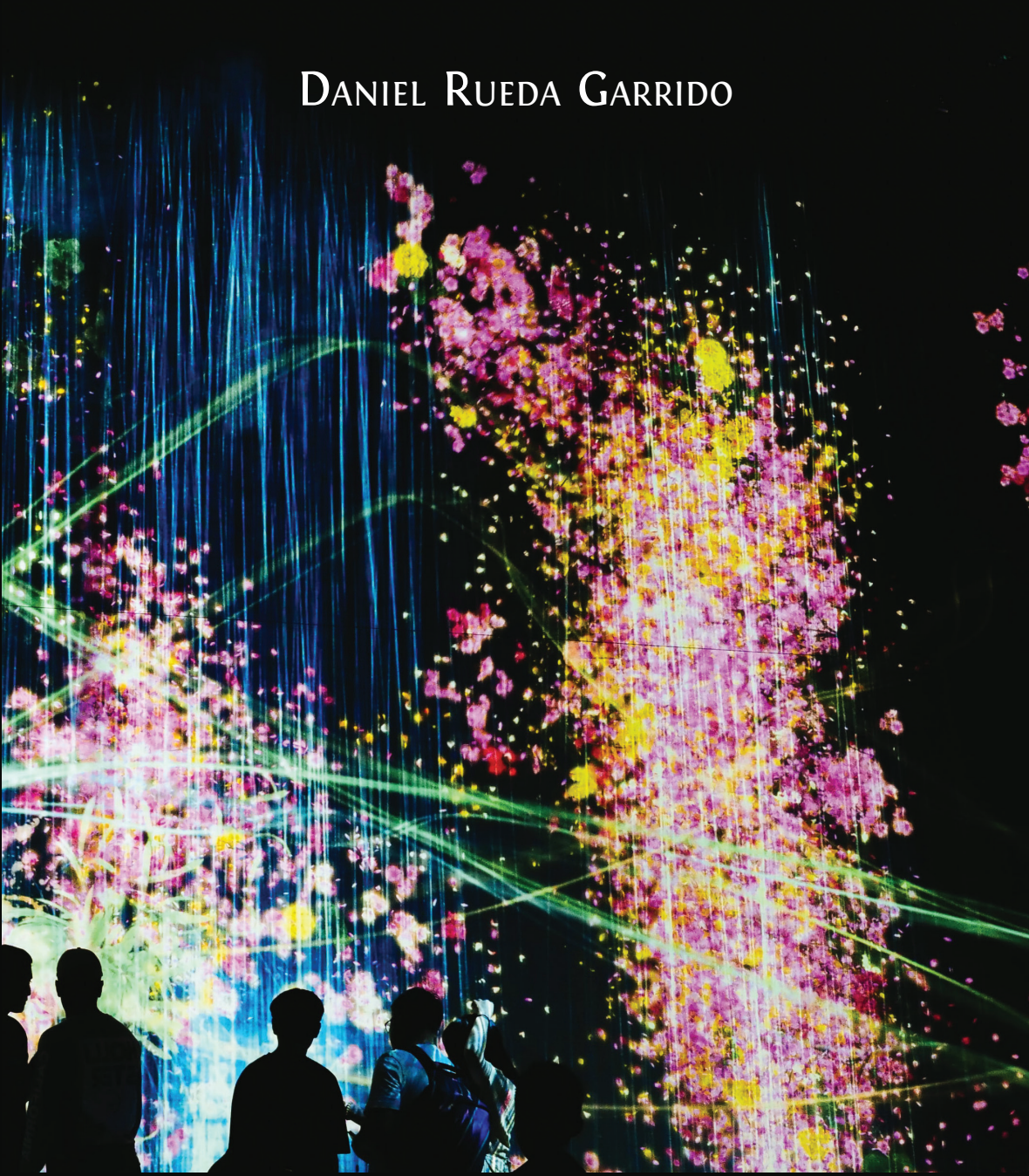


DANIEL RUEDA GARRIDO



Forms of Life and Subjectivity

Rethinking Sartre's Philosophy



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ISBN Paperback: 9781800642188

ISBN Hardback: 9781800642195

ISBN Digital (PDF): 9781800642201

ISBN Digital ebook (epub): 9781800642218

ISBN Digital ebook (azw3): 9781800642225

ISBN XML: 9781800642232

DOI: 10.11647/OBP.0259

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Cover design by Anna Gatti

3. Habits, Identification and Forms of Life¹

1. Introduction

From the phenomenological ontology that I have outlined in the preceding pages, it has been possible to distinguish between the praxical image and the anthropical image in the experience of our action and its meaning as a unity. And it has been shown how that unity is a form of life as a transcendent-immanent totality. So, every action has meaning, and every meaning refers to an action in the form of life. It is the latter that confers identity and subjectivity, for the subject is an incarnation of a form of life. This means that every subject is an incarnation of a 'We' or a particular image of human being. And therefore, in it the individual and the community are expressed in a unitary and inseparable way, as well as the set of possible actions with meaning. The following chapters are concerned with examining what exactly is the relationship between actions and the form of life as a unit of meaning; or how the latter is expressed in its habits. I do this in dialogue with various authors of contemporary philosophy as well as cognitive and social psychology. The result of this discussion aims to establish the concepts that will be key to the analysis of particular forms of life and the relationships between them.

