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# Dewey, Second Nature, Social Criticism, and the Hegelian Heritage

Italo Testa

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- 1 The expression “second nature” is used a significant number of times by Dewey throughout his philosophical career, since the early *The Study of Ethics: A Syllabus* (1897) up to *Freedom and Culture* (1939) and later writings, and mostly related to the commonplace saying that “habit is second nature.”<sup>1</sup> As such, the expression “second nature” is used by Dewey in a predicative sense, to qualify something as something – even though some uses as a noun expression are to be found in his works.<sup>2</sup> And that which is so characterized is not a marginal feature but rather a core notion – habit – of both his theory of knowledge and action. It is not by chance that the first occurrence of this expression takes place in 1897, the same year in which Dewey lectured at the University of Chicago on Hegel’s *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*. In this course Dewey dealt intensively with the “Anthropology” section of the “*Encyclopedia*”<sup>3</sup> and gave a central role in his reading of Spirit to the notion of “habit” developed in §410: the paragraph where Hegel explicitly writes that “habit has been rightly called a second nature (*Die Gewohnheit ist mit Recht eine zweite Natur genannt worden*).”<sup>4</sup> Even though Hegel is never directly quoted by Dewey whenever he refers to second nature, a stark Hegelian imprinting, as we’ll see, is to be found both in his understanding of habit and of second nature.

## I. Dewey’s Understanding of Habit and its Hegelian Background

- 2 *Constitutive role.* The starting point for this consideration is to realize that habit is the basic notion of Dewey’s understanding of social reality and that according to him it plays a constitutive role for human life forms both in a structural and in a genetic sense. That’s what Dewey expresses in *Human Nature and Conduct* with the anthropological theorem that “Man is a creature of habit, not of reason nor yet of instinct.”<sup>5</sup> Dewey insists on the decisive role that habit formation plays for the constitution of human social facts. As

Dewey argues in *Human Nature and Conduct*, social reality is dependent upon human interaction, which has the form of conjoint action. And habit is the fundamental socio-ontological notion necessary in order to understand what conjoint action is, since human action is always action that happens in the context of prior action. Habit is thus defined as “the kind of human activity which is influenced by prior action and in that sense acquired.”<sup>6</sup> As Dewey writes in *The Public and Its Problems*,

habit is the mainspring of human action, and habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs of a group. [...] The dependence of habit-forming upon those habits of a group which constitutes customs is a natural consequence of the helplessness of infancy.<sup>7</sup>

- 3 Such an understanding of habit is naturalistically rooted. Habituation is a life process, which concerns the way our natural life form is made, interacts with its environment and reproduces itself. The formation of habits is built into our organic nature and is sensitive to the affordances of natural environment, but still acquired as a result of a social learning process, since the heart of learning is exactly the “creation of habitudes.”<sup>8</sup>
- 4 *Objectivity of Habits.* The process of habit formation does not concern only individuals and their subjective dispositions, but involves also the shaping of the natural and social objective world. First, habits are connected with a double sense of embodiment: they are embodied in corporeal attitudes of the subjects of habit formation, and incorporate objective forces, since they are sensitive to the affordances of the natural and social environment we inhabit and the social environment we inherit. But such an embodiment is not merely an adjustment to the natural and social environment, but also an adjustment of the social environment, which is thus reshaped by the process of habit formation and in its turn embodies it.<sup>9</sup>
- 5 Moreover, habit formation for Dewey has three sides: “habits” properly said, by which he means established patterns of action of individuals; “customs,” by which he means established collective patterns of action; and “institutions,” understood as systematized established social arrangements of habits.<sup>10</sup> In this sense, Dewey’s notion of habit corresponds both to what I have elsewhere named “subjective,” “internal second nature,” and the notions of custom and institution correspond to that of “objective,” “external second nature.”<sup>11</sup> The process of habit formation, understood as a process that leads us from our first biological nature to our second nature (our cultural nature), is a process in which these two sides are strictly intertwined. On the one hand, according to Dewey habits are formed for the most part under the influence of the customs, which means that the objective side has some sort of priority in this process.<sup>12</sup> But on the other hand, this prominence of custom, does not mean that the subjective side of habit does not continue to have a deep role, especially for what concerns its dialectical relation with (first) organic nature, that which Dewey in this context names “impulse.”
- 6 If we understand it this way, Dewey’s affirmation in *Human Nature and Conduct* that “man is a creature of habit” can be appreciated as an original and systematic reconstruction of Hegel’s thesis, expressed in the *Encyclopedia*, of the universal anthropological role of habit, which “embraces all kinds and stages of mind’s activity (*umfaßt alle Arten und Stufen der Tätigkeit des Geistes*).”<sup>13</sup> The naturalistic side of this Hegelian position is more radical for Dewey, but significantly emerges from his interpretation of Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit.<sup>14</sup> Secondly, Dewey traces in a more systematic way a distinction between habits, customs, and institutions, which recaptures the objective side that for Hegel too the notion of habits played – applying both to individual abilities and activities –

subjective spirit – and to the social objective world – objective spirit. In this way Dewey regains in a theoretical way the socio-ontological role that “custom” plays for the constitution of *Sittlichkeit* in §§ 4 and 151 of the *Grundlinien*.

- 7 *Critical and dialectical dimension.*<sup>15</sup> The notion of habit for Dewey is not just an affirmative and descriptive one, concerning an accomplished positive state, but rather a critical dispositive which should allow the critical re-description of processes of critical transformation and growth. As for Hegel, habit is taken by Dewey as a manifestation of the “will.”<sup>16</sup> In his *Philosophy of Right* Hegel conceives of habit qua custom as an embodiment of the will which moulds the bodiliness of the “first,” “purely natural will”<sup>17</sup> into a “second nature.” This relation between “natural will” and second nature is reconstructed by Dewey into the relation between “impulse” – which is by him understood as “original,” “native” will – and “habit.” Dewey constructs such a relation in a strong dialectical way. On the one hand, the notion of habit as manifestation of the will – understood as an embodied pattern of action, that is action which happens in the context of prior action – presupposes that of “impulse,” taken as original, native activity/will. But impulses are not to be understood as having a given, fixed content, independent from the way in which they dialectically relate to habits. As Dewey writes, “the meaning of native activities is not native; it is acquired. It depends upon interaction with a matured social medium.”<sup>18</sup> This does not mean that the notion of impulse is completely absorbed into and reducible to that of habit, since a dialectical relation to the naturalness of impulses is still needed in order to capture the dynamic structure of habits. As such, impulses, understood as not yet determined and organized activity, play the role of “agency of deviation,” “pivots of readjustment,”<sup>19</sup> grasping the open, unpredictable character of every action. The notion of impulse expresses the fact that every action is in some sense a unique one,<sup>20</sup> which happens anew and involves an unpredictable readjustment of previous experience: as Dewey writes, “all action is an invasion of the future, of the unknown. Conflict and uncertainty are ultimate traits.”<sup>21</sup>
- 8 In this sense the notion of habit is not just a descriptive, static notion, concerning the structural features of social action in a synchronic sense, but it is also critical and dynamic too, since, in its dialectical relation to impulses, it is also used to account for habit formation as a diachronic process that involves variation and change, and in whose development plurality and conflict are immanent.<sup>22</sup> Hegel’s understanding of spirit’s activity as a process of habit formation rather than as total habituation (which for Hegel would correspond rather to loss of vitality and eventually “death”<sup>23</sup>), is here made explicit by Dewey and reconstructed in a radically pluralist way through the articulation of the internal relation of habit to impulse.
- 9 A further point concerning the critical dimension of the notion of habit regards the way the process of habit formation is interpreted by Dewey as a process of liberation which expresses a dialectical tension between freedom and un-freedom, disempowerment and empowerment. Such a dialectical tension is reflected within the very notion of habit. That’s why Dewey repeatedly distinguishes between ‘bad’ and ‘good,’ ‘dead’ and ‘living’ habits, ‘routine’ and ‘intelligent’ habits. In their process of formation habits can manifest both aspects. On the one hand, the establishment of habitual patterns is a form of empowerment insofar as it can free us from previous limited and oppressive situations and lead to the development of novel capacities and courses of possible action. But on the other hand, these same habits can turn into repetitive, inertial patterns of behavior which block the expansion of life’s forces.<sup>24</sup>

