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Rethinking the Double Law of Habit: James' Case

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Abstract In this paper I suggest to rethink the traditional double law of habit as a theoretical development of the co-presence of activity and passivity inherent to the concept of habit. My thesis is twofold: firstly, I will argue that speaking in terms of the double nature of habit is conceptually different from speaking in terms of the double law of habit because recognition of the former does not necessarily entail endorsement of the latter. Secondly, I will argue that the traditional formulation of the double law brings the risk of the dualism between activity and passivity of action, and the dualism between habit and will. In particular, I will look at James' *Principles of Psychology* as a relevant example: I will argue that James conceptualizes the double nature of habit through the notion of plasticity *without* formulating the double law of habit as developed by his predecessors.

Keywords William James. Habit. Double law of habit. Habituation. Joseph Butler.

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1 Introduction: From the Double Nature to the Double Law

There[1] seems to be basic agreement on the idea that the concept of habit entails structurally a kind of tension or paradox (Pedwell 2016, 9): on the one hand, the concept conjures the sense of ease and facility of action, that is, a sense of *power*, yet on the other hand it also intrinsically conjures repetition and automatism, that is, a sense of *stasis*. Malabou (2008, VIII) states that habit can be both grace and addiction, Carlisle (2014) explains the duplicity of habit in terms of the ancient *pharmakon*: it is at once a blessing and a curse. Similarly, Portera (2020, 76) conceptualizes the notion of habit by arguing that it is both active and passive in structure, that is to say, it keeps in itself the possibility of mechanization and automatism without being in itself automatism. This ambivalence is internal to habit itself. We can then speak in terms of the double nature of habit. Indeed, even Dewey – who can be considered one of the champions of a positive and rich conceptualization of habit – admits that "all habit involves mechanization" in terms of a mechanism of action which operates spontaneously whenever the cue is given. However, what is important for Dewey is to know that mechanization "is not of necessity *all* there is to habit" (Dewey 2023, 40-41).[2]

Given the widespread recognition of the double nature of habit, philosophers have then developed more theory-laden views on the opposition between the element of activity and the element of passivity inherent to habit itself. Historically, one of the results was the formulation of what Ravaisson (2008) calls "The double law of habit", which was first noted by Joseph Butler in 1736. Butler noticed that when we become accustomed to certain sensations we cease to notice them, while actions become easier and more assured when repeated several times. The double law is then a specific characterization of the principle of habituation but developed – at least in Butler – from the distinction between active and passive habits that, as we will see, is problematic: passive habits – feelings and

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2 Indeed, given the double nature of habit, we can read the narrow conceptualizations of habit as stemming from a particular focus placed on just one of the two poles of the duplicity. The negative conception of habit as epitome of inauthenticity, mere mechanism and routine process is an example of this. See Malabou 2008 and Barandiaran, Di Paolo 2014 for an overview of the two basic ways of speaking of habit in the history of philosophy.

sensations – lose power by repetition while active habits – actions and movements – gain. This principle cuts across the Aristotelian distinction between habit as *hexis* – an acquired and stable disposition – and habit as *ethos* – the process of habituation by which we acquire particular habits as *hexeis*.

In this paper, I work with the assumption that speaking about the double nature of habit is conceptually different from speaking about the double law of habit, for recognition of the former does not necessarily entail endorsement of the latter. In other words, the passage from the double nature to the double law is not theoretically neutral. Given this, I will argue that from Butler's first formulation of the double law, subsequent formulations assume different senses of activity and passivity in relation to habit and they bring the philosophical risk of two kinds of dualism: dualism between activity and passivity of action, and dualism between habit and will. In particular, I suggest looking at James' conceptualization of habit in his *Principles of Psychology*[3] as a relevant example: I shall argue that James conceptualizes the double nature of habit through the notion of plasticity *without* formulating the double law of habit as developed by his predecessors and without falling into philosophical dualism. To do this, I will first present Butler's double law and some significant subsequent versions with different uses of the concepts of activity and passivity. Secondly, I will focus on James' case by presenting a comparative analysis of three versions of the content of his chapter on habit in his *Principles*, and some remarks on his treatment of sensation in relation to habit.

