Minor Ethics

Deleuzian Variations

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McGill-Queen's University Press
Montreal & Kingston • London • Chicago

ISBN 978-0-2280-0563-6 (cloth)
ISBN 978-0-2280-0564-3 (paper)
ISBN 978-0-2280-0699-2 (ePDF)
ISBN 978-0-2280-0700-5 (ePUB)

Legal deposit first quarter 2021
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec

Printed in Canada on acid-free paper that is 100% ancient forest free (100% post-consumer recycled), processed chlorine free

Funded by the Government of Canada | Financé par le gouvernement du Canada | Canada | Canada Council for the Arts | Conseil des arts du Canada

We acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts.

Nous remercions le Conseil des arts du Canada de son soutien.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Minor ethics: Deleuzian variations/edited by Casey Ford, Suzanne McCullagh, and Karen Houle.

Names: Ford, Casey, 1987– editor. | McCullagh, Suzanne, 1975– editor. | Houle, Karen, editor.

Description: Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200380885 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200381180 | ISBN 9780228005643 (paper) | ISBN 9780228005636 (cloth) | ISBN 9780228006992 (ePDF) | ISBN 9780228007005 (ePUB)

Subjects: LCSH: Ethics. | LCSH: Deleuze, Gilles, 1925–1995.

Classification: LCC BJ1012 .M56 2021 | DDC 170—dc23

This book was typeset by Marquis Interscript in 10.5/13 Sabon.

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The Affective Milieu of Ethical Life in Aristotle and Deleuze

Casey Ford

Never fail to ask thyself this question … What relation have I to this part of me they call the ruling Reason [ἡγεμονικὸν]? And whose soul have I got now? The Soul of a child? Of a youth? Of a woman? Of a tyrant? Of a domestic animal? Of a wild beast?

Marcus Aurelius

[The] appetite for pleasures, which is very strong and grows by being fed, can be starved … if the body is given plenty of hard work to distract it.

The Athenian, Plato's *Laws*

Nothing straight can be constructed from such warped wood as that which man is made of.

Immanuel Kant

A central insight of Aristotle's ethics is that ethical problems and norms are grounded in the concrete nature of the human being rather than in abstract and speculative terms removed from the messiness of life. Ethical decisions are a concern precisely because we are human, and it is the form of humanity that provides the normative measure for "virtuous" conduct.[1] Our question is what ethics entails when it begins, as it does with Aristotle, from the ground of life and being in the world? In one sense, there is something major to Aristotle's thought insofar as the diverse considerations he offers about ethical life are measured in terms of the human "form." In another sense, the process of achieving "virtue" (ἀρετή) – that is, of fulfilling and actualizing a

fully human life – is possible only through a complex process of habituation. Habituation presupposes, we will argue, a heterogeneous and differential self that is worked on and fashioned in and through a world that is fundamentally more than human.

Emphasizing this minor dimension to ethical determination in Aristotle's thought allows us to appreciate how major ethical norms are realized through – and limited by – a pragmatics of life, desire, and embodiment. By reading Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* from the perspective of its second book on habit formation,[2] this chapter situates ethical judgment in terms of what Aristotle calls the "practical" and what Deleuze and Guattari call "pragmatics" as an "experimentation in contact with the real" (TP, 12/20). The wager of this chapter is that the primacy given to "affect" and "becoming" in Deleuze's work can allow us to see a deeper and more challenging dimension to Aristotle's own "practical" ethics in which worldly habituation is an essential ethical activity rather than a nature that is secondary to the more primary form of being human.[3] We thus aim to push Aristotle's insightful premises about life to some of Deleuze's consequences.

In the intersection between Aristotle and Deleuze, the sections of this chapter make four sets of claims. (1) The "practical" ethics conceived by Aristotle hinges on a conception of human nature that is realized and analyzable only in the context of a living and temporal world. (2) The ethical development of the self toward virtue requires a logistical deliberation in its habitual life among the heterogeneous forces constitutive of who we are in our desire. The guiding principle or "mean" of ethical judgment is thus oriented in terms of bodily and affective situations. (3) While Deleuze's thought also takes the habituated body, as a contraction of differential elements, as its ontological point of departure, it also extends the domain of habit significantly beyond the human actions in which Aristotle locates it. Here we raise the issue of the experience of addiction as a way of problematizing the models of the atomistic individual and autonomous choice in ethical action. (4) Deleuze's conception of "becoming" effectively reverses the priority of form over becoming that we find in Aristotle. Consequently, the goal of ethical life ceases to be the perfection of a particular form of life and becomes the experimentation on and production of new forms of life. Deleuze and Guattari thus redefine the normative principle of the "middle" as a "milieu" of ethical interaction

rather than a "mean" of moderation. This reversal, we argue, creates the condition for an expansion of ethical values.