This chapter aims to show that every habit is an action but not every action is a habit. The distinction between the two is important, because only habits are actions that imply identification and therefore

1 Some of the contents of this chapter have been expressed earlier in Daniel Rueda Garrido, 'Actions, Habits and Forms of Life', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 50:3 (2020), 321–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jtsb.12236>.

endow identity, although every action can become a habit. Moreover, this distinction is intended to undo the prejudice held throughout much of the history of Western philosophy that habits are automatic acts as opposed to actions. Thus, it is a matter of showing that habits are behaviours governed by a unitary principle and that this principle implies a way of being and acting, that is, the ontological principle of a form of life. This requires arguing about the relationship between habits and that form of life; and to argue that such habits are so because they would cease to be carried out if identification with another form of life were obtained. If the habits did not exist, there would be no personal identity either, nor could one speak of a communal identity. And these arguments contribute to the conclusion that habits are not automatic, yet require an identification and a will to be or to incarnate a particular image of being human.

In the second section, I explore the concept of habit in its structural characteristics. The first structural characteristic of habit that I underline is that of being an act born of a pre-reflective consciousness, that is, a consciousness that serves as the background to any consciousness of a particular object or action. That pre-reflective consciousness implies an identification with a particular form of life. I argue that habits require a free will to be obtained and that this can only be directed by a prior identification of the subject with a form of life as a whole. This leads me to discern the responsibility of the free agent with respect to his pre-reflective identification over and above his particular actions. Moreover, if habits are the product of a free will and a form of life with which the subject identifies, one cannot conclude but that habits are not an automatic behaviour, since they imply a certain analogical reasoning by which, wanting to maintain a particular course of action, I give myself a whole form of life.

And finally, once the concept of habit and its structural characteristics have been shown, I devote the last section to its comparison with and distinction from other phenomena that are often confused with habits, such as physiological reflexes, routines or skills. But, in fact, these last ones are automatic or repetitive behaviours, which moves them away from habits as actions carried out freely and under an identification with the form of life they constitute.

2. Actions and Habits

Following the body-mind dualism, the distinction between habits and actions assumed by a great many of the philosophers of the Western tradition have tended to identify, on the one hand, habits with automatic behaviours or mechanisms, endowed with a strong biological component and subjected to a necessary and unconscious realization associated with body functions. On the other hand, in the opposite direction, actions have been considered rational, free, related to the mind and the conscious states, the spirit or *Geist*, and ultimately, are the ones that has traditionally deserved the interest of philosophical studies.² This traditional distinction, as I say, can be traced throughout Western philosophy, both in the continental tradition and in the analytical one. This treatment of habits has not allowed us (among other things) to think properly about their relationship with forms of life and the responsibility that agents have regarding them.

In continental thought, René Descartes referred to habits as a sort of 'knowledge in the hands'.³ So, although he attributed to it certain knowledge, this was purely bodily, a master movement but alien to the mind or consciousness, aided by his essential dualism. The same can be found centuries later in Maurice Merleau-Ponty,⁴ for whom habits are strictly bodily habits, a sort of memory and knowledge that bodies exhibit without the aid of reflective thinking, as, for instance, the immediate knowledge we have about whether a doorway is high enough or wide enough to pass through it with our body, and by which we bend down so as not to hit our head with the frame of the door, without the need for reflection or calculation. Thus, as Dermot Moran puts it, 'Merleau-Ponty is keen to argue against habit as involving an initial mental act of recognition or the performance of an intellectual synthesis.'⁵ So it is with Henri Bergson, who, in conceiving consciousness

2 See Bill Pollard, 'Identification, Psychology and Habits', in *New Ways in Philosophy of Action*, ed. by Jesús H. Aguilar, Andrei A. Buckareff and Keith Frankish (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), pp. 81–97.

3 René Descartes, *Philosophical Writings of Descartes*, Vol. III: *The Correspondence*, ed. by John Cottingham et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 146.

4 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002 [1945]).

5 Dermot Moran, 'Edmund Husserl's Phenomenology of Habituality and Habitus', *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, 42:1 (2011), 53–77 (p. 58).

as the product of the principle of life, or *élan vital*, and in identifying this with constant creativity, cannot but treat human habits in terms of mechanical repetition, as condensation of that creativity, and, ultimately, as a restriction of freedom. In his own words: 'Our freedom, in the very movements by which it is affirmed, creates the growing habits that will stifle it if it fails to renew itself by a constant effort: it is dogged by *automatism*.'⁶

In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, William James referred to habits in the sense of second nature; because for him, in his *Principles of Psychology*, habits are strictly related to animal or biological instincts. In fact, habits are those repetitive actions that (controlled by an external force, such as the environment or the education received) select and stabilize some instincts and, conversely, let others fade away. The habits thus understood are a second nature derived from instincts by means of repetitions imposed and carried out mechanically or automatically as well as unconsciously: 'A habit, once grafted on an instinctive tendency, restricts the range of the tendency itself, and keeps us from reacting on any but the habitual object, although other objects might just as well have been chosen had they been the first-comers.'⁷ It is precisely this condition of automatic response that is relevant in James' account, for habits economize the expense of nervous and muscular energy and render easier and more accurate human actions.⁸ Again, in his view, the distinction between habits and rational actions is obvious, the former being a response to sensation (body), while the latter is a movement guided by an idea or some high-level cognitive function.⁹

In the analytical tradition, very little has been written about habits, and probably partly because of its inherent conception of habit as a mechanical behaviour that is far from expressing any meaningful aspect for intellectual analysis in relation to consciousness. In Pollard's words:

Habits have had some bad press in analytic philosophy. This is not only due to a prevailing intellectualism about what can count as an action in

6 Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. by Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan & Co., 1922), p. 134. Italics are mine.

