

Inhabiting the Ethical Life: Habit and Trust in Hegel's Philosophy

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Introduction

As is well known, Hegel is one of the philosophers of the modern Western tradition who have given considerable attention to the concept of second nature in relation to both subjectivity and the socio-institutional dimension of the state, which he calls ethical life¹. In both his *Philosophy of Mind* and *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel argues that habituality stands for second nature in that it grounds the self-appropriation of consciousness, thereby guiding the transition from nature to spirit². Furthermore, in the *Philosophy of Right*,

¹ Ethical life translates Hegel's notion of *Sittlichkeit*, meaning customs and practices that inform ongoing ways of life, in which community partakes. See also A. Ferrarin, *Hegel and Aristotle*, CUP, Cambridge 2001, pp. 356-364, and B. O'Connor, *Ethical Theory*, in M. Baur (ed.), *G.W.F. Hegel. Key Concepts*, 59-75, Routledge, London-New York 2014. An earlier version of the argument I am proposing here can be found in E. Magrì, *Zweite Natur und Sittlichkeit. Über Hegels Auffassung von Inhabitanz*, in *Objektiver und absoluter Geist nach Hegel: Kunst, Religion und Philosophie innerhalb- und außerhalb von Gesellschaft und Geschichte*, ed. by T. Oehl and A. Kok, Leiden, Brill 2018, pp. 213-232.

² Abbreviations:

Enz III: Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse 1830. Dritter Teil. Die Philosophie des Geistes*, in E. Moldenhauer, K.M. Michel (eds), *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Band 10, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1986. English trans. *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A.V. Miller, rev. M. Inwood, OUP, Oxford 2007.

PR: Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts oder Naturrecht und Staatswissenschaft im Grundrisse*, in *Werke in 20 Bänden*, in *Werke*, Band 7, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt 1989. English trans. *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. T.M. Knox, revised by S. Houlgate, OUP, Oxford 2008.

Ak: *Akademie-Ausgabe (Kants gesammelte Schriften*, hrsg. von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Berlin 1910 ss). Ak 7: *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht*. English trans. *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, trans. R.B. Loudon, CUP, Cambridge 2006.

KrPV: Ak 5, *Kritik der Praktische Vernunft*, English trans. *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. M. Gregor, CUP, Cambridge 2015.

Hegel links habit to the notion of ethical life, arguing that lasting dispositions are essential to actualise morality within social and political institutions. Thus, Hegel proposes a theory of habituality that is anchored in nature while paving the way for practical reason and agency. For the most part, however, the recent literature on the topic of habit in Hegel's philosophy has been concerned with situating Hegel's view with respect to the concept of naturalism. In this regard, it is possible to identify three main motifs in the discussion of Hegel's account of habit: (a) one that focusses on the process of purification from natural drives³; (b) one that revolves around the transformation of nature into spirit *via* habit and practice⁴, and finally (c) one that centres on the intelligibility of the transition from nature to spirit⁵.

The central difference between these accounts is that, while (a) argues that habits contribute to spirit's emancipation from natural constraints; (b) stresses the continuity and unification between nature and spirit. Indeed, according to (b), habit is fundamental to developing skills and abilities that ultimately culminate in self-consciousness. In a very Aristotelian fashion, proponents of (b) hold that Hegel's notion of habit is an embodied process that does not produce a split between nature and spirit. As Menke writes, «habit is the praxis of an ontological transformation: habituation turns the body, a given or predefined being that determines who I am and what I do, into a site of possibilities»⁶. In this light, it can be said that (b) sustains a naturalistic approach to Hegel's philosophy, which is inspired by an anti-dualist reading of the relation between spirit and nature. By contrast, position (c) puts more emphasis on the problem of the intelligibility of the

³ See J. McCumber, *Hegel on Habit*, in «The Owl of Minerva», 21, 2 (1990), pp. 155-165.

⁴ For example, T. Pinkard, *Hegel's Naturalism. Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life*, OUP, Oxford 2012; C. Menke, *Hegel's Theory of Second Nature: The Lapse of Spirit*, in «Symposium. Canadian Journal of Continental Philosophy», 17, 1 (2012), pp. 31-49; S. Lumsden, *Between Nature and Spirit. Hegel's Account of Habit*, in D.S. Stern (ed.), *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, SUNY, New York 2013, pp. 121-137; I. Testa, *Hegel's Naturalism or Soul and Body in the Encyclopedia*, in D.S. Stern (ed.), *Essays on Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, SUNY, New York 2013, pp. 19-36; J. Peters, *On Naturalism in Hegel's Philosophy of Spirit*, in «British Journal for the History of Philosophy», 24, 1 (2016), pp. 111-131; F. Ranchio, *Dimensionen der zweiten Natur. Hegels praktische Philosophie*, Felix Meiner, Hamburg 2016.