1. ARISTOTLE AND AN ETHICS FOR LIFE

What Aristotle designates as "ethics" (ἠθικός) is a field of study that "does not aim at theoretical knowledge like the others,"[4] for instance, in the way the thought of a triangle's geometric properties can remain indifferent to the imprecision of physical bodies or the use-value of geometry. Rather, ethics is concerned with the "actions" and "states" of being human in the world.[5] As Aristotle cautions, "we are inquiring not in order to know what excellence is, but in order to become good, since otherwise our inquiry would have been of no use."[6] Our aim in this section is to frame the central insights of Aristotle's ethical thought in terms of its existential and practical bases. We show how, for Aristotle, ethical judgment emerges from, and intends to remain concerned with, the complex situation of human life.

If the vital and practical development of human life forms the special object of ethical inquiry, it is because human nature is foremost the site of a problem: the "goodness" we seek is not a mere predicate or given of our nature but rather a task to be accomplished.[7] Insofar as an ethical state is something we aim to achieve, it is not something we already possess or are guaranteed to achieve. This makes us different from beings or events in the world that can be explained in terms of constitutive or efficient causality.[8] For instance, the glass's fall downwards can be accounted for by the factors of weight, trajectory, and gravity, or by the external impact of the errant hand that sends it off the desk (*primum movens*). Yet the course of a human being's life – and the life of the species through which its individual existence is brought to fruition – is irreducible to mere causal determinations. Human beings are not simply determined by an extrinsic state of affairs; we have a defining capacity to act, decide, and deliberate between possibilities, and this capacity offers us a world and a self to be arranged and fashioned rather than terms to which we must resign ourselves. Yet while ethical thought allows us to investigate the principles by which we should act and behave in a world, and thus become different than we are, it does so in relation to a world that is not wholly our own. Ethics allows us to step beyond the actuality of existence by seeing that human life is oriented toward a future in each moment of decision, toward unrealized possibilities to which

we are answerable and through which we will accomplish what it means to be ourselves. Yet as we will see, the paradox of the ethical self is that of a living actuality oriented to its *own* indeterminacy, which is determinable through the principles of its own nature.

Every being – or what Aristotle designates as "substance" – strives to bring into "actuality" the form constitutive of itself and that at its inception is only a potential to be realized or not. In fact, this "movement" of "becoming"[9] is ultimately what it means to "be."[10] For instance, it would be inadequate to take the child in its present moment of crying as a finalized reality that simply "is," since the cry is both the result of a preceding, efficient cause (e.g., the withdrawal of the mother's breast) and the anticipation of a future state of relief or calming (the return of sustenance). The "being" of a reality must take into account the complex causal logic whereby something "is" only in its multi-causality; a sapling is thus "caused" both by the insect that carried its seed to the place of growth and by the constitutive teleology that determines its development into a maple rather than an oak tree.[11] In short, explaining any reality must take into account how something becomes different in the course from rudimentary state, through the contingencies of an environment, toward the "actuality" of maturation.

Two points in Aristotle's insight about the nature of things are of interest here. First, the analysis of living things must take up the temporality in which life unfolds.[12] If personal, physical, and social histories concern the past development leading to the determinacy of who we are in the present, ethics is one type of concern with what we may and should become beyond our present self. While the ethical prescriptions regarding any decision indicate a certain determinacy about a possible life that will follow, the disjunction between the present moment of decision and its future outcome retains a certain indeterminacy; drought may prevent a sapling from partaking the nourishment it needs to become a tree just as much as the contingency of a situation may send a human life to a place where prior plans and aspirations are stunted or forfeited. In this sense, Aristotle cautions us not to treat the "subject-matter" of ethical life within a theoretical framework that demands "exactitude," since "matters concerned with conduct and questions of what is good for us have no fixity, any more than matters of health."[13] Second, like organic life, ethics recognizes that individual reality is possible as an existence only through a complex and vital interaction with its world.[14] Something can be said to

be living only to the extent that it relates to and exists through an environment of otherness as the conditions of its being.[15] For ethics to inform the practical life of the individual, it must thus consider the constitution of the person (its "character") in this physical and social space.[16] In short, ethics must begin with the condition of life in the same gesture that it expands and makes human life possible.

