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Article

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Abstract
This article compares the concept of habitus, as formulated in the work of Mauss and Bourdieu, with the concept of habit, as formulated in the work of Merleau-Ponty and Dewey. The rationale for this, on one level, is to seek to clarify these concepts and any distinction that there may be between them – though the article notes the wide variety of uses of both concepts and suggests that these negate the possibility of any definitive definitions or contrasts. More centrally, however, the purpose of the comparison is to draw out a number of important issues and debates which, it is argued, further work must address if the concepts of habit and habitus are to continue to prove useful and illuminating in social science.

Keywords
Bourdieu, Dewey, habit, habitus, Mauss, Merleau-Ponty

In a key paper of the mid–1980s Charles Camic (1986) both describes how the once important and mainstream concept of habit was erased from the sociological lexicon between the 1940s and the 1970s and explores the reasons for this. In an aside, however, he also speculates that it may be primed for a comeback, in the form of the then little-known concept of habitus advocated by Pierre Bourdieu, who at that time was just beginning his rise to prominence in the world of English-speaking sociology. It is fair to conclude that Camic's speculation regarding 'the return of the repressed' has been borne out. 'Habitus' is an everyday term in much contemporary sociology, largely because of its use in the work of Bourdieu.

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Habitus is also a somewhat ambiguous concept, however. There is no single, authoritative and consistent definition of it in Bourdieu's work. He continually revises it in order to both address criticisms and meet the demands raised by his successive empirical projects. Furthermore, Bourdieu is not the only theorist to have a concept of habitus. Mauss (1979), Weber (2004), Adorno (1976), Husserl (1973, 1990), Elias (1996) and Deleuze (2004), to name only the best-known writers, all develop and use a concept of habitus in their work. And, though there are similarities, their versions differ. Finally, as any number of informal conference conversations and student consultations both attest, a nagging question remains as to the difference between 'habitus' and the more familiar 'habit'? Are they the same? If not, what is the difference?

It is tempting to try to answer these questions and address these ambiguities by seeking out authoritative definitions but that is not possible and it is perhaps not quite as desirable as we might at first believe. Not only are we faced with different histories of usage and an absence of any obvious meta-criteria by which we might decide between them but these different uses raise substantive theoretical, philosophical and empirical questions which cannot, or at least should not, be circumvented by recourse to the authority of this or that tradition or thinker. Habit and habitus are question-begging concepts and we have more to gain to by addressing these questions than by foreclosing them through reference to intellectual authorities.

The aim of this article is to open up some of these questions and begin to explore them. It is framed, however, at least initially, as an attempt to address the above-mentioned question regarding the difference between 'habitus' and 'habit'. I begin by considering accounts of the differences by Bourdieu and Mauss respectively. This is followed by a discussion of the manner in which the concept of habit fell out of favour and was denigrated by sociologists in the latter half of the 20th century, and also much earlier by some philosophers. This denigration, I suggest, informs the efforts of Mauss, Bourdieu and perhaps also Weber and Husserl to offer an alternative to 'habit' in the form of habitus. Finally, I question the distinctions suggested by Mauss and Bourdieu through a discussion of the exploration of 'habit' in the respective works of Merleau-Ponty and Dewey. Both are aware of the denigration of 'habit' but rather than reject or replace it each elects to revise and rehabilitate it, and they do so in a manner which parallels Mauss's and Bourdieu's respective conceptions of habitus.

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On one level this challenges the distinction that Mauss and Bourdieu argue for and problematizes the idea that there is any difference between habit and habitus, properly conceived. More importantly, however, Merleau-Ponty and Dewey each explore the concept of habit in considerable detail, engaging it in far greater depth than either Mauss or Bourdieu, raising questions that the latter, at best, gloss over and problematizing assumptions that the latter tend to take for granted. It is these questions and problematizations that form my main focus in the article. While I tend to side with Merleau-Ponty and Dewey against Mauss and Bourdieu, where their accounts differ, my main concern is to raise questions and to problematize our habitual use of 'habit' and 'habitus' in order to encourage further discussion of issues that can easily be glossed over when we use these concepts and, notwithstanding the exegetic nature of the article, perhaps also to discourage any attempt to short-circuit those discussions by recourse to 'the word' of any particular intellectual authority, be that Mauss, Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty, Dewey or anybody else.

Habit and Habitus: What's the Difference?

The short answer to the above question is that it depends upon whose concept of habitus and whose concept of habit we are referring to. I have already noted that 'habitus' has been formulated in a variety of different ways by different philosophers and theorists. The same is true of 'habit' and the case of 'habit' is further complicated by the fact that it belongs to everyday language, wherein its meaning is variable and imprecise. The very fact that some academics have posited a concept, 'habitus', when there is a concept of 'habit' in everyday usage, suggests that they at least believe that there is an important difference, however, and in the case of both Bourdieu and Mauss this difference is spelled out. I will take their respective explanations as my point of departure.

