Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living: Socratic Reflections from Plato to Foucault* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), p. 2, John Sellars, *The Art of Living: The Stoics on the Nature and Function of Philosophy* (London: Bloomsbury, [2003] 2009), pp. 173-175, and Richard Sorabji, "Is Stoic Philosophy Helpful as Psychotherapy?", in Richard Sorabji ed. *Aristotle and After*, BCIS Supplement 68 (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 1997: 197-209).

of thinking. What makes their concepts of philosophy distinct, however, is that the goals of their philosophical practice go beyond assimilation of oneself to a particular way of life and instead entail continual self-transformation. Philosophical practice for Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty does not simply consist of giving one's ways of thinking, feeling, perceiving, and acting a particular form but moreover involves their constant and open-ended change. I intend in this dissertation to elucidate their conceptions of philosophical practice as indefinite self-transformation and to draw out their implications for contemporary theories of philosophical practice, particularly that of Pierre Hadot.

In making this argument, I will focus on the concept of habit and its role in philosophical practice in the work of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty as a perspective from which to critically examine Hadot's and other conceptions of philosophical practice. Specifically, I will argue that these thinkers develop conceptions of habit that call into question both the goal of philosophical practice for Hadot and the efficacy of the practices by which it is achieved. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty conceive of habit as a process whereby repeated acts and affections are retained within subjects that produces and transforms dispositions in a fluid and continuous fashion. While each thinker conceptualizes this process in different ways, they all recognize that habit is an essential element of human selfhood that operates independently from consciousness and gives rise to constant changes in our ways of being. As a result, undertaking philosophical practice to achieve a particular state of being will always produce something either beyond or different from what can be consciously intended. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all demonstrate how the process of habituation causes projects of philosophical practice to produce unpredictable results and thus limits the extent to which it is possible, and even desirable, to attempt to live according to a determinate way of life. Philosophical practice must entail a degree

of openness not only in regards to how philosophical commitments might be expressed, but moreover to creative change within those commitments themselves that do not arise solely from rational reflection but rather from the dynamics of habituation as a process.

My intention in investigating the work of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty is both to articulate and defend their conception of philosophy as indefinite self-cultivation, and to argue for the importance of an understanding of habit to future conceptions of philosophy as a lived practice. In this regard, I situate my discussion of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work as a response to Richard Shusterman's plea to theorize lived philosophical practice not as a "one-sided life of the mind" but as including the body as an element of the philosophical way of life.⁷ My analysis of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty expands upon his turn to the body by discussing how their understandings of habit as a process and as an element of the human self can influence our understanding of philosophical self-transformation. I hope to demonstrate that habit complicates not only attempts at gaining intellectual self-mastery over the body but also at achieving somatic self-perfection, and instead points towards new ways of understanding philosophical practice as a continuous and open-ended process. In this introduction, I will first articulate in provisional fashion my understanding of philosophical practice as indefinite self-cultivation. I will then provide a sketch of how Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty ground theories of habit in accounts of the effects of repetition on the human body, and finally outline the argumentative and chapter structure of this dissertation.

1. Philosophical Practice as Indefinite Self-Cultivation

⁷ Richard Shusterman, *Body Consciousness: A Philosophy of Mindfulness and Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 15-16. Shusterman names Hadot, Nussbaum, Nehamas, and Cavell as philosophers guilty in his mind of intellectualizing the philosophical life.

In identifying philosophical practice for Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty as “indefinite” self-cultivation, I contrast the goal of their philosophical practice with types of philosophical practice which seek to produce a “defined” or “formed” self. This contrast should not be taken, however, as crude opposition. I do not wish to suggest that the thinkers I study in this dissertation valorize radical self-contradiction or incoherence. Rather, the kinds of self-cultivation they articulate result in ways of being that exceed the boundaries of form or definition in different ways and to varying degrees. The goal of philosophical practice cannot simply be identified therefore with assimilating oneself to a particular self-conception that is expressed in actions, or with reshaping one’s habits of thought according to a rational standard, but instead allows space for continual change and even transformation of dispositions and forms of character. In this section I intend to provide a preliminary conception of what indefinite philosophical practice involves by contrasting it with some existing conceptions of philosophical practice that involve different notions of definition or form. Marking these relationships will not only illuminate the theoretical terrain on which this dissertation is built, but also clarify some of the presuppositions of contemporary theories of philosophical practice.

Beginning with the basic notion of “form” or “definition,” take the elucidation of the concept of “form” in Sabina Lovibond’s “practical-reason” view of ethics as: “a structure such that the person in whom it is present will know (insofar as anyone ever does) how they should act ‘occasion by occasion,’ even if they cannot state any fully explicit, exceptionless principle from which, on a given occasion, the relevant bit of knowledge is deduced.”⁸ Lovibond’s definition of form is normative rather than substantive, but it offers some helpful indications of what the notion

⁸ Lovibond equates the terms “form” and “definition” in her work, contrasting them with “formlessness” or “indefiniteness,” see Sabina Lovibond, *Ethical Formation* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2002), p. 54.

entails. First, “form” implies a structure or pattern whose ideal is a perfectly rational principle that admits of no exceptions. A defined character exhibits consistency and regularity in its actions, such that it can be said to act the same even as circumstances change. As she clarifies later, a formed character acts according to what is “essential” to a given form such as justice or bravery regardless of the circumstance.⁹ A formed character’s actions thus preserve whatever is essential to the particular ideal or virtue by which it is formed. And second, form entails knowledge of how to act in different circumstances. Whether or not one can articulate this knowledge in any given case, insofar as one’s character or way of life is “formed” one possesses some kind of knowledge that guides one’s actions. Along with consistency and predictability in one’s behavior, a formed person is ideally the “author” of her acts, in that she can take responsibility for them and provide an account of them.¹⁰

With regards to the first aspect of the notion of form, the notion of indefiniteness I espouse in this dissertation again does not simply mean the opposite of inconsistency or incoherence. Instead, it relaxes the ideal of perfect norm-governed action and instead is open to a greater range of situational and improvisational acts. In other words, normative behavior tends less towards rational deducibility but has greater space for actions whose relationship with the ideal is felt or intuited, as well as for experimentation in one’s ways of acting.¹¹ The connection of form to essence is also loosened, as ways of living in accordance with one’s ideal might emerge through experimentation or improvisation. An indefinite conception of philosophical practice will thus

⁹ Ibid., p. 69.

¹⁰ As Lovibond says, to be the author of one’s acts, the acts must not only be consistent but the actor must satisfy a “more demanding psychological criterion” regarding her relationship with her acts, *ibid.*, p. 85.

¹¹ In deference to Wittgenstein’s critique of the notion of “rule-following,” Lovibond recognizes “inexplicit” responses to moral situations as legitimate expressions of formed character, and prefers the language of norms over that of rules, but still holds perfect rationality as at least a regulative ideal in ethical behavior, *ibid.*, p. 49.

affirm a greater degree of unpredictability in the philosophical life than the “defined” or “formed” way of life does. As a result, it will also attempt to conceive of the ideal of the philosophical life on a model other than that of a principle that admits of no exceptions. While a way of living will still guide the philosopher’s conduct, the ideal on which that life is based will be open to changes in the ways it is expressed, perhaps even continual changes. Consistency and regularity is balanced with recognition of the need to abandon patterns of action that have become ossified or irrelevant to one’s circumstances or to create new patterns of action. Indefinite philosophical practice therefore does not reject the notion of form, but opens it to unforeseeable changes to one’s way of living according to the ideal.

The ways the second aspect of form would be changed in indefinite philosophical practice follow from the changes to the first. What constitutes “knowledge” of how to act in a particular case is further opened to include such mental resources as intuition, aesthetic taste, or other affective forms of experience that can provide guidance to one’s ways of acting. Likewise, it also allows for cases in which no prior knowledge of how to act is possible or desirable, and where one proceeds by experimentation or improvisation rather than in ways whose norm is deliberation. As a result, the responsible authorship standard for action is relaxed, such that indefinite self-cultivation not only accepts but has the space to affirm cases where actions can only be justified by aesthetic criteria, or cases where justification can occur only after actions have been completed.

Differentiating the conception of philosophical practice I will articulate and defend in this dissertation from the concept of form or definition as Lovibond articulates provides helpful suggestions for what indefinite self-cultivation entails. I will now further specify what I mean by indefinite self-cultivation by elucidating two aspects of it that arise from contrast with Lovibond’s work, and a third that is separate yet crucial, namely: (1) openness, (2) unpredictability, and (3)

receptivity to bodily influence. I will continue to proceed by relating each aspect of indefinite self-cultivation to a current theorist of philosophical practice, in order to provide greater clarity to the kinds of philosophical practice Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty advocate.

The first way indefinite philosophical practice differs from current conceptions is that it is open. I elucidate the notion of openness by contrasting it with the unity attributable to the “character” resulting from Alexander Nehamas’ conception of philosophy as “aesthetic self-fashioning.” Aesthetic self-fashioning understands philosophical practice as construction of a model of aesthetic perfection from which one’s conduct and self-understanding follows. This model is not created *ex nihilo*, but drawn together from the various apparently meaningless moments of one’s life in order to give them a unique and consistent form.¹² As a result, self-fashioning tends towards unity and individuality. The goal of philosophical practice is to move from formlessness in one’s biography to a form that provides coherence to one’s history and an orientation for one’s future actions. Philosophical practice produces, in other words, what Nehamas calls a “character” understood not in terms of moral character but as a literary character that forms the self dispersed throughout its life into an individual unity, a “set of features and a mode of life” that differentiate oneself from others and make one memorable.¹³ As his repeated use of metaphors such as “self-fashioning” and “stylization” suggest, literary self-presentation for Nehamas becomes the basis of one’s behavior.¹⁴ For Nehamas, self-formation can thus be taken

¹² The goal of philosophical practice is in Nehamas’ words to “be like no one else, before...or after.” Alexander Nehamas, *The Art of Living*, p. 11.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

¹⁴ Nehamas draws the notion of style from Nietzsche’s exhortation to “give style” to one’s character, see Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 185, cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufman (New York: Vintage, 1974), p. 290. Hutter’s study of Nietzsche’s conceptions of “self-shaping” add to Nehamas’ by focusing on the political aspirations behind them (Horst Hutter, *Shaping the Future: Nietzsche’s New Regime of the Soul and Its Ascetic Practices* [New York: Lexington, 2006], pp. xii-xiii).

in two senses, first as providing one's life with a form that gives it determinacy, and as inhabiting an aesthetic form that makes it beautiful, together resulting in a harmony of thought and action that differentiates one from others.

The notion of aesthetic self-fashioning is significant for my purposes in that Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all analogize the practice of philosophy to that of the artist. Whereas self-fashioning for Nehamas entails articulating a character that determines one's conduct in a linear fashion, however, the philosophical life as the thinkers discussed in this dissertation understand it entails a much greater degree of openness to actions that do not directly follow one's model of conduct. Philosophical practice for Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty entails constant production of new forms of action associated with one's philosophical commitments. The fixity and unity of the solid, statuesque character Nehamas idealizes will thus be replaced with openness to change, even constant change, in possibilities for a philosophical life, albeit to varying degrees. Whereas for Ravaisson philosophical practice entails spontaneous invention of new ways of acting in accordance with one's ideal self-model, Bergson sees the goal of philosophy as the creation of new ways of living, and Merleau-Ponty as the uncovering of possibilities implicit within one's social world. These forms of philosophical practice exhibit varying degrees of structure, but they all involve continual change in the actions and dispositions associated with them. Philosophical self-cultivation does not tend towards solidity and unity in one's conduct but is open to development and transformation.

To the unpredictability of indefinite philosophical practice I contrast the way the result of philosophical practice can be anticipated in advance in Martha Nussbaum's "therapeutic" conception of philosophy. Unlike Nehamas, the goal of philosophical practice for Nussbaum is not achieving a beautiful form of character but alleviating "sick" or unpleasant states of being and

replacing them with “healthy” ones, and is motivated by the “urgency of human suffering.”¹⁵ In order to cure their patients, philosophers operate with normative conceptions of human flourishing or *eudaimonia* that function as criteria for assessing health and sickness, and it allows the result of successful philosophical practice to be marked out in advance. Even though the course of treatment, which Nussbaum refers to as “therapeutic arguments,” are applied situationally, with respect to the particular malfunctions in belief and desire with which a patient presents, the goal in each case of treatment is the same: to expose the false beliefs that give rise to unhealthy desires and to replace them with true ones.¹⁶ Specifically, therapeutic arguments cure misdirected desires and disturbed emotions by going to their source, the false or misleading beliefs to which one has become habituated through socialization.¹⁷ A patient who has been “cured” of her disease through philosophical therapy is one who achieve a state of “self-sufficiency” and “flourishing” that results from living life consistently and according to one’s inherent nature.¹⁸

We will see that Bergson in particular and Merleau-Ponty to a lesser extent offers something like a philosophical therapy in that they isolate a negative condition it is the goal of philosophical practice to alleviate. What differentiates the thinkers I study from Nussbaum, however, is that the results of philosophical practice are unpredictable and cannot be defined in advance. Philosophical practice produces something unanticipated, a form of action or possibility that could not be articulated prior to its performance. To use the language of contemporary

¹⁵ Martha Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, p. 15.

¹⁶ In her discussion of Epicurus Nussbaum compares the effect of therapeutic argument to that of Proust’s examinations of habit, in which the soul is left “raw and unprotected, simply perceiving itself.” (*The Therapy of Desire*, p. 199) Williams, however, doubts how much ancient forms of therapy have to say to the modern subject in the wake of its interpretations by Christianity, Romanticism, and psychoanalysis among other doctrines (Bernard Williams, “Do Not Disturb,” *London Review of Books*, 16 (20), 20 October 1994: 25-26.

¹⁷ Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, p. 39.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 502.

philosophers of creativity, the results of philosophical practice will be more or less “original,” not derivable from a previous set of ideas or elements.¹⁹ Whereas the doctor can identify states of health and therefore knows that the result of therapy will be beforehand, philosophy for Ravaison, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty is closer to an improvisational practice where the philosophical life emerges through the practice of philosophy itself. While each philosopher will outline a goal for philosophical practice to achieve, the criteria by which success in achieving that goal can be measured will not be as neatly objective as for Nussbaum. The philosophical life for these thinkers is better understood as operating within a dialectic of freedom and constraint in which particular acts or dispositions will be more or less recognizable as conforming to a particular self-model or state of existence, with the possibility of an individual action developing the model in an unforeseen yet consistent direction.

The final aspect of philosophical practice as indefinite self-cultivation is its receptivity to bodily influence. This feature I do not contrast but associate with Richard Shusterman’s conception of philosophical practice as somaesthetics, which he defines as “critical meliorative study of one’s experience and use of one’s body as a locus of sensory-aesthetic appreciation (aesthesis) and creative self-fashioning.”²⁰ As a form of self-fashioning, somaesthetics bears great similarity to Nehamas’ model of philosophical practice, though Shusterman focuses directly on the body as a site of fashioning rather than indirectly through the medium of literary self-creation. In conceiving of the body as a locus of aesthetic experience in its own right, however, Shusterman takes seriously bodily subjectivity as a basis of self-expression. Ideals of perfection are to be expressed not simply

¹⁹ Originality, as Bence states, is an attribute of the products of mental or physical processes, whereas creativity is an attribute of the subjective experience of those processes (Nanay Bence, “An Experiential Account of Creativity,” in Elliot Paul and Scott Kaufman eds. *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 17-38], p. 19).

²⁰ Shusterman, Richard. *Body Consciousness*, p. 19.

in one's words or even in one's acts but also in one's bodily "style," the "intentionality" or "spirit" that animates one's ways of behaving and gives them a unique quality.²¹ Furthermore, the body is taken as its own independent criteria of perfection to be combined with mentally-derived aesthetic models of perfection. Cultivating consciousness of one's bodily states allows aesthetic perfection of the body's "functioning at its happy best" through recognition of pleasures, pains, and other bodily "pathologies" and training to eliminate what is harmful, a regime of training Shusterman refers to as the art of living.²² Bodily experience in Shusterman's work becomes an influence thus not only on the expression of models of aesthetic perfection in one's conduct but also in their production.

While the philosophers I study in this dissertation do not go as far as Shusterman in articulating a bodily form of self-perfection, their theories of habit result in a similar recognition of the influence of the body and bodily processes on philosophical practice. Indeed, their analyses of habit provide the theoretical basis for explaining why philosophical practice is open and unpredictable. Conceiving of habit as a process of retaining repeated actions and affections allows Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty to grasp its ongoing effects upon the self and upon attempts at self-cultivation in a way that I will argue is more nuanced than Shusterman's own understanding of bodily style and habit. Habit, as I will describe in more detail in the following section, is an autonomous process that occurs independently from and at times in active opposition to conscious awareness and therefore has important effects, both helpful and harmful, on efforts at active self-cultivation. In attempting to enumerate and account for these effects, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty also attend to bodily influence on the process and products of self-

²¹ Richard Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body: Essays in Somaesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), p. 334.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 314.

cultivation, though I will argue that their accounts of habit complicate efforts like Shusterman's to gain conscious awareness of one's own body and to shape it according to a particular model.

At stake in these conceptions of philosophical practice, I argue, is whether it is possible and indeed desirable to actively and self-consciously work on oneself with the goal of providing a determinate form to one's conduct, or whether such projects will produce either something other or beyond than what they intend, or in fact have some negative effect upon those who undertake them. Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of habit give insight into the ways the body and bodily processes affect the processes of self-cultivation in ways that give rise to its fluidity and unpredictability. In analyzing their conceptions of philosophical practice, I will demonstrate that embedded within their work are reasons why the philosophical life tends towards indefiniteness in the sense I have sketched in this section. Through critical examination of current theories of self-cultivation not only in philosophy but also in the study of religious ethics in Chapter Four, I will argue that Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of philosophical practice give insight into both the possibilities and the limits of philosophical practice and embodied practice more generally construed as an active, goal-oriented process.

Also at stake is the goal of the philosophical life, the aim of giving one's character a certain form or allowing it to be transformed in what I am calling an "indefinite" fashion. Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty go beyond articulating conceptions of philosophical practice that entail continuous and unpredictable change and furthermore argue for why the philosophical life should be conceived of in this manner. Investigation of their work will thus afford an opportunity to reflect upon current conceptions of philosophical practice, the notions of subjectivity they affirm or presuppose, and whether the particular picture of self-cultivation that will emerge in this investigation provides a more compelling understanding of the philosophical life. In this regard,

Pierre Hadot will be a constant conversation partner in this dissertation, not only because of his centrality to current conceptions of philosophical practice, but more importantly because of the role Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty play in his own thought. Hadot returns to the thinkers discussed in this dissertation at various points in his work as examples of philosophers who treat philosophy as a lived discipline in a manner that extends the ancient tradition into the modern age. In fact, these three thinkers are crucial to his argument for the permanence of the notion of philosophy as a way of life, as for Hadot the existential concerns motivating their conceptions of philosophy are shared with the ancients. In the course of investigating Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's forms of philosophical practice, I will critically examine Hadot's interpretation of their work from the perspective of their theories of habit in order to put the originality of their understandings of the goals of the philosophical life and the issues that they believe animate it into sharper relief.

Examining these issues from the perspective of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of habit is particularly relevant in this case as the concept of habit is crucial to Hadot's understanding of the problems philosophical practice attempts to solve. Bergson and Merleau-Ponty in particular represent according to Hadot a continuation of the tradition stretching back to antiquity that opposes everyday, "habitual" ways of perceiving and engaging with the world to the philosopher's conscious lucidity.²³ For Hadot, the overarching goal of philosophy as a way of life is to achieve a "total transformation of one's vision, lifestyle, and behavior" that entails "a state of complete liberation from the passions, of utter lucidity, of knowledge of ourselves and of the

²³ This argument is made most clearly in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 346-356, cf. Pierre Hadot, *La voile d'Isis: Essai sur l'histoire de l'idée de la nature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), pp. 279-284. Hadot also argues that the "aesthetic" mode of perception he argues is most fully developed in Bergson finds a precursor in Ravaisson, see Pierre Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité de la regard* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 76-79.

world.”²⁴ Hadot’s understanding of the goal of philosophy is existential: the philosopher is defined by her mode of being, her recognition of herself as free and rational and her control over her ways of thinking, feeling, acting, and even perceiving. Achieving this state requires “tearing oneself away” from ways of being in which one is identified with one’s everyday concerns and in which practical need and selfish desire govern one’s conduct, a state of existence that Hadot argues that is governed by habit and that it is the task of philosophy to overcome.²⁵ While for Hadot achieving conscious self-mastery is the very essence of the philosophical life, however, we will see throughout this dissertation that when situated in the context of their theories of habit, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s forms of philosophical practice affirm the freedom and joy that they claim arises from their “indefinite” forms of philosophical practice over rational self-mastery. Although these thinkers all harken back to antiquity, particularly to the figure of Socrates, in their articulations of philosophical practice, their theories of embodiment transform ancient conceptions of philosophy and reveal strikingly different concerns and aims for the philosophical life. I will conclude my argument in Chapter Four by defending the goals and methods of their forms of philosophical practice as interpreted through their theories of embodied subjectivity, which allow for more sustainable harmonization between philosophical commitments and everyday practical and social concerns than Hadot’s attempt to deploy their conceptions of philosophy to provide contemporary justification for the ancient opposition between reason and the passions.

2. Habit and Self-Cultivation

I stated earlier that Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s forms of “indefinite” self-cultivation are not grounded in an aesthetic idealization of incoherence or equivocity for their own

²⁴ Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 63-64.

²⁵ Hadot, “Qu’est-ce que l’éthique?”, in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 381.

sakes. Nor do they take their inspiration from the cognitive embrace of paradox in the structure of the cosmos, society, or the self.²⁶ Their projects are instead animated by an even more basic issue, namely that which Richard Shusterman puts in the mouth of Socrates: what is the “self” that is to be cultivated?²⁷ Or to use Foucault’s language, what is the “ethical substance” on which practice will work to achieve a particular ideal?²⁸ Even prior to any issues in our behavior that we might find to be imperfect and require improvement, we must ask what the object of ethical practices will be, or in what aspect(s) of ourselves will we find the issues that it will be the task of practice to resolve. For Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty, this is not an idle or a merely theoretical question. Each of them claims that the potential success of self-cultivation depends upon knowing what the true basis of our behavior is, and on understanding how and to what extent it can be shaped through consciously-undertaken practice. These concerns are neatly summarized by a statement Socrates makes to Alcibiades regarding his education: “if we know ourselves, then we might know how to cultivate (*epimeleian*) ourselves, but if we do not know ourselves, then we never will.”²⁹ If the soul is what we truly are as Socrates insists, and if our states of character depend therefore upon the state of our soul, then it will be a mistake, for instance, to cultivate the body in order to achieve virtue. Cultivating ourselves requires knowledge of what we truly are and

²⁶ As Matthew Bagger has argued is the case in a cross-cultural swath of ascetic and mystical forms of self-cultivation. In Bagger’s “deflationary” interpretation, the response of religious thinkers to conceptual paradox is related to their attitudes towards social boundaries and the boundaries between self and other, and various strategies for harnessing or transcending paradox are formed in this crucible, see Matthew Bagger, *The Uses of Paradox: Religion, Self-Transformation, and the Absurd* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007). What I find most helpful about Bagger’s account is his broad framing of the question concerning how forms of self-cultivation respond to particular attitudes concerning boundaries and their crossing in the self and in society. As we will see, Ravaissou and Merleau-Ponty both embrace openness in the self to external influence, whereas Bergson is more concerned with setting the limits of the individual.

²⁷ Shusterman, *Thinking Through the Body*, p. 69.

²⁸ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Volume 2: The Use of Pleasure*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Vintage, 1985), p. 26.

²⁹ Plato, *Alcibiades I*, 129a.

what makes us behave the way we do, as it is only on the basis of such knowledge that we can craft ways of improving ourselves that impact us in desired ways.

Whereas Socrates identifies the soul as the object of self-cultivation, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all claim that philosophical practice must understand and work on *habit*. Each of these thinkers argues that habit forms a “layer” of the self, and that the self is constituted by habit in a profound enough fashion that it must be treated as a primary object of philosophical practice.³⁰ To be more precise, these thinkers articulate theories of habit as a continuous process whereby repeated actions and affections are retained within the self as dispositions, which are then adapted, transformed, and made new in their very enactment. Understanding habit as a process might seem odd to those of us accustomed to thinking of it as a settled tendency or a pattern of behavior. We will see in our investigation of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s work that this understanding of habit is not so much incorrect as it is incomplete. Habit can become a settled tendency or pattern, but it is better conceived actively as a *tending* or *patterning*, the way actions and affections are formed into dispositions that become the basis of our engagement with the world. What I hope to emphasize in the work of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty, however, is that the active process of habit is ongoing and continually produces change in us. Whereas tendency and pattern by themselves suggest stasis, the process of habit is equally the basis of spontaneity and movement. We are, to a certain degree, what we repeat, such that the opposition between first and second nature, what is natural and what is acquired, becomes blurred in the

³⁰ I take the word “layer” from Gaines’ study of Maine de Biran, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty, though in my view his understanding of the habitual “layer” of the body overstates its conservatism. For Gaines, habit becomes the “stable, massive, and almost objective layer” of the body that is “opposed” to the more “buoyant layer” of spontaneity, whereas I see habit and spontaneity as inextricably linked. (Jeffrey Jay Gaines, *The Habitual Body-Subject: A Study in the Maine de Biran – Bergson – Merleau-Ponty Lineage*, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992, pp. 15-17).

phenomenon of habit in ways that have important implications for consciously undertaken practice.

In conceiving of habit as a process, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty treat it as in Malabou's words a "primary ontological phenomenon."³¹ The common premise underlying their work is that all actions and affections have some effect on entities that lasts beyond the time of their occurrence. A theory of the self must therefore include an account of how the repetition of actions and affections produces durable changes within them that in turn affect their characteristic behavior, and the concept of habit serves their purposes in this regard. The association of habit with durable change is of course not original to their work, but stretches back into the Early Modern period. David Hume, for instance, famously notes that: "Whenever the repetition of any particular act or operation produces a propensity to renew the same act or operation, without being impelled by any reasoning or process of the understanding; we always say, that this propensity is the effect of *Custom*."³² Custom for Hume is not merely a static regularity but also entails causality. Repetition is the direct cause of a change within the individual, a difference that lasts beyond specific acts of repetition and takes the form of a propensity or tendency to continue acting in ways one has done in the past. Propensity is thus the form retained repetition takes in the individual, and it continues to exercise an influence even in the absence of conscious intervention.

What distinguishes the approaches I examine in this dissertation from earlier accounts in the modern period is that their conceptions of habit do not merely articulate *that* habit entails the retention of repetition but go on to explain *how* it occurs, something Hume's empiricism prevents

³¹ Catherine Malabou, "Addiction and Grace: Preface to Félix Ravaisson's *Of Habit*," in Félix Ravaisson *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008: vii-xx), p. vii.

³² David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 42.5.

him from doing as Sinclair has argued.³³ Although their accounts differ in important ways, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all attempt to describe the process whereby repeated acts and affections bring about durable changes within individuals, and they refer to this process as habit. In doing so, they recognize habit as an inherent dimension of our being, something that is not only ongoing but indeed essential to our ontological constitution. In this regard their conceptions of habit go beyond associating habits with particular actions as Hume and other Early Modern thinkers do and common definitions of habit tend to do and instead understand them as change occurring within the body as a whole.

Specifically, I will argue that their conceptions of habit respond ways of accounting for habit that followed from Descartes' ontological separation of mind and body. One method, which Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty will call "physicalist" or "empiricist," interprets habit as arising through physical changes to the body and to the nervous system. In physicalist or empiricist accounts of habit, repetition leaves a "trace" or "imprint" within specific bodily organs that determines the way it acts.³⁴ Habits, under this view, operate according to mechanical laws and create tendencies to repeat specific actions that have become easier to accomplish through physical change. The other method, which they refer to as "rationalist" or "intellectualist," understands habit as the automatic association of ideas and actions brought about through the application of conscious attention. Repetition, under this view, relates specific impressions drawn from the senses or the imagination in ways that create causal links between ideas and motions in ways that as Pfau

³³ Mark Sinclair, "Ravaisson and the Force of Habit," *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 49 (1), 2011: 65-85, pp. 65-66.

³⁴ On these notions see John Wright, "Ideas of Habit and Custom in Early Modern Philosophy," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42 (1), 2011: 18-32. On the connection between Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty cf. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, "Editors' Commentary," in Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit* (London: Continuum, 2008: 78-114), p. 98.

has argued anticipates behaviorist understandings of habit as pathways from stimuli to responses.³⁵ Like the empiricist view, the intellectualist view also regards the result of habit as a tendency or propensity to repeat particular actions, though that tendency arises not from physical but from mental change.

Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty attempt to either add to or go beyond these conceptions of habit by theorizing habit not just as an effect within a specific bodily organ or the mind but as a process that involves the body in holistic fashion. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty explain habit as a determination within the body's capacities as a whole that gives rise not only to tendency or propensity but an ability to act in a certain way. These changes need not be understood materially: while Bergson will hypothesize a form of bodily memory that comes about through changes in the nervous system that expands upon conceptions of habit in modern philosophy, Ravaisson will understand habit as a force of desire that gives rise to spontaneity, and Merleau-Ponty will describe an intersubjective process of the structuring and restructuring of bodily and perceptual aptitudes he names "sedimentation." Despite their differences, these accounts all attempt to grasp the production of dispositions and tendencies as a process that creates a condition that characterizes not just particular actions but the body's capacities in general.

As a result, habit will appear as an active process that produces both change and stability. By effecting a determination in the body in a systematic fashion, habits do not merely affect particular acts but the manner of action in general. To paraphrase Lockwood, by instituting a condition within the body, habit predisposes us "adverbially."³⁶ Terms like "propensity" thus

³⁵ Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern: Human Agency, Intellectual Traditions, and Responsible Knowledge* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 2013), pp. 355-358. I will discuss behaviorism in greater detail in Chapter Three.

³⁶ Thornton Lockwood, "Habituation, Habit, and Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*," in Tom Sparrow and Adam Hutchinson eds. *A History of Habit: From Aristotle to Bourdieu* (New York: Lexington, 2013: 19-36, p. 23.

encompass only one side of the phenomenon of habit. While we will see that habit can give rise to a fixation on and even a necessity to reiterate past acts in a nearly identical fashion, it also takes the form of abilities to act in particular ways for which terms like “disposition” and “aptitude” are more appropriate. Habits take the form of stable ways of engaging with the world, but ones that are simultaneously characterized by adaptability to circumstance and receptivity to change. While changes to bodily systems are durable, they remain susceptible to the very same influences that brought them about in the first place, such that any regularity in one’s conduct habit gives rise to is never final but only provisional. In claiming that habituation is a continuous process that produces ongoing changes, I wish to emphasize the durable yet temporary nature of one’s ways of being in and engaging with the world that result from habit, and that habit should be understood as *mutable* rather than *static*.

In understanding habit as a process that produces dispositions, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s theories of habit are both historically and substantively related to a tradition of thinking on habit that begins with Aristotle, runs through Medieval Scholasticism, and is again taken up by sociologists such as Elias, Mauss, and Bourdieu along with contemporary virtue ethicists. For this “organicist” tradition, which we will see also has resonances with recent philosophy of action and neuroscientific research, habit constitutes a mode of self-organization that resides not solely in the mind but is rather distributed throughout the body.³⁷ Instead of either behavioral patterns or static traces deposited in the body, this tradition conceptualizes habit

³⁷ I take the term “organicist” from Alberto Toscano’s genealogy of 19th and 20th Century thinking on what he calls “organismic ontology,” in which the “philosophy of habit” entails an attempt at merging Kantian and Nietzschean conceptions of the organism that replace Early Modern mechanistic conceptions of being with Aristotelian and Scholastic conceptions. (Alberto Toscano, *The Theatre of Production: Philosophy and Individuation between Kant and Deleuze* [New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006], p. 110f.). Toscano’s focus is on early Pragmatists like Charles Sanders Peirce and William James and he only briefly mentions Ravaisson, but I think the term is equally applicable to Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty. For a discussion of this tradition of thought concerning habit in relation to the neurosciences, see Xabier Barandianan and Ezequiel Di Paolo, “A Genealogical Map of the Concept of *Habit*,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8, July 2014: 1-7.

according to its etymology as *hexis* or *habitus*, flexible dispositions of action and feeling, that serve as the basis of an embodied form of practical knowledge. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty share concerns with the modern inheritors of this Aristotelian tradition, namely to rescue the body from its reduction to a passive object in post-Cartesian philosophy.³⁸ Aristotle's concept of *hexis* has been invaluable for this project, naming as it does a "kind of activity" that forms the basis of one's dispositions and character and thereby providing the conceptual space to understand the body as inherently *active*.³⁹ In retrieving Aristotelian thought, modern "organicist" thinkers have employed the concept of *hexis/habitus* to free subjectivity from its imprisonment within the *res cogitans* and instead understand it as in itself embodied.

What is especially significant for the purposes of this dissertation is the association drawn in this tradition between concepts like habit, *hexis*, and *habitus* and the notion of practical reason. Aristotle's understanding of *hexis* in particular as "second potentiality," an ability or skill that subtends a way of acting, has been applied among a number of organicist thinkers to conceptualize the body as more than the effect of physical or biological laws.⁴⁰ Instead, the habituated body has been conceptualized as "man's first and most natural technical object," the acquired means whereby the subject achieves its purposes and that serves as an immediate and non-propositional

³⁸ On the avoidance of the term "habit" in the discipline of sociology in particular due to the way the concept had been developed in behaviorist psychology, see Charles Camic, "The Matter of Habit," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 91 (5), 1986: 1039-1087.

³⁹ See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1022b4-14.

⁴⁰ Aristotle gives the example of knowledge of mathematics or grammar, in which "first potentiality" names the simple capacity for learning while "second potentiality" or "first actuality" names an acquired understanding that can be applied but is not necessarily in practice at any given time (i.e., it is being held in potential). "Second actuality" refers to the current exercise of that ability in a specific act of knowing. See Aristotle, *De Anima* 417a22-27.

form of knowledge of how to act in various situations.⁴¹ Viewed objectively, the body is thereby conceptualized as a set of abilities that form the subject's "objective potentialities," its immediate possibilities for acting that it applies and adapts to individual cases.⁴² Viewed subjectively, the body can be attributed a principle of practical intelligence that spontaneously "understands" how to coordinate its abilities as means to the exigencies of a particular situation in order to achieve a particular end even in the absence of conscious deliberation.⁴³ Taken as a whole, the habituated body thus becomes a true body-subject, an entity that is capable of carrying out the acts that it itself plays a role in positing. The embodied subject of habit in the modern organicist tradition thus appears as (1) *intelligent*, capable of engaging in action that is oriented towards a goal and not either repetitive or arbitrary, and (2) *free*, self-moving and self-directing without requiring conscious acts of will to determine it from without.

Yet also essential to the organicist picture is that the subject's *hexis* or *habitus* is not natural but acquired. Although the capacity to acquire habits is innate within human subjects, it is inevitable that they undergo processes of formation in which they acquire the dispositions that form the basis of their practical lives. The institutions of socialization such as the family, the school, work, among others, as well as the related institutions of ethical formation, comprise the subject's "education" to use Mauss' term, and the habituated body-subject only exists as an

⁴¹ That is, not merely as an instrument for the mind's use but simultaneously as a form of knowledge in its own right, see Marcel Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," in Jonathan Crary and Sanford Kwinter eds. *Incorporations* (New York: Zone, 1992: 455-477), p. 461.

⁴² The range of these abilities articulates the limits of the subject's possibilities, what it can and cannot do. In this regard, it serves the function in particular of eliminating the need to interpret the subject's actions in terms of explicit rules it does or does not follow. On this point see Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), p. 76.

⁴³ Thus avoiding the twin evils of "mechanism" and "finalism," the interpretation of acts as the simple repetition of formulae or as the products of reflective consciousness, see *ibid.*, p. 73.

educated subject.⁴⁴ Although habit is an essential component of the body-subject, it comprises not its *first* but rather its *second* nature as an acquisition that has become so essential a component of the subject that they become indistinguishable. The subject's *habitus*, in other words, is the product of a pedagogical process of habituation, such that the latter can be understood as causing the former.⁴⁵ The ability to engage with one's world intelligently and freely is based on a process of habituation that necessarily involves – along with any amount of explicit knowledge – repetition of particular ways of acting. If undertaken correctly, the repetitive process of habituation gradually and seamlessly produces a flexible disposition that is incorporated into the subject's stock of acquired aptitudes.

It is well known that a major concern of Merleau-Ponty's work is to challenge the Cartesian subject identified with the active, self-conscious mind and separated from the passive, material body, but Ravaisson and Bergson are important predecessors of his in this regard. For each of these thinkers, habit gives rise to constant change in the body's capacities, such that first and second nature, what is natural and what is acquired, become almost indistinguishable. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all articulate conceptions of embodied subjectivity that are grounded in

⁴⁴ Mauss, "Techniques of the Body," p. 73. I cite Mauss here because of the distinction he draws between *hexis* that is a function of education and what he calls the "metaphysical *habitudes*" that belong to a body that would exist in a hypothetical State of Nature. The human subject only exists as a socialized subject. Similar points have been made, however, in recent studies of Aristotle as well, and the acquisition of moral dispositions both as children and throughout life has become the focus of a set of recently published collections of essays on the subject of "virtue acquisition," see for instance Myles Burnyeat, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," in A.O. Rorty ed. *Essays on Aristotle's Ethics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980: 69-92), Thomas A. Lewis, "Ethical Formation and Ordinary Life in the Modern West: The Case of Work," in Elizabeth Bucar and Aaron Stalnaker eds. *Religious Ethics in a Time of Globalism: Shaping a Third Wave of Comparative Analysis* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012: 27-48), and the essays included in Brad Wilburn ed. *Moral Cultivation: Essays on the Development of Character and Virtue* (New York: Lexington, 2010), David Carr and Jan Steutel eds. *Virtue Ethics and Moral Education* (New York: Routledge, 2014), and Nancy Snow ed. *Cultivating Virtue: Perspectives from Philosophy, Theology, and Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁴⁵ As Burnyeat puts it, the "appropriate mode of acquisition" for ethical virtue in Aristotle is habituation, even though the latter must be understood as having "cognitive powers" along with its repetitive aspects, "Aristotle on Learning to Be Good," p. 73.

theories of habit, and their discussions of the nature of the habituated body-subject will be a guiding thread throughout this dissertation. As an aspect of this project of uniting first and second nature, we will see that each of these thinkers articulates how the “educative” process of acquiring habits situates individuals within their social world. While Ravaisson’s interest in socialization is limited to the potential social benefits of moral pedagogy, Bergson focuses on how habituation causes subjects to conform to existing customs, while Merleau-Ponty articulates a more dialectical process of exchange between the individual and other people and institutions with whom she interacts. In each case, the habituated body is understood as the result of interactions between self and world that produces a socially informed subject.

What sets them apart from the larger organicist tradition is their greater focus on the nature of habituation as a process. Each of these thinkers grounds his conception of embodied subjectivity in an account of the processes whereby repeated actions and affections are retained within subjects and of the ongoing and ultimately unpredictable effects of these processes on the aptitudes of which embodied subjectivity is formed. Specifically, what results from their theories of habit as a process is an understanding of the self as to varying degrees fluid. The gradual and mutable nature of the process of habit is both productive of embodied practical reason *and at the same time* significantly disrupts the self’s transparency to itself, as well as its autonomy. The process whereby repeated actions and affections are formed into dispositions and exercise ongoing changes in subjects takes place outside of conscious awareness and gives rise to bodily spontaneity that precedes rational deliberation. Insofar as it takes the form of an adaptable disposition, habit will appear as a form of bodily intentionality that both makes possible the achievement of goals and desires and producing a world with which one is familiar and comfortable but that operates independently of and sometimes even at the expense of conscious self-mastery and self-

knowledge. Clare Carlisle's invocation of the Derridean term *pharmakon*, something that is both poison and remedy, is thus not inappropriate as a way of describing habit.⁴⁶ Habit entails both automatic action and imperceptible change that limits autonomy and self-transparency, and at the same time embodied freedom and practical ability that allows for stable yet intelligent engagement with the world, all of which are receptive to change.

What also results from these conceptions of habit is an appreciation of both the potential and the limitations of undertaking conscious practice on oneself. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all recognize that it is possible to actively and consciously create habits in oneself, and that one can become aware of acquired habitual dispositions through attention or through interaction with other people. In consciously habituating oneself it is indeed possible to create an aptitude that becomes incorporated into one's ways of intelligently engaging with one's environment as a skill. Their conceptions of habit as a process, however, suggest limits to the extent to which one can achieve full mastery over one's acquired dispositions. While one can take advantage of the process of habit in acquiring desired dispositions, that process remains autonomous and outside of the sphere of consciousness. Attempts at self-formation will thus always run up against the inherent openness and mutability of habit as a layer of one's being one cannot control. The continual changes habit brings about affect attempts at controlling and shaping one's tendencies, and this results in the indefiniteness of projects of philosophical self-cultivation described in the previous section. While Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all appreciate the importance of habit in self-cultivation, they recognize that it causes such projects to produce results other than what they intend, and they articulate their theories of philosophical practice in consideration of this fact.

⁴⁶ Clare Carlisle, *Of Habit* (New York: Routledge, 2014), p. 5, cf. Clare Carlisle, "Creatures of Habit: The Problem and the Practice of Liberation," *Continental Philosophy Review*, 38, 2006: 19-39, p. 29.

3. Chapter Outline

The conceptions of habit and philosophical practice I examine in this dissertation do not progress in a linear fashion. At the risk of oversimplification, it would be more correct to say that the progression is closer to dialectical. Ravaissou's conception of philosophical practice as the art of life, a notion he takes from Greco-Roman and particularly Stoic practice, relies heavily on a notion of habit as a form of embodied spontaneity that frees the self to accomplish its ends without the need of rational deliberation. Bergson, however, articulates a mechanistic theory of habit that shares features with (though by no means replicates) Cartesian dualisms and looks suspiciously at the effects of habit on human consciousness and human freedom. While Bergson draws on ancient notions of philosophy to describe his conception of philosophical practice, it diverges sharply from Ravaissou's and is premised on overcoming the effects of habit rather than using it to achieve a particular form of selfhood. Merleau-Ponty in certain ways returns to a conception of habit like Ravaissou's but operates with a different ontological foundation and takes on some of Bergson's insights even while rejecting his overall dualistic picture. This results in a more nuanced picture of habit as a fluid process that is both essential to practical life and also resists conscious self-awareness and gives rise to a conception of philosophical practice as self-experimentation and examination. I will attempt to articulate how much of each form of philosophical practice I believe is defensible in the course of relating their work to Hadot's in Chapter Four.

In Chapter One, I begin to develop my conception of indefinite self-cultivation through an interpretation of Ravaissou's late theory of philosophical practice as the art of life that reads it as an outgrowth of his early reflections on habit. Ravaissou's claim that imitation of models of ideal conduct gives rise to what he calls "invention," creation of new ways of acting that accord with the model but are products of principles of intelligence and desire that reside in the body, relies, I

argue, on his theory of habit as productive of bodily spontaneity that precedes conscious deliberation. Habit for Ravaisson expresses the metaphysical desire or *conatus*, a concept he takes from Leibniz, to persist in one's way of being that operates as a principle of freedom within the human body. While I do not attempt to resuscitate either his or Leibniz's metaphysics, I argue that his relationship of habit and desire is a brilliant intuition that allows us to view habits as more than simply skills or tendencies but as bodily expressions of purposiveness and preference. By cultivating habits that follow the models one has chosen for oneself, an ability and a desire to inhabit that model is produced that allows for the "unreflective spontaneity" of habit to govern one's actions in a way that both accords with models but does so on the basis of imagination and preference rather than reason. I will argue, however, that Ravaisson's optimism regarding the power of habit to serve as the basis of ways of being is at odds with some of his own statements regarding its potential to lead to fixation and need, a tension that is left open in his work.

Bergson's attempt to provide a naturalistic reading of Ravaisson's theory of habit results in a mechanistic account that culminates in a starkly opposed conception of philosophical practice. In Chapter Two, I will argue that Bergson's form of philosophical practice is therapeutic in that it seeks to alleviate the harm habit causes to consciousness and operates not through habit as a principle of freedom but against habit in what I view as a problematic attempt to introduce radical novelty into philosophical practice. Habit in Bergson's view is a bodily automatism that arises from the reduction or "fossilization" in his words of free acts into motor mechanisms within the nervous system. While this process of fossilization produces a form of bodily memory that allows for quick and effortless practical activity, it also homogenizes perceptual experience and creates a layer of the self characterized by imprecise thinking, rigid and unfree conduct, and social conformism. I will argue that he treats the application of conscious effort he calls "intuition" not

just as an epistemological method but as the basis of his conception of philosophical practice. Intuition grasps the qualitative richness of lived experience that breaks through the “superficial” self and opens up new avenues for acting that results in philosophical practice as radical self-creation and the production of absolutely new models of living. Because his theory of habit is ultimately weaker than Ravaisson’s, however, I will conclude that his theory of philosophical practice is best understood as an adjunct to Ravaisson’s that responds to contingent ways in which habit can degenerate into automatism.

Merleau-Ponty offers a comprehensive and, in my view convincing, critique of the Bergsonian picture of habit, and in Chapter Three I will argue that his own conception of habit as “body schema” takes on many of Ravaisson’s insights regarding habit without his metaphysics, though I will claim that Ravaisson’s linkage of habit and desire fills a gap left open in Merleau-Ponty’s theory of the body. Merleau-Ponty goes beyond both Ravaisson and Bergson, however, in his understanding of habit as being structures as a “vertical history” in which forms of gesture and speech are drawn from one’s social world and expressed in various contexts in a way that continually changes them. I will argue that this fluid understanding of the process of habit as sedimentation and style culminates in a powerful criticism of attempts to live according to a particular ethical ideal. Not only does the constant change habitual dispositions undergo make them impossible to contain within a particular model, attempting to live in accordance with a model despite that fact creates the danger that one’s way of life will ossify and do violence to the freedom inherent to one’s existence within an open social world. Merleau-Ponty’s own theory of philosophical practice thus entails a Socratic dialogue with oneself that involves experimental expression of one’s occurrent reactions and affects in a way that reveals change within one’s habitual states and uncovers possibilities implicit within one’s social world.

In Chapter Four I bring my discussion of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty together by using their work to critically examine current theories of embodied practice and of philosophical practice. I will first define the concept of indefinite self-cultivation more precisely by putting Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories in conversation with contemporary discussions of embodied practice in the study of religious ethics. In doing so, I will argue that when understood in terms of their theories of habit, bodily practices that use habituation as a means to achieve a certain ideal selfhood will give rise to continuous and unpredictable changes and hence become indefinite. I will then turn to discuss the implications of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work for discussions of philosophical practice by putting their work in conversation with that of Pierre Hadot to demonstrate that their theories of philosophical practice resolve the problem of the passions in a superior manner than Hadot does. In making this argument, I will demonstrate attempts to achieve rational self-mastery without accounting for the fluid nature of habit as it is revealed in Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work inevitably degenerate into a repressive form of self-control that prevents the kind of harmony between reason, emotion, and action that Hadot seeks. By treating the condition of stasis in one's habitual aptitudes or in one's conscious knowledge through uncovering forms of existence that develop possibilities for perfection within one's existing social world while constantly examining them to prevent ossification, indefinite philosophical practice solves the problem of the passions without degenerating into self-repression.

Chapter 1: The Necessity of Desire: Habit and the Art of Life in Félix Ravaisson

If the name of Félix Ravaisson (1813-1900) is still not familiar within the English-speaking world, it is not because of his lack of importance within the philosophical tradition. In spite of the brevity of his career as a professional philosopher, his work helped to bring German Idealism to France, and his theories of metaphysics and the body presented in his *thèse d'agrégation* and his report on 19th Century French philosophy exercised an enormous influence on French thought in both the 19th and 20th Centuries.⁴⁷ Since English editions of some of Ravaisson's main works have been made available over the past decade, however, a greater appreciation of the substantive value of his thought in its own right has developed, with scholars exploring the possibilities of Ravaisson's thought to address contemporary issues in embodiment, metaphysics, ethics, and aesthetics.⁴⁸ In this flurry of new interest, one topic that has gone relatively unnoticed is Ravaisson's metaphilosophical considerations. Along with his interventions into discussions on traditional philosophical topics, Ravaisson also reflected on the nature and function of philosophy. Of overarching concern to Ravaisson in this regard was to defend the value of philosophy against

⁴⁷ In making these claims, I am referring primarily to English-language scholarship, in which the name of Ravaisson is still fairly unfamiliar. Bergson enjoys somewhat greater recognition as I will discuss in Chapter Two, in part due to Gilles Deleuze's influential interpretation of his work. For some English-language studies of the relationship between Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work see Jeffrey Jay Gaines, *The Habitual Body-Subject: A Study in the Maine de Biran – Bergson – Merleau-Ponty Lineage*, Ph.D. Dissertation, 1992, Pascal Engel, "Psychology and Metaphysics from Maine de Biran to Bergson," in Sara Heinämaa and Martina Reuters eds. *Psychology and Philosophy; Inquiries into the Soul from Late Scholasticism to Contemporary Thought* (Amsterdam: Springer, 2008: 235-246), Mark Sinclair, "Is Habit the 'Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity'? Ravaisson, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42 (1), 2011: 33-52, Mark Sinclair "Embodiment: Conceptions of the Lived Body from Maine de Biran to Bergson," in Allison Stone ed. *The Edinburgh Critical History of Philosophy, Vol. 4: The Nineteenth Century* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011: 187-203). The "lineage" running from Ravaisson to Merleau-Ponty is much better known in the French literature and numerous titles could be given as examples, but see along with Janicaud's study of French Spiritualism Clare Marin, "L'être et l'habitude dans la philosophie française contemporaine," *Alter*, 12, 2004: 149-172, and for discussion of Ravaisson's influence on the larger phenomenological tradition, particularly the work of Heidegger, see Frédéric Towarnicki, *À la rencontre de Heidegger: Souvenirs d'un messager de la Forêt-Noire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1993).

⁴⁸ See Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, trans. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair (London: Continuum, 2008), and Félix Ravaisson, *Selected Essays*, ed. Mark Sinclair (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

what he called the “majority view” of the time that the natural sciences and mathematics had made it obsolete.⁴⁹ Ravaisson’s defense focuses on philosophy’s value to change individual conduct for the better. While mathematics and the sciences have made astounding discoveries over the past century, they possess, Ravaisson claims, no equivalent to the Socratic project of turning critical attention back from its focus on the external world and onto one’s own self and one’s patterns of thinking, feeling, and acting. Ravaisson understands philosophy as a “Socratic” activity in that he argues that its role is to change individual “conduct of life.”⁵⁰ Properly understood and practiced, philosophical thought can give rise not just to knowledge but moreover to love of truth and of the good and desire to live in accordance with them. In doing so, philosophy opens up the possibility for true moral perfection, not merely correctness in actions and consistency in thought but moreover “purity of heart” and total transformation in individual character and personality.⁵¹ By cultivating a love of truth, philosophy can create the desire to live in accordance with the truth and embody it in one’s life to the greatest possible extent.

Ravaisson’s belief that philosophical thought can be made applicable to everyday life conduct, along with his emphasis on moral perfection as the goal of philosophical practice, associates his conception of philosophy with the Greco-Roman traditions of philosophy as a “way of life” that have been studied by scholars such as Pierre Hadot, Martha Nussbaum, and John Sellars. As with the conceptions of philosophical practice these authors and others have studied, Ravaisson regards philosophy not simply as a cognitive activity but as one that has real effects on

⁴⁹ Félix Ravaisson, “Métaphysique et morale,” *Revue de Métaphysique et la Morale*, 98 (4), [1893] 1993: 437-454, p. 437. The “majority view” of which Ravaisson speaks derives from what he sees as overexcitement with Auguste Comte’s positivism in particular and in addition with Immanuel Kant’s critical philosophy. Comte had already been a major target of criticism in Ravaisson’s 1867 *Rapport* on contemporary French philosophy (Félix Ravaisson, *La philosophie en France au XIXe siècle* [Paris: Fayard, [1867] 1984]).

⁵⁰ Ravaisson, “Métaphysique et morale,” p. 452.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 454.

everyday conduct. Ravaisson makes this connection explicit when he claims that philosophy should be understood as an “art of life,” a Stoic understanding of philosophy as a practice that produces a disposition of the soul in conformity with wisdom and human flourishing.⁵² My argument in this chapter is that Ravaisson’s theory of moral pedagogy appropriates the Stoic conception of the art of life along with Aristotelian virtue ethics in a way that opens the theoretical space to consider the body as a subject of the philosophical life. In vindicating the social value of philosophy, Ravaisson articulates a theory of moral education that makes a powerful case for viewing the body not as the passive object of self-cultivation but instead as a subject that functions as the primary agent of virtue. In doing so, Ravaisson’s conception of the art of life responds to and ultimately deepens Shusterman’s call for a form of philosophical practice that treats the body as an independent criterion of perfection by understanding ethical ideals as defined not solely in advance by the mind but also by the body itself in the course of their enactment. Cultivating virtue for Ravaisson goes beyond acquiring dispositions that conform to a pre-given model by simultaneously allowing those dispositions to govern one’s conduct in place of rational deliberation. As a result, the ideal state of being moral pedagogy strives to achieve emerges in the very attempt to achieve it and cannot be articulated in advance. Ravaisson’s conception of the art of life entails the production of dispositions that continually adapt to circumstances and give rise to forms of action that cannot be anticipated. As a result, Ravaisson’s philosophical practice entails what I call “indefinite” self-cultivation in which the way of being to be achieved through practice is in a constant state of change and development.

⁵² Félix Ravaisson, *Testament philosophique et fragments*, ed. Charles Devivaise (Paris: Vrin, [1933] 1983), pp. 96-97. Ravaisson had dedicated two essays in the middle of his career to the study of Stoicism, in both of which he discusses traditions of the Stoic art of living or conceptions of wisdom (Félix Ravaisson, *Discours sur la morale des Stoïciens* [Paris: Firmin Didot, 1850], pp. 19-21, Félix Ravaisson, *Essai sur le Stoïcisme* [Paris: Imprimerie Impériale, 1856], pp. 52-53). See also Félix Ravaisson, *Essai sur la métaphysique d’Aristote, Tome II* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Velagsbuchhandlung, [1846] 1963), pp. 197-198.