If one existential side of ethical thought is oriented toward the indeterminacy or openness of something's environment and future, it is also determinatively guided by a principle endemic to the human being that strives to realize itself. For Aristotle, the study of ethics requires, first, that we apprehend the appropriate "end" of ethical activity, and second, that we examine the nature of the thing to which ethical judgments apply and for which they have meaning.[17] Our understanding of Aristotle's ethics is clear on this first point: the chief and supreme end – that is, the principle and "human good" that should guide the development of our character in its worldly becoming – is determined and measured by our own nature. What is designated by "happiness" (εὐδαιμονία) is thus "the activity of the soul in conformity with excellence."[18] Just as the excellence of the hammer is determined by its ability to "hammer" well, human life excels ethically by realizing what it means to be and do itself. Yet given the functionally complex nature of what a human life entails, the ethical determination of an individual life requires more than something like a unifunctional tool. The state of happiness is thus "the best and most complete" insofar as it reflects the holistic demands of a human life, and not merely one of the many (personal, occupational) ends we may pursue to the detriment of others; "one swallow does not make a summer,"[19] and in the same way, one determinate goal does not make a human life. Thus, for Aristotle, it is not simply a matter of realizing something like a leisurely "contemplative life" of the mind at the expense of the degeneration of physical health, familial or civic obligation, or artistic sensibilities. There is a demand for holism in Aristotle's thought precisely because human life is not reducible to a simple, homogeneous essence or activity. Its "function" is "fulfilled" through a balance of a multiplicity of needs and capacities.

The problem at the heart of the opening chapter of Aristotle's *Ethics* is twofold: to recognize human nature's complex and shared constitution with the non-human world while also identifying the singular, defining capacity of the human soul. The problem with identifying the humanness of the soul is that a significant portion of the soul's

activity involves both an organic life and a perceptual one. For all the given diversity of the natural world, with its plethora of species and functions, the human soul finds a profound complicity with nature. The bodies of the human swimmer, the galloping racehorse, and the spreading vine are all individually and distinctly encased in similar layers of material flesh – skin, muscle tissue, plasma, functionally analogous membranes and fluids – and organized in ways that facilitate the common task of surviving and growing. To develop we must extend beyond ourselves to acquire, consume, and metabolize the organic material of an exterior world that sustains us. Furthermore, Aristotle notes that for both rational and non-rational animals, these organic elements and processes are indissociable from perceptual experience.[20] Thus we do not simply consume the material world; we also smell and taste it, just as our capacity to move and navigate our environments is made possible by sight and touch. The domesticated dog, in the home no less than the forest, charts the course of its body based on discovered and placed scents – a veritable cartography of sense – just as humans choose things to engage based on their perceptual qualities. In short, there is no singularly human life without the being material of an organic body or the being perceptual of an experiencing subject. Yet the essence of the human cannot be reduced to these parts of the soul, since they also define the capacities of different forms of life.[21] Rather than formally distinguishing the body from the soul in terms of substance,[22] Aristotle recognizes that the form of the human soul must be grasped as a multiplicity of formally distinct but vitally holistic elements integrated into a single, moving life.[23] There are two important points to note before we move in §2 to define this complex constitution and situation of human nature more precisely.