2 The Double Law of Habit

Scholars working on the philosophy of habit agree in tracing the first occurrence of the principle of the double law in Butler's *The Analogy of Religion* (Butler 1927), although it was Ravaisson who named it and gave it metaphysical thickness in his *Of Habit*.[4] Moreover, the principle was taken and used by other philosophers working with the notion of habit, such as Hume (1896), Bichat (1809), Maine de Biran (1970), Turnbull (1740) and – for some (Carlisle 2014; Piazza 2018) – James (1914) as well. Given this, I have taken Butler's first formulation as a reference point for a comparison with the subsequent formulations of the principle and I have identified at least four different ways in

3 Henceforth *Principles*.

4 For an exposition of the genealogy and development of the double law in the history of philosophy see Carlisle 2014; Piazza 2018; Wright 2022.

which the concept of passivity is used, to which correspond four different ways of talking about the active element of habitual action:

1. 'Passive' as being subject to the process of habituation, being/becoming accustomed, versus "active" as acquiring particular habits, acting in a certain way rather than another;
2. 'Passive' as becoming insensitive to certain feelings and emotions, to feel less, versus 'active' as being sensitive to feelings and emotions, feeling with a certain degree. In this case, passivity/activity is of *the faculty of sensation*;
3. 'Passive' as involuntary and pre-reflective: in this sense, being passive means being unaware, not noticing something, while 'active' means being aware and noticing something;
4. 'Passive' as acting with little or no conscious attention, versus 'active' as acting with conscious attention.

In what follows, I will suggest that (1) is part of the concept of habit, (2) corresponds to Butler's formulation of the principle, (3) can be found in Hume's treatment of habit as the cause of inductive inferences, and (4) is found in James' treatment of habit in his *Principles*. I will argue that the passage from (1) to (2) corresponds to the passage from the double nature to the double law of habit, (2) conveys the dualism between different faculties, or different kinds of habits, and (3) conveys the dualism between habit and will.

2.1 Activity and Passivity

There is a distinction between passivity and activity already at the level of the concept of habit itself (1). Indeed, we can distinguish between the process of becoming accustomed to something – being subject to the process of habituation – and the process of acquiring the habit of acting in a certain way. This co-presence of activity and passivity of habituation is part of the double nature of habit and the internal element of mechanization, for what we become accustomed to compels us in a certain way. However, this is not the sense of passivity which Butler presupposes in his treatment of the principle of habit (2). For the sake of my argument, I focus on two aspects of Butler's reflection: 1. The distinction between passive and active habits; 2. The role of repetition. The point I want to stress here is that Butler recognizes the dual effect of habit in terms of the dual effect of repetition on alleged different faculties instead of as the double nature of habit discussed above.

First of all, Butler distinguishes from the beginning between active habits and passive habits through the distinction between habits of perception and habits of action. The former are instances of passive habits and are, for example, the involuntary readiness in

correcting the impression of sight,[5] associations of ideas not naturally connected, and the readiness in understanding language upon sight or hearing. The latter refers to the readiness in speaking and writing, which is an instance of active habits. Secondly, given this distinction, Butler develops the "faculty of habits" by looking at the inverse effects of repetition on these two kinds of habits: while "passive impressions, by being repeated, grow weaker", active habits "are formed and strengthened by repeated acts", therefore "active habits may be gradually forming and strengthening, by a course of acting upon such and such motives and excitements, whilst these motives and excitements themselves are, by proportionable degrees, growing less sensible; i.e. are continually less and less sensibly felt" (Butler 1927, 65-6). Repetition is treated as a fundamental ingredient of habit acquisition and its effects are considered in the context of reflection on moral discipline and improvement: the main idea is that habituation improves moral discipline for it allows the agent to be more effective thanks to the weakening of sensation. Experiencing the suffering of others may entail a high degree of emotional engagement. From a practical point of view, this engagement may hinder effective concrete aid action. However, repetition of occasions of contact with suffering weakens the emotional response (passive habit) and reinforces the capacity of action (active habit). Habit's double law in this context is the dual effect of repetition on habits of perception and habits of action, and the concept of passivity implied is that of a weakening of the faculty of sensation: habit improves capacity for action *because* it weakens sensation, thus it involves a kind of progressive insensibility. The problem with this formulation is that substantial distinction between active and passive habits conveys the risk of philosophical dualism. Indeed, Maine de Biran (1970) develops the double law in a dualistic context where a difference between active and passive impressions corresponds to a distinction between two different faculties, namely sensation and perception. According to Maine de Biran, while passive impressions deteriorate and vanish through repetition, active impressions become clearer and more precise.[6]