- 10 Such a dialectic notion of habit is at the basis of the social notion of freedom as emancipation which Dewey develops also in socio-philosophical writings such as *Liberalism and Social Action*.<sup>25</sup> Human freedom has to be understood as an ongoing process of liberation, which has an iterative structure, since the habits which secure freedom's expressive expansion as the result of a process of emancipation from previous natural and social constraints, can always transform themselves into inertial patterns, engendering the need to be liberated from their oppressive, life's and meaning's blocking structure.
- 11 This dialectics of habit formation has again a footing in Dewey's reading of Hegel. Already a passage from his early (1887) *Psychology* affirms the enabling and freeing role of habit in a way pretty close to Hegel's formulation in § 410 of the *Encyclopedia*,<sup>26</sup> to which Dewey himself will again give an important role in his 1897 *Lectures on Spirit*.<sup>27</sup> The idea that habit in itself is not identical neither to freedom nor to enslavement to repetition, but is rather a dialectical process, can be traced back to the passage where Hegel writes that "by habit a man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its slave (*der Mensch durch die Gewohnheit einerseits frei wird, so macht ihn dieselbe doch andererseits zu ihrem Sklaven*)."<sup>28</sup> Moreover, such a dialectics of relative freedom and relative un-freedom is also understood by Hegel as a process of "Liberation (*Brefreiung*)"<sup>29</sup> which involves a distinction between "bad habits (*üblen Gewohnheiten*)" (inertial, enslaving) and good ones (expansive, expressive of life's freedom) meaning that habit is not in itself identical neither with enslaving repetition nor with freedom, but can be expressive of both in different contexts or under different aspects.
- 12 *Automatic Structure of Habit*. This leads us directly to the question of "second nature." In fact, the passages where Hegel in the *Encyclopedia* articulates this dialectics between freedom and un-freedom is immediately followed by the passage where Hegel explicitly qualifies habit as "second nature":
- Die Gewohnheit ist mit Recht eine zweite Natur genannt worden, – *Natur*, denn sie ist ein unmittelbares Sein der Seele, – eine *zweite*, denn sie ist eine von der Seele *gesetzte Unmittelbarkeit*.<sup>30</sup>
- 13 Here it is important to note that this notion of habit as second nature is strictly connected with the understanding of habit as a "mechanism of self-feeling (*Mechanismus des Selbstgefühls*)."<sup>31</sup> As Hegel writes in the same paragraph, habit is the "determinacy of the feeling [...] made into something that is natural, mechanical (*die zu einem Natürlichseienden, Mechanischen gemachte Bestimmtheit des Gefühls*),"<sup>32</sup> where it is the activity of the spirit which gives to it "the shape of something mechanical, of a *merely* natural effect (*die Gestalt eines Mechanischen, einer bloßen Naturwirkung*)."<sup>33</sup> And please note that here the mechanical side of habit is not per se negatively qualified, since for Hegel it is a necessary aspect of the functioning of spiritual life in all its forms and levels – including intentional, reflexive and free ones – that "the *voluntary* embodiments of the mental discussed here become through habit something mechanical (*die hier besprochenen freiwilligen Verleiblichungen des Geistigen durch Gewohnheit zu etwas Mechanischem*)."<sup>34</sup>
- 14 The mechanism of habit – the fact that habit has to function as something automatic, embodied in preintentional physiological mechanisms, and operates at a prereflexive, unconscious level – is thus a sliding door, since it can be the natural basis of the expression of spiritual freedom – a necessary, even if not sufficient condition of it, expressed by the idea that habit "has the content of freedom" – but can also implement an enslaving pattern and thus take the form of un-freedom. Which means that neither

freedom nor un-freedom are identical with habitual mechanism. As we'll see, Dewey, who already in his early *Psychology* insisted on the automatism of habitual action, and who in the *Lectures on Psychology* quoted the passage on the "mechanism of self-feeling," will give a central role to the mechanical structure of habit, positing it at the core of his account of life's processes and of his understanding of second nature.

## II. Dewey's Uses of Second Nature

- 15 Let's now come to analyze the way Dewey explicitly uses the expression "second nature" in his works. How does second nature qualify habit when it is used by Dewey in this way?
- 16 *Constitutive role.* First, already in Dewey's early writings, "second nature" is connected with the constitutive role habits play for the human associated form of life. As Dewey writes in the syllabus *A Study of Ethics*, "habits, second nature, give us consistency and force."<sup>35</sup> Here second nature understands the fact that habits constitute a deep ontological structure which cements the way of being of human life forms. For this reason Dewey very often quotes the saying that habit is second nature to underline the strength, potency, persistency and urgency, and even authority of habitual action patterns in human interaction. It is here that the relation between the notions of first and second nature frequently comes up. "Habit is second, if not first nature," writes Dewey in his 1908 *Ethics*.<sup>36</sup> In *Freedom and Culture* habit as second nature is said to be not only "as potent and as urgent as first nature,"<sup>37</sup> so deeply engrained to "have all the inevitability that belongs to the movements of the fixed stars."<sup>38</sup> What is more, Dewey writes that "second or acquired nature is stronger than first nature."<sup>39</sup> All these passages are echoing in a close manner a topos to be found in Hegel's *Grundlinien*, where *Sittlichkeit* is qualified as second nature insofar as it "takes the place of the first and purely natural will,"<sup>40</sup> and where, in the preceding paragraphs, the "absolute power and authority" of the ethical laws is said to be "infinitely higher," "infinitely more firmly based than the being of nature (*eine absolute, unendlich festere Autorität und Macht, als das Sein der Natur*),"<sup>41</sup> exemplified here by the sun and the moon and their physical laws.
- 17 *Automatism.* The potency and urgency of habit is furthermore captured by its qualification as second nature because the latter comprehends exactly the fact that habit has a grip on us insofar as it takes the form of a mechanism which operates at a natural level, being rooted in our physiological structure, functionally implemented in subpersonal mechanisms, and phenomenologically expressed in a pre-reflexive dimension. This is what Dewey for instance expresses when he writes that "all these things, which are habits with us, which are automatic, which have become second nature, have to be acquired by the child."<sup>42</sup>
- 18 *Objectivity of Second Nature.* A further point to underline here is that second nature according to Dewey involves an objective dimension. Dewey uses the expression "second nature" to refer to instances of individual subjective corporeal dispositions and activities such as the upright posture and the activity of walking,<sup>43</sup> thinking dispositions such as logical skills<sup>44</sup> and "habits of opinion."<sup>45</sup> But he uses second nature also, and in a paradigmatic sense given the socio-ontological priority of custom over individual habit, to refer, as seen, to shared customs,<sup>46</sup> socially accustomed prejudices such as racist attitudes<sup>47</sup>, rituals and etiquette,<sup>48</sup> and institutional forms of life.