Ravaisson opens the conceptual space to conceive of practice as embodied in this way through the theory of habit he articulates in his early work. It hardly requires establishing at this point that Merleau-Ponty and other phenomenologists articulate a profound critique of Cartesian mind-body dualism and articulate notions of embodied subjectivity that have been enormously influential in philosophy and sociology. Over the past few decades a greater appreciation of the influence of Ravaisson and Bergson, often known as representatives of the “Spiritualist” tradition in French philosophy, on Merleau-Ponty’s work above and beyond that of phenomenology, has also arisen.⁵³ Ravaisson and Bergson are not only forerunners of Merleau-Ponty’s in the sense that they share his concerns with questioning modern philosophical conceptions of the body, but they also articulate theories of embodiment that are philosophically valuable in their own right. It is my contention in this dissertation that the “indefinite” conceptions of philosophical practice Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty articulate all arise from theories of habit that attempt to challenge dualistic conceptions of the body, and Ravaisson’s theory of habit is the first in this particular lineage to be applied to understand the nature of self-cultivation. Ravaisson understands philosophical practice to be embodied in a manner that not only anticipates the work of such contemporary scholars as Richard Shusterman but also helps to inspire Henri Bergson and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s own theories of philosophical practice.

In reinterpreting ancient conceptions of self-cultivation through his theory of embodiment, Ravaisson also begins to articulate an aim of the philosophical life that diverges from current emphases on conscious self-knowledge and rational self-mastery and that Merleau-Ponty and to a

⁵³ In using the term “Spiritualism,” I do not contest Dominique Janicaud’s claim that the philosophers typically grouped under that heading are united more by a “convergence of inspiration than by shared adherence to a system.” (*Ravaisson et la métaphysique: Une généalogie du spiritualisme Français* [Paris: Vrin, [1969] 1997], p. 1). I do not intend in this dissertation to make historical claims about Spiritualism as a whole, but on the specific line running from Ravaisson through Bergson to Merleau-Ponty. On Ravaisson’s influence in the 19th Century see Jean Beaufret, *Notes sur la philosophie en France au XIXe siècle: De Maine de Biran à Bergson* (Paris: Vrin, 1984), p. 37f.

lesser extent Bergson will further develop. Because the body plays a role in defining the nature of ethical commitment and in enacting it, the importance of conscious self-governance diminishes for Ravaisson in favor of the free exercise of bodily capacities. We will thus begin to see, particularly in section three of this chapter, that greater attention to the body in Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work reveals that their conceptions of philosophy differ in crucial ways from Pierre Hadot's interpretation of them as being animated by at bottom the same concerns as ancient forms of philosophical practice. By grounding their conceptions of philosophical practice in theories of embodied subjectivity, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty displace and ultimately challenge the primacy of conscious intelligence over the body in the philosophical life. For Ravaisson, allowing the body to serve as the primary agent of the philosophical life allows for a stronger and more pleasurable adherence to ethical commitments, such that he can be read as articulating a criticism of attempts like Hadot's to treat ancient philosophical practice as a permanent "live" option.

Ravaisson synthesizes ancient and modern concepts in order to articulate a theory of habit that challenges Cartesian dualism and opens up new avenues for understanding ethical practice. Accordingly, before turning to his conception of the art of life, this chapter's first two sections will present the argumentation of Ravaisson's thesis *De l'habitude* as providing a viable theory of habit in a manner that allows us to appreciate his contributions to theories of philosophical practice. The first section reads Ravaisson's theory of habit as a critique of the dualistic descriptions and accounts of habit of post-Cartesian philosophy and physiology. My aim in doing so is two-fold. First, to establish Ravaisson's interest in breaking with Cartesian dualism and thereby motivate the three-way conversation I will stage in this dissertation between his work and that of Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. And second, to elucidate the concept of *tendency* that lies at the heart of his

theory of habit and by extension his conception of philosophical practice. The second section examines how this concept of tendency founds a unique theory of embodied subjectivity that I argue both anticipates and goes beyond current interpretations of habit as a form of skill. This theory accounts for how goal-oriented actions become habits and give rise to what Ravaissou calls an *inclination*, an intelligent ability that coordinates bodily and perceptual capacities that makes possible the accomplishment of ends (1) without conscious deliberation, (2) with increasing immediacy and ease, and (3) as more of a felt preference. This examination of Ravaissou's theory of habit will prepare us to appreciate the novelty of Ravaissou's theory of moral education and the cultivation of virtue, this chapter's third section. In particular, I will focus on how Ravaissou critiques rationalist theories of virtue and moral education, embodied in the figure of the Aristotelian *phronimos* and the Stoic conception of the art of life, from the perspective of his theory of embodied subjectivity, and how he deploys this theory to articulate a conception of moral education in which habitual inclinations themselves play a role in constructing the ideal of virtue towards which moral education strives. Ravaissou's conception of the art of life as the imitation of models of ideal conduct articulates an understanding of self-cultivation as "invention" that gives the body an active role in the moral life. I will conclude by showing how Ravaissou's program of moral pedagogy results in a form of moral selfhood that goes beyond current conceptions of the "formed" or "defined" self and instead affirms continual and indefinite change.

1. Tendency and Desire: Ravaissou on the Double Law of Habit

Ravaissou's theory of habit is a solution to a problem he believes post-Cartesian philosophers have left open. In this section I follow Ravaissou's critique of his contemporaries' attempts at describing and explaining the "double law of habit," an understanding of habit's effects

on human life and human action common in the early modern period.⁵⁴ Previous commentators are noted that Ravaissou's method in *De l'habitude* is "phenomenological," not in that it engages in something like the Husserlian *epoché* but in the broader sense of providing a unitary account of the phenomena or appearances of habit.⁵⁵ Ravaissou argues that descriptions of and theories purporting to explain the double law of habit that separate the passive and mechanistic body from the freely active mind fail to account for all its features. The double law of habit can only be explained, he concludes, by abandoning Cartesian dualism and instead conceiving habit as a dynamic process grounded in an ontological desire to persist in current ways of being. Examining Ravaissou's argumentation will illuminate the notion of "tendency" that is at the heart of his theories of bodily intelligence and philosophical practice. This section builds on interpretations of Ravaissou's "phenomenological" investigations to clarify the concept of tendency as an ability or aptitude that strengthens over time, such that one becomes more likely to engage in a particular type of action and develops a conscious preference for doing so. With his understanding of habit as tendency grounded in an ontological desire to persist in place Ravaissou is able to account for the features of the double law of habit more successfully than his predecessors and thus articulates a theory of habit that is worthy of contemporary consideration.

What is the double law of habit? In Ravaissou's statement of it: "prolonged or repeated sensation diminishes by degrees until it is extinguished. Prolonged or repeated movement gradually becomes easier, quicker, and more assured. Perception, which is linked with movement,

⁵⁴ For contextualization of the "double law" of habit within broader debates concerning habit, freedom, and the body in post-Cartesian philosophy see John Wright, "Ideas of Habit and Custom in Early Modern Philosophy."

⁵⁵ See for instance Mark Sinclair, "Ravaissou and the Force of Habit," p. 77, citing Claire Marin, "L'activité obscure de l'habitude," in Jean-Michel Le Lannou ed. *Études sur Félix Ravaissou: de l'habitude* (Paris: Kimé, 1999: 47-59), p. 47, and Dominique Janicaud, "Habiter l'habitude," *Les Études Philosophiques*, 1, 1993: 17-23, p. 19.

also becomes clearer, more certain, and quicker.”⁵⁶ Habit, in other words, has two primary effects on human life. On the one hand, sensations to which we have become habituated pass from conscious attention to the point where they are no longer noticed. Repetition of motions such as rocking, for instance, or monotonous sounds that at first may cause disturbance over time recede and fade from consciousness, even to the point where they can be soothing and help someone sleep (H 51). On the other hand, actions, including perceptions, that have become habitual are reproduced with greater frequency or ease. To use Ravaisson’s words, “spontaneity increases” as movement begins to occur even without an inciting cause, and those movements gradually occur not only more quickly but with greater facility (H 31). Habit causes actions we consciously undertake become easier and quicker to accomplish and sensations we experience to become dull and recede from consciousness.

Ravaisson does not claim to be the first to have observed these features of habit, but questions the dualistic frames in which they have been interpreted in the past. In particular, he credits their discovery to the Eighteenth-Century philosopher Joseph Butler, who interprets the law in terms of a distinction between active mental habits and passive bodily habits. Butler’s distinction between active and passive principles, language that will be taken up by later philosophers such as Hume and Maine de Biran whose work Ravaisson also cites⁵⁷, fits neatly within Cartesian ontological dualism in differentiating between a free, active mind and a passive, material body. Butler uses this distinction as the interpretive clue to the double law of habit: the tendency of sensation to fade from consciousness is attributable to a passive principle that belongs

⁵⁶ Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, p. 49. Translations of *De l’habitude* in this chapter are adapted from those in Carlisle and Sinclair’s volume, with French and English text on opposing pages. Throughout this chapter, I will cite *Of Habit* in text by the abbreviation “H”.

⁵⁷ See David Hume. *A Treatise Concerning Human Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 2.3.5.1, François-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran, *Influence de l’habitude sur la faculté de penser*, in *Oeuvres, Tome II* (Paris: Vrin, 1987), p. 187.

to the body and that gives rise to an “involuntary readiness” to respond to situations in automatic and stereotyped ways.⁵⁸ As sensation weakens we notice our behaviors less and less to the point where they become automatic and difficult to control. On the other hand, although difficult to perform at first, “practical principles,” habits acquired through conscious acts of will, require less effort as they are repeated.⁵⁹ For Butler, these “active habits” are crucial to our practical and ultimately our moral abilities, as they allow us to achieve our goals of performing a certain type of action or of acquiring a certain character without the need to consider all that we do. Butler suggests that these habits, though visible in bodily acts, properly belong to the mind, as they entail action of the mind that produces a lasting change within the body.

Ravaisson does not directly challenge Butler or his followers’ dualistic frameworks, but argues that they fail at the descriptive level in a way that suggests the need to go beyond them. Habit, Ravaisson argues, does not merely outstrip both sensation and conscious acts of deliberation but tends to anticipate (*prévient*) them (H 51). As a result of habit, one’s actions and affections respond not to current but to projected circumstances. This phenomenon also entails a subjective, felt expectation and even need for a certain event to occur that can cause pain if it is disappointed. Repetition does not simply produce a change that *subsists* in the body or mind but rather one that actively *persists* as an active being-disposed towards repeating what one has done before. As sensation and effort diminish it becomes increasingly difficult for them to become reestablished, and one can even come to feel discomfort in the absence of whatever change instigated those effects. Once one becomes “accustomed” to reading while listening to music, for instance, one

⁵⁸ Joseph Butler. *The Analogy of Religion* (New York: Ungar, [1736] 1961), p. 71. Butler uses the language of “perception” to describe “passive” habits, while Ravaisson uses that of sensation, but they are intended in identical ways.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

ceases to notice the music and it can even become more difficult to read without such background noise. Likewise, movements and perceptions become both easier and quicker to accomplish, and more pleasurable as well. Building a habit of jogging makes running easier and more pleasurable to the point where failing to run on a particular day causes discomfort. The separation between “active” and “passive” habits might account for the decrease in sensibility and the increased ease in action associated with habit, but not the way habits become *tendencies* in a progressive sense of tending towards repeating what one has repeated before. Habits strengthen over time, and this appears not just in the form of an increased likelihood to behave in a certain way but moreover in a conscious preference for doing so, and the dualistic separation of active mental and passive bodily habits does not possess a way to account for this mixture of the physical and the mental in the phenomena of habit.

Ravaisson’s case against dualistic theories of habit is that they fail to account for both the progressive nature of the effects associated with the double law of habit, and also their affective dimensions. In making this case, Ravaisson criticizes what he calls “physicalist” and “rationalist” theories of habit in a manner strikingly similar to Merleau-Ponty’s later discussion of “empiricist” and “intellectualist” theories of habit (H 53-55).⁶⁰ Like Merleau-Ponty, Ravaisson sees theories that explain habit solely through mental or physical changes as outgrowths of the ontological separation of mind and body and as failing on their own terms. Physicalist theories of habit account for the effects of habit in terms of physical changes that occur in the body. Ravaisson cites as an example of such a theory the early neurological hypotheses of Charles Bonnet, who speculates that the ease with which habitual movements are undertaken and their independence from

⁶⁰ I discuss Merleau-Ponty’s arguments against dualistic theories of habit in detail in Chapter Three, Section One of this dissertation. Cf. Carlisle and Sinclair, “Editors’ Commentary,” p. 98.

consciousness suggests that they originate in modifications within nerve fibers.⁶¹ Such modifications function mechanistically, such that once an organic change has occurred an impulse will automatically cause a particular response whose ease is thus explained by a determination within the nervous system. Ravaisson responds that while organic changes within entities might account for the diminished attention given to habits and increased muscular facility through alterations in the neural connections, but “no organic modification can explain the *tendency* (*tendance*), the inclination (*penchant*) whose progress coincides with the degradation of sensation and effort.” (H 51) The habituated body is not merely statically capable of acting in certain ways without effort or attention but is actively oriented towards doing so as an inclination that is expressed both as a propensity within the body and as a consciously experienced need. Intellectualist theories like that of Dugald Stewart, in which habits result from the repeated association of ideas that becomes so rapid as to be forgotten, fail on precisely the same grounds.⁶² The mind itself is the agent of the changes brought about through habit, and as association occurs the mind’s operations come occur more quickly and with less effort, and leave conscious attention free for other matters. Ravaisson agrees that associative theories of habit can explain especially how repetition frees attention, but not why one begins to prefer the sensations or operations to which one has been habituated. The habituated body acts in an intentional fashion in a way that neither physical determination nor association of ideas can grasp: “Physicalist and rationalist theories are equally lacking on this point.” (H 53) The effects of habit combine the objective and

⁶¹ Charles Bonnet. *Essai analytique sur les facultés de l’âme* (Copenhagen: Philibert, 1775), pp. 101-106. Bonnet’s remarks are admittedly speculative, but he believes that such physical changes account for why habits developed when young have such a profound effect even on the adult individual. Ravaisson was familiar with Bonnet’s work through its citation at the beginning of Maine de Biran’s *mémoire* on habit (Maine de Biran, *Influence de l’habitude sur la faculté de penser*, p. 126).

⁶² Dugald Stewart. *Elements of the Philosophy of the Human Mind*, vol. 1 (London: Tegg, 1850), pp. 113-114.

the subjective in a way that requires an account that presupposes a holistic account of mind and body rather than one that treats them as antecedently separated.

By observing the effects of habit on human life, Ravaisson concludes that habit must be understood as a tendency in the senses that emerge in his observation of the effects of habit: first as a propensity or likelihood to act in a certain way that slowly increases over time, and second as a felt preference for acting in that way. Viewing habit in this manner preserves his contemporaries' observations concerning the effects of habit while rejecting their dualistic explanations of those effects. Habit for Ravaisson is neither a behavioral pattern nor a specific determination within one's thinking or physical structure but rather what Ravaisson calls a "change in the disposition, the potential, the internal virtue" of an entity (H 25). Ravaisson's language here is Aristotelian, and his concept of tendency can be understood as attempting to provide a dynamic interpretation of Aristotle's concept of *hexis*. *Hexis*, which is translated into Latin as *habitus*, is defined as a "disposition, according to which something is either well or ill disposed, either towards itself or with reference to something else."⁶³ A *hexis* for Aristotle is an acquired state of one's capacities, an ability to act in a particular way that characterizes one's overall comportment. One who has acquired a *hexis* of moderation (*sophrosunē*), for instance, has a general ability or potentiality to modulate one's actions and preferences so as to eat and drink the proper amounts.⁶⁴ This ability gives rise to consistency in one's actions and a disposition whereby one is disposed towards acting moderately on a regular basis, such that moderation becomes a character trait. In interpreting the concept of *hexis* dynamically, Ravaisson adds to Aristotle's picture that habitual abilities and states

⁶³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1022b4-12.

⁶⁴ Specifically, for Aristotle a *hexis* is a "second potentiality," an ability that one has acquired and can bring to bear in particular situations through voluntary action. Knowledge of mathematics is thus an example of a *hexis*, an ability that one can exercise or to use Aristotelian language "actualize" in specific acts of knowing, see *De Anima* 417a23f.

of character not only develop slowly but that as they develop we become increasingly prone to express them in our actions. Whereas an ability can be actualized in voluntary acts, a dynamic reading of *hexis* suggests that habitual tendencies come to anticipate acts of will. What Aristotle calls a state or condition is in fact for Ravaisson a dynamic proneness or aptitude that grows over time and spontaneously gives rise to activity.

Ravaisson's dynamic reading of *hexis* also builds on Aristotle's ontology to provide an alternative to the dualistic frameworks in which the phenomena of habit had been explained. Aristotle conceives of states of character, skills, and intellectual capacities all as types of *hexis*. To Ravaisson, this suggests that what Descartes had separated as substances of thought and extension can in fact be comprehended under one single principle, and he indicates that habit should be understood as a principle of ontological monism when he defines it as a "way of being" or "state of an existence" (H 25). Whether bodily or mental, habit refers to the way capacities have been exercised and have built a tendency to function. Ravaisson provides an ontological grounding specifically for habit as a dynamic phenomenon by reading Aristotle's concept of *hexis* through the Leibnizian notion of active force, which Leibniz defines as an "act or *entelecheia*...mid-way between the faculty of acting and the act itself, and involves a conatus."⁶⁵ Leibniz's use of the language of entelechy suggests that active force carries the same sense of actualizing a potentiality that the concept of *hexis* carries, but strengthens it by viewing the process of actualization as the production of a conatus, a striving or drive that impels an entity to motion.⁶⁶ Ravaisson develops this notion of force into a principle of desire, which he calls an "obscure activity" that manifests

⁶⁵ G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Papers and Letters*, ed. Leroy Loemaker (Boston: Riedel, [1969] 2011), p. 433.

⁶⁶ Thornton Lockwood ("Habituation, Habit, and Character in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*,") and Pierre Rodrigo ("The Dynamic of *Hexis* in Aristotle's Philosophy," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42 (1), 2011: 6-17, p. 9) have recently argued that Aristotle's concept of *hexis* should in fact also be read dynamically and not simply as a trait or ability. Whether or not this is true, the influence of Leibnizian dynamism allows Ravaisson to examine the progressive strengthening of habitual states in a unique fashion.

itself as a tendency persist in a particular way of being (H 53). Ravaisson's preference for the term "desire" over that of "conatus" in his thesis suggests that the form of striving pertinent to habit is goal-oriented: "Desire is a primordial instinct, in which the goal of the act is fused with the act itself" (H 61) Desire is not simply striving but striving *for something*, and Ravaisson specifies that the desire of which habit consists is directed towards persisting in present ways of being. Ravaisson's understanding of persistence or perseverance draws again on Leibnizian dynamism in which persistence is associated with inertia, the tendency of objects to stay in motion or at rest. Leibniz interprets inertia as an intrinsic power or force that actively resists external influence. Persistence in this sense is an urge inherent to entities to remain in a particular state, whether of stasis or change.⁶⁷ In conceptualizing desire as persistence, Ravaisson thus views habit as an active striving to continue either in the same state in which one finds oneself, or in an ongoing process of change. Repetition produces a striving that impels us to actualize the abilities we have developed, thus giving rise to increasing proneness to act or react in certain ways.

Applying his concept of tendency to the double law of habit allows Ravaisson to account for it in a non-dualistic fashion that ultimately provides a more successful explanation. Instead of indexing different types of habits to the mind or the body or to separate passive and active principles, Ravaisson's conception of habit as the expression of desire treats it holistically as a process of responding to change. Ravaisson emphasizes the basis of habit in responsiveness to change when he claims that habit should be understood not simply as "acquired" but as but "contracted, as the result of a change, with regard to the very change which brought it into being"

⁶⁷ G.W. Leibniz, *Philosophical Essays* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989), pp. 161-162: "And just as there is natural *inertia* opposed to *motion* in matter, so too in body itself, indeed in all substance, there is a natural *constancy* opposed to *change*. Indeed, this doctrine does not support, but rather opposes those who deny activity to things." On this point see Janicaud, *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, pp. 30-31.

(H 27).⁶⁸ Ravaisson still uses the language of activity and passivity in his treatise, but his refusal to reify that language into separate principles in Blondel's words "displaces" dualistic accounts and gives him the space to explain the phenomena they cannot.⁶⁹ Changes, instigated either outside the entity or within, disrupt the desire to persist and when repeated force it to express itself in tendencies that respond to those changes. The desire to persist accommodates changes instigated from outside an entity such as sensations by adjusting the "tone" of consciousness to match that of the sensation, such that it no longer leaves an impression and recedes from attention (H 53). Yet as that sensation is repeated, it becomes a stable condition of the entity's environment it desires to persist in. This results in a preference to continue experiencing particular sensations and discomfort when they are absent. Likewise, beginning a new form of movement is also a disturbance to the desire to persist that is experienced as effort, but as the movement is repeated the desire to persist accommodates it by training the muscles to perform it with greater ease and results in a need to repeat and develop that movement. The desire to persist is an "antecedent tendency" to both the will and sensation, independent from them and over time coming to anticipate them in the form of a tendency that includes a conscious preference (H 61). The settling of desire into a particular mode of expression in one's manner of existence gives rise to an inclination for the acts and affections associated with it, such that the effects of the double law of habit are in fact nothing other than the growth and development of desire.

⁶⁸ Ravaisson borrows the term "contraction" from the physiologist Xavier Bichat, for whom "contractility" (*contractilité*) names a principle of excitation and movement that gives rise to faculties within living organisms, to describe the process of habit as one that entails receptivity to change and results in the production of tendencies (Xavier Bichat. *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et le mort* [Paris: Gabon, 1802], pp. 3-6). On Ravaisson's use of Bichat's "plurivitalism" see Jean Cazeneuve. *La philosophie médicale de Ravaisson* (Paris: PUF, 1958), p. 35.

⁶⁹ Emmanuel Blondel. "Ravaisson Lecteur de Maine de Biran," in Le Lannou, Jean-Michel ed. *Ravaisson* (Paris: Kimé, 1999: 15-32), p. 16, cf. Dominique Janicaud. *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, p. 23.

In solving the problem of the double law of habit “phenomenologically,” Ravaisson’s account is vulnerable to the objection that alternative accounts might explain the phenomena of habit more comprehensively and without some of his more problematic ontological commitments. In particular, Ravaisson’s dismissal of Bonnet’s neurological hypotheses is best interpreted in the context of the tentative understanding of the brain in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries and the deterministic way in which they are stated. Scholars have already noted the resonances between Ravaisson’s dynamic understanding of the double law of habit and ongoing research on brain plasticity, particularly what is known as “activity-dependent plasticity,” or the brain’s ability to forge lasting neural pathways as a result of its experiences as opposed to genetics, chemical effects, or injuries.⁷⁰ The concept of plasticity is particularly relevant, as it indicates not simply flexibility but a resistance to change that suggests parallels between contemporary understandings of brain function and Ravaisson’s understanding of habit as tendency and his explanation of the double law of habit. Like Ravaisson’s habituated body, the brain is not simply patterned or organized but is actively oriented towards the circuits it practices. As synaptic connections are activated their efficacy in conducting signals between neurons increases, such that actions can be accomplished with a minimum of neural activity and hence with ease in movement and decreased attention.⁷¹ This emerging picture of neural plasticity corroborates many of the dynamic attributes of

⁷⁰ Leandro Gaitán and Javier Castresana. “On Habit and the Mind-Body Problem: The View of Félix Ravaisson,” *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8, 2014: n.p., Clare Carlisle. “The Question of Habit in Theology and Philosophy: From Hexis to Plasticity,” *Body & Society*, 19 (2&3), 2013: 30-57, pp. 30-34. For another philosophical account of the relationship between habit and brain plasticity that draws on Ravaisson’s work see Catherine Malabou. *What Should We Do with Our Brain?*, trans. Sebastian Rand (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), pp. 22-25.

⁷¹ See Gaitán and Castresana, and on the notion of “Hebbian” synapses or “synaptic plasticity” see Henri Yin and Barbara Knowlton. “The Role of the Basal Ganglia in Habit Formation,” *Nature*, 7 (6), 2006: 464-476, p. 470.

Ravaissonian habit while avoiding his somewhat uncritical application of Leibnizian concepts of active force and natural inertia well after Kant's critical objections.⁷²

Even if we reject the metaphysics of force to which Ravaissou appeals and instead ontologically ground his account of habit in neural processes, contemporary corroboration of his understanding of habit as a *tendency*, and its capacity to explain everyday observations concerning the effects of habit on human life that makes the notion an important contribution to theories of habit. In this regard, I would argue that even without Leibnizian metaphysics Ravaissou's interpretation of habit as the expression of a desire to persist remains valuable for two reasons. First, it focuses attention on the active and goal-oriented nature of the process of habit more directly than the notion of plasticity. While discussions of plasticity go beyond mechanistic understandings of the brain and instead tend to view it as capable of self-regulation, Ravaissou's use of the language of persistence draws attention to the drive-like characteristics of such maintenance.⁷³ Habit entails an active process of producing tendencies and seeking out ways to maintain repeated changes that have effects on the mind and body as a whole, and the language of desire expresses more clearly than that of plasticity the intentional nature of this process. Second, the language of desire also highlights the progressive and affective dimensions of habit, its

⁷² The extent to which Ravaissou's account of habit is dependent upon Leibnizian metaphysics is a matter of dispute. Andre Bellantone ("Ravaissou: Le 'champ abandonné de la métaphysique,'" *Cahiers Philosophiques*, 129 (2), 2012: 5-21, p. 19) and Jeremy Dunham ("From Habit to Monads: Félix Ravaissou's Theory of Substance," *British Journal of the History of Philosophy*, 23 (6), 2015: 1085-1105, pp. 1099-1103) have argued that Ravaissou's thesis on habit attempts to serve as a demonstration of Leibnizian monadology, while Sinclair ("Ravaissou and the Force of Habit, pp. 82-83) claims that Ravaissou's description of habit does not rely on a "supersensible" or "dogmatic" notion of force, as the phenomena of habit nothing other than desire. I agree with Sinclair that Ravaissou's understanding of habit desire is continuous with his larger metaphysics of nature but is not dependent upon it, but either way the issue is not central to my argument, as even if Ravaissou's metaphysics cannot be sustained his understanding of habit as desire can be given an alternative ontological grounding.

⁷³ On the collapse of the "cybernetic metaphor" understanding the brain as an unchanging "thinking machine" see Malabou, *What Should We do with Our Brain?*, pp. 34-35.

subjective experience as a need for certain actions or sensations or as the enjoyment taken in repeating what one has done before.

This view of habit as a desiderative, intentional process of responding to change culminates in an understanding of the body as permeated and oriented by desire that allows us to see Ravaisson as participating in the same project of challenging Cartesian mind-body dualism as Bergson and Merleau-Ponty. The phenomena of habit can only be explained by recognizing that the body is not merely extended but oriented and organized by desire. Ravaisson's concept of habit thus challenges the body's reduction (to paraphrase Sinclair) to a "third-person" object that can be understood independently of the self's motivations and preferences.⁷⁴ Insofar as consciously felt preferences are continuous with bodily tendencies, the body must be understood as a genuine aspect of subjectivity. One's mannerisms and ways of acting reflect the desire to persist, such that conceptualizing actions as "behaviors" that can be comprehended in terms of statistical probability fundamentally misses their intentional nature.⁷⁵ Bodily states and tendencies can only be understood as strategies by which one can persist in one's way of being in the context of one's life circumstances even as they change and develop. The body contains a principle of intelligence and of freedom that operates separately from consciousness and the will but is continuous with them, and it is to this principle that I will now turn.

2. From Intelligence to Inclination

So far, we have seen that the phenomena of habit cannot be explained if the body is understood solely as an object. I will argue in this section, however, that Ravaisson's remarks on

⁷⁴ Mark Sinclair. "Embodiment," p. 196.

⁷⁵ For a genealogy of the elimination of "internalist" and "mentalist" conceptions of the passions and their slow replacement with objectively verifiable and measurable notions of "behavior" see Thomas Pfau, *Minding the Modern*, pp. 355-373.

habit, although not stated in these terms, can be interpreted as constructing a unique picture of the body as subject. Ravaillon breaks with the Cartesian picture of the body by viewing it as animated by the desire to persist. Desire causes conscious goals to become states in which we tend to persist, such that through habituation the body functions as an intelligent and free agent capable of carrying out conscious goals in the absence of conscious acts of will. This this view of the body as an extension of conscious subjectivity anticipates contemporary conceptions of habit as skills, but also goes beyond them in certain respects. By grounding bodily intelligence and freedom in the desire to persist, Ravaillon is able to also articulate how they continue to develop once a set of habits has been acquired. Ravaillon's concept of inclination articulates a process whereby habituation gives rise to purposive actions that also become easier and more immediate over time while also becoming imbued with an affective sense of familiarity and preference that can even become a need. Ravaillon can thus be understood as holding a *dynamic* theory of embodied subjectivity that follows from his understanding of habit as a tendency in which the body, while it continues to act in accordance with conscious goals, does so in an increasingly independent fashion from consciousness throughout the process of the acquisition and enactment of habits.

Ravaillon does not go as far as we will see Merleau-Ponty do in arguing for mind-body unity, but instead argues that habit mediates between the two by incorporating consciously willed actions into the body's tendencies. As we saw in the previous section, that habit is grounded in a form of desire indicates that it is in itself intentional and purposively oriented towards a certain goal, that of persisting in a particular way of being. This excludes any understanding of the actions that arise from habit as "rote" or blindly repetitive: habit instead entails a tendency that spontaneously adapts existing abilities in ways that allow the individual to maintain itself in a particular state. Habit must be understood as inherently intelligent, in that it is precisely the

capacity of the body to carry out particular goals. Ravaisson thus regards the process of habit acquisition as one of forming the body in accordance with conscious goals, such that the body becomes an extension of conscious subjectivity:

In reflection and the will, the end of movement is an idea, an ideal to be accomplished, something that ought to be, that can be, and which is not yet. It is a possibility to be realized. But to the extent that the end is merged with movement, and the movement with tendency, the possibility, the ideal is realized in it. The *idea* becomes *being*, the same being of the movement and the tendency that it determines. Habit becomes more and more a *substantial idea*. The obscure intelligence that succeeds reflection through habit, this immediate intelligence where object and subject are confused, is a *real* intuition, where the real and the ideal, being and thought are brought together. (H 55)

Ravaisson's language of the ideal and the real owes much to his metaphysical interests arising from German Idealism and in particular that of Schelling, whose lectures Ravaisson had attended a few years prior to the writing of his thesis, but for our purposes what is significant in this passage is his claim that in contracting a habit the body takes on a purposive character by gaining the ability to accomplish consciously willed goals through its own means.⁷⁶ As a result, intelligence and agency cease to be the sole province of consciousness but are instead made "substantial" in the form of habitual tendencies. Habit is the extension of consciousness into the body in a way that allows it to be "realized:" goals proposed by consciousness are "ideal" representations that exist solely theoretically, and are actualized only insofar as they are embodied in the form of actions. Through habituation goals become literally incorporated, put into the body, in the form of tendencies that cause the body to function in an agential fashion and accomplish the will's goals without any explicit acts of consciousness. Conscious intelligence and agency become diffused

⁷⁶ Joseph Dopp (*Félix Ravaisson: La formation de sa pensée d'après des documents inédits* [Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie: 1933], pp. 227-229), goes so far as to argue that demonstrating the unity of the ideal and the real is at the treatise on habit's "heart and governs its path." In this regard Dopp's interpretation of *De l'habitude* is closer to that of Dunham and Bellantone, who emphasize Ravaisson's metaphysical project, than to Carlisle and Sinclair's, who emphasize the anti-Cartesian nature of the text's attitude towards the body. Despite Dunham's criticisms of Carlisle and Sinclair, I do not think we need to necessarily choose between these readings of *De l'habitude*, though I tend to agree with Sinclair that Ravaisson's pursuit of his metaphysical project occurs in this particular text through an "original conception of bodily being." (Sinclair, "Embodiment," p. 195) This differentiates the project of *De l'habitude* from Ravaisson's 1840 article on the philosophy of William Hamilton, which Dunham argues is its necessary interpretive context. (Dunham, "From Habits to Monads," p. 1094)

throughout the body in the form of habitual tendencies, such that the body becomes an *embodied subject* that accomplishes conscious goals of its own accord.

An example will help to clarify Ravaisson's argument here. Insofar as subjectivity remains solely conscious, being a teacher is only an ideal representation or self-conception that serves as the goal of one's actions.⁷⁷ When one begins to teach, one must therefore consciously perform the actions associated with the goal of being a teacher (e.g., lesson planning, grading, classroom management). Repeating these actions over time, however, gives rise to a tendency and ultimately an inclination to act in ways appropriate to the role of teacher, and as one continues to encounter new situations in one's teaching that inclination develops further into a set of abilities. To use Ravaisson's terms, the ideal goal of being a teacher becomes "real" or "substantial" in the form of these habitual tendencies, and it also becomes more immediate as one needs to deliberate on how to perform the actions associated with teaching less and less. As a result, the body becomes as much of a teacher as consciousness, as it takes on the character of an agent that is capable of independently carrying out actions that realize the goal of being a teacher. One's actions, bearing, and mannerisms all immediately conform to the goal of being a teacher, such that the distance between oneself as subject and the object of teaching decreases to the point of nonexistence.

As the example of the teacher indicates, the status of the body as an intelligent agent grows gradually in the context of a particular set of goals. And indeed, Ravaisson's understanding of bodily intelligence does not entail a *static* view of the body as a means to accomplish conscious ends but a *dynamic* one in which the body's abilities to recognize how to accomplish a particular goal and to adapt itself in order to do so grow increasingly sophisticated. The body, in other words, is not simply an intelligent subject but one that *learns*. In a manner consonant with his

⁷⁷ I thank Jacqueline del Nido for this example, which helped me parse Ravaisson's dense argumentation in this section of *De l'habitude*.

interpretation of the double law of habit, Ravaisson argues that goal-oriented actions become quicker, easier to accomplish, and more assured as the desire to persist inhabits organs and orients them to move in certain ways. Ravaisson now specifies that the strengthening of actions through habit entails the progressive cultivation of perceptual and bodily abilities. Just as the body develops the ability to engage in activities such as running with less effort through continual exercise, perception too becomes clearer and more distinguishing through habituation. In one of the few examples he provides in his treatise, Ravaisson argues that habituation increases a wine connoisseur's ability to recognize and discriminate between ever more subtle differences in flavor, thereby gaining "taste" in wine (H 49). Ravaisson admittedly does not present a well-developed theory of perception, but his analysis of habit's effects on perception closely follows that of Maine de Biran, for whom perception is an active faculty that is related to judgment and enables differentiation and comparison between objects. Perceiving something repeatedly or for an extended time gives rise to more distinct recognition of its features and an ability to differentiate them from others.⁷⁸ Likewise, bodily and perceptual capacities allow ends to be accomplished without the need for deliberation. Through experience perception learns to recognize relevant features of situations as opportunities for action and primes bodily capacities to function in accordance with what is necessary to achieve a particular end. In this way habit allows goals to be accomplished unreflectively but precisely by "pulling down obstacles in front of them, and securing their means" (H 53) Through repetition this ability to grasp how to act in order to achieve a proper result becomes more immediate and less deliberative, and slowly becomes more sophisticated as well.

⁷⁸ Maine de Biran, *L'influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser*, pp. 38-39. In Chapter Three I will argue that Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception helps to clarify some of the aspects of Ravaisson's arguments concerning perception that are only stated allusively or implicitly.

In articulating this form of immediate coordination of perceptual and bodily capacities, Ravaissou anticipates many of the insights of contemporary discussions of habit as a form of “skilled” conduct. Ravaissou’s argument for immediacy in the relationship between habitual actions and conscious goals expresses in the language of German Idealism what contemporary skill theorists would call the “context sensitive” nature of skilled actions, their calibration to the opportunities afforded by a particular situation to achieve a desired end.⁷⁹ Habitual actions are neither mechanical nor stereotyped but entail the spontaneous coordination of perceptual and bodily capacities to recognize what a particular situation requires with precision. In addition, Ravaissou’s argument that consciously undertaken actions become “by a succession of imperceptible degrees” tendencies that allow for the immediate unreflective accomplishment of goals describes in brief the process of gaining what Hubert Dreyfus for instance calls “expertise” (H 57).⁸⁰ Dreyfus describes a process of skill acquisition in which processes of decision-making slowly through experience give way to perceptual and bodily responses to specific situations. When at first engaging in a particular activity a novice applies rules and plans strategies that sequence particular acts in order to achieve a goal. Through experience, however, the individual notices and remembers situational aspects of the activity in which they are engaged and constructs plans less through conscious deliberation and more through perception and memory in a manner

⁷⁹ On the notion of context sensitivity see John Sutton et al. “Applying Intelligence to the Reflexes: Embodied Skills and Habits Between Dreyfus and Descartes,” *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42 (1), 2011: 78-103, pp. 79-80.

⁸⁰ The analysis of the process of cultivating “expertise” as an element of what he calls “skillful coping” as a form of intelligence in which perception and bodily capacities fluidly engage with situations has been a concern running throughout Hubert Dreyfus’ career, see chapter 8 of *What Computers Can’t Do: The Limits of Artificial Intelligence* (New York: Harper, 1972), and more pertinently for the concerns of this chapter “What is Moral Maturity? Towards a Phenomenology of Ethical Expertise,” in *Skillful Coping: Essays on the Phenomenology of Everyday Perception and Action*, ed. Mark Wrathall (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014: 183-201). I will return to Dreyfus’s concept of coping in Chapter Three. For a theory of skill acquisition that emphasizes “mindedness” or the presence of higher-level cognition in the acquisition of skills see Wayne Christensen et al. “Cognition in Skilled Action: Meshed Control and the Varieties of Skill Experience,” *Mind & Language*, 31 (1) 2016: 37-66.

strikingly similar to Ravaisson's understanding of the manner in which bodily intelligence functions. For Dreyfus, habit is a form of practical knowledge that obviates the need for reason and problem-solving but allows goals to be achieved by "feel and familiarity" and through recognition what a particular situation requires.⁸¹ Like Ravaisson's habituated body, an expert for Dreyfus does not act deliberately but intuitively, to the point where she might not even be fully conscious of her actions. She simply sees what to do in a particular situation and allows her trained bodily abilities to carry it out.

Dreyfus' account of expertise as a slowly developing ability nicely captures the sense of bodily learning Ravaisson is after. Yet in viewing habit not simply as an ability but moreover as a *tendency*, however, Ravaisson goes beyond Dreyfus' by recognizing that embodied subjectivity is dynamic in yet a second sense, namely in that it conforms to the *dynamism* of habituation as a process of expressing the desire to persist. Ravaisson goes into greater depth than Dreyfus regarding the qualitative aspects of the process of bodily learning, the ways habitual actions are accomplished more quickly over time and as more of a need. Ravaisson expresses these qualitative aspects of habit by referring to what grows out of repetition of goal-oriented actions as an "inclination" (*penchant*) (H 55). The French term *penchant* refers both to a tendency to do something and a liking or preference for something, and Ravaisson plays on both of these meanings in order to express both the increased ease and rapidity with which habitual actions are accomplished and the conscious preference for them that grows over time, even to the point of becoming compulsive. Ravaisson refers to these aspects of habitual tendencies as spontaneity and taste respectively, and together they articulate how continued repetition causes habits to progressively strengthen such that the goals they achieve gain primacy in practical life.

⁸¹ Dreyfus, "What is Moral Maturity?" p. 188.

As conscious goals become habitual, they too become states in which one strives to persist. As a result, habits that follow from the will's initial movements begin not simply to operate independently of them, but do so moreover more quickly and easily. Desire, as we have seen, does not affect the body neutrally, but actively impels it to behave in a particular manner and not others. As this desire grows, the body experiences increased pressure to adapt itself so as to achieve conscious goals in new circumstances, and acts with greater immediacy. Focusing on the origin of habit in desire thus allows Ravaisson to attend to the dynamic nature of embodied agency in a manner that is absent in Dreyfus' account. Embodied agency is affected by the dynamics of desire, such that the body cannot be understood as free in a simple fashion but instead as free *to a varying degree* that depends upon the strength of the desire to persist. Ravaisson expresses this variable form of freedom as "spontaneity" that is "equally opposed to mechanical Fatality and reflective Freedom" (H 55). The body, incapable of reflection and choice, follows the dictates of the will and hence does not act autonomously. The body is not therefore necessitated in a mechanical sense but is instead governed by the "necessity of attraction and desire" in which perceptual and bodily capacities immediately and without reflection coordinate in ways that are oriented towards the satisfaction of the desire to persist (H 57). The body's freedom is thus a situated freedom, limited both by the extent of conscious goals, and also by the amount of pressure desire places on it at a particular time. Spontaneity expresses continuity between reflective will and the immediacy of instinct through which actions are calibrated to resolve needs with perfect automaticity. In Ravaisson's words, spontaneity is a "mobile *middle term*" between will and instinct, a "dividing line that is always moving, and which advances by imperceptible progress from one extremity to the other" (H 59). Habit remains a second nature, an acquired nature, which cannot take over the anatomical and instinctual constitution of an organism. The difference, however, between habit

and instinct is only one of degree, and through the contraction of a habit one increasingly acts without reflection or cause and tends towards automatism. This process results in skilled abilities that allow us to accomplish our goals, but it also slowly takes over from reflection and comes to be governed by the desire to persist through which actions become almost automatic.

The same force of persistence also creates a felt preference to act in ways that accomplish goals that have become habitual inclinations. When one pursues habitual goals, the striving that underlies one's acquired habits is temporarily satisfied. As actions become habitual they therefore become increasingly pleasurable as they require less effort to undertake compared to actions that must be consciously willed.⁸² This is experienced in everyday life as a sense of comfort or familiarity with accustomed ways of acting, and conversely discomfort or difficulty when acting in unfamiliar ways. Drawing on the physiologist Matthieu Buisson, Ravaisson uses the term "taste" to describe this familiarity as a tacit sensation that is often only noticed when one is in an unaccustomed situation or engaging in an unfamiliar activity.⁸³ In keeping with his dynamic conception of habit, however, Ravaisson departs from Buisson in arguing that taste itself grows stronger through repetition. One's comfort with a particular manner of acting can become more of a felt presence and fall upon a narrower range of activities, while the discomfort in the presence of difference grows stronger and more widespread. Ravaisson goes so far as to claim that actions can anticipate the will so greatly and become such strong preferences that they "degenerate into

⁸² This observation does not, as it might seem, fall afoul of the double law of habit. Pleasure, Ravaisson argues, is attached to action in the form of familiarity or comfort with it and does not recede from consciousness as pleasures associated with sensations do. The pleasure in each case is of a qualitatively different type, even though Ravaisson uses the same language to name them.

⁸³ Buisson refers to this pleasure as an "analogy" between ourselves and our lived environments where our bodily and mental capacities interact harmoniously with the external world. This analogy expresses an attunement between our mental and bodily capacities with the objects that surround us that comes to form our taste for those objects. Continued activity results in greater attunement with our environment, causing us to take pleasure in interacting with our surroundings and producing preferences through habit, such that in Buisson's words "my habits are my joys." (*De la division la plus naturelle des phénomènes physiologiques* [Paris: Brosson, 1802], p. 71).

convulsive ones, which are called *tics*” (H 51). Ravaisson mentions this possibility only in passing, but the claim appears to be that preferences towards certain actions can grow so strong that one feels a compulsion to repeat them. As a result, habitual actions cease, at least to a certain degree, to function intelligently and become needs to repeat specific acts more or less identically regardless of context. Habit again does not become machinic or routine but rather a kind of addiction that results from the force of desire reaching the nearest point to the irresistibility of instinct.

The dynamically embodied subject is therefore not indifferently open to all possibilities, but actively oriented towards goals that have become habitual. This sense of being driven towards particular possibilities rather than others is absent in skill-based accounts of habit. Dreyfus recognizes a form of tension in the process of coping in the concept of “maximum grip” he adapts from Merleau-Ponty, where the calibration of habitual actions to particular situations is “motivated” by a draw towards an equilibrium of optimal control of a particular situation.⁸⁴ Expert practitioners of a particular activity intuitively sense when a particular action or trajectory conduces to their overall aim and when it does not, and in the latter case experience discomfort that resolves to satisfaction when equilibrium is achieved.⁸⁵ While the form of tension Dreyfus drives intelligent action in the context of achieving a particular goal, the notion of inclination leads Ravaisson to conclude that the key tension habituation produces pertains to the goal itself. As the goal-oriented exercise and coordination of bodily and perceptual capacities grows stronger, the body becomes increasingly oriented towards the particular goal over which they are set. At a physical level, Ravaisson notes that someone who is accustomed to hard physical labor loses some

⁸⁴ Hubert Dreyfus, “Merleau-Ponty and Recent Cognitive Science,” in *Skillful Coping*: 231-248, p. 240.

⁸⁵ Compare Dreyfus’ account of the subjective dimensions of achieving grip with the description of the enjoyment garnered from experiencing “feedback” from a particular activity in so-called “flow experiences” in Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), pp. 54-58.

of their manual dexterity and writes less firmly.⁸⁶ The change in bodily capacities that occurs through repetition increases skill in one area but decreases it in others. To return to the previous example, phrases one uses in teaching, ways of interacting with students, one's bearing in the classroom, all gradually become integrated into one's everyday comportment and can even extend outside the context of the school. In each case, as one's actions become more immediate and preferred, they become more narrowly focused on a particular goal. This does not mean that actions become blindly repetitive, but rather that the goal towards which they aim becomes paramount in one's practical life, or in Ravaisson's words it "involuntarily, even convulsively, surpasses any end placed before one's accustomed end" (H 59). The forms of behavior and feeling one acquires in one context overflows that context and irrupts into others involuntarily, such that one acquires a characteristic way of being that tends to dominate over other possibilities.

While he uses this language specifically to relate will and instinct, it would not be unfair to say that habit for Ravaisson serves as the "mobile middle term" between mind and body. Through habit ideal goals become literally incorporated, put into the body in the form of inclinations. In this regard, Derrida is not incorrect to say that Ravaisson's theory of mind-body unity is really a theory of mind-body "continuism," even though his use of the term is disparaging.⁸⁷ Ravaisson's language of the real and the ideal is dialectical and suggests a mediated unity of mind and body that might not be satisfying to contemporary theorists of embodied cognition. In spite of this, Ravaisson's concept of habitual inclination enriches our understanding of embodied subjectivity by emphasizing not only the body's capacity for practical intelligence

⁸⁶ Ravaisson again turns to physiology to provide evidence for his claims, in this case the vitalist Joseph Barthez, see Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair, "Editor's Commentary," in Félix Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, p. 103.

⁸⁷ Jacques Derrida, *On Touching – Jean-Luc Nancy*, trans. Christine Irizarry (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), p. 156. Derrida argues that Ravaisson "derives his axioms from Maine de Biran," a claim my argument in Section One of this chapter should make recognizable as a misinterpretation.

but also its *driven* character. Ravaisson's dynamic theory of embodied subjectivity anticipates the transition from conscious deliberation to the coordination of bodily and perceptual capacities in habitual action described by contemporary theories of skill, but applies his interpretation of habit as desire to demonstrate that the body is actively oriented towards goals that have become habitual. In doing so, I would argue that Ravaisson grounds the Aristotelian notion of "character" in his ontology of desire.⁸⁸ By illustrating how habitual goals become increasingly spontaneous and matters of taste, Ravaisson explains how the mannerisms, projects, and preferences that qualify our behavior and differentiate us from others become engrained in us. The concept of inclination with its related aspects of spontaneity and taste develop the notion of tendency into an explanation of what it means for habitual ways of being to appear to be "second nature." Ravaisson chooses as an epigraph for his thesis on habit Aristotle's line from *On Memory and Recollection* that reads: "*hōsper gar phusis ēdē to ethos*," which translates to either "habit is a second nature," or more literally "habit is just like nature."⁸⁹ This invocation of the notion of second nature, I would suggest, is both literal and figurative. While on the one hand the notion of second nature is explained by the continuity between will and instinct the desire to persist represents, at the level of practice it indicates that as habits grow stronger they become more *instinctive* in the sense that they are accomplished with greater immediacy and from felt preference rather than from choice. As an inclination grows one's actions become progressively less "minded," such that the body, perception, and emotion take on increasingly agential roles in one's actions. As a result, the ideal goals that consciousness and the will posit become realized in ever strengthening tendencies that cause those goals to come to define one's practical life. The progress of habit blurs the distinction

⁸⁸ See Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103b14-22.

⁸⁹ Aristotle, *De Memoria et Remiscentia* 452a27-28.

between first and second nature, what is natural and what is acquired, as through the production of an inclination one's habitual actions and preferences become the foundation for one's way of being as a whole.

Although I have attempted to defend Ravaisson's concept of inclination as able to be put into conversation with contemporary discussions of habit and bodily intelligence, it is not without its flaws. In particular, Ravaisson does not fully resolve some of the questions that arise from his understanding of the dynamics of the production of habitual inclinations. Ravaisson's claim that the strengthening of taste can cause habits to become compulsive is left underanalyzed. Ravaisson does not enumerate the conditions under which habit "degenerates" into addiction. This is a problem especially since the dynamics of his theory of habit conceive of habitual tendencies as progressively strengthening through repetition, which would seem to imply a propensity to fall into automatism that would ultimately weaken his argument for conceiving of habit as the basis of embodied intelligence. One way that this issue could be resolved is by articulating how different habits interact with one another and perhaps prevent each other from becoming too strong. The closest Ravaisson comes to a discussion of how different forms of action affect one another, however, is in his statement that habitual goals "surpass" non-habitual goals as a result of the retraining of the body, perception, and the emotions. While this argument is persuasive enough when it comes to explaining the difficulty of consciously willing actions that differ from one's established habits, it is less helpful in articulating how different established habits affect one other (e.g., the habits associated with being a teacher, being a father, etc.). Ravaisson's is ultimately a theory of *habit*, not of *habits*, and this causes his account of the dynamics of habit acquisition to become unidirectional in a way that introduces a tension between his central claims. While on the one hand he insists that habit never leaves the "sphere...of intelligence," his analysis is too terse

to explain how the gradually increasing strength of habitual inclinations does not overwhelm that intelligence and degenerate into addiction (H55).

3. Ravaisson on Moral Pedagogy: Virtue and the Art of Life

By relating the concept of inclination to the Aristotelian notion of character, Ravaisson already hints at the moral dimensions of his theory of habit. Ravaisson ultimately confirms philosophy's value in changing everyday conduct by articulating a program of moral pedagogy that is grounded in his theory of habit. As a result, Ravaisson's conception of moral pedagogy not only avoids Shusterman's critique of intellectualism but also strengthens his claim that the body is an essential component of philosophical practice by constructing a powerful argument that the habituated body is the primary locus of moral agency. Ravaisson deploys his dynamic theory of embodied subjectivity to criticize what he views as intellectualist theories of moral pedagogy such as Aristotelian virtue ethics and the Stoic art of life. In doing so, Ravaisson demonstrates that the body is capable of learning to independently recognize and comport itself according to an ethical ideal. In place of conceptions of the moral subject that subordinate the body to rational capacities of deliberation and moral knowledge that only give rise to compliance with virtue, Ravaisson argues that the aesthetic imitation of models develops a gradually-increasing love of virtue that makes virtuous conduct into a skillful, spontaneous, and preferential state of being. In this regard, while Hadot is right to emphasize the importance of the aesthetics of grace in Ravaisson's conception of philosophical practice, reading this aesthetics through his conception of embodiment reveals that Ravaisson's appropriation of the Stoic art of life articulates a program of cultivating an embodied subject of virtue, which does not simply conform to but rather actively defines how to express virtuous commitments in particular situations, and thus serves as the basis of a strongly non-intellectualist theory of virtue cultivation and philosophical practice.

Although he does not put it in these terms in his treatise on habit, Ravaisson lays the theoretical groundwork for his interpretation of the art of life in a section of his treatise where he applies his concept of bodily intelligence to what he calls the “moral world.” Ravaisson argues that the same principles that explain how conscious practical goals become habitual apply to the project of achieving individual perfection. The moral world should be understood as merely an extension of the practical world as the “highest domain of freedom” in which it is the same person who “proposes its own end for itself, and who commands itself and who executes action” (H 71). Whereas in practical life it is possible to be carrying out another’s goals, be acting on another’s orders, or more generally be acting out of need, the moral world is delimited by one’s own understanding of the good and aspiration for “absolute perfection” (H 69). Moral pedagogy for Ravaisson is the project of achieving a particular state of character, a set of habitual dispositions that correspond to one’s conception of the good life. Making his parallel between the practical and ethical worlds explicit, Ravaisson argues that “*morals* and *morality* are formed” through repetition of willed actions that gives rise to an “inclination” to act in accordance with the good (H 69). Just as one becomes a teacher by practicing actions that accord with one’s understanding of what it means to be a teacher until those actions become habitual, one becomes good by creating a habit of acting in accordance with one’s understanding of the good. Through the process of habit acquisition one begins to act spontaneously, without reflection but intelligently, in accordance with the good, at the same time as one gains a preference or taste for doing so.

In drawing this parallel between the practical and moral worlds, Ravaisson signals that embodied intelligence and freedom, rather than conscious intentionality, are the basis of ethical agency. Although moral formation begins for Ravaisson as a willed choice to act in accordance with one’s rational understanding of the good, in its acquisition it gradually takes the form of an

inclination that becomes a spontaneous, non-conscious way of being in the world. This suspicion is confirmed when we look at Ravaisson's creative appropriation of the Aristotelian concept of virtue. While he retains Aristotle's understanding of virtue as a state or disposition (*hexis*) of character, Ravaisson displaces Aristotle's emphasis on the unity between intellectual and moral virtue and on the grounding of virtuous action in knowing choice and instead affirms a concept of virtue in which actions are not self-conscious but instead governed by bodily spontaneity and felt preference.⁹⁰ Ravaisson devotes a brief section of his study of Aristotelian metaphysics published a year prior to his thesis on habit to the role of Aristotle's metaphysical thought in his ethics, in which Ravaisson focuses on the relationship between virtue and pleasure. He interprets Aristotle's claim that the sign of a virtuous state of character is the "supervening" of pleasure on action as describing harmony between the virtuous agent's actions and feelings that allows for free choice.⁹¹ Crucially, this harmony comes about through the acquisition of a virtuous habit, which he already calls the "interior reality of action."⁹² In Ravaisson's reading, actions become pleasurable such that they can be said to follow from virtuous states of character when there is perfect harmony between dispositions (*hexeis*) and acts, or in other words when there is no divergence between an

⁹⁰ Clare Carlisle's statement that Ravaisson's theory of habit "provides a wider context" for Aristotelian moral psychology therefore does not seem to go far enough in articulating the differences between the two theories of virtue ("Between Freedom and Necessity: Félix Ravaisson on Habit and the Moral Life," *Inquiry*, 53 (2), 2010: 123-156, p. 136). While both use the language of habituation and second nature in describing the process of acquiring virtue, the dynamism in Ravaisson's theory of habit results in a much greater emphasis on pleasure and spontaneity as marks of a virtuous character rather than the ability to deliberate well.