(3) Besides Maine de Biran, Butler's principle was indeed taken up by other authors, such as Bichat (1809) and Ravaisson (2008), but the passive element of habituation is not exclusively characterized by reference to sensation against action. For example, Hume's

5 Butler uses Locke's example of the involuntary belief to immediately sense visual objects as three dimensional, though we actually make an inference that they are so on the basis of their varying sensations of colours and shadow (Locke 1975, II.IX.8, 145).

6 The possibility of a dualistic theoretical drift is not a necessity, rather it is just a risk. Indeed, a continuistic approach can be also compatible with the double law, such as Ravaisson's anti-dualistic claim that unreflective spontaneity is both active and passive.

account of habit as the basis of inductive inferences seems to imply a different use of the concepts of passivity and activity. Hume is mentioned among the authors who actually take up Butler's principle because – even though he does not talk about a double law – he distinguishes between active and passive habits when he writes that "custom increases all active habits, but diminishes passive" (Hume 1896, 221). This is presupposed in his treatment of the calm passions (Wright 2022): some passions are originally violent and only become calm through custom and habit in virtue of the principle according to which passive impressions become calm when constantly repeated (Hume 1896, 219). However, a different sense of the couple activity-passivity – sense (3) – is assumed in his treatment of habit as the cause of inductive inferences. According to Hume, inductive inferences often occur without explicit reflection on past experience, and they operate in mind "in such an insensible manner as never to be taken notice of and may even in some measure be unknown to us", because "custom operates before we have time for reflection" (Hume 1896, 60). In this context, there is no reference to Butler's dual effect of habit respectively on sensation and action. We might see the reference if we presuppose an identification between pre-reflective and passive but, firstly, the former does not necessarily mean the latter and, secondly, even if we endorse this identification, we would work with a different concept of passivity than the one applied to the faculty of sensation. 'Passive', in this context, means 'pre-reflective', 'involuntary' and 'insensible manner' seems to be equivalent to 'unawareness' rather than insensibility, that is to say, it is not a matter of 'feeling less', but a matter of 'not reflectively noticing' what has become automatic. Indeed, according to Hume, inferences from past experience are fundamentally involuntary (Wright 2022). This second way of explaining passivity in habitual action reinforces the traditional dualism between habit and will.

2.2 From Passive Habits to Involuntary Habits

The principle of the double law becomes the root of the traditional dualism between habitual behaviour and voluntary behaviour through the conceptual assumption according to which 'passive' – *in all the senses* distinguished above – amounts to 'involuntary'. In other words, firstly, the co-presence of activity and passivity in the concept of habit has been developed into a distinction between passive habits and active habits affected by repetition in an inversely proportional manner. Secondly, the latter distinction has been further developed into the distinction between voluntary behaviour and involuntary behaviour via the conceptual identification of the automaticity of action acquired through habituation to its irreducible