⁵ This line of interpretation normally takes up issues in McDowell's reading of Hegel as naturalism of second nature (J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge [MA], Harvard University Press 1996). See C. Halbig, *Varieties of Nature in Hegel and McDowell*, in «European Journal of Philosophy», 14, 2 (2006), pp. 222-241; D. Forman, *Second Nature and Spirit: Hegel on the Role of Habit in the Appearance of Perceptual Consciousness*, in «The Southern Journal of Philosophy», 48, 4 (2010), pp. 325-352.

⁶ C. Menke, *art. cit.*, p. 36.

transition from first to second nature. Thus, proponents of (c) consider more closely whether and how the acquisition of second nature in Hegel counts as conceptual or non-conceptual⁷.

While most of these interpretations concentrate on habit in light of the normative status of either spirit or nature, the connection between habit and ethical life seems more problematic. In this case, the problem concerns not just the relation between nature and selfhood, but also the process of the institutionalisation of shared practices and norms. Hegel himself highlights the contrast between the normativity of ethical life and nature in the PR, arguing that the former is characterised by the feeling of being at home in the community and the State in a way that is more firmly established than any other natural feeling, and more binding than faith and trust⁸. In this regard, recent works by Houlgate and Lumsden have pointed to the complex relation between ethical life and trust. According to Houlgate, the relation between individuals and ethical life «is not blind, but it is the immediate or educated *recognition* that right is actualized in the world. It is the understanding in the form of feeling, that right and the good – which include my right and my well-being – are embodied in the laws and institutions around me»⁹. For Houlgate, education, in the form of awareness of right and the values that inform members of the community, guarantees the actuality of the good in the State. For this reason, the ethical citizen «can, so to speak, relax and does not need constantly to take responsibility for actualising right, because his life is informed by trust in the existing institutions of ethical life»¹⁰. In a more cautious perspective, Lumsden has warned that «without dissent and

⁷ This is a line of thought that is also compatible, in my view, with a non-naturalistic reading, such those of S. Gardner, *The Limits of Naturalism and the Metaphysics of German Idealism*, in E. Hammer (ed.), *German Idealism. Contemporary Perspectives*, Routledge, London-New York 2007, pp. 19-49, and A. Papazoglou, *Hegel and Naturalism*, in «Hegel Bulletin», 66 (2002), pp. 74-90.

⁸ See, for instance, PR § 146: «This ethical substance and its laws and powers are, on the one hand, an object over against the subject, and from the latter's point of view they are – 'are' in the highest sense of self-subsistent being. This is an absolute authority and power infinitely more firmly established than the being of nature», and PR § 147: «On the other hand, they [the laws and powers of ethical substance] are not something alien to the subject. On the contrary, his spirit bears witness to them as to its own essence, the essence in which he has a feeling of his selfhood, and in which he lives as in his own element which is not distinguished from himself. The subject is thus directly linked to the ethical order by a relation which is closer to identity than even the relation of faith or trust».

⁹ S. Houlgate, *Right and Trust in Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, in «Hegel Bulletin», 37: 1 (2016), pp. 104-116, 113.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*.

contestation habits and customs become stagnant»¹¹. The problem of habit in relation to ethical life is precisely that of identifying the boundary between conscious and the passive acceptance of norms. If ethical life shapes our sense of reality through the norms we habitually validate through our everyday practices, how is it possible to evaluate critically the form of life we inhabit?¹² Does trust in social institutions entail the possibility of taking a critical stance towards institutions? If so, is habit in the context of ethical life essentially different from habit in relation to subjectivity? What is the difference, if any, between habit and trust?

This problem is particularly relevant in order to fully appreciate Hegel's account of practical freedom. Depending on whether and how habituality is involved in the constitution of ethical life, it is possible to articulate a theory of freedom that is centred either on the normativity of social institutions – as Pippin does¹³ – or on the critical authority of reason. Such an issue has been brought out nicely by O'Connor in his critique of Pippin¹⁴. As O'Connor points out, the very possibility of feeling at home crucially depends on the possibility of taking a critical stance towards the social world we inhabit. Indeed, if ethical life represents a form of second nature, it is legitimate to wonder whether this has an impact on the exercise of practical reason, specifically on the capacity of individuals to take a critical perspective towards the traditions, customs and norms that they inhabit. In order to address this set of issues, I propose to first examine the role of habituality, which is consistently tied up with the notion of ethical life as second nature. I will first concentrate on the role of habit in relation to subjectivity before addressing the relation that exists between habit and ethical life. As I will show, this view lends itself to a revision of the naturalistic reading of Hegel's account of habit, as well as of the normative priority assigned to either spirit or nature in Hegel's view of habit.

¹¹ S. Lumsden, *Second Nature and Historical Change in Hegel's Philosophy of History*, in «International Journal of Philosophical Studies», 24: 1 (2016), pp. 74-94, 83.

¹² A recent exploration of this theme can be found in A. Novakovic, *Hegel on Second Nature in Ethical Life*, CUP, Cambridge 2017, who emphasises the positive role of habituality in the context of ethical life. While I sympathise with Novakovic's interpretation, I argue that habit, as described in Hegel's Anthropology is not exhaustive, for ethical life is informed by ethical dispositions, which involve the will and active position-taking.

