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THE HABITUAL CONCEPTION OF ACTION AND SOCIAL THEORY

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THE HABITUAL CONCEPTION OF ACTION AND SOCIAL THEORY

Man is essentially a social animal, but to be social is one thing, to be gregarious is another.

C. S. Peirce.

Yet another pragmatist against his will?

Perhaps I should start by apologizing to Hans Joas. Without asking his permission, I have in the above section title borrowed an expression that he has recently used. Joas, a German sociologist and social philosopher, is one of today's self-avowedly pragmatist social thinkers, and his essay with the title 'Ein Pragmatist wider Willen?' (1996) is a sympathetic critical review of the work of Charles Taylor. This Canadian philosopher is famous most of all for his *Sources of the Self* (1989), and in the review-essay mentioned Joas shows that without intending to pay any particular homage to pragmatism, and drawing on some quite different sources, Taylor's ethical theory nonetheless leads to some very pragmatist conclusions. My theoretical interest and general intent in this paper is quite similar, although its topic is social theory methodologically considered, rather than ethics. In the work of another contemporary philosopher, Stephen P. Turner, I find so many ideas that remind one of pragmatism that I cannot resist but take the liberty of paraphrasing Joas's original title.

Stephen Turner stands out among contemporary philosophers of social sciences in the sense that there is no uncertainty about his knowing what he is talking about. All too often one comes across authors who claim to address philosophical problems in these sciences, but take their descriptive examples from philosophers like Winch or Wittgenstein, if not from remoter sources. This makes a problem in the sense that these classics rarely offer such examples that actually exercise practicing social scientists in their methodological problems. Turner, in contrast, possesses a specialist's knowledge about Max Weber and Émile Durkheim (he has published several book-length studies on both of them), is at home in the work of many lesser names, – and has mastered even his Winch and Wittgenstein. The reasons to raise about him the question of unwitting pragmatism are his 1994 book, *The Social Theory of Practices*, the main problem in social theory which he locates in that work, and his subsequent attempts to solve it in his later literary production.

The Social Theory of Practices is a slim but very rich volume, and deals with some problems that already exercised the classical pragmatists in their time. In spite of its title, it is actually quite critical about the concept of practice as a key term in philosophy and social sciences. As the title's plural form already indicates, Turner prefers to talk about 'practices' rather than 'practice' pure and simple, because his argument concerns also the relativity that inheres in the uses of the practice-concept. Furthermore, the conclusion that Turner ends up with is rather negative: The concept of practices is 'deeply flawed' for its traditional purposes. The reason why is that it is not able to explain what it purports to explain: the shared behaviour patterns of those individuals who populate the practices. As Turner puts the matter (1994: 13),

The concept of shared practices (...) requires that practices be transmitted from person to person. But no account of the acquisition of practices that makes sense causally supports the idea that the same internal thing, the same practice is reproduced in another person. Every causal account which attempts to establish sameness leads to ludicrous results.

When people behave in a uniform manner, what is thereby produced and reproduced is, in Turner's opinion, habits rather than practices as such. Accordingly, his suggestion is that 'The alternative [to the above state of affairs] is a highly familiar one. It is the notion of habit, a concept implicit in the concept of practices and its cognates' (1994: 13). Speaking about cognates of the practice-concept, terms such as traditions, rules, norms, *habitus*, *mentalités*, and so on, are often used to express more or less the same idea. As one takes a look at this group of concepts as a whole, it is easy to see that they constitute a problem field around which a great deal of the discussion in twentieth-century social theory has revolved. In Turner's opinion this discussion has failed to produce positive results. Each concept in its turn is placed to explain concrete behaviour at the individual level, but in the end only a cavalcade of terms is all that we see, not any advancement in explanation. In spite of differences in their terminological clothing, the concepts are in fact putting forward the same underlying idea time and again. 'New objects – *habitus* instead of norms, norms instead of *mores* – are proposed' (p. 116), but without a real change in content, and this Turner finds an inherent failure in twentieth-century social theory. The reason why the thinking remains the same, in spite of change in terminology, is that those concepts tacitly rely on a factor in human behaviour that secretly resides in all their verbal variants: habituation.

Turner accordingly asserts that (i) the prevailing notion of social practices rests on so many dubious assumptions that it is to be discarded as an explanatory theoretical concept. Of course

this does not mean that it should be banned from discussion, and Turner himself (2002: 9 *et passim*) goes on talking about ‘the centrality of practices’. The thing to be remembered just is that this makes a problem, not a solution. The main reason why practice fails to make a solution or an explanation is, according to Turner, that there is no guarantee that it (or its cognates) means at all the same thing to all individuals involved. Thus, it is not able to explain uniformities in individual behaviour; it rather is so that uniform behaviour explains the practice. The second (ii) part of the 1994 book’s argument thus is, as we heard, that it rather is habit which actually constitutes practices, traditions, etc. But if so, it is not too far-fetched to conclude that the volume’s actual thesis is ‘A Social Theory of Habits.’ And this is my reason to call Turner a willy-nilly pragmatist, because habit is not only a basic concept, if not *the* basic concept in the philosophical tradition of pragmatism. Even more pointedly, this tradition has also produced in more than one version such theoretical constructions for which the most appropriate name would be ‘a social theory of habits’ (Kilpinen 2000; Hartmann 2003; Hodgson 2004; Joas and Kilpinen 2006). Accordingly, the relationship between this philosophy and Turner’s problem field turns out to be just closer the more we learn about it.

However, as I assert that habit perhaps is the basic concept in pragmatism, I simultaneously have to hasten to add that it is not so in the same sense as in Turner’s (1994) depiction. It is not simply so that the classic representatives of pragmatism make frequent use of this term. It is much more important to note that they also perform a *conceptual transformation* in its usage. In their usage it does not refer to repetitive mindless routine, where the acting subject’s consciousness, intentionality or rationality are supposed to play only a small role or perhaps none at all. Instead of taking the habit concept in this garden variety meaning, the pragmatists have developed it further, into a model for which I have dubbed a name: *reflexive habituality* (Kilpinen 2000). It seems apparent that Turner (1994), who takes his habit-concept from classic philosophical sources (from David Hume to Rudolf von Jhering), has not been aware about the pragmatist upheaval in this term’s meaning. This has some theoretical consequences, for example the one that although the notion of practice might be reducible to the idea of habit, this does not imply that the former is a redundant notion, Turner (1994) to the contrary notwithstanding.

Thus far I have briefly summed up Turner’s argumentation in his 1994 volume, and given a first intimation that pragmatism in its time came quite close to his problems. However, the relation between him and this philosophical tradition goes even farther and deeper than this. The conclusion that Turner reaches in his analysis is of course a negative one. Practices (or traditions, etc.) turn out to be dubious things with hardly any causal efficacy, and to say this is tantamount to saying that a great deal of social theory rests upon a void. Turner’s conclusion to the effect that it

actually is habit that keeps social life going thus is a kind of anti-climax to his discussion of practices. He seems to be aware of this, has not rested content with this negative conclusion, and has sought a way out of the dilemma of the all-pervading habituality in social life, as it might be called. In his subsequent work he has strived to look by empirical means beyond the phenomenon of habit, and has found most solid arguments for this purpose in cognitive science. As he defines the current theoretical situation (2002: 21),

One of the most striking features of the rise of the philosophy of cognitive science is that it has led to a reconsideration and revival of problems and positions which, thirty years ago, were thought to be quite dead. Locke, Descartes, and Hume become interesting as theorists of mind whose views pertain directly to the problems of cognitive science with mind and the mental. Social theory has a rich tradition as well, and it would be surprising if there were not many sources within it that could shed light on the relation [between it and cognitive science].