mechanization. Wright (2022, 89) characterizes the paradox of habit in terms of the fact that "while thoughts and actions that result from repetition in some cases appear voluntary and free, in others they are involuntary and determined", that is to say, habits are both compulsive forms of behaviour and acquired skills, but even acquired skills "when fully developed can apparently be performed mindlessly and without any act of the will on the part of the agent". Now, this idea seems to be assumed by the authors mentioned above, and we find it already in Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, in which he actually makes a sharp distinction between voluntary and involuntary habits on the basis of a distinction between voluntary and involuntary action (Wright 2022). The point I want to stress here is that Locke works with a 'demanding' concept of will: an action is voluntary only if it follows an order or command of the mind. Accordingly, an action is involuntary if it is performed without this preceding thought of the mind. However, according to Locke, custom and habit make us lose awareness of the actions of the mind, and they thereby become involuntary. Involuntary habits – such as the shutting of the eyelids and the idiosyncratic speech pattern – are actions that occur without thought or reflection because either there is no preceding thought, or we are not aware of them because of the speed of performance. I think that this very sense of involuntary habit is presupposed by Hume when he says that inferences from past experience are involuntary because they are performed without paying attention to the operations of the will. In this case, the conceptual association is between passive and unaware, and then between unaware and involuntary.

Butler's principle assumes a concept of passivity in terms of passivity of the faculty of sensation, but he also assumes a concept of voluntary action as self-aware action. His distinction between active and passive habits is a distinction between voluntary actions as self-conscious actions – in terms of awareness of the operation of the mind – and involuntary readiness.[7] Finally, even the fourth sense of passivity mentioned above – absence of conscious attention during execution – can be associated with absence of will. In this case the conceptual association is between passive and unconscious, and then between unconscious and involuntary. This is the case of Ravaisson's development of the double law. According to Sinclair (2019, 52) Ravaisson works with the assumption that consciousness is a function of the will, therefore "he is unable to accept the claim that consciousness could decline in the acquisition of a habit while the will remains as it was". By contrast, this is something defended for example by

7 However, differently from Locke and Reid, Butler argues that habit as repeated practice makes voluntary action possible.

Porterfield (1752), for he argues that some bodily actions – such as the motions of the eyes – are voluntary but unconscious, and they become unconscious through habit.

2.3 To Sum Up

So far, I have suggested thinking about the double law of habit as a theoretical way to give an account of the double nature of habit, that is, the co-presence of the element of activity and the element of passivity in habitual action. In particular, I have distinguished between four different ways to employ the concepts of activity and passivity, and I have suggested that traditional formulations of the double law entail the risk of two kinds of philosophical dualism: the dualism between two different faculties, or two substantially different kinds of habits, and the dualism between habit and will. Overall, I isolate three main theoretical points of the double law of habit:

1. The opposition between sensation and action – differently affected by repetition;
2. The idea that the capacity for action increases through the weakening of sensation;
3. The conceptual association between passive as mindless and involuntary on the basis of a concept of voluntary action as explicit deliberation of which the subject is conscious.

In what follows, I shall argue that these theoretical points are not necessarily endorsed by philosophers working on the philosophy of habit and who recognize habit's double nature. In particular, I shall argue that they are not endorsed by James, although he does make sense of the double nature of habit. My idea is that James does not formulate the traditional double law of habit – for he does not assume the above points – but he does recognize the double nature of habit, therefore he constitutes an interesting example of the fact that recognition of the latter does not entail endorsement of the former.

3 James' *Principles of Psychology*

In this section I argue that James does not formulate the traditional double law of habit, although he re-formulates the double nature of habit through the scientific notion of plasticity. In particular, James' characterization of habit does not assume the three points mentioned above:

1. In *Principles* we find the fourth sense of passivity mentioned in section 2: the opposition is not between sensation and action, but it is between conscious attention and action even

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though, as we shall see, conscious attention never disappears completely;
2. James does not endorse the assumption that the capacity of action increases through the weakening of sensation;
3. James admits the possibility of voluntary and intelligent action to which we are not consciously attentive;

There seems to be a reference to the double law of habit in James' formulation of the two practical applications of the principle of habit to human life in chapter 5 of *Principles*:

1. "Habit simplifies the movements required to achieve a given result, makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue" (James 1914, 26);
2. "Habit diminishes the conscious attention with which our acts are performed" (James 1914, 31).

