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RESUMEN

En este artículo me centro en el concepto de hábito en la filosofía de Kant. En primer lugar, me enfoco en las críticas que él delinea contra *Gewohnheit* en su filosofía epistemológica y moral. En particular, el hábito es visto como ausencia de libertad moral. Esta conclusión es bastante diferente a la posición expresada por Kant en su *Antropología en sentido pragmático* y en la última parte de *El conflicto de las facultades*. Tras profundizar sobre los diferentes términos referidos al campo conceptual del hábito, me concentro en la relación entre *Gewohnheit* y deseo: de hecho, Kant reconoció que el hábito no es una mera repetición de un acto, sino, más precisamente, es el deseo de repetición. Es por esto que no está estrictamente ligado al mundo determinista y no se refiere a máquinas: solo los seres vivos podrían tener hábitos. De esta forma, es posible comprender su rol en el tema de la salud: en la reflexión sobre dietética, el hábito es particularmente útil. La última parte del artículo está consagrada a la nueva perspectiva en la filosofía política kantiana abierta por esta visión positiva de este concepto.

Palabras clave: *Kant, hábitos, vida, filosofía política moderna, libertad.*

ABSTRACT

In this article I focus on the concept of habit in Kant's philosophy. First of all, I concentrate on the criticisms he delineates against *Gewohnheit* in his epistemological and moral philosophy. In particular, habit is seen as absence of moral freedom. This conclusion is pretty different from Kant's position expressed in his *Anthropology From the Pragmatic Point of View* and in the last part of the *Conflict of the Faculties*. After a deep insight on the different terms referred to the conceptual field of habit, I focus on the relation between *Gewohnheit* and desire: in fact, Kant recognized that habit is not the mere repetition of an act, but more precisely it is the desire of repetition. That is why it is not strictly bonded to the deterministic world and it does not refer to machines: only the living beings may have habits. This way, it is possible to understand its role within the theme of health: in the reflections on dietetics, habit is particularly useful. The last part of the article is devoted to the new perspective on Kantian political philosophy opened by this positive view on this concept.

Keywords: *Kant, Habits, Life, Modern Political Philosophy, Freedom.*

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The Vital Habit in Kant's Philosophy

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1. Introduction

Among the modern philosophers that faced the topic of habit, Kant is probably the one who confronted it with the biggest hostility, considering it as a negation of freedom and as an automatism that determines the will, subtracting it from the dominion of practical reason.¹ Coherently, with the dualism that characterizes his whole philosophy, we will see that Kant generally places freedom (intended as autonomy from experience, as not repeatable or imitable radical difference from everyday acting) on one side and the mechanical repetition of the identical and of the necessary in the *Angewohnheit* on the other. However, sometimes the opposition between active freedom and the automatism of habit, even if present among Kant's texts, gets less radical, opening (even not too timidly) to the possibility that a particular interpretation of habit could dissolve the distance between the realm of (moral) freedom and the realm of mechanical (and natural) necessity. As we will see, such possibility is offered by the relation between life and habit: in fact, when Kant analyses the vital force (*Lebenskraft*), the active aspect of habit arises, preventing its reduction into a mechanical automatism.

¹ Tony Bennet argues that the Kantian construction influenced the negative view of habit typical of the 19th and 20th centuries. See Tony Bennett, Francis Dodsworth, Greg Noble, Mary Poovey, and Megan Watkins. "Habit and Habituation: Governance and the Social", *Body & Society*, Vol. 19, N°. 2-3, 2013, pp. 3-29, in particular p. 7.

2. Habit in Kantian Science and Moral

According to Kant, habit is a form of coercion on the subject, both in the practical and in the cognitive sphere. In both cases, however, it implicates only a subjective and not an objective necessity, because on it, it is not possible to build neither a science nor a universal valid moral. The subjective necessity implied by habit is at the centre of the dialogue that Kant establishes with Hume among the paragraphs concerning nature of causality in his *Critique of Pure Reason*. According to the Scottish philosopher, the causal connection is not intrinsic to the objects, but is derived from the natural human inclination to create habits that leads people to attend, after having experienced a sequence of phenomena, that this sequence will necessarily repeat.² However, this necessity is not fully justified and can always be denied by an unexpected sequence of experiences.

Consistent with the sceptical tradition to which Hume oft refers to,³ representations – and, therefore, also causality – are recognized as products of the subject, and the necessity we associate to some of them is the result of the habitual nature of the subject, which leads him to expect that the future will be a repetition⁴ of the past. According to Kant, this perspective, concentrated on the nature of the human being, reduces the causal link to a subjective necessity.⁵ The German philosopher does not avoid the confrontation with Hume, but rather fully admits the sceptical doubt. But this is entrusted with a limited task within philosophy,⁶ in the sense that it must allow

2 See David Hume. *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2000, pp. 58-61; David Hume. *A Treatise of Human Nature*. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2007, Vol. I, pp. 61-74.

3 The importance of scepticism in the formulation of the problem of representation is central in Gianni Paganini. *Skepsis. Le débat des modernes sur le scepticisme*. Paris, Vrin, 2008. For a detailed study on modern scepticism, I refer to the classic: Richard Henry Popkin. *History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Spinoza*. Berkeley, University of California Press, 1979. See also Popkin's shorter text: "Scepticism", in Knud Haakonssen. *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006, Vol. 1, pp. 426-450.

4 The repetition to which Hume refers here is a repetition of analogies and not of identities. For textual references and critical literature on this point, may I be allowed to refer to my text: Giulia Valpione. "Politics Without a Subject: David Hume on General Rules", *Ipseitas*, Vol. 3, N° 2, 2017, pp. 177-196.

5 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1998, p. 138.

6 "And thus the skeptic is the taskmaster of the dogmatic sophist for a healthy critique of the understanding and of reason itself. [...] Thus the skeptical procedure is not, to be sure, itself *satisfying* for questions of reason, but it is nevertheless preparatory for arousing its caution and showing it fundamental means for securing it in its rightful possession" (Immanuel Kant. *Critic of Pure Reason*, p. 658; see also pp. 652-658).

further consideration to criticism⁷ and metaphysics,⁸ which proceeds in a dogmatic way.⁹ Kant's transcendental philosophy can be read as an attempt to demonstrate both the possibility of objective knowledge and the objective necessity of causality to get over the sceptical crisis. Briefly, through the deduction of the categories,¹⁰ Kant demonstrates that, in order to make an experience possible, there has to be *a priori* concepts (including causality) linked to intuitive *a priori* forms. The transcendental project fully admits the sceptical doubt that prevents us from asserting with certainty the correspondence between our experience and the things as they are in themselves (that is, from asserting that a causal link exists outside our representations), but this does not prevent the possibility of an objectivity in knowledge. This objectivity rests on the demonstration of the necessity of categories to have an experience of any kind; that is, on the proof that, in order to have an experience, there must be a universally valid 'structure' made by *a priori* forms. In other words, Kant accepts Hume's challenge and admits that, indeed, the necessity which characterizes causal representations is present in the subject and not in the things in themselves (or, better, we cannot know if it is present also in the things in themselves). But, the transcendental approach allows us to state that, if an object is to be given (for a subject), then this object must be subordinated to the table of categories and to an *a priori* form of intuition. Thus, the necessity of the causality, no longer derives from the habitualness of man, but from the transcendental structure of the subject, which is self-grounded,¹¹ and is not affected in any way by experience.¹²

7 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 654.

8 "Thus all pure *a priori* cognition [...] constitutes a special unity, and metaphysics is that philosophy which is to present that cognition in this systematic unity" (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason...*, p. 698). "This name [metaphysics] can also be given to all of pure philosophy including the critique, in order to comprehend the investigation of everything that can be cognized *a priori* as well as the presentation of that which constitutes a system of pure philosophical cognition of this kind" (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 696).