¹³ Pippin has particularly insisted on the normative authority of social institutions in that he interprets the notion of *Geist* as the «first implicit and inchoate and then fully realized state of norm-governed individual and collective mindedness and social reality» (R. Pippin, *Hegel's Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life*, OUP, Oxford 2008, p. 39).

¹⁴ B. O'Connor, *The Neo-Hegelian Theory of Freedom and the Limits of Emancipation*, in «European Journal of Philosophy», (2012); doi: 10.1111/j.1468-0378.2012.00524.x

1. *Habit and Subjectivity*

Since Aristotle, habit is traditionally associated with a compound product of nature and reason, which is achieved by training appropriately both personal inclinations and natural qualities. In this sense, *habitus* indicates the cultivation of disposition (*hexis*), whereby different qualities and traits develop and mature across time, forming what the Medieval tradition called “second nature”. As shown by Burnyeat, habits are not mindless, especially when it comes to ethics and moral character¹⁵. In this regard, and unlike Kant, Hegel takes very seriously the idea that habituality implies the cultivation of dispositions that empower natural capacities¹⁶. Indeed, in the *Enz III*, habit is not simply a mediating term between nature and spirit, for it represents the hinges on which the whole development of subjective spirit hangs. Hegel’s idea of subjective spirit is made up of distinct layers (soul, consciousness, intelligence) that are internalised and appropriated by spirit thanks to various forms of habituation that include bodily habits, work, and memory. While habit is operative in the soul in the *Anthropology*, work is crucial for the development of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*¹⁷, and finally memory is the mechanism that enables the activity of thinking in the *Psychology*¹⁸.

It appears, then, that Hegel’s view of the mind is marked by processes of habituation that are operative at different levels and in different contexts, and yet they all share a fundamental element: they are distinctive features of the activities that enable practical reason, but they do not fall

¹⁵ M.F. Burnyeat, *Aristotle on Learning to be Good*, in M.F. Burnyeat, *Explorations in Ancient and Modern Philosophy*, vol. 2, CUP, Cambridge 2012, pp. 259-281.

¹⁶ For Kant, «virtue is moral strength in adherence to one’s duty, which never should become habit but should always emerge entirely new and original from one’s way of thinking», cfr. Kant, *Ak 7*, § 12, 147; 38. See also A. Ferrarin, *op. cit.*, p. 332 ff, and S. Lumsden, *Habit, Sittlichkeit, and Second Nature*, in «Critical Horizons», 13, 2 (2012), pp. 220-243.

¹⁷ As Russon points out, even the discussion of work in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* presents an elaborated argument that involves the acquisition of habit. More specifically, for Russon, the 1807 *Phenomenology* centres on the relation between *physis*, *hexis* and *logos* that gives rise to self-consciousness. While *physis* is essentially unconscious, habit provides the middle term between nature and reason. See J. Russon, *The Self and its Body in Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, Toronto University Press, Toronto-Buffalo-London 1997.

¹⁸ I have discussed the difference between habit and memory in Hegel elsewhere, see E. Magrì, *The Place of Habit in Hegel’s Psychology*, in S. Herrmann-Sinai, L. Ziglioli (eds), *Hegel’s Philosophical Psychology*, Routledge, London-New York 2016, pp. 74-90, and E. Magrì, *The Problem of Habitual Body and Memory in Hegel and Merleau-Ponty*, in «Hegel Bulletin», 38, 1, 2017, pp. 24-44.

into what Hegel calls practical spirit or will. As one can easily see from the overall scheme of the *Enz III*, Hegel tends to consider intelligence and will separately, for he distinguishes between a theoretical and a practical development of spirit. However, this is not supposed to introduce any hiatus between theory and praxis, for Hegel insists that there cannot be any will without intelligence (*Enz III* § 469). Yet, granting these premises, and given that the soul and consciousness are necessary to undertake any course of action, one may still wonder in what sense the soul does not count as a practical manifestation of rationality.

We must assume that the unity of theoretical faculties is essential to ground our practical involvement in the world. This is due to the fact that, from a Hegelian standpoint, the will is not a given *factum*, but it presupposes different layers of capacities and abilities, which provide schemes for possible actions. As long as the individual does not consciously appropriate those schemes as *her* reasons for action, subjectivity does not yet qualify as practical reason. This means that practical agency requires not only the cultivation of dispositions, which is provided by habit, but also a stance of commitment and position-taking that is distinctive of deliberation. While the outputs of my deliberation can be internalised by habit, thereby informing my own attitude to the world, deliberation in itself is not the result of habit. Thus, practical freedom entails a sense of commitment and reflective ownership that is not manifested by the psyche in the *Anthropology*.