Bourdieu spells out the difference in a footnote to *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. Having just discussed the inventive role of habitus, he writes that:

> One of the reasons for the use of the term habitus is the wish to set aside the common conception of habit as a mechanical assembly or preformed programme, as Hegel does when in the *Phenomenology of Mind* he speaks of 'habit as dexterity'. (Bourdieu, 1977: 218, note 47)

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'Habit', Bourdieu is suggesting, denotes mechanical behaviour, a stimulus–response reflex, whereas 'habitus' implies a flexible disposition which, though pre-reflective, remains commensurate with purposive action and in no way precludes intelligence, understanding, strategy or knowledge on the part of the actor. Habitus, as the reference to 'dexterity' suggests, entails competence and know-how. It captures the skilled activity of the expert player rather than the conditioned response of the lab rat. The footballer who moves instinctively into the right position on the pitch, arriving just as the ball does and at exactly the right angle to it to put it in the back of the net, all without having to think reflectively about doing so, exemplifies this, as Bourdieu's (1992) description of habitus as a 'feel for the game' suggests. To anticipate a later point, however, note that his reference to Hegel indicates that some writers, rather than abandoning 'habit' as an overly mechanical conception, have elected to work with it, specifying a non-mechanical use of it ('habit as dexterity'). Hegel, Bourdieu seems to suggest, thinks of habit much as he, Bourdieu, thinks of habitus.

In a similar vein, in his celebrated paper on body techniques, Mauss argues that such techniques are habitus rather than habits:

> I have had this notion of the social nature of '*the habitus*' for many years. Please note that I use the Latin word – it should be understood in France – *habitus*. The word translates infinitely better than '*habitude*' (habit or custom), the '*exis*', the 'acquired ability' and 'faculty' of Aristotle (who was a psychologist). It does not designate those metaphysical *habitudes*, that mysterious 'memory', the subject of volumes of short and famous theses. These 'habits' do not vary just with individuals and their imitations; they vary between societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges. In them we should see the techniques and work of collective and individual practical reason rather than, in the ordinary way, merely the soul and its repetitive faculties. (Mauss, 1979: 101, original emphasis)

Habitus, Mauss explains here, translates Aristotle's (1976) 'exis' (or hexis). It suggests 'acquired ability' rather than 'repetitive faculties'. Indeed, it suggests 'practical reason'. To acquire habitus is to acquire means of knowing, handling and dealing with the world. The body techniques that Mauss enumerates are not merely mechanical behaviours, he is arguing, but rather techniques which afford the actor an understanding of some aspect of their world, manifest in their mastery

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over it. Swimming techniques are not simply physical movements, for example. They embody a practical understanding of buoyancy and an ability to stay afloat and move around in deep water. They afford mastery over a particular type of environment. Likewise, learning to type entails acquisition of knowledge of the position of the various keys. The actor may not be able to say or otherwise bring to consciousness the location of a specific letter on the keyboard but their finger will reach out to the right key without hesitation. Habitus involve know-how, practical knowledge and understanding; practical reason. And, to reiterate, Mauss contrasts this with habit and habitude, which, he implies, denote rigidly repetitive behaviours. Like Bourdieu, Mauss rejects 'habit' as an overly mechanical concept and embraces 'habitus' as an alternative.

Mauss means something specifically social and indeed sociological by habitus too, however, and again he apparently believes that this something is not adequately captured by the concept of habit. Habitus (actually he reverts to 'habits', in scare quotes) vary not only between individuals, he argues, but between 'societies, educations, proprieties and fashions, prestiges'. His point is that 'habit' suggests individual variation, whereas habitus, without precluding individual-level variation, suggests variation between social groups. We all have individual habits but habitus are social facts, in Durkheim's (1982) sense. This point must be briefly unpacked.

The body techniques that Mauss describes are shaped by biology and other 'facts' of the natural world. How and indeed that we walk reflects our anatomical structure (e.g. two legs located directly beneath our trunk) and must negotiate the facts of, among other things, gravity and the nature of the surfaces we walk upon (e.g. high heels on a pavement require a different approach to bare feet on soft sand). Likewise, body techniques may reflect psychological 'facts'. They may, for example, embody a mood (e.g. when we walk aggressively) or purpose (e.g. walking quietly to avoid making a noise). Whatever these variations and conditions, however, Mauss is interested in social variations, the variations which reveal habitus as social facts. He claims to be able to distinguish, for example, between French and American styles of walking.

This discussion of habitus belongs squarely to the Durkheimian tradition of sociology (Mauss was Durkheim's nephew). It might even be read as an attempt to complement Durkheim's (1915)

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concept of 'collective representations' with a sense of collective pre- or non-representational forms of knowledge and understanding. Body techniques and other habitus belong to the collective repertoire of practical reason within a particular group.

Notwithstanding these sociological ambitions, however, as he notes himself, Mauss bases his account on Aristotle, whose conception of 'hexis' was translated from Greek to the Latin 'habitus' by the scholastics (the English translation usually being 'disposition'). And his usage, though 'sociologized', resonates with the basic Aristotelian account. There are other terms (than habitus or hexis) that Mauss could have appropriated from Aristotle to capture and further theorize body techniques: 'ethos', like hexis, is often translated as 'habit', for example, and 'techne' perhaps better captures the aspect of craft, art or skill that Mauss is suggesting. Conversely, on some translations 'hexis' suggests more than just acquired disposition. Although it is often translated as 'acquired disposition' or 'acquired habit' (e.g. Hughes, 2001: 224), it can also imply a 'state' or state of readiness, which perhaps isn't fully captured and certainly isn't explored by Mauss. This is not the place to discuss Aristotle and *a fortiori* the translation of his key concepts into Latin and English, however, and I am certainly not the person to lead any such discussion. The key point is that the image Mauss conjures, of actors in different social communities acquiring from those communities the dispositions and skills constitutive of practical reason, accords with that conjured by Aristotle (1976) in his *Ethics*, even if most contemporary English translators, ignoring Mauss's distinction, seem content to translate hexis as 'habit' rather than 'habitus'.