9 It should be remembered that dogmatic method is different from dogmatism: "Criticism is not opposed to the *dogmatic procedure* of reason in its pure cognition as science (for science must always be dogmatic, i.e., it must prove its conclusions strictly *a priori* from secure principles); rather, it is opposed only to dogmatism [...]. Dogmatism is therefore the dogmatic procedure of pure reason, *without an antecedent critique of its own capacity.*" (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 119).

10 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, pp. 219-266.

11 See Gerhard Funke. "Gewohnheit", *Archiv für Begriffsgeschichte*, N°. 3, 1958, pp. 9-606, in particular 490-493.

12 "I call all cognition *transcendental* that is occupied not so much with objects but rather with our *a priori* concepts of objects in general" (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 133). According to Clare Carlisle (*On Habit*. London, Routledge, 2014, p. 64), this approach is opposed to that of Deleuze, who theorizes a habitual subject whose experience is conditioned by a subjectivity that is formed and emerges through the experience itself.

Of course, experience can lead to the development of *a posteriori* concepts with which the objects of experience are further elaborated, but the emergence of those concepts from the subject's habitual abilities (including habit itself) cannot be scientifically analysed in a proper sense. Objectivity is possible, despite scepticism, because the philosopher identifies the formal conditions of possibility of experience (conditions that the object necessarily respects), while habit is subjective and not translatable in terms of intuitive, intellectual, or rational elaborations.¹³ It is but a condition subjected to contingency and it cannot lead to a dogmatic: in Kantian philosophy, knowledge is a set of representations, made by an *a priori* transcendental form and an *a posteriori* content. Thus, it is not possible, to develop a metaphysics of habit.¹⁴

The *Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View* is particularly clear in this regard: habits are conditioned by the situations in which every individual is living, making it impossible to achieve the formal criteria required for a scientific knowledge about them.¹⁵ So, the interpretation that reads the *Anthropology* (Kant's text that, above all the others, addresses the concept of habit) as the answer to the question that the German philosopher poses since the beginning of his philosophical reflection ("Was ist der Mensch?")¹⁶ is legitimate, but it is undeniable that for him anthropology cannot be a science, and will always remain pragmatic.¹⁷ Therefore, habit not only cannot lead to objectivity, but cannot even be the object of a universal science, as it is closely linked to subjective necessity.

The attempt to marginalize the importance of habit is evident even in Kant's reflections about morality. Here, Kant investigates the possibility of freedom, as a condition of the moral law understood as an *a priori* law that benefits of objective necessity.¹⁸ It is in this particular regard that, once again, habit is considered a subjective necessity. The moral law is an imperative, a rule characterized by duty and is valid for the will of every rational being.¹⁹ In this case, the determining motive

13 See Gerhard Funke. "Gewohnheit", p. 493.

14 Contrary to the well-known example of Ravaisson.

15 See Immanuel Kant. "Anthropology From a Pragmatic Point of View", in *Anthropology, History and Education*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, p. 233.

16 See Michel Foucault. *Introduction to Kant's Anthropology*. Los Angeles, Semiotext(e), 2008, pp. 76-86. It is particularly significant that the purpose of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is to establish the extension of practical reason without any consideration for the human nature: this seems to imply that habit is, in reality, the constitutive element of the human being.

17 In this regard, see Kant's Preface to *Anthropology...*, pp. 231-233.

18 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*, in *Practical Philosophy*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 146-147.

19 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 153.

of the will consists in the form of the law and not in its matter: a form that is not the object of the senses that therefore does not belong to the world of phenomena, and thus is independent from causality. The moral law, then, has an objective necessity for the will, but at the same time is a rule that permits the will to be free.²⁰ Habit, on the other hand, is the determining motive of the will through the matter of a rule and not through the form: it is determined by empirical conditions, falls within the sphere of phenomena, and, therefore, is not a sign of freedom.

3. The Automatism of Habit: Between Monotony and Cogency

Before a further inquiry on the Kantian reflections on habit, it is necessary to make some terminological clarifications, thanks to two different passages in the *Anthropology*. In the first, the topic is considered from the point of view of the influence of habit on the will; in the second, habit is analysed with particular attention to its link to desire.²¹ In the first, we can find the relevant differentiation between *promptitudo*, *habitus*, and *assuetudo*. The *promptitudo* indicates the progressive ease in performing an action, thanks to its repetition. This concept concerns, for example, the exercises of an athlete, who increases his or her capacity and potentiality from repeated training, and can be summarized with the formula: "I can, if I want to".²² Strictly speaking though, what we commonly consider habit actually concerns *habitus* and *assuetudo*, since the will is also influenced. In fact, it is certainly possible to claim to have the habit of doing something that we voluntarily do, and which is easier for us to accomplish over time. But it is when habit affects our will, or when it manifests itself involuntarily, that it further forges our way of being, our nature, forcing us in a mechanical way, almost like instinct.

Habitus is a skill in doing something, but it also implies a degree of will acquired through repeated use of our ability and can be summarized to "I choose this, because duty commands it".²³ However, it does not lead to a moral behaviour precisely because this duty is not

20 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 162.

21 Kant distinguishes two kinds of faculties of desire: the first is the lower and sensible one. The second is the higher and is driven by reason according to concepts; this consists in the will. See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 156. Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*, in *Practical Philosophy...*, pp. 374-375.

22 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 259.

23 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 259.

rational and *a priori*, but has arisen from the continuous repetition in the past that also extends into the present. Following the example of the athlete, he or she contracts a *habitus* not only if his or her ability increases over time, but rather if there is a desire to repeat the exercise with a certain cogency and not as a simple desire to accomplish the goal (to improve the athletic results). *Habitus* is a form of necessity to repeat the act as such. Discussing this nuance of habit, Kant takes position starkly for its exclusion from the moral realm. Here emerges the Protestant doctrine that claimed – contrary to the idea sustained by the Catholic Church, according to which the divine grace can be possessed by the Christian in the form of a *habitus* –²⁴ that grace is something that cannot be possessed, following Luther’s interpretation of the *Letter to the Romans* written by Paul of Tarsus.²⁵ Grace must be given every time as a gift from God to the human soul that promptly loses it again and again.²⁶ Likewise, Kant categorically rejects the idea that virtue consists in the *Fertigkeit* to perform free actions, since morality must never become a habit (*Gewohnheit*): it must always be realized in a new and original way.²⁷

The pressure exerted on will through repetitions of an action reaches, however, the apex in the *assuetudo* (*Angewohnheit*): the necessary compulsion (*Nötigung*), the physical constraint inside the individual that pushes him to behave exactly as he or she did in the past.²⁸ The idea of habit as second nature is particularly evident here. The *Angewohnheit* is in fact comparable to instincts, as it manifests the same automaticity, but she does not lead to ‘natural’, but rather to ‘artificial’ instincts, acquired in the condition in which the individual is living. She is therefore “another nature”,²⁹ that manifests in habit: she is a “second nature”.³⁰

Angewohnheiten are the actions that we continue to reproduce involuntarily after long conscious repetitions, as, for example, the necessity for a lawyer to continue to touch a string when he speaks

24 See Clare Carlisle. *On Habit*, pp. 130-137.

25 See Clare Carlisle. *On Habit*, p. 118. For Lutheran criticism of *habitus*, I follow Carlisle’s suggestion, provided in the text just cited: see Bernhard Lohse. *Martin Luther’s Theology Its Historical and Systematic Development*. Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 2006.