7 William James, *The Principles of Psychology*, 2 vols. (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1890), II, p. 395.

8 *Ibid.*, I, p. 113.

9 *Ibid.*, I, pp. 115–16.

the first place, but also due to misunderstandings of what habits are. Among other things, acceptance of the position on offer will depend on our being free from such prejudicial preconceptions.¹⁰

A champion of this conception was Gilbert Ryle, who in his book *The Concept of Mind* (1949), wrote a section that carries the significant title of 'Intelligent Capacities versus Habits', or, what is the same, distinction between 'skills' and 'competences'. For him, neither intelligent capacities nor habits involve propositional content (statements that can be viewed as true or false and trigger a reasoning for action), and only the former can be treated as a type of 'knowing how', that is, a behaviour that implies vigilance, judgment, training, and so on. So, 'when we describe someone as doing something by pure or blind habit, we mean that he does it *automatically* and without having to mind what he is doing',¹¹ while, when we describe skills, on the contrary, we describe someone doing something with care, judgment and learning from previous occasions. That entails another difference between habits and intelligent capacities, according to Ryle: 'It is of the essence of merely habitual practices that one performance is a replica of its predecessors. It is of the essence of intelligent practices that one performance is modified by its predecessors. The agent is still learning.'¹² Thus, habits are from then onwards in the analytical tradition seen as automatic responses caught in repetitions from which no learning and no variation is possible.

In order to find a different approach to habits and actions, we must go back to the origins of Western philosophy, to Aristotle. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle considers the *hexis* as a disposition that changes the nature of the action.¹³ Making (craftsmanship or *poiêton*) and acting (*praktikon*) are different because of the disposition that is associated with each of them. In the first one, the end is beyond the action (a product or *ergon*), while in the second, the end is the action

10 Pollard, 'Identification, Psychology and Habits', pp. 85–86. See also, Bill Pollard, 'Habitual Actions', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. by Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 74–81 (pp. 74–75).

11 Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London and New York: Routledge, 1949), p. 30. Italics are mine.

12 *Ibid.*, p. 30.

13 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by Jonathan Barnes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), II, 1140a 1–20, pp. 3863–64.

itself. In the mentioned sense, virtue is related to action (*praktikon*), not to making or creation. Then, in the opening lines of Book II, Aristotle intimately connects habits to virtue, in remarking that ‘moral excellence [i.e., virtue] comes about as a result of habit’.¹⁴ The precise nature of this relationship between virtue and habit is principally explicated through a partial analogy between virtue and the arts. Aristotle first wonders ‘what we mean by saying we must become just by doing just acts, and temperate by doing temperate acts’ given that ‘if men do just and temperate acts, they are [or seem to be] already just and temperate’.¹⁵ Aristotle’s solution to this dilemma lies in a distinction (one not shared with the arts) between the internal and external conditions of virtue. The goodness of virtue, in contrast with the goodness of art, requires some addition: the moral agent must also be in a ‘certain condition’ when he acts.¹⁶ In short, unlike the arts, virtue requires harmony between the external action and the internal states of an agent (*hexis*). Thus we might say that while the person learning virtue will do virtuous acts, he or she will only learn to do those virtuous acts virtuously with the practice that comes with real-life experience.¹⁷ In exploring the dis-analogy of virtue to the arts, Aristotle also enumerates three other necessary ‘conditions’ of the moral agent: knowledge,¹⁸ choice,¹⁹ and character.²⁰ In sum, according to these three conditions imposed upon the moral agent, virtue cannot be either accidental, or involuntary, or erratic. It must then be a habit. And here the difference with respect to modern philosophical analysis becomes clear. For Aristotle, habit is not a mere repetition, but an action linked indissolubly to an internal disposition or internal state, which implies at least the consciousness of its realization; an action, thus, whose intrinsic value guarantees that it is done by itself

14 *Ibid.*, 1103a 16–17, p. 3746.

15 *Ibid.*, 1105a 17–20, p. 3752.

16 *Ibid.*, 1105a 28–30, p. 3753.

17 *Ibid.*, 1104a 33–b3, p. 3751. Blaise Pascal refers to a similar strategy in *Pensées and Other Writings*, trans. by Honor Levi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), the so-called argument of the ‘necessity of wager’ (Fragment 680, pp. 152–58). He wrote that, in order to believe, the subject needs to act as if he already believed, for the acts or habits in themselves would make him believe (it will change his internal state, which, in turn, will make him attain the desired practice).

18 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1105a 31, p. 3753.

19 *Ibid.*, 1105a 31–32, p. 3753.

20 *Ibid.*, 1105a 31–b1, p. 3753.

(and not for an end beyond it). The habit from the Aristotelian ethics puts us out of the modern mechanistic biological pattern, which sees in habits an imitation of the automaton.