Thus, the systematic organisation of subjective spirit demonstrates that the nexuses between soul, consciousness, and intelligence represent necessary but not sufficient conditions for practical agency. The significance of habit is not, however, diminished by this. Hegel stresses that, in habit, natural and acquired abilities overlap and sediment over time, shaping the individual sense of being someone. This is apparent from Hegel's philosophical anthropology within his *Philosophy of Mind* in the *Encyclopaedia*, where habit is closely related to the genesis of the self (*Enz III* §§ 410-413). In this respect, Hegel's appraisal of habit in the *Anthropology* is particularly relevant in that it shows that, while subjective experience is always embodied and rooted in the sphere of nature, habit signals the first emergence of the self as self-acquaintance, namely as bodily and affective self-relation. This is not based on deliberation and reflective awareness, but rather on the sedimentation of experiences across time, which generates self-identity.

More specifically, habit underpins a sense of outward projection in the world, which enables the psyche to have a sense of oneself that is notably different from self-knowledge, for it does not require the soul to engage at

each moment in the conscious appraisal of her states and feelings. Habit makes possible the acquisition of skills, like learning how to read or to ride a bicycle, by instituting a dimension of familiarity with both context cues and bodily capacities. Habit organises the manifold of experience by establishing sensory and kinetic ties between the soul, the environment, and the contents of her experiences. In this sense, habit becomes a component of self-trust by training sensitivity in such a way that, when we routinely follow a path without having any reflective consciousness of what we are doing, we are not acting blindly, for kinetic awareness and bodily attunement are always involved. Thus, while habit is not sustained by a decision made anew at each moment, it is at the same time fundamental in establishing self-acquaintance.

In a way, habit is an “impure” analog of Kant’s unity of apperception, for it is not just a function of inner sense but rather a form of bodily orientation. As the psyche is originally immersed in the multifaceted life of feelings, habit unifies and integrates different sensations in order to provide a transition towards self-appropriation. Such a unity, however, does not require any transcendental synthesis, for it is obtained in the course of repeated behaviour, that is, in virtue of a process of sedimentation that lets different experiences cohere together, producing self-identity across time. The identity brought about by habit consists in the cultivation of sensitivity, which for Hegel is only a prerequisite of practical or moral identity. Thanks to habit, we internalise beliefs and follow specific rules, because habituality is responsible for the way in which a course of action or sequences of thoughts are internalised through practice and exercise. This is why Hegel holds that habit «is the most essential feature of the existence of all mental life in the individual subject» (Enz III § 408, Remark). However, habit is responsible only for the permanence of the connection that is established between the self and the contents of experience, but it is not the *reason* why *those very* contents or beliefs are endorsed. Like a corporeal schema, habit justifies how certain contents become durable features of our style and behaviour, but it does not account for the validity or legitimacy of the contents of our beliefs, for these require deliberation and conscious position-taking. To put it differently, habit does not underlie any “I do”, but rather an “I can” that manifests receptivity to potential new solicitations and experiences.

In light of this, it does not surprise that habituality does not appear in Hegel’s discussion of practical spirit, which, instead, centres on the integration of the will with practical feelings and drives. The will represents a power of practical self-determination, hence it is not another faculty, distinct and separate from intelligence, but rather a specific actualisation of

spirit that presupposes intelligence. In this context, practical feelings are form of affective assessment, which manifest the individual response to external solicitations. Shame, joy, regret, contentment etc. disclose our subjective agreement or disagreement with situations and events. Yet, for Hegel, the moral force of practical feelings lacks cogency. These feelings do not have an objective ground due to their strong ties to subjective qualities and circumstances. For example, my joy and solicitude to help my friend may be distinctive of my commitment to assist him, but at times personal circumstances may impede and influence my enthusiasm.

It is precisely in relation to this issue that Hegel's discussion of drive (*Trieb*) helps to recast the dimension of practical spirit in more fine-grained terms. Unlike practical feelings, drives are not solicited from without but rather originate from the will's power of self-determination. The notion of drive indicates that an impulse to act has been internalised by the agent and it is reawakened in certain appropriate circumstances. In this respect, drives are also different from desires (Enz III § 473, Addition). While the latter highlights the polarisation of consciousness with respect to an external object, the former is a type of volitional intelligence that aims to achieve the practical goals of the subject. If to desire something, e.g. a loved one, means to experience a lack or an absence that aims to an external object, the drive is a teleological motivation based on the practical determination of the subject. By bringing forth her goals, the subject develops personality and practical character, which makes her responsible for her actions towards others as well as to institutions (Enz III § 474, Remark).