The social facticity of habitus is central to Bourdieu too, of course. *Distinction*, in particular, offers an empirical investigation of the social distribution of tastes, understood as habitus, and much of Bourdieu's other work on habitus focuses upon their social location (Bourdieu, 1984). Furthermore, Bourdieu uses 'habitus' in a structurationist type argument regarding the reproduction of social structures. The actor incorporates social structures as habitus and perpetuates them, by force of habit, in their practices. Habitus are 'structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures' (Bourdieu, 1992: 53). Indeed, in *Reproduction* he borrows the analogy of genes, suggesting that habitus contain the genetic 'instructions' for the reproduction of the social body, much as genes

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do in relation to biological organisms (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1996). Habitus have a key (reproductive) social function.

Before we move on it is important to acknowledge that not all accounts of habitus foreground the social dimension. Although phenomenological reflections on habitus and habits generally reflect upon their social distribution (e.g. Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schutz, 1972),[1] much as Mauss and Bourdieu do, Husserl (1973, 1990), for example, uses 'habitus' in a more individualistic way, exploring the way in which perceptual, cognitive and action schemas take shape within the biography of an individual.[2] Husserl is not oblivious to socially shared traditions and cultures of thought. In one of his best-known later works he explores the intellectual tradition of Europe and lays the grounds for a cultural history of geometry, in both cases exploring the way in which the sedimented collective intellectual work of one generation forms an increasingly tacit basis of assumptions from which the next generation begin their own work (Husserl, 1970). His use of 'habitus', which is contemporary with this 'historical turn', retains an individualistic emphasis, however. As noted earlier, there is no one concept of habitus but many.

Habit in History

In what follows I am going to take the two key aspects of habitus identified above, their belonging to practical reason and their social facticity, and explore them in relation to two conceptions of habit which, I will argue, incorporate them to the same extent as we find in Mauss and Bourdieu, thereby demonstrating my earlier point that the difference between habit and habitus depends upon whose version of the concept one is referring to. Before I do this, however, I want to further explore the rationale for formulating a separate conception of habitus by reference to the history of the concept of habit in both social science and philosophy. The reason that writers such as Mauss and Bourdieu argue for a conception of habitus over a conception of habit, I believe, is because the concept of habit has been distorted and on this basis discredited in the course of intellectual history. It is probable that these particular writers recognize this distortion and adopt 'habitus' for purely strategic reasons; that is to say, they recognize that 'habit' need not imply mechanical repetition but recognize also that this is how it often is conceived and so use

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'habitus' to avoid misunderstanding. Whether or not this is so, however, the distinction that each seeks to draw, as I have outlined above, rests upon a historical denigration of 'habit'. 'Habit' used to do the job, in both philosophy and everyday parlance, that 'habitus' is now called upon to do, and used to translate Aristotle's 'hexis' relatively straightforwardly. The changes that have undermined this position have come in two phases.

The most recent and straightforward phase, as identified by Camic (1986), centres upon the rise of physiological and psychological behaviourism, in the work of Pavlov (1911) among others, and the tendency within behaviourism to conceptualize habits as conditioned reflexes. This is not the place to rehearse the many criticisms of this form of behaviourism. It is clearly discredited as an adequate account of human behaviour. Suffice it to say, first, that 'habit' is often identified with mechanical behavioural responses of individual organisms, qua individual, because of the successful colonization of the concept by the early behaviourists; and, second, that sociologists in the post-behaviourist period have tended to reject or ignore the concept of habit because of this (Camic, 1986). In particular, Camic suggests that Talcott Parsons wrote 'habit' out of his canon-defining account of the various sociological classics; specifically in his accounts of Durkheim, who refers to habit frequently in his work, and Weber, who develops a conception of habitus. Parsons redefined the sociological field in the middle of the 20th century and, though 'habit' was not a big issue for him, his redefinition excluded it as a useful term. Parsons' sociology perpetuates the Aristotelian image of societies as communities who train their members to belong but it removes all reference to habit, habitus or hexis in the process.

If social scientists had worries about the overly mechanical nature of behaviourism and its habits, however, philosophers had been worried for longer, and not just about behaviourism. Certain key modern philosophical currents are centred upon worries regarding human science and its potential to threaten prevailing images of human beings, the implications of those images (e.g. regarding moral responsibility) and the discipline of philosophy itself.

Descartes' (1969) mind/body dualism is a useful way in to this point. Although Descartes claims to discover this distinction through rigorous philosophical meditation, and though its veracity as a distinction does rest upon the arguments put forward in those

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meditations (and others that might develop them), it is commonly acknowledged that Cartesian dualism represents an effort to rescue a religious conception of the human soul from the new science of matter that was emerging at Descartes' time of writing and which seemed likely to explain, mechanically, all physical behaviour, including human behaviour. Descartes, who was a pioneer of this science as well as a philosopher, sought to rescue the religiously inspired self-image of the age by locating the soul and essence of the human being in a mental substance quite distinct from the physical substance (matter) defined and analysed by, among others, his near contemporaries, Galileo and Newton;[3] a substance whose properties and behaviour could not be explained in the terms of the new science of matter. The human body is a machine like any other, Descartes believed, but the human essence does not lie in this body. It lies in the mind that occupies this body, a mind which is not mechanical.