26 See Clare Carlisle. “The Question of Habit in Theology and Philosophy: From Hexis to Plasticity”, *Body & Society*, Vol. 19, N°. 2-3, 2013, pp. 30-57.

27 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 259.

28 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 261. The English translation of the Kantian text is flawed, as it translates both *Gewohnheit* and *Angewohnheit* with “habit”.

29 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 261.

30 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 233. Italics added.

in public,³¹ or, in the cognitive field, the association of some representations that usually occur together or in succession.³² Or, again, it is the case of the movements that we do as we sleep: in Kant's interpretation, they are the involuntary continuation of the muscular contractions that are needed during the day to move our body. Even if these motions could denote the presence of a kind of attention by the subject, this is very feeble, to the point that such movements can be performed completely unintentionally or in a state of unconsciousness.³³ The coercion exercised by the *Angewohnheit* is the pinnacle of the possible influence of habit on the human being. In this case, this coercion overshadows the role of will and reason when we act. If desire and rationality are the sign of human's freedom, habit (and, in particular, the *Angewohnheit*) testifies, according to Kant, its absence. It deteriorates the human being to an automaton,³⁴ inasmuch as it provokes the necessity of always conforming to an action that has been frequently repeated,³⁵ like a machine built to perform the same action continually. In the image sketched here, habit, with its different degrees of constraint on the individual, is therefore confined within the realm of nature, as opposed to the realm of freedom. Like the laws of nature, or like instincts, habits continue to recur in a straight monotony.

Uniformity is the main characteristic of *consuetudo* (*Gewohntwerden*), and testifies to what extents, at least up to here, habit is the recurrence of the equal, according to Kant. 'Being accustomed' (*consuetudo*) is a state of passivity of the subject, who, after having perceived the same sensation for a long time, will no longer bring attention to it, reaching a total atony of sensations.³⁶ Sensitive impressions are objects of our attention only because of a difference (i.e. the interruption of an identity), in other words because of a contrast with other sensations, or because of the introduction of a change or the increase in the intensity of

31 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 284.

32 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, pp. 285-286. Kant evidently has here Hume's explanation of causality as polemical objective.

33 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 298. The same happens with the habit, contracted during the day and prolonged in sleep, to breathe with closed mouth. See Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 324.

34 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 261. In fact, habit transforms virtue into a mechanism. See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 259.

35 "If it is a *habit* [*Angewohnheit*] (*assuetudo*), that is, a uniformity in action that has become a *necessity* through frequent repetition, it is not one that proceeds from freedom, and therefore not a moral aptitude" (Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 535).

36 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 261; see also p. 274.

an impression.³⁷ It is a frequent experience that a sensitive stimulation, if constantly repeated over time, seems to fade away, until it almost disappears, without drawing our attention anymore.

The idea that habit may be only an automatic index of passivity is not easily defensible. The ‘active’ aspect of habit was examined in depth in France at almost the same time as the appearance of Kant’s *Critiques*, developing a line of research³⁸ that better develops the complexity of the topic. Cabanis and Destutt de Tracy had already noted the diversity, or even the opposition, among the different effects of habit, which on one hand facilitates the expression of will, but on the other leads to automatic gestures.³⁹ Bichat, in *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort* (1800), dedicates a dozen of pages to that concept and sketches out its ‘double’ peculiarity,⁴⁰ later developed also by Maine de Biran and Ravaisson.⁴¹ According to Bichat, habit softens the intensity of a sensation, but at the same time perfects the judgement we can formulate about it. Habit is a two-faced Janus that increases and diminishes the human faculties: the ability of judgement, according to Bichat, is refined, but the sensibility is weakened.⁴² These two aspects constitute the duplicity of habit – a “double law of habit”, formulated by Ravaisson in 1838 –⁴³ investigated by Maine de Biran,⁴⁴ for whom repetition leads not only to a weakening of impressions, but also to a refinement of perceptions,⁴⁵ as well as to improvements in voluntary acts.⁴⁶ In fact, through the repetition of an act over

37 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 273.

38 Ravaisson had already identified the presence of such a tradition. It should be remembered that his text on habit is subtitled: *La philosophie en France au XIX siècle*.

39 See Dominique Janicaud. “L’habitude selon Ravaisson et Maine de Biran: d’après ‘De l’habitude’ et l’ ‘Influence de l’habitude sur la faculté de penser’”, *Revue philosophique de la France et de l’Étranger*, N° 158, 1968, pp. 65-87, in particular p. 68.

40 See Xavier Bichat. *Recherches physiologiques sur la vie et la mort*. Paris, V. Masson, 1852, pp. 30-37 (available at the link: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k6275881c>).

41 See Marco Piazza. *L’antagonista necessario. La filosofia francese dell’abitudine da Montaigne a Deleuze*. Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2015, p. 141. On p. 145, Piazza emphasizes that Biran nevertheless developed his theory of habit independently of Bichat, as he read his *Recherches* only in 1802, a year after de Biran’s publication: *Influence de l’habitude sur la faculté de penser*. Paris, Henrichs, 1802 (available at the link: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b8618395t>).

42 “Plus nous voyons un objet, moins nous sommes sensibles à ce qu’il a de pénible ou d’agréable, et mieux nous en jugeons tous les attributs” (Xavier Bichat. *Recherches...*, p. 30).

43 See Jean-Gaspard-Félix Ravaisson-Mollien. *De l’habitude. La philosophie en France au XIX siècle*. Paris, Fayard, 1984, p. 18.

44 “Les résultats de l’habitude se partageront entre l’affaiblissement, d’un côté, la persistance ou le progrès, de l’autre” (Maine de Biran. *Influence de l’habitude...*, p. 108).

45 This is the theme of the first two chapters of Biran’s text: *Influence de l’habitude...*, pp. 87-149.

46 “Tout mouvement volontaire, fréquemment répété, devient de plus en plus facile, prompt et précis” (Maine de Biran. *Influence de l’habitude...*, p. 223).

time, we acquire greater ease and familiarity in accomplishing it: less attention and less effort is required in order to improve the performance; therefore the voluntary activity is facilitated. On the other side, however, Maine de Biran also recognizes that the reduction of the effort required to perform the same act over time implies (as Kant had already seen) that habit leads to actions accomplished in an unconscious and mechanical way. The first side implies a positive evaluation of habit, since it increases the potentiality of the subject that contracts the habit. But the second has a negative nuance, as it presupposes the absence of will and of conscience. With an example, the habit of smoking is a form of necessity that imposes the subject to act automatically, preventing the possibility of an intervention that might occur only with great effort. On the contrary, the habit of walking all day long brings the improvement of our physical structure as a result, as well as our ability to manage the succession of steps, of movements of the arms, even in difficult situations. In this case, habit provokes an increase in the subject's potential, enlarging its possibilities and its ability to reach increasingly complex objectives. In short, habit can be seen as an active instance, as an actualization of a power that is reflected by the increase of the expressions of potentiality itself.⁴⁷ At the same time, however, it is also an indicator of passivity, and Kant seems to concentrate only on this last aspect. In his critique of the *Angewohnheit*, he seems to have taken in consideration only one side of the two-faced Janus.

4. The Force of Habit: The Desire of Living Beings

For Kant, habit is, as far as we have seen, a mechanical repetition of actions that does not possess in itself any force. The invariability of any *Angewohnheit* corresponds to Kant's formulation of the principle of inertia for which matter persists in its condition unless there are external causes that force it to change its state.⁴⁸ According to Kant,

47 The reference here is obviously to the Aristotelian doctrine of *hexis*. Briefly, and following Pierre Rodrigo's analyses, in Aristotle *hexis* is an intermediary between act and power. This means that the act, once attained, does not completely disappear, but leaves its trace on power, enriching it. In other words: in *hexis*, the actualizations of power lead to better and better practices. See Pierre Rodrigo. "La dynamique de l'*hexis* chez Aristote. L'état, la tenue et la limite", *Alter*, N° 12, 2004, pp. 11-26.