However, I argue that the two applications are not a re-presentation of the traditional double law for two reasons: firstly, from a terminological point of view, James does not talk about a double law of habit, and he does not talk about alleged different laws of habit in terms of different operating principles. Secondly, in terms of content, James' characterization of the principle of habit does not involve a weakening of sensation, rather its redirection. In what follows, I shall first address the terminological stance by presenting a comparative analysis of three versions of James' text on habit: chapter 5 of *Principles* (James 1914), the article *The Laws of Habit* (James 1887), chapter 10 of *Psychology: Briefer Course* (James 1923).[8] Secondly, I shall discuss James' characterization of the principle of habit and the role assigned to sensation.

3.1 Language

As a first step, let's compare chapter 5 of *Principles* to the article *The Laws of Habit*, for the former is a second version of what James wrote in the latter in 1887. The first striking aspect is the difference between the two titles: from 'The Laws of Habit', to simply 'Habit'. James removes the plural form and the reference to laws. The second striking aspect is that in both texts – even though the title of the article might confuse – there is no actual mention of plural laws of habit, or of the double law of habit. James employs the expression 'the law of habit' twice in the texts. The first occurrence is at the beginning of the section on the ethical implications of habit (James 1914,

8 Henceforth *Briefer Course*.

48; 1887, 446). The second occurrence is in a section in which James argues that attention and effort do depend on brain processes – even if we still do not know to what brain processes they correspond – because "they seem in some degree subject to the law of habit, which is a material law" (James 1914, 65; 1887, 450). The plural 'laws' is used for the expression 'the laws of nature', which he actually defines in terms of "immutable habits" (James 1914, 4; 1887, 433). However, he does not write about alleged plural laws of habit, neither explicitly, nor implicitly. The plural form is used to write about the practical applications of the (singula) principle of habit to human life, which James addresses in terms of results (James 1914, 26; 1887, 439) and the ethical implications of the law of habit, together with some maxims of conduct (James 1914, 48; 1887, 446). Given this, my hypothesis is that the plural expression 'the laws of habit', which actually appears only in the title of the 1887 article, does not refer to the functioning of habit as a process, but to the plurality of natural laws which James characterizes in terms of habits.

This hypothesis is confirmed by the further comparison between chapter 5 of *Principles*, and chapter 10 of *Briefer Course*, which is a later and reduced version of chapter 5. In chapter 10, James keeps the changes made in the passage from the 1887 article to chapter 5 of *Principles*, but he further reduces and slightly changes the latter as well. First, James does not mention alleged laws of habit and the double law of habit. On the contrary, he even removes the expression 'the law of habit' which was present in *Principles* at the beginning of the section on the ethical implications of habit and he substitutes the expression 'the principle of habit': from "the law" (James 1914, 48), to "the principle" (James 1923, 142). Secondly, in this third version of the text, it is more clear that it would be inappropriate to ascribe to James a re-presentation of the double law in its traditional form from a content-point of view, that is to say, if we look at his own view on the nature and the functioning of the principle of habit. I shall discuss this in the following section.

3.2 The Role of Sensation

According to James, a simple habit is, from a mechanical point of view, a reflex discharge and, from an anatomical point of view, a path in the nervous system, while complex habits are "concatenated discharges in the nerve-centres, due to the presence there of systems of reflex paths" (James 1914, 12-13). At the bottom, for James a habit is a physical principle. Indeed, his characterization of habit can be seen as a synthesis between the views of Carpenter and Dumont (Caruana, Testa 2020). However, as clearly shown by Bella (2020) too, James' view is not reducible to a mechanistic interpretation of habit

as blind routine, especially because of his use of the Darwinian notion of plasticity which gives habits a flexible and teleological structure in analogy with organic materials. Plasticity means "the possession of a structure weak enough to yield to an influence, but strong enough not to yield all at once" (James 1914, 6). In *Principles*, James offers a definition of habit, some practical consequences of the principle of habit to human life, and some ethical implications. For the sake of my argument, I will focus on the practical consequences and the role of sensation in the construction of the principle of habit, for this is the place in which James seems to formulate the double law of habit. Within this context, I shall argue that facility of action is not explained in terms of a proportional weakening of sensation, and that sensation has an important role in habitual action.