This argument clearly sets the scene for an ejection of habit from philosophical consideration because the irreducibly embodied nature of habit consigns it to 'the body' and thereby to the mechanistic realm, the realm of physical science not philosophy. It was Kant (2007) and other continental philosophers of the Enlightenment, according to Carlisle and Sinclair (2008), who more explicitly took exception to 'habit', however. Where the British empiricists, such as Hume (1984), embraced 'habit', Kant rejected it, at least for philosophical purposes. Mirroring Descartes to some extent, Kant opposed the naturalism and empiricism that identify human beings as just one more object within the natural world, and he rejected 'habit' because, for him, it belonged to that worldview. 'Habit' might belong to the empirical nature of human beings qua physical things but, for Kant, our knowledge of that realm presupposes a realm which precedes and defines it. It is this transcendental realm which is the proper locus of philosophical enquiry for Kant, and it is by means of this dualism of the transcendental and the empirical that habit is excluded from philosophical reflection within Kantian and neo-Kantian thought.

Interestingly however, significant figures within the Kantian and 'transcendental' traditions, including Weber within sociology and (the later) Husserl (1973, 1990), do afford a role to acquired dispositions within their general approaches. And, intriguingly, each labels these dispositions 'habitus' (although Weber uses 'habit' too; Camic,

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1986). In this context the distinction between habitus and habit perhaps reflects the underlying dualism of the transcendental and empirical which, according to Foucault (1973), structures thought about 'man' (*sic*) in the modern episteme. Habit belongs to the empirical domain and to a scientific conception of human beings, habitus to the transcendental domain and to a philosophical conception. Or rather, 'habitus' is used to capture the habitual basis of human perception, thought and motor activity in a discourse which explicitly disavows the empiricism and naturalism with which the concept of 'habit' is tinged.

As Foucault also suggests, however, this dualism cannot be sustained. Nor need it be. Developments in human science, as Merleau-Ponty[4] argues, have seen them increasingly converge with arguments regarding mind and action in philosophy (and phenomenology in particular). The mechanical worldview, which no longer holds in much of natural science, certainly does not hold in much empirical social science and it is now possible to develop a philosophically sophisticated and acceptable model of human action and experience within a naturalistic framework (see Dewey, 1958; Merleau-Ponty, 1965).

With the collapse of the transcendental/empirical distinction comes the collapse of any rigid distinction between habit and habitus that might be constructed upon it. We can perhaps better understand why certain writers, particularly Husserl, opt for the language of habitus by reference to this distinction, but we have no justifiable basis upon which to sustain it. With this said we can turn to the idea of habit(us) as collective practical reason.

Habit(us), Practical Reason and Social Facticity

As noted above, Mauss and Bourdieu distinguish habit from habitus by suggesting that the former denotes mechanical, repetitive behaviours, while the latter captures purposive and intelligent dispositions which belong to the repertoire of practical reason. As I also suggested, however, other thinkers, seeking to theorize the dispositional aspect of human agency but confronted with the denigration of the concept of habit, have sought to rehabilitate it. Their accounts allow us to develop and deepen the relatively sketchy account offered by Bourdieu and Mauss.

The two most obvious examples are Merleau-Ponty (1962, 1965) and Dewey (1988). Both are key critics of behaviourism and its

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mechanistic worldview (Dewey, 1896; Merleau-Ponty, 1965) and both offer fascinating accounts of ‘habit’ which overlap with and deepen the conceptions of habit(us) posited by Mauss and Bourdieu.

Nature, Second Nature and Material Culture

Habituation is part of human nature for Merleau-Ponty. It is a power to conserve structures of perception, communication and action which prove useful to us, thereby enhancing agency. Moreover, it lends our lives continuity. My self and life manifest continuity across time because and to the extent that they are rooted in habit, allowing me to pick up tomorrow what I began today. And habit lends this same continuity to collective history and culture. We are not just creatures of habit but also creatures of culture and fundamentally historical beings who reflect the historical epoch to which we belong in all that we do, think, perceive and say. We are only any of these things, however, in virtue of a body inclined and equipped to incorporate external patterns and conserve past experience in the form of know-how and schemata:

> Although our body does not impose definite instincts upon us, as it does other animals, it does at least give our life the form of generality, and develops our personal acts into stable dispositional tendencies. In this sense our nature is not long-established custom, since custom presupposes the form of passivity derived from nature. (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 146)

Indeed, in places Merleau-Ponty appears to challenge any hard and fast distinction between nature and culture, viewing culture as a manifestation of the plasticity and room for invention within nature itself, a plasticity and inventiveness that mean that culture, too, is always ‘in process’:

> What defines man is not the capacity to create a second nature – economic, social or cultural – beyond biological nature; it is rather the capacity of going beyond created structures in order to create others. (1965: 175)

This is mirrored in the way in which human innovations acquire (relatively) durable form in material culture:

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> behaviour patterns settle into that nature, being deposited in the form of a cultural world. Not only have I a physical world, not only do I live in the midst of earth, air and water, I have around me roads, plantations, villages, streets, churches, implements, a bell, a spoon, a pipe. (1962: 346)

And, through habit, such material artefacts can become a part of our self and agency; extensions of our self. Merleau-Ponty famously discusses the example of a blind man whose stick becomes a part of his corporeal schema, for example. The man does not perceive the stick, rather he perceives with it. The stick becomes a perceptual organ and a part of the man's self and agency.