Following Aristotle, then, in this joint treatment of habits and actions, and therefore from a vision that exceeds the mechanistic account, is the starting point of this chapter and its positioning with respect to the subject matter. But still, in both classics and moderns, habits are seen as atomistic or isolated behaviour, with no connection to other habits. So, let us take a step further by reviewing a relevant account in this respect. Recently, a more holistic and comprehensive view of habits has been launched from cognitive science. This view is called enactivism. It was defended for the first time in *The Embodied Mind* (1991) by Francisco Varela, Evan Thompson and Eleanor Rosch, and it has since then opened a new field of research. In general, they propose an interpretation of cognition that is based on the body: 'The overall concern is not to determine how some perceiver independent world is to be recovered; it is, rather, to determine the common principles or lawful linkages between sensory and motor systems that explain how action can be perceptually guided in a perceiver-dependent world.'²¹ Cognition occurs when an organism acts on its environment and that action modifies the point of view from which it is perceived. Enactivism promotes a concept of cognition that is the result of understanding the importance of the activity of the living being (the organism with its particular characteristics, especially its mode of perception) and the environment in which it occurs. Cognition does not presuppose a given world that only later is represented (they refute the concept of representation in cognition), but a type of constructivism, by which cognition is simultaneous to the action on the environment.²²

The authors aligned with enactivism see the individual in terms of an organic system made of internal components and functions, which are respectively taken as the whole and its operational parts. There are a few central themes important to underscore in this approach: 1)

21 Richard Menary, 'What is Radical Enactivism?', in *Radical Enactivism*, ed. by Richard Menary (Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Co., 2006), pp. 1–12 (p. 2).

22 Lawrence Shapiro, *Embodied Cognition* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 54.

Autonomy: The organic system is autonomous, for it only depends on its internal processes to generate and sustain its identity:²³ 'Autonomous systems are those that are inherently purposeful, in that they generate ends or purposes within themselves in order to maintain themselves.'²⁴

2) Autopoiesis: The organic system produces its own living organization in a metabolic process for which 'the material components that are constantly being produced sustain that same network that produces them', that is, its materials are modified constantly but the organization remains.²⁵ The capacity to become a closed system like that is related to what they call operational closure, which, according to Varela, 'arises through the circular concatenation of processes to constitute an interdependent network'.²⁶

3) Precariousness: This feature of the system makes clear that the individual processes cannot exist without the organizational whole and that, consequently, the metabolic identity of the organic system depends on the internal equilibrium.

4) Adaptivity: This capacity enables an organism to regulate itself in order to couple with its environment, seeking preferable encounters with it and avoiding potential risks: 'in that way, those situations that contribute to the conservation of its metabolic identity are viewed by the system as "intrinsically good", while those that challenge its subsistence as "intrinsically bad"'.²⁷ According to this approach, repeated behaviour or habits, understood as regulatory actions performed in order to adapt to an environment (safeguarding their internal balance), form habitual identities or forms of life that organisms strive to sustain. What I am interested in highlighting from this proposal is the understanding that each action is required by the internal balance of the individual's form of life; that is, the form of life is the organization in which the actions of the individual are accommodated, becoming habitual, that is, habits, to maintain this balance.

Enactivism, however, in spite of its important step towards a more comprehensive and accurate description of habits, remains within the

23 Susana Ramírez-Vizcaya and Tom Froese, 'The Enactive Approach to Habits: New Concepts for the Cognitive Science of Bad Habits and Addiction', *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10 (2019), p. 4, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00301>.

24 Rebekka Hufendiek, *Embodied Emotions* (London and New York: Routledge, 2016), p. 15.

25 Ramírez-Vizcaya and Froese, 'The Enactive Approach to Habits', p. 5.

26 Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 5.

27 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

organic level, referring habits to the living being as isolated from the rest of its species, which, in human beings seems to be essential. That is to say, enactivism remains within the individual sphere. It is not able to go further into the social and cultural level, where habits intertwine with each other in a particular form of life promoted and filtered by what is seen as good or bad, profitable or not for such a community. This same lack in the proposals of enactivism has recently been pointed out by Rebekka Hufendiek, who, although also from an externalist and biological approach, defends the need to think of the individual (organism) embedded in a structured social environment, in which actions and habits in some way do not depend only on the individual and his or her well-being but on what the group establishes as socially regulated behaviour: 'an ontology that takes organisms to be embedded in a structured environment in which certain things are of value for us and should be approached, while others should be avoided'.²⁸

Thus, by rejecting the presumed automaticity, the habit can be seen again with Aristotle as an action that implies a particular state or condition in the agents, of whom it can be said that they are in a certain way modified by that action and that, therefore, just as enactivism acknowledges, habits define the agents' identity. However, it happens that agent's identity, in the cognitive theory, depends exclusively on the individual in relationship with his environment, which can be favourable or dangerous and, therefore, habits would be reinforced or eliminated according to its adaptivity. This way (after all, caught into biology) of understanding the formation of habits and their preservation, does not fail to denounce a serious deficiency, because individuals do not seem to have, to such a degree, either the autonomy or the adaptability that are attributed to them from enactivism. The influence of the social environment, the actions and habits of other individuals as well as a degree of persuasion or constriction from positions of power, are some of the elements that seem to be left aside, because if a subject follows a form of life, being as he is in a social environment, that form of life will be shared and reinforced by the contact and perception of other subjects in that community.²⁹ And what is even more important, this

²⁸ Hufendiek, *Embodied Emotions*, p. 19.