In this way, practical spirit brings to light the importance of training feelings so that they become a source of moral motivation, an inner drive that is oriented to the good. On Hegel's view, moral character arises when the will becomes the centre of her own feelings and drives by cultivating interest in a goal-oriented manner. To illustrate with an example: I may have a passion for philosophy, which awakens within me anytime I come across philosophy books in a bookshop or hear philosophy talks. In this case, my passion for philosophy is distinctive of my particular predispositions, and it also characterises my way of responding to social contexts. If I am not only passionate about philosophy but also interested in it to the point that philosophy influences my actions and choices, I then develop a philosophical attitude. As Hegel says, nothing comes about without interest (Enz III § 475). Interest underpins the process of translating drives and impulses into objective and durable acquisitions and actions. The relevance of drives consists in the fact that they provide practical determination with an affective quality that

is built on moral feelings. Yet, drives give spirit opportunities for reflection in order to develop a more mature stance towards the world, and they cannot override deliberation. Accordingly, free will only arises when the subject appropriates her drives as motives and reasons for action. This entails that the subject needs to reflect upon her feelings and drives in order to transform them into reasonable sources of self-determination.

It appears that the will and practical agency are built on habit, which counts as a necessary but not sufficient condition for practical freedom. While free will cannot do without a self that is receptive to inner inclinations and external solicitations (as shown by habit), the relation between bodily attunement and practical sensitivity (e.g. responsiveness to values and norms) requires a more complex and fine-grained integration between moral feelings, character, and practical thinking. The genetic model of subjectivity that Hegel puts forward in the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* helps to understand how habit represents a necessary condition for having a self, but it is not sufficient for justifying whether and how the self is a subject of rational choice who is responsible for her actions. This is particularly relevant in order to critically revisit the relation between ethical life and second nature.

2. *Habit and Ethical Life*

For Hegel, the concept of *ethos* corresponds to the notion of ethical life or ethical substance (*Sittlichkeit*), with which Hegel occupied himself since his early writings. By ethical substance, Hegel refers to a community of people who are bound together by something that they have not consciously established. This is a bond that can be found in institutions like the family, civil society, and the state and that is – at the same time – the condition for their acting together. In this sense, the term *Sittlichkeit* covers both subjective attitudes and objective institutions. With regard to this, in the essay *The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law*, published between 1802 and 1803 in the *Kritisches Journal*, Hegel emphasises the affinity between the German word *Sitte* and the Greek *ethos*, pointing out the interdependence between universality and particularity¹⁹. Hegel argues that the concepts of subject and person cannot be completely abstracted from ethical life, and that there

¹⁹ Hegel, *Natural Law. The Scientific Way of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T.M. Knox, University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1975, p. 112.

is a sense in which ethical life coincides with the spirit of a people. The Greeks are exemplary of such living together that achieves self-awareness through art, religion, and philosophy²⁰.

Most notably, the concept of ethical life is linked to education and to the genetic constitution of the state, which acquires legitimacy by being inhabited by a community of subjects. For example, in the *System der Sittlichkeit* (1802), ethical life is defined in terms of *Bildung* and the life of a native land. In this context, Hegel emphasises that ethical life does not indicate a love towards one's own native land, people and laws, for it is rather absolute life itself that is at stake²¹. Absolute life arguably corresponds to a felt abidance by the laws and norms of the country. In the Enz III, Hegel also argues that: «The guarantee of a constitution, i.e. the necessity that the laws be rational and their actualization secured, lies in the spirit of the whole people, namely in the determinacy by which the people has the self-consciousness of its reason. [...] If one separates the idea of a constitution [from the idea of the spirit, as if the spirit exists or has existed without possessing a constitution conformable to it, such an opinion demonstrates only the superficiality of the thought about the connection between the spirit, its consciousness about itself and its actuality]» (Enz III § 540). Ethical life is associated with the notion of constitution (*Verfassung* or *Konstitution*), which provides spirit with a durable content both in terms of norms (e.g. as a system of law and institutions)²², and in terms of practical acquaintance with the customs and traditions that are held by the community. This is why the constitution represents «the firm foundation not only of the state, but also of the citizens' trust [*zutrauen*] in it and disposition [*Gesinnung*] towards it» (PR § 265). Through the constitution, citizens acquire a sense of belonging to the community, which in turn grounds their feeling of trust in the state.

It is at this level that the relation between habit and trust becomes noteworthy, for trust may be in conflict with the attitude of taking for granted norms and codes of behaviour without questioning them. As Hegel puts it, «We trust that the state must subsist and that in it alone particular interests

²⁰ For a discussion of the relation between art and politics in Hegel's philosophy that acknowledges and contextualises the paradigm of the Greeks, see A.L. Siani, *Il destino della modernità. Arte e politica in Hegel*, Edizioni ETS, Pisa 2010.

²¹ Hegel, *System der Sittlichkeit*, Meiner, Hamburg 1967, p. 57; trans. in english by H.S. Harris and T.M. Knox as *System of Ethical Life*, SUNY, Albany 1979, p. 147: «It does not appear as love for country and people and law, but as absolute life in one's country and for the people».