Though only briefly touched upon by Merleau-Ponty, these observations raise important questions for our concepts of habit and habitus and suggest developments which represent an advance upon the positions of Mauss and Bourdieu. Three points are particularly important. First, in contrast to Mauss and Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty offers a dynamic account of the process in which habits are formed, reformed and, in some cases, extinguished across time, exploring this process and identifying its mechanisms. Habits, for Merleau-Ponty, are structures of behaviour, attaching the embodied actor to their world, which take shape and are reshaped (and sometimes extinguished) in the dynamic and always ongoing process of interaction between actor and world. They form the actor but are equally formed by way of the actor's engagement in specific interactions and the resourcefulness of the actor (qua creative and resourceful organic structure) in handling novel situations. Bourdieu acknowledges that habitus evolve, at least in his later work (e.g. Bourdieu, 2000), but offers no equivalent or competing account of how or why, and his tendency to reduce agency to habitus renders it difficult to explain this dynamic. The formation of habitus, at both the individual and collective levels, is at best glossed over.

Second, Merleau-Ponty's questioning of the nature/culture distinction, while insufficiently elaborated to be compelling, is interesting, resonates with arguments of more contemporary thinkers, such as Latour (2007), who have also questioned the distinction, and calls into question the Durkheimian ontology, which grounds the concept of the habitus as posited by both Bourdieu and Mauss. Though naturalistic in outlook and insistent that both the psychological and social worlds are emergent phenomena, arising from the physical world, Durkheim (1915, 1974) posits a relatively hard distinction

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between primary (biological) and secondary (cultural) nature, which Mauss and Bourdieu appear to adhere to in their conceptions of habitus but which Merleau-Ponty would appear to want to challenge.

Third, again paralleling developments in the work of Latour (2007) and simultaneously differing from Bourdieu and Mauss, Merleau-Ponty both draws a parallel between habits and the modification of the material world effected by means of the development of material culture, and considers how certain of those modifications (such as the blind man's stick) are incorporated into the habitual ways of being of the actor, modifying and reconfiguring their agency.

Habit as Dexterity

The acquisition and formation of habits is not mechanical for Merleau-Ponty. A habit is not, as it was for Pavlov (1911), a causal pathway between a given stimulus and response. Physically identical stimuli do not cause physically identical responses; actors respond to the meaning of events, as they understand it, and their responses are intelligent and tailored to the exigencies of the situation:

> Any mechanistic theory runs up against the fact that the learning process is systematic; the subject does not weld together individual movements and individual stimuli but acquires the general power to respond with a certain type of solution to situations of a general form. (1962: 142)

Indeed, habits involve meaning, understanding and (practical) knowledge:

> We say that the body has understood and habit been cultivated when it has absorbed a new meaning and assimilated a fresh core of significance. (1962: 146)
>
> We said earlier that it is the body which understands in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense datum under an idea, and if the body is an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of 'understand' and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience harmony between what we aim at and what is given, between intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in the world. (1962: 144)

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> If habit is neither a form of knowledge nor an involuntary action what then is it? It is knowledge in the hands which is forthcoming only when bodily effort is made, and cannot be formulated in detachment from that effort. The subject knows where the letters are on the typewriter as we know where one of our limbs is, through knowledge bred of familiarity which does not give us a position in objective space. (1962: 144)

These comments arise in a context where Merleau-Ponty has been discussing his opposition to both empiricism and rationalism. The rationalist is right to criticize the empiricist for failing to recognize that the world is meaningful for the subject and that the subject, in some respects, imposes that meaning upon the world, he notes, but wrong to understand this in terms of a disembodied constituting consciousness. Meaning-making is achieved through practical and embodied activity within an institutional framework (such as language). Furthermore, the rationalist, particularly Descartes, is wrong to conceive of thought as the essence of human being. Human beings think and reflect, of course, but we are primarily practical beings; part of the material world and active within it (see also Csordas, 1994). Objects exist and have meaning for us only in the context of and relative to this praxis, as a function of their use or practical significance for us. Habit arises when we arrive at a new (relatively stable) way of handling or using the world, which in turn then constitutes its meaning differently for us, and it consists in this. Insofar as these habits are shared institutions, moreover, insofar as they derive from a common social repertoire, then the meanings in question are intersubjective. To acquire the linguistic habits of one's society, for example, is to gain access to a world of intersubjective meaning and symbolic culture.

Likewise, in a move which mirrors aspects of Wittgenstein's (1953) and Ryle's (1949) respective critiques of Cartesianism, Merleau-Ponty challenges the mentalistic assumption that 'thought', 'understanding', 'knowledge', etc. are inner mental events merely *expressed* by way of practical activity. Understanding is not an event lying behind or preceding our capacity to do certain sorts of things, he suggests, it *consists in* our capacity to do those things. To understand something is to acquire a way of doing something, a habit which is embodied. To understand calculus, for example, is to acquire the ability to do it. And this implicates knowledge, not in the discursive sense (although that too consists in a practical capacity to

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do) but rather in the form of what Ryle (1949) calls ‘know-how’; the practical ability to do something. Likewise, the typist ‘knows’ where the keys are on the typewriter in the respect that their finger extends in the right direction when the demand arises, even if they could not say or otherwise bring that position to consciousness. Habit is knowledge and understanding.