- 19 *Critical and Dialectical Dimensions*. The notion of second nature is double edged in Dewey's use. As seen, Dewey on the one hand uses it to qualify the automatic, mechanical, pre-intentional and pre-reflexive structure of habitual disposition. Moreover, second nature qualifies the persistency of character of habits and their persistent grip over us. Furthermore, the expression is used also, with a negative connotation, to qualify the "inertial" moment of habits,<sup>49</sup> that is the fact that the automatic mechanism can turn into patterns where habits perpetuate themselves in a repetitive, rigid, reifying way.
- 20 But on the other hand, second nature is used also to qualify "reflection as "arrested habits"<sup>50</sup> or else to say that "habits of reflection," which manifest varying, flexible and living attitudes, are "as easy and natural as organic appetites."<sup>51</sup> Here, "second nature" qualifies the strength of habits which manifest themselves in a varying, flexible and living manner. And in *How We Think*, such a notion of second nature is connected with "conscious and deliberate skills in thinking,"<sup>52</sup> which are then to be interpreted as modes of habit that can manifest themselves in varying, flexible and living attitudes.
- 21 The relation between these two sides of habit as second nature is by no means external, but is rather an internal one. The inertial moment is not to be misunderstood as identical with the ontological strength of habits and their automaticity – since even not inertial habits, that is flexible ones, have to be instantiated in an automatic and persistent way in order to work properly. Still, the inertial momentum relies on and can profit from the same mechanism that implements good habits, including reflective ones. On the other hand, even reflective habits are not per se prevented from turning into inertial patterns. For instance, Dewey observes in *The Public and its Problems* that "habits of opinion" are "the toughest of all habits; when they have become second nature and are supposedly thrown out of the door, they creep in again as stealthily and surely as does first nature."<sup>53</sup>
- 22 More generally, the ambivalence of second nature is here analyzed in terms of the dialectics between first and second nature. When Dewey wrote that habit as second nature is as potent, as urgent as first nature, or even stronger, we were confronted with a dialectical exchange, when one term turns into its opposite. Here, what Adorno would have called the "appearance of necessity" of second nature, and Dewey in *Contrary to human nature* labels as the "confusion of second or acquired nature with *original* nature,"<sup>54</sup> is much more than a cognitive error. Since such an appearance manifests an objective dialectical inversion which suspends the rigid opposition between the given sense which opposes first nature as original, fixed and not modifiable and second nature as acquired, variant and modifiable by human action. In the end, second nature manifests itself as more persistent than what appears to be the case at first, and first nature manifests itself as more variable and modifiable than what appears as second. As Dewey writes in the article *Human Nature*,
- the acquired nature may moreover become so deeply engrained as to be for all intents and purposes native, a fact recognized in the common saying that habit is a second nature. And on the other hand, taking a long biological evolution into account, that which is now given and original is the outcome of long processes of long growth.<sup>55</sup>
- 23 Here the critical use of the notion of second nature is, in comparison with Hegel, accentuated, and the dialectics between first and second nature more insistently articulated and demarcated by a Darwinian flavor that nevertheless works as a reinforcement of a dialectical dispositive within some form of social naturalism rather than as a foundational device of a reductionist type.

- 24 The “paradoxical” inversion between second and first nature takes us back to Dewey’s analysis of the relation between habits and impulses. The latter are at first sight characterized as “primitive,” “native” and “inevitable” activities, whereas habits are understood as “secondary,” “not original,” “acquired,” which implicitly corresponds to a distinction between first and second nature.<sup>56</sup> But as Dewey observes, when we consider this distinction in relation to human conduct, it turns out that habits manifest themselves as primitive, whereas impulses acquire their meaning and define their content in relation to them, and are as such secondary and derived (“in short, the meaning of native activities is not native, is acquired”).<sup>57</sup> Moreover, in the evolution of habit formation the apparent first nature of native activities manifests itself as a dynamic factor – impulses function as not yet organized activities which introduce elements of variation, deviation from old routes – whereas acquired patterns which appear as second nature are much less permeable to change and may operate as inertial factors.

### III. Art and Routine

- 25 *An Expressive Model of Habit.* I would now like to show that at the core of this critical and dialectical interpretation of second nature lies an expressive model. Once again, Dewey’s reading of Hegel’s Anthropology seems to offer here a convenient point of departure. In fact, while reconstructing the three moments of habit distinguished by Hegel – hardening against external sensations, indifference towards satisfaction, and dexterity (*Geschicklichkeit*) – Dewey already put a strong emphasis in his *Lectures on Spirit* on the third moment, which is the culminating one and that for Hegel is characterized in terms of an expressive embodiment, where bodiliness is taken into possession and one “becomes more and more at home in its expressions in ihren Äußerungen somit immer heimischer wird.”<sup>58</sup> Here Dewey uses the notions of “power” and “skill” to reconstruct this active form of habit. Through habit, then, human beings come to possess their experience. They acquire “an additional power,”<sup>59</sup> that is, they are empowered in their acting capacities.
- 26 This idea that the culminating moment of habit formation can involve an expressive appropriation is, according to the interpretation I am presenting here, a peculiar trait of Dewey’s approach to second nature. If we realize this, then we can start to appreciate why Dewey does not oppose habituation and meaningful expression, or in other terms why the ethical model of second nature based on habituation is for him dialectically connected with the aesthetic model of second nature based on art.<sup>60</sup> In the common sense, and for many philosophical authors of the 20th century, the notion of habit tends to be reduced to a negative meaning where it is identical with routine, bare repetition, and tends to be opposed to the active notion of skill – as it happens, for instance, in the analytical tradition, by Ryle, who opposes habits to skill, but also, in the dialectical tradition, by Lukács, who tends to use the notion of second nature as a negative one.<sup>61</sup> Whereas it is a peculiar feature of Dewey’s position that here skills are understood as an accomplishment of habit, and hence habit, and second nature, can both have a negative and a positive sense, being compatible with an expressive dimension that involves plasticity, flexibility, and creativity.<sup>62</sup> Expressive accomplishment is a possible perfected outcome of habit formation, which is by no means guaranteed and does not prevent habits from falling back into rigid patterns. Still, the possibility of expressive appropriation is what makes the difference here in Dewey’s model.