²⁹ See an account of this necessary relationship of identity between individual and social groups in a recent paper by Daniel Moulin-Stożek, 'The Social Construction

form of life is not necessarily the best for the subject in isolation, but for the group or community to which he belongs or from which such a form of life emerges. For example, the neoliberal capitalist form of life could be positive for one subject (e.g., a citizen and entrepreneur of a large Western city) and negative or less positive for another (e.g., an under-waged worker in a factory for a Western firm in Indonesia), but such a form of life requires to be implemented by both if the community that is identified with it wants to maintain itself and still integrate even more into it.³⁰

In this sense, we must emphasize that the form of life goes beyond the subject, in the way that, as the subject performs the actions of that form of life, transforming them into habits, he integrates himself more into that life and is more identified with it. This explains why one ends up thinking in the way one lives (thus reducing the possibilities that one would think in a different way). Therefore, the first thing that seems important to point out in this section is the relationship between action and habit. That is, although habits are actions, not all actions are or become habits. Habits are actions that constitute a form of life, that is, a whole. It is, in a first approach, the repetition of certain actions that constitutes a form of life. So, does an isolated action make up a form of life? Only potentially but not integrated yet in it, for an isolated action does not stand for an identification between the agent and the form of life, although it could be the start of building towards that identification.

At this point, and having already examined how actions and habits share the same source from which they are generated, and how habits respond to a greater integration in the form of life with respect to actions, it is necessary to emphasize the direct implications that this change of philosophical perception entails in the social and political level, which makes clear the importance of its meaning, especially in the present times. This view implies that habits are interrelated and co-dependent within a network of social behaviour (as stated above by enactivism). So, they cannot be discarded without at the same time

of Character', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 49:1 (2019), 24–39.

30 For an insight on neoliberal capitalist form of life, see Matthew McDonald, 'Social Psychology, Consumer Culture and Neoliberal Political Economy', *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 47:3 (2017), 363–79. See also my analysis of capitalist subjectivity in Chapters 6 and 7 of this book.

discarding the entirety of the form of life to which they belong. That is, a change of habit requires a change in the totality of which it is a part. But that change can only occur if the subjects become aware (in the Sartrean notion of reflective consciousness) that their habits are a product of their free acceptance and not of necessity. That is the *sine qua non condition* and what I want to draw attention to. A change is possible precisely because habits are not instinctive or mechanical reactions. But neither are they mere isolated actions, without any connection between them and without a guiding principle. The recognition of such freedom and responsibility with respect to the form of life in which the agent is integrated is the inescapable ground without which no change can be expected. And, on the contrary, taking up Sartre's moral thought, any insistence on the impossibility of an alternative form of life, especially when the demand for change has been experienced, leads to a life lived in bad faith (*mauvaise foi*).³¹

3. Habits and Form of Life

Harry Frankfurt established in a well-known article the agent as a cause of his actions with regards to a second-order volition.³² That is to say, actions that are carried out because the agent has motives that go back to an identification with what the action represents, so they go beyond a decision about carrying out that specific action. The incompatibilist libertarians defend, on the contrary, that only in decisions taken without any kind of constriction or conditioning motivation, can free will be obtained. Some have followed the criticism made by Gary Watson (1975) to Frankfurt's notion of second-order volition, alleging an unnecessary reduplication of levels, for a second level cannot explain what it leaves without explaining the first-order volition.³³ And in this regard, the

31 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. by Hazel E. Barnes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1956 [1943]): 'the one who practices bad faith is hiding a displeasing truth or presenting as truth a pleasing untruth. Bad faith then has in appearance the structure of falsehood. Only what changes everything is the fact that in bad faith it is from myself that I am hiding the truth. Thus the duality of the deceiver and the deceived does not exist here.' p. 49. In *L'être et le néant*, 'c'est que dans la mauvaise foi, c'est à moi-même que je masque la vérité. Ainsi, la dualité du trompeur et du trompé n'existe pas ici.' p. 83.

32 This is one of the versions of the so-called 'source argument or principle'.

33 Gary Watson, 'Free Agency', *Journal of Philosophy*, 72:8 (1975), 205–20.

notion of habit defended in this book has something to add. For if habits express a certain need with respect to the form of life and the principle that constitutes it, they nevertheless do not cease to exhibit a certain freedom in the adoption of the form of life that these precise habits demand. That is, the chosen form of life and the constitutive principle with which the agent identifies can be interpreted as Frankfurt's notion of second-order volition, while the first-order volition is the habitual actions that constitute the particular form of life. If the former is freely chosen (at least insofar as it involves free identification with it, or 'want to want'), the latter is necessary (it is determined by the first), and more so the more the agent is integrated into the form of life with which he identifies. Against Watson's critique, then, it can be added that, on the one hand, it is necessary to resort to the form of life to understand how habits are an expression of a free identification of the agent, even if the habits themselves are not free in the incompatibilist sense of being able to do otherwise (the one who identifies with a particular form of life cannot but behave according to it). On the other hand, we must emphasize that in the agent, these two levels (methodologically distinguished) are phenomenologically only one, that is, the agent maintains his habits precisely because they constitute his form of life.

The latter clearly expresses that the perspective taken in this section concerning habits, as a conscious, rational and free behaviour, is situated within the compatibilist position. That is to say, habits present us with a behaviour that is both free and necessary: the form of life with which the agent freely identifies requires a series of habits, which if they are necessary as constitutive of a form of life, are, nevertheless, the expression of a freely accepted commitment. My habits define me, and I define my habits by identifying myself with a particular form of life. The latter leads us to a somewhat more detailed analysis of the characteristics that habits share with actions, as it has been analyzed traditionally and, in particular, in the philosophy of action: consciousness, free will or intentions and rationality. As Pollard writes:

Habitual actions do not fit comfortably into contemporary philosophical conceptions of action, or not at least in analytic philosophy. Under the influence of Anscombe (1957) and Davidson (1980), debate has focused on the nature of intentional actions; on issues such as the role of the

reasons 'for which' we act; and on the nature of psychological antecedents of actions such as beliefs, desires, and intentions.³⁴