48 See Immanuel Kant. *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002, pp. 251-252. This confirms the hypothesis that the interpretation of the habit conditions (and is conditioned in turn) the interpretation of matter (Alexandra Renault. "L'habitude chez Bergson: une esquisse du

inertia is not a force (*Bestreben*) which tends to self-preservation.⁴⁹ On the contrary, it consists in the passive persistence of a condition.⁵⁰ In the same way, no impulse, force, or power can be associated with habit: it is inertial matter, simple monotony. The limitation of habit to the idea of an inertial identity as simple automation without force can only conflict with the concept of freedom as self-determination that interrupts and interferes, as a radical difference within the monotony of customs. This difference follows from the leap necessary to move from being a person who only has a specific temperament or a habitual disposition, to becoming a person of character, who has “that property of the will by which the subject binds him to define practical principles that he has prescribed to himself irrevocably by his own reason”.⁵¹ Temperament is a natural disposition⁵² and the habitual disposition is given by mere occasional causes:⁵³ both reduce the human being to a determined state without freedom. There is no mediation between these two and the tenacity of principles:⁵⁴ the firmness of character can be produced by the subject only with an explosion.⁵⁵

The autonomy of a person who has character consists in the self-imposition of behaviour cohesive with a principle of conduct (*Lebenswandel*),⁵⁶ which must not depend on habitual condition. He or she is free, original,⁵⁷ the incarnation of a difference. The adherence to this principle cannot be accomplished by imitation (or, even worse, by fashion, *Mode*).⁵⁸ The originality of character, given by avoiding any external influence (be it culture or nature), is realized in a non-gradual way, it is given all at once;⁵⁹ it is a radical transformation that involves a vow to one's self,⁶⁰ interrupting the atony of habitual repetitions that reduce the subject to passivity. Moreover, the character, thanks to his

concept phénoménologique de *Stiftung*?”, *Alter*, N° 12, 2004, pp. 79-103, in particular p. 86).

49 In contrast to Leibniz' hypothesis. See Max Jammer. *Concepts of Force: A Study in the Foundations of Dynamics*. New York, Dover, 1999, pp. 160-161.

50 We have to wait at least until the revaluation made by Schelling and the German Romanticism of the dynamics in order to have a different interpretation.

51 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, pp. 389-390.

52 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 384.

53 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 384.

54 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 392.

55 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 392.

56 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 392.

57 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 390.

58 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 391.

59 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 390.

60 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 392.

absolute self-determination, cannot but coincide with the assumption of the moral law as its own practical principle; freedom is thus produced as an interruption and radical difference.

It would be possible⁶¹ to trace here the Kantian dualism which sees on one hand the absence of strength and the mechanical reproduction of the *Angewohnheit*, and, on the other, freedom; but this interpretation is limiting. Not everything that isn't inertial is a sign of freedom. Between the machine (automatism) and freedom (actions done only for moral duty), there is life. Life is also the force of empirically conditioned self-determination. It is not a machine or simple inertia, so as it is not free in itself, as Kant clearly states in *Metaphysische Anfangsgründe der Naturwissenschaft*, immediately after having refused the idea of inertia as force:

The inertia of matter is, and means, nothing else than its *lifelessness*, as matter in itself. *Life* is the faculty of a substance to determine itself to act from an internal principle, of a *finite substance* to change, and of a *material substance* [to determine itself] to motion or rest, as change of its state. Now we know no other internal principle in a substance for changing its state except *desiring*.⁶²

And so, life is the opposite of inertia, and its force is desire. "*Life* is the faculty of a being to act in accordance with laws of the faculty of desire (*Begehrungsvermögen*)",⁶³ wrote Kant in the *Critique of Practical Reason*. The *Begierde*, "self-determination of a subject's power through the representation of something in the future as an effect of this representation",⁶⁴ is not always sign of freedom, because she can be sensitive and determined by pleasure.⁶⁵ Freedom is a rule that determines *a priori* the will to respect the form of its maxims,⁶⁶ and is therefore independent from any matter of the law.⁶⁷ Desire, on the

61 This is for example Funke's interpretation: Gerhard Funke. "Gewohnheit", pp. 479-494; likewise: Gerhard Funke. *Gewohnheit*, in Joachim Ritter (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Basel-Stuttgart, Schwabe & Co., 1974, Vol. 3, pp. 597-616, in particular pp. 609-610. See also: Clare Carlisle. *On Habit*, and Clare Carlisle. "Between Freedom and Necessity: Félix Ravaisson on Habit and the Moral Life", *Inquiry*, Vol. 53, N°. 2, 2010, pp. 123-145.

62 Immanuel Kant. *Metaphysical Foundations...*, pp. 251-252. See also: Immanuel Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 265.

63 Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 144. See also: "The *faculty of desire* is the faculty to be, by means of one's representations, the cause of the objects of these representations. The faculty of a being to act in accordance with its representations is called *Life*" (Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 373).

64 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 353.

65 See Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 374.

66 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 162.

67 "Thus a practical precept that brings with it a material (hence empirical) condition must never be reckoned a practical life [...]. Thus the matter of the maxim can indeed remain, but

other hand, can be sensitive and can then be conditioned by the context, because it does not derive from a rational *a priori* law, but depends on its object, which causes a feeling of pleasure. An action is free if it's done for duty, not for habit,⁶⁸ or for *Lust* or *Unlust*.

Habits are not a simple series of repeated actions: an action does not become habitual until there is a desire for repetition. The *Begierde* here is the force or the potentiality that causes the recurrence of an action, a form of coercion (more or less cogent), an impulse to repetition. The word impulse (*Trieb*) is not accidental here, because, in this case, desire is instinct⁶⁹ (to which Kant associates the concept of impulse).⁷⁰ However, since *Angewohnheit* is an instinct of 'second level' –not linked to the first but to the second nature –,⁷¹ she is in fact one of the possible expressions of *Begehrungsvermögen*. Then, even if habit is not consciously done for purpose, it has something to do with desire.

The *Begierde* also urges us *to will* the repetition of this action, as in the case of propensity (*Hang*) and inclination (*Neigung*). Propensity is the subjective possibility that a certain desire arises.⁷² In other words, it is the potentiality that manifests itself in the desire to repeat an action. Propensity is therefore also the latency of a possible habit. The fact that habit is not only conditioned by the will, but that it also conditions it in turn, is particularly evident in the case of inclination, which is a form of *Gewohnheit*, or rather a "habitual sensible desire".⁷³

Machines do not have habits because habit is not simply repetition of an act, but rather the potentiality and desire that this may be accomplished again, in a tendency that reconciles the passivity

it must not be the condition of the maxim since the maxim would then not be fit for a law" (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason*..., p. 167).

68 See Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals*..., p. 537.

69 Remember that for Kant instinct is the necessitation (*Nötigung*) of the faculty of desire to take possession of an object even before knowing it. See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology*..., p. 367.

70 Between propensity (*Hang*), which "is actually only the *predisposition* to desire an enjoyment which, when the subject has experienced it, arouses *inclination* into it" (Immanuel Kant. *Religion Between the Boundaries of Pure Reason*, in *Religion and Rational Theology*, p. 76), and inclination "there is yet *instinct*. It is a felt need to do or enjoy something to which we still do not have a concept (such as the drive in animals to build [*Kunsttrieb*] or the drive [*Trieb*] to sex" (Immanuel Kant. *Religion Between the Boundaries*..., p. 77).