²² For a discussion of this concept in relation to Hegel's account of freedom, see G. Duso, *Libertà e costituzione* in Hegel, FrancoAngeli, Milano 2013.

can be secured. But habit blinds us to that on which our whole existence depends. When we walk the streets at night in safety, it does not strike us that this might be otherwise. This habit of feeling safe has become second nature, and we do not reflect on just how this is due solely to the working of particular institutions» (PR § 265, Addition). This passage brings to light the ambiguity of habit. On the one hand, it seems that the force of habit prevents members of the community from questioning and reflecting on the beliefs and norms that permeate their living together. On the other hand, however, habit is an essential component of dispositions in general, hence it necessarily underlies any form of being oriented or disposed towards institutions. On what basis is it then possible to distinguish between hardening (e.g. inert habituation) and trust, provided that customs have a pervasive force on the life of the subjects and require habit in order to be internalised?

One way to look at the problem is to consider ethical life as a social body, whose institutions must be oriented to the good in order to generate trust and respect. This is a top-down perspective that can be found, for example, in naturalistic readings of Hegel. The problem with this view is that it fails to explicate the role of conscience, and how subjectivity relates to (and possibly resists) norms and laws. Similarly, a bottom-up perspective that emphasises that institutions need to be grounded on relations of recognition in order to achieve the good does not fully explain how such relations suffice to produce ethical dispositions that are directed not just to other subjects but to institutions as well²³. One alternative to this consists in looking at the problem of ethical life from a generative point of view in order to appreciate a more complex dynamic between habituality and *Sittlichkeit*. From this perspective, ethical life is neither a collective agent nor an outcome of recognition, but a practical condition of possibility, a way of inhabiting the socio-political realm. This is a sedimentation of norms and practices that reminds of Merleau-Ponty's account of institution. In his courses on passivity and institution at the Collège de France (1954-55), Merleau-Ponty describes institutions as series of events that are held together by processes of sedimentation, a depth-giving process that occurs in both subjectivity and history²⁴. While, in the case of subjectivity, sedimentation refers to the

²³ A notable example of this reading is A. Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, trans. J. Anderson, The MIT Press, Cambridge (MA) 1995.

²⁴ See M. Merleau-Ponty, *L'Institution - La Passivité: Notes de cours au Collège de France (1954-1955)*, Edition Belin, Paris 2003; english trans. *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the Collège de France (1954-1955)*, foreword by Claude Lefort, Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey (trs.), Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2010.

integration of past and present experiences in a unitary, subjective stance towards the world, the second sense refers to the collective process whereby laws and practices are acquired and shared as a repertoire of meaning that is socially available. In this sense, sedimentation is closely linked to the idea of spaces that are shaped by common norms and institutions.

Two elements are of crucial importance in this view: first of all, institution refers to the creation of an ontological anteriority, which serves as a ground and as a foundation (*Urstiftung*) for an open-ended course of action. An institution generates new possibilities by establishing a collective practice, which is rooted in the past but is not necessarily determined by it. An example of this are artistic rules and paradigms, which transform and revitalise past forms of expressions by instituting new models. So did the Renaissance by introducing perspective in painting. The artists of the Renaissance were capable of appropriating the norms of Medieval iconography, but they also left the stamp of their own understanding and style. Likewise, the categories we use and the practices we refer to are institutionally grounded as long as their validity is consciously recognised and appropriated, otherwise they fall apart and reveal their inconsistency. This is why Merleau-Ponty insists that institutions can present us with open possibilities for the future, but also with stagnation and repetition. Whether it is the former or the latter that prevails, it depends on the capacity of consciousness to reanimate the past, thereby modifying “the landscapes of the present”. Thus the second and most fundamental element of institution concerns the capacity of consciousness to responsibly transform the horizons of sense given through traditions and common history.

Merleau-Ponty’s account of institution can be very helpful to explicate Hegel’s view of ethical life. For Hegel argues that institutions crucially depend on the emergence of a universal content, which is grasped and internalised by the will. Indeed, Hegel identifies custom with the precipitation of the content of freedom, which has become the habit and disposition of the will:

Since freedom and its content belong to thinking and are the universal in itself, the content has its genuine determinacy only in the form of universality. When posited in this form for the consciousness of intelligence with the determination of valid power, the content is *law*, – the content, freed from the impurity and contingency that it has in practical feeling and in the urge, and likewise impressed on the subjective will, not in the form of feeling and urge, but in its universality, as the will’s habit, disposition and character, then it is *custom* [*Sitte*] (Enz III § 485).

As Hegel says, the law becomes the will's habit only when the subjective dimension (e.g. feelings and drives) does not impinge on the process of its conscious appropriation. How then does the universal content arise? In this sense, Hegel hints at a specific form of ethical cultivation, one that results from the integration of three elements: interest, memory, and active position-taking. Without interest, the life of citizens is a life of political nullity and boredom. Hegel's idea is that ethical life offers individuals the conditions of possibility for developing concrete identities, i.e. not just as subjects but also and fundamentally as persons. Ethical life does so by providing social contexts that help to shape character and to train subjective feelings within and in dialectical relation to historically situated institutions. It is only when the interest in character formation fades and subjective feelings take over that the natural death of the state occurs. Along with interest, institutions depend on the capacity of each citizen to be the bearer of a *Sinngebung* process that acknowledges and recognises the rationality of the processes at stake. As Hegel claims: «To this extent, habit is part of ethical life as it is of philosophical thought also, since such thought demands that mind be trained against capricious fancies, and that these be broken and overcome to leave the way clear for rational thinking» (PR § 151).