In the first place, to be conscious does not necessarily mean to reason, that is, calculation of means for ends. Consciousness has two dimensions: a reflective consciousness and a pre-reflective or non-positional consciousness, where the former is impossible without the latter, as Sartre insisted.³⁵ This distinction between consciousness of different orders is also confirmed by the cognitive science, which uses respectively the terms high-powered sense of self-conscious or self-reflective agency and rationality, and, on the other hand, lower-powered sense of conscious pre-reflective intentional agency and desire-based volition:

The crucial point here is that self-consciousness or self-reflection requires pre-reflectively conscious sensorimotor subjectivity, but pre-reflectively conscious sensorimotor subjectivity does not require self-consciousness or self-reflection.³⁶

Being aware of something presupposes as a background a passive consciousness on which one focuses. When we act, we focus only on those moments that are required, but deep down the non-positional consciousness continues to guide our behaviour. For example, when we dress or wash ourselves, a repetitive action gives us a certain capacity, so we do not need to constantly look at what our hands do, which does not mean that we are not aware of what we are doing; we only focus when we do not find the sleeve of the sweater or we do not succeed in buttoning our shirt. This consciousness is precisely the one that assures the identification between the agent and his behaviour. If it were automatic, the agent would not conceive certain habits as belonging to his idiosyncrasy. This conception of human action as conscious, even in relation to habits, surpasses the dualism between action and habit, as well as between mind and body, because the agent is a consciousness that acts in the world, and that consciousness is indissoluble from its action.

34 Pollard, 'Habitual Actions', pp. 74–75.

35 See Chapter 1 of this book.

36 Robert Hanna and Michelle Maiese, *Embodied Minds in Action* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 32.

The second characteristic of habits is a consequence of being acts with varying degrees of consciousness. It has been argued that habits are the product of free will and not merely mechanical behaviour, and this requires some qualification. Precisely because our habits are carried out pre-reflectively conscious of their identification with a form of life, those habits are carried out freely, because the identification with them is presupposed. That they are carried out freely does not mean that they are carried out with a plan or that they are acts that we choose regarding an alternative, such as smoking or not smoking, since the habits require each other³⁷ and all of them constitute a form of life which, in turn, is the essence of each of these habits. As in fact happens, for example, in the case of the subject who goes out to have fun on Saturday nights as a habit; he does not do it automatically, for, on the contrary, he is aware (in a pre-reflective consciousness that can become reflective) that that is what is stipulated for young people in their form of life, and that form of life requires that habit. The freedom with which the agent arranges the date with his friends on Saturday is always pervaded by a certain obligation, without ceasing to be freely accepted ('that is what they are supposed to do'). Thus, habits express the freedom to do what requires or demands a certain form of life with which one identifies to the point of being our own identity: the habit shows more than any other action the freedom of what is necessary, that is to say, to be free to do what must be done within a given existential totality (in this sense habits are essentially a quest for subjective meaning within social life).

The argument of manipulation put forward by Derk Pereboom, in his so-called 'four-case argument' (according to which what the agent wants or what the agent identifies with could be manipulated, for which he provides four different cases or thought experiments), does not deprive the habit of its freedom, because it is born from the imitation of an action directed by (the principle of) the form of life and the image of human being with which the agent identifies.³⁸ On the other hand,

37 Something also claimed recently by cognitive scientists related to enactivism; see Ramírez-Vizcaya and Froese, 'The Enactive Approach to Habits'; and, for the general theory of enactivism, see Francisco J. Varela, Eleanor Rosch and Evan Thompson, *The Embodied Mind: Cognitive Science and Human Experience* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991).

38 Derk Pereboom, *Free Will, Agency, and Meaning in Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

there are aspects that favour certain determinism, i.e., the necessity of habitual behaviour: the identification could be manipulated and the form of life with which this identification is carried out implies a series of actions and habits that are necessary. All of these are determining factors. However, as I have shown above, the identification with this form of life must be considered free as long as the agent is aware of it (even though in pre-reflective consciousness), which he confirms by acting according to its principle. By acting in this fashion, the agent paradoxically expresses the need imposed on himself through that identification. Thus, the agent is conscious of such identification at a pre-reflective level (where manipulation may have occurred) and is responsible for taking it to a reflective level. The agent is therefore responsible for such identification, for as Patrick Todd puts it, 'having free will is [thus] a necessary condition on being responsible, which is in turn a necessary condition on the appropriateness of being held responsible'.³⁹

Finally, if the agent acts consciously and freely in pursuit of an action with which he identifies, this action cannot be considered in any way irrational (or non-rational), because in that case rationality would simply be associated with the predominant pattern of instrumental reason, leaving out other uses of reason such as the dialectical described in this chapter (and that will be explored in more details in Chapter 5): in habits, the action performed is not taken as a means or instrument but as an end, which is identified with the integration in a posited totality; and the habit expresses that totality in a dialectical relation that, in turn, constitutes the identity of the agents themselves—as has already been shown previously. We might not rationalize in terms of means to ends, but while carrying on the habit, we are conscious of our objective and pre-reflectively conscious of our consciousness, or as Sartre put it: 'There can be no *exis*, no habit without practical vigilance [*pas d'exis, pas d'habitude sans vigilance pratique*], that is to say, without a concrete objective to determine them in their essential indetermination, and without a project to actualise them by specifying them.'⁴⁰

39 Patrick Todd, 'Manipulation and Moral Standing: An Argument for Incompatibilism', *Philosophers' Imprint*, 12:7 (2012), 1–18 (p. 3).