So much for general description, but what does cognitive science de facto suggest in regard of problems in social theory? Here Turner's answer is that

[Cognitive science] doesn't challenge the [traditional descriptive] model of institutional facts directly, but it undermines a traditional, though rarely voiced, answer to the problem of the ontological status of the institutions of a society, which we might call the linguistic model. (...) Put crudely, the linguistic model holds that the rules of the game are in people's heads, and they share these rules in the same way that they share the rules of grammar. If cognitive science deprives us of the 'rules' model of the tacit contents of people's heads for grammar, as it threatens to, it undermines this version of the reality of social institutions, which was plausible only by analogy. (Turner 2002: 37).

This sounds interesting, to say the least, and I have no quarrel whatsoever with this estimate about the future relevance of cognitive science. I only am tempted to say that even now the pragmatists are waiting at the end of the road that Turner is travelling, and has been travelling, some ten years or so. Although it perhaps is not quite established knowledge that pragmatism has adumbrated cognitive science in many issues, there is a small body of literature arguing to this effect and its number seems to be increasing (Burke 1994 and Johnson 2006 come to mind as

examples).[1] Accordingly, the further Turner develops his argument for a change of direction in social theory, the more he gets entangled with such issues that exercised the pragmatists in their time, so that the reasons to call him a pragmatist against his will just seem to keep increasing.

But is Turner necessarily an *unwilling* pragmatist, in the first place? I do not know his explicit position on the question, but I would classify him a reluctant pragmatist, until proven otherwise. The reason to say this is the fact that lack of intimate knowledge about this philosophy seems to make a lacuna in his otherwise so impressive erudition. In *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994), there are a couple of fleeting references to John Dewey as a user of the habit-term, particularly to Dewey's *Human Nature and Conduct* (1922). Yes, Dewey does use the term in that book, but it does not take any very thorough perusal to see that he uses it in a peculiar manner that deviates from the ordinary one. The idea expressed in that book, that 'one knows with one's habits' (to which I shall return) does not go by the square with the traditional notion of the term. It rather is a novum that one does not meet outside the pragmatist tradition, at least not explicitly. In *Brains / Practices / Relativism* (2002: 62-64) Turner has a brief discussion about G. H. Mead, one that actually supports my idea of Mead as a forerunner of cognitive science (Kilpinen 2002). Here our respective conclusions converge, but one might add to Turner's depiction that Mead's insights are to an extent common to the pragmatist movement as a whole. One is left with the impression that Turner's view of pragmatism, at least in *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994), is perhaps influenced by the interpretation that Richard Rorty has in recent years given about this philosophy and made famous. That interpretation has raised much discussion (see Kloppenborg 1998 and Westbrook 1998, for summaries), and whatever the final verdict in other respects, it is a fact that Rorty has never suggested that pragmatism might have added something interesting to the habit-notion. My personal opinion is that in missing this novelty he has missed the entire point of pragmatism, but today there are enough of critiques of Rorty around. This paper is, instead, a discussion of Turner's use of the habit-concept. My first argument is that in missing the conceptual upheaval that pragmatism has made with that concept, he has missed also some of its implications for social theory. It namely is so that if we replace Turner's habit-concept with its more advanced pragmatist counterpart, social practices come up less redundant than he lets us understand.

The habit-concept that Turner makes use of is quite sophisticated. He does not equate it with behaviourist conditioning and mechanical repetition – as do some other social scientists, to their own detriment. Instead, he is explicit that an explicitly mental aspect needs to be included, even such an aspect that relates to articulated consciousness. As he writes (1994: 16),

Habit is a hybrid term, at once mentalistic and observational. The difference between habits and repetitive behaviours, or the distinction between habit and innate inclination or impulsive act is an aetiological one. The have a habit is to have a particular kind of mental cause operating. But the difference, the fact of the existence of a particular causal push that distinguishes a pattern of repetitive manifestations from a habit, is puzzling. (...) Habits are acquired, and there is something which persists between manifestations, a mental trace. (...) The same kind of reasoning that we grant in the case of habits with directly visible manifestations, that there is an invisible 'mental' element by virtue of which the visible pattern of behaviour persists, may be extended to those 'habits of mind', that we can identify and speak of only indirectly, through complex inferences.

Prima facie this description of the subject matter does not deviate much from those that one can gather from the pragmatists. 'Habits of mind', for example, is an expression favoured by both Peirce and Dewey. However, essential differences begin to turn up when one considers Turner's allegation that one 'can speak only indirectly about one's habits of mind' – and of other habits too, for that matter. According to the pragmatists it namely does not have to be so. Those inferences about habit do not have to be 'complex,' as Turner here would have it – Peirce, for one, suggested that they can be relatively simple – and what is most important: One can be also discursively aware of one's own habits! This is the main difference between the understanding of habit that Turner has, on the one hand, and the one maintained by the pragmatists, on the other. The case of the pragmatic tradition in fact tells that a body of thought does not have to share *exactly same* presuppositions in order to be able to function as a tradition. It suffices if the suppositions are sufficiently similar, so to speak. For this point I shall try to argue more in what follows.

To sum up this introduction: although Turner's habit-concept is quite sophisticated, it nonetheless serves as a mere residual category in his analysis. This is the reason for his conclusion that social theory is in deep trouble, because its common denominator turns out to be a mere residue! In *Brains / Practices / Relativism* (2002) the point is made most explicitly, as Turner says that '*Habits* is a potentially misleading term, especially if *habit* is thought of as a generic alternative explanation rather than simply as the residue of the concept of practices once its objectionable elements have been eliminated' (Turner 2002: 23; original emphasis). In pragmatism things are otherwise. In its usage habit serves as a basic, if not as *the* basic concept to refer to action-phenomena, and it is used in order to provide a sort of generic explanation. In pragmatism individual actions are defined in terms of habit, whereas in Turner habit is a derivative of individual

actions, as we shall see in closer detail below. After this it already goes without saying that the concept's pragmatist content cannot any more be the traditional one of routine, it apparently means something more advanced. The pragmatist position is that intentionality (or rationality) without habituality is empty, whereas habituality without intentionality and rationality of course is blind. Let me add that I am not quite alone with this interpretation, either. Martin Hartmann, a German scholar, has written about 'the creativity of habit' and about how this notion underlies the pragmatist interpretation of social theory and democracy (Hartmann 2003).

Below I shall discuss this conceptual difference between Turner and pragmatism and its further implications in closer detail. However, I find Turner's interpellation to the discussion so important that I wish to situate it briefly in its context, both in contemporary social theory and in regard to its historical predecessors. The contemporary context of which Turner's contribution is a part is the so-called 'practice turn' that has raised discussion in social science during the last ten years or so, and I shall say a quick word about it. For another thing, Turner's case is not quite the first time when a social scientist finds the notion of habit raising its head in theoretical discussion. In the previous time, however, the reaction of the social scientist was St. George's reaction: the dragon of habit was to be beheaded, before social theory would be able to gain a firm foothold and to begin to advance. The theorist who played the role of St. George some seven decades ago was the much revered sociologist Talcott Parsons.