As we have seen, the first practical consequence of the principle of habit is that movements become more accurate and fatigue diminishes (James 1914, 26). However, the facility of movements is not explained by James in terms of a different effect of repetition on passive and active faculties, rather it is explained with reference to the permeability of the neural paths. The more neural paths are permeable, the more they can set up with less and less strong stimuli (James 1914, 27).

The second practical consequence is that habit diminishes the conscious attention with which acts are performed (James 1914, 31). It is in this specific context that we can see how sensation keeps a fundamental role in the execution of a habitual act. Suppose that the execution of a certain act requires a chain of contiguous nervous events, which James refers to also as muscular contractions: A, B, C, D, E, F, G. Now, the first times we try to perform this act, conscious will has to deliberately choose each event from other possible alternatives, so first A, then B, then C, and so on until G. However, after a certain number of executions, habit makes every event recall the next without first pondering possible alternatives and without the intervention of conscious will until the end of the chain, so that every time there is A, all other events follow as if they were in a continuous flux. The chain of nervous events activates with a little symptom – the presence of A in this case – without a deliberation for every subsequent event. Given this, James specifies that in executing a habitual act, what ensures the correct continuation of the chain (A, B, C, …) is neither a thought nor a perception, but "the sensation occasioned by the muscle contraction just finished" (James 1914, 35). While strictly voluntary acts are guided by idea, perception and volition throughout their whole course, in habitual actions *mere sensation is a sufficient guide* and "the upper regions of mind and brain are set comparatively free" (James 1914, 36).

"A, B, C, D, E, F, G" is a chain of muscular contractions that leads to the execution of a certain act. According to James, to every muscular

contraction there corresponds a sensation excited in the subject by the contraction when it is successfully performed: sensation *a* corresponds to contraction A, sensation *b* corresponds to contraction B, and so on until G. These sensations are usually in the muscles, skin, joints of the parts moved, and they can also be effects of the movement upon the eye or the ear. We are aware whether the contraction has or has not occurred through these sensations alone, which are produced by the contraction itself. In the case of a non-habitual action – such as when we are learning the series "A, B, C, D, E, F, G" – each sensation produced by the relative contraction is the object of a separate perception. This is what happens when we test the movement before performing the next one, when we hesitate, compare, choose with intellectual means: as stated above, in this case every contraction is the product of an earlier and accurate rational deliberation. By contrast, in habitual action, to perform "A, B, C, D, E, F, G" the initial impulse is sufficient – the command to start: then A, through the sensation *a* of its occurrence, weakens B, B leads to C through its own sensation *b*, and so on until the end of the chain. According to James, in this case sensations *a*, *b*, *c*, *d*, *e*, *f*, *g*, are not singular and distinct volitions, but they are nonetheless accompanied by a certain kind of consciousness: they are "sensations to which we are *usually inattentive*, but which immediately call our attention if they go *wrong*" (James 1914, 43). According to James, habit thus depends on sensations not attended to and this inattentive feeling is a process that may still go on alongside of intellectual processes (James 1914, 48). This suggests the fact that for James, differently than Ravaisson, a mismatch between consciousness and will is perfectly possible, that is to say, there can be the case of an act which is performed with little conscious attention but which is nevertheless voluntary and this case is precisely that of habitual acts, or the "acquired aptitudes", which "differ from instincts only in being prompted to action by the will" (James 1914, 40).[9] Habitual action is involuntary in the sense that the sensations involved are not volitions – the will "limits itself to a permission that they exert their motor effects" (James 1914, 41), however, this does not mean that habitual action is mere blind routine. James quotes Carpenter and the idea that habitual actions never cease to be volitional, for an even infinitesimally small amount of will is required to sustain them. Indeed, according to James, a habitual act is automatic only apparently (James 1914, 45), and he makes use of Schneider's account of long-familiar handicraft:

9 For this reason, I think it might be interesting to compare James's view on habit to William Porterfield's (1752) and Dugald Stewart's (1994) views on habitual action.