The reference to the relation between habit and philosophical thought is particularly relevant, given that in the sections on psychology of the *Encyclopaedia* Hegel has shown that memory is the habit of thought (Enz III §§ 461-464). Hegel arguably suggests that habit is part of ethical life just like memory belongs to philosophical thought. Memory is a robust and cognitive form of habit, which enables thought by internalising the mechanism of language acquisition. In doing so, memory turns images and symbols into linguistic relations according to a model of sedimentation, whereby language is first passively learnt and then employed by the mind to express itself in more developed and conscious forms (such as philosophical thought). Likewise, inhabiting the social and political space requires a form of collective memory that turns an essential content (the constitution) into a language that can be shared and communicated. It is by acknowledging (or by not acknowledging) customs and norms that individuals inhabit the state, thereby instituting a shared feeling of ethical trust. In this sense, habit is part of ethical life in that it corresponds to inhabiting the public space in a responsible way, namely by appropriating its contents and by taking a position towards them.

The cultivation of interest, memory, and position-taking makes possible ethical trust as a form of ethical disposition. To be sure, Hegel stresses that inner dispositions (*Gesinnung*) make ethical life substantial and concrete

(Enz III § 515). However, the concept of *Gesinnung* is quite a complex concept that appears in Kant's moral philosophy as well as in Kant's philosophy of religion. For Kant, *Gesinnung* is a form of conviction that arises when we assent to something because of our adherence to principles (i.e. maxims). *Gesinnung* is a form of principled conviction that informs the individual stance of position-taking. It is by holding certain principles as true that individuals develop moral attitudes. Kant also distinguishes between two different types of convictions: *Überzeugung*, which is a form of assent that has subjective sufficiency and it is intersubjectively valid, and a more specific form of *Gesinnung* that refers to the subjective state that accompanies the acquisition of a principled attitude²⁵. For Kant, the disposition (*Gesinnung*) to conform with the moral law out of respect for the law is consciousness of a continuing propensity to observe the law, even though this involves conflicts with feelings and transgressions (KrPV [128] 103). The cultivation of moral disposition remains an endless progress, which may not be always universally communicated, while its affirmations and convictions (*Überzeugungen*) are.

For Hegel, instead, ethical conviction is both a theoretical and practical commitment. In section 515 of the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel stresses that the *Gesinnung* coincides with the *Wissen* of substance and with the identity of collective interests, taken as a totality. Inwood translates this passage as follows: «The *disposition* [*Gesinnung*] of the individuals is *awareness* of the substance and of the identity of all their interests with the whole. [...] This is *trust*, the genuine, ethical disposition [*Gesinnung*]»²⁶. Having an ethical disposition means not only that one is cognisant of having a role in ethical life, but also that one needs to bring it forth through decisions and responsible participation. Citizens participate in the political sphere by communicating their intentions and by making these concrete and visible through their choices and actions. In this respect, it is significant that the notion of *Gesinnung* does not rule out conscious acknowledgment but rather combines the individual stance of position-taking with a more practical involvement in the interests of the community. These two aspects are necessary requisites of ethical trust, i.e. the bond that ties individuals together, both in relation to each other as well as to the community as a whole. For Hegel, ethical trust is

²⁵ S.R. Palmquist, *What is Kantian Gesinnung? On the Priority of Volition over Metaphysics and Psychology in Religion within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, in «Kantian Review», 20, 2 (2015), pp. 235-264.

²⁶ M. Inwood, *A Commentary on Hegel's Philosophy of Mind*, OUP, Oxford 2010, p. 228.

the opposite of blind rule-following, in that it depends on how citizens pursue their self-determination on the ground of their convictions and adherence to collective social bonds.

From this perspective, it appears that the difference between habit and trust in ethical life is founded on a common element, which consists in the cultivation of dispositions within the framework of subjective and objective *Bildung*. Habit is a necessary condition for any cultivation of disposition, and indeed, as noted by Lumsden and Pinkard, the word habit preserves in several languages an etymological connection to living and dwelling, for habits are «lived expressions of a posited material character and they are felt as such by the subjects»²⁷. However, when it comes to ethical life, the paradigm of bodily habituation does not suffice to justify trust in the state as a specific form of ethical disposition. While habituation in the Anthropology centres on the acquisition of self-identity at the level of sensibility, ethical trust involves the training of the will and its responsiveness to ethical content, such as laws and institutions, thereby underpinning personality and critical thought. In a way that reminds of the process of habit formation, ethical trust unifies and integrates this stance of position-taking towards ethical life, producing that feeling of being at home that causes lapses into comfort and sheer passivity when is devoid of conscious appropriation.