A note about the 'practice turn'

As I said, Turner's 1994 volume belongs to a genre; it was one of the first explicit treatments of the problem of social practice or practices (Turner's preferred expression) in recent social theory. Since its appearance there have been several other contributions to this discussion, so that it has received a name of its own, the so-called 'practice turn.' In 2001 came out a collective volume with this term in its title, *The Practice Turn in Contemporary Theory*, edited by Theodore Schatzki, Karin Knorr Cetina and Eike von Savigny, and containing also a contribution by Turner.[2] These people belong to the leading discussants in the contemporary debate about practice and practices, but do not exhaust the list of important names. To that list one should add at least the British sociologist Margaret Archer (1995; 2000; 2003), and her compatriot, the (heterodox) economist Geoffrey Hodgson (2001; 2004). And, of course, the work of the recently deceased Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) is still in so fresh memory that it is to be mentioned whenever the talk is about these topics.

As the collective volume mentioned above puts the matter, it is through action and interaction within practices that mind, rationality and knowledge are constituted and social life is organized, reproduced and transformed. So far so good, but it might be instructive to ponder not only those themes to which the practice turn is turning, but also what it *turns away from*. As regards major turns in social theory, the previous important one was no doubt the ‘linguistic turn’ that had its origin in the 1950s in (analytic) philosophy, but later had many repercussions also in the social sciences. This contrasting of major turns is not quite an unproblematic affair, because Wittgenstein’s philosophy has had an impact on both of them. Theodore Schatzki’s name came up above, and he relies quite explicitly and heavily on Wittgenstein as he presents his own systematic analyses of what social practices are all about (Schatzki 1996; 2002). It is also standard knowledge that Wittgenstein was the main inspirer behind the original linguistic turn in philosophy that began to spread out from Oxford in the 1950s. In spite of this commonality, however, I think that one of the aims in practice theory is to reconsider and perhaps undo some of those conclusions that had been drawn as consequences of the linguistic turn. As we heard above, Turner’s opinion at least is that the linguistic model of institutions, for example, is to be put to critical question.

At least one contemporary theorist, the sociologist Colin Campbell, has claimed most explicitly that the linguistic turn was ‘a linguistic turn for the worse’ for the reason that ‘the assumption of an extensive parallelism between language and action is deeply misleading’ (Campbell 1996: 132; see also *passim*). With this I much agree, but much less with Campbell’s explicit thesis in his book that social action is a mere ‘myth.’ This, however, seems to match very closely with Turner’s original 1994 position, where the idea of shared social practices was asserted to be more or less a myth. As we shall see below, one of his reasons so to conclude was the idea that individual singular action is the only real thing, as far as human activities are concerned, and this brings him side by side with Campbell’s position. Here I disagree, in my opinion it is *individual action* that is to be taken as a myth, and the main reason for this is the intersubjective constitution of human reason.[3] However, I agree that it is not pointless to reconsider the consequences of the linguistic turn. One domain where it has had less than happy consequences is, perhaps surprisingly to some people, the analysis of meaning. As a consequence of the linguistic turn, questions of meaning are modelled after the linguistic model, without thinking twice, and what cannot be so modelled is all too quickly deemed as devoid of meaning. From this it is only a short step to opening doors to ‘pop socio-biology’ (Dennett’s expression, 1995) and other such approaches that have come to plague social science with less than wholesome consequences. This is also a problem field where general semiotics might offer its professional services (cf. Kilpinen, forthcoming), but

at present it seems that semiotics and practice theory are not quite at hailing distance with each other.

The reason to say so and a further piece of evidence for the idea that the practice turn turns also against ‘linguistic imperialism’ (to coin a phrase) is to be found in the introduction that Theodore Schatzki provides to the collective volume mentioned above. He lists a number of positions that the practice orientation opposes: ‘intellectualism, representationalism, individualisms, (e.g., rational choice theory, methodological individualism, network analysis), structuralism, structure-functionalism, systems theory, semiotics, and many strains of humanism and poststructuralism’ (Schatzki 2001: 2). Practicing semioticians know that the placement of their discipline on this list only tells that Schatzki does not quite know the meaning of this term, but this list tells also that all is not well at the linguistic quarters, at least in the opinion of practice theorists. To put forward my own opinion, I think that practice theorists would benefit from the more comprehensive theory of meaning that general semiotics provides, and semioticians, when considering social matters, are well advised to align their own approach with practices rather than with the linguistic approach. The latter is, in my opinion, by now outliving its validity – as a general approach. One way to suggest the relevance of general semiotics to the practice theorists might be a reminder about the common ancestry that semiotics and pragmatism share. Not only is it standard knowledge that these bodies of thought have a founding father in common in Charles Peirce. It is only slightly less established knowledge that their later history also converges in the philosophies of Royce, Mead and Morris (regarding Mead, see Kilpinen 2002). Furthermore, there have recently been also such opinions that yet another classic pragmatist, John Dewey, is to be included to the semiotic canon, Colapietro’s (2004) argument being the most convincing. As he sums up the relation between those two approaches, ‘pragmatism is formally semeiotic [and] semeiotic is thoroughly pragmatic’ (2004: 114), and this is something that would be of benefit also for the practice theorists to know.

‘No one ever claimed that habits were normative rules’ - Talcott Parsons on habit in 1935

I said that as regards the concept of habit, the play staged by Turner in 1994 has in a sense been played before, but with a different end scene. Six decades earlier, there has also been a critical confrontation about whether ‘habit’ should play any role in the analysis of practices (or ‘institutions,’ as the matter was expressed then), but then with the emphatic conclusion that this was an outcome to be avoided at all costs. In one of those early works that prepared the way to his

magnum opus, *The Structure of Social Action* (1937), Talcott Parsons considered also the habit-concept and its possible role in institutions and other social phenomena, and did this in a most critical manner. The reason why he was so critical was that to him, as to many others, 'habit' meant a hopelessly reductive notion.

As Charles Camic has observed since then, in his historical review about 'the matter of habit' in sociology, 'Although the idea of habit was used extensively in American sociology down to around 1918, in the course of the two decades that followed the concept was purposefully excised from the conceptual structure of the field' (Camic 1986: 1039). The reason why it was so excised was that it was taken as an inherently behaviouristic concept. Parsons also took it in this way, and he was one of those who actively participated in its excision. The extensive two-part article, 'Sociological Elements in Economic Thought' (1935) makes a landmark in his early literary output. First for the reason that it is the first occasion when he puts forward his famous hypothesis about an immanent theoretical convergence in European sociology, one between theorists as different as Alfred Marshall, Vilfredo Pareto, Émile Durkheim and Max Weber, the idea that later was the organizing principle in his *The Structure of Social Action* (1937). Secondly, the article about sociological elements in economic thought was also the occasion when Parsons settled his accounts with the social thought of his own country, a body of thought which he found hopelessly backward in comparison with its European counterpart. An indication of this backward state was the prevalence of the term habit in American analyses, and the economist and sociologist Thorstein Veblen provided Parsons with a telling case in point:

The [psychological position] most closely related to the Veblenian point of view and most in vogue among his followers is behaviourism. Their principal conception for the interpretation of behaviour, the 'conditioned reflex,' is a more precise and physiological formulation of what Veblen more vaguely called 'habit.' With the extension of the reflex mechanism to cover the areas of rationality (...) the 'institutional' element in his theory easily passes over into a generally behavioristic social theory. (...) Finally the common filiation from Darwinism is very clear indeed. The conditioning of behavioristic reflexes is clearly the application of the idea of natural selection to the acts of the individual ...