⁹¹ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1104b4: "*Sēmeion de dei poieisthai tōn hexeōn tēn epiginomenēn hēdonēn ē lupēn tois ergois.*"

⁹² Félix Ravaisson, *Essai sur la métaphysique d'Aristote, Tome I* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlagsbuchhandlung, [1837] 1963), p. 445. Ravaisson's original *Essai sur la métaphysique d'Aristote* was completed in 1834 and was then expanded into a volume published in 1837. The concluding chapter of the 1834 *mémoire* is published as Félix Ravaisson, *De la Métaphysique d'Aristote: Mémoire sur la question mise au concours par l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques en 1833*, in Raynald Belay and Claire Marin eds., *De la nature à l'esprit: Études sur la philosophie française du XIXe siècle* (Paris: ENS Éditions, 2001: 201-213).

ethical agent's conscious choices and her "interior" preferences.⁹³ While Ravaisson's application of the language of interiority to Aristotle is questionable, the thrust of his reading is that taking pleasure from acting rightly creates a disposition to choose to act with knowledge of the good for its own sake.⁹⁴ Through habituation, the virtuous agent becomes the possessor of a stable and lasting disposition that supports the achievement of her overall life goals, and gains the ability to deliberate on how to achieve those goals.

That alignment between action and feeling is made possible through habituation in Aristotle provides Ravaisson with the opportunity to reconsider the nature of virtue in light of his theory of habit. For as we have seen, through the growth of habitual inclinations actions gradually recede from consciousness and become states in which the body desires to persist. As a result, reason will slowly cease to exercise a governing function over one's actions as one's bodily intelligence gradually increases in strength and skillfulness. The notion of simple "harmony" between reason and emotion that Ravaisson sees in Aristotle, therefore, cannot be sustained. It follows from the progressive nature of the acquisition of habits that eventually desire itself will become the basis of one's actions instead of rational deliberation. From Ravaisson's perspective, the conscious awareness of one's own actions presupposed by the notions of choice and deliberation gradually diminishes through the development of a habitual inclination. The increased immediacy of bodily spontaneity removes the need for deliberation and choice, leaving conscious free instead for other matters. Indeed, as habits become preferences and even needs, one's opportunities to engage in deliberation and choice will increasingly diminish as the body will act

⁹³ Cf. Ravaisson, *Essai sur la métaphysique d'Aristote I*, p. 450: "Custom produces habit, habit produces desire, and desire produces action."

⁹⁴ For an appraisal of Ravaisson's interpretation of Aristotle see Pierre Aubenque, "Ravaisson interprète d'Aristote," *Les Études Philosophiques*, 4, 1984: 435-450.

before consciousness can intervene. While Ravaisson's own conception of virtue retains Aristotle's emphasis on the linkage between pleasure and action, as a result of his concept of habitual inclinations it interprets the growth of pleasure through Ravaisson's theory of habit in a way that overthrows the primacy of conscious choice and deliberation in virtuous action in favor of bodily spontaneity:

Virtue is at first an effort, a cause of fatigue; by practice alone it becomes an attraction and a pleasure, a desire that forgets itself or is unaware of itself, and little by little approaches the holiness of innocence. This is the whole secret of education. Its art lies in attracting someone to the good by action, and in so doing fix the inclination for it. In this way, a *second nature* is formed (H 69).

Ravaisson's description of virtue acquisition fits neatly within his account of the double law of habit, in which habitual actions slowly grow easier to accomplish over time and eventually become pleasures. In this regard, echoes of the concepts of spontaneity and taste can be heard in this account: Ravaisson's description of a slow progress of virtue acquisition that culminates in the formation of a "second nature" recapitulates the progress of spontaneity towards automaticity and indicates that the acquisition of virtue orients bodily intelligence and inclination towards the goal of becoming good.

In reinterpreting virtue as an inclination, Ravaisson argues that being led by the pleasure associated with action is a more effective way to ensure adherence to one's commitments than acting through deliberate choice. Habituation creates a non-self-conscious desire to act virtuously that impels one to act in accordance with the good. Aristotle's understanding of the virtuous agent as someone who knowingly chooses to act rightly entails a static relationship with one's commitments that is maintained in the course of one's actions.⁹⁵ If by contrast virtue is grounded in desire, then one's attachment to it will grow over in the process of habituation: "love is augmented by its own expressions" (H 69). Virtue as a habit will grow more deeply engrained in

⁹⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1105a30-34.

the agent in the course of a virtuous life, such that the sign of a virtuous state of character goes beyond agreement between reason and desire to the point where one's desire to act rightly becomes so strong as to overcome self-awareness, such that one's actions approximate perfect spontaneity and one achieves a state of "innocence." The Aristotelian *phronimos* who deliberates and chooses right action is thus not the proper representation of the ethical subject, but rather the non-self-conscious holiness of the recipient of divine grace. Ravaisson's theological allusion indicates that habituation causes virtue to become so deeply embedded within individuals that the body appears to be spiritualized or animated in a manner that goes beyond ordinary human capabilities.⁹⁶ Quoting the "profound theologian" François Fénelon, Ravaisson claims that habit in the moral sphere functions as "preventive grace," a form of grace precedes action and the will and frees them from bondage to sin (H 71). For Fénelon, preventive grace anticipates our acts of willing and provides us with whatever dispositions are required for our improvement.⁹⁷ Grace is the assistance of god that allows humans to act in ways they could not otherwise, and for Ravaisson, habit can be analogized to grace in that it gives rise to immediate and preferential action in accordance with virtue that the rational subject cannot by itself achieve. By making virtue into an inclination, bodily spontaneity and intelligence function like a gift that allows that allows the will's ends to be fulfilled more powerfully than consciously-undertaken action can accomplish. Conscious deliberation and choice is not the source of virtuous action, but rather the unconscious and spontaneous inclination that results from the contraction of a habit.

⁹⁶ I do not discuss Ravaisson's theory of nature in detail in this chapter. On Ravaisson's understanding of nature as governed by desire and freedom see Jean-Ivar Linden, "Fin, finitude et désir infini. Quelques remarques sur l'aristotélisme de Ravaisson," in Denis Thouard ed. *Aristote au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Septentrion, 2004: 171-207), and for discussion of the influence of Schelling in particular on Ravaisson's association of freedom and nature see Gaëll Guibert, *Félix Ravaisson: D'une philosophie première à la philosophie de la révélation de Schelling, Présentation de fragments inédits*, (Paris: l'Harmattan, 2006), p. 106.

⁹⁷ François Fénelon, *Traité de l'existence et des attributs de Dieu*, Paris: Delagrave, 1872, p. 216, cf. François Fénelon, *Explication des Maximes des Saints sur la Vie intérieure*, Paris: Bloud, 1911, pp. 198-199.

Ravaisson's case for an embodied theory of moral agency is stronger than Shusterman's arguments for treating the body as a component of philosophical practice as it affirms the independence of the body as the subject of virtue. Shusterman's arguments fall down two main lines⁹⁸: first, in a manner reminiscent of Marcel Mauss' view of the body as a technological instrument, Shusterman claims that the body is our primary tool or means by which to achieve the ends of rational thought and practical action. Caring for the body thus facilitates our ability to achieve our consciously-positing ends. And second, that the body is also in part the subject of aesthetic and emotional experience, such that improving its capacities enriches our overall appreciation of the cultural world. Ravaisson's theological language, however, indicates that the habituated body does not simply take a subordinate role as consciousness' tool or means but gradually outstrips even its abilities to engage in virtuous conduct. While moral goals are consciously posited, the acquisition of a habit of virtue replaces consciousness with the body as the governing principle of ethical action. Ravaisson's case for bodily self-cultivation expands the range of embodied subjectivity outside of the practical and ethical domains to also encompass the moral domain and provides a more robust account of the role of the body as a subject of virtue. The body is capable of a desire for virtue that makes ethical conduct spontaneous in a way that rational deliberation cannot match, such that cultivation of the body is of *primary* importance in the pursuit of ethical commitments.

But how, precisely is the body to be cultivated to acquire virtue? It is surprising, given the centrality of the body as the primary subject of virtue, how little space Ravaisson gives to the methods of moral pedagogy in *De l'habitude* apart from the association of education with the production of desire cited above that is little more than a suggestion. He further hints that it is in

⁹⁸ Shusterman makes his most sustained case in his essay "Thinking Through the Body: Educating for the Humanities," in *Thinking Through the Body: Essays on Somaesthetics*: 25-46.

fact the good (or god) itself that gives rise to the desire to act according to the good, grounding his theory of virtue in a teleological metaphysics, but the process of becoming good can be understood entirely in terms of habit acquisition more generally (H 71). Yet this picture of moral formation is incomplete. Ravaisson articulates how virtue is acquired through habituation, but is silent on any notion of vice and has very little to say about the process of overcoming existing habits more generally. Ravaisson suggestively remarks that through the continuous – and likely painful – application of conscious effort, habitual actions can return to the sphere of consciousness and therefore to subordination to the will (H 57).⁹⁹ Yet how bad habits are recognized as such, and how conscious attention is directed towards them, remain unanswered questions in this account.

Ravaisson begins to answer these questions in his later work by providing an interpretation of Socratic self-examination that emphasizes the role of desire in overcoming bad habits. Socrates, Ravaisson argues, exemplifies a self-critical moment where one reflects upon one's current ways of living and attempts to change them. Ravaisson's interpretation of Socratic philosophy entails what Pierre Hadot would call a "return to oneself" in which one attempts to view and change one's own way of living from the perspective of philosophical knowledge and methodology.¹⁰⁰ Significantly, however, Ravaisson understands this return to oneself as not primarily a rational project of self-examination, but an emotional one. In place of the process of elenctic testing in which values and aspirations are subjected to rational scrutiny, Ravaisson views the Socratic return to oneself as a process of changing one's inclinations. A return to the self is necessary not in order to rationally evaluate one's goals but rather to combat the "resistance posed by prejudice and

⁹⁹ For detailed discussion of this passage see Carlisle, "Between Freedom and Necessity," pp. 140-141.

¹⁰⁰ Hadot views the "return to oneself" as the first, self-critical moment in the process of conversion, which is followed by a self-externalization towards the truth, see Pierre Hadot, "'Conversio'," in *Plotin, Porphyre: Études Néoplatoniciennes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010: 37-42).

passions” to ways of living that differ from one’s current tendencies.¹⁰¹ This resistance is not simply laziness in thought but an active striving in which preferences for current ways of life struggle against one’s conscious commitments. Socratic philosophy entails a struggle between different aspirations, and philosophical practice effects the transition from one set of goals to another.

Ravaisson’s invocation of Socrates clarifies the nature of the problems projects of moral formation face. The nature of habitual inclinations makes rational self-criticism insufficient as a motivator for change as it does not directly impact the desires that govern habitual actions. The active resistance of prejudice and passion arising from current ways of being, forms of resistance that can be interpreted as outgrowths of the desire to persist, must be countered by practice that directly replaces the specific form of desire that is their wellspring with another oriented towards the good.

Ravaisson’s appropriation of the Stoic concept of the art of life attempts to solve the related problems of (1) becoming conscious of one’s current bad habits, and (2) weakening and replacing the desires at the heart of bad habits. The concept of the art of life appeals to Ravaisson as he is in sympathy with the ideal of self-perfection it represents. Ravaisson praises Stoic ethics as having achieved to the highest degree in antiquity the project of articulating principles of “measure and harmony” that human life can follow.¹⁰² For Ravaisson, the Stoic art of life entails the total integration of reason and action and the achievement of near-perfect harmony in individual character. By viewing wisdom as an art (*ars, technē*), the Stoics provide a pedagogical method in which individuals are trained to use a rational standard of measuring appropriate actions and

¹⁰¹ Ravaisson, Félix. “Métaphysique et Morale,” *Revue de Métaphysique et Morale*, p. 451.

¹⁰² Ravaisson, *Essai sur le Stoïcisme*, p. 75.

emotions and gradually develop a habit of self-judgment.¹⁰³ In this way, the Stoic philosopher becomes conscious of her habits and gains an ability to criticize them, allowing her to pursue a life lived in accordance with the rationality immanent to the structure of the cosmos. Represented in the figure of the sage whose impulses are constantly submitted to rational examination, the Stoic ideal of “wisdom” provides an example of a pedagogy that is designed to solve the two problems associated with ethical formation and therefore of the seamless unity of philosophical commitment and everyday conduct Ravaisson hopes philosophy can provide.

Despite Ravaisson’s general admiration for Stoic ethics, however, his placement of gradually strengthening desire at the foundation of moral character prevents him from simply taking on Stoic pedagogy or its ideal of rational self-control for his own theory of moral formation. Ravaisson agrees with the Stoics that philosophical practice as a form of art functions by establishing a criterion by which one can judge one’s character and use as a measure for achieving harmony between ethical commitment and action. Using a rational standard to accomplish this goal, however, fails to inspire lasting change in conduct. Ravaisson’s grounding of behavior in an ontological desire to persist is incompatible with what he views as the rationalistic basis of the Stoic unity of character, where reason unilaterally governs action and is placed in direct opposition to the passions.¹⁰⁴ The Stoics deny that irrational nature has any ethical value, and this results for Ravaisson in the maintenance of the sage’s harmonious character through increasing tension of the soul or “force” (*iskhus*), rather than by spontaneous consonance between rational commitments

¹⁰³ Ibid., p. 57, referring to Cicero, *Tusculan Disputations* 4.6.13: “[*Boulēsis*], they think is found in the wise man alone and they define it in this way: wish is a rational longing for anything. Where, however, wish is alien from reason and is too violently aroused, it is lust or unbridled desires, which is found in all fools.” (trans. J.E. King, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1945).

¹⁰⁴ As opposed in particular to Aristotelian philosophy, where humanity is understood as “the product of concord between passive and irrational nature with the divine, supernatural principle of intelligence.” (Ravaisson, *Essai sur le Stoïcisme*, p. 56).

and desires.¹⁰⁵ The perfect harmony between reason and action in the sage's comportment is merely illusory, and Ravaisson argues that their failure to grasp the importance of desire as a component of our psychology explains the famous Stoic denials that there has ever been a living sage.¹⁰⁶ That desire is at the foundation of our ways of being causes the Stoic art of life to devolve into rational domination of the passionate and affective aspects of one's psychology, such that its failure to bring about harmony of character is inevitable.

Instead of using a rational standard of judgment as the criterion for assessing one's conduct, Ravaisson argues that applying aesthetic criteria solves the problems of becoming conscious of one's habits and creating a desire to live better without falling into self-repression. Specifically, Ravaisson argues that imitating sensible models of ideal conduct engages the body's capacity for learning and thus makes possible the stable cultivation of virtue. Crucial to Ravaisson's argument is the claim that repeated experience with such models is sufficient to train perception and desire and hence cultivates a habitual inclination for the principle that model exemplifies: "habit is born from repeated action, or if not from an action itself, frequently reproduced simulations of action: the signs that give us a manner of feeling and thinking and have the general effect of engraving the disposition in us."¹⁰⁷ Frequent experience with examples of a mode of action produces a similar, if perhaps weaker, taste for that action as a "sign" of the virtue or goal it exemplifies. Recalling from the previous sections that Ravaisson considers perception to be a form of action, his argument here can be understood as a specific application of his theory of habit acquisition.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 54: "But, now, what is this principle of constancy, upon which one relies, in spite of obstacles, to remain faithful to oneself and consistent? It is force. Thus it was to force, *iskhus*, that all the other virtues must be reduced according to Cleanthes."

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 81, cf. John Sellars, *The Art of Living*, pp. 59-64.

¹⁰⁷ Félix Ravaisson, "Conditions d'une pédagogie capable de préparer à la vie: l'exemple des Grecs," *La Nouvelle Journée*, (Nov., Dec. 1920): 260-275, 368-383, p. 381.

Examining models of virtuous action slowly develops more skillful perception of that virtue, an ability to discriminate between different forms that virtue takes in particular circumstances with increasing immediacy and ease. As this ability develops one gains an intuitive or aesthetic understanding of that virtue and learns to recognize it when it is instantiated in a particular action. At the same time, repetition also gives rise to familiarity with that virtue and ultimately a liking for it. In this way exposure to examples is able to produce a substitute habitual inclination that “engrains” a virtuous disposition in us even though one does not enact that virtue.

The practice of imitation thus solves the issues left unaddressed in Ravaisson’s early discussion of virtue by cultivating a skill of *recognizing* virtue that precedes the skill of *enacting* it. This kind of preparation engrains an aesthetic sense of virtue into one’s perceptual abilities, thereby changing one’s form of experience by allowing one to immediately interpret actions or individuals in terms of their virtuous qualities. This ability specifically allows one to recognize one’s own faults in contrast with the model’s perfection: imitation produces “good judgment of the eye,” an ability to recognize the mannerisms of a particular artist’s vision and to differentiate their style not only from others but – crucially – also from one’s own work.¹⁰⁸ The training of perception and the cultivation of taste makes possible critical assessment of one’s own work in contrast to the model and a desire to develop an individual style that matches the beauty of while not simply replicating another’s work. Extending his analogy between aesthetic and ethical judgment, Ravaisson claims that just as one gains the ability to grasp an inner principle of aesthetic style through experience with works of art, examples of virtuous conduct trains perception to perceive and judge “character,” the “principle of the...will” that is the basis of their habitual

¹⁰⁸ Félix Ravaisson, “L’art,” in Ferdinand Buisson ed. *Dictionnaire de Pédagogie et d’instruction primaire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1882: 122-124), reprinted in Jean-Michel Le Lannou ed. *Ravaisson* (Paris: Kimé, 1999: 71-75), p. 74.

tendencies and that governs their actions.¹⁰⁹ A state of character is grasped in the same manner as the serpentine principle in art, through perception that intuitively grasps the unifying principle behind an individual's actions. Through experience with models of good conduct, one learns to recognize the virtue those models exemplify and to differentiate it from other forms of character, such that the principle behind those models serves as a criterion by which to judge one's own conduct.¹¹⁰ The cultivation of taste and the training of perception work together to facilitate the Socratic return to oneself by producing a preference for virtuous ways of acting while simultaneously cultivating the ability to contrast oneself with a particular model. Contrast between one's current mannerisms and those of the model creates dissatisfaction with oneself or "restlessness" in Ravaisson's words through which a desire to be like the model arises.¹¹¹ Imitation of models thus engages the ethical practitioner at the emotional level in a much stronger fashion than the memorization of rules or codes of conduct can. Moral education occurs not through learning to apply rules to particular cases but through the training of perception and desire that ultimately results in a "good impulsion to affections, sensibility, and the will."¹¹²

Commenting on this theory of aesthetic education, Hadot argues that the goal of Ravaisson's philosophical practice is to transform one's perceptual experience of the world. The training of perception, Hadot rightly notes, is not limited to the cultivation of an ability to see particular actions as virtuous or vicious but extends to a change in our general way of interpreting

¹⁰⁹ Ravaisson, "L'enseignement du dessin d'après M.F. Ravaisson," in Ferdinand Buisson ed. *Dictionnaire de pédagogie et d'instruction primaire*, vol. 1 (Paris: Hachette, 1882: 671-684), p. 674.

¹¹⁰ Ravaisson, "Métaphysique et morale," p. 452.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 453.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

experiences.¹¹³ Our analysis of the dynamic nature of embodied subjectivity for Ravaisson allows us to understand why this is the case: repetition of interpreting actions and events in terms of their moral value gradually makes those forms of interpretation a tendency within the subject that comes to define their spontaneous comportment. For Hadot, this goal situates Ravaisson's work not only within the tradition of ancient philosophy as a way of life as a whole, but specifically as sharing its characteristic existential concern with the stultification of everyday life. Hadot views Ravaisson as a precursor to Bergson, who we will see in the following chapter understands philosophy as a project of fundamentally changing our manner of experiencing and relating to the world away from the everyday and towards a state of self-consciousness.¹¹⁴ As a result, Ravaisson's theory of aesthetic education is important to Hadot as it provides an example of how the ancient tradition of philosophy can be actualized in the present. By learning to see the grace and virtue in nature and in other people, following Ravaisson's recommendations makes achieving the aim of ancient philosophical practice of attaining consciousness and mastery over oneself possible without having to take on their theories of perception and nature.

We will look in greater detail at the relationship between Ravaisson and Bergson's forms of philosophical practice in the following chapter, but contextualizing Ravaisson's understanding of aesthetic education as an outgrowth of his theory of embodied subjectivity allows us to see how his aesthetic education's transformation of our habits of perception do not result in conscious self-mastery but in the body's own active orientation towards virtue. Against Hadot's valorization of conscious knowledge and control of oneself, Ravaisson's preference for aesthetic over rational training avoids Stoic rationalism and serves to complement his early criticism of the Aristotelian

¹¹³ See Hadot, *Plotin ou la simplicité de la regard*, p. 77. Hadot makes these remarks specifically in the context of drawing connections between Ravaisson's notion of grace and Plotinus' interpretation of the Platonic Forms.

¹¹⁴ Hadot relates Ravaisson and Bergson in *La voile d'Isis*, p. 296.

notion of deliberation by arguing that moral education is undertaken most effectively when the body functions as the subject of its own cultivation. On the one hand, setting up reason as the governor of one's conduct is unnecessary as the habituated body is capable of governing itself. More importantly, however, when pedagogy activates embodied subjectivity it gains the advantage of the skillfulness and preferentiality of habitual action. Treating the body and desire as self-regulating subjects instead of irrational principles to be excised from the philosophical life as the Stoics do allows imitation as a form of moral pedagogy to use inherent dynamism of habit to impel the body to learn to recognize virtue and desire to approximate it for itself. Once perception has been trained to recognize virtuous ideals and to differentiate them from other forms of conduct, including one's own, the body gains both the ability and the motivation to conform to that model. In doing so, the art of life as imitation effects a return to oneself that entails self-criticism but in a way that satisfies the need to engage with oneself at the level of one's desires. Imitation coaxes desire and perception to orient themselves towards virtue and thus avoids having to rely on unsustainable forms of internal coercion as the Stoics do.

Orienting desire in this manner is crucial to the success of ethical pedagogy as it provides the impetus to overcome the active resistance of bad habits. Through imitation one gains a habitual taste for one's ethical ideal and comes to recognize oneself as failing to live up to it. The restlessness that results from this tension, however, arises only when emotion is treated as just as if not more important to the process of ethical formation than reason. Desire is indeed shaped in accordance with one's rational ethical commitments, but it is ultimately desire itself, and the associated emotional sense of self-dissatisfaction, that drives one to act according to the ideal rather than reason. Just gaining a rational understanding of virtue and attempting to enact that in one's conduct does nothing to overcome the active resistance of existing ways of being grounded

in the desire to persist. While the moral life is inevitably a struggle for Ravaisson, rationalist forms of moral pedagogy deny themselves resources that help them to succeed in that struggle. Even if we do not ultimately agree with Ravaisson's strong claim that the Stoic art of life inevitably degenerates into self-repression, it seems fair to say that orienting desire makes moral pedagogy easier and makes possible a deeper form of commitment than simple conscious adherence and assent. Ravaisson goes so far as to say that cultivation of the desire to live rightly through imitation makes possible "purity of heart," where "heart" is understood as "a feeling for things of the moral order, for what relates to the affections, to the will, to the love that is their ground."¹¹⁵ Although he does not use the language of virtue in this passage, it is possible to see how imitation produces the specific form of virtue he articulates in his early work in which one is led by habitual inclination to act rightly. By transforming the "serpentine" principle of desire from which one's actions stem, imitation makes possible spontaneous action through which ethical ideals are expressed even in the absence of conscious deliberation.

The combination of the desire to act according to virtue and the trained perceptual ability to recognize it in others as well as in oneself culminates in a bodily and perceptual ability to construct new forms of virtuous action, such that the body comes to take an active role in enacting and ultimately defining ethical commitments. Once the skill of recognizing virtue has been acquired, it can be applied in one's everyday life as an intuitive knowledge of how to act rightly in particular circumstances. Ravaisson emphasizes that this ability is fundamentally creative as a form of "invention," an ability to imagine new forms of virtue that follow from one's cultivated habits.¹¹⁶ In his aesthetic work, Ravaisson understands invention as the skill that results from the

¹¹⁵ Ibid., p. 451.

¹¹⁶ The language of "invention" is again taken directly from Leonardo da Vinci (see *A Treatise on Painting*, trans. John Rigaud [New York: Prometheus, 2002], §128f).

training of perception in which one learns not only to recognize different forms of artistic style but moreover to view objects according to one's own style and to produce works of art that express that vision. Imitation gives rise to this ability when perception is trained to such a point that one is capable of imagining objects according to one's aesthetic style and representing them in one's work without engaging in conscious analysis of those objects.¹¹⁷ Invention that produces a new and unique work that application of rational technique cannot achieve. Unlike geometric or mechanical constructions of objects, invention entails the immediate application of one's developed perception that allows one to grasp objects in an individual light and to represent that experience through one's bodily abilities.¹¹⁸ For Ravaissou, while such an ability can be taught, it cannot be reduced to a set of techniques but only occurs spontaneously through one's habituated skills. Through invention therefore absolutely new works of art can be produced that cannot be reduced to what can be achieved through use of instruments or to works of other artistic styles.

Applying the concept of invention to the moral sphere allows Ravaissou to add to his earlier argument concerning the superiority of the body over rational deliberation as the subject of virtue the fact that through imitation one's adherence to ethical commitments becomes not only more of a desire but also more of a skilled. The trained body is capable of constructing new forms of virtuous conduct in different contexts that rational deliberation is incapable of imagining. Just as the skilled artist does not apply mechanical or rational techniques to see objects but instead applies their unique aesthetic vision, the virtuous subject also does not rationally analyze situations but instead immediately grasps them as opportunities for virtuous action. This perceptual ability

¹¹⁷ As Jimena Canales notes, Ravaissou was deeply involved in discussions concerning the nature of the representation of movement in art. In particular, Ravaissou – like Bergson after him – was deeply suspicious of the “cinematographic” representation of movement through the “summation of discrete moments of analysis.” (“Movement before Cinematography: The High Speed Qualities of Sentiment,” *Journal of Visual Culture*, 5 (3), 2006: 275-294, p. 289).

¹¹⁸ Ravaissou, “Dessin,” p. 676.

operates as a skill that grows over time along with the body's ability to carry out the particular actions that are imagined. Having acquired this ability through practice, the virtuous person can create new ways of acting that conform to an ethical ideal but whose relationship with that ideal is imaginative and felt, rather than rational. As with aesthetic invention, then, invention in the moral sphere entails the production of absolutely new forms of action that are irreducible to what can be produced by conscious deliberation. Reason, Ravaisson argues, serves only a negative function in distinguishing "the possible from the impossible," what strictly violates a particular virtue.¹¹⁹ When it comes to acting in particular cases, it is the perceptual and bodily ability, oriented by desire, to immediately recognize both what a particular situation requires and what constitutes a virtuous response to that situation that governs action.

Ravaisson's application of the notion of skill to his understanding of the virtuous subject ultimately vindicates the social value of philosophy in a way that also demonstrates the independence of his form of philosophical practice from those of antiquity as Hadot understands them. The body's ability to imagine new forms of virtuous action that conscious deliberation cannot allow the trained body to enact virtue under any set of social circumstances. Ravaisson even goes so far as to say that his method of teaching can be applied in public schools as a method of cultivating the "more elevated" faculties of bodily and perceptual imaginative intelligence that allow for students going into any field, particularly industrial ones, to express love of beauty and the good.¹²⁰ By introducing this pedagogical method into public schooling in this manner, philosophy can be made into a universal practice that makes the kind of liberal education that had been previously been a privilege of the few into a public good, something which Ravaisson argues

¹¹⁹ Ravaisson, *Testament Philosophique*, p. 95.

¹²⁰ Ravaisson, "Dessin," p. 684.

would exercise an equalizing impact on a social world riven by class conflicts.¹²¹ The socially melioristic function of education operates, however, precisely by avoiding the kind of self-knowledge and rational self-mastery Hadot argues Ravaissou and the ancients idealize and instead changing students' spontaneous ways of engaging with the world. Rather than utilize aesthetic ability as a tool in the service of conscious self-direction, Ravaissou hopes in his program for public education to allow it to actively impel students to exercise virtue in whatever field they enter. Cultivating an embodied ability to imagine virtue will therefore change in Ravaissou's view a student's way of approaching whatever social situations they encounter or occupation they enter, such that philosophy will be able to change not just individuals but social life as a whole for the better. Ravaissou's vision for how philosophy can prove its social value depends, in other words, on departing from what Hadot sees as the characteristically ancient project of achieving self-mastery and instead allowing the "abandon" of the habitual love of virtue to govern individual conduct.

Ravaissou's arguments that the body is capable of learning to recognize and enact virtue more effectively than through reason, and his claim that the trained body and perception are capable of inventing new forms of virtuous action, thus culminate in the recognition of the body as a genuine subject of philosophical practice. We have already seen that Ravaissou's criticism of Aristotelian deliberation deepens Shusterman's argument for viewing the body as an independent criterion for projects of aesthetic self-formation by claiming that the desire to live virtuously is a more effective form of adherence to virtue. Ravaissou's appropriation of the art of life takes these claims further by demonstrating that the habituated body not only does not need but in fact

¹²¹ Cf. Ravaissou, "Métaphysique et morale," p. 453. I do not in these remarks wish to romanticize Ravaissou's program of liberal education. While he does argue for the universal liberal education rather than for education segregated by class, his claim that such education will resolve class conflict by alleviating the condition of workers is patronizing to say the least and ignores any analysis of the material conditions in which the workers live.

functions better in the absence of conscious rational governance. Against Hadot's interpretation of his theory of artistic education, the imitation of models bypasses conscious rationality entirely and instead installs the idea of ethical perfection as an aesthetic ideal that allows one to recognize oneself as an imperfect moral being and thus to be inspired to act better. Focus on perfecting aesthetic skills instead of rational knowledge of virtue thus gives the body the ability to itself learn how to act virtuously and ultimately to invent forms of virtuous action in particular contexts. Ravaisson thus goes beyond Shusterman's identification of the body as an instrument that carries out pre-determined conscious projects of self-perfection and instead allows the body to itself posit the definition of virtue in specific settings. Ravaisson's appropriation of the art of life articulates a primary place for the body in the philosophical life, and his criticisms of the deliberative subject of Aristotelian virtue ethics and of Stoic rationalism articulate a powerful case for why self-cultivation is undertaken most effectively through practice that constructs embodied habits. The cultivation of a habitual inclination that aligns with the virtue of generosity allows the subject not simply to conform his conduct to particular virtues but rather to fully *inhabit* them, to make them into the foundation of the desires, perceptions, and abilities through which the subject engages with the world and thereby cultivate an active skill in and love of virtue.

4. Conclusion: Ravaisson's Virtues

Ravaisson's tendency to mine antiquity for resources in constructing forms of moral pedagogy may seem a strange method for vindicating the social value of philosophy for the present day. As we have seen throughout this chapter, however, Ravaisson leaves none of the ancient theories and forms of philosophical practices he references untouched. His strategy is rather to reread them through his own theories of pedagogy and of the body in a way that makes them into contemporaries. I have attempted to argue that Ravaisson's manner of appropriating Aristotelian

virtue theory and the Stoic art of life treats the body as an active subject of philosophical practice that both learns the ideals that guide self-cultivation and also defines them in specific contexts in ways that rational deliberation is incapable of accomplishing. This claim relies, however, on modernizing these ancient theories by filtering them through his own philosophical commitments. First is Ravaisson's theory of artistic pedagogy, which affirms the role of perceptual and bodily training over the use of geometric and rational methods as a way of creating a preferential skill of virtue. This theory of pedagogy, however, relies further on Ravaisson's dynamic conception of embodied subjectivity, which is itself based his theory of habit as a form of desire. Ravaisson's advances over Shusterman regarding the body's capacity to independently learn, define, and adhere to ethical ideals stem from his conception of habit as the expression of a desire to persist that expresses itself as gradually deepening skillful abilities and inclinations to act in a certain way. Ravaisson's appeal to antiquity therefore avoids nostalgically holding antiquity up as a lost ideal that we can only hope to recapture. By rereading the ancients through current theories of habit and pedagogy, Ravaisson makes them into contemporaries whose thought can affect how philosophy is understood and practiced in the present day.

Because his theory of philosophical practice relies on his theory of habit, I believe that it is a contemporary of ours as well. Working through Ravaisson's criticisms of the post-Cartesian philosophical tradition reveals not only that the questions he asks are similar to the ones we do, but also that we can learn from the answers he gives to them. I have attempted to defend Ravaisson's interpretation of habit as a tendency grounded in desire both at the ontological and at the experiential level, and that the form of embodied subjectivity that results from it can add to current ones. Despite his adherence to outdated theories of active force taken uncritically from Leibniz, that his theory of habit can be grounded in neurological principles, and that it explains

phenomena associated with habit in a way even Dreyfus' concept of skills cannot, allows it to be taken seriously as a viable conception of habit. It follows, therefore, that his conceptions of the process of virtue acquisition and of the body as the agent of philosophical self-cultivation also deserve to be put into conversations with contemporary discussions.

I will therefore conclude this chapter by contrasting Ravaisson's manner of appropriating Aristotelian virtue ethics and the Stoic art of life with contemporary theories of virtue in order to better appreciate the novelty of his approach. In this regard, I would point out two features of Ravaisson's form of philosophical practice that distinguish it from current ways of conceiving of virtue acquisition. First is Ravaisson's preference for examples over rules and for spontaneity over decision-making. Ravaisson prefers not to articulate the virtue of generosity in terms of a rational principle but rather through description of what a generous person is like. Ravaisson does not develop what Rosalind Hursthouse would call a "v-rule," a general statement of how one should act that employs a virtue term (e.g., "be honest," "do not be uncharitable,"), and that can be consciously applied in particular circumstances.¹²² Models do not give guidance on how to make decisions in particular cases but rather indicate, or in Ravaisson's words provide a "sign" of what the virtuous person is like. The task of the model is to train perception and desire to recognize virtue, to desire to live in accordance with it, and to intuit how virtue should be expressed in particular circumstances. Ravaisson's emphasis on perception over conscious application of rules in acquiring virtue stems, as I have argued, from his affective understanding of the project of self-cultivation grounded in his theory of habit. For philosophy to become the basis of everyday conduct, ethical truths must be expressed in a fashion that can *inspire* self-transformation. It is a

¹²² V-rules are specifically meant to be "action guiding," and in Hursthouse's view do not exclude moral rules or codes of conduct of the sort a deontologist might provide (*On Virtue Ethics* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999], pp. 37-39).

mistake, Ravaisson argues, to reduce philosophical truths to the “dryness of principles” in the form of rules or codes of conduct as they are not in themselves sufficient to overcome the resistance of current habits and give rise to virtuous action.¹²³

It is equally important, however, to note the implications this understanding of virtue acquisition has for the form of character it produces. The goal of philosophical practice is not to produce an ability to engage in knowing choice of good actions for their own sake but instead to change one’s desires and *as a result* to alter one’s ways of acting. Rational choice does not enter into Ravaisson’s account of the virtuous person: her conduct is instead grounded in an infusion of virtue within our habitual tendencies such that it instantiates itself within our way of being “incessantly and without any effort on our part.”¹²⁴ It is not consciousness that governs virtuous actions but habitual inclinations themselves impelling us to act spontaneously yet intelligently to express virtue in particular circumstances. Ravaisson’s understanding of virtuous conduct thus departs from Lovibond’s ideal of rational deducibility in conduct in two ways.¹²⁵ First, Ravaisson’s virtuous agent does not need to possess a rational concept or a propositional definition of a particular virtue in order to act virtuously. While nothing in Ravaisson’s account prevents the virtuous agent from possessing such knowledge, not only is it unnecessary to acquiring a virtuous state of character, but Ravaisson’s theological language also suggests that in practice it is not essential to the virtuous agent’s conduct and perhaps even distant from the virtuous agent’s non-self-consciousness. The virtuous agent instead operates on the basis of her trained perceptual ability to recognize what constitutes virtue and thereby to imaginatively “invent” ways of

¹²³ Ravaisson, *Testament Philosophique*, p. 99.

¹²⁴ Ravaisson, Félix. “Éducation,” *Revue Bleue*, 24 (17), 1887: 513-519, p. 516: “What is finally sought, what is principally aimed at, is to become a sage and not just a scholar (*savant*), where wisdom is understood as involving a way of life which is dominated not by incessant struggle but by peace of mind and a set of habits...”

¹²⁵ See pp. 5-6 of this dissertation’s Introduction.

virtuously responding to situations. This observation leads to the second difference between Ravaisson's conception of virtue and the ideal of rational deducibility, namely that "invention" as Ravaisson understands it suggests a different process of coming to act from "deduction." Whereas deduction preserves the principle from which a particular action is deduced, invention implies the creation of something new. For Ravaisson, the creativity in a virtuous state of character arises from the coordination of perception and bodily aptitudes that allows for spontaneous production of new forms of action that extend one's aesthetic sense of virtue to encompass a new situation. Since this expression takes place directly through perception and the body, consciousness does not reflect on how a particular action relates to one's moral commitments. Reason, as noted above, tells the virtuous agent nothing more than what is possible and impossible, what falls outside of virtuous conduct and what is permissible. That reason articulates an absolute limit to the possibilities for virtuous conduct precludes a radically open conception of virtue, it remains the case that virtuous action entails not merely performance but production of forms of action that are appropriate to the situation and to one's aesthetic sense of virtue. The connection between particular actions and ethical ideals is thus not rational but aesthetic, as the virtuous agent continually invents new ways of acting that appear and feel appropriate to one's commitments.

The second connection I would draw between Ravaisson's conception of philosophical practice and current ones is that it follows from his conceptions of virtue and of invention that the state of character the practitioner of the art of life acquires constantly develops. In this sense, Ravaisson's conception of virtue as intelligent comes close to that of Julia Annas, for whom virtue is "not a once for all achievement but a disposition of our character that is constantly developing as it meets new challenges and enlarges the understanding it involves (this leading to self-direction

and improvement).”¹²⁶ Whereas for Annas, however, the enlarged understanding of the nature of a particular virtue experience provides is rational and develops one’s ability to account for one’s actions¹²⁷, for Ravaisson “understanding” is attached to the body and to perception themselves. Grounding his theory of virtue in what I have attempted to argue in this chapter is best understood as a principle of bodily intelligence, the form habit takes in the body, allows Ravaisson to articulate a concept of ethical formation that entails constant progress in one’s state of character. As a specific form of habitual inclination, a virtuous habit, when enacted, becomes increasingly sophisticated, both in terms of the bodily capacities that are brought to bear to accomplish virtuous actions and of the perceptual abilities that recognize how to act virtuously in particular cases, at the same time as the desire to be virtuous strengthens. Ravaisson’s invocations of the theological notion of grace can thus be grounded in his theory of habit. That virtuous action gradually becomes un-self-conscious and thus increasingly leaves the sphere of conscious agency to the point that it appears to be a gift or a form of possession results from the nature of habit itself, which entails momentum and the gradual deepening of dispositions that takes them outside of the sphere of consciousness and makes them desires, even needs. In terms of virtuous conduct, Ravaisson’s dynamic conception of habit results in a growing ability to intuit proper responses to situations and increased immediacy in doing so. However, since habitual inclinations ultimately replace conscious agency according to Ravaisson, the virtuous agent will not be able to predict or to articulate how her character changes over time. Whereas for Annas the development of virtue entails the heightening of conscious rational knowledge of one’s actions, Ravaisson argues that self-consciousness in fact decreases over time and is replaced by perceptual skill in acting.

¹²⁶ Julia Annas, *Intelligent Virtue* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 38.

¹²⁷ Thus differentiating a “skill” of virtue from an “inarticulate ‘knack’” (ibid., p. 20).

What results from Ravaisson's conception of virtue, then, is an understanding of the self to be produced through the art of life as in a continual process of development and whose unity of character is aesthetic rather than rational. Ravaisson's conception of the art of life thus departs from the existentialist concerns that motivate programs of philosophical practice as Hadot understands them and instead allows us to think beyond ways of living philosophically where rational knowledge and a conscious self-model guide actions and states of conduct, and opens the space to think of philosophical practice as what I call an *indefinite* process of self-cultivation in which the specific ways the virtuous person acts and her state of being constantly changes and hence eludes definition. While Ravaisson argues that philosophical practice results in adherence to a particular virtue, his reinterpretation of ancient concepts of virtue and the art of life through his theory of habit culminates in an original theory of philosophical practice in which the state of character to be achieved constantly develops in ways of which one is at best only partially conscious. Ravaisson's concepts of invention and virtue articulate an emergent state of character in which actions are undertaken through embodied intelligence. Instead of undertaking action through the application of rules or engaging in conscious deliberation, perception of opportunities to act well and an increasing preference for doing so develop and increase the sophistication of virtuous dispositions and redefine the nature of virtue in particular settings while also making them more immediate. Rather than attempting to achieve conscious agency over our states of character and actions as in Hadot's understanding of philosophy as a way of life, the art of life as Ravaisson understands it entails giving up reflective governance of one's habitual tendencies and allowing those tendencies to themselves become the source of one's actions. If the art of life "forms" or "fashions" the soul as the plastic arts do, it is distinct in that once the self has been formed it

continues to form itself in ways that preserve the virtue to which it adheres but in ways that reason can only grasp in retrospect and incompletely.

In arguing that Ravaisson's theory of philosophical practice expands theoretical possibilities for conceptualizing projects of self-cultivation, I have emphasized throughout this chapter that practice as he understands it is indefinite not because of any idiosyncratic preferences on his part but because it is the logical outcome of his theory of habit as a tendency. Because his understanding of virtue and invention depend on this theory, however, the concern I articulated in the second section concerning the possibility that habit "degenerates" into addiction applies to Ravaisson's theory of practice as well. Since virtue is dynamic in the way all habitual inclinations are for Ravaisson, it runs the same risk of becoming a need and losing its intelligent character. There is a possibility given Ravaisson's theory of habit for desire to become fixated on a particular manner of acting and to strengthen to the point of becoming unmovable, under which circumstances the ability of habitual inclinations to "invent" new forms of action would be curtailed. Rather than exhibiting the immediate intelligence and perfection of the graced body, the conduct of the virtuous person could become increasingly rigid not out of adherence to rules but due to the very necessity implied in Ravaisson's concept of desire. Ravaisson's theories of virtue and of philosophical practice provide great insight into how habits are formed, but are lacking in an account of how habits can maintain their intelligence and freedom against their proneness to strengthen to the point of addiction.

Chapter 2: The Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity: Intuition and Philosophical Therapy in Henri Bergson

While Ravaisson merely provides Hadot with an example of a modern thinker supposedly animated by ancient concerns, Henri Bergson helps Hadot articulate the existential interests that are definitive of philosophy as a way of life. Bergson remains an inspiration to Hadot throughout his career, and is a key figure in his argument for the enduring viability of the ancient conception of philosophy. In 1939, he wrote his *bac au philosophie* on Bergson, in which he commented on the latter's statement that philosophy is "not the construction of a system but the resolution, once taken, to look naively in oneself and around oneself."¹²⁸ Bergson's understanding of philosophy as a decision or an attitude that the philosopher voluntarily adopts was one of the first instances of philosophy being treated not primarily as a theoretical system but as a *way of life* Hadot was confronted with, even prior to his studies of Neoplatonism and ancient philosophy more generally. For Hadot, however, the form of Bergson's philosophy as a form of practice is intimately linked to its content. Philosophers must engage in what Hadot calls a "transformation of perception" and learn to view the world "naively" because of the banality of everyday life. Hadot argues that Bergson's claim that the task of philosophy is to transform our non-reflective and automatic being in the world is based on the opposition mentioned in the previous chapter between mundane everyday perception and that of the artist or philosopher, who grasps the world without the interference of habitual concerns. Signaling the importance of this opposition, Hadot reminisces to Arnold Davidson that studying Bergson's notion of learning to look naively at oneself and at one's world was one of the first times he was exposed to what he would later call a "spiritual exercise," a practice by which the philosopher's subjectivity is transformed from one lost in

¹²⁸ Quoted in Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness: Conversations with Jeannie Carlier and Arnold I. Davidson*, trans. Marc Djaballah and Michael Chase (Stanford: Stanford University Press, [2009] 2011), p. 125.

practical concerns to one conscious of itself as a free and rational being who is in control of its own comportment. Bergson's form of philosophy gives insight into the concerns Hadot would eventually find operative throughout ancient philosophy and ultimately as perennial issues animating philosophical practice as a whole.

If Bergson helped to inspire Hadot's early musings on the nature and function of philosophy, his work is equally important to this dissertation's narrative. It is well-known that Bergson develops a theory of habit that both responds to Ravaisson's work while also departing from it in significant ways. In this chapter, I intend to bring conversations regarding Bergson's theory of habit and his conception of philosophical practice that have typically been kept apart in commentarial literature together.¹²⁹ Doing so will involve contextualizing Hadot's interpretation of Bergson within the latter's theory of habit in order to better understand the motivations behind Bergson's form of philosophical practice. Bergson attaches the existential concerns regarding perceptual experience of the world to the loss of individual agency and self-determination in everyday conduct. Insofar as it attempts to not only garner a richer perceptual experience of the world, but also to regain this lost agency, Bergson's form of philosophical practice is therefore *therapeutic*. Bergson's philosophical practice is structured by an opposition between conscious determination of one's own actions and their external determination by mechanical or social necessity. What connects Hadot's analysis of Bergson's philosophical practice and the interests of

¹²⁹ To his credit, Hadot does mention that Bergson opposes transformed or "naïve" perception to habitual perception, but does not go on to investigate Bergson's arguments for how habit "dulls" or "deadens" perception (see for instance Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 248-249). More recently, Lefebvre's reading of the late Bergson as articulating a theory of human rights as self-care correctly opposes the "open soul" to the self formed by habits as described in Bergson's late work *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: PUF, [1932] 2013), in English as *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra and C. Brereton (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1979). He does not, however connect Bergson's late discussion of habit's role in producing the "social self" of duty that covers over the individual self with his earlier theory of habit that addresses its effects on the body and on perception (Alexandre Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life: On Bergson's Political Philosophy* [Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013], pp. 48-50).

this dissertation is that for Bergson habit is what causes our behavior to become externally determined, such that the transformation of perception functions by overcoming the effects of habit. Whereas in the previous chapter we saw that Ravaisson regards habit as the seat of bodily intelligence and spontaneity that gives rise to invention, Bergson equates habit with materiality, pure repetition that contains in itself no principle of change.¹³⁰ For Bergson, habit acquisition entails limitation of an individual's possibilities of action and perception, which while helpful and even necessary in practical life closes one off from seeing new ways of living and causes one to think and act in a deterministic fashion. I will argue that Bergson's concept of "intuition" should be interpreted as a practice of philosophical therapy that overcomes the external determination of actions caused by habit. What Hadot calls the "transformation of perception" is in fact the training of perception to experience the flow of qualitative states Bergson calls duration. Grounding one's perception in this experience of novelty makes it possible to grasp and enact possibilities that arise from one's own consciousness rather than from the outside.

Section one will demonstrate against the claims of recent commentators that Bergson's theory of habit does not entail either a rejection or a misinterpretation of Ravaisson's work but an attempt to interpret habit naturalistically while retaining key elements of his understanding of bodily intelligence. While Bergson interprets habit as a form of mechanism, he does not therefore return to post-Cartesian pictures of the body but instead articulates a form of embodied practical intelligence that allows it to be viewed as inherently purposive. Habit acquisition adds to the body's capacity to resolve needs and achieve goals by producing channels within the nervous system that Bergson calls "motor mechanisms" defining specific and closed sets of motions that are enacted

¹³⁰ Henri Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: PUF, [1938] 1985), p. 210, in English as Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle Andison (Mineola, N.Y.: Dover, 2007), p. 158: "...at the limit will be pure homogeneity, the pure *repetition* by which we will define materiality." Throughout this chapter, I cite the pagination from French editions of Bergson's works before English translations, separated by a slash.

according to the exigencies of particular situations. In concurring with Ravaisson that the body is goal-oriented, Bergson in fact develops the former's position by showing how habit acquisition directly impacts perception by limiting it to aspects of entities relevant to particular actions. The actual departure Bergson makes from Ravaisson is in viewing habit and the habituated body as mechanically determined and hence as incapable of producing new forms of activity. Whereas Ravaisson argues that habit is the ground of invention, for Bergson habit in itself contains no principle of spontaneity and hence can only repeat previously undertaken actions. While in everyday life actions are "skilled" in the sense discussed in the previous chapter to the extent that consciousness and habit interact in order to alter and adapt actions to particular circumstances, the more actions become habitual the more they become mechanically determined.

Section two will engage more directly with Hadot's reading of Bergson, and will argue that Bergson's call for a transformation in perception is in fact motivated by therapeutic concerns. Whereas Hadot simply notes that perception is cut off from the unfolding of duration, we will see that this separation is in fact the result of a dynamic relationship between habit and consciousness that forces consciousness to exert increased amounts of effort to see the world as it truly is. Understanding this dynamic will allow us to see that habit can cause us not simply to lose our ability to view the world correctly, but also to lose agency over our actions. Habit lowers the level of consciousness' tension to the point that it cannot resist the pressures of practical and social need. As a result, we lose the ability to hesitate and choose our actions, such that they become mechanically determined. Bergson argues that two negative conditions of life result from this loss of agency. First is an inflexibility of character that prevents one from engaging with new situations, a claim Bergson makes directly in opposition to Ravaisson. Bergson also goes beyond Ravaisson by relating his theory of habit more directly to social life in claiming that the loss of agency results

secondly in conformism and blind adherence to social custom. These are the problems it is the task of philosophical therapy to resolve.

Section three will finally turn to Bergson's concept of intuition, which serves not only as an epistemological method but also as a philosophical therapy designed to restore conscious agency in everyday life. Intuition entails the effortful exertion of conscious attention to our perceptual environment in a way that not only reopens us to experiencing novelty but also ourselves as freely self-creating entities. Intuition functions by raising the level of conscious tension, thereby making us capable of creating ourselves in actual fact. As a result, intuition differs from other forms of philosophical therapy in that it is not merely applied contextually to resolve disturbances when they arise but also forms the basis of a way of life in its own right. By thrusting perceptual experience into duration, intuition gives rise to what Bergson calls good sense, a form of radical self-creation in which through the application of effort one constantly invents new forms of action in response to circumstances and gains consciousness of oneself as an individual. In this way intuition resolves the issues of inflexibility and conformism at the same time as it makes possible what I call a "radical self-shaping" that entails constant production of radical novelty within oneself. Intuition should thus be understood as an indefinite form of philosophical practice that affirms radical novelty in a stronger manner than Ravaisson, though I will argue in the conclusion that it is best understood as a component of Ravaisson's philosophical practice rather than a competitor to it.

1. The Logic of the Body: Ravaisson and Bergson

Assessing the relationship between Bergson and Ravaisson's theories of habit is made difficult by the lack of explicit evaluation on Bergson's part. Bergson's *Notice* concerning Ravaisson's life and works contains his most extended discussion, but at its outset Bergson notes

a difficulty in interpreting the latter's works. Ravaisson's ideas, he says, have become classic to the philosophical tradition despite the brevity of his career as a philosopher, such that reconstructing them "in their original form," untouched by later interpretations or current knowledge of the issues he addresses, has become difficult. Bergson's solution, to do justice to Ravaisson's claims by "extending" them, has led to a great deal of disagreement among commentators in regards to how Bergson's theory of habit should be situated with respect to Ravaisson's and to the problems of the relationship between mind and body to which it responds.¹³¹ What Bergson means precisely by "extending" Ravaisson's arguments, and whether he extends them to his own theory of habit, are left unclarified, and as a result there has been little agreement among commentators except in regards to the basic fact that Bergson's theory of habit departs from Ravaisson's in crucial respects.

The position I will defend in this section is that Bergson's mechanistic theory of habit attempts to reinterpret Ravaisson's conception of bodily intelligence in a way that does not rely on its metaphysical underpinnings. While Bergson's interpretation of habit as a physical mechanism appears to retreat to the dualistic theories of the body we saw criticized in the previous chapter, it is in fact part of a naturalistic account of the human body as inherently purposive. Habitual "motor mechanisms" function as a stock of possible actions available to be enacted to resolve particular needs, and Bergson argues that these possibilities constitute the body's orientation towards action. While habit for Bergson plays an important role in the production and maintenance of bodily intelligence, he departs from Ravaisson in denying habit an inherent principle of freedom. Habit

¹³¹ Bergson, "La vie et l'oeuvre de Ravaisson," in *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 267/198, cf. p. 253n1/223-224n34: "Mr. Jacques Chevalier, member of the publication Committee for collection in which this volume appeared, had preceded the study with these words: 'The author had at first thought of making a few revisions. Then he decided to re-edit these pages as they were, even though they remain, as he says, exposed to the accusation made against him of having ever so slightly 'Bergsonified' (*Bergsonifié*) Ravaisson. But, Mr. Bergson adds, it was the perhaps the only way of clarifying the subject, by extending it.'"

for Bergson is purely passive and mechanically caused, such that habit only entails the reapplication of actions undertaken in the past rather than the construction and alteration of new ones. In opposition to Ravaisson's argument that as habits develop they become increasingly skillful, for Bergson the formation of habit results in increased automatism and decreased adaptability to new circumstances in one's manner of action. As a result, to the extent that our actions are governed by habit they are governed by mechanical causality and necessity.

The question of whether and how Bergson's theory of habit is an extension of Ravaisson's arises due to the different ways they attempt to explain similar phenomena, namely the body's capacity to acquire new possibilities of action. Ravaisson's and Bergson's accounts of habit explain how new forms of action are learned and preserved within the body. The three features of habitual action Bergson enumerates, however, reveal the differences between those accounts. Habitual action according to Bergson: first, is acquired by "repetition of the same effort;" second, requires "first the decomposition, and then the recomposition of the whole action;" and third, is preserved as a "mechanism that is set in motion by an initial impulse, in a closed series of automatic movements, which succeed each other in the same order and take the same amount of time to complete."¹³² While the first feature of habit is shared with Ravaisson, the second and third evidence an opposition between active and passive roles of consciousness and the body that is alien to his approach. Consciousness plays an active and causal role in the process of habit acquisition, instigating the process and ultimately functioning as the sole agent of learning. Learning occurs through the conscious analysis or "decomposition" of an action into particular motions that the body repeats, followed by their "recomposition" into a complete action through the application of conscious effort. Learning a poem by heart entails breaking it up into individual

¹³² Ibid., p. 84/80

parts that can be remembered more easily.¹³³ Having done so, the student then repeats each individual part until it is remembered and then links each part together until the whole is remembered. While Ravaisson does not demand that habitual actions originate in explicit acts of will, Bergson argues that all actions are learned through application of conscious effort. Conscious effort mediates each stage of the learning process, and only while it is in activity does change in one's actions occur.