- 27 It's Dewey's expressive notion of habit which accounts for his strong rejection of the identification of the latter with repetition. Repetition and exercise are a mechanism through which habits can be acquired and consolidated but do not define their essence. As Dewey argues, "habit is in no sense the essence of habit. Tendency to repeat acts is an incident of many habits but not of all."<sup>63</sup> For instance, a murderous attack may happen only once in a lifetime but still be due to habit for someone who has the disposition to give way to anger. On this basis, Dewey argues against those who assume "from the start the identity of habit with routine," and thinks rather that the most fundamental feature of habit, their essence in the Hegelian sense of the concept to which they correspond and that they can instantiate at different degrees of accomplishment, consist in the fact that "habit is an ability, an art formed by past experience."<sup>64</sup> These abilities are per se no more conservative than they are progressive, but everything depends on their quality, which takes us back to the distinction between "bad" and "good" habits, the latter being understood as qualitative enhancement of the very structure of habit.<sup>65</sup>
- 28 It is exactly here that the distinction between routine and art plays a decisive role for the way Dewey articulates the distinction between two qualitatively different modes of habit expression, that is "routine habits" on the one hand, and what he calls "intelligent," "creative" habits.
- 29 Here, on the one hand, the positive notion of habit is characterized as something sensible to practice and exercise, both self-preserving and self-transforming, freely intertwining with other habits, flexible and adjustable to different situations. And capable of creative answers – the aesthetic model of the free play of faculties is somehow in the background – that fit the unusual and the novel by producing new meanings that are "unique" and "never twice alike,"<sup>66</sup> thus empowering life's evaluative manifestation and introducing within it elements of deviation and variation. Whereas, routine habits are seen as habits that "apply only where conditions remain the same or recur in uniform ways."<sup>67</sup> They are qualified as "rigid" responses, pigeon-hole like rather than intertwining, overspecialized, based on previous patterns that merely self-perpetuate without transforming themselves. They are incapable of adapting themselves to varying situations and are incapable of renewing themselves, but rather tend to decay to "dead," lifeless schemes, and thus to "sink below the level of any meaning."<sup>68</sup>
- 30 Routine habits are distinguished from creative ones on a qualitative scale, that is, they are understood as a poor instantiation of the expressive structure of habit, where expressiveness tends to the degree zero of meaning production. But the relation between these two poles is still a dialectical one, since they are both manifestations of the same expressive dynamic structure of habit formation and in this process can turn one into the other. That's also why the distinction between art and routine does not correspond to that between impulse and habit – as if impulse were the creative element and habit the mere routine. Although dialectically intertwined with the distinction between first and second nature, the distinction between art and routine is not identical to it, since both habits and impulses – which are in the end the dynamic aspect of habit – can manifest themselves in various ways and play a role in the creative process of social life.
- 31 *Life and Mechanism*. But what does this expressivist dialectics of habit qua second nature mean for critical social philosophy? In what follows I will argue that this expressivist model plays an important role in Dewey's analysis of currents of social thought in the identification of their conceptual strategies and of their typical fallacies, and in the diagnosis of social pathologies of the modern world. In order to understand exactly the

socio-philosophical meaning of this model, we first need to investigate at a deeper level the distinction between routine and art and how it relates to the question of the automaticity of habits. As we saw, already Dewey's early work gave an important role to the fact that habit has to function as something automatic, embodied in preintentional physiological mechanisms, and operates at a prereflexive, unconscious level. Whereas, according to some interpreters, the young Dewey had the tendency to identify this automaticity with routine and to oppose it to skills,<sup>69</sup> we have seen that already in the early lectures on Spirit, and certainly in the mature systematization of *Human Nature and Conduct*, Dewey goes beyond such a dualism and realizes that automatism is required for both routine and skills to function. This leads Dewey to deeply appreciate the indispensable role that "mechanism" plays for the development of life's activities, including social ones.

- 32 In *Human Nature and Conduct* this leads Dewey to develop a strong criticism of those positions – one implicit target seems to be Bergson's vitalism – that assume a dualism between life and mechanism. Dewey states on the contrary that "all life operates through a mechanism." In this sense mechanism is "indispensable" for life and higher levels of life's development are not to be understood as merely departing from mechanical organization, but rather as evolving into more complex and flexible automatisms.<sup>70</sup> Dewey refuses to identify mechanism with an "unintelligent automatism," and thinks that automatism applies both to unintelligent and intelligent activities. Hence the notion of mechanism cuts across the distinction between routine and art and lies at the core of Dewey's understanding of habit. The old Hegelian motif of "habit as mechanism of self-feeling" is here being re-elaborated in a more encompassing model according to which, as Dewey writes:

Yet all habit involves mechanization. Habit is impossible without setting up a mechanism of action, physiologically engrained, which operates "spontaneously," automatically, whenever the cue is given. But mechanization is not of necessity *all* there is to habit.

- 33 The indispensability of mechanism for habit formation is here related to the idea that habit, in order to function, needs first to have physiological correlates ("physiologically engrained"). Secondly, it must be implemented in a functional mechanism that operates automatically at a pre-intentional and subpersonal level ("automatically"). And thirdly, it must be phenomenologically expressed in a pre-reflexive, "spontaneous" dimension.
- 34 It is interesting to note that the passage quoted above also implicitly broaches an important distinction between "mechanism" and "mechanization." Whereas "mechanism" is indispensable at all levels of life in general, and of habit formation in particular, "mechanization," according to Dewey, "is not of necessity *all* there is to habit." The point here is not to oppose again mechanism and intelligent life, but rather to make room for a gradual and evolutionary distinction between qualitatively different forms of mechanisms, that is between simpler and repetitive ones and more complex and adaptable mechanisms: un-flexible and flexible machines.<sup>71</sup> As Dewey writes, "the higher the form of life, the more complex sure and flexible the mechanism." Moreover, this notion of "mechanism," whereas compatible with a naturalist frame of research, does not seem to be a mechanistic one, and seems to go beyond the opposition between mechanism and self-organization, mechanical and teleological structure, since it makes space for the evolution of intelligent, purposive mechanisms.

35 The distinction between routine habits and “intelligent, artistic habits” must then be read in the light of the indispensability of mechanism for the organization of social life forms. This has an important effect also on the role that the aesthetic model of “art” plays in this context. As Dewey writes:

Nevertheless the difference between the artist and the mere technician is unmistakable. The artist is a masterful technician. The technique or mechanism is fused with thought and feeling. The “mechanical” performer permits the mechanism to dictate the performance. It is absurd to say that the latter exhibits habit and the former not. We are confronted with two kinds of habit, intelligent and routine. All life has its élan, but only the prevalence of dead habits deflects life into mere élan.<sup>72</sup>

36 Whereas the mechanical element is here affirmed to be indispensable also for the creative act of the artist, the latter, understood as “masterful technician,” is characterized not by the absence of mechanism, but rather by its expressive mastery. Whereas in routine automatisms the mechanism “dictates the performance,” in creative habits automatisms are fused with thought and feeling and are characterized by a higher plasticity. Here the creative element is not an additional one, injected from the outside, such as a spiritual supplement, but rather a qualitative upgrade of the mechanism itself, a deeper embodiment of its functioning. The creative element of art, that which introduces “variety, flexibility and sensitiveness to disposition,” is here related to some sort of expressive empowerment. This is a matter of what is named “force,” that is vital expenditure involving physical expression, that for Dewey is at different degrees an element of all the manifestations of our life form, and that through habituation is deployed and given consistency in a structured form. Intelligent, creative habits are then those patterns of behavior that happen to liberate life’s energies in a “constructive form,” that is, that expressively expand life’s forces – where the expressive act “releases energy and focuses and tranquillizes it”<sup>73</sup> – producing new meanings and leading to their appreciative enhancement.

37 Here the expressive notion of habit and the notion of freedom come together. As we have already seen, this notion of habit as an expressive skill had already been connected by Dewey in his *Lectures on Spirit* with the notion of self-mastery, of being with one-self as its most accomplished form: a form that already in Hegel’s §410 of the *Encyclopedia* was outlined as exhibiting the content of freedom, that is the structure of being with oneself in the other that is the core of the expressive notion of social freedom.<sup>74</sup> In *Human Nature and Conduct* we can appreciate how an expressive model of habit formation shapes Dewey’s understanding of social freedom as expressive liberation and reshaping of life’s energies which emancipates them from stagnation and oppression. That’s why Dewey sharply criticized the opposition between “convention,” “habit” and “institutions” on the one hand, and “art,” “impulse” and “freedom” on the other hand, while affirming that the real problem is not convention in itself, but rather stupid and rigid convention. This way Dewey makes room for a habit-based notion of embodied and institutionalized freedom which expressively liberates impulses, reshaping them creatively and stabilizing them in institutional form.<sup>75</sup>