Parsons goes on to maintain that in contrast to Veblen's crude Darwinian behaviourism,[4] Durkheim's notion of institutions, for example, represents a completely different degree of sophistication, because the French thinker has a correct appreciation of the importance of

normativity: ‘The institution of contract [for example] is not for Durkheim a complex of habits. (...) he speaks of it mainly as a body of normative rules – no one ever claimed that habits were normative rules.’ (Parsons 1991: 214).

As I have said elsewhere (Kilpinen 2000), there is more than a grain of historical irony in this assertion of Parsons, because in so asserting he knocks out himself, instead of his adversary. It is not at all a novel idea to claim that ‘habits are normative rules.’ In fact, the pragmatist tradition has maintained right from the beginning that just so they are to be taken. The history of this philosophy is usually counted from Peirce’s 1877 article ‘The Fixation of Belief,’ and here he for the first time proposes, among other things, that ‘The particular habit of mind which governs this of that inference may be formulated in a proposition whose truth depends on the validity of the inferences which the habit determines; and such a formula is called a *guiding principle of inference*.’ (Peirce *EP* 1: 112; original emphasis). Now, as Peirce recognized no such thing as non-inferential human thought, this means that such a habit of mind, here called a guiding principle of inference, is a rather prevalent phenomenon. But, granted that it is prevalent, just how normative is such a principle, because Peirce’s above words are not quite explicit about that? That principle, in fact, is as normative as one could wish because Peirce’s position in logic is that we do not actually ‘draw’ our inferences. We rather *receive* them in a putative form and critically review them by means of self-control as they emerge (Kilpinen 2002: 9). The idea is a bit like a gardener developing her flowers: killing off some seedlings, usually most of them, and actively nurturing some others. As this is the case with all inferences, and as all mental movements according to Peirce are of inferential nature, this means that the *whole* of human thought is *in principle* normative (for a closer treatment of the issue see Bergman 2004). The thing to be added is that though Peirce is the most explicit pragmatist to talk about a positive correlation between habituality and normativity (and rationality), he is not the only one. The idea that ‘habits of inference may be formulated as rules or principles’ survives also in Dewey’s *Logic: The Theory of Inquiry* (1938: 13), for example.

I am not the first one to note that Parsons was less than well versed with the philosophy of his own country, and that this occasionally caused him to blunder. As regards his opinion about the worth of the habit-term, the historical irony involved in his 1935 solution is not yet exhausted and it does not take a pragmatist to note this. Having formed his position in the above article, Parsons in his later work *The Structure of Social Action* was insistent that the thought of Max Weber, for example, had nothing to do with the psychological notion of habit, his original term *eingelebte Gewohnheit* notwithstanding (Parsons 1949: 647). More recent Weber scholarship, by Stephen Turner and Regis Factor (1990; 1994) in particular, has reached quite different conclusions.

The truth rather is that the notion of habit plays a most prominent role in Weber's work, so that 'Action, as Weber depicts it [in his formal definitions, like those in *Economy and Society*] is a small island of self-conscious intentionality in a sea of conduct which is determined largely biologically [by such phenomena as] "reaction," "habit," and the like' so that 'the activities of most individuals most of the time are only quasi-actions,' i.e., habitual or routine-like behaviour patterns (Turner and Factor 1994: 39, 169). Parsons's *Auseinandersetzung* with the habit-term thus turns out to have been rather Quixotic, but hereby we have also found our way back to the important work of Stephen Turner.

Animadversions on habit

Habit possessed: Turner's original dilemma

Turner (1994), as noted, finds much more imaginable than Parsons (1935) the idea that habits and normative rules might be able to go together. In the book that I have been talking about he maintains that those two indeed *do* go together, because implicit rule following and habit can be understood as reverse sides of the same coin. The only problem – which is a grave problem – is that as so understood they remain disappointingly opaque, as we heard above. With this we are back where we started; Turner's argument to the effect that the bulk of social theory, in so far as it holds any water, in fact rests on the notion of habit, even though the various proponents of social theory are not aware of this.

I mentioned that Turner's habit-concept is not of any crude variety but taken and developed from classical sources. In *The Social Theory of Practices* he mentions most often David Hume as a predecessor, but I think that other sources are also relevant here. I mentioned those studies on Weber that Turner has conducted jointly with Regis A. Factor, and in them the authors have demonstrated that the 19th century German legal theorist Rudolf von Jhering (1819-1892) has had much relevance for later social theory in general and for Weber's thought in particular. Although I cannot demonstrate that the source of the habit-concept that Turner makes use of in *The Social Theory of Practices* is necessarily Jhering's work, it is a fact that those two notions do match. Jhering's original definition went as follows:

Habitual action represents in the life of the individual the same phenomenon as morality and customary law do in the life of a people. In both, the individual as well as the people, a more or less clearly conscious or felt purpose originally called for the

action, but the frequent repetition of the same action from the same motives and with the same purpose has bound together purpose and action to such a degree that the purpose has ceased to be a consciously perceptible element of the voluntary process. (Turner and Factor 1990: 413-414, citing von Jhering's *Der Zweck im Recht* [1886]).

I think that this definition answers pretty well to the notion that most people have in mind when talking about habit. It is explicitly related to a 'voluntary process' and this makes it a much subtler notion than its behaviourist counterpart, which is based on reaction and conditioning. But what makes this the standard notion, so to speak, is the following: Habit is here defined in terms of an action. '*Am Anfang war die Tat,*' as Goethe famously began his *Faust*. In this definition, in the beginning there was an original, consciously purposeful action, 'an intentional action,' as the analytic philosophers are wont to say, which in later repetition has crystallized into a self-propelling behaviour pattern where the 'consciously felt purpose' has faded to the background. Now, it is appropriate to remind already at this early stage that this is not quite the same thing as the notion of habit that pragmatism makes use of. The notion here, statistically prevalent though it is, rather makes one particular sub-case under the pragmatist habit-concept, and the latter is not defined as a residue of some 'original' singular action, that has an afterlife in repetition. Turner's habit-concept, like that of Jhering, has the explicitly mental dimension, and like its predecessor it is also a residue of an originating individual action. Before considering whether this is the only possibility, let us dwell a brief while on the mental dimension.

'To have a habit is to have a particular kind of mental cause operating,' we once heard from Turner (1994: 16). But precisely this mental connotation brings also problems in its wake, because habit is for Turner also a very *personal* thing. Therefore it is ill-suited to explain social and public phenomena like practices and traditions, but still it seems to be the only solution available as we heard. 'Habits, taken by themselves, are private things. My habits ordinarily differ from yours,' Turner maintains (1994: 57-58). For another thing, habits and practices even more so, are for Turner something that an individual literally has, carries with oneself, so to speak. But this only deepens the dilemmatic nature of the question, because the author maintains that 'Habits die with individuals. If something persists in history, it cannot be habits alone. Traditions do persist. So traditions cannot consist of habits.' (p. 78). Here is the other horn of the dilemma. Furthermore, this understanding of traditions and practices literally as individual possessions, and the supposition that habits do die, leads to a problem of *transmission* of the traditions, about which we also have heard above. Turner states this problem in very clear terms (pp. 60-61):

To explain how [the practices] get to the places they must get to – namely, inside some people and not others – in order to do their explanatory job seems to require an unusual process of transmission. If we conceive of practices as public quasi-objects, they must get from their public location into the persons who act in accordance with them. If we conceive of them as dualistic objects or forces, with collective and individual aspects, we are faced with the problem of how they can interact causally both on the collective and individual level. If we conceive of practices as nothing more than habits, we are faced with the question of how the *same* habits get into different people.