> Knitting appears altogether mechanical, and the knitter keeps up her knitting even while she reads or is engaged in lively talk. But if we ask her how this be possible, she will hardly reply that the knitting goes on in itself. She will rather say that she has a feeling of it, that she feels in her hands that she knits and how she must knit, and that therefore the movements of knitting are called forth and regulated by the sensations associated therewithal even when the attention is called away. (James 1914, 44-45)

Therefore, in this context the concept of involuntary action seems to equate that of non-intellectualistic process, that is, the idea that habitual action is not the product of explicit deliberation through distinct acts of will but it is not involuntary in the sense of completely detached from the will, blind, unintelligent and purely automatic. Furthermore, the concept of inattentive feeling is not equivalent to that of unconsciousness: habitual action is performed with little conscious attention, but it is not completely unconscious, for a little degree of consciousness is still at work. In other words. James seems to admit the case of consciousness with little conscious attention, which immediately reactivates when the habitual action gets disrupted.

4 Conclusion(s)

Two conclusions can be drawn from my previous analysis. First, I tried to argue that we do not find in James' characterization of habit a re-formulation of the traditional double law of habit as developed by Butler and Ravaisson. In particular, James' characterization of the principle of habit does not involve what I presented as the three main theoretical points of the traditional double law:

1. James's account of habitual action is not construed in terms of the different effect of repetition on different faculties or different substantial kinds of habits (passive and active). Rather, the difference regards the degree of conscious attention during the execution of the act;
2. It is true that habit makes action easier; that is, it increases the ease and the capacity of action, but this result does not come from a weakening of sensation. Rather, the facility of action is explained in terms of an increase of permeability of the neural paths;
3. James' characterization of habit seems to avoid the two dualistic drifts to which the traditional double law can easily lead: dualism between two faculties and dualism between habit and will. Indeed, although James writes that habitual action is involuntary, this involuntariness is not characterized in terms of total absence of will, but as the fact that habitual acts are

> not produced through explicit acts of deliberation. In habitual action conscious attention diminishes, but never disappears, for it is ready to immediately re-activate when faced with some obstacles. A habitual action can still be intelligent. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that there is no reference to the double law of habit in Baldwin's *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology* too (1901), in which James is mentioned among the consulting editors for English. Indeed, under the entry 'Habit' we do not find references to the double law or plural laws of habit, but only to the law of habit, which is defined in psychology as the generalization according to which "any function becomes thus modified and organized with repeated efforts". (Baldwin 1901, 435)[10]

Secondly, James' case is a concrete example of the fact that speaking in terms of the double law of habit is conceptually different from speaking in terms of the double nature of habit. That is to say, the double law of habit is a theoretical development of the co-presence of activity and passivity inherent to the concept of habit itself, but it does not necessarily follow from the recognition of habit's double nature. I argued that – as it is traditionally formulated – the double law of habit brings with it at least two theoretical problems: the idea that capacity improvement necessarily involves progressive insensibility (the association between passivity and weakening of sensation), and the idea that the passivity of action renders it involuntary and unintelligent.[11] These are two theoretical drifts hardly endorsed by current philosophers working on habits and habitual action within the new frame of 4E Cognition. This is, of course, not a sufficient reason to reject them, but I think it is at least a sufficient reason to reflect again on the nature and the possible philosophical consequences of the traditional double law of habit in the context of the current and renewed philosophy of habit.

10 The entry 'Habit' is written by J. M. Baldwin and G. F. Stout.

11 I am not arguing that all the authors working with the double law are actually doomed to endorse these theoretical points. I am just arguing that the traditional formulation of the double law inherently brings with it these possible theoretical drifts.

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