38 *Over-mechanization and reification.* We can now come back to the diagnostic role of the expressive notion of habit qua second nature. The notion of mechanism is here a turning point as for the dialectical torsion of habit formation. The ambivalence manifests itself here in the above mentioned tension between mechanism and mechanization and is grounded in the dialectical core of what Dewey names in his 1932 *Ethics* the “mechanizing

influence of habit.”<sup>76</sup> Whereas mechanism is necessary for all forms of life, from simple life forms to more complex and intelligent ones, mechanization goes wild when it becomes a process where mechanism is dualistically opposed to life, and reduced to a dead thing that rather than empowering life, blocks its processes and leads them to decay to an inorganic level. I would label “over-mechanization” this dialectical inversion where organic mechanization turns into inorganic mechanization. This is a process, affected by a deep dualism between mind and body, spirit and instrument, life and mechanism, which not only results in some sort of conceptual philosophical pathologies which cause intellectual suffering and instability, but for Dewey is deeply connected with social pathologies that affect modern life. Such pathologies are due to economic and social patterns which are dualistically structured, and where, as Dewey writes while commenting upon Veblen, “machine-workers, he thought, tend to become mechanized in their habits of thought and thus to resemble the machines which they operate.”<sup>77</sup> Here this form of brute mechanization of habit, which tends to reduce living mechanisms to inorganic and simple machines, is clearly the model on which the process of the reification of industrial labor is conceived by Dewey. Reification is here understood as the decay of living patterns of interaction to mere routine habit – consisting merely of “machine-like repetition.”<sup>78</sup> According to Dewey’s diagnosis, such forms of social pathologies are connected with forms of social power which profit from dualist schemes of the mind/body, life/mechanism relation, using them as functional means for the establishment and the perpetuation of domination of some social groups over some others.<sup>79</sup> This phenomenon, labeled here as “monopoly of social power,” is analyzed by Dewey more extensively in his *Lectures in China*, where he shows how the habitual patterns of some social groups become dominant in social life over other groups in a way which establishes “patterns of dominance-subservience.”<sup>80</sup> Thus they end up exercising a sort of monopolizing activity over life’s forces, reducing them to something “unilateral,” “rigid,” “fossilized”<sup>81</sup> – which are exactly the same expression that will be used by authors such as Lukács and Adorno to refer to commodification as reified second nature, a sphere of interpersonal life turned into a dead thing.<sup>82</sup> Reification is thus analyzed as a deprivation and suppression of life’s potentialities by the establishment of routine patterns of reified second nature that sustain the domination of some groups over some others but that lead to a social pathology from which all parts somehow suffer, since such a unilateral and mortifying block of life’s forces affects also the dominating groups’ life.<sup>83</sup>

#### IV. Benchmarks of Social Criticism

- 39 *The ambivalent appeal to human nature in social sciences and political thought.* We can now better see how exactly the lexicon of second nature informs Dewey’s social diagnoses and critical analyses of social theories and political thought. This is a question we can detect not only in the writings of the early twenties such as *Human Nature and Conduct* and in the *Lectures in China*, but also in some of his later works such as *Freedom and Culture* and the articles *Human Nature* and *Contrary to Human Nature*. For Dewey the question of second nature is a social theoretical one already because competing social and political theories, as he argues in *Freedom and Culture*, tend to justify courses of action and political policies by appealing to different understandings of words such as “nature” and “natural.” And what differentiates such understandings of the meaning of naturalness consists exactly in the way they articulate the relation between “first” and “second nature,” “native,”

“original” and “acquired.”<sup>84</sup> Here Dewey underlines not only the different and often opposing way such words are used in order to structure different political options within political struggle, but also the intrinsic ambivalence of such notions and how this is reflected and mobilized in competing practical programs. Also in the article on *Human Nature* he wrote for the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (1932), Dewey is particularly interested in how the difference between families of political thought such as conservatives, liberals, nationalists, internationalists, democrats, aristocrats and so on, can be traced back to different takes on human nature, which are on the other hand framed in relation to the purposes of “practical social movements” rather than with scientific objectiveness.<sup>85</sup> Dewey’s point is a subtle one and should not be misunderstood as a merely relativistic one. He is not just saying that political interests and purposes of some social groups shape our understanding of human nature. He is also claiming that different social movements bring into light distinct aspects of human nature. Here the dynamics of social conflict plays a practical cognitive role by disclosing something otherwise not accessible to our experience. According to Dewey “new social movements,” that is social movements expressing interests previously not recognized in the public sphere, bring into light factors of human nature that were disfigured, concealed or repressed by the discourse grammar shaped by dominant groups.<sup>86</sup>

- 40 By saying that there is a least one “incontrovertible fact in human nature,” that is the variety of the uses of this notion and their correspondence to different practical uses, Dewey is stressing first the contested character of the concept of human nature. Here Dewey’s philosophical contribution consists of a conceptual analysis of the principal meanings in which nature is understood by different understandings of “human nature,” that is 1) nature conceived as something “original” and “native” vs. nature as “acquired” and derived; 2) internal (psychological) nature vs. external (physical and social) nature; 3) nature as something wholly modifiable and moldable by external influences vs. nature as something invariant; 4) human nature as an institutional fact (language, religion, law, state) vs. human nature as based on (either native or acquired) individual potentials.
- 41 Dewey’s overall strategy does not consist here in adopting one or another definition, but rather in revealing the underlying dualism between original and derived, subjective and objective, internal and external, on which all these conceptions are based, and in showing the dialectical inversion of such meanings. Here the dialectics of second nature is exactly what sets in motion this process, since it shows, as we have seen, that which appears first as native nature, manifest itself also as derived, and vice versa; that acquired nature, once understood as wholly moldable, ends up being more persistent than native impulses, which in turn aren’t at all invariant and represent factors of change and deviation; that habit is not just an internal element but embodies objective natural, social and institutional forces, which are in turn incorporated in individual dispositions whose deployment contributes to the reshaping of these same forces.
- 42 *Arguments from Nature in Social Discourse*. In *Human Nature and Conduct* and in the article *Contrary to Human Nature* (1940) such an approach is developed into a critical analysis of specific socio-philosophical arguments based on an understanding of human nature. In particular Dewey analyzed three main arguments he considers somehow fallacious, that is 1) arguments that something is contrary to human nature, 2) arguments from the fixity of human nature, and 3) arguments from the complete malleability of human nature. The first argument is often used by those who oppose social change – as, for instance, was the case with many arguments against the abolition of slavery and the enfranchisement of

women. But, as Dewey notes, social change is on the one hand always somehow against human nature as it exists at a certain time – that is, against human nature if understood as acquired habitual disposition; on the other hand, social change can be said to conform to human nature, if we consider the fact that the tendency to learn and acquire is a component of our native biological stock. Here we can see how Dewey’s criticism appeals dialectically both to the ambivalent use of the notion of nature to be detected in such an argument, and to the objective ambivalence of our naturalness.