In a similar vein, Dewey opens his book-length exploration of habit with the claim that:

> habits are arts. They involve skill of sensory and motor organs, cunning or craft, and objective materials. They assimilate objective energies, and eventuate in command of an environment. They require order, discipline and manifest technique. (Dewey, 1988: 15–16)

Habits emerge in interactions between the actor, other actors and the wider physical environment on this account. And they undergird the classifications that we make, our tastes, moral and aesthetic sensibilities, intellectual operations, perceptions and actions:

> Concrete habits do all the perceiving, recognizing, imagining, recalling, judging, conceiving and reasoning that is done. . . . We may indeed be said to *know how* by means of our habits. (Dewey, 1988: 124, original emphasis)

Indeed our very selfhood and agency comprise a structure of habits:

> habits formed in the process of exercising biological aptitudes are the sole agents of observation, recollection, foresight and judgment: a mind or consciousness or soul in general which performs these operations is a myth.
>
> The doctrine of a single, simple and indissoluble soul was the cause and effect of a failure to recognize that concrete habits are the means of knowledge and thought. (Dewey, 1988: 123)

Whatever consistency can be identified in our conduct and experience derives from interlocking and mutually reinforcing habits.

This is not to deny that habits can be changed both through spontaneous and pre-reflective improvisation and also as a result of deliberative changes to our course of action. Our environment is such that our habitual tendencies are under constant threat from accidents and contingencies that undermine their mastery of it (see also Dewey, 1958). We never revise all of our habits at once, however, nor could

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we, as our very agency depends upon them. Indeed, the revision of certain habits will always depend upon other habits.

Interestingly, Bourdieu (1977) too recognizes what he calls 'crises', where habitus cease to suffice as a basis for action. Such moments are relatively rare and involve major social and political upheaval for Bourdieu, however. They are both more mundane and more common for Dewey, stemming from the fundamental contingency of our everyday worlds. We constantly face disruptions to some aspects of the taken-for-granted world that our habits are attuned to, such that we are always re-adapting and reforming some of our habits. Furthermore, Bourdieu's efforts to explain what happens in crises draw him back to the above-mentioned dualities of philosophical thought which he and we are trying to avoid:

> habitus is one principle of production of practices amongst others and although it is undoubtedly more frequently in play than any other – 'We are empirical', says Leibniz, 'in three-quarters of our actions' – one cannot rule out that it may be superseded in certain circumstances – certainly in situations of crisis which adjust the immediate adjustment of habitus to field – by other principles, such as rational and conscious computation. (Bourdieu, 1990: 108)

The implication, apparently, is that we are one-quarter transcendental. And there is also an implication both that habitus and reflective thought are mutually exclusive and that the latter is absent in much of our action. Dewey (1988) offers a more plausible case when he recognizes that the intellectual functions which allow us to deal with crises (and which belong, like all that we are, to our 'empirical being') are themselves learned and belong to the habitual structures of our everyday life and activity, working alongside them in much of our day-to-day activity. Reform of one habit or set of habits, for Dewey, necessarily mobilizes other habits.

It is clear from the material discussed in this section that Merleau-Ponty and Dewey offer a very different conception of habit to the one criticized by both Mauss and Bourdieu. The concept of habit offered by Merleau-Ponty and Dewey is as much opposed to the behaviourist account of reflexes as are Mauss and Bourdieu. It is important to add, moreover, that, in contrast to both Mauss and Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty and Dewey engage extensively with the behaviourist literature (theoretical and empirical), taking it apart claim by claim and, in

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Merleau-Ponty's case, rebuilding the concept of habit through a detailed engagement with the empirical psychological literature. Furthermore, as noted, Merleau-Ponty's concept of habit is also built in the context of a detailed engagement with the philosophical traditions referred to in the second section of this article (Descartes, Hume, Kant, etc.). In this respect Merleau-Ponty and Dewey each give their conception of habit a much stronger grounding than we find in either Bourdieu or Mauss, and they provide a crucial resource for anyone wishing to deploy 'habit' for sociological purposes.

They do not agree entirely with Bourdieu and Mauss, however, and the differences are important. I have already noted that they resist the dualistic thinking which Bourdieu, in the final instance, falls back into and I return to this shortly when I discuss the relationship of habit to freedom. Before I turn to freedom, however, it is important to consider how Dewey extends the account of the formation and shaping of habits that we find in embryonic form in Merleau-Ponty, discussed briefly above, but which, I have suggested, is absent and may be difficult to achieve within the constraints of Bourdieu's approach.

Merleau-Ponty, I suggested, conceives of habit formation in terms of ongoing interactions between actor and world; habits are the sediments of actor–world interactions and of particular interaction strategies which have proved successful for the actor and have consequently been conserved within their connection to the world. Dewey agrees but adds to this in two respects. First, he makes explicit and thematizes the fact, acknowledged but underdeveloped in Merleau-Ponty, that these interactions usually involve other human actors, as well as non-human elements, and that habits, as such, emerge from and belong to the collective life of human beings. Habits take shape in the to and fro of social interaction. They are social facts even where, in some cases, they vary between individuals. Second, as noted, he views everyday life as beset by continual crises, on a small scale as well as the (much less frequent) major crises noted by Bourdieu, which motivate both a continual recourse to habits of reflection and a continual revision of certain habits. Putting these points together we might argue that the demands and unpredictability of social interaction are such, for Dewey, that a portion of our habits is always being short-circuited, forcing reflective intervention and reworking.

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Freedom

As the 'transcendental' references above suggest, Bourdieu appears to view habit as a constraint upon freedom which the actor is only liberated from during periods of crisis, and even then only temporarily. Again, both Dewey and Merleau-Ponty see things differently.