Turner evidently ends up in a genuine dilemma. The only principle according to which practices can cohere at the individual level seems to be the notion of habit. But at the same time this principle is invalid at the societal level, because each person has his or her own habits, and practices thus cannot be assumed to mean the same thing to different people. Thus they cannot be shared, or transmitted. But an explicit transmission there must be, because habits are mortal, die with their possessors and thus cannot bring practices across generations, for example. But, on the other hand, we do have historical evidence about perdurable traditions...

But is it really the only possibility to define practices as possessions, as something that an individual literally has or possesses? Let me sketch an example that is more historical than fictional.

Imagine a child, ten years old or so, who watches other kids play basketball but has no personal experience of the game herself. We can also suppose that those players play the game rather regularly, on a daily basis, perhaps. The first child finds the game interesting and asks to join. The other kids let her in. At first she of course is clumsy and does not much know what to do, but she learns quickly. In the course of her advancement she learns new physical skills and gets to know some rules, both tacit and explicit. However, there is no need to suppose that the basketball game should necessarily mean exactly the same thing to all kids involved. A ‘working agreement’ about basics is all that is needed. For example, there might be some kid in the group, a little older perhaps than the others, who entertains hopes about a future career in basketball, whereas the others play just for fun.

In brief, there is no need to think here that the practice (the basketball game) necessarily means *exactly* the same to all those involved, and I submit that this or something similar may hold also about more serious practices. Another thing that I submit is that Turner’s idea about tradition-*cum*-habit being something that an individual carries with oneself and then transmits – like

a father gives an inherited gold watch to his own son – is not necessarily a defining characteristic of traditions, either. In sum, I submit that one can maintain a *participatory* notion about practices as an alternative to the model that Turner uses and which I am tempted to call one of *possessive individualism* – in deference to Hobbes and Locke, whom Turner mentions. My point with the game model is that it carries, I think, so much weight that we do not have to take Turner's possessive model as *the only logically possible*, so that we may have free hands, so to speak, to search for alternatives. However, even those possible alternatives are still well advised to rely on a notion of habit.

A pragmatist alternative: Habit reversing the order of naturalness in human action

I have said by way of introduction that the pragmatist interpretation of habit is not necessarily committed to the famous Faustian principle that '*am Anfang war die Tat*', at the beginning there was a particular deed. In other words, in this tradition habit is not necessarily defined in terms of an originating singular action that by repetition is crystallized into a mechanic pattern. The first thing to be noted about the pragmatist interpretation, in comparison with Turner's, which might be called the standard one, is that the pragmatist habit-concept is much more comprehensive. It is more explicit in reference to the mental dimension, as we shall see, but it is also more explicit in reference to the mechanic dimension. Even that model that later on has come to be known as behaviouristic (the model of conditioning) contains a grain of truth, although it cannot serve as a basic model. Let us take a closer look at all this and start by making sure that there is some common language between Turner and the pragmatists, so that a comparison is possible in the first place. To show this, I quote a famous passage from the *Principles of Psychology* (1890), by William James, which according to some people (e.g., Sills and Merton 1991: xv) is the *locus classicus* of the whole idea of habit:

Habit is the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious uprisings of the poor. It alone prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman and the deck-hand at sea through the winter; it holds the miner in his darkness, and nails the countryman to his log-cabin and his lonely farm through all the months of snow; it protects us from invasion by the natives of the desert and the frozen zone. It dooms us all to fight the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or

our early choice, and to make the best of a pursuit that disagrees, because there is not other for which we are fitted, and it is too late to begin again. It keeps different social strata from mixing. Already at the age of twenty-five you see the professional mannerism settling down on the young commercial traveller, on the young doctor, on the young minister, on the young counsellor-at-law.’ (James 1890/1950, I: 121)

I think that this answers pretty well to Turner’s idea of habit and its role in practices. To call habit as the ‘fly-wheel of society’ is an apt metaphor for the idea that it is habit that keeps the traditions and practices going. Turner’s own expression for the matter is not remote at all, as he says (1994: 15) that ‘The term [habit] describes an activity, such as rising before dawn, which is an observable repetitive form of behaviour.’ To this he adds immediately the important observation that ‘merely repetitive behaviour is not necessarily habitual: a distinctive mental component is required.’ Most differences between Turner’s position and that of the pragmatists concern how this mental component is to be conceptualized and what role it actually plays in the habitual process. However, before moving to address that question, let me keep my promise about explaining in exact terms also the role that the *mechanic* pattern has in the pragmatist understanding of habit.

The role of the mechanic pattern is to relieve consciousness from those tasks where its contribution is not actually needed. William James found an expression for this in his aforementioned *Principles*, as he called it ‘the principle of parsimony in consciousness’ (vol. II: 497 *et passim*). This principle means, as James says elsewhere, that ‘The more of the details of our daily life we can hand over to the effortless custody of automatism, the more our higher powers will be set free for their own proper work’ (vol. I: 122). The effortless custody of automatism was an important thing for the pragmatists, because Peirce has also paid attention to the phenomenon. His expression about it is perhaps even more telling than James’s, as he says that ‘It is bad economy to employ the brain in doing what can be accomplished mechanically, just as it would have been bad economy for Napoleon to write his own dispatches’ (Peirce *NEM* 4: 71). The point to be gathered, it seems to me, is that the pragmatists are more careful than Turner in pointing out that mechanical repetition can have even a positive role in human conduct.

However, the point that most exercises us is the role of the mental component in habitual conduct. Both positions do recognize its presence, but their understandings about it do differ. For Turner the mental component is a residue of the earlier deliberative decision that was made when the original ‘first action’ was performed. I have already maintained that for pragmatism there is not necessarily any ‘first action’ to give birth to the habit, so that the position of the mental component is also somewhat different. Peirce’s well-known starting point is that ‘the whole

function of thought is to produce habits of action' (*EP* 1: 131), but he is also famous for insisting that there is no such thing as a 'first thought,' all thought is a continuation of some previous thought.[5] From these two principles it is not far-fetched to conclude that there is no such thing as a 'first action' in Peirce's understanding of action, so that the relation between habit and singular actions in his (and other pragmatists') philosophy is *from* the former *onto* the latter, not the other way round as we have it in Turner and some others. As we shall see, this hypothesis gets also some support from Peirce's other discussions.