71 In *Angewohnheit* "the animal in the human being jumps out far too much, and because here one is led *instinctively* by the rule of habituation (*Angewohnheit*), exactly like another (non-human) nature" (Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology*..., p. 261).

72 "By *propensity* (*Hange*) (*propensio*) I understand the subjective ground of the possibility of an inclination (habitual desire, *concupiscentia*), insofar as this possibility is contingent for humanity in general" (Immanuel Kant. *Religion Between the Boundaries*..., p. 76).

73 Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology*..., p. 353.

of an automatic repetition with the activity of a vital impulse that constantly pushes towards this repetition. Habit is a habit of desire, not mere reiteration of the act, as Kant initially sustains. Comparing habit to the proceeding of a machine, implicates the ignorance of its nature. It is linked to the *Begehrungsvermögen*. It is a self-determining force, and the machineries are “mere instruments of external moving forces”.⁷⁴

As the German Romantics pointed out,⁷⁵ the straight duality in Kantian philosophy between machine and freedom allows to pass from one realm to the other only through a *salto mortale*.⁷⁶ In some passages, however, Kant leaves open the hypothesis of a middle way in the crossroad that separate repetition of identity – a repetition deprived of any force, as in the machine – from the radical difference, from the explosive force due to freedom. In those sections, the importance of habit emerges together with the recognition of its plasticity: habit cannot be seen only as a machine and as an automatism. It is also a kind of desire, a force that tends to its own determination (even if this is not free and rational). Namely, it is the *Bestreben*, which is not possessed by machines or by inertial matter, but rather by the living beings. When Kant deals with life, and, in particular, when he considers it as desire,⁷⁷ manages to go beyond that dualism that otherwise prevents him from dealing and analysing in depth the concept of habit.

Habit is not opposite to life, despite its proximity to the operations of automata. This is evident for example in the Kantian texts dedicated to dietetics, in which, even the *Angewohnungen* (that had been criticized for being independent from consciousness) are considered useful for keeping the human being alive. This is the case, for example, of movements involuntarily performed during sleep by muscles. Recalling

74 Immanuel Kant. “Metaphysical Foundations...”, p. 242.

75 For example, Friedrich Schlegel in his Jenenser lessons *Transzendentalphilosophie*. See Friedrich Schlegel. *Transzendentalphilosophie*. Hamburg, Meiner, 1991, p. 50.

76 This expression has been used by Friedrich Schlegel to describe the difficulty to overlap the duality in Jacobi's philosophy (see Friedrich Schlegel. *Jacobi's Woldemar*, in Hans Eichner [ed.]: *Kritische Friedrich-Schlegel-Ausgabe*. München, Schöningh, 1967, Vol. 2, pp. 57-77, in particular p. 77), but it could be applied also in case of Kant.

77 Although in the *Critique of Judgment* Kant coined the famous definition of an organized product (“An organized product of nature is that in which everything is an end and reciprocally a means as well”; Immanuel Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 247-248), it should be emphasized that ‘life’ and ‘organism’ are not perfectly comparable concepts, even though life is only known in organisms (“There must therefore be a circle in the explanation if one would derive the purposiveness of nature in organized beings from the life of matter but in turn is not acquainted with this life otherwise than in organized beings, and thus cannot form any concept of its possibility without experience of them”; Immanuel Kant. *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, pp. 265-266).

the physiological theories of Haller⁷⁸ and John Brown,⁷⁹ Kant describes life as the succession of muscle contractions interrupted by their distension: the moment in which this sequence would stop, blood circulation would be interrupted, causing the death of the individual.⁸⁰ Then, even if habit proceeds without our awareness, the equivalence initially posed by Kant between *Gewohnheit* and machine (understanding this as the absence of life) must be modified: the example described shows that habit is in fact essential to life itself.

The shift from the consideration of habit as a deplorable element – something that reduces the human being into a machinery – to the recognition that habit is necessary to perpetuate the life of individuals, is due to the admission that *Gewohnheit* is actually a force and, therefore, is not simply an inertial automatism. It is a form of desire to push the subject towards the habitual actions that does not intervene from the outside as in the case of machines, which in fact need an external impulse to move their motor.

5. The Rhythm of Habit

In some passages of his texts, Kant seems to recognize that habit is not a rigid inertial repetition of an identity. Certainly, it resists change because, for example, it leads to continue in sleep the typical muscular contractions of waking activity. Under another perspective, however, the contractions of the sleeper's muscles interrupt (and do not corroborate) the dead identity. In other words, thanks to the continuation of the binary rhythm of contraction-relaxation that characterizes life, they counteract the absence of motions that in sleep can lead the individual to death. Moreover, it is not a mechanical repetition, as this is the recurrence of an effect of external stimuli that must be continually reintroduced. In automatons, repetition is the succession of interrupted stimuli: after each stimulus, there is a pause, wherein repetitions and stimuli are absent. On the contrary, in the case of habit, it would be a mistake to separate the act (the contraction, in this example) from the

78 Von Haller, in his *Elementa physiologiae corporis humani*, drew the parallelism between the relationships of irritability (*Reizbarkeit*) and sensitivity on one side and muscles and nerves on the other. In particular, muscle contraction is due to stimulation (*Reizung*). For further information: Kurt Danziger. "Reiz und Reaktion", in Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer, and Rudolf Eisler (eds.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*. Darmstadt Wiss. Buchges. 1992, Vol. 8, pp. 554-567.

79 More precisely, in the case of Brown, it concerns the succession of excitement and recovery. See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 357.

80 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 298.

condition in which this act is only potential and latent. To understand what it means to contract a habit, we must consider not only the action, but also the force which leads to it. For this reason, *Gewohnheit* problematizes the binarity not only of necessity and freedom, but also of power and act.⁸¹ In fact, when Kant relates habit and desire, he must admit that habit is not simply constituted by the act that is repeated or by the effective use of a force that exhales and must be reintroduced every time, as if the habitual repetitions were the discrete recur of unrelated actions.⁸² Habit is instead an active maintenance of power itself, an increase in the (conscious or not) desire that this power might be effective. In Aristotelian terms, it is “second power”.⁸³ *Angewohnheit* (and, more generally, *Gewohnheit*) is a self-determining force consisting of the rhythmic succession of contraction and relaxation. It would be a mistake to separate these two phases: habit, health, and life consist of their interaction.

In the initial explanations of *Angewohnheit*, Kant disregards it considering it as an automatism, not only because he does not contemplate the fact that she is the result of a force (the *Begehrungsvermögen*), but also (or, rather, consequently) because he does not consider the pauses between the different repetitions of the act as an integral part of habit itself.⁸⁴ This interpretation changes when the object of his reflection is the health of a human body. In fact, health is the succession of the presence-absence of stimuli, and through this concept, Kant can consider the moments in which the habit is not manifested as a latency of the habit itself and not as its absence tout court.

Habit is linked to life, in Kant's philosophy, because life is the tendency towards the rhythm of contractions and distensions, whose relationship determines the vitality of the individual.⁸⁵ This position allows to overcome the radical duality of freedom (as an explosive difference) on one side and of dead mechanism (as a passive repetition of an identity) on the other. Moreover, it is then possible to open to the consideration of multiple degrees of intensity (from a maximum of health towards illness), in which radical difference and straight identity must be tempered towards their mutual hybridization and their

81 As can already be read in Aristotle: see Pierre Rodrigo. “La dynamique de l'*hexis* chez Aristote...”, pp. 19-23.

82 Kantian position is different from the Platonic expressed in *Theaetetus*. See Pierre Rodrigo. “La dynamique de l'*hexis* chez Aristote...”, p. 19.