- 43 As for arguments from the fixity of human nature, these are analyzed by Dewey as instances of the arguments that something is against human nature, since the latter often appeal to the fact that human nature cannot be changed and from there jump to the conclusion that policies that would like to modify it would be destined to fail. Such an argument is thus reconstructed as a model of conservative discursive strategies in social thought. Here the appeal to fixity of human nature is based on an a priori framework shaped by practical interests rather than on objective scientific facts or on experimental research. From the point of view of experimental inquiry one should rather say, as argued above in a Darwinian way, that our native biological stock involves openness to change and variation, and that history is but “a record of changes in human habits.”<sup>87</sup> And if there were elements of our nature that are relatively constant – which so far we don’t know – their assessment would be a matter of experimental research rather than of a priori anthropological statements.
- 44 But arguments from fixity are rather persistent notwithstanding their discrepancy with what we know. And here Dewey finds some lessons to be learned for progressive thinkers. First, such arguments tend to be rationalizations of existing habits and of the prejudices, one-sided interests and institutionalized power structures which they incorporate. But secondly, and here more relevantly, arguments from fixity are so successful over history not because there is an invariant native human nature, but because our derivative nature, that is habits, has a strong grip on our minds and action. We now see how an argument that is supposed to be based on the immutable structure of original nature, ends up having its real base grounded on the inertial moment of habits. This is what Dewey names here the “confusion of second or *acquired* nature with *original* nature” as that which substantiates arguments from fixity and could give them an appearance of cogency.
- 45 As for arguments from the complete malleability of human nature, these are criticized by Dewey on the basis of the same conceptual strategy. First, habits are genuine components of our nature – since we are biologically disposed to acquire a second nature – and manifest some traits of inertial persistency that go against the idea of the complete modifiability of human nature by will, at least at a given time. Dewey is of the idea that social reformers should learn a lot from this, and that many families of progressive thinking – from liberalism to utopian socialism – reveal themselves to be based on a questionable constructionist anthropology. They conceive dualistically the relation between history and nature, understanding the first as something completely modifiable at will and ending up having a disembodied notion of social practices as something abstracted from material and natural processes. But this is no more than the complementary side of the conservative perspective that reifies naturalness as something given and not modifiable.
- 46 *Aversion to the Unfamiliar and the Genealogy from Habit of Social Prejudice.* I would now like to explore more closely how the notion of habit as second nature is the source that sets in motion Dewey’s figures of social criticism. First, Dewey’s critical notion of second nature

is the basis of his reconstruction of the genealogy of social prejudice. In *Human Nature and Conduct* and in more detail in the article *Racial Prejudice and Friction* (1922), Dewey traces back to the constitutive anthropological role of habit formation the origin of some social bias that come before judgment and influence our reflection by leading us to produce defective judgments. These biases spring from the fact that habits are so “deep set in our natures”<sup>88</sup> as to produce some sort of spontaneous, unconscious aversion and antipathy to what is unfamiliar, “new,” “unusual,” “strange,” “foreign,” “alien,” that is, to what departs from the established habits in which we were brought up. Please note, against possible misunderstandings of this point, that such a natural and anthropological mechanism does not yet naturalize prejudices, since the determinate content of prejudices such as racial ones, is created and determined by a number of physical, religious, and political factors which historically cluster around the aversive dialectics of habit formation.

- 47 Here the commonplace saying that “habit is a second nature” is again quoted as for the “literal truth it contains,” and which is here related to the way such an aversive mechanism functions, leading us unconsciously to feel as “unnatural or supernatural whatever departs from our established habits.”<sup>89</sup> The confusion between original and acquired nature comes up again here not just as a fallacy of political thought, but rather as a bias of our spontaneous and prereflexive way of thinking which can be revealed by social critique through a reflective use of the critical notion of second nature.
- 48 *Figures of Social Criticism and the Dialectics of Nature*. But how is this second nature based model of social criticism exercised and which are the figures of conceptual reification it unveils? Which are the practices of critique of social forms which Dewey deploys and that manifest different, even if interrelated, aspects of the exercise of our critical potentials? I think we can distinguish analytically the following figures.
- 49 Critique of Normalization. The first practice to be criticized is what I would call ‘normalization’. What is criticized here is the identification of the standards of practices with “what is normal and hence is right” (*Freedom and Culture*).<sup>90</sup> This is a process where habitual standards of practices are taken to be social norms which define what is normal and what is not, and hence prescribe what should be according to such a model of normality. This is what happens in the instinctive aversion of social groups for whatever departs from established habits. This is mediated by the process of habituation, which does not mean that habituation should be identified with it. What happens here is that the standards supplied from our habits are taken to be norms which define what is normal and which lead to understanding whatever is alien and strange as being abnormal or unnatural. Such an instance of habitual patterns is at the origins of many social prejudices, including what manifests itself as racism, that is, racial prejudice towards the stranger (*Racial Prejudice and Friction*).<sup>91</sup> This is also what happens in sexist societies. Here some customary standards which embody a pattern of dominance-subservience tend to be tacitly accepted by those who are subjected to them as established facts, having a normative meaning. This is what in his *Lectures in China* Dewey describes as the first phase – “tacit acceptance of the status quo” – of social reforms understood as struggles for recognition.<sup>92</sup>
- 50 Critique of Over-Naturalization. This form of normalization may additionally combine with some sort of naturalization, that is, with the fact that nature is taken to be normative, or else that social standards are taken to be inherent in the nature of things as their natural norms.<sup>93</sup> In this sense in sexist societies women not only tend to tacitly and

acquiescently accept their subordination, but are additionally led to see their subordination as an “inalterable” natural fact.<sup>94</sup> The problem here is not merely the naturalization of social standards. In some sense, as we have seen, social standards are always immanent to the development of natural human life and are constantly naturalized by the process of habit formation. There is nothing wrong in the fact that habits come to be deeply engrained in our nature. The problem is much more in the way such a naturalization takes place in some instances and is combined with certain conceptions of naturalness. This reifying naturalization or over-naturalization is what happens when naturalization is combined with normative normalization. Here the fact that nature is taken to be normative means that it is understood to be as an original, invariant, immutable, fixed norm. This is what Dewey names the “confusion of second or acquired nature with original nature”<sup>95</sup> and Adorno understood as an instance of “identity thinking.” And the critique of reifying naturalization is not just a form of denaturalization, since, on the one hand, it does not consist in saying that what was supposed to be natural is merely artificial, conventional, historically constructed; moreover, such a critique has one of its sources in naturalness itself and its dialectic movement.

- 51 Critique of Essentialization. In this sense, the problem here is what might be called essentialization: that is, the fact that standards are taken to be essential, original norms, that is, norms which define the invariant essence of something. That’s why a further practice of social criticism can be exercised as *critique of essentialization*. In some cases what is essentialized is precisely naturalness. But naturalness, as we have seen, is not the same as invariance, and in this sense the criticism of essentialization is a form of criticism which may be performed from within nature, that is, deploying the polysemy of naturalness against the unilateral and reifying tendency to identify it with invariance. This corresponds to the second phase of social reform, as Dewey describes it in his *Lectures in China*, that is, “challenge”: a phase where “facts of nature” turn out not to be immutable after all, that is, where their invariance is revealed by criticism, to use the words of Adorno, as an appearance of necessity, something which conceals the contingency and transience of those very facts.<sup>96</sup>
- 52 Critique of Alienation. A further practice of social criticism consists in the critique of the “alienation” of social life. This is what the criticism of bad habits amounts to. Habits are criticized not as such, neither because they assume the form of a second nature – that is, are constantly re-naturalized – but rather insofar as they assume a rigid, lifeless, dead form. That is, insofar as their naturalness loses its living, organic and expressive character and becomes something dead, crystallized, decaying to inorganic naturalness. Alienation is here understood as an “antonym of associated living,”<sup>97</sup> that is, as devitalization, deprivation of its natural expressive force, of its energy. And the previous figures of practices of social critique are somehow encompassed by this latter, since normalization, overnaturalization and essentialization can be understood as specific mechanisms through which life is alienated. The qualitative enhancement of associated living is understood by Dewey in his *Lectures in China* as extended communication. Then social alienation – which Dewey exemplifies with rigidly stratified authoritarian societies such as the caste system in India, clerical religions, societies divided into uncultivated masses and social elites – is understood as a lack of communication between social groups where this is limited or impeded by a socially established blockage. Alienation is connected with reactive feelings such as dissatisfaction, dislike, aversion to otherness,



hatred, and deprivation, in those who are subjected to them. Moreover, alienation leads to the inhibition and atrophy of individual and collective capacities, and can lead to forms of introversion which can take two complementary forms, that is, on the one hand social acquiescence and servility, on the other hand, cunning and deceitfulness (an analysis of social alienation which seems to be following the model exposed by Hegel in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his analysis of the *Neveu de Rameau* as estranged consciousness).