40 Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Vol. I (London: Verso, 2004 [1960]), pp. 455–56. In *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Vol. I (Paris: Galimard, 1960), p. 468.

Consequently, the actual habits that the agents hold are expressions of their free will because they identify themselves with them (the capacity to act otherwise is not needed). But the form of life that habits constitute can be considered an expression of the agents' free will only if the agents can, at least potentially, identify with another form of life (and the principle that drives it); that is, if the agents are responsible for that identification because they can reject it instead (given a situation in which they understand they must reject it, as shown in Chapter 2 on conversion). The agents are morally responsible for the good or bad within their form of life and they are also rationally responsible, for they can become reflectively aware of their identification. That is to say, it is their responsibility to make reflective the spontaneous identification made at a pre-reflective level,⁴¹ which is nothing more than becoming aware of whom they want to be (a decision already made by their original identification and will). In that way, if by their actions the subjects might be legally and ethically accountable, for their identification they should be morally accountable.⁴² This last argument satisfies the principle for moral responsibility adduced by John Martin Fischer⁴³ and, in a sense, also meets the definition of freedom by Galen Strawson in terms of 'quasi' *causa sui*,⁴⁴ for the agents by identifying themselves with a different form of life, give themselves a different identity, with different habits. If *habits* belong to the category of 'couldn't do otherwise', on the contrary, *identification* with a form of life can become reflective and thus can be refused or affirmed, which carries with it a responsibility.

41 This does not mean that some forms of life are intrinsically better or worse than others (at least no universal criteria can be drawn from this approach). That is an assumption that the reader will not find in this book, and that will become clearer in the following chapters. The responsibility mentioned indicates that the subjects are responsible for their habits in terms of their form of life. Therefore, they can be held responsible for its consequences and be questioned not only about the content that their form of life does encompass, but about all that is left out in the shadows.

42 For this claim in relation to racist habits, see Helen Ngo, *The Habits of Racism: A Phenomenology of Racism and Racialized Embodiment* (London: Lexington Books, 2017), p. 24. I take here the realm of the moral in relation to identification, while I associate the legal and the ethical with the code of behaviour and doctrines that derive from the form of life. That is to say, the difference between what they want to want (moral) and what they should want (ethical).

43 John Martin Fischer, 'Responsibility and Autonomy', in *A Companion to the Philosophy of Action*, ed. by Timothy O'Connor and Constantine Sandis (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), pp. 309–16.

44 Galen Strawson, 'Free Agents', in *Real Materialism and Other Essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 359–86.

Are freedom, consciousness and rationality (in the dialectical and not in the analytical sense) necessary to explain why agents follow particular habits and forms of life? The biopolitics elaborated by Michel Foucault and Giorgio Agamben would argue that in societies of control, such as that of industrial and post-industrial capitalism, agents are persuaded and driven to follow various patterns of behaviour through what have been called ‘dispositives’, defined as ‘the force of a decision and the enacting, defining aspects of a law or a legal decision’.⁴⁵ These dispositives would serve as behavioural triggers and would not require any of the characteristics defended in this chapter. If those who argue so are correct, the agents would think themselves free when otherwise they would only be performing the actions that have been imposed on them by various channels and dispositives. In the extreme case, and accepting that this is the most plausible account of the way social agents act, it could be argued that in this belief of freedom there is certain consciousness and identification with what is done, to the point that, as Foucault himself wrote, ‘power is exercised only over free subjects’.⁴⁶ Regardless of whether there are devices that control parcels of social and individual life (or even the totality of it, as in the state of indistinctness between law and life, *bios* in opposition to *zoe*, that Agamben has studied),⁴⁷ if we accept that there are habits and forms of life, then there needs to be a constitutive principle with which agents identify freely and consciously. The ultimate importance of underlining such defining characteristics of habits is that they make it inevitable that agents assume responsibility not only for the actions they perform, but also for the form of life with which they ultimately identify and with which they become ‘accomplices’, in the sense of sharing responsibility.

According to the above, and if the arguments have been accepted, it should be concluded that we are responsible for our habits because it is our identification with the form of life—that they constitute—from which they originate. And in this sense, our incarnation is not free of

45 Jeffrey Bussolini, ‘What is a Dispositive?’, *Foucault Studies*, 10 (2010), 85–107 (p. 105).

46 See quoted and discussed in Samuel Bagg, ‘Beyond the Search for the Subject: An Anti-Essentialist Ontology for Liberal Democracy’, *European Journal of Political Theory* (2018), 1–37 (p. 27) of advance online publication, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885118763881>.

47 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995).

moral burden, because the agent is responsible for making reflective that identification made at the pre-reflective level. The latter means that the freedom that can be shown in the examination of social habits combines the two traditional types: on the one hand, the identification of the agent with the form of life in which he integrates is supposed to be an act of freedom because it is within his reach to make this identification reflective, which implies the principle of the capacity for doing otherwise, or more appropriately, the capacity for *making a different identification*, and hence his moral responsibility. This does not mean that it is a pure act of the will, but a process mediated by an identity crisis, since the form of life, as has been said, constitutes the identity of the agent. And, on the other hand, the principle of freedom applied to a particular action carried out by an agent who identifies himself with the form of life in which that action was required (driving to work every day or spending more than he actually has, as examples of the hegemonic form of life). That is to say, a version of Frankfurt's second-order volition. The agents cannot change or avoid their habits (driven by a pre-reflective identification), but they can identify themselves with a different form of life and an alternative image of being human (I have suggested in previous sections how this conversion is attained).