83 Pierre Rodrigo. “La dynamique de l'*hexis* chez Aristote...”, p. 21.

84 This position can also be found in Bergson, who considers laughter as an automatism that reduces man to machine.

85 Clare Carlisle. *On Habit*, pp. 91-93.

gradualness. This perspective increasingly imposes itself in the practical-moral sphere, in a subtle way in the three *Critiques*, more evidently in the *Metaphysics of Morals* (particularly in *Doctrine of Virtues*), and in a disruptive way in the *Anthropology*. But, furthermore, it also poses the problem of how preserving life, that is, of maintaining health.

Taking care of health implies to worry about the preservation of the life force and to sustain the constant attempt to maintain and to restore the forces of the human being, so that the *Lebenskraft* may be kept within the extremes of *sthenia* and *asthenia*.⁸⁶ In this case too, health is not a passive state. It must be kept active, in a condition of strength,⁸⁷ maintaining constant the interplay between increase and obstruction of life.⁸⁸ If we focus on the third part of the *Conflict of the Faculties* (written in response to Hufeland, who asked Kant how to treat morally the human physique), dietetics is a set of advises and precepts to be followed so that life force may not exhaust or weaken due to excess or lack of stimulation. It is in this context, that the critical judgment on *Angewohnheit* is reversed, to the point that she is seen as something healthy. Here, the deadly identity is no longer referred to habit, because the harmful identity pertains the absence of stimuli. The habit of muscular contractions is recognized as an alternation of an excess of stasis and an excess of rupture against an affirmed condition. Briefly, habit consists in a rhythm built with the alternation of identity and difference, a self-determining force (inasmuch as desire) that prevents the absence but also the excess of stimulation.

The change of judgement regarding habit takes place in two steps then: the first consists in the recognition of habit as force (because it is a form of desire) that therefore cannot be restricted to a lifeless mechanical process that continue to present an identity; the second step consists in correlating this force to the vital force (*Lebenskraft*), which must acquire habits to avoid disease. Habit is formed by the alternation between the implementation of the habitual action and its latent state, which allows the prolongation of human life – whose natural interruption can only be given by a disease, i.e., by the exhaustion of *Lebenskraft* due to, once again, the excess or the lack of stimulation.⁸⁹ In other words, habit is not the discontinuous set of disconnected signals, but a continuous function.

Another characteristic of habit emerges through the theme of health: its plasticity,⁹⁰ that makes even more evident the distance from

86 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 357.

87 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 310.

88 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 334.

89 See Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties...*, p. 316.

90 The recognition or not of the plasticity of nature is, according to Carlisle, one of the

a mechanical automatism. Habit is certainly a repetition of actions that introduces a difference in lethal identity, like doing the same walk every day at the same time, interrupting a workday, or consuming the same amount of food and water within an established frequency, interrupting a fasting, but this introduced difference can itself, in turn, be altered. Kant recognizes, in fact, that the wholesomeness of habit also consists in its adaptation to changing conditions: it contemplates exceptions. This would not be possible if habit wasn't a continuous balance between a form of resistance to change and a permeability to it. As we will see in the next paragraph, this malleability is crucial because it opens to the possibility of practices aimed at changing established habits.

Habit is central in Kant's philosophy when it comes to the necessity of mediating between the radical difference and monotony. It helps to prevent the deadly effects of excessive stimulation or total absence of it. Not only that, habit can be used to introduce differences within other established habits, such as the monotony of an established artistic style or the clichés of everyday life. The genial artist must have a familiarity with his own instruments, which is consequence of a habit of their use; the explosive originality of his or her talent⁹¹ is not enough. Otherwise, it is not possible to introduce a change in artistic styles and canons.⁹² With another example, the philosopher, who must pass through the crisis of scepticism to be awakened from the dogmatic sleep,⁹³ must have assumed daily habits – as Kant himself admits to have done (for example, he abstains from reflecting while eating)⁹⁴ – and must have assumed a “diet with regard to thinking (*Diät im Denken*)”.⁹⁵

6. The Amphibious Nature of Habit

Free people have a character, that inserts in the daily course of life as an explosion and as a promise that must continually be repeated. Morality (contrary to the Aristotelian doctrine of *hexis*)⁹⁶ is not

differences between Ravaisson and Bergson. See Clare Carlisle. *On Habit*, p. 93.

91 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 329, *Critique of Judgement...*, 293.

92 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 329.

93 “I freely admit that the remembrance of *David Hume* was the very thing that many years ago first interrupted my dogmatic slumber and gave a completely different direction to my researches in the field of speculative philosophy” (Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*, in *Theoretical Philosophy after 1781*, p. 57).

94 See Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties...*, p. 322.

95 Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties...*, p. 322.

96 Gerhard Funke. “Gewohnheit”, p. 9 and pp. 46-66. An abridged version can be found in Gerhard Funke. “Hexis (habitus)”, in Joachim Ritter (ed.): *Historisches Wörterbuch der*

equivalent to a virtue that can be possessed, just as if it were possible to have a virtue that defines the acting subject. Kantian doctrine of moral is marked by a polarization (apparently) lacking in any possible mediation. However, the introduction of the gradual intensity of *Lebenskraft* and of habit (that sustains it) attenuate that polarity. Habit is not really a mechanic succession, as Kant argues at the beginning. It is not really equal to inertia, that, if not disturbed by an external impact, causes the permanence of stasis or of movement of a corps. Being a force that continually reproduces itself – in which its manifestation in an act follows its potential dimension and then returns to be an act – habit can (or better: must) always be directed and governed: dietetics cannot be a simple set of rules imposed once and for all, but it needs to be regulated to adapt to the conditions in which it applies – age, work, change in physical constitution are elements that has to be taken into account continually to adapt the daily routine. There is no law which should be imposed to the object. On the contrary, there is a twofold relationship in which the circumstances and the aspect of the object (i.e. the *Lebenskraft*, through the body of the individual) influence the norm that, in turn, manipulate its object.

Surprisingly, habit is no more criticized, but rather recognized as useful. In fact, it is possible to produce a habit or “to establish a lasting inclination apart from any maxim, through frequently repeated gratifications of that inclination”.⁹⁷ The acquired habit must be *managed* and *governed*, through a principle of intelligence: we are far from the model presented by Kant about the relationship between rationality and practice in the short essay on *Theory and Praxis*. There, in fact, rational principles are thought of as a touchstone, to which the practice must always refer.⁹⁸ In that case, the political rationality (represented by the idea of a social contract) is universal and out of time; it does not change according to the conditions. In case of habits, on the contrary, we are faced with a loss of rationality. Rather, rationality has to play a different role, since its goal is not to establish universal principles to adapt to; it is not possible to establish a good universal habit so as it is possible to find universal moral law dictated by reason and valid independently from the conditions of the subject who adopts it. Moral *maxims* can be given, but they will always be subjective – the quantity of water to drink every day, the food to be assimilated daily, the way we breathe

Philosophie, pp. 1120-1123.

97 Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 593.

98 See Immanuel Kant. *On the Common Saying: That May Be Correct in Theory, but It Is of No Use in Practice*, in *Practical Philosophy...*, p. 297.

– cannot be worth for everybody, and furthermore they must maintain a malleability and an adaptability that allow to consider both particular cases and exceptions.⁹⁹ On the other hand, even if it were possible to establish some necessary laws to maintain health – eradicating this way the natural causes of death –, it wouldn't be beneficial if they were completely applied, as they would imply the end of civil life and the human existence would be entirely dedicated to self-preservation.¹⁰⁰ The absence of one or more imposable maxims aimed to obtain healthy habits makes difficult their diffusion and adoptions. These require the education of that desire that pushes habit to repetition. The distance between habit and an *a priori* legislative procedure dictates that a good habit cannot simply be instilled through the imposition of a rational law. The desire that constitutes the habitual force often comes into collision with human rationality, since it perceives it as a heteronomous legislation. Imposing a law does not mean succeeding in making it desirable, in inducing the will to its repetition. On the other hand, habit is constituted by the force of desire, i.e. the vital force, which is not placed in a totally other realm than that of reason: therefore, it is possible to have an intermediation between habit and rationality.