However, *prima facie* it easily seems that the pragmatists can be faulted for gathering an unbecoming multitude of things under their habit-concept, so that one is entitled to ask whether they use it at all consistently. Such misgivings about inconsistency are understandable, I would say, but I also think that there is a real although not quite outspoken motivation behind the pragmatists' choice of this term. A later commentator, Israel Scheffler, provides us with a first elucidation by saying that the pragmatist terminology 'reverses the order of naturalness as the modern concept of inertia reversed the natural state from rest to motion' (Scheffler 1974: 59). He says this while explaining Peirce's relation to the Scottish philosopher and psychologist Alexander Bain,[6] but we are entitled to generalize the characterization to go for the pragmatic movement as a whole. John Dewey, at least, called it a 'monstrous' assumption to think 'that man exists naturally in a state of rest so that he requires some external force to set him into action.' This, he continued, is the tacit, or sometimes not quite tacit, assumption behind those theories that make a motive or an incentive the most basic concept in their analyses of action (Dewey 1922: 118). To take this pragmatist train of thought a bit further, if one takes lethargy to be the natural human state, it is only a short step from this to conclude that the human body is an *instrument* that in an unproblematic manner is at mind's disposal. With this one is back at the Cartesian dualism, the traditional bugbear of the pragmatists. One indicator about how the pragmatists wished to avoid that dualism is Peirce's aphoristic saying that 'knowledge is habit' (*CP* 4.531), which I take to be a case of 'reflexive habituality' (my coinage), because I believe that Peirce did not mean merely tacit knowledge here.

How to know with one's habits

It is no doubt a bit unusual conceptualization to say that knowledge is habit. One thing that I think Peirce wished to express in so saying is that to know is not to be in a state, but either to be in (mental) activity or to possess a capacity for activity. Why so? One apparent reason is the principle of *fallibilism* that is built in the pragmatist conception of knowledge – and action – the assumption that failure and error are always possible, but can also be anticipated and guarded for. However, I

also wish to make the point that the idea that knowledge is habit is not idiosyncratic to Peirce. Dewey namely has a more extensive example to just the same effect:

The reason a baby can know little and an experienced adult know much when confronting the same things is not because the latter has a 'mind' which the other has not, but because one has already formed habits which the other has still to acquire. The scientific man and the philosopher like the carpenter, the physician and politician know with their habits not with their 'consciousness.' The latter is eventual, not a source. Its occurrence marks a peculiarly delicate connection between highly organized habits and unorganized impulses. (Dewey 1922: 182-183).

Although it is not quite usual to say that someone knows with one's habits, this position is not actually worlds apart from that of Turner's who also admits that habits and consciousness may have concomitant effects. However, the decisive point is the following: Turner admits this for tacit knowledge, but only for that kind of knowledge. The *opacity* of habits, and, as a consequence, the opacity of practices was what bothers him in *The Social Theory of Practices* (1994). His dilemma was just that to admit the presence of habit in social life – which seems to be an unavoidable conclusion – is tantamount to admitting that practices (and thereby social life more generally) are opaque, not amenable to explicit analysis. However, the novel pragmatist point is that to say that one knows with one habits does not imply that the case is about tacit knowledge only.

It may be advisable to proceed stepwise, so that our first question would be: Are habits necessarily completely opaque, so that we can know about them only by their indicators, as is Turner's (1994) position? The principle, for which one author, Donald Schön (1983/1991) has suggested the name '*reflection-in-action*,' suggests that it does not have to be so. Schön, whose field of study is the psychology and sociology of professional work, is a later 20th century follower of Dewey, and maintains like his predecessor before him that 'our knowing is *in* our action' (1991, 49). By this Schön and Dewey mean explicitly that our knowing takes place inside the process of action, not outside it or before it. Schön tells more about the closer relation between such intelligent knowing and competent doing as follows:

Like the baseball pitcher, we may reflect on our 'winning habits'; or like the jazz musician, on our sense of the music we have been making; or like the designer, on the misfit we have unintentionally created. In such processes, reflection tends to focus

interactively on the outcomes of action, the action itself, and the intuitive knowing implicit in the action. (Schön 1991: 56).

To suggest this is to suggest reservations about Turner's assumption that habits are inherently opaque, to be known only by their indicators. The reason why I take up Schön's above principle is that it provides us with a half-way house, so to speak, between Turner's opaque habits and their pragmatist counterparts in 'reflexive habituality.' Schön does talk about reflecting 'on' habits above, but that is not quite what I mean by my neologism 'reflexive habituality.' Schön's baseball pitcher apparently reflects on his winning habit only as a *fait accompli*, after the game, so to speak, while submitting it to the scrutiny of his coach, for example. (Bourdieu used to give similar examples.) Where is the difference in regard to Turner's position? It is in the idea that the baseball pitcher reflects on his habit as a whole, not in a piecemeal manner, as in Turner's inferences by indicators. So, I think, the case has to be at least with the musician, about whom it would be ridiculous to say that she thinks about her music note by note. However, these examples about competent doers, instructive though they no doubt are, do not quite present us with cases of 'reflexive habituality' as I understand it. Although Schön's professionals reflect on their habits as wholes, they apparently do not view them *from the inside*, so to speak. However, the classics of pragmatism have suggested that even this might be possible.

'Consciousness of habit is a consciousness at once of the substance of the habit, the special case of application, and the union of the two,' Peirce once said in correspondence with his friend William James (Peirce *CP* 8.304). As regards this saying, there cannot any more be any question about the knowledge involved being only tacit. The acting individual is here aware of having mastered some action processes, both cognitively and as a corporeal skill. The individual can physically bring out the state of affairs in the outer world that he or she wishes to achieve, and also give a discursive account of the whole procedure. This, I think, is what Peirce wants to bring out with the above saying that *prima facie* seems a little cryptic. That this apparently is the correct interpretation receives support from Peirce's semiotic terminology.

Semioticians are familiar, other people less so, with his principle about how a sign *inherently* has, or rather brings about, an interpretant or several such. In sign-theoretic terms, the interpretant is a new sign (to represent the object in question), but the idea can also be expressed more colloquially by saying that the interpretant means a change in the acting individual's (be it human or animal) behaviour. Peirce is famous for his trichotomic classifications, and the classification that most pertains to our present problem enumerates as some possible types of interpretants 'emotional,' 'energetic' and 'logical' interpretants (Peirce *EP* 2: 409f.). As regards the

two latter kinds of possible outcomes of an interpretive process, some curious things come out on closer inspection. The concept that has been exercising us throughout this essay, ‘habit,’ makes here an appearance in a strange position. The curious thing is that Peirce relates it explicitly to the *logical* interpretant. This is a conceptual marriage without a precedent outside the pragmatist tradition, because other philosophies relate logicity (or rationality) to *singular* actions. Peirce, however, writes consistently, albeit a bit cryptically, that

In every case, after some preliminaries, the activity takes the form of experimentation in the inner world; and the conclusion (if it comes to a definite conclusion) is that under given conditions, the interpreter will have formed the habit of acting in a given way, whenever he may desire a given kind of result. The real and living logical conclusion *is* that habit, the verbal formulation merely expresses it. (Peirce *EP* 2: 418; original emphasis.)