Habit is not an impediment to human freedom for Dewey, at least not necessarily. Habits are the structures that allow us to carry forward impulses to their consummation and which allow us, in deliberation, which is itself a habit, both to plan and to implement a plan. In this respect habit is a precondition of freedom and agency – although, of course, some habits may prove unnecessarily constraining: 'Not convention but stupid and rigid convention is the foe' (Dewey, 1988: 115). Furthermore, habit is a condition for the possibility of virtue, norms, values and such institutions as democracy, which facilitate political freedom and individual liberty at a collective level. There is no freedom without habit for Dewey.

These thoughts are echoed by Merleau-Ponty in a stinging attack which he makes upon Sartre's (1969) conception of freedom. Sartre's attempt to put freedom before any anchorage that the human subject might have to the world is ultimately self-defeating, for Merleau-Ponty, because it reduces freedom to indeterminacy and randomness. Freedom is only meaningful, he argues, for a being who has relatively stable preferences and projects which they can pursue over time, and it is only possible for a being who enjoys a sufficient degree of knowledge of and mastery over self and world to be able to realize those projects successfully; all of which presupposes habit. Freedom requires the anchorage in the world that habit provides and is meaningless in its absence.

Collective Habits and Structuration

As a final point of comparison I want to consider the collective and properly sociological dimension of habit, as posited in the work of Dewey and Merleau-Ponty. Dewey's account is thoroughly sociological. He writes extensively about collective habits, for example, equating them with customs or conventions and observing that the relative segregation of social groups leads them, as Bourdieu's many studies suggests, to develop distinct (collective) habits:

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> segregated classes develop their own customs, which is to say their own working morals. . . . There is no common ground, no moral understanding, no agreed upon standard of appeal. (Dewey, 1988: 58–9)

Dewey identifies a potential for conflict here between economic classes, ethnic and age groups – any opposing groups, in short, whose patterns of differential association and relative segregation cause them to generate different and distinct customs. Where William James (1892: 143), anticipating Bourdieu, believed that differences in group specific habits adjusted each to the hardships they would face (or not), making them content with their lot, and kept 'different social strata from mixing', on both counts saving 'the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor', Dewey believes that a degree of social mixing is inevitable and that where it happens differences in collective habits will come to the fore, often leading to conflict.

At the same time, however, he echoes James's (1892: 143) contention that habit is the 'enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent'. Habits and customs are constantly in process, subject to revision and change, for Dewey, but they provide the underlying continuity of social life. Each new generation, while it will resist the imposition of collective habits, giving rise to conflict and change in the manner discussed above, assimilates a good portion of them in the process. And this is essential to the reproduction of society: 'a human society is always starting afresh. It is always in process of renewing, and it endures only because of renewal' (Dewey, 1988: 69). Habit is a key mechanism in this process of renewal, carrying the practices of the past forward into the present, minute by minute, year by year, in a largely unnoticed and unquestioned manner. As Merleau-Ponty also suggests, all social and cultural structures rest in the habits of those who do them and would immediately disappear, along with much else besides, were the human tendency to and capacity for habituation ever to cease.

Dewey's work closely prefigures that of Bourdieu here, though he offers none of the empirical support which Bourdieu offers in abundance. Bourdieu's work is clearly superior in this respect. Moreover, Bourdieu develops the notion of collective habitus further than Dewey by way of the notion of homology; that is, he purports to identify structural similarities beyond or perhaps beneath the clusters of

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habits that he identifies with specific groups, and in some instances he appears to use his concept of habitus to mark out these deep-rooted similarities. 'Habitus' does not refer to this or that concrete practice, on this reading, but rather to a stylistic or ethical consistency apparent across a range of practices insofar as they are enacted by a particular social group. One of his more concrete examples of this is focused upon the tight-lippedness which he claims to have identified across a range of bourgeois uses of the mouth (e.g. eating, speaking and laughing) and which he contrasts with the 'slack-mouthed' pattern of the working class. The point is often more abstract and more vague, however, centring upon claims regarding both the consistency that is evident across a range of a particular group's practices and the link of that pattern to the group's orientation towards and manner of being-in-the-world. Working-class habitus, for example, are not only those concrete habitus found to be associated with the working class (and thereby with one another) in social surveys, but also habitus which manifest a deeper aesthetic or ethical similarity.

The concept of homology has been subject to extensive critique in other contexts (Middleton, 2002: 147–56) and it remains an open question whether Bourdieu's use and development of it is a strength of his approach or a weakness. Whichever it is, however, it does distinguish his version of habitus to some extent from the notion of habit developed by Dewey.

On Dewey's side, however, his distinctiveness lies in his aforementioned account of the manner in which habits are generated in the context of group life, by way of interaction between group members. Dewey identifies a mechanism to explain the skewed distribution of particular habits that Bourdieu's research observes but which, as I have suggested elsewhere (Crossley, 2011), it fails to adequately explain. Particular working-class fractions, for example, tend to share specific habits, in Dewey's view, because their members are disproportionately likely to interact with one another, generating relatively closed networks of mutual influence which, in turn, generate distinct habits and lifestyles. Bourdieu refuses to accept such accounts, rooted as they are in concrete networks of social interaction (Crossley, 2011), but he never fully explains why and offers no alternative beyond rather vague allusions to the effect of the distance of actors from 'necessity' (i.e. the extent to which they are liberated

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from basic concerns of physical survival) – a factor which may well explain certain crude class differences in lifestyle but which fails to explain either the many more subtle elements of class distinction or other forms of distinction, such as those attaching to age and gender, which are less directly connected to 'distance from necessity'.