In *Idea of a Universal History in a Cosmopolitan Aim*, reason is defined as the faculty of extending the rules and intentions (*Absichten*) of the use of individual forces beyond natural instincts.¹⁰¹ Since habit constitutes “a form of instinct”, as we have seen before, reason is the faculty that extends its laws beyond the *Gewohnheit*. Instinct, however, does not respond to law, but only to its own satisfaction. Therefore, the only way to counteract these impulsions is the production of habits of different direction. The means to produce them consists in the repetition of actions, gestures, and reflections, that gradually become more and more simple to carry out until they develop a *Fertigkeit* and a tendency to their repetition, i.e., a tendency to establish a habit that contrasts the initial inclinations.¹⁰² For example, to stay awake until late hours is a bad *Gewohnheit* (because the imagination, free from the occupations that may entertain her during the day, wanders indiscriminately, increasing the fears and anxieties of the individual inflicting the forces of *Gemüt*)¹⁰³ and the only way to contrast it is to instil, through

99 See Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties...*, p. 321.

100 See Immanuel Kant. *The Conflict of the Faculties...*, p. 326.

101 See Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, in *Anthropology, History and Education*, p. 109.

102 See Immanuel Kant. *Idea for a Universal History...*, pp. 109-110.

103 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 290.

discipline (*Disziplin*), a habit of the opposite sense, dictated by reason. The introduction of a new habit is equivalent to exercise (*Übung*). To this topic, Kant devotes pages not only within his texts of practical philosophy, but also within the *Critique of Pure Reason*, as exercise is the only instrument capable of developing a familiarity in the use of judgment.¹⁰⁴ This reflection is valid both in the cognitive and in the practical field: both to judge and to act accordingly to the judgment.¹⁰⁵

Habit, if established by exercise, is fundamental for morality. Even when actions seem to, without actually being, conform to moral duty – when we assume for example a set of gestures and attentions that fit the appearance of morality, even if our intentions are not directed to moral duty itself – they help promote morality. For example, the cordiality among men of society expressed through formulas – which by widespread habit and long-term use have become effective *Gebrauch*¹⁰⁶ – that do not correspond to a real mutual respect. Or, in another example, the kindness accomplished by respect for civil costume and certainly not because of respect for moral duty. In both examples, they spread a disposition of feeling (*Gesinnung*) auspicious for morality, although they are simple simulations of virtue.¹⁰⁷ Adapting the human being to morals (*gesittet machen*), therefore, does not equate the success of making it good and moral, but he or she gets disposed for it.¹⁰⁸ In fact, thanks to the diffusion¹⁰⁹ of such cordial and apparently moral customs, the individual develops his or her attention for the possible purity of the will, thus gradually becoming attentive to, and conscious of, his or her own freedom.¹¹⁰

The second method to introduce into the human spirit the laws of pure reason consists in the exercise of judgement, through which we

104 “Now if it wanted to show generally how one ought to subsume under these rules, i.e., distinguish whether something stands under them or not, this could not happen except once again through a rule. But just because this is a rule, it would demand another instruction for the power of judgment, and so it becomes clear that although the understanding is certainly capable of being instructed and equipped through rules, the power of judgment is a special talent that cannot be taught but only practiced” (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 268).

105 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 306.

106 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 408.

107 This is certainly a deception, but it takes place against the deceiver par excellence (i.e. the inclination, *Neigung*). Therefore, this operation can lead to the obedience to the law. See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 263.

108 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 347.

109 The problem of disseminating practices through imitation cannot be explored here. Note that imitation has many common elements with habit, in particular because of their shared ambiguity that places them both between mind and body (as it is possible to imitate both a gesture and a way of thinking) as well as between rational and unconscious (let see below the importance of the imitation of the teacher in order to assume a moral behaviour).

110 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 268.

learn to judge our actions according to moral laws, until such reflections become a natural occupation. In this way we certainly create a second nature, and inasmuch as relating it to “nature”, it has to do with necessity. At the same time, however, this exercise consists in the repetition of the comprehension (and of the application) of what is moral, and this way this comprehension gets more and more simple for the subject.¹¹¹ Further again, virtue itself can be defined as a free *Fertigkeit* (*habitus libertatis*), a habit and familiarity not to produce free actions (it would be contradictory, since freedom collides with the subjective necessity of habituality), but rather to decide to act following the representations of the law.¹¹²

The theme of exercise, however, introduces the problem of how to educate to morality and freedom, as these imply autonomy, which is uneasily compatible with the heteronomy of the precepts that the teacher imposes to his or her student. Pedagogy – whether moral or philosophical, as Kant often has the opportunity to underline – cannot be a simple imposition of notions, because this would mean reducing it to simple exercises of mechanical memory¹¹³ that, at best, can lead to historical knowledge,¹¹⁴ i.e. to an unreasoned repetition of sentences, definitions, concepts.¹¹⁵ Again, the formation towards moral actions has no success, if it is thought of as the imposition of norms. It must instead be the production of a habit (and therefore of a desire) of wanting duty as such, it must be the production of a habitual potentiality towards self-constraint in respect of an internal principle

111 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, pp. 267-268.

112 See Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 535.

113 In a certainly not fortuitous parallelism with the different declinations of habit, Kant finds also here a gradualness in the uses of memory corresponding to a more or less narrow repetition of the identical. The lowest level is mechanical repetition (intended as a literal repetition; see Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 292), which is followed by the ingenious memorization (see the example of the *Haus-* or *Staatsdiener*; Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 305), which also requires the use of the intellect (see Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 292), and finally the judicious memorization. In this case the subject reproduces the rule or precept that has been imparted, but he or she must also decide whether that rule is to apply in a particular situation experienced by the subject (see Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, pp. 292-293).

114 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 249.

115 “If I abstract from all content of cognition, objectively considered, then all cognition, considered subjectively, is either historical or rational. [...] However a cognition may have been given originally, it is still historical for him who possesses it if he cognizes it only to the degree and extent that it has been given to him from elsewhere [...]. Hence he who has properly *learned* a system of philosophy, e.g. the Wolffian system, although he has in his head all of the principles, explanations, and proofs together with the division of the entire theoretical edifice, and can count everything off on his fingers, still has nothing other than a complete *historical* cognition of the Wolffian philosophy [...]. He has formed himself according to an alien reason, [...] and although objectively it was certainly a rational cognition, subjectively it is still merely historical” (Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Pure Reason...*, p. 693).

of freedom.¹¹⁶ Although it may seem paradoxical, the teacher must stimulate in the student a desire of free self-constriction and a habit of submission of the *Begehrungsvermögen* (which constitutes life) to rationality. The accent is correctly put on the role of rationality that especially in the *Critique of Practical Reason* is the only faculty in play. But as soon as Kant asks the question of how a moral education is possible, it must take a step back and admit that the training of desire towards the application of the categorical imperative goes through what he had initially strenuously rejected: habit. And if desire cannot be imposed (because only the mechanical repetition of an act can be), the inclination cannot be the result of a commanded law. What enabled Diogenes the Cynic to educate the son of a Cretan merchant, of which Kant speaks in a note to the *Anthropology*, is not the doctrinal set of norms, but the fact that he knew how to govern.¹¹⁷ His pedagogical purpose was achieved through his own example, whose imitation should not consist in taking it as a model to be replicated,¹¹⁸ but – with an expression that incorporates one of the most important points of discussion on aesthetics in those years – must rather be an “imitation of its spirit”.¹¹⁹ The student is able to replicate a moral practice after having verified, thanks to the educator’s actions, the possibility to govern him- or herself,¹²⁰ to behave according to duty.¹²¹ The student does not repeat the actions of the teacher, but generates in him- or herself the same potential disposition to the use of practical reason, a disposition that adapts to the context. The moral law is certainly immutable and universally valid, but the training towards its introduction into

116 “virtue is not merely a self-constraint [...], but also a self-constraint in accordance with a principle of inner freedom” (Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 525).