4. Conclusion: Habits vs. Routines, Skills and Motor Responses

If, as I have argued, habits are those actions that are guaranteed by a certain identification with a form of life, and if it is accepted also that identification ensures its continuity, it seems that many types of behaviour, frequently considered habits, are not such. It seems irremediable then, at this point, to examine the different phenomena that are usually taken as habits and to establish their differences.

First, routines are usually included within habits or at least as a similar phenomenon.⁴⁸ And the truth is that the difference between routines and habits is not completely obvious because both refer to a repetitive action performed with a certain degree of consciousness, for

48 Claude Romano, 'The Equivocity of Habit', *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal of the New School for Social Research*, 38:1 (2017), 3–24 (pp. 9–10).

example, drinking tea at five every evening could well be denominated *routine*, but following the arguments given so far, as it is an action in which the agent can express an identification with a certain form of life, we could also denominate it a *habit*. And yet, it seems that there are two key aspects to distinguishing routine from habit. The first aspect is that while the routine is in itself a repeated action over time, the habit arises in relation to a routine, or, in other words, while the routine is reduced to the action performed, the habit is what the routine brings about. The second aspect to take into account to differentiate routine from habit is that precisely what the habit brings about is an identification of the agent with that action and with the form of life of which it is a part. A routine, then, can easily be abandoned, but a habit cannot cease without provoking an identity crisis. You can stop running in the morning if it was done as a routine, but you cannot stop training physically if training is a habit that constitutes a part of the form of life that has been assumed as an identity. And the same can be said about smoking, when one identifies oneself with that action and becomes part of a form of life, quitting implies a vacuum that has to be replaced by another habit in the same form of life or the change of the latter. The ultimate test of this difference between habits and routines is that a routine can be imposed, the habit, on the contrary, cannot. Besides, the latter is acquired from the routine, when the agent establishes an identification with the action performed as part of his form of life.⁴⁹

Second, it is necessary to discriminate between habit and skill. For example, having the skill to build a house, to care for the sick, to make a sculpture or to make a painting are actions that, for Plato,⁵⁰ are related to *Technê*, or knowledge about how to do something (*Epistasthai*, or know-how). Aristotle opposes skills to actions,⁵¹ because in both the disposition is different: the first, skills, produce something, and therefore, are the means to an end, while the action (or habit as an action) is the end itself. This distinction of the Stagirite can be reinforced with the approach

49 For a different account in relation to social learning, see Nathalie Lazaric, 'The Role of Routines, Rules and Habits in Collective Learning: Some Epistemological and Ontological Considerations', *European Journal of Economic and Social Systems*, 14:2 (2000), 157–71.

50 Plato, *Republic*, in *Complete Works*, ed. by John Cooper (Indianapolis and Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Co., 1997), 342d, 346a, pp. 987, 989–90.

51 Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, 1140a 1–20, pp. 3863–64.

proposed in this section; that is, in the case of habit, the end is the habit itself, which is identified with a certain form of life, while in the case of the ability to make a sculpture or to paint with oil paint, the end is not the action itself but the product of the action, respectively, a statue or an oil painting. Habit does not produce a form of life, yet it is itself a form of life. However, in a final clarification, it could be said that a certain skill can be considered a habit at a social level, if, for example, oil painting becomes part of a form of life, and therefore, practising that skill can be considered a habit with which a certain community is identified, for example, those that incarnate the artistic form of life.

Third, automatic body movements are usually taken as habits, but, based on previous arguments, they might be better understood as motor responses, reflex movements or impulses. William James, who understood that habits operate on instincts by selecting some of them in particular and developing or fixing them, also distinguished habits from those other phenomena that we call motor responses.⁵² The latter are not fixed by human work but have a merely physical substrate, such as sneezing when looking directly at the sun, or scratching our elbows because of the dryness of the skin. These are not made voluntarily and they neither express a complete consciousness nor can they be understood as a free and voluntary satisfaction of a requirement with respect to a form of life. In this sense can be understood the results of the experimental work done by Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh (1999) with regard to the so-called *chameleon effect*,⁵³ which prove that the movements perceived in another subject, with *which there is some empathy*, are mechanically imitated (*perception-behaviour link*); the movements with which Chartrand and Bargh have worked are fundamentally reflex movements, such as the movement of the leg or arm, scratching when the other subject scratches, or could even include the fact of yawning when the other yawns. The interesting thing about the experiments carried out by these social psychologists, for the purposes of this section, is that they show the innate power of the behaviour we perceive (perceptual stimulus), which could be at the grounds of the imitation of others to which already Gabriel Tarde referred a century ago to explain

52 James, *The Principles of Psychology*, II, p. 384.

53 Tanya Chartrand and John Bargh, 'The Chameleon Effect: The Perception-Behavior Link and Social Interaction', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 76:6 (1999), 893–910.

social facts; but to take that step would be an unjustified leap, for the imitation of actions requires not only the apprehension of meaning but a sort of pre-reflective identification on the part of the agent. This makes imitation not merely a biological process of stimulus-response, which is somehow implied (although contradictory to their goals) in the very conclusions of the experiment where it is suggested that imitation or mimicry is performed under the condition of a certain *empathy* between the candidate and the confederate. I will take up this issue in the next chapter.