Turner’s position (1994: 16) is, as we recall, that a mental component has to be present in habit, on this he is quite insistent. It might not be going too far to say that he thereby may allow also a dose of rationality in habit. Such rationality, however, would be rational only in the same sense as moonlight is illuminative. Moonlight does illuminate but the light that it throws is only ‘borrowed,’ mediated sunlight, colloquially speaking. The source of rationality in Turner’s model apparently is the originating first action, from which the habit in question got its lease of life. The reason to think so is that Turner (1994: 104) talks about habits as ‘mental traces’ in a manner that reminds one of those ‘memory traces’ that empirical psychologists study. That what the habit is a ‘trace’ of, apparently is the originating first action, which perhaps was a rational action of which some social scientists are very fond. We have already gathered that Peirce, a classic in the discipline of logic, does not maintain an idea about a ‘first action,’ but of course wishes to include the notion of rationality (logicity) in his action model. Accordingly, he situates it *within* the habitual dimension itself. As his point continues:

The habit conjoined with the motive and the conditions has the action for its energetic interpretant; but action cannot be a logical interpretant, because it lacks generality. The concept (...) somewhat partakes of the nature of a verbal definition, and is as inferior to the habit, and much in the same way, as verbal definition is inferior to the real definition. (*ibid.*).

Motive, conditions, the action in the singular, and habit, these are all terms that even other philosophies rely on, while talking about human action. But here Peirce's position differs from the normal. The singular action is defined in terms of habit rather than vice versa. Even such thinkers, like Turner, who do not mean by 'habit' mere mechanical repetition, would be most reluctant, I believe, to admit that the concept, i.e., the reflexive side of the action-situation would in any sense be 'inferior' to habit. They also might be puzzled at Peirce's insistence to the effect that 'the action' (in the singular) cannot be logical. Peirce namely does insist to this effect, because he rounds out his argument by saying that

The deliberately formed, self-analyzing habit, – self-analyzing because formed by the aid of analysis of the exercises that nourished it, – is the living definition, the veritable and final logical interpretant. Consequently, the most perfect account of a concept that words can convey will consist in a description of the habit which that concept is calculated to produce. But how otherwise can a habit be described than by a description of the kind of action to which it gives rise, with the specification of the conditions and of the motive? (Peirce *EP* 2: 418).

This is a curious passage indeed, and tells about various things. In the first place, the mental and corporeal aspects of action seem to be here in mesh, because Peirce talks about the analysis of the exercises that nourish the habit; such a protean expression apparently means that we are not dealing with mere mental ponderings here. Habit definitely is no mere residue of some previous first action in this context, because Peirce says explicitly that it is *habit* that is deliberately formed. As he adds that habit is also 'self-analyzing,' this gives justification to my earlier assertion about how the habit is viewed 'from the inside' in this way of thought. And the most curious and radical idea apparently is that Peirce in these formulations establishes a *positive correlation* between logic and habit, but emphatically not with logic and a singular action! The point to be gathered thus is that it is habit that is the basic, main concept in Peirce's theory of action, whereas 'a' singular action turns out to be a residue. One does not have merely to reason toward this conclusion, there is also some evidence to this effect, as Peirce writes in the penultimate article of his publishing career that

Every action of Napoleon was such as a treatise on physiology ought to describe. He walked, ate slept, worked in his study, rode his horse, talked to his fellows, just as every other man does. But he combined those elements into shapes that have not been

matched in modern times. Those who dispute about Free-Will and Necessity commit a similar oversight [as do those who search for Napoleon's rationality in his actions one by one – E.K.]. (...) our power of self-control certainly does not reside in the smallest bits of our conduct, but is an effect of building up a character. All supremacy of mind [over matter] is of the nature of form. (Peirce *CP* 4.611).

It was once mentioned above that Peirce defines human rationality in terms of self-control, so that this passage testifies literally to the effect that rationality is not to be found in singular actions one by one; it is to be found in more comprehensive phenomena, for which Peirce here uses the somewhat arcane term 'character.' In view of the fact that we are dealing with a recognized classic of logic, Peirce's insistence about the correct locus of rationality is quite interesting. As has been noted (Pietarinen 2003: 34), 'an early anticipation of the game-theoretical notion of strategy can be found in Peirce's concept of habit' (see also Hintikka 1998). The depiction of human action as strategic is no novelty as such, but the Peircean order of things renders his case a special one, because the cited author goes on to add that 'what Peirce is in effect saying is that no single action or a sequence of actions, that is, a choice or a sequence of choices as consecutive moves in a game, can spell out the meaning of the signs in question, because it does not put into the picture how one arrives at such choices.' (Pietarinen 2003: 36). Accordingly, I think that we are entitled to conclude that in Peirce's model 'habit' is the primary thing, the foundational mode of action, both descriptively and logically (rationally) conceived, whereas 'an action' is a residue.[7]

With this we thus have found a diametrically opposed counterpart to Turner's (1994) notion, so that the only common thing in the two depictions is the concept of habit, but so that it is a basic notion in one, a residue in the other. The role of a singular 'action' changes likewise, as we move between the two action-models. But what is this pragmatist model good for, if anything? Even here Pietarinen (2003: 36) provides a starting point by saying that Peirce used habit 'as an organizational principle that could bring an organism's modes of response, or its interaction with an environment, into a unified, strategic rule of action.' This tells that we are dealing with a model of action that is more advanced than its counterparts in analytic 'philosophy of action' or in the sociological 'action theory' tradition. These latter action-depictions deal with the phenomenon of how an agent or actor approaches the concrete reality. What they do *not* deal with, is such situation where reality *approaches us*, but that situation is no less important than the former, perhaps more so (see further Kilpinen, forthcoming, and some references therein). However, an approach that is applicable also to such a situation is cognitive science, and with it we come back to Turner's later suggestions to his 1994 dilemma.

Some solutions to the unhappy conclusion

At the beginning of this paper I mentioned that Turner in his later writings has turned to cognitive science in search for a way out of his dilemmatic conclusion of 1994. Above we have found that the situation, though perhaps complex, does not have to be taken as so dilemmatic as Turner took it in that book. It is by no means self-evident that the notion of habit is so hopelessly opaque (and thereby renders social practices opaque) as Turner then would have it. This is how he found the situation in *The Social Theory of Practices*:

... the point of what I have argued in this book is that the limitations of the inferences we may make about bodies of habit are profound. The character of the limitations bears directly on the question of what social theory can be. We deal with the habits we are trying to understand as through a fog. We have no access to them save by analogical reasoning and no clear understanding of their inner causal structure because there is no collective object to understand. (Turner 1994: 113).

It does not have to be so, we can argue by now. Habits are not necessarily so foggy, we can have access to them and reflect on them, *while they are operating*, so to speak, and the modes of inference that we have at our disposal while doing so, can be more sophisticated than mere reasoning by analogy. However, the comparative story does not end here, for let us keep in mind what else we found above. With its ‘principle of parsimony’ pragmatism does recognize that there are also occasions when our consciousness loosens its command over our doings and lets the free-wheeling habit take over. Accordingly, my point in showing that things can be taken and have been taken in a different sense is not to assert that Turner has been grappling with a non-problem. He certainly has been wrestling with a genuine problem and his further solutions to it are most interesting.