While consciousness is the agent of learning and habit acquisition, the body takes on an entirely passive role. Bergson's third feature of habitual action in particular associates the habituated body with a principle of passivity in the manner of philosophers such as Butler, Hume, and Maine de Biran discussed in the previous chapter. For one, viewing habit as a mechanism indicates that it does not possess a principle of freedom but is rather determined by the laws of efficient causality. Once an "impulse" is delivered to the habituated body it responds necessarily and immediately. Rather than interpreting the freedom of the habituated body as a continuum of spontaneity that moves between reflective freedom and mechanical necessity and only touching the latter extreme through a process of degeneration, Bergson regards habit as in itself automaticity, an immediate response to a stimulus that occurs invariably. The passivity of the habituated body also entails a lack of adaptability. Whereas Ravaisson argues that habitual inclinations adapt to new circumstances and coordinate an individual's ends with bodily and environmental means, for Bergson the motions associated with habits are "closed" and do not change. They follow each other in an invariable order and take an invariable amount of time. Habit in Bergson's definition cannot be understood as a dynamic *ability* that makes possible a range of actions: it is instead a pathway that exists within the nervous system and subtends a specific and

¹³³ Ibid., p. 83/79.

closed set of motions, or in other words, a single and complete *act*. As a passive and non-adaptive entity comprised of various mechanisms, the body appears in Bergson's theory of habit appears to lack any principle of freedom but seems to reside entirely within the realm of causal necessity.

Bergson's theory of habit as a mechanism presents a problem because it appears to be at odds not only with Ravaissou's theory but also with his own identification of the body as a "center of action." The human body is unique among objects according to Bergson in that it is capable of escaping causal necessity and exercising a "genuine and therefore a new action upon the surrounding objects".¹³⁴ The body's capacity for undetermined and novel actions is in tension, however, with the determined and passive nature of habitual motor mechanisms. Ravaissou explains the body's freedom through the concept of inclination, in which the desire to persist gives rise to the constant calibration and adaptation of bodily potentialities to new situations. Since for Bergson it is only consciousness that changes and learns actions, however, the habituated body appears to do no more than reenact learned actions when determined to do so by reception of a stimulus and as a result has no role in freedom. This tension in Bergson's account has led some commentators to read his mechanistic and materialist understanding of habit as weakening his assertions regarding the human body's intelligence and freedom and ultimately as a retreat towards mind-body dualism.¹³⁵ Indeed, one could even say that Bergson's grounding of habit in neurological changes associates his theory with the "physicalist" accounts that we saw Ravaissou criticize in the previous chapter. Such an interpretation appears to be confirmed by the distinction

¹³⁴ Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire: Essai sur la relation du corps à l'esprit* (Paris: PUF [1896] 2012), p. 14, translated into English as *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone, 1991), p. 20.

¹³⁵ The immediate American reception of Bergson tended to view Bergson as attempting to update post-Cartesian thought in light of recent advances in the sciences, see Larry McGrath, "Bergson Comes to America," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 74 (4), 2013: 599-620, pp. 605-607. More recently, while recognizing that Bergson's dualism does differ in crucial ways from Descartes', Mark Sinclair argues that his mechanistic theory of habit reverts to the classical dualism between mechanism and freedom, see "Is Habit the 'Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity?'" Ravaissou, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty," cf. Sinclair, "Embodiment," and also in Carlisle, *Of Habit*, pp. 91-96.

Bergson draws between “dynamic” and “mechanistic” explanations of habit in his early lectures and his stated preference for the latter.¹³⁶ Bergson correctly recognizes that Ravaissou participates in a tradition stretching back through Leibniz to Aristotle that regards habit as the effect of an interior force of spontaneity rather than of mechanism. Against this tradition, however, he argues that recent developments in the scientific understanding of inertia and the brain vindicate the accounts of Descartes and Malebranche, who argue that matter “stores” (*emmagine*) actions as habits in the “animal spirits” or nervous system.¹³⁷ In articulating his theory of habit, Bergson appears to be primarily interested in making his account cohere with recent developments in the physical sciences and as a result retreats from Ravaissou’s conception of embodied subjectivity.

To suggest on the basis of these differences, however, that Bergson either rejects Ravaissou’s theory of habit and returns to Cartesian dualism, or that he misinterprets it in an otherwise “elegant and perceptive appreciation” of his work, misses Bergson’s critique of classical materialism and therefore what is original about his theory of habit.¹³⁸ Instead of rejecting Ravaissou’s association of habit with freedom and bodily intelligence and reinserting Cartesianisms into his conception of the body, Bergson attempts to read Ravaissou naturalistically in a way that still affords habit a role in bodily intelligence and freedom, albeit a very different one from what Ravaissou believes it to be. Bergson affirms “the reality of spirit and the reality of matter” in a perspective that is “frankly dualistic” but that does not fall into the trap of viewing bodily movements as either the cause or the occasion for mental representations, instead rejecting

¹³⁶ Henri Bergson, *Cours II: Leçons d’esthétique; Leçons de morale, psychologie et métaphysique* (Paris: PUF, 1990), pp. 268-271.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 270.

¹³⁸ Gary Gutting (*French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001], p. 12) does not recognize Bergson as changing any of Ravaissou’s account of habit, incorrectly implying that Ravaissou interprets habit as a form of mechanism. Janicaud, however, claims that Bergson commits a “contre-sens sur la méthode ravaissouienne, et du même coup sur la nature de l’habitude” (*Ravaissou et la métaphysique*, p. 49).

representationalist theories of consciousness altogether.¹³⁹ While habit is in itself determined, automatic, and closed, it is not therefore divorced from conscious freedom but is rather its preservation in material form. Bergson presents this view at the end of a statement summarizing Ravaisson's theory of habit:

For motor habit, once acquired, 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 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 demonstrating of this truth, that mechanism is not sufficient unto itself: it is, so to speak, only the fossilized residue of a spiritual activity.¹⁴⁰

Without repeating the objections to this statement as an accurate reading of Ravaisson, it is important to note the manner in which it “Bergsonifies” Ravaisson's theory of habit. Despite his use of the language of stimulus and response in his description of habit, Bergson nevertheless insists that habit demonstrates the insufficiency of mechanism taken by itself as a principle with which to account for the body. Regarding habit simply as retention of physical change ignores our conscious experience of it as resulting from our own actions. Memorizing a poem cannot occur through efficient causality alone: a genuine principle of conscious freedom is required to explain the various stages by which such learning occurs. Habit can only be understood as the preservation or storing of freedom in a “fossilized” form, one that can no longer change but that retains the originally free act and allows it to be repeated when necessary. Habit is indeed an “enmattering” of freedom that transforms it into mechanism, but the phenomenon of habitual learning demonstrates complementarity between matter and freedom that is incompatible with a reduction of the body to simple geometrical extension.

¹³⁹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 1/9.

¹⁴⁰ Henri Bergson, “La vie et l'oeuvre de Ravaisson,” p. 285/197-198, translation slightly amended.

Bergson's use of the language of mechanism in describing habit does not constitute a rejection of bodily freedom and intelligence, but is instead part of an attempt to derive them from a principle other than from "hyperorganic" forces as Ravaisson does. Bergson's statement of preference for mechanical theories of habit arises in the context of arguing that the concept of physical inertia as developed by philosophers who respond to Ravaisson's work such as Auguste Comte, Émile Boutroux, and the "ingenious writer" Léon Dumont, serves precisely this function.¹⁴¹ At that time, however, Bergson was also deeply engaged in the study of recent psychological and neuroscientific research, and in his 1896 work *Matter and Memory* Bergson presents a fully neurological theory of habit that grounds its role in bodily intelligence in its effects on perception. Even though habit is externally determined, Bergson argues, it facilitates goal-oriented activity by deepening and maintaining the connections perception makes in the nervous system between stimuli and actions. Perception is action- rather than knowledge-oriented, and Bergson derives bodily intelligence from its function of filtering, or in Mullarkey's words "subtracting" from, the innumerable facets of the external world and their mutual interactions to only those that pertain to the individual's interests and needs.¹⁴² This process of filtering is the opposite of representationalist theories of perception in which a layer of subjectivity is added to the world, and instead entails the selection those aspects of it relevant to possible actions the body

¹⁴¹ Bergson, *Cours II*, pp. 269-270, citing Léon Dumont, "De l'habitude," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Étranger*, 1, 1876: 321-366, pp. 323-324. For Dumont, inertia is a property of conserving physical change that can be found in all matter, organic and inorganic. Against the pan-psychism implicit in Leibniz's concept of force, Dumont argues that inertia is a mechanical property in which physical change causes matter to "contract" in ways that when repeated give rise to habits. Over time, the material of a shirt will conform to the body that wears it, just as a lock and key are altered through continual use such that the former is turned more easily over time.

¹⁴² John Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1999), p. 43. Bergson makes this argument by drawing on psychological studies of reading, which he calls an act of "divination," in which rather than looking at each letter of a particular text test subjects look only at typical images within a text and use memory to project what the remainder of the text is likely to say, see A. Goldscheider and R.F. Müller, "Zur Physiologie und Pathologie des Lesens," *Zeitschrift für Klinische Medizin*, 23, 1893: 131.

can perform. Perception in this sense is a bodily, or more specifically a cerebral, movement that consists of a “virtual action” or the preparation for a possible action of the body on the world.¹⁴³ This process of subtraction occurs through the production of channels that link the peripheral and central nervous system and index perceptions to specific bodily actions, thereby creating a practical schema that bears resemblance to the Heideggerian notion of *Zuhandenheit*.¹⁴⁴ Insofar as perception is action-focused and not a “speculative” faculty it is crucial to the body’s status as a center of action in which the nervous system “choose[s] intelligently” the actions that accomplish particular goals.¹⁴⁵ For Bergson, perception is a principle of bodily intentionality that constitutes a purposive and hence intelligent stance towards the world.¹⁴⁶

While not strictly necessary to the purposiveness of the body, the acquisition of motor mechanisms adds to its capacity for intelligent action by increasing the number of potential motions to which perception can attach stimuli. In making this claim, Bergson’s account of the role of habit in bodily intelligence draws a closer connection between habit and perception than Ravaisson does. Habit cannot be understood as mediating or coordinating between perceptual and bodily capacities, because for Bergson perception is not only in itself a form of action but also directly instigates actions and is therefore intimately tied to the body. The construction of motor mechanisms instead facilitates the intelligent selection of possible actions by making travel along

¹⁴³ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 18/23. For discussion of Bergson’s critiques of representationalist theories of perception see F.C.T. Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 18f.

¹⁴⁴ Alain Panero is correct to say that Bergson “substitutes for the Kantian schematism a schematism of utility,” though to be sure not a schematism that belongs to a transcendental “I” (*Corps, cerveau et esprit chez Bergson: Le spiritualisme minimaliste de Matière et Mémoire* [Paris: L’Harmattan, 2006], p. 33). Rather, as Frédéric Worms argues, the form of images, that is the part of external matter that has been isolated from its indefinite flux, is relative to the needs of our action (“Matter and Memory on Mind and Body: Final Statements and New Perspectives,” in John Mullarkey ed. *The New Bergson* [New York: Manchester, 1999: 88-98], p. 92).

¹⁴⁵ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 154/138.

¹⁴⁶ Cf. Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy*, p. 49.

the pathway running between perception, the brain, and muscles automatic.¹⁴⁷ Bergson even suggests a continuity between habit and perception by referring to habit as a form of memory, not because “it conserves past images, but because it prolongs their useful effect into the present moment.”¹⁴⁸ So-called “habit memory” preserves specific responses from past situations in the form of mechanisms that can serve as the termini of the pathway from perception to action. Motor mechanisms provide a “ready-made response” to the “question” perception poses to the body of what action should be undertaken to achieve one’s goals in a specific set of circumstances that “renders the question unnecessary.”¹⁴⁹ The process of habitual learning results in a stock of actions that are available to be called up when necessary, and in storing these actions in the nervous system and the muscles habit causes them not only to conform to the interests of the free individual but also to make the achievement of those interests automatic. The more such motor mechanisms are preserved, the greater a reserve of possible actions one possesses, and the more nuanced and contextual one’s actions can be. Habit memory thus effects what Bergson calls the “correspondence to environment” that allows efficient selection of actions appropriate to achieving goals in specific settings.¹⁵⁰ While habitual actions are themselves determined mechanistically, when aggregated they add to the body’s capacities to respond to new requirements and needs and over time become the material basis of its intelligence.

Bergson’s theory of habit parallels Ravaisson’s to the extent that it places habit at the center of the body whose intelligence is defined by its ability to achieve goals automatically. What Bergson’s theory of habit lacks, however, is a principle of freedom. The fundamental difference

¹⁴⁷ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 80/84.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 87/82.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43/45.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 80/84.

between the two in fact lies in Bergson's insistence that habit is a *passive* phenomenon that is incapable of spontaneity and hence cannot give rise to new forms of action. While for Ravaisson habit entails the continuous calibration of bodily potentialities to external conditions, Bergson claims that it is consciousness alone that is capable of such creativity. Bergson's understanding of bodily intentionality entails only the intelligent application of past actions to present circumstances, not the production of new forms of action. Bergson instead accounts for bodily adaptation and freedom dualistically, as the interplay between habit and the opposed principle of consciousness. Specifically, Bergson focuses on the power of conscious attention, an effortful process of supplementing filtered images with ones drawn from "image memory," retained images of past experiences.¹⁵¹ While habit acquisition determines the body to act according to a particular mechanism, attention introduces indeterminacy into the body by expanding the possibilities for action. Attention opposes the tendency of perception, aided by habit, to limit itself to what is immediately relevant for action by synthesizing filtered images and memory images to create a composite in which new possibilities can be recognized and chosen.¹⁵² In doing so, attention introduces a temporal delay between stimulus and response that opens the space for free choice of actions rather than replication of past ones.¹⁵³ These two elements of enriched images and a temporal delay result in the possibility of creating "genuine and new action" that cements the body's "privileged position" among objects: instead of automatically repeating what one has done

¹⁵¹ Ibid., pp. 111-112/102.

¹⁵² Bergson draws again here on experimental psychology, specifically referencing studies in which images, "stored in memory, which simply resemble it, and others, finally, which are more or less distantly akin to it," all "go out to meet the perception, and, feeding on its substance, acquire sufficient force and life to express itself with it." Ibid., pp. 112-113/103. On Bergson's use of experimental psychology in his analysis of attention see Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp. 133-135.

¹⁵³ Cf. Henri Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle* (Paris: PUF, [1919] 2009), p. 11, translated into English as Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy*, trans. H. Wildon Carr (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, [1920] 2007), p. 11: "If consciousness signifies memory and anticipation, it is because consciousness is synonymous with choice."

in the past, attention makes possible the composition of novel forms of action of which the individual is the genuine author.¹⁵⁴ If habit preserves freedom in the form of mechanisms, conscious attention actualizes freedom by producing the conditions for the construction of genuinely novel and unconditioned actions.

Bergson accounts for skilled behavior by interpreting the body as a site of productive tension between the determinism of habit and the freedom achieved through conscious attention.¹⁵⁵ For Bergson, habit and consciousness require each other: if habit alone is unable to instigate and alter actions, consciousness alone is too inefficient to be the sole basis of everyday conduct. Having to compose and choose each individual action anew would require amounts of time and mental effort that would ultimately make everyday functioning impossible, and the possession of automatic mechanisms for action frees consciousness to attend to other matters.¹⁵⁶ Habit and consciousness are *theoretically* independent principles and function in opposed ways, but for precisely this reason they are *in practice* interdependent, and their interaction results in adaptation of action to circumstances. Bergson illustrates the interaction between consciousness and habit with the image of an upside-down cone, whose wide base consists of inert memory images and whose tip is the habit memory that produces instantaneous action. This cone is formed by the relative degrees of strength of consciousness and of habit, and bodily states result from their

¹⁵⁴ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 14/20.

¹⁵⁵ In this regard my reading of Bergson's understanding of the role of habit-memory in the accomplishment of "skilled" action is closer to G. William Barnard's, in which motor mechanisms only "function effectively" when combined with consciousness (*Living Consciousness: The Metaphysical Vision of Henri Bergson* [Albany: SUNY Press, 2011], p. 156), than to Edward Casey's, in which skill is one possible form of habit memory among others ("Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty," *Man and World*, 17, 1984: 279-297, p. 282).

¹⁵⁶ On the importance of "routines" in practical life for Bergson see Elizabeth Grosz, "Habit Today: Ravaisson, Bergson, Deleuze and Us," *Body & Society*, 19 (2&3), 2013: 217-239, pp. 227-228. Alexandra Renault makes a similar point in noting how the fall into automatism is not a "contingent" but a "necessary" materialization of consciousness and freedom ("L'habitude chez Bergson: Une esquisse du concept phénoménologique de *Stiftung*?", *Alter*, 12, 2004: 79-103, p. 98), cf. Nann Clark Barr, "The Dualism of Bergson," *The Philosophical Review*, 22 (6), 1913: 639-652, p. 646.

equilibrium. Skilled activity results when the body exists in a state where consciousness and habit both possess moderate degrees of strength or “tension,”¹⁵⁷ such that recall of image memory can take the role of “guiding” motor mechanisms and giving them “the direction suggested by the lessons of experience” without inhibiting them to too great a degree.¹⁵⁸ At this equilibrium, while the body does not learn new actions it does become capable of altering existing motor mechanisms by continuing the process of decomposition and recombination conscious activity had started. Through the guidance of image memory, the body is able to differentiate elements of its actions and refine them in light of new circumstances. In doing so, the body develops the “internal structure” of actions, defining and differentiating the motions of which the action is composed and thereby giving the action greater complexity and potential to respond to new situations.¹⁵⁹ While habit is in itself incapable of giving rise to adaptability, its interaction with conscious attention at varying levels of tension gives rise to not only intelligent but also fluent and near-automatic interaction with the world.

While Bergson has room to account for the adaptiveness and freedom of bodily acts, that he must appeal to consciousness to do so highlights the essentially deterministic nature of habitual actions. Bergson’s mechanistic theory of habit attempts to ground a conception of bodily intelligence in naturalistic and ultimately neurological principles rather than in a metaphysics of desire. While habit plays a crucial role in the production and expansion of that purposiveness, however, it takes the form of a static *logic* that coordinates particular ends with existing means rather than the dynamic coordination and adaptation of potentialities Ravaisson describes.

¹⁵⁷ The concept of “tension” will be discussed in greater detail in the following section.

¹⁵⁸ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 169/152.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123/111-112.

Whereas in Ravaissou habit entails the progressive expansion of capacities, Bergson's rejection of the Aristotelian ontology of *hexis* in favor of contemporary neuroscience causes him to view habit as a set of acts that are learned and preserved as a stock that can be called up when necessary. Bodily intelligence, in other words, is not a creative intelligence as it is in Ravaissou. While Ravaissou considers automatism and the inability to adapt to new situations as the degeneration of habit, for Bergson these are its fundamental characteristics as a form of physical mechanism. It is therefore consciousness alone that is capable of acquiring new forms of action and of adapting existing ones, such that it is only through application of conscious attention and effort that the body is capable of freedom. By viewing the body as the site of tension between consciousness and the body, Bergson is capable of accounting for an embodied form of freedom, but that freedom is merely preserved in habit rather than actualized through it. The body's indeterminacy and capability to determine itself arises only through conscious effort, not through habit in itself.

I will return to the issue of relating Ravaissou and Bergson's accounts of habit in this chapter's conclusion, but for the present I would suggest that what Bergson's theory of habit highlights over and above Ravaissou's is the phenomenon of routines, or what Gilbert Ryle would call "single-track" dispositions.¹⁶⁰ Single-track dispositions are manifested only when instigated by an external cause and only in one way, as opposed to multi-track dispositions that can manifest themselves spontaneously and in different ways. Such openness (and I would add, skillfulness) in one's ways of acting is for Bergson only possible through the application of a certain amount of conscious effort. Instead, what Bergson's theory of habit gives insight into are the mass of routinized actions that do not adapt to new circumstances but are equally necessary to our practical life. To take an example from Julia Annas, when one drives the same route every day one ceases

¹⁶⁰ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1949), pp. 43-45. Ryle in fact refers to such dispositions as "habits."

to notice the specific acts associated with driving (e.g., putting one's keys in the car, disengaging the parking brakes, etc.). These acts become routines in the sense that conscious thought becomes disengaged with these action, such that they occur automatically and unchangingly.¹⁶¹ By viewing habit as the “fossilization” or material preservation of freedom rather than as a principle of spontaneity, Bergson allows us to consider even “mere routines” are constituents of embodied practical intelligence. Even though habit operates according to mechanical causality, their existence as a stock of available actions frees consciousness from having to attend to each individual act and instead allows particular motions to respond to situations automatically.

2. Habit, Duration, and Conscious Freedom

Interpreting Bergson on habit is also difficult because of the differing ways he evaluates it. While we saw in the previous section that habit for Bergson performs a necessary and useful function in practical life, on other occasions he focuses negative attention on its passivity and automatism. He is particularly concerned with the effects of habit on our ability to freely determine our ways of acting, at times referring to automatism as the “degradation” of conscious freedom, a “menace,” and as something that “stifles” our creative impulses.¹⁶² Disentangling these differing evaluations of habit by examining the way Bergson argues it affects conscious experience will provide insight into how and why Bergson's philosophical practice is therapeutic. Bergson acts as a diagnostician who identifies a persistent behavioral problem or *condition*, the lack of individual agency over actions, that afflicts us in our everyday lives, and provides a causal explanation of it, namely the dynamic effects of habit on consciousness. Doing so will also deepen Hadot's interpretation of Bergson's form of philosophical practice. Hadot is correct that the practical

¹⁶¹ Annas, *Intelligent Virtue*, p. 13.

¹⁶² See for instance Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 128/134; 184/198, *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 17/17.

orientation of everyday or non-philosophical perception is closed off from experience of the metaphysically true world, and that the “force of habit” forms part of the constraints on perceptual experience.¹⁶³ While Hadot treats habitual perception and unmediated experience simply as separate phenomena, however, Bergson in fact makes the stronger claim that habit exerts dynamic pressure on consciousness that prevents it from experiencing the continuous flux of qualitative states Bergson calls duration. Whereas Hadot’s interpretation views the transformation of perception to experience duration as good in itself for Bergson, equally of concern to him is that the limitation of perception weakens our ability to make choices and causes to act deterministically. This loss of conscious agency expresses itself in two *symptoms*. First, by preventing us from uncovering new ways of thinking about and experiencing the world, habit makes it more difficult to see alternative possibilities of action, causing us to repeat old ways of acting such that our character becomes inflexible. And second, habit causes us to automatically accept ideas drawn from social custom and prevents independent thought. As a result, we tend to conform to social custom instead of independently choosing our ways of being.

Bergson’s evaluations of habit as both necessary and as pathological stem from the same cause, namely its tendency to limit conscious experience of the world. Specifically, both follow from Bergson’s “dynamic” account of consciousness that views it as being actively limited by the pressure or force the automaticity of habit exerts upon it. Interpreting consciousness dynamically allows Bergson to explain some of the phenomena noted in the previous section, in particular the variable extent to which consciousness can add memory images to perceptual experiences. For

¹⁶³ Hadot in fact argues that Bergson’s claim that habit impedes direct experience of metaphysical reality is part of a “millennium-old tradition,” see Pierre Hadot, *La voile d’Isis: Essai sur l’histoire de l’idée de Nature* (Paris: Gallimard, 2004), pp. 280-281, in English as Pierre Hadot, *The Veil of Isis: An Essay on the History of the Idea of Nature*, trans. Michael Chase (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 212, cf. Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 348/253-254.

Bergson, consciousness' inability to access these images results from a *force* or *pressure* habit exerts on it. A brief return to Bergson's image of the cone will clarify this claim. While we saw that the cone in one sense articulates the level of adaptability of bodily actions, Bergson presents this image in the context of arguing that habit memory actively inhibits the addition of image memories to perceptual experience through conscious attention. The automaticity and action-oriented nature of habit exerts pressure on the nervous system to limit experience to only aspects relevant to immediate action, thus limiting conscious experience to what is at the tip of the cone. At its wide base perceptions and the image memories that lie at their margins interpenetrate and merge indifferently like in dreams, but habit enforces the demands of physical need and conscious interest and actively excludes irrelevant image memories.¹⁶⁴ Acquiring a habit thus not only creates a motor mechanism but also "solidifies" a particular aspect of conscious experience into a "general idea" on the basis of which future situations are immediately recognized and one can automatically apply a motor mechanism to respond to it.¹⁶⁵ In his work *Creative Evolution*, Bergson goes so far as to speculate that the inhibiting force habit exerts on consciousness might even have an evolutionary basis in the need to secure the necessities of self-preservation.¹⁶⁶ Consciousness' openness to memory images is made actively difficult by the need, enforced by habit and strengthened by evolutionary imperative, to concentrate on purposive action.

Hadot's interpretation of Bergson focuses on the result of this process, namely the inability of consciousness to access reality in an unmediated fashion. And indeed, our being cut off from

¹⁶⁴ Bergson returns to this analogy between everyday perception and dreams in *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 99/95.

¹⁶⁵ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 173/155, cf. Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant*, p. 57/41: "It is no less true that to be made aware of the true nature of concepts, and to resolve with some chance of success the problems relating to general ideas, one must always look to the interaction between thought and attitudes or motor habits, generalization being originally nothing other than habit, rising from the field of action to that of thought."

¹⁶⁶ Henri Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice* (Paris: PUF, [1907] 2013), pp. 144-145, in English as Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henri Holt, 1911), pp. 143-144.

an immediate experience of the qualitative flux of duration that is for Bergson metaphysically real is indeed a critical component of his argument in that it causes us to experience the world in terms of discrete concepts rather than in its qualitative richness. Hadot reasons from Bergson's distinction in the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* between "immediate consciousness" and "reflective consciousness" that the force of habit gives rise to two opposed modes of experiencing the world, and justifies his claim that philosophy is a transformation of perception in that it frees us from the habitual "world of everyday perception."¹⁶⁷ Distinguishing between two forms of consciousness is useful for Bergson as it reveals precisely that from which habit closes us off. Reflective or "everyday" consciousness represents the "data" of consciousness as generalized by habit into spatially extended units that can be defined and measured. These units comprise a "numerical multiplicity" of discrete entities that are recognized as separate through their juxtaposition in homogenous space and that can therefore be treated as individual objects.¹⁶⁸ This presentation of the world as distinct sets of entities permits comparison and contrast between objects and their being grasped linguistic means in a way that facilitates practical life.¹⁶⁹ Immediate consciousness, by contrast, is not mediated by habit and symbolic representation and consists of direct encounter with reality. Against psychophysicists like Fechner who attempt to measure conscious states in terms of mathematical properties of magnitude and intensity, Bergson argues that the immediate data of consciousness is of *duration*, qualitative states that interpenetrate and

¹⁶⁷ Hadot, *La voile d'Isis*, p. 279/211.

¹⁶⁸ Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: PUF, [1889] 2013), p. 59, translated into English as Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (London: George Allen, 1913), p. 80.

¹⁶⁹ Counting sheep, for instance, requires a reduction of the data of consciousness to a set of discrete objects that are grasped in terms of common qualities that identify them as "sheep" and yet whose spatial distinctness prevents them from being merged into a single unit, *ibid.* pp.57-58/77.

form a confused mass that can only be separated through mental effort.¹⁷⁰ Such qualitative states can be neither spatially represented nor treated as numerically distinct and are therefore symbolically unrepresentable. The experience of immediate consciousness is of a “qualitative multiplicity” in which qualitative states that cannot be reduced to one another flow together in a movement that cannot be described spatially but only as temporality. Despite being metaphysically real according to Bergson, this level of perceptual detail is in the main irrelevant to immediate practical action. Perception and the body cannot interact with symbolically unrepresentable and mutable fluidity, such that the pressure habit exerts on consciousness has the function of actively excluding it from our perceptual experience.

What Hadot misses, however, is that although Bergson posits a difference in kind between these two forms of consciousness, the distinction is ultimately a heuristic, and Bergson later clarifies that consciousness in fact exists in varying states of “tension” that define a relative degree of openness to material that is not immediately relevant to practical action. While this distinction is subtle, it is not, so to speak, without a difference, as it indicates that the dynamic pressures on consciousness have a causal impact on how open our experience is.¹⁷¹ Consciousness does not simply exist in states of reflectiveness or immediacy but rather possesses a certain tension or “disposition” to contract immediate experience according to a certain “rhythm” or “tone,” a degree of condensation.¹⁷² What follows for Bergson is that as the tension of consciousness decreases,

¹⁷⁰ For Bergson’s critique of Fechner see *ibid.*, pp. 45-54/60-72.

¹⁷¹ In his 1910 introduction to *Matter and Memory* Bergson cites Pierre Janet’s theory of psychodynamics as confirmation of his notion of tension. Janet, a psychologist cited in the original 1896 version of the text as well, claims that mental life is lived at a certain level of tension in which stimuli carry a certain “force” that impels the nervous system to react to them in varying degrees of immediacy, see Karl-Ernst Bühler and Gerhard Heim, “General Introduction to the Psychotherapy of Pierre Janet,” *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 55 (1), 2001: 74-91, pp. 86-87.

¹⁷² Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, pp. 188-189/169.

one lets oneself think in terms of general ideas that emphasize similarities between experiences and which are correlated with immediate action increases with it. Although one's ways of thinking are open to alteration through synthesis with additional memory images, habit decreases the level of consciousness' tension and strengthens its disposition to condense conscious experience into determinate objects and general ideas.¹⁷³ Change in one's thinking is thus made more difficult through the strength of habit, with the result that one increasingly tends to apply existing notions to interpret experiences. When one interacts with the world by means of habits, one tends to think in a more general fashion as one's reactions are automatically applied.

Our understanding of the dynamism of the relationship between habit and consciousness allows us to add to Hadot's account the claim that habit acquisition makes experiencing duration progressively more difficult, such that consciousness can only encounter qualitative multiplicity and "leap" into immediate consciousness through the application of *effort*, a point that will be crucial to his notion of practice. The qualitative multiplicity Bergson argues immediate consciousness can access lies in a continual state of becoming and interpenetration whose tendencies cannot be predicted or determined in advance. Unlike the data of reflective consciousness, qualitative multiplicity cannot be represented spatially but can only be understood as a temporal unfolding. Duration is difficult for reflective or everyday consciousness to access because of the radical novelty it entails: the overlap and interpenetration of states give rise to new states that are continuous with yet irreducible to the old, such that grasping them in their purity requires continual attention on the part of consciousness. Consciousness must actively resist the tendency, strengthened by habit, to reduce qualitative flux to symbolically representable units and to interpret

¹⁷³ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 180/161: "The essence of the general idea, in fact, is to be unceasingly going backwards and forwards between the plane of action and that of pure memory."

duration simply as the rearrangement of prior elements.¹⁷⁴ If it does, consciousness in its immediate mode is capable of experiencing the unfolding of duration, an unfolding that Bergson argues is metaphysically primordial to the symbolically mediated world. In keeping with his theory of perception, Bergson does not regard consciousness as adding anything to the world as it is: the world *endures*, and it is only through an act of reduction that it is separated into discrete objects and experienced as homogenous space and time.¹⁷⁵ Because in our everyday lives habit puts pressure on consciousness to encounter the world through the reductions of reflective consciousness, however, we gain access to this level of experience only in infrequent experiences of lucidity in which a certain qualitative state irrupts into consciousness, such as when a clock strikes multiple times but only the last strike is noticed or, a point to which we will return, in experiences of aesthetic beauty.¹⁷⁶ Normally, such experiences lie “below” the level of ordinary consciousness and can only be uncovered through the application of intellectual effort.

Understanding the dynamic between habit and consciousness also allows us to better appreciate *why* Bergson feels the need to articulate a form of philosophical practice that opposes the force of habit. For one the one hand, Bergson insists that the limiting function habit places on consciousness facilitates efficient and purposive action that is necessary to our practical lives. This form of thinking in terms of general, communicable concepts rather than expressing the

¹⁷⁴ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 19/15: “[Consciousness] sees in a new form or quality only the rearrangement of the old, nothing absolutely novel.”

¹⁷⁵ Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, pp. 74-75/100: “Pure duration is the form the succession of our states of consciousness takes when the ego (*moi*) is left to live, when it abstains from establishing a separation between the present state and previous ones.” Much of these first chapters of *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* is an attempt to criticize not merely contemporary scientific psychology but also the Kantian understanding of space as an *a priori* form of intuition. Spatial representation is posterior to the work of perception and ultimately of habit, and as a result of his misunderstanding of the nature of space Kant also interprets time mathematically and hence misunderstands it as well. On this point see Frédéric Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie* (Paris: PUF, 2004), pp. 40-45.

¹⁷⁶ For the example of the striking clock see Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p. 95/127.

indeterminate flux of duration is in general beneficial for practical life as it prevents consciousness from falling into a dream-like state of lostness in the flow of memory images. However, Bergson's dynamic understanding of habit suggests that the state of consciousness' tension can be made too low, such that habit begins to operate in a *pathological* fashion, specifically by causing us to lose agency over our actions. As consciousness becomes increasingly constrained through the force of habit, we become increasingly unable to think outside of the general ideas that facilitate automatic action. To put it dynamically, consciousness is lowered to a state of tension that hinders adaptation to new circumstances and conforms to the logical yet inflexible structure of the habituated body. As a result, for Bergson we become less able to choose our own actions and instead act according to the mechanical necessity of habit. Choice, for Bergson, requires conscious effort: in order to choose something, we must remain aware of our possibilities, remember past consequences and project future ones, and consider how we can act in a different way from in the past in order to respond to a situation's specific needs.¹⁷⁷ By contrast, when one acts habitually, one acts immediately by applying a particular motor mechanism. The level of conscious tension, in Bergson's words, is the "measure of its power of acting, of the quantity of free creative activity it can introduce into the world."¹⁷⁸ As one's actions become increasingly habitual, one's power to consider options and to choose and improvise solutions decreases and one begins to act mechanically.

For Bergson, the loss of agency over one's actions manifests itself in two negative traits of human character found in everyday life. First and most generally, the loss of agency takes the form of comic inflexibility in one's character that results from the application of existing ways of

¹⁷⁷ Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 10/10.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 17/16.

thinking and acting rather than learning and choosing specific forms of action in response to them. What follows from Bergson's arguments concerning choice is that at a certain degree of tension habit can cease to facilitate practical life and in certain ways come to hinder it. Bergson in fact calls individuals "impulsive" who think solely in terms of general ideas, possessing great facility in immediately resolving familiar situations but who cannot respond to unfamiliar ones.¹⁷⁹ As the level of tension in their consciousness decreases, impulsive people gradually lose their ability to respond to unfamiliar situations that require greater exploration and inventiveness and merely repeat old ways of thinking and acting. With limited possibilities of thought that mirror the habituated body's limited possibilities for acting, the impulsive person fails to confront novel circumstances and becomes rigid. In his essay on comedy, Bergson goes so far as to say that the inability of habitual consciousness to adapt to new circumstances constitutes an "inelasticity" that is paradigmatic of comic characters whose machine-like movements are so rigid as to appear inhuman.¹⁸⁰ When the force of habit grows too strong, it gives rise to a rigid state of character that acts not as an individual who can determine their own actions but as what Bergson calls a "conscious automaton" who merely enacts automatically past ways of acting and thinking.¹⁸¹

Second and more important for Bergson is the alienation from oneself habit brings about and the consequent determination of one's ways of thinking about oneself and one's possibilities by social custom. To his earlier arguments that the reduction of conscious experience through habit facilitates practical life Bergson adds that it also is the basis of social existence. Since duration entails the continual production of what is absolutely new, experiences of it inevitably overflow

¹⁷⁹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 170/153.

¹⁸⁰ Henri Bergson, *Le rire: Essai sur la signification du comique* (Paris: PUF, [1900] 2007), p. 14, translated into English as *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), p. 18. In this essay inelasticity is opposed to "tension" as a principle of life.

¹⁸¹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 172/155.

our ability to linguistically express them. It follows that communication between individuals requires a certain degree of reduction of conscious experience through habit. As with practical life, social life would be impossible without the work of habit, but Bergson worries again that when habit causes consciousness to lower to a certain degree of tension one becomes unable to think of oneself outside of one's social identity. Bergson argues that alienation begins through the reflexive application of reflective consciousness. Interpretation of one's conscious states through general concepts causes individuals to in Bergson's words "lose sight of" our "fundamental" or "deep-seated" self that experiences the world through immediate consciousness.¹⁸² Habit alienates us from our individual experience of the world and causes us to understand ourselves through the medium of linguistically articulable concepts. While this reduction makes possible communication with others, for Bergson it ultimately produces a "superficial self," a mode of experiencing oneself solely through shared concepts and that is as a result cut off from one's individuality and "inner life."¹⁸³ As a result, our experience of the world becomes increasingly repetitive and in Bergson's words "banal."¹⁸⁴ Bergson parodies the Ravaissonian and Aristotelian notion of "second nature" in claiming that habit gives rise not to a virtuous but an impoverished way of being in which one understands oneself through general ideas rather than by entering into the flow of one's conscious states. As habit causes our experience of the world and of ourselves to become more communicable, it also makes them increasingly impersonal, reduced solely to terms drawn from our cultural context and without reference to our individual and unique experiences of duration.

¹⁸² Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, p. p. 96/129.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 104/139.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103/138: "Henceforth we no longer perceive [qualitative states] except in the homogenous medium in which we have fixed their image and through the word that lends them a banal color. In this way a second self is formed that covers over the first, a self whose existence consists of distinct moments, whose states are detached from one another and are easily expressed in words."

Without access to individual experience, people become susceptible to the conformism that tends to result from the process of socialization. In his last major work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson clarifies his earlier account of habitual alienation by arguing that the concepts we repetitively apply are in fact *derived from* socialization. Instead of a “superficial self,” Bergson argues that socialization adds a “social self” to our individual selves, a conscious identification of ourselves with a social label and of our individual experiences with ideas drawn from the social groups in which we participate.¹⁸⁵ Like the superficial self, the social self is also cut off from individual experience, but it is produced by the internalization of ways of experiencing the world drawn from society that become automatic through habituation.¹⁸⁶ In Bergson’s telling, this process of internalization is mediated at all stages through prohibition and obedience and gives rise to a tendency in us to conform to the dictates of authority. As children, we learn to obey our parents and teachers and to defer to their authority on matters of our conduct. Deference and obedience to the prohibitions that arise from it over time become habits in such a way as to reinforce a difference of status between us and those whose authority we come to respect automatically. As we grow older, we come to recognize that our parents and teachers are themselves merely actors who are playing roles in a larger drama directed by the society in which they live as a whole. The particular social characteristics that conform to one’s social self therefore consist in fact of internalized prohibitions that limit our ways of thinking and acting to ones that conform to others around us and the authorities we have become accustomed to follow.

¹⁸⁵ Henri Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* p. 8/15.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 9/15: “...his memory and his imagination live on in what society has placed (*mis*) in them, because the soul of society is immanent in the language which he speaks, and which, even if no one is present, even if he only thinks, he still speaks to himself.”

Conformity to others that is an inevitable result of socialization, however, is in danger of becoming conformism when combined with the pressure of habit. The inability to think and act outside of existing possibilities come together in the case of acting outside of social customs. The conscious tension habit institutes makes even the accidental violation of social norms difficult, and Bergson argues that when such a violation does occur it is experienced as a painful, tension-filled deviation from one's everyday tendencies.¹⁸⁷ It requires effort to maintain oneself in this state of tension: consciousness attempts to resolve the struggle by returning to one's socially-informed ways of thinking and acting and thereby eliminating the deviation. The force of habit increases the effort it requires to persist in independent action, such that we tend to passively accept the limitations of social custom in our daily lives. Habit thus gives rise to conformism, not merely in matters of explicit duty but even in the countless decisions made daily regarding how to undertake all manner of tasks. How one interacts with one's family and follows one's profession, for instance, and the way one negotiates the demands of the two, is a matter of rules grounded in models of one's selfhood, as is when and how one goes about one's shopping or takes strolls. How, when, and where one undertakes these tasks is a matter of custom, and in our everyday lives it is simply easier to follow social custom, and so we do: "A choice," Bergson says, "is imposed upon us at every instant; and we naturally opt for the choice that conforms to the rule. We are hardly conscious of this; we do it without effort. A road has been traced out by society; we find it open before us and we follow it, for it would take greater effort to trek across the country."¹⁸⁸ Because the violation of norms requires greater intellectual and motor effort than conformity, the force of habit

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 15/21: "We have thousands of special obligations, each of which demands its own explanation. It is natural, or more precisely habitual, to obey them all. When we exceptionally deviate from one of them, it resists us; if we resist this resistance, a state of tension or contraction results."

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., p. 13/19.

causes our actions to become determined by social custom and makes independent action outside of those customs increasingly difficult.

The differing evaluations Bergson provides of habit are explained when viewed through the lens of his dynamic understanding of consciousness. While the lowering of consciousness' tension habit acquisition causes is necessary and useful for practical and social life, the danger of it being lowered to a pathological degree is ever-present. And because this dynamic is permanent in our psychic life, I suggest that the loss of individual agency should be understood as an *illness*, or perhaps more precisely put a general *condition*, that is found in human life, and the attendant problems of inflexibility and conformism its *symptoms*. Hadot's interpretation of Bergson helpfully highlights the ways practical concerns through habit come to dominate our everyday experience of the world. By situating this interpretation within Bergson's theory of habit, we have been able to see how this mode of perception results in a particular way of behaving in the world as well. Acting in an automatic, inflexible, and conformist fashion are behavioral patterns into which humans are permanently at risk of falling, and Bergson ultimately claims that they characterize the majority of people. Bergson at one point states even goes so far as to say that rigidity and conformism are "essentially human" and that human thought in general "accepts, such as it is, its insertion into social thought, and that uses preexisting ideas like any other tool formed by one's community."¹⁸⁹ While the extent to which these conditions cause suffering varies, for Bergson they merit a practical response in that they entail a loss of autonomy. Loss of agency, inflexibility, and conformism are the negative states philosophical practice will have the task of alleviating, and in this regard Bergson's form of philosophical practice should be understood as "therapeutic" as described in the introduction. The task of philosophy is to "cure" us of rigidity

¹⁸⁹ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 64/46.

and conformism, and in the final section I will argue that Bergson's concept of "intuition" is designed to do precisely that.

3. Intuition, Self-Creation, and the Art of Life

It was Deleuze who first rescued Bergson from the oblivion into which his work had fallen by demonstrating – against critics such as Russell who were as eloquent as they were uncharitable – that intuition constitutes a rigorous philosophical method.¹⁹⁰ It is also, however, a therapeutic philosophical practice that allows us to regain individual agency over our actions and to combat the problems of inflexibility and conformism. Intuition entails the trained application of conscious attention that practices experiencing duration, such that it provides access to the world as it truly is. In doing so, however, intuition allows us to grasp ourselves as individuals capable of determining our own ways of life. Intuition experiences the indeterminacy in the world of objects and thus makes it possible for us to see ourselves as free to choose our own ways of being and thus restores to us the conscious agency habit causes to withdraw from us. The practice of intuition resolves the issues of inflexibility and conformism by going directly to their source, namely the decreased tension of consciousness exacerbated by habit that makes choice difficult. Instead of helplessly repeating past ways of thinking and acting, intuition opens consciousness to possibilities of self-creation in which we articulate and follow a path of life that we ourselves discover within the movement of reality. In doing so, intuition makes it possible for us to create an individual course of life, from which we garner feelings of joy and strength that allow us to resist the temptation to conformism.

¹⁹⁰ Deleuze even goes so far as to say that intuition is "one of the most fully developed methods in philosophy," see Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone, 1988), p. 13. What is important about Deleuze's articulation of this method is that he demonstrates that it is completely unrelated to any vague notions of feeling or sentiment as Bertrand Russell had argued ("The Philosophy of Bergson," *The Monist*, 22, 1912: 321-347).

The primary goal of the practice of intuition is to achieve precision in thinking, and Bergson argues that it accomplishes this by refusing the reductions of the reflective consciousness. Intuition is related to conscious attention, but for Bergson it differs in that it can be consciously cultivated and practiced as a method of actively resisting the pressure of habit to reduce conscious experience to generalities. Instead of taking the generalizations of reflective consciousness as the basis of thought, intuition is founded on the postulate that follows from the theory of duration that change and motion are more primitive than stasis and hence actively attempts to grasp them in one's conscious experience, in this regard functioning as a "supplementary attention."¹⁹¹ By focusing on change and motion in things, intuition actively attempts to free itself of the general concepts that everyday ways of thinking applies thus reaches a greater level of precision in thought. Specifically, by focusing on change and becoming one becomes capable of grasping qualitative *differences* between things. Whereas ordinarily thought attempts to grasp different and new things as an "arrangement of pre-existing elements" in which nothing is either lost or created, intuition grasps the uniqueness of individual things, their sensuous richness that habit erases.¹⁹² By refusing to simply identify a quality with the term "orange," for instance, one can experience the particular hues of which orange is composed as it appears in different levels of light or shade and comes to more precise knowledge of it.¹⁹³ Through the application of conscious effort, intuition allows one to escape the limitations of one's perceptual scheme and grasp uniqueness and ongoing change in the world.

¹⁹¹ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 70/62.

¹⁹² Ibid., pp. 30-31/22. Deleuze mentions that in grasping qualitative differences between things, one also liberates oneself from the philosophical "pseudoproblems" that have arisen due to the application of general concepts to specific experiences, see *Bergsonism*, p. 15.

¹⁹³ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 210/159, cf. *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 174/169: "The feeling of effort, in intellection, is produced on the passage from the scheme to the image" (emphasis in the original).

Although Deleuze is correct that intuition constitutes a method that provides increased precision in thought and that Bergson himself applies it to dispel classical philosophical problems such as that of free will, the relationship between mind and body, Zeno's paradoxes of motion among others, Bergson also views it as a way to alter our everyday experience of the world. The world as it is in itself to which philosophy gives us access is, as we saw in the previous section, given in the most immediate mode of conscious experience. Engaging in intuition allows us to regain contact with this mode of experience whenever we put in the effort to do so. Intuition is a method that can be applied at any time and in any context, and as a result Bergson argues that through it philosophy can be taken "out of the school and...into closer contact with life."¹⁹⁴ As something that can change our manner of perceiving the world in our everyday lives, Bergson thus treats the concept of intuition not just as a philosophical *method* to achieve precise metaphysical knowledge but also as a philosophical *practice* that trains philosophers to base their way of living on their enriched everyday experience of the world. Bergson's hope that philosophy can exit the school and enter into life indicates that he regards his method of intuition as something that can directly affect our ways of perceiving, and I suggest, of acting as well. Intuition as a practice does so by reversing the effects of habit on consciousness, and therefore makes regaining agency possible.

Intuition resolves the conditions that afflict human life by attacking them at their root, namely the dynamic limitation habit effects on conscious experience. Though the application of intellectual effort, intuition plunges consciousness directly into the flux of duration and grasps entities in their unique and unpredictable processes of change. In doing so, intuition opens consciousness to experiences of the unfolding of radical novelty from which habit separates us

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 112/104.

and thus actively breaks down the concepts we use to interpret them. By mediating our experiences of entities through general concepts, we ordinarily perceive them as simply a bundle of externally related properties. Intuition resists this static mode of perceiving entities by entering into a kind of attunement with them that Bergson calls “sympathy,” a patient and attentive experience of them in their specific processes of motion and development, the way they retain their past state and integrate them into their present and thereby anticipate the future.¹⁹⁵ In viewing clouds, for instance, one can remain satisfied with noting their color, direction of motion, and type, but sympathetic perception avoids these attributions altogether and instead attempts to directly experience its directionality and tendency that articulates the course of its motion, the ways different parts of the clouds appear differently in particular qualities of light, and so on. Abstract qualities are impotent at describing clouds at this level, such that sympathetic experience also entails an immediate demonstration of the insufficiency of general ideas in describing the world. Stated more positively, intuition grasps the way even inanimate objects participate in “spirituality,” or are in other words unbound by the concepts and rational knowledge we apply to them and are hence free from external determination.¹⁹⁶ Intuition puts the philosopher in contact with the specific processes of unpredictable change and motion that define the concrete existence of entities, such that it allows for a direct experience of the world as it is in itself. Bergson in fact refers to intuition in this respect as “metaphysics,” and it provides us access to the truth by distancing us from perception as formed by habit: “*to philosophize*”, Bergson concludes, “*means to reverse the habitual (habituelle) direction of the workings of thought.*”¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁵ Bergson, *L'évolution créatrice*, p. 178/177.

¹⁹⁶ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 29/21.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 214/160. Italics in the original.

When applied to everyday life, intuition allows for the continual transformation of our ways of perceiving and thinking in a way that responds to duration rather than erasing it. In this regard, intuition brings philosophy out of the school by allowing not just our philosophical but moreover our everyday thinking, what Bergson labels “common sense,” to gain in precision.¹⁹⁸ Intuition adds to our perception by focusing specifically on the qualitative and changing aspects of our experiences that are generally filtered out of consciousness. In doing so, the philosopher learns to perceive like artists, who for Bergson “reveal” unique experiences of the world in their sensuous and affective richness. Artists work with our quotidian perceptual faculties but extend them by concentrating on the way perception, affect, and memory interpenetrate in order to form a truly individual experience. The atmospheric effects produced by the vivacity and indeterminacy of the colors of one of the landscapes of Turner, an artist Bergson admires, presents a vision that transcends the “pale and colorless vision of things that is habitually ours” and captures it in a particular work through the medium of paint, just as a poet does with words.¹⁹⁹ Turner presents an experience that lies outside our everyday perception of the world, limited as it is by the effects of habit. Rather than simply copying a memory or a photograph of a sunset on the water onto canvas, a work like “The Scarlet Sunset” fuses vision and emotion to create an image that testifies to the uniqueness of Turner’s perception of the sunset and presents it enriched with the motion of clouds and water and the influence of that motion on the rest of the scene. For Bergson, philosophical intuition attempts to achieve qualitatively unique experiences like these but goes beyond artistic practice by altering old concepts and possibly even constructing new ones that are added to one’s common sense. By attending to processes of change and motion,

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 113/105.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 130/112.

intuition can become the basis of what Bergson calls a “progressive philosophy” that continually recasts and transforms existing categories in light of new experiences.²⁰⁰ In doing so, philosophers accustom themselves to attending to the qualitative aspects of their everyday experiences and using them to alter their commonsense ways of thinking.

These changes intuition effects in our thinking are the basis of its therapeutic efficacy. In changing our commonsense ways of thinking, intuition introduces freedom into our everyday experience of the world, and allows us to recover agency over our actions in two ways. First, at the level of conscious experience, intuition allows us to recognize ourselves as individuals capable of creative self-determination. Intuition reverses the process of filtering through which the superficial self is created: whereas reflective thought grasps ourselves through general concepts that alienate us from our inner life, intuition grasps the individuality of entities and the undetermined nature of the processes they undergo and allow us to see ourselves as equally individual and *free*. In doing so, intuition allows us to resist the alienation habit brings about and to identify ourselves with our individual experience of the world and our ability to bring about novelty by ourselves. Intuition practices seeing freedom and the creation of the absolutely new in the universe and hence in ourselves as well: through intuition we “feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes.”²⁰¹ In becoming cognizant of our own inherent self-creativity we can gain a greater appreciation for our own capacity of self-determination and begin to work to act less as a result of habit and more as a result of conscious choice. Rather than seeing ourselves as limited to the possibilities that have been given to us by our past or by our socialization, we see

²⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 172/160.

²⁰¹ Ibid., p. 116/86.

ourselves as capable of creating new possibilities, of finding new ways of life. Intuition thus changes our conscious sense of self and allows us to recognize ourselves as undetermined along with the rest of the universe and hence as able to determine our own ways of life.

This conscious self-recognition is in turn made possible by a second change produced at the dynamic level of conscious tension that ultimately provides the physical basis for the recovery of individual agency. The exertion of effort required to engage in intuition that holds in a single experience the various aspects and flux of perception and memory present in it greatly raises one's level of conscious tension. As a result, consciousness becomes increasingly able to resist the pressures of habit and practical need and attend to the perpetual creation of novelty that is sensible within one's perceptual field. In fact, it is precisely resistance to habit through effort that gives rise to the consciousness of oneself as a free being described in the previous paragraph. In a manner influenced by Maine de Biran's analysis of tactile resistance, Bergson argues that the exertion of effort against the limits of habitual perception gives rise to conscious awareness of oneself as an individual who exists independently from the external world.²⁰² The resistance habit offers the attempt to engage intuition stimulates consciousness to continue to exert itself, to refuse the partial and general notions we have become accustomed to applying and to instead reach a truly unique experience of the world. The sense of oneself as independent being capable of exerting such effort follows from this experience, and in achieving this self-consciousness we gain a sense of ourselves as "masters" of our own exertions and hence our possibilities for

²⁰² Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle*, pp. 22-23/22: "Effort is painful, but it is also precious, more precious even than the work it produces as because of it one has drawn out of the self more than it previously had, and one raises it above itself. But this effort is not possible without matter: by the resistance it opposes and by the docility with which we provide it, it is at the same time obstacle, instrument, and stimulus. It experiences our force, it keeps the imprint of it, and calls for its intensification." For Maine de Biran, the application of effort first and foremost in the sense of touch is what gives rise to self-consciousness through separation of oneself from that which offers resistance, see Maine de Biran, *L'influence de l'habitude sur la faculté de penser*, pp. 71-72.

acting.²⁰³ What is essential about Bergson's analysis of the dynamic effects of the practice of intuition is that by raising the tension at which consciousness resides, it cultivates a counter-force to the force of habit that makes the hesitation required for choice and invention possible in actual fact. Effort that resists habit maintains consciousness in its state of concentration, thus allowing it to not only weigh options but to actively seek out opportunities for new types of action in one's surrounding world. In doing so, the practice of intuition actively lessens our determination by the mechanical causality of habit, and thus opens us to uncovering new ways of thinking and acting, rather than simply repeating old ones.