The social being of habit is more difficult to tease out in Merleau-Ponty, not because he is any less a social and historical thinker – his philosophy is irreducibly social and historical in orientation (Crossley, 2004) – but because he tends to shift terms when discussing collective habits, from 'habit' to 'culture' and 'institution' among others. Habit is entirely social for Merleau-Ponty, however, in much the same way that it is for Dewey. Our individual habits arise in the context of interaction and relations with others, and what he variously describes as customs, culture and institutions are treated within his work as collective habits, being acquired, enacted and modified in these same interactions.

Furthermore, he insists that the relations which shape the context in which our habits are generated include relations of production. In a discussion of class and revolution, for example, he argues that class is not external to the actor but rather something that they carry 'within' in the form of habit: 'a way of being in the world within this institutional framework' (Merleau-Ponty, 1962: 443); a 'habit of reckoning with a fatum, or appointed order, which I do not respect but have to humour' (1962: 444); a 'style of living' shared with others in their social position which allows them, in a process leading to the formation of class consciousness, to perceive their similarity: 'not in virtue of some comparison, as if each of us lived primarily within himself [*sic*], but on the basis of our tasks and gestures' (1962: 444). Workers share a common position qua workers in relation to their bourgeois masters and also share common dispositions in virtue of their interactions and collective responses to their common position. This point clearly anticipates Bourdieu (1984).

Conclusion: Habit, Habitus and Beyond

As I noted at the outset of this article, its short conclusion is that the difference between the concepts of habit and habitus depends upon whose version of those concepts we are referring to. 'Habit' can be and has been used in ways which correspond more or less identically

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to the way that sociology's main advocates of 'habitus' have used that concept. But not everybody uses either concept in this way.

The difference between habit and habitus is much less important and has been less of a concern in this article, however, than the various debates and questions that are thrown up by a detailed comparison of their use and development in the work of Mauss, Bourdieu, Merleau-Ponty and Dewey. I have suggested at various points in the article, building upon and hopefully not repeating too much earlier work (e.g. Crossley, 2001, 2011), that Merleau-Ponty and Dewey develop their conceptions of habit in ways which variously ground and advance upon that suggested by Bourdieu. More central than this argument, however, has been my attempt to identify certain key problems and questions which, I believe, are central to the further development of our understanding of habit(us) in social science, and which should certainly take priority over exegetic endeavours to get to the heart of what this or that thinker really meant. I will conclude the article by outlining six of the issues arising from it which, I believe, call for further debate, analysis and evidence.

First, I noted that Merleau-Ponty's conception of habit calls into question the distinction between nature and nurture or first and second nature. His argument is too brief to be convincing but his position apparently differs from that of Bourdieu and raises a genuinely interesting question.

Second, Merleau-Ponty's concept of habit incorporates a consideration of non-human material objects which are, on occasion, incorporated into human agency. Again the reference is too brief to be persuasive but it is suggestive and it overlaps with claims in actor-network theory, opening up a possibility for dialogue with that body of theory.

A third debate centres upon the relation of habit to freedom. Is habit a precondition of human freedom, as Dewey and Merleau-Ponty both believe that it can be, or an impediment, as Bourdieu seems to imply? Clearly it can be an impediment in some cases but is it always and necessarily?

A fourth debate or set of debates centres upon the way in which habit(us) are generated and shaped both at an individual level and such that they cluster in particular social groups (and of course there is a perennial empirical question as to the extent to which particular groups are distinguished by particular habits and what those habits

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are). Dewey and Merleau-Ponty both locate the process of habit formation within the context of interaction between human actors and between those actors and their environments, accounting for their skewed distribution by reference to mutual influence between clusters of actors who are disproportionately linked in social networks. Bourdieu appears to disagree but it is not clear what credible alternative there is.

Fifth, there is a question of the extent to which such differences further segregate the actors in question, such that their paths do not cross and the likelihood of conflict between them is minimized, as Bourdieu and William James both seem to assume, or, alternatively, the extent to which contact is unavoidable such that these differences become a source of conflict, as Dewey suggests.

Finally, I will table the question of homology. Do the habits which cluster together and characterize particular groups manifest a consistency which, in turns, signals their attachment to a deeper orientation towards the world? If so, is it this deeper structure that merits the term 'habitus' and that, for sociological purposes at least, distinguishes habitus from habit?

Notes

1. Strictly speaking Merleau-Ponty uses the term 'habit', as I discuss later, and Schutz introduces the terminology of 'typification' and social 'stocks' of 'recipe knowledge'. The substance of their argument is a development of Husserl's ideas, however, and in particular his reflections upon habitus.
2. Schutz (1972) transposes this biographical focus into a focus upon socially shared 'typifications' and 'recipe knowledge'.
3. Descartes lived between 1596 and 1650, Galileo between 1564 and 1642 and Newton between 1642 and 1727. Descartes' *Meditations* were published in 1641, one year before Newton was born. This precludes Newton from having been an influence upon Descartes but it allows us to comprehend the type of science that Descartes was engaging with. Newton drew together and expounded systematically ideas that were current at Descartes' time of writing.
4. Merleau-Ponty is thinking of gestalt psychology in particular, and its conception of structured fields of experience, meaning and action. Interestingly 'structure' is key here for Merleau-Ponty,

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as it was for Foucault in the final sections of *The Order of Things* (1973) referred to here. Where Foucault believed that concepts of structure removed necessity for a concept of 'man', however, Merleau-Ponty strives to locate 'man' in structures and structure in 'man', maintaining a sense of subjectivity and agency.

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