- 53 *First and Second Nature as Benchmarks of Social Criticism*. All the above mentioned figures of social criticism – critique of normalization, critique of over-naturalization, critique of essentialization, and critique of alienation – are understood as manifestations of a wider critical dispositive, that is, the dialectics of first and second nature, or else, the dialectics of impulse and habit. Habit, as we have seen, is acquired, is a secondary formation which is the result of the social shaping of impulses, but is nevertheless a manifestation of our organic natural way of living, since it is necessary for our life form to reproduce itself through habituation. In this sense habit is a second nature. But habit is also nature because, even if secondary, it is as potent and urgent as first nature. Such a distinction between first and second nature is then a contextual and positional one and should not be absolutized. I think we can find here a sort of criticism ante litteram of those positions that, such as bald naturalism on the one side, and McDowell’s quietism on the other, tend to absolutize the distinction between first and second nature and choose to place themselves exclusively on one side (whereas bald naturalism stays on the side of first nature, McDowell chooses to stay only on the side of second nature).<sup>98</sup>
- 54 When the distinction is absolutized, this leads to forms of essentialization which have an alienating character. It is, as Dewey writes in his article on *Human Nature*, as if we took a “static cross section,” a “snapshot of man,” ignoring the dynamic process of his growth.<sup>99</sup> That’s what happens for instance when nature is taken to be normative and such normativity is essentialized as invariance. This may affect both our understanding of first and of second nature. So, for instance, conservatism (and bald naturalism) tend to identify first nature – instinct, impulse – with something invariant, whereas radical historicism tends to think of second nature as being completely malleable. But if we do not absolutize the distinction between first and second nature, we may discover that what appears as first nature, as for instance impulse, is rather undetermined, readily modifiable, and shapeable by already given habits; moreover, native activities are secondary in the course of conduct, since they acquire their meaning in function of given habitual patterns. Hence the first naturalness of impulse may turn into second nature. Whereas what appears as second nature, for instance, habit, is often, even if not essentially, rather persistent and manifests a greater inertia; moreover, habit is primary in the course of conduct, since it is in its function that native activities acquire social meaning. Hence the second naturalness of habit may turn into first nature.<sup>100</sup>
- 55 In this sense the distinction between first and second nature is not always a given thing, but manifests itself anew in relation to the changing social and historical contexts of life’s development. Neither should we assume that the concepts of first and second nature describe two metaphysically given and separate domains of objects.<sup>101</sup> First and second nature are rather dialectically intertwined place-holder concepts, to be filled in relation to different contexts and which disclose certain configurations of experience and action. This does not mean that such a distinction cannot be useful and justified under some circumstances. This is a point Dewey makes when he argues that such a distinction between first and second, native and acquired nature is a “convenient intellectual

device,” a “bench mark useful for studying some particular period of development” which has descriptive power and is practically important since it can disclose to us configurations of experience not otherwise accessible.<sup>102</sup> In fact, in biological and social arrangements there is always something which is given and something which has to be acquired under this basis. And if we want to modify and transform human nature and social life, we have to take this into account and depart from here. Hence, the distinction between first and second nature is a dynamic and dialectic one and always needs to be re-described anew in relation to the context we need to map and operate within. Its dialectic character means that such a distinction not only has a certain descriptive power, but also a critical power, since it describes the process of critical transformation of associated life. Hence the distinction between first and second nature is a critical dispositive, which is needed to deploy the practices of social criticism we have sketched out: such a distinction is the perspective from which, from time to time, we can critically re-describe processes of associated life, criticizing the ongoing normative essentialization of its shape and the consequent alienation which results from it.

- 56 *Nature as a Source of Criticism.* The intimate dialectics of first and second nature is finally rooted in the polisemy of naturalness and in the ambivalence of its social manifestation, as it is manifest in the ambivalence of the process of habit formation and its performative oscillation between enslavement and liberation, repetition and creativity, routine and art, inertial tendency and unexpected development. On the one hand, some forms of essentializing naturalization lead to social subjugation. But on the other hand, naturalness – as for instance it is manifest in the role that native impulses play in education and in social life, and in the role that reflexivity, as naturally grounded, plays in moral and social thought<sup>103</sup> – can be an agent of deviation, transformation, revitalization, and reconstruction of social practices. Naturalness can then be a source of the liberation of social life and of the enhancement of individual and shared human capacities.
- 57 The intimate dialectics of first and second nature manifest also the ultimate dynamic character of naturalness, the way in which it constantly transforms itself – either decaying, or falling into pieces, or evolving. This, according to what Dewey wrote already in his article on *The Influence of Darwinism on Philosophy* (1909), is not only the lesson of social criticism but also of Darwinism, understood as a revolt against a philosophy that endorses the primacy of that which is immutable and fixed – of nature as origin – and in this respect contributes to the rethinking of a new philosophy of nature capable of turning from the “permanent to the changeable”: to the rethinking of nature as something temporary and contingent, relatively stable and relatively changeable.<sup>104</sup> That which the young Adorno named the “transient” character of nature, and which manifests the internal connection between first and second nature, nature and history – the intimate tendency of history to decay to naturalness, and the tendency of nature to develop historically<sup>105</sup> which is expressed in the dialectics of habit formation.

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## NOTES

1. See for instance EW 4: 241, MW 5: 309-11, MW 13: 243-344, and LW 13: 308.
2. See LW 13: 68, EW4: 356-7, and LW14: 258-9.
3. Dewey (2010: 130-1).
4. Cfr. Enz § 410A: 141.
5. MW 14: 88.
6. MW 14: 31.
7. LW 2: 334-5.
8. LW 2: 335: "The influence of habit is decisive because all distinctively human action has to be learned, and the very heart, blood, and sinews of learning is creation of habitudes."
9. MW 14: 38: "habits incorporate an environment within themselves. They are adjustments of the environment, not merely to it."
10. See Dewey (1973: 85, and MW 14: 85).
11. See Testa 2008.
12. See MW 14: 43.
13. Enz § 410A; and Wallace/Miller: 132.
14. On the idea that Hegel's naturalism turns around his reading of habit, and for a criticism in this light of constructivist interpretations such as Robert Pippin's and Terry Pinkard's, see Testa 2012 and 2012a, and Levine 2015, who characterizes Dewey as a "left-hegelian naturalist."
15. See Enz § 410A; and Wallace/Miller: 132: "Habit is a form that embraces all kinds and stages of mind's activity. The most external of them, the individual spatial determination, his upright stance, is made by will into his habit, an *immediate, unconscious* posture which always remains a matter of his continuing will."