By opening human consciousness to novelty and becoming, intuition also provides resources to combat inflexibility and conformism in human character. Intuition resolves the problem of impulsiveness and rigidity by creating the dynamic conditions for creative judgments and choices tailored to individual situations. Having raised conscious tension to the level of making hesitation prior to action possible, intuition allows a focused examination on the conditions in which one makes a decision regarding how to act. Rather than simply applying past solutions to a particular scenario, the practitioner can explore the immediate perceptual details of her experience of it as well as her memories of past experiences. In doing so, she gains a "presentiment" (*presentiment*) of possible consequences of her actions and uncovers ways of calibrating her actions according to her desired ends.²⁰⁴ By strengthening conscious tension against the impulse that leads to unthinking and rigid conduct, intuition allows consciousness to examine and even create possibilities for action. Bergson argues that one must continually reapply such effort in order to maintain it, but when applied in the case of action it becomes "good sense" that entails "constant

²⁰³ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, 116/86.

²⁰⁴ Henri Bergson, "Le bon sens et les études classiques," in *Écrits philosophiques*, ed. Frédéric Worms (Paris: PUF, 2011: 152-164), p. 154.

wakefulness” to the specificities of particular situations and individual judgment in each case.²⁰⁵ Bergson is clear that good sense cannot be hypostatized into a single state of character that can become passive and habitual: it is rather “work itself,” the continually renewed vigor of attention that refuses to accept past solutions but instead invents new ones in each specific occasion and thus aspires to perfect adaptability and flexibility.

As the outgrowth of intuition, good sense is a form of practical knowledge that is able to respond to the constant and unpredictable change of duration. As such, it functions creatively by forming a new action in each case it encounters. Bergson in fact argues that the good sense that arises from intuition is the most effective way to respond to the novelty of duration and hence to combat inflexibility in one’s conduct. Bergson makes this argument by contrasting good sense from experience and deliberation, two other forms of practical knowledge that he claims fail to confront novelty.²⁰⁶ Experience, accumulated observations that have been condensed into a general understanding of how to act in particular cases, cannot respond to the new situations we encounter in life. For example, Aristotle’s doctor who acts according to experience (*empeiria*) reasons based on accumulated memories of past patients, their symptoms, underlying diseases, and modes of treatment.²⁰⁷ From these past situations, the doctor chooses which course will be most likely to cure the disease with which she is presently confronted, yet when presented with an unfamiliar patient who presents symptoms with which she has not encountered before here reasoning from prior examples fails to provide guidance. Deliberative reasoning that begins with general principles that it applies to particular cases fails for the same reason that the application of general ideas as a

²⁰⁵ Ibid., p. 155.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., p. 156.

²⁰⁷ As Aristotle puts it, experience entails knowledge of “particulars” rather than reasoning from first principles, the province of art (*technē*), see Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 981a9.

whole cannot escape inflexibility for Bergson, namely their qualitative poverty when placed next to the flow of duration. Deliberation, Bergson argues, is a blunt instrument that only approximates the contours and flow of particular situations and as a result produces rigid forms of action. By attending to the qualitative uniqueness and the processes of change that are present within situations, good sense can construct an action that is calibrated to its requirements, producing novelty in response to novelty. A truly courteous person, in Bergson's example, does not simply past acts thought of or even defined as polite to present circumstances, and nor does he apply general principles of politeness, but senses the preferences of a particular individual, recognizes through both memory and perceptual observation what their interests are and projects how they might respond to particular forms of action, and thus crafts an act that displays courtesy as it applies to that person in particular.²⁰⁸ Good sense produces genuinely new forms of action that are irreducible to the rearrangement of elements of previous actions but that solve the problem of inflexibility by perceptively and intelligently adapting preserved actions to respond to the new situations one encounters in a dynamically unfolding universe.

The changes to consciousness intuition causes also cultivate the emotional resources to confront and resist the experiences of painful tension that incline us towards conformism. Specifically, Bergson argues that the emotion of joy (*joie*) instills a sense of ourselves as individuals that forms the basis of a countervailing force to the impact of social opinion and custom. Joy is the consciously-felt emotion that arises solely with creativity.²⁰⁹ Joy for Bergson is a special emotion that, following the Stoics, he differentiates from pleasure (*plaisir*), the

²⁰⁸ What Bergson calls "courtesy of the heart," see Henri Bergson, "La Politesse," in *Écrits philosophiques*, ed. Frédéric Worms (Paris: PUF, 2011: 47-59), p. 54. Bergson provides examples pertaining to the professions as well in Henri Bergson, "De l'intelligence," in *Écrits philosophiques*, ed. Frédéric Worms (Paris: PUF, 2011: 272-279), p. 275.

²⁰⁹ Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 22/22: "...wherever there is joy, there is creation; the richer the creation, the deeper the joy."

satisfaction of need, and instead views as a feeling of euphoria that arises from achievement.²¹⁰ At the dynamic level, joy arises when psychic resistance is overcome, when effort triumphs over the pressures exerted against it and it comes to a unique experience or action. Qualitatively, Bergson compares this experience to the joy the artist experiences at seeing her creation, the completed work of art that testifies to the effort that went into it. What Bergson adds to the Stoic conception of joy, however, is that it is attached to one's experience of oneself as an *individual*. Bergson rejects what he takes to be the common explanation of joy, namely that it arises from the glory or admiration we receive from others. Such concern for the opinions of others, Bergson claims, is the result of insecurity in one's achievement, and when one is sure that one has created something joy arises one does not seek out validation for it. In this regard, Bergson argues that in the experience of joy we briefly transcend the human condition and feel ourselves to be as gods whose creation is self-validating.²¹¹ Joy, in other words, is an individualizing emotion, a pride that one feels in regards to oneself and one's own efforts. In experiences of joy one briefly forgets one's standing in the eyes of others and instead is able to concentrate on the value of oneself as creator of something absolutely new and that is hence owed the "absolute value of a great work of art."²¹²

Making intuitive thought a component of common sense makes this experience of joy an increasingly regular occurrence in one's emotional life and ultimately provides the space to articulate a way of life that is more or less independent of social expectation. Treating intuition as

²¹⁰ As Margaret Graver notes, Stoic joy (*eupatheia*) arises only from the accomplishment of virtuous actions that affirm one's recognition of oneself as a perfected being (*Stoicism and Emotion* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007], pp. 52-53). Bergson draws a similar distinction here, which he repeats again in *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion* (p. 52/60), and it is an important qualification to readings of Bergson's appropriation of Stoicism as in Vladimir Jankélévitch's words an "asceticism of the spirit" (*Bergson* [Paris: PUF, 1959], p. 198), cf. Simone Kotva, "The God of Effort: Henri Bergson and the Stoicism of Modernity," *Modern Theology*, 23 (2), 2016: 397-420.

²¹¹ Bergson, *L'énergie spirituelle*, p. 23/23.

²¹² *Ibid.*, p. 23/23.

a practice attempts to make novelty as much of a regular component of one's common sense and everyday perceptual experience as possible. As a result, one's experience of the world, as well as one's actions in it, will become increasingly creative. By cultivating the ability to have sympathetic experiences of entities, one will find more qualitative nuances in one's everyday experiences that had previously been excluded, as well as more opportunities for new forms of action. Bergson thus argues that intuition slowly builds upon itself to the point where it becomes a general ability to engage in the "creation of self by self, the growing of the personality" that entails the cultivation of individual tendencies that differentiate oneself from others and articulate a unique set of actions and goals for oneself.²¹³ Bergson ultimately claims that in doing so, philosophical practice makes aesthetic satisfaction into a more frequent, continuous, and ultimately accessible occurrence than art does.²¹⁴ Whereas the production of art requires talent and specialized training, the practice of intuition simply entails an extension of one's natural perceptual abilities, such that anyone can experience the joy of creativity. Furthermore, as one engages in intuition as a more regular occurrence joy becomes a seduction to further creativity. Intuition and joy become a virtuous cycle that inspires increased creativity in our actions and increased independence. Bergson even speculates that moral systems originally came into being in this way, through an individual emotion that arose through actions and eventually crystallized in the form of doctrines.²¹⁵ The continual practice of intuition allows one to develop an individual pattern of life that both responds to and incites one to one's creative acts and experiences.

²¹³ Ibid., p. 23/23.

²¹⁴ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 175/131.

²¹⁵ Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion*, p. 44/47.

The practice of intuition culminates in a Socratic attitude towards society, which Bergson understands as one of non-identification with the internalized labels of the social self. Against interpretations of Socrates as positing an intellectualist ethics, Bergson argues that what is essential to Socratic ethics is his *daimōn*, the quasi-divine voice that prevents him from doing what he knows to be wrong.²¹⁶ Socrates' ethics is in fact a "mission" that "transcends" reason and instead entails a felt commitment to the truth that governs his ways of comporting himself among others.²¹⁷ Grounded in a voice of refusal, this commitment is to a large degree negative. Socrates refuses to engage with others in ways that would compromise the ethical foundations of his way of life. Stated more positively, however, it is possible to interpret the daimonic voice of refusal as a voice of *hesitation* that allows for independent choice even in the face of social pressure. Bergson seems to have something like this in mind when he says that whenever a philosopher "detaches himself from the common rule of humanity...living Socrates is there" in the form of the "attitude of the sage" he exemplified in his own life and taught to subsequent Greek schools, including that of the Stoics.²¹⁸ While the individual who adopts the attitude of the sage remains within society, he separates his own self-conception and goals from those of the groups in which he participates and maintains his commitment to his individual way of life. This detachment entails retention of the dynamic openness to new possibilities and options that allows one's behavior to remain supple

²¹⁶ Ibid., p. 60/61. Carl Power's claim that Bergson regards Socrates as a paradigm of "intellectualist" ethics confuses what Bergson sees Plato, and ultimately the rationalism of Athenian culture, as adding to Socratic thought with Socrates himself ("Bergson's Critique of Practical Reason," in Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White eds. *Bergson, Politics, and Religion* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2012: 174-192], p. 177).

²¹⁷ Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion*, p. 60/62.

²¹⁸ Ibid., p. 61/62. In Kotva's study of Bergson's early fascination of Stoicism she notes with some surprise that Bergson hardly mentions the Stoic sage as such in his later work despite its affinities with his conception of god in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* ("The God of Effort," p. 417). I would suggest that at least part of the explanation for this absence is the role Socrates plays in Bergson's argument, whose ethics was indeed based on a "creative emotion," unlike that of the Stoics who he claims were unable to inspire followers in the same fashion, see Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion*, p. 59/60.

even in the face of the tension of social non-conformity. The attitude of the sage is thus an attitude of non-attachment, of distance from social pressure and commitment to one's own choices and to one's personality as one creates it that Bergson concludes is the result of intuition.²¹⁹ Although insertion in social life is inevitable and the need to communicate with others is permanent, the attitude of the sage entails the cognitive and emotional resources to resist the inevitable temptation towards conformism that ultimately derives from the increase in conscious tension and change in self-recognition brought about by intuition.

By focusing on both the dynamic and the conscious aspects of the problems of agency, inflexibility, and conformism, Bergson's practice of intuition serves as a genuine treatment to the negative conditions of human life he diagnoses according to the terms in which he defines them. If intuition were merely to change our ways of thinking about and recognizing ourselves without engaging with the effects of habit at the dynamic level, that change in self-conception would be empty and lacking in the resources to combat the continual pressure habit exerts on consciousness. Such an individual could even be open to charges of hypocrisy, or at least of an even more comic lack of self-awareness, thinking herself to be master of herself while in fact conforming to the necessity of habit in its mechanical and social form. Bergson's practice of intuition avoids this problem by functioning at both the dynamic level and the level of self-awareness simultaneously: experience of duration through the application of effort both raises the level of consciousness' tension while also providing one with an experience of the world and hence of oneself as creative and free. Intuition thus gives consciousness the *strength* to resist the pressure habit exerts, without which one's recognition of oneself as a self-creating being would be empty and in vain. Furthermore, Bergson's analysis of the emotion of joy that results from creativity suggests that

²¹⁹ Ibid., p. 63/64.

self-determination and creation draws strength from itself and becomes an incitement to further activity in its own right. The ongoing adaptation of oneself to one's circumstances in good sense, and the Socratic attitude of non-identity with social norms, thus are grounded in physical changes to consciousness that actively resist the effects of habit. Intuition succeeds in its therapeutic function by combining the opening of consciousness to novelty with changes at the dynamic level that support continuous creative activity.

In arguing that intuition should be understood as a form of philosophical therapy, however, it should be noted that there is an important difference with therapeutic practice as Nussbaum understands it. Bergson's extolling of good sense and the Socratic attitude of the sage suggests that like Nussbaum's forms of therapy, intuition is attached to an account of normative human life. Intuition, Bergson claims, is not only able to revivify our experience of the world and our own conducts but also constitutes a "preparation for living well (*bien vivre*)."²²⁰ Unlike Nussbaum's therapeutic arguments, however, for Bergson the therapeutic practice of intuition is not merely applied contextually or *medicinally* according to the specific needs of a patient at a particular time, but more precisely as a permanent *regimen* that institutes a state of "health" at the same time as it cures "sickness." Intuition is not a practice that is used solely to treat a particular condition and then be left aside: since habit is a permanent and necessary feature of human life, even though the joy of self-creation feeds on itself it is always liable to be limited, or in Bergson's words to undergo a process of "cooling," that makes one's newly learned ways of acting habitual.²²¹ Intuition must be continuously practiced and made into the basis of one's everyday ways of perceiving and acting in the world. To the extent that intuition is practiced as a concrete way of life, it allows the

²²⁰ Ibid., p. 116/86.

²²¹ Bergson, *Les deux sources de la morale et la religion*, p. 252/238.

philosopher to achieve good sense and the attitude of the sage, but the effort that is its foundation cannot be avoided.

4. Conclusion: *Homo Faber*

In interpreting philosophy in Bergson as a “transformation of perception,” Hadot links the metaphysical and existential interests animating his philosophical practice. What is problematic about our everyday ways of perception is that they are not only cut off from experience of the world as it truly is but also prevent us from grasping ourselves as free beings in contact with the metaphysically real world. Philosophy is a choice in that one must actively refuse to accept one’s everyday experience of the world and instead strive to come into contact with the continual unfolding of duration, the creation of the radically new as it occurs in nature. And indeed, we have seen that Bergson’s concerns are quite close to those Hadot attributes to him and that he claims Bergson shares with the ancients. In its capacity as a therapeutic practice, intuition functions by making us conscious of ourselves as free and responsible beings capable of controlling our own activities. Although dependent upon a neurological theory of habit that differs strongly from ancient conceptions, Bergson’s argument that recognition of our free and creative nature causes us to abandon a passive and mechanistic mode of behavior for an active and vital one coincides nicely with Hadot’s understanding of the existential concerns that animate philosophical practice.²²²

Both the motivations and the efficacy of Bergson’s philosophical practice can only be understood, however, as responses to the effects of habit on human consciousness and human action. Training oneself to see the world “naively” or in terms of duration is a component, if admittedly the key component, of what can be appropriately called a *permanent philosophical therapy*. The effortful attention to one’s immediate perceptual world of intuition transforms

²²² See for instance Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 64; 323.

perception to the extent that it trains us to notice the qualitative details and shifts we normally ignore, but for Bergson the reason to do so is not only to see the world as it is in itself in a way that can resolve philosophical problems but also because it resists the ongoing and inevitable effects of habit on human action and human consciousness. While we have seen that as a component of bodily intelligence habit is an ineradicable and necessary component of human life, its dynamic relationship with consciousness means that it constitutes a permanent threat to individual agency and self-determination. For Bergson, human life is always at risk of becoming routinized, such that we automatically re-enact ways of acting rather than developing new ones that respond to our world. The very automaticity and passivity that makes habit useful to the body also incline us towards inflexibility and conformism, and by indicating that they are part of the human condition Bergson suggests that they in fact characterize the majority of us. Agency is won only through the continual struggle to apply the effort of intuition that must become for Bergson a permanent feature of our lives.

Focusing on Bergson's concept of habit shows that even though his philosophical practice is primarily therapeutic, his concepts of good sense and the attitude of the sage indicate that therapy is in fact a component of a highly optimistic picture of our capacity to achieve self-determination. Indeed, the practice of intuition opens up the possibility of what can be called *radical self-creation* that goes farther than Ravaisson's concept of invention in allowing for change and unpredictability in one's way of being. Whereas for Ravaisson, invention remains tied to a particular virtue that it instantiates in an improvisational fashion, for Bergson the cultivation of good sense is a *creative* practice in that it uncovers absolutely new possibilities for being within one's perceptual experience. As his critiques of experiential and deliberative knowledge demonstrate, the attempt to derive actions that respond to current circumstances from previous ones limit one's capacity to

adapt. Action must instead begin from the discovery of the exigencies of a specific situation to which one then adapts oneself. Unlike the expert or the deliberator who act from pre-established principles, whether tacit or explicit, the person of good sense ceaselessly reapplies the free effort of intuition to explore their immediate perceptual world as it is infused with memory and qualitative richness and discover new possibilities and needs. Bergson holds as an ideal perfect responsiveness to change in circumstances, and this results in the need not to alter existing actions in light of new circumstances but to create new ones that the body then learns. Bergson jettisons the idea of a pre-given virtue for philosophical practice to instantiate and instead seeks to uncover new ways of acting that culminate in an individual personality and manner of living.

As a result, Bergson's conception of philosophical practice entails a *radical* openness to change and unpredictability in one's way of life that is not limited to variation on a theme but runs to the point of making oneself mirror the ceaseless productivity of reality. Reality, as Bergson argues, possesses the structure of duration that entails the continual production of absolute novelty, in order to respond to it one's actions must also be absolutely new. Bergson's philosophical therapy thus results in a program of radical self-creation, of continuous change in one's ways of acting that bring about absolute novelty and give rise to a truly individual manner of being in the world. Bergson expresses this conception of self-creation in his definition of humanity as *Homo Faber*, "Man the Maker," who is differentiated by his capacity "to create materially and morally, to fabricate things and to fabricate himself."²²³ Self-determination for Bergson ultimately takes the form of self-creativity, of being able to invent for oneself a flexible and individual way of being through one's own efforts. Like Ravaisson's conception of practice, radical self-creation entails the invention of actions that cannot be predicted or articulated in advance. Bergson radicalizes the

²²³ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 92/67.

notion of “invention,” however, by suggesting that intuition allows humanity to invent their entire way of being from their actions to their perception through the practice of intuition. Philosophy’s focus on freedom and indeterminacy gives rise to mastery over ourselves to the point where we become self-creators, even breaking through the human condition at points and seeing ourselves function alongside universal creation.

Since habit is a permanent fixture of our embodied lives, however, it seems to me that the possibilities for self-creation will be tempered in actual practice by the fossilization of free actions into motor mechanisms. Good sense and the attitude of the sage require continuous application of intellectual effort, and it seems doubtful that such effort can be sustained in everyday life. Indeed, Bergson’s own arguments concerning the practical and social utility of routines could be brought to bear in analyzing the plausibility of treating practice as an intuition. It is absurd for consciousness to attempt to invent each new action it undertakes: automaticity remains a necessary feature of our behavior to prevent consciousness from being overwhelmed with necessities. One could even argue that by allowing so many of our everyday activities to be undertaken automatically, habit fulfills a positive role in allowing consciousness to focus on situations that are particularly relevant to one’s interests and aspirations. Bergson’s argument that the new ways of acting and thinking that are created through the practice of intuition inevitably undergo a process of “cooling” appears to recognize this fact. What the person of good sense invents through philosophical practice will eventually become fossilized, closed, and automatic, in short, a habit, requiring a new application of effort to retain agency. One could make a similar argument at the social level as well. Striving to retain the attitude of the sage allows the philosopher to retain distance from social custom and opinion, but she remains in the world and must communicate with others. Bergson’s idealization of heroic figures such as the Stoic sage and Socrates are in a certain

degree of tension with his quotidian examples of good sense, which he claims is found in phenomena like courtesy and in professional life.²²⁴ The likely outcome of the practice of intuition, in short, seems to be one of an oscillation between expansion of oneself through creative action and contraction into habits. Although the practice of intuition remains radically creative, that creation will not be continuous but part of a movement between extremes of flexibility and inflexibility, individuality and conformism. Bergson's therapy attempts to treat the most extreme forms of habitual stasis, and given the necessary and even positive role habit plays in everyday life that therapy appears at its most attractive when it attempts to achieve a middle ground between radical creativity and stasis.

This discussion ultimately returns us to the issue of assessing Bergson and Ravaissou's differing theories of habit left over from the first section. At this point, however, we are in a better position to appreciate what is at stake in their contrasts. Both regard habit as the way repeated actions and affections are retained within individuals, and both claim that habit plays a crucial role in embodied intelligence. Bergson's notion of good sense, and his analysis of bodily adaptation contained in the image of the cone, suggests however that the kind of "skilled" behavior Ravaissou claims is essential to habit only comes about through a certain degree of effort. Bodily intelligence in the absence of consciousness for Bergson is limited to a means-ends logic: the production of novelty arises only with consciousness. These observations ultimately stem from his basic account of habit as a mechanism that plays only a passive role in learning. Bergson's account of a loop that runs between perception, the nervous system, and the body is clearly much more advanced than Ravaissou's uncritical reliance on Leibnizian dynamism, and relates these aspects of our being much more effectively than Ravaissou. The question that arises in the contrast between the two

²²⁴ See note 208 above.

thinkers, however, concerns whether a certain degree of conscious effort is required for bodily learning and adaptation, and on this front I side with Ravaisson over Bergson that it does not. In the next chapter, we will see that Merleau-Ponty argues, in my opinion convincingly, that Bergson's dualism between habit and consciousness fails to properly account for the phenomenon of learning. For now, however, it is also worth noting that while Bergson's theory takes the neurosciences into account far more than Ravaisson, it falls afoul of the dynamism of the contemporary discussions of plasticity described in the previous chapter. Variability in synaptic connections that occur through repetition at no point require conscious mediation, such that changes in one's manner of acting do not require Bergson's dualistic explanation. And although contemporary neuroscience differentiates between adaptable and static forms of unconscious or "automatic" action, often referred to as "goal-oriented" and "habitual" respectively, the difference between the two is not explained by conscious effort but by differences in training patterns.²²⁵ In particular, "overtraining," or the unnecessary repetition of particular actions, is often cited as a cause of the degeneration of adaptable into static forms of action.

These observations are more consistent with Ravaisson's overall account of habit as an ability rather than an action in two respects. First, they attribute to the body a greater range of adaptability and freedom in the absence of conscious intervention than Bergson. And second, they regard adaptation as primary over stasis, or in other words they view habit as the primary phenomenon in terms of which the concept of "routines" must be understood. Bodily learning is primarily a dynamic process that allows for change and adaptation and does not require the explicit

²²⁵ On the difference between "action – outcome" and "stimulus – response" circuits, the latter of which is generally referred to as "habitual," see Yin and Knowlton, "The Role of the Basal Ganglia in Habit Formation," p. 466. Yin and Knowlton focus in particular on "overtraining" as a reason why action-outcome circuits degenerate into "habitual" ones (on this point cf. Amir Dezfouli and Bernard Balleine, "Habits, Action Sequences and Reinforcement Learning," *European Journal of Neuroscience*, 35, 2012: 1036-1051). Given my claims here, use of the term "habit" to name stimulus – response circuits seems inappropriate; better would be the term "routine" as described earlier in this chapter.

agency of consciousness. Bergson's conceptions of closed, automatic, and unchanging habits, and of the process of their acquisition as fossilization are best understood, in other words, as deviations from the general account of habit Ravaisson provides. In this regard, we can see the process of fossilization that results from overtraining in a similar vein as Ravaisson's account of addiction, both of which result from the overuse of particular forms of action. Whereas addiction for Ravaisson entails a heightening of the preference for and automaticity of to an unstoppable level, fossilization results in preference's weakening, leaving only its automaticity. In a book heavily influenced by Bergson, Paul Ricoeur provides a way to account for how both of these results can come about. Ricoeur argues that "automatism," what in this chapter I have called routines, results when one adopts a "repetitive attitude," or in other words engages in actions regularly but without thinking or concern for them.²²⁶ This often occurs, Ricoeur argues, in common life with "daily cycles of action" that do not need to change or adapt. Whereas the skilled actions that are Ravaisson's focus are pertinent to our conscious goals, a repetitive attitude can be adopted when undertaking actions that are necessary yet undertaken in conditions that rarely if ever change. While driving to school is an important activity, it rarely changes in its character. There is thus no need for the body to adapt itself to new circumstances, such that it can get by merely by reapplying old forms of action. Likewise, my routine of turning on a pot of water each morning to make coffee is unchanging, such that the focus of perceptual and bodily attention can be placed elsewhere. In both of these cases, adaptation through the application of bodily intelligence is unnecessary in order to achieve a particular goal, such that the body can engage with the world in a more passive manner. These special cases seem to be the most likely ones in which fossilization in the manner Bergson understands it occurs, and should be understood as a different form of habit's

²²⁶ Paul Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, trans. Erazim Kohak (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1966), p. 305.

“degeneration” from that which Ravaisson describes. The problem of the limitation of everyday perception Hadot identifies, along with the loss of agency and the attendant problems of rigidity and conformism we have discussed in this chapter, are thus best understood as results of this form of degeneration rather than permanent features of the human condition that are perennial problems for philosophical practice to solve.

Yet thinking of habit in its sense as “motor mechanism” or “routine” as a separate form of its degeneration allows us to see the value of his philosophical practice in a new light. Whether or not we agree with Bergson’s identification of duration with metaphysical reality (another subject to be discussed in the next chapter), the focused application of conscious attention on one’s surroundings can be seen as efficacious in combating habits that have degenerated in either form of addiction or fossilization. Since both of these forms of degeneration entail automaticity, applying effort in order to regain the capacity to hesitate prior to acting would serve as a mechanism with which to raise habits that have become fossilized and have come to hinder our practical and social lives back to consciousness, such that a new habit can be formed. Ravaisson himself suggests such a possibility in passing in *De l’habitude*, claiming that habits that have exited the domain of consciousness can be brought up to it again through effort, though he does not go into detail regarding how this can be accomplished in practice (H 57). Bergson’s concept of intuition thus provides a potential answer to the question Ravaisson’s own theory of practice left open, namely how to prevent cultivated ways of being from degenerating and turning into addictions. The analysis in this chapter allows us to add the problem of fossilization, and intuition treated as a form of therapy provides a potential solution. As a result, we can recast the role of effort and attention in order to accommodate its role in a less mechanistic theory of habit. Viewing habit as in itself dynamic and adaptable causes the loss of agency to appear as a less immediate

threat to human action. As a result, constant effort will not be required to ensure the kind of adaptability Bergson associates with good sense, such that its role in living well as a whole will be diminished. Its role as a form of *therapy*, however, will become a crucial counterpoint to the purposive cultivation of habits. Intuition will remain a valuable practice both for ensuring that one's cultivated habits do not degenerate, and for helping one to overcome old habits that are irrelevant or antithetical to one's commitments.

Chapter 3: Knowledge in the Hands: Maurice Merleau-Ponty on Habit, Freedom, and Self-Experimentation

Contemporary philosophy, Merleau-Ponty declares in his inaugural lecture as chair of philosophy at the Collège de France, has lost its uneasiness (*malaise*) with everyday life.²²⁷ In an academic world that values erudition over originality, and in which life has become bureaucratized and routinized, philosophical work strives for ease in communication only. Philosophers have become reduced to mere functionaries, passing opinions on theoretical subjects back and forth between each other like memoranda and all but forgetting that their practice originated with a man who neither wrote nor taught but who questioned the way people in the streets and the marketplace lived their lives. Socrates exemplifies what Merleau-Ponty calls the “total function of philosophy,” which stems from the sense that “the world is unacceptable as it is: knowledge we wish to be written down for the honor of humanity but which we forget when we return to our affairs.”²²⁸ Socratic philosophy gains its value from its continual relevance to everyday life, which lies precisely in its refusal to give in to the temptation to rebel from it and to live alone as one of Hegel’s beautiful souls, wrapped up in the hypocritical sense of one’s superiority. Socratic philosophy for Merleau-Ponty recognizes our inherent embeddedness in the world, that we are ourselves “inescapably,” and yet that it is precisely on the basis that we are who we are by our participation in a social world that we can recognize our aspirations and struggles in the lives of others and relate to them authentically.²²⁹ Socratic philosophy does not advise us to rebel against our social world but what is far more dangerous, to understand our world on the basis of rational

²²⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty *Éloge de la philosophie et autres essais*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1953), p. 38, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty *In Praise of Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. John Wild, James Edie, and John O’Neill, (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1970), p. 33.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39/34.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43/39.

thought. Critical examination of opinions and acceptance of only those which survive scrutiny puts us at odds with a social world that demands absolute adherence to custom. While Socrates refuses to challenge his execution, he does so on different grounds from any that would be acceptable to the Athenians, just as he accepts the gods on a different basis from traditional religion. And yet, in taking this distance from the world by searching for its truth through reason the philosopher gains a kind of freedom he did not previously possess. The philosopher only clarifies the social world, only puts into words what everyone already knows but cannot yet articulate, yet in doing so takes experiences that were previously felt to be private and shows them to be common and therefore available to change by common action. Philosophy, in short, “opens each of us up to freedom.”²³⁰

Although he does not take on Socrates’ philosophical method, I will argue in this chapter that Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical project is Socratic in that it too attempts to achieve and maintain freedom. Merleau-Ponty sees his philosophical work as an aid to living well in the social world in which his readers live, recognizing as Socrates did the impossibility and undesirability of flight from the world and attempting to demonstrate the commonality of seemingly private experiences to gain a better practical grasp of our world. Merleau-Ponty’s clearest expression of this goal is found in the preface to *The Phenomenology of Perception*, where he claims that:

True philosophy entails learning to see the world again, and in this sense a historical account can give meaning to the world with as much “depth” as a philosophical treatise. We take our fate in our hands, we become responsible for our history by means of reflection, but equally by means of a decision on which we stake our life, and in both cases what is involved is a violent act which is validates itself in its exercise.²³¹

Engaging in philosophy entails taking a decision that implicates one’s way of experiencing and living in the world. It involves choosing what Pierre Hadot calls the “existential option” (*option*

²³⁰ Ibid., p. 43/39.

²³¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 21, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, (*The Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith, New York: Routledge, 1962), p. xxiii.

existentielle)²³² to relearn how to perceive (*voir*) the world and to base one's identity and projects on this new discipline. For Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology is a form or style of thinking that precedes its crystallization as a distinct movement within philosophy and that is continuous with the "effort of modern thought" found not merely in philosophy but also in art to creatively articulate meaning in the world.²³³ By attending to and describing the patterns of our first-person experience of the world we can establish its structure not merely as it is reflectively thought but as it is lived through our active engagements. In doing so we can come to see how our activity creates an environment of lived and social space that is familiar to us and available to our concrete goals. Philosophy, both his earlier phenomenology and to a certain extent his later ontology, attends to what Merleau-Ponty following Husserl calls our "operative intentionality," intentionality not found in our objective knowledge of the world but in our practical commerce with it, "our desires, our evaluations, and in the landscape...the text which our knowledge tries to translate into precise language."²³⁴ Philosophical analysis uncovers our pre-reflective practical comprehension of the world and reveals to us how the values we presuppose in our everyday lives are not private but common to a social formation. Philosophy uncovers not just the immanent structure of our world but its participation in a shared history and thus opens us up to the possibility of changing that world for the better.

²³² Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* p. 18. The passage reads in full: "Philosophical discourse originates in a choice of living, an existential option and not the other way around." It is worth noting that Hadot himself regards Merleau-Ponty as a philosopher who participates in the ancient philosophical project of transforming one's self and one's way of life through philosophical practice, see *ibid.*, p. 415.

²³³ Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 22/ xxiv.

²³⁴ Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 18/ xx. For more on Husserl's notion of operative intentionality and Merleau-Ponty's appropriation of it see Martina Reuter, "Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Pre-reflective Intentionality," *Synthese*, 118 (1), 1999: 69-88, pp. 70-71.

Merleau-Ponty's theory of habit is crucial to his understanding of how to live freely, and that it makes key advances over both Bergson and Ravaisson while preserving many of their insights. In this chapter's first section I focus on Merleau-Ponty's presentation of habit in *The Phenomenology of Perception*, which develops Ravaisson and Bergson's notion of embodied intelligence by demonstrating that habit is the basis of our meaningful experience of the world. By preserving some of Bergson's analysis of the "lived body" while sweeping away the traces of mind-body dualism left in his work, Merleau-Ponty is able to capture much – though not all – of Ravaisson's account of the spontaneous and goal-oriented body without relying on his metaphysics. Merleau-Ponty's contribution, however, is to combine this analysis with the phenomenological concept of meaning to argue that habit functions as the mediator of a "world," a horizon of familiar possibilities of which repeated interactions gives us a practical grasp that allows us to accomplish our everyday tasks. Through habituation our capacities of motion and perception are not only coordinated but synthesized, such that habit is to thank for the seamlessness of our sense of reality. What results from this analysis is an appreciation of both the independence and ultimately primacy of embodied intelligence over reflective consciousness.

Merleau-Ponty's most sophisticated advance over Ravaisson and Bergson, however, is to ground skillfulness in an inherently *social* process of habit acquisition. Relating his early phenomenological and his late ontological work, section two will explore the role habit plays in embedding us in an intersubjective world. Developing the theme of interaction hinted at in Merleau-Ponty's early work, I will argue that habit for Merleau-Ponty is a process of appropriating meanings through communication, mimesis, and through our participation in shared social activities. As a result, Merleau-Ponty develops a conception of the self that is produced historically in and through its interactions with other people and institutions and thus constantly in the process

of formation. Merleau-Ponty comes closest to Bergson in his appropriation of Husserl's concept of sedimentation (*Sedimentierung*), the retention of repeated experiences, to explain the habitual subject's openness in terms of its historicity. Repetition produces the aptitudes through which we live unconsciously, such that we can never even in principle come to know their origin. Habituation entails continuous interaction with our spatial, social, and institutional environment, our internalization of practices through creative repetition that changes practices in the process. The habitual subject is thus a fluid subject always in process of becoming, such that attempts to reflect upon it will only serve as approximations that highlight some of its tendencies and relationships.

With this analysis of the ways habit produces meaning and embeds us in a social world we will be prepared in the final section to see how Merleau-Ponty integrates his thought on habit into a theory of philosophical practice designed to help us live freely within our social world. Habit complicates attempts to gain conscious control of one's circumstances, such that philosophy's task of clarifying the contours of our world and the nature of the precise relationships of which we are constituted will be an endless one. While we are free insofar as our world is open to our action such that institutions and practices can be changed through our work, actively assuming our freedom will require knowledge of just the concrete conditions which have formed us habitual subjects of which we can only gain partial understanding. Philosophical practice for Merleau-Ponty thus does not take the form of introspection but of self-experimentation that attempts to uncover our habitual ways of grasping the world and comparing them to our conscious knowledge. Through observation of our affective reactions to diverse situations we do not *discover* radically new possibilities for life as in Bergson but instead *uncover* possibilities that are latent within our habitual world yet currently unthematized. Self-experimentation entails the crystallization of

possibilities, a better – though necessarily incomplete – sense of what they are and how we share them with others, such that we learn what our concrete interests are and how best to achieve them. Philosophical practice thus culminates in political practice as philosophy, theoretical consideration of our existential constitution, turns into non-philosophy, interrogation of the concrete histories that have made us who we are and what possibilities we have to improve our situation. Philosophical practice provides a situated self-consciousness, not full recognition of ourselves as rational beings in Hadot’s sense as such complete knowledge is impossible, but rather greater awareness of particular possibilities and our ability to pursue them.

1. The World of Habit: Ravaisson, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty

Merleau-Ponty’s attempt to uncover our pre-reflective lived experience of the world stems from the desire he shares with Ravaisson and Bergson to avoid both empiricist and intellectualist accounts of human subjectivity and knowledge. All three reject the dualistic picture of the mind and body inherited from Descartes and attempt to articulate a concept of subjectivity that inheres in the body and challenge the ontological opposition between cognitive and corporeal substances, and all three identify habit as a phenomenon that highlights weaknesses in mind-body dualism and points toward an alternative. Merleau-Ponty’s treatment of habit is much closer to Ravaisson’s than to Bergson’s, however, in that Merleau-Ponty understands habit in terms of an aptitude rather than in terms of a mechanism. We do not respond automatically to specific stimuli in our environment by means of specific motor mechanisms as Bergson holds: rather, habit entails the “power” (*pouvoir*) to recognize particular types of situations taken as a whole and to respond to them by means of a certain type of action.²³⁵ Merleau-Ponty develops his own theory of habit in explicit opposition to Bergson and to contemporary theories of habit drawn from behavioral

²³⁵ Merleau-Ponty *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 179/166.

psychology that interpret habit mechanistically and which fail to explain the process of learning skills. This engagement allows Merleau-Ponty to extend Ravaisson's understanding of embodied intelligence to include a pre-reflective source of *meaning* in the phenomenological sense of encountering entities as relevant to our projects and concerns. Habit is the basis of our horizon of possibility, our pre-reflective experience of the world in terms of its availability to certain types of action. By demonstrating the inseparability of bodily and perceptual intentionality, Merleau-Ponty places Ravaisson's affirmation of a body whose actions are not simply goal-oriented but improvisational on a firmer ontological footing and ultimately goes beyond him by understanding the relationship between body and world as one of unceasing co-production.

Merleau-Ponty's analysis of habit decisively rejects mechanistic explanations and thus restores to it adaptiveness and freedom. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's definition of habit as an intelligent aptitude bears strong similarity to Ravaisson's habit-based theory of embodied subjectivity. Becoming habituated to playing the organ, for instance, entails learning how to use the organ to create a particular musical effect, to perceive the organ not merely as a set of keys and pedals but as a tool to be deployed in the course of realizing the goal of making music. Habit correlates new objects with bodily potentialities, developing those potentialities in the process. One learns to play the organ through variation on existing motions of one's fingers, hands, and feet, and as one becomes familiar with the organ one learns new types of motion. And the understanding of a particular object the body garners through habituation is transferable to other situations as well. Once one has learned how to play the organ one can play new pieces on new organs, such that habituation culminates in an intelligent and flexible aptitude rather than a mechanism. For both Merleau-Ponty and Ravaisson, habit entails a principle of practical intelligence that coordinates means and ends. Habit acquisition entails the "motor grasping of a

motor significance,”²³⁶ indicating that habit allows the body to use objects in the course of accomplishing its goals without having to consciously analyze them. Habituation organizes objects into types and our actions respond to types of objects rather than to the particular object at hand. Even when an organist sees a new organ for the first time she immediately knows how to play it and requires little practice to master it. In this way habit gives insight into a form of bodily understanding that belongs to the body as a “mediator of a world.”²³⁷ This form of practical understanding Merleau-Ponty calls “knowledge in the hands,” and it not only makes us familiar with our surroundings but also makes them meaningful to us.²³⁸ Habit organizes the body’s motions into aptitudes that it projects into the world through perception, such that our actions express our understanding of the world and can be further expressed in language. Rather than being merely an immobile fossil, habit is a fluid process of producing meaningful and intelligent behavior in such a way as to suggest continuity between mind and body.

Commentators have often noted convergences between Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty on these points.²³⁹ However, Merleau-Ponty seems never to have cited Ravaisson in his articulation of the concept of habit. According to Janicaud, Merleau-Ponty only mentioned Ravaisson once during his *Agrégation* and only then as a precursor to Bergson, apparently failing to recognize the infidelity of Bergson’s reading of Ravaisson described in the previous chapter.²⁴⁰ Rather than

²³⁶ Ibid., p. 178/165.

²³⁷ Ibid., p. 180/167.

²³⁸ Ibid., p. 170/166.

²³⁹ See Carlisle, “Freedom and Necessity,” Sinclair, “Is Habit the ‘Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity?’,” and James McGuirk, “Metaphysical and Phenomenological Perspectives on Habituality and the Naturalization of Mind,” in Rinofner-Kreidl and Wiltzsche eds., *Analytic and Continental Philosophy* (Boston: de Gruyter, 2016: 203-214) for recent examples.

²⁴⁰ Janicaud, *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, p. 11. It is interesting to note that the few citations of Ravaisson Merleau-Ponty does make in his corpus are almost always made in context of Bergson’s reception of Ravaisson.

working with Ravaisson, Merleau-Ponty develops his concept of the body-schema as a rejection of the conception of embodied subjectivity we saw Bergson develop in the previous chapter in a way that ends up with a position similar to Ravaisson's, though with crucial additions. Merleau-Ponty critically engages with Bergson in regards to his theory of perception and of habituation, arguing that in both cases Bergson retreats to the very same kind of intellectualism that Ravaisson in Chapter One called "rationalist," and as a result fails to comprehend the nature of bodily learning that can be found in the work of habit. These failures point towards the need for understanding the habituated body as productive of meaning in the phenomenological sense, an addition that ultimately expands Merleau-Ponty's conception of embodied intelligence beyond Ravaisson's by viewing the body as productive of practical knowledge in its own right rather than only extending and clarifying consciously-positing goals.

While Merleau-Ponty's conception of bodily learning takes on the Bergsonian relationship between perception and action, he argues that Bergson himself fails to provide a role for the body and thus falls back into intellectualism. Bergson sees perceptions as sensori-motor responses to the aspects of objects relevant to practical interests or as "a system of nascent acts,"²⁴¹ and hence appears to challenge a picture of perception grounded in mind-body dualism. Merleau-Ponty argues, however, that Bergson fails to follow through on the thrust of his theory of perception in claiming that consciousness alone is capable of interpreting entities. Rejecting a mentalist understanding of perception requires recognizing that, in Merleau-Ponty's words, "I perceive *from here* and from nowhere else."²⁴² In other words, were perception a truly holistic process involving

²⁴¹ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 69.

²⁴² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *l'Union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson* (Paris: Vrin 1968), p. 83, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Incarnate Subject: Malebranche, Biran, and Bergson on the Union of Body and Soul*, trans. P. Milan (Amherst: Humanity, 2001), p. 90.

both mind and body, the situatedness of one's perspective would have to be taken into account. Ambiguity and perceptual limitation would follow as positive phenomena from a holistic account of perception, but Bergson avoids reaching this conclusion and instead regards perception as simply highlighting one aspect of preexisting objects. Perception is a form of subtraction for Bergson: when I perceive an object, I notice merely those aspects of it relevant to my situation rather than the object as a whole. Perception does not act as a constituting (*constituante*) activity that posits entities in their being, then, but merely grasps some of an antecedent object. Bergson ultimately remains a realist in regards to perception, and his attempts at articulating a form of bodily subjectivity flounder on his inability to provide a genuine role for the body in perception. Perception entails an anticipation of action only because of the role consciousness plays in editing our experiences of the world and making a certain portion of it available to bodily activity. The body merely responds to sensory cues and thus possesses no principle of freedom or consciousness of its own. "It would have been necessary," Merleau-Ponty concludes, "to show that the body is unthinkable without consciousness, because there is an intentionality of the body, and to show that consciousness is unthinkable without the body, for the present is corporeal."²⁴³ As we shall see, Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body-schema takes on the Bergsonian insight that perception entails an anticipation of bodily activity while grounding that anticipation in the practical structures of embodied perception and thus escapes the dualistic trap into which Bergson falls.

The oversized role of consciousness in perception also weakens Bergson's attempt to make habit a component of bodily intelligence. Habit entails a kind of synthesis of perceptions and bodily motions, but Bergson provides an intellectualist account of this synthesis that cannot account for improvisation in behavior. In Bergson's example of learning a poem by heart consciousness plays

²⁴³ Ibid., pp. 81-82/ 89.

the crucial role of separating the poem into passages short enough to be remembered. Repetition of verbal recitation of passages follows and is determined by conscious activity, such that the body remains passive in the process of memorization. It is conscious thought that delineates simple motions and their order in performance; bodily repetition merely solidifies the pathway from the instigation of an action to its completion. Bergson thus also provides a causal picture of the nature of behavior, where the body's acts are determined according to the dictates of rational understanding and where habit originates in "an act of understanding that organizes elements only to subsequently withdraw."²⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty argues that understanding habit as a motor mechanism, an ability to perform a specific action resulting of this process of decomposition and repetition, fails to accurately describe the process of learning.²⁴⁵ A dancer, for instance, does not learn particular moves through memorization of a consciously analyzed formula but through perception of another person performing those moves and imitation of their motions. Conscious analysis does not mediate between perception and repetition, but is rather preceded by perception that grasps them in terms of bodily potentialities. A dancer first recognizes motions and imitates them before comprehending them in terms of a formula. The addition of conscious analysis to the process of learning is false and fails to account not only for the possibility of direct imitation but also of improvisation. When a skilled dancer learns a new set of steps she can immediately incorporate them into her stock of known moves and can embellish through projection of her body's capacities into new emotive situations, just as when an organist learns new melodies or chords he can treat them as phrases that can be treated as "emotional or musical values" that can

²⁴⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* p. 177/ 165.

²⁴⁵ See Maria Talero, "Merleau-Ponty and the Bodily Subject of Learning," *International Philosophical Quarterly*, 46 (2), 2006: 191-203, on the centrality of an explanation of bodily learning to Merleau-Ponty's theory of habit in the *Phenomenology of Perception*, and Edward Casey "The Unconscious Mind and the Prereflective Body," in D. Olkowski and J. Morley eds., *Merleau-Ponty, Interiority and Exteriority, Psychic Life and the World* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1999: 47-56), pp. 52-54.

be altered based on the occasion.²⁴⁶ Bergson's concept of motor mechanism is too rigid to account for the fluidity of the process of learning and hence distorts the nature of habituation.

The failure of Bergson's theory of habit to adequately describe the process of learning results from the passivity it attributes to the body, which for Merleau-Ponty causes it to lapse into mind-body dualism. Although Bergson describes the body as a "center of action"²⁴⁷ that can bring about genuinely novel events in the world and hence avoids Descartes' deterministic view of the body, its freedom still depends upon prior acts of consciousness. Once those acts of consciousness cease the subject is left with a mechanical principle of action that is unable to calibrate itself to changes in the individual's environment and therefore cannot develop further.²⁴⁸ Merleau-Ponty thus sees Bergson as a precursor of behaviorist psychology, which also holds a mechanistic view of the nature of habit as simple conditioning. Through repetition of a scenario where a dog is fed after seeing food and hearing a bell ring, for instance, these latter events gain the power to instigate the motion of salivation as response, or in other words become stimuli. The association of environmental and behavioral events is purely external: Pavlov's dogs do not salivate upon hearing a bell ring because of any intrinsic connection between the sound of a bell and the act of eating but because through numerous experiences of being fed following the sight of food and the ringing of a bell the dogs have become accustomed or conditioned to associate these events.²⁴⁹ The "stimulus-response" theory of behavior is thus nothing other than a mechanistic theory of habit acquisition

²⁴⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 181/168, cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), pp. 184-185, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Structure of Behavior*, trans. Alden Fisher (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1963), p. 120-121.

²⁴⁷ Bergson, *Matière et mémoire*, p. 138.

²⁴⁸ Thus Sinclair argues that Bergson's theory of the body in fact represents a regression from Ravaisson, whose notion of habit comes closer to Maine de Biran's notion of the *corps propre* and with which Merleau-Ponty has greater affinity, see Sinclair, "Embodiment," pp. 197-198.

²⁴⁹ Merleau-Ponty discusses Pavlov in Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement* p. 75f./52f.

where a purely passive body becomes determined to act in a certain way through repetition of events. Habit entails the production of a causal vector, or a “reflex arc”, that causes the body to act automatically when stimulated. Individuals respond to discrete excitations in their environment with the motions they have learned through repetition, and these motions accumulate into a stock of possible actions an individual can deploy when engaging with the world.²⁵⁰ Under this view the body is rendered a passive object, a mechanism that is determined by external forces and for which consciousness has no role.

If Bergson provides an intellectualist account of the process of habituation, behaviorism provides an empiricist account, and their shared failure to grasp the process of learning signals for Merleau-Ponty the need to integrate the concept of meaning into an account of habituation. Behaviorist theories of conditioning cannot account for why any and all excitations associated with an unconditioned stimulus do not become over time conditioned stimuli, and why even when an irradiative effect does arise from a conditioned stimulus it does not last.²⁵¹ While one of Pavlov’s dogs may associate specific stimuli that are manipulated in an experimental setting such as the ringing of a bell with the presentation of food, nothing in the theory of conditioning prevents the dog from also associating other elements of the situation that are held constant such as the lighting or temperature with the food. Pavlov himself is eventually forced to hypothesize the existence of

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 9: “In this linear series of physical and physiological events the stimulus has the dignity of a cause, in the empirical sense of a constant and unconditioned antecedent; and the organism is passive because it limits itself to executing what is prescribed for it by the place of the excitation and the nerve circuits which originate there.” In fact, behaviorists have argued that while classical conditioning explains so-called “simple behaviors” consisting of one motion, simple behaviors can themselves become causally linked so as to allow for more complex behaviors. Thus John Watson, an early behaviorist, can argue that “a man *is* the sum of his instincts and his habits,” that human subjectivity can be understood in terms of automatic responses added on to our given stock of instinctual responses. (John B. Watson, “Practical and Theoretical Problems in Instinct and Habits,” in Herbert Jennings et al eds., *Suggestions of Modern Science Concerning Education* (New York: Macmillan, 1917), p. 55. For a more recent account of the nature of habit that integrates behaviorist explanation with neuroscientific research see Charles Duhigg, *The Power of Habit: Why we do what we do in Life and Business* (New York: Random House, 2013), p. 19.

²⁵¹ Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, pp. 75-76/52-53.

forces such as inhibition that counter the effects of conditioning to account for these anomalies, forces which themselves require additional hypothetical forces to explain their functioning and which ultimately cause the theory of conditioned reflexes to collapse. Ultimately, it is behaviorism's refusal to see the body as anything other than a mechanical object that prevents it from grasping the role meaning plays in the acquisition of behavior. Behaviorism's mechanistic view of the body attributes to it the ability to respond only to specific excitations from its environment as inputs that instigate causally determined outputs from the body. The body is in itself merely a conduit for specific nerve excitations without an ability to filter and choose between excitations. The question of why particular excitations become stimuli and others do not therefore becomes unanswerable, necessitating the hypothesis of illusory forces Merleau-Ponty compares to the proliferation under Medieval Scholasticism of fictional faculties to explain holes in classical Aristotelian metaphysics.²⁵²

The only way to adequately account for the process of learning without introducing illusory forces for Merleau-Ponty is to abandon mind-body dualism altogether. His manner of doing so attributes to the body a capacity for meaning-making that goes beyond Ravaisson's in constructing an environment that is structured by possibilities for action. This expansion is made possible by Merleau-Ponty's avoidance of the ontological foundations for Ravaisson's theory of habit: Merleau-Ponty at no point mentions Aristotle's substance metaphysics or Leibnizian dynamism in the course of articulating his position on habit, but instead partakes of the language of worldhood drawn from German phenomenology.²⁵³ Habit makes possible our possession of a world,

²⁵² Ibid., p. 94/63.

²⁵³ In point of fact, Merleau-Ponty's later ontology of flesh will substantially engage with Leibnizian monadology, but the present discussion of habit is limited to his earlier phenomenological work in which the influence of Heidegger is much stronger. See Renaud Barbaras, *The Being of the Phenomenon: Merleau-Ponty's Ontology*, trans. Ted Toadvine and Leonard Lawlor (Indianapolis: Indianapolis University Press 2005), pp. 229-234 on Leibniz' influence on the later Merleau-Ponty.

understood in a Heideggerian sense as an environment structured by possibilities for action. Merleau-Ponty follows Heidegger in rejecting the conception of humans as consisting of an ego or consciousness that exists apart from its surroundings and instead views the human subject as existing in and through its engagements with the world.²⁵⁴ For Merleau-Ponty perception constitutes our engagement with a meaningful world, an environment structured in reference to our goals and projects in a manner similar to the conception of “virtual space” found in Gestalt psychology.²⁵⁵ Geographical space is superseded by a figure-background structure of space consisting of objects with use-values in positions that are correlated with the body’s possibilities for action and organized according to one’s present goals and concerns. Elements of a structured situation have meaning insofar as they are encountered in terms of their functional relations, as a shirt that is *for wearing* or a doorknob that is *for being turned*, and it is the body itself that grasps these relations rather than their being grasped through conscious synthesis. Merleau-Ponty prefers the Heideggerian understanding of meaningful involvement in the world as “ontologically definitive” of us, however, rather than the Gestaltist theory that meaning arises through the application of structured neurological frames to it.²⁵⁶ Humans exist insofar as they relate to their environment, such that the problems associated with causal explanations of behavior turn out to be pseudo-problems. Our ontological constitution as self-projecting beings is reflected in our

²⁵⁴ On this point see Taylor Carman, *Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Routledge, 2008), p. 42, cf. Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper, 1962), p. 84: “Being-in is not a ‘property’ which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and *without* which it could *be* just as well as it could with it. It is not the case that man ‘is’ and then has, by way of an extra, a relationship-of-Being towards the ‘world’ – a world with which he provides himself occasionally. [...] Because Dasein is essentially an entity with Being-in, it can explicitly discover those entities which it encounters environmentally, it can know them, it can avail itself of them, it can *have* the ‘world’.”

²⁵⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, p. 138/90.

²⁵⁶ Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p. 116.

experience of our environment not just as an opportunity to achieve a particular goal but rather as a set of open possibilities available to action.

In grounding his conception of the intelligent body in the phenomenological tradition rather than in Leibnizian metaphysics, Merleau-Ponty is able to adapt Bergson's treatment of the body and perception as a unified system for his own purposes while restoring to the body its capacity for spontaneous action. Our involvement in the world does not take the form of hermeneutic structures as it does for Heidegger, but instead finds its "anchor" in the body. Perception, our engagement with the world, is an embodied process and cannot be understood otherwise. Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body schema explains how this is the case. By locating the origin of virtual space in bodily potentialities and postures rather than immediately in neural structures as the Gestaltists do, Merleau-Ponty argues that habitual learning entails the coordination and development of bodily and perceptual capacities. Not only do I see a doorknob as a potential *manipulandum* amidst an indifferent background but moreover as manipulable by my own hand, such that when I perceive the doorknob my arm readies itself to reach for it. It is thus not merely my eyes that perceive the doorknob but also my arm and with it the system of muscles from my neck to my toes that allows me to raise my arm and reach for the knob. Merleau-Ponty thus adds one's own body (*corps propre*) to the Gestaltist's figure-background structure of perception as a "third term" that is presupposed in our concrete experience of the world.²⁵⁷ Perception entails anticipation of bodily actions as it does for Bergson, but this anticipation is not the effect of the movement of stimuli from the central to the peripheral nervous system but is rather one half of a holistic system of perception in which bodily and virtual space are coordinated, and Merleau-Ponty refers to the system as a whole as the body schema. Our being-in-the-world is thus irreducibly

²⁵⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* p. 130/115.

embodied as our projection of meaning into the environment is mediated by our body's sense of its potentialities that it can enact without external instigation. Bodily capacities and postures form the "intentional threads" (*files intentionelles*) that link us with our environment, such that bodily awareness posits our environment as available to our free activity and hence as a world in the Heideggerian sense.²⁵⁸

Merleau-Ponty's concept of the body schema is designed to avoid providing an intellectualist or an empiricist account of habituation like those of Bergson and the behaviorists and instead affirms a notion of bodily intentionality irreducible to either conscious or causal determination in a manner strikingly similar to Ravaisson. Both Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty regard habit as grounding a form of human subjectivity that consists of neither an unreflective, bodily in-itself nor of its counterpart of a transparent for-itself of consciousness. While Bergson offers a picture of a body-subject that can relate to its world through habits, those habits are static and only develop through the application of conscious attention and analysis. By contrast, Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty both allow room for an unconscious form of habitual synthesis that coordinates bodily and perceptual capacities and in Merleau-Ponty's words "synthesizes" them. While one can doubtless learn to memorize poetry in the manner Bergson describes it is not the primordial form habituation takes. Rather, habit is the manner our being-in-the-world is "dilated" to the particular situation at hand. When I enter a space my repeated interactions with similar spaces allows me to recognize the kind of posture and comportment appropriate to that physical and social environment and I adjust myself spontaneously. Two further implications follow from this: first, habit constitutes a form of subjective temporality where my past makes possible a certain present for myself and inclines me towards a certain future. My occurrent sense of available actions

²⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 121.

is produced through repetition that structures my perceptions and bodily responses, such that the possibilities I project into the world are always limited by habit. Second, a corollary of the first point, when I reflect upon my actions I do so from a vantage point already structured by habituation. In other words, consciousness for Merleau-Ponty is produced through habituation. My understanding of my own actions and affections is not objective: it too is limited by my capacities for attention and differentiation which are themselves the effects of habituation. Humans are therefore not immediately ethical subjects, able to critically examine their ways of life. Rather, they must be opened up for freedom.