117 “What can you do? What do you know?” asked the broker who had put him on the stand. “I know how to rule” (Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 390). This translation does not really fit to the original version: “Was kannst du, was verstehst du?” fragte ihn der Mäkler, der ihn auf eine Erhöhung gestellt hatte. “Ich verstehen zu regieren” (Immanuel Kant. *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht, in Gesammelte Schriften*. Berlin, Reimer, 1917, Vol. VII, p. 292). In the *Metaphysics of Morals* (pp. 593-595), we find some possible examples of the dialogues between Diogenes and his pupil.

118 See Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 593.

119 I refer to the problem of the imitation of ancient art in modernity. The controversy was stimulated in particular by Winckelmann’s (on the side of classicism) and Friedrich Schlegel’s texts (in favour of an autonomy of modern art). On this, I may refer to mine: Giulia Valpione. “Genealogie frammentarie. Tendenze e linearità della storia in Friedrich Schlegel”, *Scienza & Politica*, Vol. 30, N°. 58, 2018, pp. 171-188, in particular p. 173-178.

120 “Two things are required for inner freedom: being one’s own *master* in a given case (*animus sui compos*), and *ruling oneself* [*über sich selbst Herr zu sein*] (*imperium in semetipsum*), that is, subduing one’s affects and governing one’s passion” (Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 535).

121 See Immanuel Kant. *Critique of Practical Reason...*, p. 268; Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 593.

practical experience cannot simply be the imposition of rationally established rules.

Theory can explain the functioning of the categorical imperative and can convince the reader, or the student, that the imperative and the acting according to duty (for duty as such) are the only guarantor of morality. The example of the teacher, moreover, can show the possibility of wanting duty as such. But exercise can also initiate to *habitus libertatis*, the *Fertigkeit* to self-determination through the representation of the law, and it is by means of exercise that it is possible to animate the will of duty.

As we have seen in Kant's description of the transformation towards morals, it seems that this conversion is not susceptible to mediation, and that it takes place suddenly. In those Kantian words there is no place for a preparation that could stimulate the conversion to freedom. This transformation is described as a jump over the chasm between two separate kingdoms. But in *Anthropology* and in *Metaphysics of Morals*, he tries to outline a progressive ascent, punctuated by discipline¹²² and exercise, towards moral action. It must be possible to insert an intermediate between law and will, unless we accept to leave the introduction of freedom in humanity in the hands of a simple revelation, in respect to which we can only be passive. It is possible to act in favour of the affirmation of freedom, but this practice cannot consist in imposing a further law that gives orders to the will: it wouldn't get any success and would simply lead to the need for an additional law which, again, should mediate between herself and desire. The middle between the law and the free will can only be habit.

Even the superficial repetition of formulas, attitudes, and simple gestures of the body can contribute to the promotion of morality. In fact, habit marks a field that includes both procedures of *Gemüt* and actions.¹²³ Because of the link to *Lebenskraft*, that pushes both to mental and physical activity, Kant can therefore think that habit becomes an instrument to influence the intellectual faculties through the repetition not only of intellectual procedures, but also of bodily gestures. This way he demonstrates the amphibious nature of *Gewohnheit*:

122 However, discipline must be limited and must not reach monastic asceticism or self-mortification (see Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, pp. 597-598): "the training (discipline) that a human being practices on himself can become meritorious and exemplary only through the cheerfulness that accompanies it" (Immanuel Kant. *The Metaphysics of Morals...*, p. 598).

123 Following Packham's analysis (Catherine Packham. *Eighteenth-Century Vitalism: Bodies, Culture, Politics*. Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), the concept of *Lebenskraft* is at core of vitalistic thought, but it undermines the mind/body duplicity even within the philosophies that are not part of that tradition.

between mind and body, between freedom and necessity, Kant finds a space that oscillates between these two extremes. Thanks to the common denominator of mind and body, i.e. habit, even a trivial handshake as a sign of respect and hospitality, stimulates the use of practical reason. This perspective serves not only to highlight an underestimated (in respect to rational freedom) topic of Kantian practical doctrine, but also to open new interpretations of its political philosophy. It is no coincidence that precisely in *Anthropology* – that gets the transcendental gaze aside, and in which habit plays a crucial role – Kant puts aside the crystal clear system of the rational legal order (whose respect is valid only *in foro externo*) to deal instead with conscience (*foro interno*). To have an ordered and rational state that functions like a perfect machine, the compliance of established right is not enough, it must also take in consideration the private dimension of the conscience. In *Anthropology*, Kant proposes the possibility of manipulating (*Handhaben*) individuals, to control and modify their habits so that they *want* the civil law, and not only obey to it.¹²⁴ If it is not associated with the individual will, the external respect of the law is only superficial and uncertain.¹²⁵

7. Conclusions: The Rhythm of Habit

In this article we highlighted that Kant's critique of habit is not as clear as it may seem by reading certain passages, especially from the *Critique of Practical Reason*. While maintaining the distance that separates it from moral freedom, the *Gewohnheit* can also become free. The re-evaluation of habit in Kantian philosophy seems to be the consequence of a deeper awareness of the implications inherent in this concept, which can erroneously be considered as the simple set of repeated equal actions. Between the radical difference introduced by the sudden revolution towards freedom and the rigid identity of inertial motions or mechanical automatism, Kant perceives the presence of a force (the *Lebenskraft*) that is maintained as a succession of stimuli of opposite poles, but whose difference is enclosed in a rhythm that unfolds over time. Life and its identity are maintained only through repeated differences. And habit is a rhythm which, to repeated actions,

124 See Immanuel Kant. *Anthropology...*, p. 316.

125 Following Schmitt's texts, the distance between private and public reason is the "deadly germ" of those intermediate powers from which the potential destruction of the Hobbesian state develops. Carl Schmitt. "Die vollendete Reformation. Bemerkungen und Hinweise zu neuen Leviathan-Interpretationen", *Der Staat*, N°. 4, 1965, pp. 51-69.

alternates moments when action is not actual, but only potential. The fact that habit does not only consist of acts, but also of the power towards them, is what distinguishes it from the simple automaticity of a machine that is not able to develop an inclination, i.e. it does not have a *Begehrungsvermögen*.

The intermediary stage between necessity and freedom is a step between the blind physical laws of nature (that cannot be transgressed) and the adherence to duty as such. Between these poles, we find the constant desire that characterizes the essence of habit. Its plasticity does not allow it to be degraded into the level of nature, just as its dependence from circumstances does not grant it the autonomy proper to morality: it constitutes a “second nature”. Moreover, it is not static and immutable, but rather plastic, driven to change by a self-determining force, that can – or rather, has to – be governed and directed. This direction and discipline of habit constitutes dietetics and, more generally, exercise, which are not a simple imposition of a rule, since they have the purpose of stimulating the will of the rule as such. The compliance with the moral law, in fact, if limited to *foro externo*, does not lead to morality: we must want the law; and the only way to stimulate this will is through the habit of respect to it or the example of moral action.

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