16. "Habit means special sensitiveness or accessibility to certain classes of stimuli, standing predilections and aversions, rather than bare recurrences of specific acts. It means will" (MW 14: 32).
17. RPh § 151.
18. MW 14: 65. See also MW 14: 86: "it exemplifies again our leading proposition that social customs are not direct and necessary consequences of specific impulses, but that social institutions and expectations shape and crystallize impulses into dominant habits."
19. MW 14: 67 and 76.
20. "For any activity is original when it first occurs. As conditions are continually changing, new and *primitive* activities are continually occurring" (MW 14: 108).
21. MW 14: 10-1.
22. See Testa 2017.
23. "Human beings even die as a result of habit – that is, if they have become totally habituated to life and mentally [geistig] and physically blunted, and the opposition between subjective consciousness and mental activity has disappeared. For they are active only in so far as they have not yet attained something and wish to assert themselves and show what they can do in pursuit of it. Once this is accomplished, their activity and vitality disappear, and the loss of interest which ensues is mental or physical death" (RPh 151A). Note that that total habituation would correspond to a situation, in Dewey's terms, where impulses are completely exhausted by formed habits, that is, where all habits would be "dead habits." Hence, the distinction between "living" and "dead habits" which Dewey often traces (see for instance MW 14: 51-2), articulates exactly the point Hegel made in the *Grundlinien*.
24. Arvi Särkelä (2017) has to my mind usefully emphasized the important role that the notion of "stagnation" plays here to characterize the situation where habits block life's forces and lead them to decay into inorganic, lifeless nature.
25. "If we employ the conception of historic relativity, nothing is clearer than that the conception of liberty is always relative to forces that at a given time and place are increasingly felt to be oppressive. Liberty in the concrete signifies release from the impact of particular oppressive forces; emancipation from something once taken as a normal part of human life but now experienced as bondage" (LW 11: 34). On the notion of freedom as liberation in relation to Hegel (*Befreiung*) see Menke 2010, and Testa 2015.
26. "There would be no chance of learning a new factor mastering a new action, were it not that the automatic action of habit takes care of all old and familiar experiences, and thus leaves conscious and purposive action free" (EW 2: 103). See Hegel's passage: "the soul is *free* of them, insofar as it is not interested in or occupied with them; while it exists in these formations as its possessions, it is at the same time open to other activities and occupations" (Enz § 410A).
27. See Dewey (2010: 130).
- "The unfreedom in habit is partly just *formal*, pertaining only to the being of the soul; partly only *relative*, in so far as it really arises only in the case of *bad* habits, or in so far as a habit is opposed by another purpose; the habit of right in general, of the ethical, has the content of freedom. The essential determination is the *liberation* from sensations that man gains through habit, when he is affected by them" (Enz § 410A; Wallace/Miller 131).
28. Enz § 410Z; Wallace/Miller 134. For an interesting analysis of the dialectical relation between 'productive' and 'repressive' sides of the "*Macht der Gewöhnheit*" see Ranchio (2016: 217-29).
29. Enz § 410Z; Wallace/Miller: 131.
30. Enz § 410 A; Wallace/Miller: 131.
31. Enz § 410A; Wallace/Miller: 131.
32. Enz § 410A; Wallace/Miller: 132.
33. Enz § 410Z; Wallace/Miller: 136.
34. Enz § 411Z; Wallace/Miller: 139.

35. EW4: 24.
36. MW5: 309-11.
37. LW13: 108; see also LW2: 336-7.
38. LW13: 96.
39. LW13: 68.
40. RPh: § 151.
41. Rph: § 146.
42. LW 17: 259.
43. LW17: 258.
44. MW6: 229.
45. LW2: 336.
46. LW13: 108.
47. MW13: 43.
48. MW5: 58.
49. See MW5: 310.
50. EW4: 356-7.
51. MW5: 209.
52. MW 6: 229.
53. LW 2: 336-7.
54. LW14: 258.
55. LW6: 32.
56. "Habits as organized activities are secondary and acquired, not native and original. They are outgrowths of unlearned activities which are part of man's endowment at birth" (MW 14: 65).
57. See MW 14: 65.
58. Enz § 410Z; Wallace/Miller 136.
59. Dewey (2010: 130).
60. On some historical aspects of the aesthetic model of second nature in German classical philosophy, see Kuhrana 2016.
61. See Ryle (2009: 28), and Lukács 1971.
62. Please note that also Hegel refers to the fact that in the common sense and the philosophical tradition "habit is often spoken of disparagingly and taken to be a lifeless, contingent and particular thing" (Enz §410A; Wallace/Miller 133). Hence, Hegel himself does not identify habit with lifeless repetition, and in principle makes room for a distinction between expressively poor and expressively rich manifestations of habit.
63. MW 14: 32.
64. MW 14: 48.
65. See MW 14: 48.
66. MW 14: 146.
67. MW 14: 74.
68. MW 14: 146.
69. See Hartmann (2003: 157).
70. MW 14: 51: "All life operates through a mechanism, and the higher the form of life the more complex, sure and flexible the mechanism. This fact alone should save us from opposing life and mechanism, thereby reducing the latter to unintelligent automatism and the former to an aimless splurge."
71. On the relation of the notion of mechanism to Dewey's notion of instrument see Renault 2017.
72. MW 14: 51.
73. MW 14: 113.

74. See Enz §410Z, Wallace/Miller 134: “This being-together-with-one’s-own-self we call *habit*. In habit the soul [...] has made itself so at home in the content, that it moves about in it with *freedom* .”
75. See MW 14: 115.
76. LW 7: 381.
77. LW 7: 379.
78. MW 14: 126.
79. See MW 14: 52.
80. Dewey (1973: 92).
81. Dewey (2015: 19).
82. See Lukács (1971: 140-156), and Adorno (1973: 356-7).
83. See on this Testa 2017a.
84. LW 13: 108.
85. LW 6: 39.
86. LW 6: 39: “A new social movement brings into play factors in human nature which were hitherto dormant or concealed; in thus evoking them into action it also presents them to the notice of organized thought.”
87. LW 14: 259.
88. MW 13: 243.
89. MW 13: 243-4.
90. LW 13: 108.
91. MW 13: 243-8.
92. Dewey (1973: 77).
93. MW 13: 243-8.
94. Dewey (1973: 77). For an interesting reading of this aspect of sexist naturalization in the context of a critical approach to the dualism between nature and society in feminist discourse, see Gregoratto 2017.
95. LW 14: 258-9.
96. Dewey (1973: 77).
97. Dewey (1973: 91).
98. For a critical comparison between McDowell and some aspects of Dewey’s philosophy, see Welchman 2008, and Godfrey-Smith 2010. Both authors argue that Dewey would resist McDowell’s idea that it is unnecessary to engage in constructivist or bridging philosophical projects of locating features of second nature in first nature or in the world as conceived by natural science. This diagnosis, although a correct one, concerns only the epistemological aspects of Dewey’s philosophy and does not address its socio-philosophical side. Moreover, it does not offer a reconstruction of the notion of “second nature” by Dewey, which is to my mind also needed in order to better appreciate his relation to McDowell’s project.
99. LW 6: 31.
100. MW 5: 309-11.
101. See on this also Schmid Noerr 1997.
102. LW 6: 32.
103. LW 1: 62: “A naturalistic metaphysics is bound to consider reflection as itself a natural event occurring within nature because of traits of the latter.”
104. MW 4: 3-15.
105. See Adorno (1997: 345-5).

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## ABSTRACTS

Dewey's notion of second nature is strictly connected with that of habit. I reconstruct the Hegelian heritage of this model and argue that habit qua second nature is understood by Dewey as a something which encompasses both the subjective and the objective dimension – individual dispositions and features of the objective natural and social environment. Secondly, the notion of habit qua second nature is used by Dewey both in a descriptive and in a critical sense and is as such a dialectical concept which connects “impulse” and “habit,” “original” or “native” and “acquired” nature, “first” and “second nature.” Thirdly, the ethical model of second nature as habituation and the aesthetic model of second nature as art are for Dewey not opposed to one another, since by distinguishing “routine” and “art” as two modes of habit, he makes space for an expressive and creative notion of second nature. Finally, I argue that the expressive dialectics of habit formation plays a crucial role in Dewey's critical social philosophy and that first and second nature operate as benchmark concepts for his diagnosis of social pathologies.

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