It should not be taken from these similarities, however, that Merleau-Ponty is best conceived as an implicit disciple of Ravaisson's. The differences in the ontological foundations of their theories of habit also carry weight at the experiential level. Merleau-Ponty does not regard habit as the actualization grounded in a metaphysical principle of persistence as Ravaisson does but as the production and synthesis of bodily and sensory structures that makes the body-schema possible. As Mark Sinclair has argued, Ravaisson's appropriation of Leibnizian dynamism explains phenomena pertaining to habit that Merleau-Ponty's cannot. While the understanding of habit as a practical form of bodily knowledge can account for everyday practices of coping in Hubert Dreyfus' words, Ravaisson seems to have a clearer sense of the way repetition makes actions easier and more assured.²⁵⁹ Habit not only produces determinate abilities that orient our behaviors and perceptions but makes abilities active tendencies that we apply more and more often. Coping does not capture the sense of momentum Ravaisson attributes to the process of habituation,

²⁵⁹ See Sinclair, "Is Habit 'The Fossilized Residue of a Spiritual Activity?'," p. 47, and on the language of coping see Hubert Dreyfus, "Overcoming the Myth of the Mental: How Philosophers can Profit from the Phenomenology of Everyday Expertise," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 79 (2), 2005: 47-65, p. 49f., and more specifically pertaining to Merleau-Ponty see Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, "The Challenge of Merleau-Ponty's Phenomenology of Embodiment for Cognitive Science," in G. Weiss & H. Haber ed., *Perspectives on Embodiment* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

which explains not only why habits become so strongly rooted in us but also why they are so difficult to break.

At the same time, however, Merleau-Ponty's clearer articulation of the relationship between the enhancement of bodily and perceptual potentialities in the process of habituation than Ravaisson's, and his addition of the phenomenological concept of meaning, allows us to see the body as engaged in a continual process of learning and development that affirms the primacy of embodied intelligence as over reflective thought in our practical commerce with the world. Taking on Bergson's notion of perception as incipient action allows Merleau-Ponty to describe how we constitute our environment in terms of its practical relevance and how the environment incorporates itself into our behavior. Merleau-Ponty's contribution over and above Ravaisson is to take Bergsonian notion of perception past its own limitations and demonstrate how habituation entails the production of meaning that is not merely independent of but in fact *precedes* reflective consciousness. Merleau-Ponty articulates a theory of embodied intelligence that goes beyond viewing the body as an enhancement of the goal-positing activity of consciousness to also include the body's own capacity to understand the world and to form itself in light of that understanding. The body's production of "skilled" actions that spontaneously coordinate means and ends must be viewed therefore as part of a larger process of mediation between self and world in which the body continually extends its grasp of the world while simultaneously being changed by it. The result of habituation is a body that is truly a human body and not simply an object, a body that consists of "lived meanings" (*significations vécues*) that correlate its potentialities with its environment in such a way that we can come to understand our world.²⁶⁰ *Habit*, in other words, is best understood as an ongoing process of *habituation* in which the body ceaselessly appropriates new aptitudes and

²⁶⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* p. 190/177.

objects and in so doing continually modifies its world. Ultimately, Merleau-Ponty's grounding in phenomenology allows him to account for how habituation entails the co-constitution of not merely a practical but also a social and ultimately historical world, as we shall see presently.

2. Beyond Second Nature: The Open Self and the Social World

In the previous section, it was noted that the aptitudes of which the habituated body consists are acquired through repetitive interaction with our environment and are produced in tandem with it. The body and its environment constitute for Merleau-Ponty a system in which the self exists as its set of possibilities. For Merleau-Ponty, however, we will see that the self's possibilities are both *social* and *historical*. The self is produced through a fluid and multidimensional process of exchange between individuals and the institutions and systems with which they interact. Merleau-Ponty's analysis of intersubjectivity, an interest that unites his early and late work, views habit as an always already social process of internalizing historically produced ways of understanding the world through encounters with cultural objects and institutions and imitation of other people that produces a familiar environment of shared meanings and possibilities. In Merleau-Ponty's later work he divides his discussion of habit into two related concepts, sedimentation and style, to describe how subjects are formed as they appropriate particular aptitudes from their social environment and express those aptitudes by adapting them to their own settings and thereby change the worlds they inhabit. What will emerge from this discussion is an understanding of the self as open to being altered by engagement with other subjects and particular practices and ultimately as fluid, continually in the process of acquiring and adapting the aptitudes by which it understands the world and itself. This account of openness yields a more nuanced and flexible account of how social subjects are formed than Ravaisson and Bergson provide, and that pays greater attention to individual processes of habituation than Pierre Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*.

Conceptualizing habit as a process of habituation grounded in the body's capacity to construct meaning results in an understanding of the self as open to its environment, to whose influence it responds by continually reconfiguring its aptitudes. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty challenges the distinction between first and second nature. The process of coping with new environments necessitates learning new skills that are transposable to other contexts. It is therefore insufficient to say that humans create practices and institutions that structure their behavior, as it is "the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others" that characterizes human beings.²⁶¹ Humans do not simply shape their environment through their actions as other animals do but continuously interpret it, and this capacity to interpret and reinterpret the world separates human intelligence from that of animals.²⁶² Objects transformed into tools by non-human animals possess only one use and according to Merleau-Ponty are never reimagined. Humans by contrast perceive objects under a "plurality of aspects", allowing them to provide objects with new uses under different necessities. Regarding institutional and social life as "second nature" objectifies them and regards them as a one-time result of creation rather than as fluid constituents of the process of constructing a human world. Like Ravaisson, Merleau-Ponty regards second nature as the outgrowth of a continuous process, though not of an ontological principle of persistence. Instead, for Merleau-Ponty the continual transformation of the human world is the result of the inherent dynamism of the body schema. The human body constantly calibrates its sense of possibility based on the nature of the particular situation at hand. Humans perceive objects

²⁶¹ Merleau-Ponty, *La structure du comportement*, p. 266/175.

²⁶² See Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 383/ 381, cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Nature: Course Notes from the Collège de France*, trans. Robert Vallier (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2003), pp. 221-222.

under new aspects and appropriate them as tools in different ways, and in so doing alter and recalibrate their own bodily aptitudes.

Merleau-Ponty's argument for the habituated self's openness to the influence of its environment is an extension of his analysis of bodily learning that allows him to demonstrate that the world in which the habituated subject lives is inherently intersubjective. As we approach objects in the world we find that some are in Merleau-Ponty's words "engraved" with particular human actions they serve.²⁶³ That is to say, we encounter certain objects in terms of a human use we have not given to them but that indicates the existence of others like ourselves who have intentions, projects, and perspectives analogous to our own. The construction of meaning through habit produces a world of cultural objects, and we find ourselves immersed in a world of such objects and hence with a pre-conscious sense of other humans. One learns what a book, a building, or an implement is, for instance, when one comes to understand its culturally-prescribed purpose. The transposition of aptitudes allows one to use human objects for purposes other than those given to them (e.g., using a shoe as a hammer), but one's existence in the midst of artifacts creates what Merleau-Ponty calls an "atmosphere of humanity" that gives us a sense of the appropriate uses and meanings of things. Our sense of an intersubjective world is thus mediated by habit, and habituation allows perception to encounter a world of objects and actions with a shared significance. We perceive intentions in the actions of other people just as we perceive the intentions built into the cultural objects that surround us. As a result, we are not closed, self-evident subjects but ones are forced to recognize the limits of their potentialities. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, humans are "beings which are outrun by their world, and which consequently may well be outrun by each

²⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception* p. 405/405: "Chacun de ces objets porte en creux la marque de l'action humaine à laquelle il sert."

other.”²⁶⁴ Constantly presented with intentions that are not our own, our habitual selves are placed in a social world filled with otherness and possibilities for learning.

It follows from Merleau-Ponty’s conception of intersubjectivity that the possibilities that define the self are acquired in and through social life, such that bodily intelligence is oriented towards learning the possibilities that define a particular social identity. Socialization takes the form of learning the use of objects and adapting our aptitudes to those uses, a process that begins in and lasts throughout childhood through the imitation of others as examples of roles the individual can play.²⁶⁵ Through play children learn to appropriate objects in the way their family and friends have and thus come to resemble them in their habits. A crucial step in the process of socialization is the appropriation of language, through which the individual learns to express in symbolic form the generalized aptitudes learned through habituation. The result of this process is that an individual’s habits, his ways of understanding and coping with the world, become consonant with those of the social groups with which he interacts. Social identity as Merleau-Ponty understands it does not entail conscious self-recognition in terms of social labels; it is a tacit phenomenon, implicit in the possibilities with which one tends to reckon. In Merleau-Ponty’s example, being a proletarian is not in the first instance an issue of conscious class identification but a manner of projecting possibilities into the world based on one’s experiences with social and

²⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 410/411. As Marratto notes, consciousness we have of space as a field of possibilities perforce entails consciousness of the limitations of our body in that space. The chair that has been made for sitting on has not received its signification from me, but comes stamped with its signification as for sitting on (Scott Marratto, *The Intercorporeal Self: Merleau-Ponty on Subjectivity* [Albany: SUNY, 2012], p. 48).

²⁶⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Merleau-Ponty à la Sorbonne: résumé du cours 1949-1952* (Dijon: Cynara, 1988), p. 562, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Child Psychology and Pedagogy: The Sorbonne Lectures 1949-1952*, trans. Talia Welsh (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2010), pp. 452-453. Merleau-Ponty follows Paul Guillaume in thinking that children do not imitate single motions but rather the bearing or comportment of other people.

economic institutions.²⁶⁶ This self-formation through socialization is crucial to our having a world according to Merleau-Ponty. Concomitant with our sense of individual self-identity is the “zone of generalized existence” we find around ourselves, the already-constituted meanings of objects and possibilities we imitate and internalize or learn to separate ourselves from that constitutes the social world with which we compare and contrast ourselves and through which we gain a sense of our own selfhood.²⁶⁷ Human subjects are not formed unidirectionally by some abstracted society; rather, they appropriate certain possibilities and reject others and thereby come to a tacit understanding of what they can and cannot do and ultimately who they are. Social subjects exist in Merleau-Ponty’s words between the two poles of anonymity and individuality, constantly working out the extent to which they can reckon with socially given possibilities.

As a form of socialization, habituation provides the subject with limits to its openness to new possibilities. While humans are constantly capable of reinterpreting their world, that capacity is usually limited to working through the possibilities inherent to social groups to which one belongs and adapting them to one’s specific setting. The habituated self thus exists not merely as a process of working through a social dialectic of anonymity and individuality but also as possessing its own form of historicity, which for Merleau-Ponty entails a dialectic of inheritance and adaptation. When we engage with the world we participate in what Merleau-Ponty calls a “perceptual tradition” that is constructed not only by our own repeated behaviors but those that our cultural and social environment has made available to us.²⁶⁸ The present of our conscious experience is suffused with a past that has never been the theme of a present, consisting of

²⁶⁶ For this example see Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 507/515.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 514/523.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 285/ 277.

repetition through which the aptitudes by means of which we experience the world are acquired. The process of habituation that structures the body is in turn structured by the socially-defined objects and practices it engages with, such that in every moment of the conscious present is hidden traces of not only our personal history but that of the society into which we are born. It is in this sense that Merleau-Ponty speaks of a habitual body that underlies the occurrent body, the body consciousness experiences as an object like others in the world but which is already structured by the intentionality it gains through habituation.²⁶⁹ Our participation in a shared social world provides us with possibilities inherited from previous generations based upon our cultural, economic, and political situation. Habit thus serves as the mediating term between ourselves and a world that is both social and historical that forms the horizon of our possibilities. In his later work, Merleau-Ponty will refer to his philosophy as a “transcendental geology” that attempts to grasp the human subject in terms of the nexus where history and behavioral structures intersect and inscribe themselves on the human body.²⁷⁰ Historical institutions and practices have become layered into our bodies through repetition, on which our everyday experience of the world is built and structured without our being conscious of the fact. Philosophical interrogation of habit and the habituated body forces us to see ourselves as inhabiting a set of social histories of necessity and allows us to begin the process of bringing those histories to light.

²⁶⁹ For instance in *ibid.*, p. 111/ 95.

²⁷⁰ See especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), pp. 306-307/ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), pp. 258-259, and cf. Edward Casey, “Habitual Body and Memory in Merleau-Ponty,” *Man & World*, 17 (3-4), 1984: 279-297, p. 284, on what he translates as Merleau-Ponty’s “transcendental speleology.” As Glen Mazis, “The Depths of Time in the World’s Memory of Self,” in David Morris and Kyn Maclaren eds., *Time, Memory, Institution* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015) (p. 65) notes, the idea of a transcendental geology ultimately displaces anthropocentric notions of history and points to an inheritance that links our existence to the history of the earth, though the relationship between human and natural history is outside of this chapter’s scope.

This understanding of the relationship between the body and socially-produced possibilities is what Pierre Bourdieu will appropriate for his own sociological theory. It is not incidental that Bourdieu credits Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty for “[opening] the way for a non-intellectualist, non-mechanistic analysis of the relations between agent and world.”²⁷¹ Merleau-Ponty in particular strongly influences Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus*, bodily dispositions produced by participation in social practices that regulate everyday conduct and form a stock of abilities that are spontaneously brought to bear in different practical situations.²⁷² For Bourdieu as well as for Merleau-Ponty bodily comportment gives insight into the social practices into which one has been socialized and hence is inscribed with individual and social history. Indeed, Bourdieu’s understanding of the historicity of the subject as a “present past that tends to perpetuate itself into the future by reactivation in similarly structured practices” owes much to the language of sedimentation, or the transformation of repeated experiences into stable dispositions Merleau-Ponty borrows from Husserl.²⁷³ While both seek to provide an account of a socially-informed body that is capable of understanding and responding to a world, Merleau-Ponty provides a richer description not only of the process of habituation as it pertains to individuals, but also regarding how individuals concretely exist within their social context, or to use Bourdieu’s terminology, regarding the relationship between individual *habitus* and class *habitus*. Bourdieu understands this

²⁷¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *In Other Words: Essays Towards a Reflexive Sociology*, trans. Matthew Adamson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 10.

²⁷² For a full definition of *habitus* see Pierre Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992), p. 53: “The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce *habitus*, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them.”

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 54, see for instance Edmund Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book: Studies in the Phenomenology of Constitution*, trans. Richard Rojcewicz and André Schuwer (Boston: Kluwer, 1980), p. 118. On this point see Iordanis Marcoulatos, “Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu on Embodied Significance,” *Journal for the Theory of Social Behavior*, 31 (1), 2001: 1-27, p. 9.

relationship as one of homology between members of a particular class, where their common participation in social practices is balanced by the sequence in which individuals participate in those practices, what Bourdieu calls their unique “social trajectory.”²⁷⁴ Early experiences dominate one’s subsequent engagement with society and hence modify the way one is formed by social practices. One’s experience of work, for instance, is affected by the knowledge and values one received while in school, which in turn is affected by one’s family life.²⁷⁵ Personal history inflects the dispositions one acquires in one’s social life for Bourdieu that allows for individual variation among members of a particular group.

Merleau-Ponty is acutely aware of the importance of an understanding of the ways appropriation of social dispositions is grounded in an individual’s personal history. However, his twin concepts of sedimentation and style also give insight into the ways subjects enact and transform the dispositions they acquire through social practices and provide greater depth to the form of historicity proper to the habituated self. Merleau-Ponty interprets the concept of sedimentation as an attempt to engage in what he calls a “vertical history,” a history where events are pushed beneath the level of conscious reflection through repetition and become foundational for future events.²⁷⁶ Merleau-Ponty notes that Husserl even uses the term *Stiftung*, foundation or institution, to describe the events whose significance outstrips our attempts to grasp them consciously.²⁷⁷ A book, for instance, is a matrix of meanings that emerge through repeated readings

²⁷⁴ Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, p. 60.

²⁷⁵ Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, p. 87.

²⁷⁶ For this terminology see Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l’invisible*, p. 316/ 268. Note that sedimentation for Merleau-Ponty does not entail that habits must have begun as consciously undertaken actions as Bergson believes (and a view M.C. Dillon, *Merleau-Ponty’s Ontology* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1988), p. 137 attributes to him), as we have discussed in the previous section.

²⁷⁷ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*, trans. John O’Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 68.

and interpretations of the book and becomes foundational for later authors' works. A particular manner of speaking of writing becomes available to readers of a certain work, and through repetition of these mannerisms the reader gains the ability to deploy them in various contexts. In this way, an author's work is incorporated into a cultural tradition. Stylistic elements of language become potentialities to express a particular emotional or factual value like the keys of an organ described earlier and hence become foundational for future expressions of language by the reading audience.²⁷⁸ In Merleau-Ponty's later work the language of sedimentation increasingly replaces that of habit to reflect his shift in emphasis towards understanding the subject in historical terms. Social institutions are as much products and matrices of sedimented activity as cultural works, and embodied subjects are formed through their participation in them and make available aptitudes that become the foundation of future activity. In both cases engagement with entities in the world gives depth to the embodied subject in the form of aptitudes whose origins are unknown and that lie below the surface of consciousness ready to be reactivated. Over time and through new experiences some habits lose their relevance to the subject's life and sink into oblivion while others rise to become elements of the subject's self-understanding. The embodied subject thus not only lacks self-transparency, it is also by nature fluid. The capacities that form the world the subject inhabits are always in the process of generation or corruption, and in this way the traditions and institutions in which the subject participates are also changed as the possibilities they embody get adapted to new settings and remain vital or fall into disuse.

The result of subject formation through sedimentation is what Merleau-Ponty terms style, which along with sedimentation also replaces the language of habit in his later work. In *The*

²⁷⁸ Ibid., p. 13: "Sedimented language is the language the reader brings with him, the stock of accepted relations between signs and familiar significations without which he could never have begun to read. It constitutes the language and the literature of the language. Thus it is also Stendhal's work once it has been understood and added to the cultural heritage."

Phenomenology of Perception style is described in Heideggerian terms as the unity of a particular world, the manner of comportment that identifies an individual or a group and differentiates it from others.²⁷⁹ Style, in other words, denotes the specific aptitudes that form an individual's body schema and articulate the ways she encounters and responds to her environment. As Merleau-Ponty elaborates on the concept of style in his later work the connection with Heidegger becomes more explicit. In *The Visible and the Invisible* Merleau-Ponty equates style with *Wesen*, Heidegger's term denoting the verbal form of being. The embodied subject exists as its potentialities, sedimented through repetition of specific experiences the unconscious retention of which forms its ways of understanding and interacting with its environment.²⁸⁰ Whereas sedimentation refers to the retention of past experiences, style draws attention to how sedimented aptitudes are actively expressed in everyday life. The way we perceive things in the world and the way we use them to achieve certain ends bestows meaning upon them, such that even our most mundane activities are creative acts. Our bodies and our environment stand in a relationship of mutual co-production: through their interaction they both become works (*oeuvres*), entities endowed with significance drawn from traditions and altered by personal history.²⁸¹ Dispositions, in other words, are not merely acquired through sedimentation: rather, they are transformed in their very enactment in specific cases as they are adapted to particular needs and desires, and in this adaptation one gains the possibility of acting in a new and unique fashion. Our actions are matrices of meaning just like the cultural products we appropriate, and our intentions are not exhausted in the bodily or technological means we have to express them. An individual's style is their futurity

²⁷⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 384/ 382.

²⁸⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p. 152/115.

²⁸¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp. 109-110, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 68.

just as sedimentation is their past, as one's manner of expression points towards the repetition in which one's intentions will be fulfilled, and it is this repetition that gives the world its sense: in Merleau-Ponty's words, "the continued attempt at expression finds one single history – just as the hold our body has upon every possible object finds one single space."²⁸² The dialectic between individuality and anonymity can be restated as that between intention and existing linguistic possibilities, and subject-formation is an ongoing mediation between the two terms.

Habituation and the related concepts of sedimentation and style thereby allow us to view social worlds without objectifying them. Rather than viewing habituation as assimilating us to a preexisting community, or as constraining us to live according to customs as with Bergson, Merleau-Ponty presents a fluid picture of how possibilities embodied in objects and practices form the human body, which in turn produces new possibilities through adaptation that enter into the subject's environment. The differences between the individual and society are merely stylistic, pertaining to the particular aptitudes that characterize different individuals and which form institutions and practices, an ontological reversibility Merleau-Ponty expresses by referring not to discrete social entities but to "flesh" (*chair*), a continuous tissue whose enfolding through time produces distinct yet open constellations of possibilities.²⁸³ Merleau-Ponty thus regards both

²⁸² Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 113/70. Although discussion of Merleau-Ponty's difficult notion of expression is outside of the scope of this chapter, it is important to note with Waldenfels that expressive behavior in language or in motion is both creative in that it adapts existing possibilities of language and also responsive, such that intention and expression are brought into being together rather than expression translating some pre-existing desire into language. Merleau-Ponty is thus closer to the postmodern notion of excess than to any romantic notions of self-expression. See Bernhard Waldenfels, "The Paradox of Expression," in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor eds., *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2000), pp. 95-99.

²⁸³ See Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, p. 184/141-142. As Saint Aubert makes clear, conceiving of habit in terms of the body schema provides a link between the early and late Merleau-Ponty's work as it indicates that habituation is nothing other than production of the system of equivalences that relates language and body and is thus both spiritual and corporeal. The reversibility inherent to flesh as touching and touched, as seeing and seen, is inextricably linked to the sense (or prose) of the world made possible through habituation, see Emmanuel de Saint Aubert, "Le sens de l'habitude chez Merleau-Ponty," *Alter*, 12, 2004: 105-128, pp. 112-116.

subjects and social institutions as open to change through creative repetition that alters possibilities to the point of transformation.

The concepts of sedimentation and style, however, give insight into a self that is irreducibly historical, provisionally stable yet dynamically changing in a manner that is not dependent upon conscious activity. Habit is a mediating term between anonymity and individuality that pays greater attention to individual variation and trajectories among members of a group than Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* allows for. While *habitus* explains how individual subjects are formed by participation in social practices without explicit exercises of power over them, sedimentation and style provide a more nuanced account of how this process of formation takes place and what individual subjects do to alter the dispositions they acquire through social activities as well as the social worlds in which they live. Repeated attempts at expressing intentions alter linguistic and behavioral patterns develop some and cause others to be forgotten, such that traditions are changed in the very process of their transmission. The process of appropriating dispositions is never one of simple acquisition but entails negotiation between new and existing aptitudes, experimentation and sometimes invention that unites them in creative ways. Using a shoe as a hammer is a quotidian example that gives insight into the ways aptitudes interact with each other, a phenomenon that Merleau-Ponty points out in a clearer way than Ravaissou does. This process in an ongoing exchange between self and world through which both are transformed articulates the course of our relations with the social world and our ability to discover and interpret ourselves as individual subjects in its context.

3. Merleau-Ponty, Philosopher of Freedom

The results of the proceeding sections can be stated in the following terms: consciousness is not a pre-given faculty that can objectively survey the elements of the embodied subject and

unify them into a self. Conscious reflection always comes *après-coup*, after the work of sedimentation has already produced the aptitudes by which we inhabit and engage with the world and while we creatively express those aptitudes and change ourselves in the process. The habitual subject exists as a temporal ecstasis where the past is retained in the present even as it is directed towards a future that it itself enacts. There is no complete conscious self-knowledge, then, but only an approximation of one's states based on momentary observations and retrospective judgments. Yet our ways of thinking and knowing are not independent either, but themselves the product of historically contingent processes of appropriating traditional material and expressing them in the unique circumstances of our lives. Against Bergson's notion of a deep-seated self, Merleau-Ponty argues that the self can only gain a sense of itself when it is in activity, when it has a sense of what it is doing and synthesizes its acts, feelings, and thoughts into a more or less coherent idea of itself.²⁸⁴ How I understand myself is limited by the terms available to me within my cultural and historical location and I only come to learn what to make of myself gradually and incompletely. The same is true of the social world in which I live. Although I have been and continue to be formed through my interactions with other people, texts, and institutions, I am not directly conscious of the ways those interactions shape me and them but only experience moments of illumination where I can see the effects of something I say or do on someone else or vice versa and retrospective judgments regarding how my time working or being at school has changed me. Conscious understanding attempts to stabilize and concretize the continuous flow of habituation and hence leaves a remainder that is merely felt yet still active in the way one exists.

In this final section, I will examine how Merleau-Ponty applies his concepts of embodied intelligence, sedimentation, and style to develop a conception of philosophical practice that

²⁸⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 439/442.

conforms to his Socratic project of achieving freedom. Freedom for Merleau-Ponty is situated within social worlds and entails actively taking up possibilities for social and institutional change that exist but only tacitly as part of our set of habits. We shall see, however, that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the relationship between philosophical practice and freedom changes throughout his career. In his early work, he argues that by investigating the ways we experience social institutions we can see how they have formed us and ultimately how they themselves can be reformed. Separating from the habitual world through philosophical investigation allows us to see it as a site of potential change, rather than as simply existing. As he grows more sensitive to the nature of sedimentation as a form of historicity, Merleau-Ponty focuses more on the work philosophy does to clarify our personal situation within our socially and historically constituted world. Instead of directly trying to grasp the social and institutional structures that have formed us, Merleau-Ponty advocates a kind of experimentalism, modeled on the work of the artist, which attempts to articulate the inchoate feelings that remain after conscious reflection. By attending to our affective reactions to situations and putting them into language in a manner similar to a novelist we can gain a better, yet still incomplete, sense of our habitual ways of experiencing the world, and by comparing them to our conscious knowledge we can test that knowledge's relevance to our way of life. Merleau-Ponty never abandons his dictum that philosophy only puts into words what we already know, but it becomes a Socratic self-examination that questions whether our habitual experiences are truly our own or whether they are shared and in so doing creates the unease with the world that is a prerequisite for changing it. In investigating Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of freedom and philosophical practice, I will argue that his form of philosophical practice can be read as a critique of attempts to gain mastery over our comportment.

Merleau-Ponty's early thought concerning freedom remains close to the Marxist project of changing the world through critique, but he interprets Marxism through his phenomenological method. In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's theory of "effective freedom" that is situated within an existing yet open set of social possibilities subtends a political project of becoming conscious of one's possibilities and actively committing to them. The intersubjective world as we have seen is one that we have not created and of which we lack transparent knowledge. We come slowly through repeated experiences to understand our possibilities and gain a sense of who we are. The embodied subject is its way of inhabiting its world, its manner of reckoning with certain possibilities rather than others. Our identities are ultimately nothing other than the projects that orient our actions and constitute our intentions. We are thrown, to use the Heideggerian term, into a world whose significance we discover only gradually and incompletely, based on the specific history that becomes our habitual way of understanding the world. Actively taking up a class identity is not a matter of accepting Marxist theory but rather of reflection on one's own experiences and comparison of one's experiences with those of others. The worker gains a sense of "the appointed order with which he is at grips" by learning about his wages, those of his co-workers, and those of other industries, about the strikes that have increased wages in various industries and the tactics bosses, police, and governments have used to stifle resistance, etc.²⁸⁵ When the worker comes to see the conditions of his livelihood as similar to those of people who live under different circumstances, and furthermore if he comes to regard their fates as linked, only then does he gain class consciousness. Identification with a social label occurs only at the end of

²⁸⁵ Ibid., p. 507/516.

a process of clarifying a certain set of possibilities or in Merleau-Ponty's words a "field" in which projects and intentions are embodied in our behavior.²⁸⁶

His (admittedly controversial) critique of Sartre illuminates how freedom for Merleau-Ponty is inherently situated within existing social world.²⁸⁷ Sartre regards our being a field of possibilities as an effect of our choices regarding who we are to be, while Merleau-Ponty sees it as nothing other than our nature as embodied subjects existing in an intersubjective environment.²⁸⁸ Claiming as Sartre does that our choices structure the world we inhabit ignores the role of social self-formation in constituting and limiting our sense of possibilities. It is not we as isolated individuals who confer meaning upon cultural objects and practices but we as formed by those practices and who are always in conversation with them.²⁸⁹ This is not to say that we cannot make choices regarding our projects and commitments, and indeed Merleau-Ponty regards coming to an explicit understanding of one's possibilities as the very process of opening up to

²⁸⁶ Merleau-Ponty describes this view of freedom as "*avoir du champ*," playing on the valences of the French word *champ* which can refer to a physical field in which one can roam or to a zone of possibilities in the sense of a sphere of action (*un champ de action* or *un champ d'activité*) or a zone of visibility (*un champ de vision*). See *ibid.*, p. 501/509.

²⁸⁷ Merleau-Ponty's critical discussion of Sartre in the chapter titled "Freedom" in *The Phenomenology of Perception* is notoriously ambiguous. My interpretation of Merleau-Ponty on this subject follows that of John J. Compton, "Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Human Freedom," *The Journal of Philosophy*, 79 (10), 1982: 577-588. For an opposing interpretation that defends Sartre from Merleau-Ponty's criticisms see Jonathan Webber, "Freedom," in Sebastian Luft & Soren Overgaard eds., *The Routledge Guide to Phenomenology* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

²⁸⁸ See Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Washington Square Press, 1956), p. 578: "Therefore the cause, far from determining the action, appears only in and through the project of an action... In other words the consciousness which carves out the cause in the ensemble of the world has already its own structure; it has given its own ends to itself, it has projected itself toward its possibles, and it has its own manner of hanging on to its possibilities..."

²⁸⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p.505/513: "I am free in relation to fatigue to precisely the extent that I am free in relation to my being in the world, free to make my way by transforming it. But here once more we must recognize a sort of sedimentation of our life: an attitude towards the world, when it has received frequent confirmation, acquires a favored status for us." Cf. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Oeuvres*, ed. Claude Lefort (Paris: Gallimard, 2010), p. 516f., in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 161f. For a fascinating discussion of this passage that connects Merleau-Ponty's concept of sedimentation to the language of weight he often uses see Donald Landes, "Memory, Sedimentation, Self: The Weight of the Ideal in Bergson and Merleau-Ponty," in David Morris & Kyn MacLaren eds., *Time, Memory, Institution: Merleau-Ponty's New Ontology of Self* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

freedom. But freedom is gained slowly as individuals come to understand who they are and where they stand in their social world and what their location allows them to do and not to do. Sartre's understanding of the individual as a nihilating force that possesses absolute freedom to explicitly choose its way of life over and against the world ignores the fact that it is only in relation to the world that we gain a concrete existence, that rejection of the world is itself a mode of existing in the context of the intersubjective environment that has formed us.

Instead, Merleau-Ponty's interactional understanding of the relationship between self and world results in a recognition of the world's incompleteness and an understanding of freedom as situated agency. Even as we are formed by institutions and practices we did not create, aspects of the social world remain open to our action: "The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities."²⁹⁰ Part of coming to reckon with our identity as a proletarian is to recognize that wage structures are not in fact fixed but can be altered through collective action. The combination of knowledge of how to change conditions and social organization oriented towards those changes makes possible the achievement of one's aims. Freedom thus entails the recognition that one's field of possibilities is not indifferently arrayed, but some possibilities are closer to us while others are more remote, and learning to act based on an understanding of the possibilities that are in fact open to one. As a member of the proletariat I can try to work for a raise or a promotion or to start my own business but through experience and observation I learn that in the unlikely cases where these events do come about the same structures of exploitation and alienation from work remain, such that my best option is to work to take more control of the labor process. Freedom in Merleau-Ponty's words is "a meeting of the inner and the outer," the

²⁹⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 517/527.

intersection between our projects and the conditions that can bring them about, where the options by which to bring about this meeting are greater or lesser based on the “tolerance” our sense of possibility and institutional givens have for it.²⁹¹ Freedom in other words is where the ethical and the social meet harmoniously, the location where individual commitment and social and institutional conditions are made to cohere through our own activity.

Freedom is in this sense therefore an inherent feature of our socially and historically constituted world, but actualizing that freedom in practice requires knowledge of the institutions, practices, ideas, and individuals one is involved with that is garnered by means of a form of philosophical self-examination that explicitly expresses one’s habitual, pre-reflective knowledge. By highlighting the experienced yet unthematized projects that constitute one’s existence and the ways certain aspects of one’s environment help or hinder the achievement of those projects one can produce an understanding of how one can change one’s world for the better. In other words, to become free one must first bring what is habitual up to the surface of consciousness so that it is available to examination and judgment. The exercise of freedom requires a suspension of one’s habitual way of life so that it can be presented to oneself objectively. Our habitual world to Merleau-Ponty is as the water in which fish live but of which they are never conscious. Habits articulate the contours of our world, relating bodily and technological means to particular ends and bestowing objects relevant to our projects significance, but they are expressed in the style of our conduct rather than cognized in thought. Merleau-Ponty ultimately agrees with Sartre that when one comes to understand that the institutional and social conditions of one’s existence are themselves impediments to that existence one’s habitual way of life becomes precarious and the actions one takes can force those habits to change. For Merleau-Ponty, being opened up to freedom

²⁹¹ Ibid., p. 518/528.

requires a denaturalization of our habitual world, and it is in this respect that his philosophy is Socratic as described at the outset of this chapter. Philosophy retains its uneasiness with the world by taking its task to be the uncovering our habits and the nature of the world we take for granted they give insight into and which we share with others.

While this picture of the way freedom is achieved through philosophical reflection is appropriate to Merleau-Ponty's early analyses of intersubjectivity, it fails when put in the context of the historicity defined by sedimentation. That the social possibilities one acquires through habituation are inflected not only with inherited forms of behavior and understanding but also with their adaptation to new circumstances signifies that the structures of our social world are necessarily opaque, meaning that philosophical reflection cannot even in principle fully articulate them. The attempt to conceptually articulate our social world ignores that social subjects exist as a process of continual becoming, whose interpersonal and institutional influences remain unclear. Sedimentation, as Merleau-Ponty will say, does not merely constitute a "deposit or a residue" of ossified behaviors but a process of change in the matrix of possibilities with which individuals reckon that is inherent to its production.²⁹² The very interactions and improvisations that create institutions and practices alter and transform them, such that social worlds must be understood not only as open in the sense discussed above but furthermore as fluid. The possibilities I act upon have been produced through unpredictable and contingent processes of change and will produce new possibilities equally unpredictable and contingent. The unity of my social world lies only in the interconnection between events and possibilities that admit of multiple avenues of interpretation. A theory of history that searches for dialectical totality thus flounders in the ambiguity necessary to the process of sedimentation. Social history is not revealed as sequential

²⁹² Merleau-Ponty, *Oeuvres*, p. 444/39. See also Stephen H. Watson, *Phenomenology, Institution and History: Writings After Merleau-Ponty II* (New York: Continuum, 2009), pp. 19-20.

and logically interconnected states but as “asymmetries, vestiges, diversions, and regressions.”²⁹³ While sedimentation and style reveal regularity in the social subject’s mode of existence, they also point to an essential instability in social and individual practices, calling into question the enterprise of understanding either conceptually.

The late understanding of the fluidity and historicity of the habitual subject results in a recognition of profound limitations on the possibilities of practices of ethical self-cultivation. The limits the temporal structure of sedimentation and style set on self-knowledge put projects that attempt to fundamentally transform one’s way of being at risk of either giving rise to a form of subjectivity they did not intend, or worse, to become ossified in the form of institutions that impose violent forms of discipline and impose an artificial stability on one’s way of being. While one can see this concern in Merleau-Ponty’s criticism of contemporary philosophy with which this chapter began, in an essay called “Faith and Good Faith” Merleau-Ponty draws a parallel between the ways contemporary Soviet Marxist and French Catholic institutions engage in the social world that reveals his understanding both of the structure of projects that change one’s way of life and their dangers. Structurally, Merleau-Ponty claims that ethical projects begin with a diagnosis of a condition of human existence to be resolved, in the former case of class struggle and in the latter, sin. The conceptual and institutional systems of Marxism and Christianity as he understands them respond to these issues in our habitual world, and the figures of the proletarian and Christ are parallel in that they exemplify how to live life in response to the diagnoses that animates these systems.²⁹⁴ To be a Marxist or a Christian requires that one comes to share in the recognition of

²⁹³ Merleau-Ponty, *Oeuvres*, p. 445/39.

²⁹⁴ Merleau-Ponty *Signes*, p. 50/28: “One day a man declares himself a Christian or a Communist. Just what does he mean? We are not completely changed in an instant. What happens is simply that in recognizing an external cause of his destiny, man suddenly gets permission and even the mission (as I believe Maritain used to say) to *live in the bosom of the faith of his natural life*.” Merleau-Ponty draws here on Gabriel Marcel’s existentialist theology grounding Christianity in a recognition of the “brokenness” of the world, see Simpson 2014, pp. 87-91.

the influence of class or sin on one's manner of existing, to see past experiences, present states of character, and future projects not as individual but as shared, and then to work to eliminate those influences both through ethical and political action. Yet Merleau-Ponty argues that such projects can become a "dead or sectarian faith" if they resolve themselves into sets of doctrines or disciplines that attempt to fix the possibilities for ways of living in response to their diagnoses. Merleau-Ponty finds such an attempt at fixation in the Catholic critics of Sartre, who reflexively reject the latter's analysis of inauthenticity out of a dogmatic insistence on the perfection of humanity in history. For Merleau-Ponty, the application of the Syllabus of Errors to analyses of human existence runs the risk of freezing the development of the Christian life and closing off possibilities for its expression.²⁹⁵ Likewise, Merleau-Ponty worries that Soviet communism in particular has failed to maintain fidelity to its humanistic origins in Marxist philosophy. Having failed to transform human nature through revolution the communist party in Russia has become a dictatorship of bureaucrats who through forced labor and show trials have attempted to impose a way of life upon the Russian people. Communism is in Merleau-Ponty's words "going back on its principles" in that it abandons just the relation of idea to lived experience and which animated the thought of Marx as well.²⁹⁶ In this way communism has become what Merleau-Ponty following Arthur Koestler calls a "philosophy of the commissar" that reduces all ethical and political questions to mathematical applications of bureaucratic principles and that therefore loses the ability to relate to the habitual world.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens* (Paris: Gallimard, 1966), p. 314, in English as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Sense and Non-Sense* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 177.

²⁹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 496/303.

²⁹⁷ Merleau-Ponty, *Oeuvres*, p. 323/161-162, referring in particular to Arthur Koestler, *The Yogi and the Commissar* (London: Hutchinson, 1965).

Merleau-Ponty does not argue that ethical and political projects of personal transformation inevitably devolve into bureaucratized forms of self-discipline. Such a result is only the worst outcome for such projects, but Merleau-Ponty's slow disillusionment with the French Communist Party in particular makes it a primary concern of his. As a result, Merleau-Ponty's own understanding of philosophical practice in his late work emphasizes opposing the tendency of ethical and political commitments to ossify and become new sources of oppression. Merleau-Ponty clarifies how philosophy accomplishes this task by analogizing it to art, which he regards following both Ravaisson and Bergson as a "figurative philosophy" (*une philosophie figurée*) that accomplishes the task of self-examination not through direct observation but by providing a medium for the subject to creatively express her pre-reflective, habitual knowledge.²⁹⁸ A style of engaging with the world is expressed in our behavior and Merleau-Ponty uses the aesthetic language of a "work" (*oeuvre*) to describe what is produced through our comportment towards the world, including both cultural objects and our own bodies. The work is a specific product of style, a response that crystallizes our way of being in the world into something that can clarify it upon observation. Corporeal style is thus an incipient form of art: bodily motion is in Merleau-Ponty's words "primordial expression" that aims at explicitly articulating our habitual being in the world. The artist merely amplifies everyday forms of expression by creating an aesthetic style that serves as an appendage to corporeal style.²⁹⁹ Aesthetic style, the style of the artist, takes the artist's way of inhabiting the world and uses the material means at the artist's disposal such as paint, a musical instrument, or words, to create a language of expression that makes his habitual life legible. Rather

²⁹⁸ Merleau-Ponty uses this phrase citing Ravaisson and Bergson explicitly in Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception and other Essays on Phenomenological Psychology, the Philosophy of Art, History, and Politics*, trans. James Edie (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964), p. 168n10.

²⁹⁹ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 108/67.

than creating *ex nihilo* a method of representing the world, the artist learns to express in a particular medium his sedimented experiences and his style is his method for doing so.

Also like Ravaisson and Bergson, Merleau-Ponty's analogy between philosophy and art extends to drawing a parallel between artistic and philosophical practice. Gaining the ability to translate one's habitual being in the world into the language made possible by an artistic medium does not occur naturally. Against any notion of artistic genius, Merleau-Ponty argues that artistic style is developed only through experimentation and exercise, repeated attempts to capture the ways the artist's environment is made manifest. The eye, for instance, can be trained through techniques that "outline [sic] and amplify [sic] the metaphysical structure of our flesh."³⁰⁰ Repeated attempts at expression in traditional forms trains the artist's vision to grasp how her world is made manifest in everyday life, the particular effects of color, light, and shade that make her environment appear as it does. In doing so, the artist distances herself from her habitual way of seeing and thus her habitual way of being in order to represent it, and in viewing the work of art the spectator suspends his own habitual way of life in experiencing the work of art. Cézanne's still life paintings for instance highlight the brute physicality of nature and the independence of color from human vision and perspective by rejecting shading effects in favor of a gradient of different tones, unsettling viewers of his paintings by forcing them outside of their habitual ways of seeing the world even in presenting to them a world intimately familiar to them.³⁰¹ Through producing such a style Cézanne takes up his freedom through what Merleau-Ponty calls a "creative

³⁰⁰ Merleau-Ponty, *The Primacy of Perception*, p. 168. Gaines, *The Habitual Body-Subject*, p. 281, rightly points out that the painter is inhabited as much as he inhabits his style, that the kind of repetition the painter engages in for Merleau-Ponty is not simply active but more precisely an appropriation of what he has inherited from the world, such that there is an essential moment of passivity within his activity. Experimentation in the way that I discuss the term must be understood as this form of appropriation or *Erinnerung*, this attempt at collecting the varied experiences of one's life into a manner of faithful expression.

³⁰¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 28/16.

repetition” (*reprise créatrice*) of himself, a practice that gradually uncovers his sedimented ways of perceiving the world and allows him to express them in such a way that he maintains fidelity to himself.³⁰² Art such as Cézanne’s presents the world in the very strangeness in which it is experienced but which is forgotten because of its sedimentation into established habits, and opens its viewers to reflection upon their own ways of seeing the world and its commonality to Cézanne’s. In this regard art helps to perform the political function Merleau-Ponty believes is necessary to the full appropriation of freedom by allowing artist and spectator to go beneath their everyday experience of the world and to see how it is not private but shared.

Merleau-Ponty’s artist does not attempt to remove himself from habitual life to take up a position of pure reflective consciousness by which his actions can be judged in a Bergsonian manner, as this is not merely impossible but undesirable. If habit is our manner of existence in the world as a sedimented past that forms our present experiences, then it is impossible for consciousness to gain full independence over our practical and ethical lives. Bergson’s subject who resists the force of habit through a heroic exertion of effortful attention is as unrealistic a model of ideal selfhood as Aristotle’s *phronimos* who reflectively deliberates concerning optimal choices as both ignore the situated and constructed nature of consciousness. Humans cannot achieve perception of their environment that lacks mediation by sedimented experiences, such that the artist’s distance from her habits provides her only a marginal degree of reflective freedom. However, this outcome is not to be lamented. It is ultimately the very attempt to radically recreate ourselves based on an abstract ideal that risks the freedom that comes from existing in a world, as such a project can alienate us from the people, objects, and institutions, that serve as the anchoring

³⁰² Ibid., p. 43/25.

points of our habitual ties to the world.³⁰³ Freedom is meaningless outside of the very structures that orient the projects through which we live our lives, and attempting to transcend those structures risks alienating us from our situated freedom. The artist does not practice self-transcendence, then, but rather creative repetition, continual experimentation to articulate and work through the possibilities inherent to his location in the world. The artist's exercise of freedom works both with and against habit, training vision to grasp the ways the world comes to presence and thus separating the artist from habitual perception only to return to the habitual world and consciously enact his possibilities in the work of art to discover what they permit and forbid him to do. Merleau-Ponty sums up the paradox of freedom by stating that "If there is a true liberty, it can only come about in the course of our life by our going beyond our original situation and yet not ceasing to be the same: this is the problem."³⁰⁴

Philosophical practice is likewise not so much introspective as it is experimental, consisting not of solitary reflections concerning our own patterns of thought but of interrogations of our responses to situations and events in the world. By attending to the concrete ways individuals interact with their environment philosophy makes visible their presupposed concepts and practices of perception and comportment that constitute their engagement with the world. In this way to quote Merleau-Ponty a "philosophical life always bases itself on these three cardinal points:" our everyday thought as it grounds itself in what we take to be true, in personal history, and in relationships with others.³⁰⁵ Simply reflecting upon individual thought processes misses what is

³⁰³ Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 520/530: "But there are these things which stand, irrefutable, there is before you this person whom you love, there are these men whose existence around you is that of slaves, and your freedom cannot be willed without leaving behind its singular relevance, and without willing freedom for all."

³⁰⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 36-37/21.

³⁰⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie*, p. 37/32.

essential about human existence, that it is only in the interaction with other individuals, built spaces, and institutions that our being in the world is made manifest and worked through gradually and over time. In this light, the full meaning of Merleau-Ponty's hope for philosophy to transform perception can be seen. Philosophy uncovers the interconnected aspects of our *Wesen* and allows us to initiate what he calls a "dialogue with self" where we step outside of ourselves and view our emotional and behavioral reactions to events in his life from a distanced standpoint.³⁰⁶ This critical distance entails seeing our comportment in general terms, as potentially shareable by others and therefore as a theoretical interpretation of our world. Our perception of the world, and perforce our behavior as well as our self-understanding, no longer seem natural but rather as a determinate stance, one that has been produced by certain conditions and which allows for certain possibilities while closing off others. Philosophy according to Merleau-Ponty thus exercises a more powerful denaturalizing function than art does by uncovering the structures of existence and personal and social histories that underlie our everyday experience of the world.

In dredging up our sedimented personal and social histories, philosophy allows us to engage in self-experimentation that most fully takes up our inherent freedom. In an essay devoted to the work of Michel de Montaigne Merleau-Ponty argues that this self-experimentation begins by focusing attention on our occurrent moods and reactions to test how well our conscious view of the world coheres with them:

Self-understanding for Montaigne is dialogue with self. It is a questioning addressed to the opaque being he is and awaits a response from. It is like "essaying" or "experimenting on" himself. He has in view a questioning without which reason's purity would be illusory and in the end impure. Some are amazed that he should want to speak about even the details of his mood and temperament. It is because for him every doctrine, when it is separated from what we do, threatens to be mendacious; and he imagined a book in which for once there would be expressed not only ideas but also the very life which they appear in and which modifies their meaning.³⁰⁷

³⁰⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, pp. 323/199.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 323-324/199.

Self-experimentation for Montaigne is a practice of skepticism regarding our habitual notions. It involves asking whether in accepting doctrines derived either from one's own life experience or from one's social and intellectual world (and this includes even philosophies such as Pyrrhonian skepticism) we have not lost contact with our passions and desires, such that these notions have become imaginaries that mask our experience of the world rather than express it. Practicing philosophy requires examination of the relationships between ideas and the affections that indicate sedimented experiences that have not yet coalesced into language, as it is only through such testing, such experimenting on oneself with ideas, that one discovers their relevance and value and protects against the mendacity of purely abstract notions. Such a practice not only clarifies one's own engagements and commitments through comparison with doctrines but also adds to the meanings of those doctrines by seeing how they apply to the events of one's life. From Merleau-Ponty's perspective, philosophy entails not only the uncovering of existential structures and personal and social histories but also their comparison with our conscious ways of knowing. Concrete philosophy is unhappy because the elaboration of concepts must always come up against its own limitation of the "ontological cipher" that limits their applicability.³⁰⁸ As we discover the implicit ways we know the world through attention to our momentary passions and affects, we at the same time discover the contradictions and between our ideas and our behaviors, moods, and social possibilities. And just as Montaigne complained of the continual effort required to assess the validity of his ideas in light of his passions, we too must submit ourselves to a regime of "unremitting *virtù*" to discover how our conscious ways of thinking falsify our ways of being and to learn to calibrate our ideas to our authentic possibilities.³⁰⁹

³⁰⁸ Ibid., p. 256/157.

³⁰⁹ Ibid., p. 61/35.

Merleau-Ponty's understanding of philosophical practice thus preserves a measure of critical scrutiny towards one's behaviors while focusing attention on the concrete ways our social existence affects our possibilities. Philosophy "limps" as an intellectual discipline in Merleau-Ponty's words because it forsakes pretensions to absolute knowledge in favor the relative and limited perspective offered by investigation of one's own life and thus becomes what he will in another context call non-philosophy.³¹⁰ Ontological inquiry finds that our existence lies entirely in our relations with others, with our spatial and built environment as well as with other humans and institutions. Philosophy fails to reach final conclusions about our existence that transcend historical mediation but instead develops ways of understanding the meaning we make of things, including ourselves. Philosophy's failure to transcend the world it attempts to study is in fact the source of its liberatory potential. Philosophical practice does not seek full rational control of one's behaviors and thought processes. Such an attempt fails to grasp the irreducible historicity of the habitual subject and thus risks becoming nothing more than a new form of bad conscience that futilely attempts to negate our ability to creatively express our sedimented ways of being. Instead, philosophical practice highlights our occurrent impulses and feelings that resist conceptual formation but indicate our contact with "brute being," the moments of encounter in which we orient ourselves in the world and from which we construct meaning.³¹¹ In this way philosophy states descriptively nothing more than what we know but lack the language to articulate, having been turned towards mute experiences through investigation of the nature of habit.

³¹⁰ For the language of limping (*claudication*) in relation to philosophy see Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie*, p. 61/58.

³¹¹ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 40/22. As Mauro Carbone, "Variations of the Sensible: The Truth of Ideas and the Idea of Philosophy in the later Merleau-Ponty," in B. Flynn, W. Froman, and R. Vallier eds., *Merleau-Ponty and the Possibilities of Philosophy* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2009), p. 245, argues, Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the role of philosophical language borrows from Heidegger's notion of *Gelassenheit* as "letting be."

Philosophy for Merleau-Ponty is thus a Socratic activity in that it works both with and against habit to achieve the exercise of freedom. Merleau-Ponty questions but does not abandon the project of making what was believed to be private public, but adds another crucial layer that makes this project possible. Any attempt to study the ways interaction with institutions affects our sense of possibility and to test whether institutional or social formations are compatible with our aspirations must begin with to our momentary responses and comparison with the affects of others. Such testing reveals whether experiences of frustration or disappointment are personal or whether they are shared with others and grounded not in accidental events but in the structure of our world. In so doing philosophical investigation both highlights in a manner similar to art how our world appears to us and explains why it appears in the way it does, thus providing the material by which to ask whether and how it can be changed. In doing so, philosophical practice does not attempt to assimilate us to a preexisting model of perfection but entails uncovering possibilities for action that are not radically new as in Bergson but latent within our social worlds yet still inchoate. Philosophical practice gives us a sense of our social location amidst the inescapable ambiguities of our experience of the world and indicates how our interactions with social institutions have formed our particular identities and possibilities. With this knowledge, we can begin to interrogate our existing social world based on an analysis of the effects institutional formations have on people's aptitudes and self-conceptions. Critique becomes possible as we test whether social formations make possible the achievement of our interests, and if not whether new institutions and social practices can be developed that maintain greater fidelity to our being in the world.

If Merleau-Ponty's philosophical practice is directed towards the goal of achieving concrete freedom, however, it is equally wary of the ways that freedom can be lost in the very attempt to gain it. I have tried to suggest in this section that Merleau-Ponty can be understood as

either criticizing, or at least as qualifying, ways of enacting ethical and political commitments in practice in a way that arises from his theory of habit. Merleau-Ponty's rejection of notions of freedom as self-creation exemplified in the work of Sartre relies on his understanding of habit as mediator of a world that is inescapable save through an act of self-deception. It is incorrect to say that sedimentation opposes freedom: freedom for Merleau-Ponty is nothing other than the range of projects we have open to us as beings situated in time and place and who have been brought up to see ourselves under a certain light, and any ethical or political project must reckon with our grounding in historical and social practices. Yet the effects of habituation are ongoing, such that one's commitments must remain sufficiently open to unpredictable change in one's way of being and in the possibilities for expressing a particular ethical or political ideal. For Merleau-Ponty, the fluidity of the habitual subject precludes the achievement of full conscious self-mastery, as the aptitudes that form the basis of one's style and manner of engaging with the world are in a state of constant yet imperceptible flux. Just like the historical manners of acting described in the previous section, dispositions one consciously cultivates through practice will transform themselves in the very acts by which they become integrated into one's habitual being in the world. As a result, the "ideal self" one attempts to cultivate through practice will also be transformed over time. Engaging in self-experimentation as Merleau-Ponty understands it can therefore be understood not only as a potential basis of political practice but also as a complement to forms of ethical and political commitment that guards against the possibility of their devolving into forms of self-repression.