For Hegel, ethical trust represents the objective dimension of second nature, for it requires the internalisation of reflective and deliberative abilities in order to provide subjectivity with personality and commitment. Yet, just like habit is permeable and open to external solicitations, likewise trust makes us vulnerable towards others and the social sphere, exposing us to the constant and never ending effort of cultivating responsibility and revising or changing attitudes. This is why ethical trust cannot be mistaken with safety or security. While we walk the streets in the night being confident that – whatever bad things may happens to us (e.g. robbery or aggression) – we can appeal to justice, this does not guarantee that freedom is realised in the state. Indeed, safety can be the result of a higher level of security and control that hinders freedom. Unlike the habit of feeling safe, ethical trust calls for the exercise of reflection and critical thinking.

This difference between habit and ethical trust explains why Hegel is keen to recall the ambiguity of habit in the *Philosophy of Right*, while pointing to a disposition towards ethical life that is stronger than subjective trust. The reason for this is that he was aware of the risks involved in taking habit

²⁷ S. Lumsden, *art. cit.*, p. 79.

tout court to be the natural bond of the state. In this respect, I believe that Hegel's philosophy compels us to reconsider the limits of habit, and to further appreciate the richness of ethical dispositions, such as ethical trust. For it is only when citizens inhabit the state by relying exclusively on passive imitation of practices that are devoid of acknowledgment and practical determination that political and social crises are the only possible outcome.

Conclusions

Hegel's view of habit and ethical life allows a reconsideration of the relation between nature and spirit not in terms of naturalism or anti-naturalism, but rather in light of the sense-making processes that inform institutions. Most notably, I have argued that the relation between first and second nature is neither a relation of emergence (i.e. priority of either spirit or nature) nor a top-down relation, but rather a generation of sense that occurs in both subjectivity and the state. Within subjectivity, second nature is a process of bodily habituation that centres on the acquisition of self-identity and underpins sensitivity to contexts cues and bodily abilities. In the case of ethical life, second nature stands for ethical trust, which is a way of inhabiting the state that is informed by interest, memory, and active position-taking. Far from coinciding with a vertical structure, ethical life corresponds to a horizontal dimension inhabited by subjects who own themselves as persons, and who responsibly participate in the community and the state. This suggests that the relation between habit and ethical life cannot be understood in terms of power relations, but only in terms of generative processes that call forth responsibility and conscious appropriation.

However, since the social and political dimensions of ethical life are not immune to error, as they are contingent and often inadequate to realise the concept of freedom, we should still ask – following O'Connor – whether freedom can be realised within a strict institutional space. As I have argued, the institutions Hegel refers to are not normatively constrained forms of life in Pippin's sense, but rather forms of inhabiting, which are subject to self-appropriation and position-taking. To be sure, individuals and ethical substance engage in reciprocal action and inter-action (Enz III § 540): ethical life provides subjects with an objective ground and a rational constitution, whereas citizens validate the rationality of their institutions through their actions. Still, it is true that Hegel's view of ethical life leaves little room for an understanding of how social and political change can be gradually intro-

duced and realised within the community and society at large. Hegel does not seem interested in exploring forms of resistance, as he maintains that constitutions that fail to institute ethical life are doomed to natural death in their entirety. Thus, it looks like no institution of ethical life would survive the disintegration of their relational unity.

The force of ethical life, however, lies not only in its grounding structure, i.e. in the fact that it provides a condition of possibility for the development of institutions. Ethical life is also a durable, historical formation that is shaped by culture and education. In this sense, Hegel's idea is that the reformation of customs is always possible as long as individuals cultivate their conscience and pursue the good. As he writes: «It is only in times when the world of actuality is hollow, spiritless, and unstable, that an individual may be allowed to take refuge from actuality in his inner life. Socrates lived at the time of the ruin of the Athenian democracy. His thought vaporized the world around him and he withdrew into himself to search there for the right and the good» (PR, § 138, Addition). While being aware of one's freedom as something that belongs only to me («as the *substance* within me» § 137, Addition) is detrimental to action, Hegel nonetheless acknowledges that the cultivation of subjective spirit will always be a viable solution to restoring or instituting new objective realities.

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Abstract

This paper explores the relation between habit and ethical life in Hegel's philosophy drawing on both Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit and the Philosophy of Right. For Hegel, habituality underlies the constitution of dispositions, including the sense of belonging to the the community and the state that is distinctive of ethical life. However, habit in itself does not suffice to motivate or to justify trust in the state. In this light, I reconsider the difference between habit and trust in ethical life by looking at the specific nexus that holds together institutions and citizens. This will lead to a reconsideration of ethical life as a form of inhabiting the social and political dimension that is informed by conscious acknowledgment and appropriation. Accordingly, I argue that while habituality in the Anthropology is crucial for the cultivation of sensibility, ethical trust involves the cultivation of interest, memory, as well as theoretical and practical position-taking.

Keywords: Habit; Trust; Ethical life; Hegel; Dispositions.

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