In *Brains / Practices / Relativism* (2002) Turner claims that cognitive science would be able to provide a new foundation for social science and social theory, but simultaneously also affect traditional understandings of what is basic and what is less so. The theoretical objects in social science radically change their status, once the findings and conclusions of cognitive science are taken into account; this is Turner’s leading idea. The least one can say is that he is not alone in thinking that cognitive science might have some revolutionizing effects. Before him, Lakoff and Johnson made a similar claim and even more radically, by saying that more than two millennia of a priori philosophical speculation about mind and of reason ‘are over,’ due to the results obtained by

the new discipline (Lakoff and Johnson 1999: 3). It perhaps is advisable to add immediately that the ‘cognitive science’ mentioned here does not refer to the ‘computational theory of mind’ approach that was in vogue some decades ago, but to a newer interpretation with an emphasis on mind’s embodied nature and its capacities for learning. At this point, however, pragmatism again joins the discussion, because one of the aforementioned authors says also emphatically that ‘James’s and Dewey’s ego-less, functional, process-oriented view of consciousness meshes nicely with recent cognitive science work on the development and loss of various states of consciousness. It is this sense of an embodied, value-laden, transient (yet relatively stable) self that lies at the heart of a naturalist, non-dualist view of the person.’ (Johnson 2006: 376). So far so good, one only is tempted to add, – though the case cannot be argued here – that with Peirce and Mead it may be even more so than in regard to those two pragmatists mentioned. Just to give an example, not only James, the psychologist, but also Peirce, the logician, maintained that ‘emotion plays a crucial role in reasoning; rather than being its enemy, emotions are part of what makes good reasoning possible,’ as Johnson (2006: 374) notes about James. The point to be taken concerning our topic thus is that pragmatism remains a discussion partner for Turner even after his ‘cognitive-scientific turn,’ as his most recent position might be characterized.

What then does Turner wish to alter in social theory discussions, drawing on cognitive science? He claims that ‘the problem that concerns me is that social theory, including its most “advanced” postmodern forms, employs or depends on the models of mental life, mostly handed down through various routes, from late nineteenth-century neo-Kantianism (...) that do not correspond to – and indeed conflict with – the models that presently figure in cognitive [science]’ (2002: 2). The reference to postmodernism I take to be sarcastic, to add more bearing to the thesis in Turner’s collection of essays, that neo-Kantian presuppositions about mind effloresce in twentieth-century social thought almost throughout, but this is perhaps not for the best – in view of the emerging empirical picture about mind. However, I think that an article that he has published since the above collection gives the best examples about what the cognitive-scientific intent in social theory is all about. The article is entitled ‘Tradition and Cognitive Science’ (2003) and Turner tells there that this approach presents of model of human thought ‘that deals with thought [pre-eminently] as skilled activity’ (Turner 2003: 61). This is most agreeable, but I perhaps do not need to remind any more in so many words that just so has pragmatism always taken thought. As we peruse Turner’s article more thoroughly, converging points with pragmatist positions just keep increasing. As thought is to be taken as ‘skilled activity,’ this suggests the further conclusion that just so is social life in general also to be taken. As Turner (2003: 63) goes on,

A practical activity can succeed with skilled practitioners whose skills are not identical but are acquired in such a way that they enable the practitioners to act cooperatively and even to improve their skilled performances in relation to one another, to adjust to one another, and to learn more generally to adjust to others, as in, for example, the joint activities of skilled practitioners and in the improvement and adaptation gained through practical cooperative activity involving other skilled practitioners. And the “inherited” condition of this activity, the tradition or practice, to the extent that it consists of the skills that the practitioners have, will also have no changeless center, no gist, and so forth.

This is most agreeable, but I would not call this quite a new thing. One rather reads this with an impression of *déjà vu*, at least if the reader has spent some time with pragmatist writings. It is no exaggeration to say that the idea of individuals acting cooperatively, in so doing learning to adjust to each other, and in and by this adjustment augmenting also their general learning capacities, is but a paraphrase of G. H. Mead’s (1938; 1934) general position, and, incidentally, of the basketball game model of practices that I proposed above. ‘We fall into a form of life as a result of being born into it, and it is a historical product of largely blind past choices, but once we experience its benefits, we can come to recognize and appreciate them as benefits and to improve on our achievement of them,’ Turner writes now (2003: 66). I agree but also ask isn’t this something quite different from Turner’s (1994) former idea of practices or traditions (here: forms of life) as something that one carries with oneself like money in one’s pocket?

‘Skilled practitioners,’ furthermore, are the *dramatis personae* also in a work we have come across before, in *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983/1991) by Donald Schön. This is not to belittle Turner’s insight, and I agree wholeheartedly as he adds that it is characteristic of skilled behaviour that it is ‘not merely the assimilation of some package of rules but depends on the experiences that made up the skill’ (2003: 62). I only am afraid that I am repeating myself ad nauseam, if I add one more time that this all is proven pragmatism.

In short, I think that Turner is right in suggesting that social thought should take some new bearings and give up some of its traditional assumptions about how mind works in relation to behaviour. If the prognosticated paradigm change will take place, it will also more or less amount to a vindication of pragmatism. Not this time in the happy-go-lucky manner in which Rorty has used and (some would say) abused this philosophy, but on serious empirical grounds. But are not the prospects of social theory rather dim, if all that comes true, some people might wonder? Quite to the contrary, I would say. It is the same author, Turner, who is proposing the aforementioned paradigm

change and who is also advising social theory to take a self-conscious attitude and not to be too humble in relation to other approaches and disciplines. This is the tenor in his essay, 'The Maturity of Social Theory' (2004), and the point is that

What I mean by a mature field, and why I believe social theory to be (...) in this category [is the following]: By 'mature' I mean autonomous, that is to say with its own purposes and problems, but also sufficiently rich in its means of approaching these problems, and sufficiently balanced between the alternative ways of approaching problems, that it is not likely to collapse into a sectarian school of 'application.' (Turner 2004: 160).

If we follow this lead, we are entitled to take social theory as an independent field of study, with a *raison d'être* of its own, and not as one that is to be judged only according to its ancillary performances. I am with those who think that this comes only more evident if social thought is bold enough to search for those new empirical bearings.

Notes

[1]

I have intimated about pragmatism adumbrating cognitive science in Kilpinen (2000; 2002).

[2]

Turner's contribution to that volume is also available as chapter one in his own collection *Brains / Practices / Relativism* (2002: 23-34).

[3]

A detailed argument for this position is beyond the purview of this paper, but I have given some suggestions for it, in a social scientific context, in Kilpinen (2003). Empirical evidence to support it is forthcoming from such scholars and scientists as Damasio (1995; 1999) and Bogdan (2000), who, incidentally, belong to the cognitive science movement!

[4]

Be it noted that Parsons's accusation of behaviourism does not hit Veblen (Hodgson 2004; Kilpinen 2004). The reason is that Veblen does not mean 'habituation in the old-fashioned sense of the word,' as his own expression goes (Veblen 1994: 136), whereas Parsons does.

[5]

This, as is widely known, is the leading idea in Peirce's early series of writings, the so-called 'anti-Cartesian' articles of 1868-69 that are available in the standard editions *Collected Papers* (vol. 5), *Writings* (vol. 2), or *The Essential Peirce* (vol. 1).

[6]

And Bain's concept was 'belief' rather than 'habit,' but it is standard knowledge that the early Peirce defined these concepts in terms of each other. Later on he was only more radical, by making 'habit' include also 'belief.'

[7]

Someone might say that these points, even if correct, are points scored by Peirce rather than the pragmatic tradition as a whole. Recently, however, the opinion has been spreading that this tradition is more unified than its first reception or its Rortyan renaissance have suggested (e.g., Kilpinen 2000; 2003; Colapietro 2004). This means that it is not a hopeless attempt to make its representatives help each other, so to speak.

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