4. Conclusion: Merleau-Ponty and the Examined Life

The attitude Socratic philosophy cultivates towards social institutions, says Merleau-Ponty, is one of "obedience without respect," and in cultivating this attitude it develops a form of

resistance to them.³¹² Socrates participates in the practices of the Assembly and of the law courts but reminds his jurymen that they fail to understand, let alone live up to, what the city of Athens is and what it means. And yet if those jurymen and those institutions that have failed to embody the idea of Athens are not the city, then what is? Where is the meaning of the city of Athens to be found outside of the people who make it up? Are their values and goals not the only content we can give to the idea of Athens? Finally, what could a man who claims to take no part in public matters, who converses with people privately and avoids advising the assembly on matters of policy, and who claims that anyone who cares for justice must shun the intrigue of political life, possibly know?³¹³ Socrates would be guilty of hypocrisy and arrogance in claiming to have a unique understanding of the values and goals of the city of Athens while refusing to participate in its institutions if it were not for his ironic approach to his relations with other people and to the truth as a whole. Socratic irony in Merleau-Ponty's view is grounded in our ambiguous relationships with ourselves and other people. We cannot avoid making choices and taking responsibility for them even though our decisions are taken in circumstances we do not fully understand and have effects we cannot predict, and where whatever we do is seen and judged by others from whose perspectives our acts can take on an entirely new meaning. Socrates' criticism of the Athenians avoids hypocrisy only because he refuses the standpoint of absolute knowledge, the closure of the Hegelian dialectic of spirit into a self-contained *Sittlichkeit* in which moral certainty is rejoined with historical and ultimately metaphysical validation, from which he could make pronouncements concerning the inherent value of the Athenians' actions. Socrates' method is instead to point out the divergences between the self-understanding of his fellow citizens and

³¹² Merleau-Ponty, *Éloge de la philosophie*, p. 40/36.

³¹³ Plato, *Apology* 32a.

their habitual way of life. The irony behind Socrates' famous disavowals of knowledge is not that he does not possess true knowledge of Athenian virtue, but that there is no such knowledge, no state where the individual and the city coexist in perfect harmony. Athenians' behavior has a different meaning in the light of Socratic questioning from the way they had understood it, and in being shown this divergence lies the possibility of examining and changing oneself.

Merleau-Ponty argues that it is precisely this irony that modern philosophy needs in order to recapture its uneasiness with the world and its relevance to it. As we have seen in this chapter, however, regaining this sense of irony is only possible on the basis of an understanding of the nature of habit. Merleau-Ponty goes beyond both Ravaissou and Bergson's accounts of habit while preserving many of their key insights in conceiving of habit not just as the production of a potentiality, nor as a mechanism attached to perceptions, but as a fluid process of organizing and synthesizing motions and perceptions through repetition into gestures in which our understanding of the world is embodied and expressed. Our preconscious and prereflective ways of knowing are grounded in our habitual manner of existing in the world, our style that reflects the forms of speech and behavior that we have internalized from our environment and which become the aptitudes by means of which we experience and cope with new situations. Our conscious ways of knowing the world are built on yet diverge from the fluid meaning we experience in the world that is implicit within our comportment. Our comportment also gives insight into our interactions with a social world that outstrips our ability to understand it, as what we inherit goes beyond our personal history and involves us in the struggles of our fellow beings. To be human for Merleau-Ponty is thus to exist in a world that one did not create and whose meaning one cannot assimilate and yet to which one remains responsible. In an essay on the Nazi occupation of France Merleau-Ponty reflects that our goals and aspirations, in short our values, only have meaning insofar as they are put into the

world, established “according to a man’s mode of work, the nature of his loves, and the shape of his hopes; in brief, according to the way he lives with others.”³¹⁴ Human life is always ironic in the sense that he attributes to Socratic philosophy, unable to escape its situatedness in a social world, mediated by habit, and yet having a task, a project, that defines us and which we cannot but strive to achieve. The attempt to ignore our inclusion in the world of institutions and practices, and to try to achieve individual self-perfection isolates us in the way philosophers have isolated themselves in the bureaucratic academy or were forced into silence during the occupation. As our analysis of habit has shown, we only exist insofar as we interact with our environment, such that any self-transformation must be combined with institutional or social transformation or it will only serve to alienate us from the world and makes us guilty of the hypocrisy Socratic irony strives to avoid.

This irony is exacerbated by the work of sedimentation, the retention of experiences through repetition that produces our forms of comportment and which remains at the heart of all our interactions with the world. Against Bergson, Merleau-Ponty demonstrates that habit entails the creative expression of forms of action and language we inherit from our social world, such that habit is best understood as habituation, a continuous process of developing, working through, and transforming aptitudes. At the same time, the openness of sedimentation as Merleau-Ponty understands it is far greater than what Ravaisson allows for. While Merleau-Ponty lacks the sense of dynamism in Ravaisson’s conception of habit as desire, Ravaisson’s “continuist” theory of mind-body unity views the habituated body as simply an extension of conscious agency as a form of skill. For Ravaisson, the invention of new forms of activity habit brings about remains within the confines of the goals consciousness posits, even if its tendency towards automatism disrupts

³¹⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 268/152.

conscious self-mastery. Sedimentation as Merleau-Ponty understands it by contrast reveals the continuity of spirit and nature, mind and body, rather than just their rapprochement, as it shows that our embodied existence is nothing other than gradual and mimetic appropriation of existing forms of comportment and application to our specific circumstances that produces new manners of existing that are thrown back into the social world. Merleau-Ponty thus brings the linkage of nature and second nature, of inheritance and acquisition, Ravaisson inaugurates to its conclusion in recognizing that all action is expression that takes place in interactions with a shared world. Human existence is nothing other than its cultivation through participation in social and institutional life, such that the opposition between self and world is dissolved. This cultivation takes place over time and is fluid, such that our inability to grasp the totality of culture is mirrored by an inability to grasp ourselves as a totality either. Our sense of self-identity is always an approximation that papers over the constant change of which our existence consists, such that Merleau-Ponty adds to Socrates' ironic relationship with others an ironic relationship with ourselves that investigation of habit reveals.

The task for philosophy as Merleau-Ponty sees it following Montaigne is to cultivate both the sense of our inability to conceptually grasp ourselves and our world and at the same time our responsibility to it, to be “simultaneously ironic and solemn, faithful and free.”³¹⁵ Because we live in a world of shifting traditions, institutions, and practices, our world is never fully constituted but always open to being changed through our activity in it. Our freedom lies in this openness, yet our freedom is neither absolute nor indifferent to circumstances. We are *not* free to create ourselves in Sartrean fashion as this ignores our embeddedness in a social world, but at the same time because we exist among specific configurations of institutional and social possibilities we *are* free to the

³¹⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 342/210.

extent that we understand and can change those formations. We are free both to work for a raise and to go on strike for better wages and in so doing improve our conditions, but these avenues for action operate under different assumptions of the nature of our situation and of the institutional and collective means at our disposal and are likely to lead to drastically different outcomes. Our ironic distance from our conscious understanding of our world must be balanced by the recognition that we are our projects and that value consists of “actively being what we are by chance, of establishing that communication with others and with ourselves for which our temporal structure gives us the opportunity and of which our liberty is only the rough outline.”³¹⁶ This communication is established by attending to one’s momentary feelings as they emerge through one’s reactions to situations rather than through self-analysis as the latter ignores the nature of sedimentation and thereby falsifies our self-knowledge once again. Attention to and description of one’s experiences allows comparisons with other people that sketch the lines of institutional power dynamics and possibilities for collective actions through which freedom is exercised.

Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical practice does not begin from a pre-defined “ideal self” or objective conception of the good life, but instead uncovers the possibilities that lie latent within one’s habitual being in the world. In this regard, his theory of philosophical practice is open to change to a greater degree than Ravaissou’s but less than Bergson’s. In contrast to how the person of good sense acts, expressing ethical or political commitments in one’s style does not entail creation of new forms of action in response to individual situations. Whereas for Bergson, good sense is defined by its radical novelty, that is its irreducibility to the rearrangement of prior elements, for Merleau-Ponty intelligent action entails the calibration and adaptation of existing sedimented possibilities to present needs. Because he does not see the body as passive, Merleau-

³¹⁶ Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 83/40.

Ponty is able to demonstrate how responsiveness and flexibility can occur without having to attribute to consciousness the ability to grasp absolute novelty, and his criticisms of Bergson's theories of perception and the body are powerful reasons to prefer his view.

At the same time, while his understanding of the habituated body's adaptability is much closer to Ravaisson's, commitment as Merleau-Ponty understands it, whether ethical or political, resists definition in two ways that are not true of Ravaisson's form of virtue ethics. First, the forms of commitment of interest to Merleau-Ponty are not antecedently given but uncovered in the course of self-experimentation and hence partially resist conceptual articulation. Knowledge of the way of life to which one is "condemned" to live is only uncovered through the process of entering into dialogue with oneself and with others, and can only exist as an incomplete task. Attempting to gain complete knowledge of all of the sedimented possibilities from one's personal history along with the histories one shares with others that have come together to form one's current orientations is a futile endeavor, such that one can only have a partial understanding of the tasks one must achieve and of the specific habits one must cultivate in the process of doing so. Second, the ways we form ourselves in light of our commitments will be subject to gradual yet unpredictable change. Possibilities that we enact will be affected by the expressive structure of sedimentation, in which aptitudes are imperceptibly altered in their very enactment and are slowly transformed. As a result, our ability to understand how our conduct instantiates a particular commitment, or whether it exceeds it in various ways, will only be determinable through the practice of interpretive self-experimentation. Indeed, the fluidity of Merleau-Ponty's notion of sedimentation all but guarantees that the ways of being one cultivates in light of one's commitments will eventually become transformed into something new. Just as Cézanne's creative repetitions of himself ultimately produced a new aesthetic style, repetition of particular forms of action will deform

existing aptitudes and ultimately transform them into new ones in an ongoing process of adaptation. Patterns of action and states of character are altered in their very enactment, such that making ethical or political commitments into habits will ultimately result in those commitments being exceeded in ways that cannot be anticipated.

Merleau-Ponty's practice of self-experimentation offers a limited and contextualized self-consciousness and mastery over one's ways of being in a way that qualifies Hadot's association of his work with that of Bergson and the ancients. Hadot's interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology as "perception of the world as a world" is correct so far as it goes, but he goes on to assimilate Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology to the transformation of perception as Bergson practices, ignoring the essentially socially and historically situated nature of the habitual subject.³¹⁷ While intuition in Bergson effects a global, or to use Hadot's terms, existential transformation of our mode of engaging with the world that entails self-recognition as a radically free being, for Merleau-Ponty freedom exists only in particular contexts and is only actualized through projects that respond to specific circumstances. The achievement of self-awareness is thus limited for Merleau-Ponty to recognition of oneself as inhabiting a particular social and historical location within one's world, and with a greater sense of one's existing possibilities. Engaging in self-experimentation teaches one to see the world anew insofar as it denaturalizes one's world and reveals it as the product of histories of social and institutional interaction. This shift in our way of viewing the world, however, is not a "radical rupture" in Hadot's words that rouses us from lostness in the everyday, but rather entails a clarification of our everyday being in the world.³¹⁸ By gaining distance from our habitual, pre-reflective knowledge through its conscious expression, we

³¹⁷ Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 347.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

gain a provisional mastery over ourselves in sharpening the understanding we have of our existing possibilities for action, but only in specific contexts of our everyday activity. Such self-consciousness and self-mastery is also provisional in another sense, namely that the work of sedimentation will ultimately cause whatever actions we consciously undertake to exercise gradual and unpredictable impacts upon our character. Even as one becomes conscious of oneself as in possession of particular possibilities and actively pursues them as projects, the changes to one's aptitudes brought about by that pursuit will accumulate to the point that one's overall character is transformed, such that one's understanding of oneself will gradually become obsolete.

Merleau-Ponty's discussions of contemporary Catholic and Marxist projects allow us to read these qualifications as offering challenges to the goals of achieving complete self-consciousness and self-mastery through philosophical practice. First, any attempt to articulate a program of self-transformation must cultivate self-awareness through attention to our affects, rather than attempt to rationally reconstruct our psychology. As we have seen, the attempt to conceptually map our pre-reflective ways of knowing always leave a remainder of sedimented content found in our emotional reactions to situations that give insight into our occurrent yet inchoate understanding of the world. Self-work must therefore base itself on constant attention to one's occurrent emotional states and interpretation of those states in communication with others. To use Pierre Hadot's terms, the aspect of attention (*prosoche*) to the present moment and one's responses to events must therefore be emphasized³¹⁹ but also supplemented with an understanding of the nature of sedimentation, that one's reactions not only give insight into the way one understands the world but are also indexed to specific interactions with other people and institutions that have inclined us to see the world in particular ways. Ethics must merge with

³¹⁹ See Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, pp. 84-85.

history, including social history, and describe not just how one lives in the world but explain why, and this explanation cannot be merely psychological but at the same time social and even political.

Second and more importantly, the achievement of rational self-mastery must be balanced with accommodation of the unpredictable work of sedimentation. In our habitual conduct is found the meaning we make of the world, our experience of it as relevant to our concerns, desires, and aspirations. If practice attempts to take control of our habitual way of being, our bodily aptitudes as well as our momentary thoughts and feelings, it will be burdened by the fact that our dispositions result from the fluid process of the production, expression, and transformation of aptitudes in the light of new events. The collapse of the distinction between first and second nature means that our very existence lies in our contingent interactions with the world, such that self-transcendence to the position of the sage who sees all from the vantage point of objective truth is only possible at the price of alienating us from the very environment in which we make meaning of ourselves and of others. The project of leaving behind the occurrent self that is ridden with uncontrollable passions is ultimately an attempt to transcend the human condition entirely. Our aptitudes, and the active behaviors that arise from that, contain a moment of passivity within them, material we garner from our relations with others and which we cannot control. The attempt to gain control of our thoughts and feelings through practice shares the same limitations as the attempt to transform human nature through the application of Marxist theory in Soviet Russia, and may result in a new “philosophy of the commissar,” an oppressive discipline that sees our entanglement with the world as an impurity and hence stifles our ability to adapt to our changing circumstances.

Chapter 4: The Feeling for Ambiguity: Indefinite Self-Cultivation and Philosophical Practice as Self-Unfolding

The merging of first and second nature that Ravaisson initiates and Merleau-Ponty completes with his concepts of sedimentation and style introduces historicity to the embodied subject of habit. While all three thinkers agree that the body must be understood as an intelligent agent capable of instigating purposive action, their ways of grounding embodied subjectivity in analyses of the effects of repetition on subjects force us to go beyond seeing bodily intelligence and agency as, to paraphrase Andy Clark, a “leaky” consciousness that is extended in the body.³²⁰ For at the same time as the body as oriented towards practical rationality, it is also a product of processes such as desire, fossilization, and sedimentation that cause it to develop in ways that cannot be articulated in advance. The intelligence and historicity of the habituated body are not opposing forces in tension with each other: the processes whereby repeated actions and affections produce ongoing effects in subjects are the ontological foundations of embodied subjectivity, its very condition of existence. Yet what Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty have shown is that embodied intelligent agency develops in the course of its very actualization. The body’s adaptations and motions that allow it to engage purposively and responsively with its environment subtly change it through repetition, such that the body exists in a perpetual state of *becoming*. The concepts of desire, fossilization, and sedimentation all outline aspects of this process, and are each involved in the production and adaptation of bodily intelligence to varying degrees. When taken together, however, they culminate in an understanding of the embodied subject as fluid and whose development inevitably outstrips conscious self-knowledge.

³²⁰ On the “leakiness” of the mind as extended both into the body and the objects with which it interacts in the world, see Andy Clark, *Being There: Putting Brain, Body, and World Together Again* (Cambridge, M.A.: MIT Press, 1998), p. 53.

The result of our investigation of the habituated body in Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty is the recognition that projects of self-cultivation do not simply form the subject according to a rational ideal but are simultaneously impacted by these features of bodily intelligence and historicity. What unites the programs of philosophical practice Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty articulate is that they respond to the intelligence and historicity of habituated subjects, whether they take advantage of the dynamic nature of habituation to cultivate virtue as with Ravaisson, combat the mechanization of human behavior resulting from fossilization as Bergson does, or uncover new possibilities for projects to which one can consciously commit oneself in the case of Merleau-Ponty. In doing so, the forms of philosophical practice investigated in this dissertation (including Bergson's in its adapted form) produce the conditions for the unencumbered expression of embodied intelligence even as it is produced and affected by its own historical formation. Allowing both principles to function simultaneously, however, introduces the principles and practices of self-cultivation to the structure that underlies the body's becoming. The dispositions and aptitudes practice gives rise to do not stay static but continue to develop as they are enacted in everyday life and the effects of repetition gradually alter them. The self cultivated through conscious practice, in other words, continues to cultivate itself, and this causes projects of self-cultivation to result in something in excess of the form or principle that animated it. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty all affirm this process of development in their conceptions of philosophical practice, and to conceptualize the open-ended and continuous nature of the changes they seek to institute in human life I have coined the term *indefinite* self-cultivation.

In this concluding chapter, I would like to examine the philosophical stakes of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work for theories of self-cultivation and philosophical practice more broadly. I have attempted throughout to defend the philosophical merit of the theories of

habit and embodied subjectivity that stem from them investigated in this dissertation, and I intend to now demonstrate that their work, including their conceptions of philosophical practice, provide resources that can benefit current discussions of ethical and philosophical practice. In doing so, I hope also to clarify the ways Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work can be understood as complementary and as articulating a unitary position on the nature of habit and its role in ethical and philosophical practice. I will first clarify the notion of indefiniteness that emerges through reading Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's theories of habit together. By putting their work in conversation with theorists of virtue acquisition in philosophy and the study of religious ethics, I will argue that projects that understand self-formation as the acquisition and cultivation of habitual dispositions and aptitudes will ultimately give rise to results beyond or other than their pre-defined goals. I will then turn to the work of Pierre Hadot, whose conception of philosophy as a way of life originally inspired many of the questions I set out to investigate in this dissertation, in order to articulate the theoretical territory indefinite self-cultivation covers. I will argue that Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's conception of the embodied subject provide a perspective from which we can critique theories of philosophical practice like Hadot's that seek to cultivate rational self-mastery and form the basis of an alternative set of goals for philosophical practice to achieve. Against dualistic theories of philosophical practice that pit reason against the passions that we will see ultimately result in a violent dominance of reason over the body and the emotions, indefinite philosophical practice exercises intelligent bodily agency in a way that opposes circumstances that give rise to a repetitive and passive mode of existence and actualizes bodily and social freedom while giving rise to stable and increasing pleasure.

1. Indefinite Self-Cultivation

In this dissertation's Introduction, the notion of indefiniteness was provisionally defined negatively by contrast with theories of self-cultivation that interpreted the concept of definition in terms of the concept of form. We have seen throughout this dissertation, however, that the indefiniteness of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of philosophical practice reflects the nature of the subjects they pretend to form. Articulating a more comprehensive concept of indefinite self-cultivation therefore requires reading their theories of embodied subjectivity together to pinpoint precisely where and how they exceed the criteria that define the formed subject. In this section, I will define the concept of indefinite self-cultivation by putting the work of Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty in conversation with contemporary theories of embodied practice in the study of religious ethics. In doing so, I will argue that attempts at consciously forming the embodied subject as it is conceptualized in their work through practice will give rise to changes in the subject that exceed the criteria for the formed subject and can thus only be understood as *indefinite*. Whether explicitly recognized or not, practices of intentional habituation cultivate a state of character that functions as an embodied form of practical reason by activating the autonomic processes of desire, fossilization, and sedimentation that underlie embodied intelligence. Projects of self-formation build character by orienting the process of habituation, but having done so those processes continue to function in ways that give rise to unpredictable changes that ultimately overflow any particular form of character. The dynamic and mutable nature of habit as Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty theorize it cause projects of self-cultivation to bring about results other than or beyond what they intended, such that projects of intentional habituation are inherently liable to bring about indefinite change.

The present focus on the relationship between Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty and theories of embodied practice will force us to momentarily depart from the intellectualism of

current conceptions of philosophical practice. The relationship between habit – named by the terms *hexis* or *habitus* – as the foundation of practical reason, and its origin in practices of individual formation, is examined in much greater detail in the study of religious ethics, in which the notion that “reason has a material, embodied life” has become a common theoretical principle.³²¹ In particular, the turn towards the application of virtue theory in the conceptualization of ethical practice and the ethical subject makes scholarship on religious ethics an attractive conversation partner for Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s work. Scholarship on religious ethics has tended to view becoming an ethical subject as participation in a pedagogical process of acquiring dispositions that conform to a particular model. This approach relies upon a “dispositional model”³²² of the self in which the ethical subject is conceived as a harmony between conscious self-conception and the body viewed as an “assemblage of embodied aptitudes” or dispositions that is achievable through practice.³²³ The model can take various forms, including a set of virtues or excellences, a sage or saint whose example is to be followed, or even a broader conception of

³²¹ Richard Miller, “On Making a Cultural Turn in Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 33 (3), 2005: 409-443, p. 439. For Miller, the focus on the material and embodied nature of moral and practical reasoning is common to both philosophical and theological as well as anthropological investigation of religious ethics in the “cultural turn.” For a general discussion of recent discussions of embodiment in the study of religious ethics see Constance Furey, “Body, Society, and Subjectivity in Religious Studies,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 80 (1), 2012: 7-33.

³²² This language comes from Elizabeth Bucar and Aaron Stalnaker, “Comparative Religious Ethics as a Field of Study,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 42 (2), 2014: 358-384, p. 381, who also provide a helpful review of literature from the “third wave” of religious ethics that has tended to be more friendly towards virtue theory. For more critical assessments of this turn, see John Kelsay, “The Present State of the Comparative Study of Religious Ethics,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 40 (4), 2012: 583-603, and Jung Lee, “The Rhetoric of Context: Comparative Religious Ethics and the Limits of Virtue,” *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 41 (4), 2013: 555-584.

³²³ An understanding of the body taken directly from Marcel Mauss, see Talal Asad, *Genealogies of Religion: Discipline and Reasons of Power in Christianity and Islam* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993), p. 75, cf. Talal Asad, “Remarks on the Anthropology of the Body,” in Sarah Coakley ed. *Religion and the Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997: 42-52), p. 47.

human flourishing.³²⁴ In each case, however, the model of ethical subjectivity is given in advance, and the possibility of conforming to this model through some pedagogical program is assumed. In this regard, practice or ritual are to be seen not primarily as symbolic or communicative but as pedagogical and efficacious in producing a certain form of ethical subject, such that they serve as pedagogical techniques through which habituation according to a particular model is achieved.

In constructing a dispositional model of the self, scholars of religious ethics view acquired habits as *durable*, in the sense that they become the more or less permanent basis of the ethical subject's everyday way of life once they are acquired. Scholars of religious ethics have thus heightened Aristotle's connection between states of character and deliberation to argue that it is the body itself that "learns" how to instantiate virtue in particular situations.³²⁵ By understanding the body as a set of acquired aptitudes, scholars of religious ethics have broken down the distinction between "body sense and body learning," thereby giving practice the role of actively producing the forms of experience previously understood to be natural such as physical movement, emotional being, and even states of belief.³²⁶ It thus becomes possible to speak of a learned and embodied practical reason, a bodily competence at acting and feeling in accord with moral norms. The body's capacities serve as the self-moving means that spontaneously achieve ethical and

³²⁴ For discussion of this latter possibility, which relates the study of religious ethics most closely with Aristotelian virtue ethics, see Jonathan Wyn Schofer, *The Making of a Sage: A Study in Rabbinic Ethics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005), pp. 10-11.

³²⁵ Thus going beyond understanding *enkrateia* as the enactment of a "practical syllogism," or the ability to carry out the ways the good can be achieved identified by consciousness, see Brad Wilburn, "Moral Self-Improvement," in Brad Wilburn ed. *Moral Cultivation*: 69-84, p. 75.

³²⁶ Asad, *Genealogies of Religion*, p. 76. Asad takes his understanding of bodily learning through practice directly from Marcel Mauss, and cites pain as an example of circumstance in which a response that appears to be natural but is in fact learned, cf. Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), pp. 88-92.

practical ends.³²⁷ Ethical, political, and religious commitments are therefore not simply or even primarily cognitively believed but are rather enacted in everyday contexts through the medium of the body. Grounding the concept of character in embodied practice demonstrates in particular that once dispositions have been acquired they become increasingly difficult to change. By lodging commitments within the body, practice has the effect of making actions and feelings that had been consciously repeated unconscious, a spontaneous component of the subject's aptitudes.³²⁸ As a result, those commitments become natural and difficult to dislodge either through conscious argumentation or through conscious change in one's actions. Having acquired a set of aptitudes, the mode being in the world they articulate tends to maintain itself against change.

Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work both complements and ultimately goes beyond this picture of the ethical life by grounding the dispositional model of the self in an ontology of the body. In particular, I would suggest that their work gives content to the linkage of body sense and body learning by allowing bodily learning to be conceptualized in terms of the processes underlying embodied practical reason. Merleau-Ponty's correlation between non-propositional knowledge and embodied aptitudes in his concept of the body schema indicates how consciously cultivated habits become unconscious and appear natural. Actions that instantiate virtues are incorporated into the process of bodily learning and change our immediate experience of the world. The body "learns" to play the organ for instance when perception is trained to interpret the organ's keys as possibilities for producing a particular set of musical "values" while

³²⁷ Amy Hollywood writes most explicitly about this, arguing that Asad's appropriation of Mauss should be seen as a way of expanding the Kantian notion of practical reason as determining the moral law into an embodied knowledge of how to instantiate the moral law in particular circumstances as a mode of "being in the body and in the world." (Amy Hollywood, "Practice, Belief, and Feminist Philosophy of Religion," in Kevin Schilbrack ed. *Thinking Through Rituals: Philosophical Perspectives* [New York: Routledge, 2004: 52-70], pp. 58-59 and n15 where she rightly recognizes that Asad's Maussian-inflected conception of practical reason is closer to Aristotle's than to Kant's.).

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

the body is trained to move itself in ways that produce those values. The organ only becomes an object for the subject insofar as it has been incorporated into its perceptual field in this manner, such that acquiring the skill of playing the organ necessarily entails an immediate understanding of how it can be utilized. Merleau-Ponty's adaptation of Bergson's understanding of perception as a nascent action indicates that the body furthermore acts in a way that follows from the perceptual knowledge one acquires. Merleau-Ponty often goes so far as to describe pre-reflective perception as a kind of "faith" that objects in the world are what they are that in what Husserl would call the "natural attitude" goes unquestioned, such that the appearance of naturalness and the unconscious reenactment of a certain manner of engaging with it result from the fact that they have been incorporated into our stock of non-propositional knowledge.³²⁹ Likewise, the acquisition of virtue entails learning to immediately recognize the ethical "value" of a particular action, to see in one's perceptual field opportunities for acting well and to calibrate one's bodily motions to achieve that end. Ways of being acquired through practice are durable insofar as the ways of interpreting the world they instantiate become a component of our pre-reflective knowledge and cease to be questioned, an aspect of the world simply as we believe it to be.

The dynamism of Ravaillon's concept of inclination strengthens the sense of durability of habitual aptitudes even further by focusing on their qualitative dimensions. Ravaillon's interpretation of habit as a form of desire focuses on the progressive and affective aspects of our relationship with habitual dispositions in a way Bergson and Merleau-Ponty do not, and it allows us to see how habits become a more central component of our behavior over time. While the latter two provide cogent arguments for how the body is able to act intelligently through habit, only Ravaillon's grounding of habit in a theory of desire accounts for the increased ease of and

³²⁹ See for instance Merleau-Ponty, *Phénoménologie de la perception*, p. 308/298.

preference for habitual actions. We gain, as we saw in Chapter One, a “taste” for the actions we repeatedly undertake, a preference for them that can even become conscious comfort at acting according to habits and discomfort at acting in a different manner. I have argued that these qualitative features take us beyond thinking of habit as intelligence or “competence” to see how habitual dispositions become *stronger* over time, in the sense that they become more of an (1) immediate and (2) preferred source of our actions. The durability of habitual dispositions can thus be understood as continually increasing as a form of tendency. The more a subject repeats a particular manner of acting the more likely it is to continue doing so, and the more it will prefer it, and conversely the more of a felt discomfort and effort it will be to act in an unfamiliar fashion.

Most importantly, however, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty highlight the ways embodied practical reason, the habituated body’s purposive nature, is a *historical* phenomenon. By conceptualizing habit as a continuous process of habituation that entails constant change to subjects, these thinkers allow us to see embodied intelligence as continually changing throughout the subject’s biography as habits are expressed in new contexts and give rise to goal-oriented actions that are then incorporated into its abilities. In this context, I would argue that Ravaisson’s concept of invention and Merleau-Ponty’s concept of sedimentation can be understood to respectively focus on the *production* and *retention* of intelligent forms of action. Invention as Ravaisson understands it is a productive process that gives rise to both a new interpretation of a situation and a new form of action. Invention thus expands one’s aesthetic understanding of virtue by calibrating it to the particular case, thus opening a new possibility for its expression. At the same time, imagination constructs a form of action that adapts existing aptitudes to the particular case, expanding them as well. New forms of action are produced as the subject interprets new situations as specific opportunities for virtuous action and adapts its habitual aptitudes to

accomplish it. Although I have argued that Merleau-Ponty's understanding of perception differs from and is ultimately richer than Ravaisson's, I nevertheless believe the concept of invention can be interpreted within Merleau-Ponty's terms as what he calls the "dilation" of our habitual being in the world to new situations. What both are describing is a process of the skillful adaptation of existing dispositions to the requirements of a new situation that is grounded in prior experiences of similar situations.³³⁰ Merleau-Ponty merely adds that this process does not entail the coordination of separate faculties of the body and perception but rather the simultaneous constitution of the situation as a unique possibility for action and of one's body as a means to achieve it through application of one's pre-reflective knowledge. I prefer the term "invention" to that of "dilation" because it more directly expresses that the process of producing purposive actions entails the *expansion* of one's possibilities, that in each instantiation one adds to one's bodily abilities as well as to one's understanding of a particular commitment. Merleau-Ponty's concept of sedimentation picks up where Ravaisson's notion of invention leaves off by demonstrating that all actions the subject undertakes are retained in some form. As a result, practical reason must be understood as a historical phenomenon, one that is produced in and through the subject's repeated interactions with the world and that is changed as new ways of acting are invented. Merleau-Ponty's language of temporal depth in particular describes a process of synthesis in which new actions transform existing aptitudes and become foundational for future ways of acting.³³¹ Any

³³⁰ I would suggest that the inherent intelligence of habit as articulated throughout this dissertation could also serve as an ontological grounding for the linkage of the concepts of virtue as character and virtue as skill that Aaron Stalnaker attempts to find in Confucian thought, see Aaron Stalnaker, "Virtue as Mastery in Early Confucianism," *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 38 (3), 2010: 404-428.

³³¹ Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the historicity of habit thus goes beyond that of Hollywood and Asad, for whom practical reason is "historical" only in that it is produced in time and through practice rather than constantly shifting in response to new circumstances (Hollywood, "Practice, Belief, and the Feminist Philosophy of Religion," p. 59). Cf. Pamela Sue Anderson, "Divinity, Incarnation, and Intersubjectivity: On Ethical Formation and Spiritual Practice," *Philosophy Compass*, 1/3, 2006: 335-356, p. 350.

trained musician understands how to use a piano to produce musical values, for instance, but Thelonious Monk's unique manner of shaping his hands when playing produces a different sound that changes the manner in which the piano can henceforth be used. As a historical phenomenon, practical reason thus takes on an individual character as the bodily "means" applied to achieve particular ends are changed in the very adaptations that constitute their iterations and conform to the subject's history.

Although I have argued this his conception of bodily intelligence as a form of static "logic" is best understood as a degeneration of habit rather than its ordinary manner of existence, it should be noted that Bergson can also add to this conception of ethics by describing what could be called a "routinized" form of practical reason. The value of Bergson's work is to illuminate how the body changes when one adopts a "repetitive attitude" towards one's commitments, either as the result of fatigue or conscious choice, or due to a lack of change in one's circumstances, or because those commitments are no longer central to one's real conditions of life. In such exceptional cases, Bergson demonstrates that the body ceases to function in an inventive manner and adapt its capacities to new circumstances and instead merely re-enacts existing actions. While this form of embodied engagement remains purposive in that existing actions are applied strategically to accomplish the individual's ends, it is a reduced form of intelligence that solely entails the continuation of existing forms of behavior rather than the constitution of new ones.³³² In this situation, the expression of ethical commitments becomes, to paraphrase Bergson, rigidified, as

³³² In this regard, Bergson's theory of habit avoids Brett's critique of Ryle's concept of "single track" dispositions for regarding "pure habits" as meaningless and non-purposive. Even though habitual actions produce nothing new when undertaken in a repetitive attitude, they still conform to the agent's purposes, even if those purposes are not consciously considered at the time (Nathan Brett, "Human Habits," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 11 (3), 1981: 357-376, p. 367).

we only reiterate previously undertaken actions and fail to adapt ourselves to changing circumstances.

Yet this historical understanding of bodily intelligence also begins to point towards the ways Ravaissou, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's conceptions of habit go beyond and even challenge this picture of the ethical life. In investigating this issue, we are returned to the discussion in this dissertation's Introduction regarding the nature of the "formed" or "defined" self as it is cultivated through practice. The preceding discussions, however, have put us in a position to investigate this issue with greater precision by advancing the following question: to what extent is it possible to achieve harmony between one's conscious self-conception as an ethical subject and one's habitual aptitudes as they are expressed in everyday life, insofar as the latter as a "layer" of the self are understood to be dynamic in the sense just articulated?³³³ The question of whether self-cultivation can be definite or not can thus be understood as whether "harmony" between self-conception and aptitudes is maintained throughout the production of actions that follow from habitual aptitudes, and the retention of changes to aptitudes these actions cause. In discussing Sabina Lovibond's conception of ethical formation, we identified two criteria for assessing whether one's character can be understood as "formed" or not. First, we saw that actions should be in theory rationally *derivable* from an ethical ideal. This entails both consistency between one's actions, such that one can be understood to have a "unified" character, and that one's actions can theoretically be articulated in advance given knowledge of a particular virtue and of a particular situation one encounters, or in other words that one's behavior is predictable. And second, we saw

³³³ Or to use the language of Lakoff and Johnson, a layer of mind. Although Lakoff and Johnson work from contemporary cognitive science, their claim that thought is "mostly unconscious" and is "shaped crucially by the peculiarities of human bodies" comes very close to the position we have seen developed throughout this dissertation that practical intelligence is extended throughout the body and takes primacy over conscious rationality, see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 4.

that the subject should theoretically be able to provide a rational account of their actions, that they possess *knowledge* of how and why they act in the way they do.

Our discussion of the study of religious ethics allows us to now add a third criterion, namely that one's knowledge of oneself as a particular type of ethical subject should *correspond over time* to the actual state of one's dispositions. That is to say, the dispositions produced through practice should endure throughout the process of their enactment in everyday contexts and should remain recognizable as exemplifying a particular virtue. This last criterion is broader than the other two, which focus on specific actions. This criterion instead entails the ability to recognize oneself as a virtuous person throughout one's everyday engagements over the longer term, or in other words that the harmony between self-conception and bodily state that is the basis to current theories of religious ethics is maintained. In this regard, the criterion of correspondence over time corresponds to the question of whether one possesses an *ēthos* in the sense Michel Foucault gives the word, a "mode of being for the subject, along with a certain way of acting, a way visible to others...in his clothing, appearance, gait, in the calm with which he responded to every event, and so on."³³⁴ In order to have a "formed" or "defined" self, one's mannerisms spread over various facets of one's conduct should, over a long period of time, correspond to one particular ideal or principle that defines them.

Instead of regarding virtuous actions as derivable from a pre-existing principle, it follows from the concept of invention that ethical ideals change in the course of their enactment. The language of derivation implies that the principle from which a conclusion is derived remains constant. When Aristotle compares the act of deliberation to engaging in a "geometrical construction," for instance, the end – the practical goal or the virtue to be instantiated – remains

³³⁴ Michel Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for Self as a Practice of Freedom," in Michel Foucault, *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (New York: The New Press, 1997: 281-301), p. 286.

constant in the manner of a first principle, and specific actions are chosen insofar as they follow as logical necessities to achieving that end.³³⁵ Derivation in this context entails only the specification through analysis of what is required to achieve a pre-given end, such that the task of deliberation is to clarify the principle in question.³³⁶ Because the invention of habitual actions entails an expansion of one's aesthetic sense of one's commitments, however, it follows that the ethical ideal given expression in habitual actions will expand with it. In seeing new situations as opportunities to express ethical or political commitments, the application of bodily and perceptual aptitudes does not hold one's commitments constant but actively gives them new content. An Christian life, for instance, would in Merleau-Ponty's view engage with the Sartrean concepts of bad faith and inauthenticity as opportunities to see sin and redemption in human life under a new light. In doing so, the Christian would preserve their commitment to enacting a redeemed way of life by changing the content of the notion of redemption in response to reality of bad faith and inauthenticity in life. Likewise, the content of Ravaillon's virtue of generosity changes in the different contexts of individual and social life to which it is applied, but it is precisely in this adaptation that it is preserved as a principle. In both cases, commitments are redefined in the course of their enactment. Whereas derivation describes a unidirectional process of specification from a fixed first principle, invention implies the bidirectional reinterpretation of one's commitments in light of the contexts in which they are applied. While the virtuous person may begin with a rational or aesthetic sense of their commitments, those commitments do not remain constant but rather change and reintegrate themselves into one's bodily and perceptual skills through new encounters.

³³⁵ Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1112b22.

³³⁶ Lovibond seems to be getting at this sense of mere clarification through deliberation when she states that the belief that "there are some questions to which the correct answers are *determined in advance*" is a basic presupposition of moral upbringing (*Ethical Formation*, p. 70).

Since the habitual subject enacts its commitments through a dynamic process of reinterpretation and adaptation, its comportment will be less consistent and predictable as it will be creative. Viewing invention as a holistic process of coordinating ethical principles with the practical interests at play in a particular situation as well as with one's bodily aptitudes relies on an understanding of perception as constituting rather than reducing its field. Perception thus posits new opportunities for expressing one's commitments, which entails the spontaneous adaptation of one's aptitudes in the form of a specific action. Actions do not follow rationally from one's commitments but *emerge* throughout the course of this coordination, such that they cannot be anticipated in advance of their enactment.³³⁷ The bodily calibration that occurs in the process of expressing habitual aptitudes results from a non-reflective perceptual grasp of a situation, such that the connection between commitments and their expression in actions is aesthetic rather than rational. Attempting to predict how the habituated individual will act is thus an inherently problematic task as actions come about only through the application of perceptual and bodily capacities that have already been formed through their past experiences and thus interpret new situations in unique ways. That actions only emerge through contact with particular contexts also indicates that consistency will take a secondary role to flexibility in the habituated subject's comportment. Although I have criticized the conception of habit on which it relies, Bergson's concept of "good sense" is thus not so far from the understanding of emergent action I am describing here in that both are an adaptive process that emphasizes change over stability. It does not follow that the virtuous person's actions will be *inconsistent*; it is more accurate to say that

³³⁷ I am using the term "emergence" following Peter Corning's definition of the term as "contexts in which constituent parts with different properties are modified, re-shaped, or transformed by their participation in the whole." ("The Re-emergence of Emergence, and the Causal Role of Synergy in Emergent Evolution," *Synthese*, 185 (2), 2012: 295-317, p. 305). Salt and water are thus examples of emergent phenomena, as they are transformed in their contact with each other. Likewise, my claim is that ethical commitments and the habituated body in which they are embodied are changed in their contact with the contexts in which they are enacted.

they are *contextual* in the sense that a particular manner of action applied in one set of circumstances would not be in another. Consistency in fact seems most appropriate when applied to the degenerated forms of habit as addiction and routine as Ravaisson and Bergson articulate them, as in those cases one simply reapplies existing actions rather than creates new ones. In its ordinary existence, the habitual subject's state of character is in a constant state of motion and change as a result of its engagements such that it expands beyond the derivability criterion.

The constant changes one's ways of acting undergo limit the amount of knowledge one can have of one's actions and of one's state of character as a whole. The rejection of deliberative models of virtue carried out by the thinkers examined in this dissertation is predicated on a view of the body as the primary agent of action and intelligence. As we saw particularly our discussion of Merleau-Ponty, the non-propositional practical knowledge embodied in habitual aptitudes forms the basis of our immediate reactions to situations. It is therefore necessary to regard practical reason as primarily embodied rather than conscious. Conscious reflection generally occurs only after the emergence of new forms of action, such that its accounts of virtuous actions will be retrospective and hence merely approximate one's pre-reflective grasp of the contexts in which actions have come to be. Through his application of the theological concept of grace, Ravaisson strengthens this sense of primacy attributed to embodied over conscious intelligence by arguing that desire is the source of the motivational force behind habitual actions. The desire to persist in present ways of being, strengthened by the pleasure garnered through expressing habitual inclinations, impels us to act, such that the holistic process of interpretation and adaptation occurs increasingly automatically and hence further from conscious control and knowledge to the point where it appears as though we are not the agents of our own actions. It follows that as habitual dispositions become more deeply engrained within subjects and come to form the basis of their

actions, the less subjects will be able to provide a rational account of how and why they act. Rational deliberation will be replaced by the holistic process of inventing actions, such that conscious agency and self-knowledge diminish as bodily intelligence and spontaneity increases.

The retrospective nature of conscious self-knowledge also gives insight into why self-cultivation will go beyond the final criterion of self-recognition as well. The preceding analysis of the retention of repeated actions in the process of sedimentation suggests that changes to habitual aptitudes accumulate over time. Actions produced in encounters with new situations and contexts gradually gather and synthesize themselves into one's habits and alter them. In Chapter Three, we saw that Merleau-Ponty argues that this process ultimately results in a unique formation that he calls "style," a way of being that is inflected with one's personal history. Given the ongoing nature of the process of sedimentation, however, Merleau-Ponty's concept might be better rendered as *stylization*, as what he is describing is continual yet imperceptible change in one's aptitudes in which they are made to conform to the situations one encounters. In their calibration to new situations, aptitudes undergo what Merleau-Ponty at one point calls a "coherent deformation" in which they are altered to fit a new set of interests.³³⁸ Over time, however, as the subject continues to express its aptitudes in everyday life these *deformations* ultimately accumulate into a *transformation* of oneself. Merleau-Ponty's preferred example of this process is the cultivation of aesthetic style. Although he began as an Impressionist studying under Camille Pissarro, through the repeated attempt at expressing his vision of the world Cézanne gradually developed a style that was irreducible to the gestures of his previous influences. Through the very process of expressing one's habitual aptitudes in everyday life those aptitudes are gradually though inexorably transformed into something new that only becomes crystallized for the subject through a kind of

³³⁸ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, pp. 91-92/54-55.

retrospective judgment when they recognize the differences between their present mannerisms and those of their past. Marcel Proust also captures some of the sense of gradual transformation Merleau-Ponty attempts to conceptualize in an observation concerning habit: “Habit! That skillful but very slow arranger who begins by letting our mind suffer for weeks in a temporary arrangement; but whom we are nevertheless truly happy to discover, for without habit our mind, reduced to no more than its own resources, would be powerless to make a lodging habitable.”³³⁹ Habit “arranges” our lives in such a way that we become accustomed to any particular context in which we find ourselves. The work of habit takes place outside of our conscious lives, but through it we are gradually adapted to new and changing circumstances and only recognize it after habit develops new ways of living.

The implication of this active and ongoing understanding of Merleau-Ponty’s concept of style as stylization is that over time, any *ēthos* the subject develops will eventually be transformed into something different and new. The specific mannerisms one develops through practice and enacts in one’s everyday life conform to the same dynamic structure as all habitual aptitudes. Unless one’s circumstances stay more or less the same, or one’s ethical commitments cease to be relevant to one’s life, in which case they would likely become routinized in Bergson’s sense, through their adaptation in light of new circumstances those mannerisms will therefore slowly change as they incorporate the actions that are invented in new contexts. As a result, what Foucault would call one’s “way of being,” or the forms of action that characterize one’s comportment, gradually and imperceptibly change through their expression in everyday contexts to the point where one ultimately constructs a way of being that is irreducible to the old and whose relationship

³³⁹ Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way*, trans. Lydia Davis (New York: Penguin, 2003), p. 8. Commenting on this passage, Gail Weiss also focuses on the positive and active role Proust attributes to habit here, as opposed to some of his other statements regarding habit in his work (*Refiguring the Ordinary* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008], p. 76)

with it becomes looser over time.³⁴⁰ To return to an example from Chapter One, if for instance one learns to become a teacher by reading a book about proper pedagogy, by taking classes, or by following the example of a mentor, one will at first teach according to the mannerisms of one's influences. As one gains experience in teaching, however, one will eventually develop one's own "style" of teaching that is an adaptation of yet remains irreducible to one's influences, and this might even result in the production of a new "method" of teaching that might be unrecognizable to one's influences as proper teaching. How novel one's style of teaching will become will depend on contingent factors such as the variety of contexts in which one teaches (i.e., in different schools, different grade levels, students of different backgrounds, etc.), but this is merely a matter of degree. Some amount of transformation will inevitably occur as one applies ways of particular mannerisms to the circumstances of one's life. Harmony between one's self-conception as an ethical subject and the actual state of one's aptitudes is therefore achievable only in the short term: the reiteration of aptitudes in new and divergent circumstances will ultimately change them in ways that cannot be predicted and may either outstrip or transform one's understanding of oneself.

In going beyond each of these three criteria of "defined" or "formed" self-cultivation, philosophical practice as Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty can be understood to be *indefinite*. To state the concept of "indefinite self-cultivation" more positively, however, we can say that it entails (1) the acquired ability to engage in unpredictable yet intelligent and creative action that expresses a particular commitment in everyday life. Through the acquisition of a set of habits that follow from one's commitments one divests oneself of direct conscious control of one's

³⁴⁰ Cf. Foucault's discussion of the "aesthetics of existence" as producing a stable set of mannerisms. Foucault in fact refers to this process of making one's specific actions conform to a particular ideal in such a permanent fashion that it comes to define one's conduct as "stylization." The difference between stylization in Foucault and in Merleau-Ponty is that stylization for Foucault entails a more or less static relationship one establishes with oneself and with one's body that entails self-mastery, whereas for Merleau-Ponty style is fluid (*The Use of Pleasure*, pp. 89-93).

actions, but in doing so one allows actions to be governed by the dynamic process of invention and sedimentation that constructs actions that mediate between practical and ethical needs and bodily potentialities and adapts the latter to act in a way that spontaneously achieves one's ends; (2) the active tendency to act in this committed yet creative manner, not from conscious deliberation or even with rational knowledge of one's manner of acting but instead from the preference for habitual ways of acting and the pleasure one takes in doing so; and finally (3) the gradual expansion and change of one's commitments to the point that they become an individual form of conduct. Through the very process of invention and sedimentation that allows spontaneous and intelligent expression of one's commitments, one will gradually alter those commitments as they encounter new contexts that imperceptibly yet inexorably change them. While the degree to which one's ways of expressing those commitments will change is variable (depending primarily on the extent to which they become routinized or addictive), these changes come about through the accumulation of an emergent process of creating new forms of action, such that they are open-ended and cannot be articulated in advance. Self-cultivation goes beyond each criterion for the definition or form of a subject and gives rise to a way of being that is constantly in the process of changing in ways that will produce something beyond or other than what could be articulated in advance, such that its results will be *indefinite*.

As is by now clear, it is not because of any aesthetic preferences for change or indeterminacy for their own sake that self-cultivation as Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty understand it is indefinite in the sense described above. It is rather the nature of the habitual layer of our subjectivity itself that is the cause of the constant and open-ended changes in the process of self-formation. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty together conceptualize an embodied subject that is constantly in the process of formation through the expression and deformation of

habitual aptitudes. Embodied intelligence and freedom are inherently creative in that through them actions emerge that adapt existing aptitudes in ways that cannot be predicted in advance yet allow the subject to achieve its goals, and through their sedimentation they continually alter the habits through which the subject engages with the world. Stasis is exceptional rather than the rule, the result of the degeneration of habits into routines or addictions that fixate the subject on a closed, unchanging manner of acting. As a result, as a general rule the self is never fully identical to itself, but exists as a process of enacting itself in the form of actions that gradually deform and transform it. Insofar as they attempt to make a certain set of mannerisms that conform to an ideal habitual, consciously-undertaken practices of self-cultivation will therefore be deformed and possibly transformed in like manner. While the nature of habit as a form of embodied subjectivity allows such projects to achieve a degree of success in introducing a particular way of being into one's habitual aptitudes, the process of their enactment in everyday life will ultimately become something in excess of the model or principle on which projects of self-cultivation are based.

2. Indefinite Philosophical Practice: The Problem of the Passions³⁴¹

While programs of bodily practice will inevitably be affected by the dynamics of the process of habituation and give rise to indefinite results, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty *affirm* these dynamics and make them the basis of their theories of philosophical practice. This final section will attempt to articulate what is at stake in this affirmation for theories of philosophical practice more broadly by drawing their work together and putting it into direct conversation with Pierre Hadot's conception of philosophy as a way of life. We have seen throughout our investigation that when read in the context of their theories of habit, the goals and methods of their philosophical practice differ from those Hadot attributes to them and at least

³⁴¹ Portions of these following sections are currently under review for publication.

qualify the concern for conscious self-mastery Hadot claims is essential to philosophy as a way of life. When read together, the conceptions of philosophical practice articulated by Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty, along with Bergson as I have reinterpreted it through their work, provide a more sustainable basis for the philosophical life than Hadot's. Attempting to achieve rational self-mastery in the way Hadot does attempts to arrest the historical processes of habituation in a manner that is both futile and ultimately harmful not only to the subject but also to the form of commitment that practice attempts to actualize by causing it to degenerate into a repressive discipline. Allowing these processes to function in an unimpeded fashion, by contrast, gains the benefits of the freedom and joy that arises from habitual action without the drawbacks of Hadot's form of philosophical practice. In addition, we will see that it also solves the problem of the passions that is the ultimate motivation for philosophical practice not only for Hadot but a number of theorists who have recently attempted to resuscitate ancient theories of philosophical practice.³⁴² Because it affirms and operates on the basis of the conception of the habitual body-subject articulated in the previous section, indefinite self-cultivation treated as an independent philosophical practice in its own right avoids Hadot's existential opposition between reason and the passions and instead views the passions as part of a larger problem of ossification in individual ways of life. Rethinking the passions in this manner allows indefinite philosophical practice to respond to them without solutions that cause a self-alienating dominance of reason and instead give rise to bodily and social freedom and pleasure.

A. Pierre Hadot on the Passions

³⁴² See for instance Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire*, discussed in the Introduction, as well as Richard Sorabji, *Emotion and Peace of Mind: From Stoic Agitation to Christian Temptation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), and the essays contained in Jonardon Ganeri and Clare Carlisle eds. *Philosophy as Therapeia* (Cambridge: Royal Institute of Philosophy Supplement: 66, 2010), which address the issue of philosophical therapy from a cross-cultural perspective.

Pierre Hadot is best known as a historian of ancient philosophy, but as I noted in the introduction, he takes his conception of philosophy as a way of life to have universal applications. As such, he can be read as having a theory of the passions, albeit one that arises primarily through readings of other philosophers. Even a cursory reading of his work reveals that he understands the passions to be the central problem that philosophy as a way of life – ancient or modern – must solve. Indeed, one need look no further than his opening definition of philosophy found in his essay on spiritual exercises to put the importance of the concept of passions in Hadot’s work in relief:

In the view of all philosophical schools, the principal cause of humanity’s suffering, disorder, and unconsciousness were the passions: disordered desires, exaggerated fears. The domination of worries prevents people from truly living. Philosophy appears therefore, in the first place, as a therapeutic of the passions (“Try to rid yourself of your passions,” writes G. Friedmann). Each school had its own therapeutic method, but all of them were related to a profound transformation of the individual’s mode of being and of seeing. Spiritual exercises had precisely for their object the realization of this transformation.³⁴³

Insofar as philosophy is not merely a theoretical discourse but a way of life, its primary aim is to rid humanity of desires and fears that have become too strong and are directed towards the wrong objects. While Hadot takes the concept of the passions primarily from Hellenistic thought, his invocation of the modern sociologist Georges Friedmann (1902-1977) and his existentialist language indicate the universality of the phenomenon as he understands it. For Hadot, not just ancient philosophy but *all* philosophical practice is premised on the dominance of human life by the passions. Pre-philosophical existence is defined by its being governed by the passions, such that the primary aim of philosophy is to serve as a form of therapy that transforms our mode of existence.

The link Hadot draws between being and seeing provides the clue to his explanation of how the passions arise in human existence. In Chapter Two, we saw that Hadot’s original insight

³⁴³ Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 23-24.

that philosophy can function as a way of life arose from his early engagement with Bergson's theory of perception. The influence of Bergson on Hadot, I now suggest, goes deeper than this basic inspiration but also extends to helping him construct a *substantive* theory of the passions and how they develop that justifies his claim that the passions are the central feature of pre-philosophical life. In applying Bergson's work, Hadot does not take on his metaphysics of duration or his account of the loss of agency as a whole, but instead argues that the limitation of perception caused by habit is the central cause of the passions. The invocation of Bergson allows Hadot to argue that this problem of the passions does not depend upon ancient psychological theories but in fact identifies a universal feature of human existence. In this regard, Hadot's argument connecting habit and the passions does not rely on Bergson's neurological account either. Instead, Hadot claims that Bergson clarifies and puts into a rigorous form the observations of both ancient and modern thinkers (including Merleau-Ponty) that repetition breeds familiarity with objects that causes us to experience them thoughtlessly and to without conscious attention.³⁴⁴ When we first see the night sky it fills us with amazement, but over time we become accustomed to seeing it to the point where we forget even to look up.³⁴⁵ Repetition dulls our perception and causes us to interact with the world unthinkingly. These observations culminate in an understanding of habit as what Hadot calls alternatively a "mode" of experience or a "domain" of everyday existence, a lower level of selfhood in which objects are encountered and interacted with solely in terms of

³⁴⁴ Hadot reads Bergson and Merleau-Ponty together in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, pp. 346-349. Bergson's philosophy is of more central importance to Hadot, however, as it focuses on the manner in which philosophy transforms perception to achieve existential change, see Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, p. 278.

³⁴⁵ Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. W.H.D. Rouse, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992, 2.1030-1039. Hadot notes that ancient philosophers often cite daily routine and base concern as obstacles to seeing the world as it truly is, see Pierre Hadot, "L'homme antique et la nature," in *Études de philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010: 307-318), pp. 314-315, Pierre Hadot, "La figure du sage dans l'Antiquité gréco-latine, in *Études de philosophie ancienne* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2010: 233-258), p. 251.

their capacity to resolve immediate *need*.³⁴⁶ Hadot appeals to Bergson's overall distinction between action-oriented perception and philosophical or aesthetic modes of perception that arise from intuition to argue for an opposition between practical and philosophical modes of existence, where the demands of practical life result in the limitation of ways of thinking about and perceiving the world to ones that facilitate action and achieve practical goals.³⁴⁷ Our automatic, pre-philosophical ways of perceiving and thinking about the world are in his words "governed by habits" and therefore tend to conform to immediate interest and desire.³⁴⁸

Hadot appropriates Bergson's theory of habit to the extent that it illuminates the cause of the ailments that plague human life. Hadot thus shares Bergson's therapeutic interests, but diagnoses a different condition, that of the passions that he argues result from an inherent propensity of the lower, habitual self to overindulge in pleasures in a way that causes them to become painful needs. Certain pleasures and pains are natural to us as embodied beings, but through habituation they can become dangerous necessities. Specifically, Hadot worries that repeated indulgences alter our way of perceiving objects: expanding upon Bergson's claim that habit reduces our field of perception to its aspects relevant to immediate action, Hadot argues that repetition causes us to encounter objects only in terms of their potential to bring about pleasure or pain. When we see wine, fine food, or beautiful bodies, for instance, they appear as objects of desire and we name and evaluate them accordingly. By causing us to experience objects solely as objects of pleasure, habit prevents us from seeing objects in other ways and thus makes self-restraint more difficult. Our experience of the world becomes defined by our appetites, thus turning

³⁴⁶ Hadot, *La voile d'Isis*, pp. 279-281, Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 64.

³⁴⁷ Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 152, quoted in Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 348: "In order to live, we must be selective in our knowledge and our memories, and retain only that which may contribute to our action upon things."

³⁴⁸ Hadot, *La voile d'Isis*, p. 279.

them into distorted passions. Habit takes control of us at an automatic level in pre-philosophical life, making previously harmless pleasures into dangerous necessities, exaggerating our fears of losing what we have, and finally distorting not just our character but our entire way of experiencing and behaving. In another context, Hadot claims that as a result habit comprises what Goethe calls *das Gemeine*, the trivial or ordinary, our immediate recognition of our surroundings in terms of our personal cares and concerns.³⁴⁹ Once habituated to experience of the world mediated by passion, we automatically encounter new situations in ways that reflect pleasures and pains. Habit thus gives rise to a limited, partial, and ultimately egoistic self in which our passions form our character and perception. It is in this sense that ancient philosophers claim that we are “enslaved” to the passions: habit seizes and perverts our perceptual experience and causes us to judge and conceive of the world in terms of pleasures as opposed to the pleasures proper to our nature as rational beings up to the point where we become unable to think or react to the world in any other fashion.³⁵⁰

Without getting into the question of whether Hadot’s use of Bergson to illuminate observations concerning habit and perception stretching back into antiquity is legitimate from a historical perspective, the analysis of the relationship between habit and perception carried on throughout this dissertation allows us to question Hadot’s move expanding Bergson’s theory of habit to the case of pleasure. It is true from both Bergson and Merleau-Ponty’s perspectives that perception is primarily oriented towards practical life, though we saw Merleau-Ponty take issue

³⁴⁹ Pierre Hadot glosses *das Gemeine* in the following manner: “I do not think that one can translate *das Gemeine* as ‘the banal flow (*cours*) of things...’ In my view, things themselves do not take mastery over us, but a certain psychological and moral state caused by habit, routine, social conventions, which prevent us from seeing the ideal world.” (*N’oubliez pas de vivre: Goethe et la tradition des exercices spirituels* [Paris: Albin Michel, 2008], pp. 24-25n2)

³⁵⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), p. 154, Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 62.

with Bergson's understanding of that orientation as a *reduction*. In this regard, there is nothing in itself problematic about arguing that through repetition one can come to experience a particular object as pleasurable or painful and react accordingly. The question comes down to whether or not the leap from this observation to the claim that habit can bring about an entire existential mode of perceiving the world is legitimate. In this regard, I think it is helpful to return to Ravaisson's discussion of the double law of habit, in which his distinction between activity and passivity allows us to see the exaggeration of desires as only one possible outcome of habituation. In the course of describing the double law of habit, Ravaisson in fact provides his own account of how uncontrollable desires are formed. While a wine connoisseur's palate grows more sophisticated through the active application of perception, "taste becomes more and more obtuse in the one who, by passion, is delivered over to the frequent use of strong liquors." (H 49) As sensation fades through repetition, consumption of more of a particular object is required to achieve the same level of pleasure that had been achieved on previous occasions. While both the connoisseur and the addict derive pleasure from the act of drinking, Ravaisson's account introduces a qualitative distinction between pleasures that is absent in Hadot's account. The connoisseur actively perceives the taste of the wine, is able to distinguish the subtleties of its flavor from other wines, and takes pleasure in her activity itself. In contrast, the alcoholic who drinks "by passion" takes passive pleasure from the sensation of alcohol. The connoisseur develops a habit just as much as the alcoholic, such that passion cannot be understood as the inevitable result of a habitual "mode" of experiencing the world but only a likely result of a passive manner of engaging with it.

In fact, our criticisms of Bergson's theory of habit from both Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty's perspectives allow us to challenge the notion that pre-philosophical life should be understood as governed by the passions. Ravaisson's remarks regarding the difference between

active and passive forms of habit are consistent with our reinterpretation of Bergson's theory of habit through Ricoeur's notion of a "repetitive attitude" in which one engages with the world without the full application of bodily and perceptual intelligence under particular circumstances. When one engages in pleasures too often, or never changes one's routines of taking pleasure, or even engages in a pleasurable activity when one is fatigued, one becomes more inclined to partake of that pleasure in a passive manner that accentuates the kind of gradually growing need for a particular pleasure that Hadot describes. This manner of describing the growth of disordered and exaggerated desires as the result of gradually diminishing sensation seems more convincing than Hadot's, however, as it is not only consistent with the other observations Ravaisson makes concerning the effects of habit on sensation but also because it provides a less totalizing picture of everyday life. By viewing passion as a mode of existence like Goethe's *das Gemeine* and identifying it with pre-philosophical life, Hadot merges the practical and the pleasurable in a way that suggests that addiction is a common feature of everyday life and that ignores real qualitative differences in ways in which people engage with pleasure. Passion is best seen as not a necessary but a contingent condition within human life, such that Hadot's claim that philosophical practice requires a "tearing away from the everyday" through a radical transformation of one's way of being relies on a misdiagnosis of the human condition.³⁵¹

This misdiagnosis of everyday life as in itself passionate is significant as it structures Hadot's account of the methods and goals of philosophical practice. Hadot's manner of drawing together ancient and modern thought attempts to provide the ancient conflict between reason and the passions with an existential grounding. As a result, overcoming the passions becomes a universal problem that all philosophical practice must solve. The existential fact that pleasure and

³⁵¹ Pierre Hadot, "Qu'est-ce que l'éthique?", in *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique* (Paris: Albin Michel, 2002), pp. 381-382.

immediate need are the basis of our experience in our everyday, habitual lives is the basis of what Hadot calls the “revolution in the concept of knowledge” that he claims is developed in ancient philosophy and ultimately defines philosophy as a way of life as a whole.³⁵² This “revolution” differentiates between propositional knowledge to which we consciously adhere and the values and motivations that guide our lives without our recognizing it, and which form the object of self-knowledge. This distinction is made evident in the common experience of hypocrisy, in which the values we explicitly espouse are at odds with our choices, and Hadot argues that passion is the origin of this problem.³⁵³ Humanity as a whole lives, Hadot argues, like Alcibiades, who consciously concurs with Socrates in discussion that his political ambitions are of lesser value than taking care of his soul, but as soon as he leaves Socrates’ company he immediately gives in to his desire for praise and honor.³⁵⁴ Even though Alcibiades rationally assents to Socrates’ arguments concerning what is truly valuable and why, his true evaluations of things are revealed in his dissolute conduct. When habit and passion control our everyday experience of the world our conscious commitments are belied by our true concerns, and in this contradiction we become a “living problem” in Hadot’s words.³⁵⁵ The values revealed in our actions, which Hadot calls our “moral intention,” are crystallizations of our desires and aspirations, which through habit are directed towards pleasures and unworthy objects. Moral intention outlines the desiderative and

³⁵² Pierre Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?* (Paris: Albin Michel 1995), p. 51.

³⁵³ In this regard, Hadot’s conception of the problem philosophical practice solves is close to that of John Sellars, for whom the goal of philosophy is to achieve harmony between the philosopher’s *logoi* and her *erga*, her words and her deeds (John Sellars, *The Art of Living*, pp. 2-7).

³⁵⁴ Plato, *Symposium* 216b.

³⁵⁵ Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 116.

affective aspect of our psychology, motivations for action that are separate from reason and that in our everyday, habitual mode of being conflict with it.³⁵⁶

Philosophical practice thus functions, Hadot argues, by bringing about a total transformation of one's mode of existence from one governed by the passions to one governed by reason. Drawing now on Bergson's differentiation between "superficial" and "profound" selves, Hadot argues that philosophy as a way of life should be identified as a whole with the "search for a superior state or level of the self."³⁵⁷ Hadot's signature concept of "spiritual exercises," which we saw earlier were defined as a therapeutic of the passions, are thus best understood as bringing about an existential "leap" between different levels of the self.³⁵⁸ Spiritual exercises fulfill this function through a variety of rhetorical, dialectical, and even emotional and imaginative methods that integrate rational commitments directly into the desiderative and motivational level of our psychological life Hadot calls our moral intention. Spiritual exercises thus supplement the theories and arguments Hadot calls "philosophical discourse" by integrating them into the philosopher's conduct. Hadot lists a number of such practices, including dialogue, reading and commenting on texts, writing down a master's sayings, imaginative meditations, meditation on death, and communication through hortatory or protreptic discourse. The term "spiritual" emphasizes that such exercises work not singly on habits of thought, imagination, affectivity, behavior, and emotion but on all of them in turn so as to effect changes throughout "all of the individual's psyche

³⁵⁶ During his trial, Socrates likens the people of Athens, renowned for their wisdom, to a steed that has forgotten its noble nature due to sluggishness. Caring for their wealth and honor rather than the health of their soul, Athenians must be "aroused by stinging" from the gadfly Socrates (*Apology*, 30e). While the Athenian people may notionally hold to certain ideals, their conduct betrays their true concerns, that they remain in the thrall of social convention and social pressure.

³⁵⁷ Hadot, "Qu'est-ce que l'éthique?", p. 379.

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 380: "It therefore has to do with spiritual exercises...practices designed to transform the self (*moi*) and to make it attain to a higher level and a universal perspective..."

(*psychisme*).”³⁵⁹ In doing so, spiritual exercises function by directly transforming the desires, evaluations, and even perceptions that form our moral intention in a way that makes them cohere with one’s rational commitments. Spiritual exercises change the entire condition of the person who practices them to the point where the doctrines and theories of a philosophical way of thinking about the world become fully incorporated into one’s ways of thinking and as a result serve as the basis of one’s comportment.

The goal of philosophical practice is thus elimination of the passions as a basis of conduct and a transition to a rational mode of selfhood characterized by wisdom, tranquility, and joy. By changing our tendencies of motivation and perception, spiritual exercises alter the way we not only cognize the world but also encounter and understand it on an automatic level. As a result, our manner of experiencing things in the world will not be based on their capacity to provide us with pleasure and pain but rather on our rational assessment of their objective benefit or harm to us. Spiritual exercises thus cure the passions as they cause our desires to conform to a rational measure as opposed to becoming the ever-deepening governor of our actions. In doing so, spiritual exercises give rise to harmony between reason and desire, thereby effecting a permanent change in our mode of existence. Hadot depicts the leap from the habitual to the philosophical mode of existence through the figure of the sage, a representation of the philosophical life common to all philosophical schools that personifies wisdom as a state of existence. The sage represents someone who has fully integrated rational theories into automatic conduct and who has distilled them into an attitude that defines their mode of experiencing and engaging with the world.³⁶⁰ The sage’s emotional characteristics follow directly from their rational commitments, such that there is no

³⁵⁹ Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 21.

³⁶⁰ Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, p. 335-337, Hadot, “La figure du sage dans l’Antiquité gréco-latine, p. 247-249.

tension between the two. As a result, the sage desires nothing other than what they need and so requires merely the joy of existence and contemplation for their happiness. Having controlled bodily pleasures, the sage remains unperturbed by events and maintains their composure throughout the course of their life. The sage thus achieves perfect tranquility, no longer plagued by the anxieties and pains associated with everyday life but instead satisfied by their state of existence as a rational individual.

Although Hadot attempts to recast the struggle between the reason and the passions in existentialist language that eases its dependence upon ancient psychological theories, his diagnosis of the passions as a fundamental and universal problem of human existence commits him to a dualistic account of human subjectivity and therefore of philosophical practice. For Hadot, the rational and passionate “levels” of the human self are inherently at odds: identifying the hypocrisy of Alcibiades, and his inability to overcome his base desires in spite of rational direction, as the universal condition of humanity in its pre-philosophical state presents a situation in which *either* reason *or* the passions dominate our psychological life. His identification of habit and passion as a “lower” level of selfhood indicates furthermore that he considers philosophical practice a reclamation of our true, rational nature from a universal fall into a fundamentally alien and *inauthentic* mode of being. To apply a category from the study of religious ethics, Hadot can be understood to possess a “recovery model” or self-cultivation, in which humanity recovers its true, rational self from its lostness in the habitual mode of existence.³⁶¹ Philosophical practice can therefore only function as a total transformation of our way of being in and perceiving the world. Spiritual exercises engage multiple registers of our psychology in order to actively wrest control

³⁶¹ See Philip Ivanhoe, *Confucian Moral Self Cultivation*, second edition (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2000), p. 102. Hadot’s identification of the rational self with the “true” self is a crucial element in his quarrel with Michel Foucault’s concept of the “care of the self,” see Hadot, *Exercices spirituels et philosophie antique*, p. 325.

of our moral intention from the passions and install reason as the governor of our psychic lives. The harmony between reason and moral intention characteristic of the sage is therefore one in which reason governs our emotions, desires, and affects.

Recognizing that passions are only a possible and ultimately exceptional form our desires can take allows us to criticize Hadot's dualistic approach. Hadot's understanding of the passions relies on what we can now see is a simplistic and one-sided understanding of the effects of habit on our affective life that precludes a more nuanced assessment of the relationship between different aspects of our psychology and therefore of human potential for rational self-mastery. Our analysis of the previous section has shown us that consciousness and the pursuit of rational commitments do not function solely in opposition to the habitual layer of the self but rather independently from it according to a complex dynamic. Holding a dualistic understanding of human subjectivity thus divests Hadot of resources that could be utilized in the pursuit of rational commitments. Hadot's appropriation of Bergson's theory of habit causes him to view habit as primarily a threat to living rationally, as the limitations it places on our perception create a propensity to fall into a passionate mode of existence. Habituation thus occupies only a very small place in the philosopher's repertoire of exercises as Hadot articulates it, and only as an afterthought to the cognitive practices that form the majority of spiritual techniques.³⁶² Ravaisson's argument that habit is productive of desire, however, claims a more important role for habituation in pursuing rational commitments. Since the production of habitual inclinations produces a preference for the acts one undertakes, habit itself can be understood as a source of the harmony between reason and desire Hadot seeks. Instead of seeing habit as a hindrance to the project of changing our moral intention, the affective

³⁶² See the brief discussion of practices of *ethismos* in *ibid.*, p. 32. Hadot does occasionally use the term *habitus* to define the effects of philosophical discourse on subjects as opposed to spiritual exercises, but this language refers to changes in our cognitive tendencies rather than the habits of the body that are the subject of this dissertation, see for instance Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, p. 412.

means spiritual exercises employ could in fact be complemented by repetition of forms of action that follow from one's rational commitments. Doing so would in fact have the advantage of exercising the form of pleasure that follows from activity discussed earlier in this section, strengthening one's attachment to one's commitments even further. A more appropriate means of overcoming the problems of the passions and hypocrisy would therefore seem to entail replacing passive habits stemming from a repetitive attitude with active ones rather than attempting to leap over the habitual level of the self as a whole.

While habituation can in one sense serve as an aid in the project of living in accordance with rational commitments, our analysis of habit also suggests the limits of the attempt to make reason into a governing principle of one's actions. While spiritual exercises can make one's automatic conduct and moral intention cohere with one's rational commitments, it follows from the fact that embodied intelligence is primary over conscious intelligence as argued in the previous section that one's conduct will eventually become habitual, not in Hadot's sense, but in the sense that over time bodily spontaneity will gradually become more and more the source of one's actions. As a result, even as one's habits and rational commitments are merged, the actions associated with the expressions of those commitments will be entered into the productive and creative process of habituation. One's actions will not therefore become mindlessly repetitive and ultimately passionate as Hadot claims, but they will begin to arise from a source other than conscious reason as they are spontaneously applied in different circumstances. At this point we can read Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty's critiques of rationalist theories of philosophical practice in tandem to reveal potential pitfalls of treating reason as the governing principle of one's actions.

Recalling Merleau-Ponty's arguments concerning the constructed and incomplete nature of conscious self-knowledge, one might worry that the sage's manner of encountering objects in

terms of their value as defined by a set of philosophical doctrines causes her to miss alternative modes of knowledge embedded in her sedimented ways of spontaneously responding to the world. Too close an adherence to reason in one's approach to the world without an appreciation of the concrete histories and evaluations embedded within one's pre-reflective grasp of the world causes one to miss details and specificities that can help bring nuance to theory. As Merleau-Ponty puts it, the philosopher must possess "*inseparably* the taste for evidence and the feeling for ambiguity," that moment of skepticism that must coincide with rational knowledge in order to prevent commitment from becoming dogmatic.³⁶³ This skepticism is not the skepticism of Sextus Empiricus, for instance, in which specific modes of argumentation are brought against a position in order to bring us to a peaceful suspension of judgment. It is rather a skepticism like that of Montaigne, an attention to one's immediate perceptual and affective life that causes one to complicate one's manner of interpreting the situations one encounters and maintain the distance from them required to live freely in one's social world. Attending to the concrete personal and social histories embedded within our pre-reflective experience allows commitments to remain responsive and thus relevant to the circumstances in which we live, even if that results in change, even constant change, in the content of one's rational commitments.

Without this openness to the ambiguity of one's sedimented, pre-reflective experience, especially as one's habitual aptitudes change in the course of the process of habituation, the harmony between reason and desire is at risk of becoming a violent domination of oneself. The constant change in our aptitudes will complicate the attempt to know the world solely through rational objectivity in the manner of the sage. As one encounters new situations, and particularly as one engages with one's social world and acquires new forms of meaning from it, one's manner

³⁶³ Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, pp. 4-5.

of interpreting the world at a pre-reflective level will change as well. In becoming habituated to new ways of acting and the forms of meaning that correlate with them, one's preferences will change as one develops a habitual inclination for one's new ways of being, such that one's motivations will gradually drift away from one's acquired rational commitments. Viewing such shifts dualistically as simply the reassertion of passion through the influence of habit inclines one to take an oppositional stance towards them, as they would give the appearance of deviation or backsliding from one's philosophical training. In doing so, Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty would warn that the harmony between reason and desire would degenerate into the kind of domination through force Ravaisson sees in the Stoic art of life and Merleau-Ponty sees in contemporary Catholicism and Marxism. By treating the passions as irrational and antithetical to the philosophical life, they can have no role in the existential state of wisdom. Understanding changes in one's habitual mannerisms, knowledge, and preferences in a similar manner denies them too a part in wisdom, such that the only way to maintain rational self-mastery will be through the application of what we saw Ravaisson call "force" that "extirpates" them to use Nussbaum's term, practice that eliminates them from one's psychic life to the extent possible.³⁶⁴ What Ravaisson calls "force" Merleau-Ponty calls the "philosophy of the commissar:" I would suggest that both are worried about the same basic issue, namely the inability of forms of rational commitment to recognize the desires and historical changes associated with the process of habit as legitimate components of the philosophical life, such that philosophical practice must attempt to eliminate them. As a result, the harmonious character of the sage will be unsustainable in the long run, and

³⁶⁴ Nussbaum articulates this notion of extirpation in the context of Stoic treatment of the passions, in which the goal of therapeutic practice is to eliminate false and disordered desires entirely from one's psychic life, see *The Therapy of Desire*, Chapter 10.

philosophical practice will be in danger of becoming a practice of self-discipline that does violence to one's habitual layer of selfhood.

B. Beyond the Passions: Stasis, Attention to Oneself, and Self-Unfolding

These criticisms of Hadot's understanding of the issues animating philosophical practice and of its way of resolving them puts us in a position to grasp the uniqueness of philosophical practice as Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty articulate it, as well as its advantages over Hadot's. I will argue in this section that the forms of philosophical practice investigated in this dissertation can be read in tandem with each other in a way that resolves the problem of the passions without taking an oppositional stance towards the embodied and affective aspects of our selfhood and thus degenerating into a form of discipline that does violence to oneself. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's form of philosophical practice accomplishes this by avoiding the dualistic picture of the human subject on which Hadot relies. Instead of pitting reason against the passions as an opposed mode of existence or a general condition into which the subject falls, our understanding of the nature of habit allows us to view the passions as a contingent component of a larger problem, that of stasis either in one's habits through the adoption of a repetitive attitude or in one's conscious ways of thinking. Philosophical practice functions by resolving the problem of stasis, and in doing so provides both resources for a therapy of the passions and methods for engaging in self-formation that avoids ossification. This form of self-formation, which I define as *self-unfolding*, thus resolves the problems Hadot's form of philosophical practice sets out to achieve, but by allowing the indefinite nature of the habitual subject to be the agent of self-formation instead of artificially arresting it, it provides the added benefits of achieving bodily and social freedom and providing the subject with the pleasure that comes from the exercise of the habitual body.

Recognizing that the passions are not a fundamental condition of human existence allows us to view them in their proper context. The passions, as we have seen, are best understood as a *symptom* of a broader issue, namely the repetitive attitude that we saw in Chapter Two is also the origin of tendencies towards rigidity and conformism. In doing so, we are put at a better position to clarify the problems philosophical practice can and should solve. One is most likely to “fall” into automatism and repetitiveness, we can recall, when the conditions within which one acts remain relatively static. When acts under similar circumstances over time, the application of bodily intelligence and freedom that gives rise to its adaptation is unnecessary to achieve one’s practical ends. As a result, one will engage in the kind of “overtraining” or overapplication of habitual actions that allows one to act in a passive manner. This is the context, I would suggest, in which the word “routine” in its application to the concept of habits is most appropriate, as it coheres with common usage of the term.³⁶⁵ When we engage in unchanging routines, we do not apply the active components of bodily intelligence, and as a result we become more inclined to engage with the world in a *passive* manner. As this occurs, our habitual layer of selfhood degenerates from a dynamic to a static form of the “logic” of the body Bergson describes that cause the problems associated with routinized or “fossilized” habits. This problem of passivity that arises from stasis in one’s circumstances is therefore more accurately identified as a condition philosophical practice should attempt to resolve than the passions alone, as it underlies the problems not only of the passions but also as we saw in Chapter Two of inflexibility, conformism, and also the fixation or addiction to particular habits Ravaisson describes.

As we discussed in Chapter Three and again in the previous section, however, this kind of stasis that afflicts the habitual layer of selfhood is not the only pathology that can develop in the

³⁶⁵ It is also very close to how Ricoeur himself describes these habits as “daily cycles of action.” (*Freedom and Nature*, p. 305).

habitual body-subject. The irrelevance of one's conscious commitments and their inability to adapt to the actual dynamic state of one's habits and the practical needs to which they respond is also an issue to which the embodied subject is liable. Because the perceptual and embodied knowledge resides at a pre-reflective level, its changes will tend to outstrip one's conscious knowledge without the application of the kind of skeptical attention Merleau-Ponty advocates. While what one could call stasis in conscious commitment arises from the inevitable gap between conscious and habitual layers of selfhood, we have seen that this stasis becomes problematic when one is unwilling or unable to adapt one's conscious knowledge to changing circumstances. The figure of the sage, just like Catholic and Marxist philosophers, have let the stasis of their conscious knowledge and values become pathological, with the result that their commitments become violent forms of self-discipline that seek to arrest the change of the habitual subject. As a situation that can give rise to such a negative result, I would argue that stasis in conscious commitment should also be understood as a condition that merits a practical response.

The goal of philosophical practice will therefore be therapeutic insofar as it attempts to resolve the problems associated with these two forms of stasis. Conversely, it will also be formative in attempting to bring about the dynamism that is attributable to habit in its ordinary condition and to help conscious knowledge mirror that dynamism. In examining how the forms of philosophical practice Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty develop respond to these issues without degenerating into a new form of static knowledge and violent discipline, I would suggest that Hadot's two-fold typology of spiritual exercises will prove helpful. Hadot conceptualizes philosophical practice as a double movement that is first directed inward towards oneself from one's everyday experience in the world and then outwards into the world again, a turning or

rotation that corresponds to the circular motion of the term *epistrophē* or “conversion.”³⁶⁶ For Hadot, philosophical practice begins as a turning back away from the world of everyday concerns and modes of perception and towards oneself, a move Hadot refers to as “concentration on oneself” in which the self “no longer confuses itself with the objects to which it is attached.”³⁶⁷ Through practices of attention to oneself and one’s habits and passions one gains consciousness of them and denaturalizes them. In doing so, concentration on oneself detaches us from the values, interests, and projects by which we define ourselves and serves as a preparation for self-formation. This preparation is followed by “expansion of oneself,” an active process through which we become a new kind of person.³⁶⁸ Expansion of oneself entails practices that apply the doctrines, arguments, and methods of a philosophical school in one’s everyday life such that they form part of one’s character. This process culminates in the philosopher’s formation into a sage, a new kind of person whose way of being follows directly from philosophical discourse.

Although his definition of each moment of conversion derives from his problematic opposition between reason and the passions, taken as a whole the double movement illuminates a thread common to Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty’s work, namely that one cannot form oneself without first actively and effortfully detaching oneself from one’s current pathological tendencies. Even though the forms of stasis just discussed are not inevitable outgrowths of the nature of habit as Hadot believes, once they have become established they become difficult to overcome. Passive forms of habit, after all, are still subject to the same dynamics Ravaisson discusses, such that once they are acquired they too become states in which one tends to persist.

³⁶⁶ *Conversio* in Latin. Hadot argues that the use of the term *epistrophē* in ancient philosophy is related to its origin in the verb *strephein*, meaning to turn or rotate on an axis, see Pierre Hadot, “‘Conversio’,” p. 37.

³⁶⁷ Hadot, *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, p. 292.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 309.

Likewise, due to the constant changes habits undergo, it will require continual practice to ensure that conscious knowledge appropriates and responds to the subject's new experiences. Acquiring consciousness of one's habitual tendencies and the awareness of alternative possibilities in a manner that weakens one's old habits and ways of thinking is a necessary prerequisite to forming oneself in a certain way, and as a result something approximating Hadot's return to oneself will be a crucial component of philosophical practice that follows from Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work. And indeed, throughout our investigation we have seen that each of their forms of philosophical practice entail moments in which practitioners become conscious of themselves and thus return to themselves. Seen from this perspective, Merleau-Ponty's notion of self-experimentation and a modified version of Bergson's concept of intuition in particular can be interpreted as methods by which existing habits can be brought up to the level of consciousness. While we saw Merleau-Ponty sharply criticize the realist tendencies of Bergson's theory of perception that underlies the practice of intuition, some of the efficacy of intuition as a practice can be retained if we view it as the outward direction of attention that complements the inward focus of Merleau-Ponty's concept of self-experimentation. Whereas Merleau-Ponty's Socratic form of self-experimentation seeks to initiate a dialogue between one's conscious knowledge and the immediate reactions, moods, and affects that reveal the content sedimented within one's habits and express them in language through which new ideas can be created, intuition can be understood as examining one's perceptual field in the same manner. By attending to one's immediate perceptual experience, intuition serves as a kind of external dialogue with oneself that attempts to uncover one's perceptual experience of the world and express it in such a way as to contrast one's habitual, pre-conscious knowledge of the world with one's conscious thought. In both cases, application of attention provides one with a degree of consciousness of one's habitual ways of

experiencing and engaging with the world, incomplete due to the fluid nature of habituation, but still enough to recognize it one's habits or conscious knowledge have become static.

The effortful focus one's emotions and perceptions practiced in self-experimentation and intuition suggest that they should be seen as two sides of one practice, which can be not inaptly named *attention to oneself*. Attention to oneself begins to combat the forms of stasis that give rise to pathological forms of habit. We have already seen in Chapters Two and Three how dialogue with oneself, whether undertaken in the manner of the philosophical skeptic or in the manner of an artist such as Turner or Cézanne, allows one to contrast one's habitual experience with one's conscious knowledge in a way that allows the latter to be altered, and I will not repeat those arguments here. I would argue that it also helps to combat the stasis that gives rise to the passions among other ills by making one conscious of that very stasis and opening one up to alternative possibilities for action. Practicing awareness of one's reactions, affects, and (particularly in the case of the passions) one's desires and fears will give insight into one's regular characteristics and of the situations in which those regularities are expressed. In doing so, attention to oneself can identify the pathological forms one's habitual way of being takes, along with the unchanging circumstances that give rise to them. With this knowledge, one can begin to search for ways of improving both one's habitual tendencies and their contexts. To begin with habits themselves, in making oneself conscious of one's pathological tendencies one can construct coping strategies for them. Focusing for the purposes of the present discussion on the issues of exaggerated desires, emotions, and fears that are constitutive of the passions, this entails learning to moderate outsized emotions, such that they no longer cause pain or distress. In his study of "somaesthetic" practices of cultivated attention to one's body, Richard Shusterman argues that coping mechanisms can be constructed as one comes to recognize the connections between one's emotions and the bodily

responses correlated with them. In recognizing and naming experiences of anxiety as such, for instance, one will come to recognize the changes in breathing and muscle tension associated with the emotional state of anxiety even at moments when it had previously been unconscious. As a result, one will gain the ability to respond to those experiences with practices such as breathing regulation or muscle relaxation that moderates them.³⁶⁹ Another example of such mechanisms can be found in Hadot's own discussions of ancient practices of meditation, in which one's immediate reactions to and desires for pleasurable objects are directly opposed by practices of visualization that present the desired object in an unpleasant light or by repeating to oneself a pithy statement that is designed to weaken one's attachment to it such as Marcus Aurelius' statements that social and political life are just so much "emptiness, putrefaction, pettiness; little dogs nipping at one another; little children who laugh as they fight, and then suddenly burst into tears."³⁷⁰ Techniques such as these serve as defense mechanisms that directly oppose and attempt to weaken the pathologies associated with static habits in a way that diminishes their negative effects.

While coping strategies defensively oppose existing static and passive habits, practices that attempt to uncover hidden opportunities for activity replace them with dynamic, active habits. By focusing attention on one's bodily and perceptual habits and the circumstances with which they are correlated, one gains a more explicit sense of one's concrete possibilities. As noted in Merleau-Ponty's discussion of freedom, our habitual world is never fully constituted, and in our everyday lives we are not conscious of all of the possibilities that exist in that world. Through attention to oneself, however, one can uncover alternative activities and projects to which one can commit

³⁶⁹ Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, pp. 121-122.

³⁷⁰ Pierre Hadot, *Introduction aux Pensées de Marc Aurèle*, p. 269, citing Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, trans. C.R. Haines. (Cambridge, M.A.: Harvard University Press, 1930), 5.33.2. Hadot is doubtless correct that Stoics like Marcus Aurelius constructed these statements in such a way as to cohere with their true nature as discovered by Stoic physics. Their psychological efficacy as Hadot describes it, however, remains the same.

oneself in a way that can disrupt the stasis of one's habits. This process functions in part simply through variation of one's habits. In pursuing previously unknown actions and projects, one encounters situations irreducible to one's existing perceptual and bodily schemata and forces either their adaptation or the construction of an entirely new habit through conscious exercise.³⁷¹ Doing so re-engages bodily intelligence and freedom in a way that reinstates an active orientation towards the world. This orientation can be in fact both bodily and conscious: even though it would not give access to metaphysically real radical creativity in the universe, intuition as externally directed attention can instill us with a greater sense of our own powers and abilities to affect our world in previously unknown ways and hence give rise to a more limited yet real sense of mastery in Bergson's words over our own actions and possibilities.³⁷² Uncovering new possibilities in this manner combats the problem of the passions more specifically by locating alternative sources of pleasure that replace ones that have become exaggerated and harmful. Just as Merleau-Ponty's worker through engagement and interaction with others gradually develops a sense of the conditions in which he lives and works and his possibilities for improving it, attention to oneself uncovers new possibilities for acting from which one could garner enjoyment. Taking enjoyment from new forms of action rather than from one's passive habits serves as an especially strong antidote to the passions as in doing so one derives the kind of pleasure and preference associated with Ravaisson's concept of "taste" that grows over time, as opposed to dependence upon the diminishing returns of passive pleasures.

Returning to Merleau-Ponty's example of the worker suggests another, more profound way in which attention to oneself combats habitual stasis that goes beyond varying one's existing habits

³⁷¹ Ricoeur mentions in like manner that teachers can prevent the ossification of students' problem-solving skills by varying the details of problems as much as possible, see *Freedom and Nature*, p. 300.

³⁷² Cf. Bergson, *La pensée et le mouvant*, p. 116/86.

and instead uncovers possibilities one can actively pursue. Merleau-Ponty's notion of self-experimentation, while skeptical in its orientation, does not depart from his early conception of freedom in that it still blurs the distinctions between the individual and the social, the philosophical and the political in its attempt to clarify the ways our interactions with other people, with institutions, and with our own acquired manners of thinking. Variation of habits as described in the previous section is thus ultimately put into the service of uncovering precisely where our habitual world is open to our activity, or in other words of an *interpretation* of the world that allows us to *change* it, even if only incompletely and provisionally. Variation is already linked with commitment for Merleau-Ponty, such that the return to self by its own movement turns itself back outwards into the expansion of oneself, the turn of conversion out towards self-formation and expression of an alternative way of life. Whereas for Hadot the way of life pursued in the expansion of oneself is that of the sage, indistinguishable from universal reason and what is metaphysically real, however, for Merleau-Ponty the way of life into which one expands arises from the partial and perspectival interpretations of the concrete conditions of one's life.³⁷³ Expansion of the self for Merleau-Ponty therefore does not entail any radical "tearing away" from everyday life that seeks to view it from an external perspective but a deeper engagement with it that makes explicit its tacit and inchoate possibilities. Expansion of oneself refers to "actively being what we are by chance," of pursuing projects through which one gains new potentialities and a new sense of identity.³⁷⁴ And due to the intersubjective and historical constitution of the self, these possibilities will inevitably be social possibilities that pertain to the needs, responsibilities, and problems of the

³⁷³ Hadot in fact refers to the "expansion of the self into the cosmos," indicating that the sage takes up a universal perspective that is continuous with the universal reason governing the universe as a whole (see for instance Hadot, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie antique?*, p. 309).

³⁷⁴ Merleau-Ponty, *Sens et non-sens*, p. 83/40.

concrete relationships, communities, and institutions in which one participates. Through examining one's own circumstances and comparing one's attempts at expression with those of others, one attends to the "local histories" that have formed one's social context in the way it appears and attempts with others to construct projects that can change those histories for the better, whether through individual or through collective action.³⁷⁵ By pursuing these projects, the variation of one's circumstances becomes full commitment to a new way of life that relates the return to and expansion of the self and institutes an active relationship with the world.

In particular, we saw that for Merleau-Ponty philosophical practice is a critical practice that questions not only whether conscious knowledge conforms to our present state but moreover whether particular institutional or social arrangements are conducive to our concrete interests or not as we best understand them. Putting this critical interest in contact with the present concern regarding stasis in one's circumstances, we can say that philosophical practice will be particularly interested in conditions that cause the body to take on a passive role and prevent it from exercising its intelligent agency. One example of this, I would suggest, is the renewed trend towards bureaucratization and routinization David Graeber has identified in professional life under contemporary capitalism.³⁷⁶ Graeber's claim that the rhetoric of "autonomy" and "flexibility" in the workplace is belied by a greater regularity in the kind of work actually done and the social arrangements that shape it, and furthermore tends to be associated with increased precarity in the worker's life, is particularly relevant to our purposes as it points towards a situation in which the appearance of creative freedom fails to match the reality of the circumstances in which people

³⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty, *Signes*, p. 61/35.

³⁷⁶ Graeber originally made this claim in an article called "On the Phenomenon of Bullshit Jobs" (*Strike!*, August 17, 2013, Web. Accessed May 4, 2017), and has expanded it into a book, see *The Utopia of Rules: Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy* (Brooklyn, N.Y.: Melville House, 2015).

operate.³⁷⁷ The subordination of imagination and creativity to bureaucratic rules and conformity to ideals stemming from managerial literature can be understood to stifle the inventiveness of habitual agency through the enforcement of regimes in which repetitive tasks dominate working life. Philosophical practice that became attentive to this phenomenon would attempt to investigate the histories that brought it about and locate opportunities to change the situation most effectively. In doing so, practice would seek specifically to reverse the enforced stasis and passivity the application of such rules and discourse gives rise to and provide greater space for the intelligent freedom of the body to express itself.

By combining practices of self-examination with ones that actively cultivate new forms of habitual engagement, this transition from the return to self to the expansion of oneself balances between the primacy of habitual intelligence and the need to maintain suppleness in one's conscious ways of knowing. For while Merleau-Ponty makes a powerful case for the desirability of becoming conscious of the contours of one's habitual and social world, both for finding new possibilities of action and for gaining critical distance from one's static knowledge, both he and Ravaissou make equally powerful arguments for why our primary mode of engagement with the world is and should be habitual. While conscious interrogation uncovers possible projects, once the goals associated with those projects are (relatively) set we have seen throughout this dissertation that perceptual and bodily knowledge entails a more immediate form of skill that furthermore is an inevitable result of repeating particular forms of action associated with projects. As one pursues a particular project, whether that of becoming a teacher or an artist or a proletarian, one's consciously undertaken actions eventually become components of bodily intelligence and form one's preferential and spontaneous orientation towards the world. While for Ravaissou and

³⁷⁷ Graeber, *The Utopia of Rules*, p. 129.

Merleau-Ponty this is both a necessary and ultimately a desirable stage in pursuing particular forms of commitment, it does raise the issue of the relationship between conscious and habitual knowledge once again. The owl of Minerva flies only at dusk when it comes to habitual skills, such that the possibility that knowledge of oneself and one's projects will not only lag behind the development of one's habitual aptitudes but moreover that they too can become ossified. Through continued practice, one's character might develop past the point of recognition as one creates a new style or method of acting, a situation that could give rise to the problem of the stasis of conscious commitment again.

Philosophical practice that recognizes the inevitably indefinite nature of commitment has the resources to solve this problem by making Socratic self-examination a permanent component of one's training. Along with continued self-experimentation in Merleau-Ponty's sense, I would also argue that Ravaillon's practice of aesthetic imitation can also help maintain self-knowledge, due to its emphasis on drawing distinctions between oneself and the model. Along with the literary and artistic models Ravaillon argues help us understand how to act, we can also see the others with whom we interact as potential models. In observing their ways of behaving and pursuing shared projects, we gain the ability both to see ourselves and our own conduct in contrast with theirs and gain the desire to engage in a like manner to them in a way that inspires invention on our own part.³⁷⁸ This contrast with others helps us maintain a sense of our own tendencies, even as it impels us to pursue projects and cultivate habits associated with them. The combination of self-experimentation and imitation continually produce knowledge of the shifts and regularities of

³⁷⁸ And not, as Nehamas fears, the simple caricaturing of others that he argues results from imitation (*The Art of Living*, p. 185). Nehamas argues against practices of imitation that they fail to construct the kind of individual character that truly justifies the moments of one's life. This fear shares individualist presuppositions with Bergson, and fails to recognize the ways in which personal identity and character is formed through the kinds of dialectical processes Ravaillon and Merleau-Ponty describe.

one's habitual aptitudes. Through these practices, knowledge of oneself and of one's projects and circumstances can become progressive in Bergson's sense, responsive and open to additions from one experiences while not interfering with the expression and development of one's skills.

Philosophical practice undertaken in this manner therefore does not abandon reason, but neither does it pit a purely rational self against an irrational embodied and affective self. Instead, rationality takes on the role of clarifying one's habitual world and of establishing coherence between the conscious and habitual layers of one's selfhood. The habituated body-subject remains the primary agent in the pursuit of commitments: reason provides the original impetus of philosophical practice, uncovering the latent possibilities within one's habitual world and continually clarifying one's relationship with them, but then allows the habituated body to learn how to engage with the world spontaneously in such a way that one's pre-reflective comportment and character becomes continuous with one's projects. In the perspective that has been opened throughout this investigation, it is ultimately not only inevitable but ultimately desirable that bodily intelligence and freedom retains its primacy in everyday life. First, allowing the habituated body to independently engage with the world confirms the therapeutic efficacy of philosophical practice by replacing static habits with dynamic ones. Pursuing a new project abandons the repetitive attitude and instead cultivates active habits whose dynamism slowly makes them into the primary foundation of one's character, such that one's overall mode of engaging with the world gradually improves. Second, and related to this, by balancing the independence of habits with continual attention to oneself one also prevents the philosophical life from becoming ossified. Abandoning the ideals of complete rational self-mastery and self-knowledge of Hadot's philosophical practice allows habitual aptitudes to freely develop and reason to remain continuous with it. One thus avoids the problems of a dualistic and oppositional relationship with one's non-rational self and

the possibility of philosophical practice becoming a violent discipline associated with his concept of the sage. And finally, in place of the fragile and ultimately untenable joy the sage feels at her rational perfection and her illusory freedom from her non-rational self with gradually increasing pleasure of acting and concrete and situated freedom within one's social world as Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty describe them. As they arise from the free development of the embodied subject, these benefits of philosophical practice are more sustainable than those Hadot's form of philosophy provides, and rely on a more accurate understanding of the nature of the subject. Philosophical practice carried out in a manner that combines Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's approaches is thus able to resolve the problem of the passions Hadot's form of philosophy is designed to solve in a more comprehensive manner by reaching to their root cause of stasis and ultimately serving as a stronger and more sustainable basis of a general way of life.

These benefits accrue to the subject undertaking this form of philosophical practice because it responds to the indefinite nature of self-cultivation. Rather than attempting to arrest the becoming of the habitual subject and fixing it into a pre-determined form, pursuing social projects through the medium of habitual agency allows the process of stylization to continuously deform and transform the subject while simultaneously maintaining critical self-awareness of those changes. Doing so, to paraphrase Heidegger, lets the being of the habitual body-subject be, such that the freedom and pleasure that arise through its active becoming are maintained. As a form of self-formation, philosophical practice as it is developed in Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work succeeds in its goals precisely by not attempting to reduce the self that emerges through the course of its formation to a unitary set of characteristics such that it becomes an individual as Nehamas does, but rather by allowing the character of the philosopher to arise in a continuous and open-ended fashion. We have seen, however, that in contrast to Hadot's model of

philosophical practice, the arising of the self that occurs in this form of practice does not occur through a *radical* transformation that uproots one mode of existence in favor of another. Instead, it is the continual adaptation of habitual aptitudes and the emergence of actions that are sedimented into them that brings about the indefinite change that preserves the freedom and pleasure of the subject. To provide a contrast with Hadot's recovery model of philosophical practice, indefinite self-cultivation can thus be referred to as a *self-unfolding* model of practice. The term "unfolding" is appropriate in this context because it is in the very actualization of the aptitudes that constitute the habitual layer of selfhood that it is changed in unpredictable and continuous ways. Through the application of existing elements of the habitual self something new is formed, just as the opening of a folded piece of paper introduces a new set of surfaces that did not exist prior to its folding. By allowing the unfolding of the habitual subject to occur, philosophical practice preserves the freedom and intelligence inherent to the habituated body that subtends its larger social freedom while maintaining the self-awareness and self-knowledge that prevents the ossification of one's way of life.

3. General Conclusion: Habit and the Art of life

Epicurus warns that "empty is the argument of the philosopher by which no human disease is healed; for just as there is no benefit in medicine if it does not drive out bodily diseases, so there is no benefit in philosophy if it does not drive out diseases of the soul."³⁷⁹ Whereas the art of medicine cures the illnesses of the body and brings it to a state of health, philosophy when practiced rightly is an art of life that cures the illnesses of the soul and brings it to a state of health. This analogy, common in antiquity, between the philosopher and the doctor separates them based on

³⁷⁹ Quoted in Porphyry, *To Marcella* 31, in A.A. Long and D.S. Sedley eds., *The Hellenistic Philosophers, Vol. 1: Translations of the Principle Sources, With Philosophical Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 25C.

the object of their practice: the doctor's art is set over the body, and the philosopher's over the soul.³⁸⁰ The phenomenon of habit, however, breaks down the neat separation between the soul – or for Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty, the mind – and the body. Habit is simultaneously bodily and mental, a zone of interplay between conscious knowledge and choice, immediate bodily freedom and intelligence, and historical processes of adaptation and change that consciousness cannot fully appropriate even in theory. As a result, the maladies of habit, as well as its form of health, cannot be strictly separated into categories of “bodily” and “mental” but pertain to the embodied subject as a whole. The philosopher's art of life as Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty understand it therefore does not reduce to what Shusterman calls a “one-sided life of the mind,” but instead affirms the independence and even the primacy of the habitual body-subject.³⁸¹ Not only is indefinite self-cultivation theorized on the basis of an understanding of the dynamics of habit as a process, but it also treats the expression of intelligent bodily agency as a good in itself and allows the body to play an active role in defining the principles and projects to which the subject commits itself. When concerned with the habitual body-subject, the philosopher becomes simultaneously doctor of the body and doctor of the soul, and through the practice of indefinite self-cultivation achieves the health of both together.

I do not pretend that the health and sickness of the habitual layer of selfhood includes all of the pathologies of everyday life to which philosophical practice can respond and all of the goals towards which it can strive.³⁸² I do, however, hope to have demonstrated that the problems

³⁸⁰ For a helpful survey of uses of the medical analogy among ancient philosophers, see Christopher Gowans, “Medical Analogies in Buddhist and Hellenistic Thought: Tranquility and Anger,” in Ganeri and Carlisle eds. *Philosophy as Therapeia*: 11-34.

³⁸¹ Shusterman, *Body Consciousness*, pp. 15-16.

³⁸² I have not extended my discussion of the passions, for instance, to address the larger problem of the emotions, a crucial component of the larger context of Nussbaum's project. Another significant domain of inquiry not addressed

associated with passive and repetitive habits and the stasis of conscious knowledge along with the benefits of situated freedom and the pleasure of action are genuine concerns that indefinite self-cultivation confronts and that merit consideration by other potential conceptions of philosophical and embodied practice. For at the heart of this dissertation's investigations of philosophical practice has been the claim that habit is the basis of a form of embodied subjectivity that can be reduced neither to the status of an effect of acts of consciousness nor to practical reason located within the body, even though we have seen throughout that the latter is an important component of habit. Over and above these conceptions, we have seen that habit is, to borrow the language of contemporary affect theory, an *autonomic* process that operates by its own laws, specifically the principles of desire, fossilization, and sedimentation which I have described as the governing dynamics of its historicity.³⁸³ As an independent and dynamic layer of our selfhood, habit thus possesses its own forms of pathology and ideal functioning that affect other aspects of our selfhood as well. Taken as a whole, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's forms of philosophical practice address these issues in particular and thus constitute a genuinely novel form of practice that demonstrate not only the necessity but moreover the desirability of including the body in the articulation of projects of philosophical self-cultivation.

Yet these same dynamics also demonstrate why philosophical practice cannot simply introduce techniques of bodily formation into its repertoire of exercises. For habit is not simply the object of self-cultivation, but rather the subject of its *own* cultivation. My analysis of theories of virtue acquisition in philosophy and religious ethics has demonstrated that embodied practice

in this dissertation pertains to the issue of power that animates much of Foucault's investigation of ancient philosophical practice.

³⁸³ See for instance Patricia Ticento Clough, "Introduction," in Patricia Ticento Clough and Jean Halley eds. *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007: 1-33), p. 2.

functions by orienting the processes underlying intelligent habitual agency towards achieving a particular goal, such that the body actively learns to comport itself in a particular fashion. The body only takes on a new form of practical reason, however, by enacting it in specific contexts through the process of invention that introduces subtle changes into one's aptitudes, which are themselves retained through sedimentation. The understanding of habit and its underlying dynamics that has developed throughout this dissertation therefore not only provides a deepens theories of embodied practice's understanding of how embodied subjects are formed, but how they continue to express themselves in unpredictable ways in everyday life. That self-cultivation inevitably produces a new form of subjectivity that exceeds that which has been determined in advance also means that one's conscious self-understanding will always remain behind one's actual bodily state and be able only to approximate it. The self is never fully identical to itself but always in a state of becoming, and philosophical practice and embodied practice more generally will therefore be forced to continually engage in the kind of experimental self-examination Merleau-Ponty (and as I have argued, Bergson as well) describes to prevent conscious self-knowledge from ossifying in a way that introduces dissatisfaction with oneself and even suspicion at one's development. Reckoning with the inevitability that embodied self-cultivation will become indefinite as defined earlier in this chapter forces us to abandon a measure of our conscious self-mastery, but I hope to have demonstrated that doing so opens us to greater freedom and joy.

It is no secret that a major thrust of the past half-century of research in philosophy and the social and cognitive sciences has been to vindicate the intelligent and free nature of the body against its reduction to a passive object carried out by Descartes and his followers. The theories of embodied practice with whom I have put Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work in conversation throughout this dissertation ultimately stem from what I have called the "organicist"

tradition of thought on the subject of habit that stretches from contemporary times back to Aristotle. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty's work does not fundamentally challenge the basic Aristotelian picture of habit as *hexis*, and indeed we have seen that the debates between them articulate a set of links – overlooked in the case of Bergson and particularly Ravaisson – in the chain that connects this tradition. By grounding their conceptions of embodied subjectivity in analyses of the effects of repetition on the capacities of which the subject is formed, however, they provide nuance to the association of the body with practical reason. I have focused in this dissertation particularly on the notion of skill, as its gradually developing nature and the sense of adaptiveness it carries corresponds to the questions Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty ask concerning the body's ability to operate in the absence of conscious deliberation. Yet I hope to have shown that the historical dynamics that govern habit force us to recognize the purposiveness of the body as a whole as the basis of continual changes in the body that go beyond the limits of conscious knowability. The body does not simply carry out our conscious purposes independently from consciousness: it actively prefers certain ways of acting over others; it develops tendencies that cause us to apply existing modes of behavior increasingly frequently and with greater ease; it learns how to adapt itself to new situations and thus changes itself in the process; and sometimes it lapses into stasis that introduces a host of problems. Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty drastically expand the range of embodied subjectivity beyond its stability and practical abilities to grasp it as a subject that is affected by its history and develops independently from consciousness. These processes are the condition for the possibility of bodily intelligence and freedom as it is understood in the organicist tradition, but they also inflect the embodied subject with dynamics that cause it to change in unpredictable yet enduring ways.

With regards to these dynamics, I have argued that Ravaisson and Merleau-Ponty's theories of habit are compatible and ultimately complement each other. Despite his outdated metaphysics, Ravaisson's interpretation of habit as a desire to persist remains valuable because the dynamism the concept of tendency introduces is absent in Merleau-Ponty's account. At the same time, the temporal scope of the development defined by Merleau-Ponty's concept of sedimentation is far broader than that of Ravaisson. Together, however, they comprise the ontological foundation of everyday bodily intelligence and freedom. Bergson's process of fossilization appears in this context as exceptional, the result of an attitude that is adopted, consciously or unconsciously, due to stasis in the conditions with which one interacts. And yet we have seen that it plays an extremely important role in accounting for the various pathologies that belong to habit. While desire and sedimentation are the basis of the "health" of the embodied subject, fossilization through the adoption of a repetitive attitude is the origin of its "sickness," a machinic and passive orientation that is at the root of the symptoms philosophical practice treats. In mediating between the post-Cartesian mechanistic conceptions of habit and the Aristotelian understanding of habit as *hexis* in this way, Ravaisson, Bergson, and Merleau-Ponty enrich the organicist understanding both of the ordinary functioning of habit and of the ways it can degenerate.

The exceptional nature of the pathologies associated with habit finally indicate why the philosopher's art of life goes beyond the individual and extends to the social and even the political. Because the repetitive attitude is fundamentally the result of external conditions, philosophical practice functions as we have seen as a critical practice that attempts to uncover the specific conditions that exercise deleterious effects on the embodied subject and to find ways to alleviate those conditions. While the practices associated with attention to oneself and self-unfolding can of course be undertaken at an individual level, the possibility remains that the conditions that bring

about particular maladies have a social or institutional origin. If they do, adequately responding to those conditions may require action that goes beyond the construction of individual coping mechanisms or variation and instead entail collective effort at changing them. Though in Merleau-Ponty's case this social and political orientation stems to a certain degree from his early Marxist politics, it derives at a more fundamental level from the ways habit itself is a mode of relating to the external world. The collapse of first and second nature means that embodied subjects are what they repeatedly do, but our discussion of invention and sedimentation demonstrates that precisely what we repeatedly do is a product of interaction between the body's capacities and goals and its environments that facilitate or hinder them. The self produced by habits is not only embodied and fluid but is furthermore constituted in tandem with a world. Philosophical practice that seeks to therapeutically treat or aesthetically perfect the self must therefore go beyond focusing on the individual treated as an atomic unit and attend to the world(s) it inhabits and that inhabit it.

At the outset of this dissertation, I noted Hadot's claim that philosophical practice stems from an "elementary human need." In spite of the grandiosity of his vision for philosophy as a way of life, however, Hadot himself in fact expresses pessimism regarding its potential to serve as anything more than a luxury. The cares, worries, and banalities of everyday life will ultimately gnaw at the sage's repose in rational lucidity, the fulness of her practical purpose, and her sense of the sacredness of existence. "How can one harmoniously unite daily life with philosophical consciousness?", he demands. "It can only be a fragile conquest, always threatened."³⁸⁴ If the philosophical art of life learns to work with rather than against habit, I would suggest in closing that it can provide a more sound basis for the improvement of everyday life. In connecting our conscious life with our bodily and our environmental and social lives, habit is the key to the

³⁸⁴ Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, pp. 189-190.

everyday, the spontaneous engagements with the world of which our pre-reflective and non-conscious existence is made up. Instead of tearing us away from the everyday, indefinite self-cultivation plunges us directly into it and allows us to take our bearings even amidst the continuous changes of the embodied subject and the world in which it lives. In doing so, it uncovers the concrete ways we can improve our world and the ways we relate to it, such that conscious commitment and everyday life unite in practice, even as both change in unpredictable ways.

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