First, if the human being were reducible to its changing body, or to its capacity to passively perceive the effects of other bodies upon its own, there would be no capacity for ethical consideration. Life would be fully determined by the material situation in a world, and consciousness would be no more than a registration of effects.[24] What is needed is a principle of decision. Second, what Aristotle identifies as our "rational principle" (ἐπιπειθὲς λόγῳ) and defining human essence[25] is precisely our capacity to act or make decisions in the world in conjunction with a thought capable of standing apart from, and deliberating about, the quality of decisions themselves. Ethics concerns practice or action rather than mere knowledge, and when the study

of it involves a kind of knowledge (as it does in the knowing of human nature), this is precisely to enable ethical action. "Thought by itself moves nothing; what moves us is goal-directed thought concerned with action," and this is why "decision is either understanding combined with desire or desire combined with thought; and this is the sort of principle that a human being is."[26] What should be emphasized here is the necessity of "combination," the conjunction of thought and desire, or what Deleuze, below, will call "contraction." Decision extends us beyond mere determinacy, suspending us in a present defined by a multiplicity of potential outcomes. In this sense, for Aristotle, it demands a logistical deliberation that combines "desiderative thought" with "intellectual desire."[27] The converse relation expressed in these formulations serves to make a crucial point about both the nature of ethical inquiry and its subject matter. Ethical judgment does not originate beyond or stand apart from the embodied reality of desire to which it is subsequently applied, as a despot might arbitrarily impose obligations on an unruly population. Nor does desire present a reality substantially irreverent to intellectual thought. The relation between thought and desire is one of mutually implicated capacities of the same moving, growing reality. Desire reaches outside itself insofar as it is informed by a thought that is irreducible to external stimulus, and thought is incited in its activity by a desiderative motive itself. When I desire food or drink, it is never as a mere mechanism; the desire is always conjoined with the anticipation of satisfaction, body images and plans, or the indecision concerning the efficacy of the act itself. Conversely, no thought, however abstract, occurs without a motive power that compels it further in its intellectual activity (whether it is a desire for intellectual credentials or the need for a solution). Yet desire and rationality still represent distinct capacities despite the way they mutually inform and implicate each other. Human life becomes both distinct and alive in this problematic moment of mutual dependence and adjustment between capacities that assert a simultaneous difference and identity.

For Aristotle, ethics is an essentially *practical* discipline whose primary concerns are the nature, parameters, and ends of action. Aristotle reminds us, in a paramount passage, that knowledge of the "supreme goods" serves to have a "great practical importance *for the conduct of life*."[28] But more importantly, ethics is meaningful in this endeavour because it is situated at this nexus in which the desires and thoughts of a being enter into an existential encounter, as at once

confluent faculties of a single organism and antagonists in a battle that is a life that can live only by becoming different than it has been. Since ethical thought itself emerges from and is activated by desire, it is necessary to consider the field in which embodied, desiderative life operates.

2. THE MEAN AS THE LIVED, VOLATILE MIDDLE

By virtue of the physical and living environment from which the human organism draws both its sustenance and its fragility, the soul essentially involves more than human reality. The human soul entails a duplicity. On the one hand, we require the acquisition and metabolizing of foreign material in order to simply be the organisms that we are. On the other hand, Aristotle draws our attention to the fact that the holism of the human organism is defined by more than propriety, coherency, and unity: the organism is itself the site of a differential and antagonistic relation in which our very bodily and desirous life is other than the intellectual processes that attempt to guide it. In short, ethics pertains to a life, and as we will see, life can go awry. The differential relationship between the principle of ethical striving and its embodied enactment means that ethical judgment is necessarily situational and relational.[29] In this section we will consider how Aristotle concludes from these insights that the achievement of ethical virtue is a "mean" of activity, and how the required habituation is, for reasons endemic to human nature, difficult to achieve. But on what precise aspect of our being does our rational capacity come to bear?

Just as it is meaningless to speak of "governance" except in relation to something that is regarded as needing to be "governed" or managed differently than it is inclined to behave, there can be in the soul a "rational principle" (λόγος) or capacity only insofar as there is also present in the soul something to manage or bring into conformity with this principle. Aristotle thus recognizes that the soul is constituted by a tension between different tendencies. However, Aristotle notes an important complication when analyzing the human body that runs counter to a basic dichotomy between the rational mind and the irrational body. On the one hand, the organic body operates by its own laws. Just as the rock cannot be habituated to stay in the air by repetitive tossing,[30] neither can the physical processes of the body (the beating heart, the reproduction of cells) be trained to operate differently than determined by their own natures. Just as "in the body

we see that which moves astray" from our capacity to determine it, "in the soul too there is something beside reason [λόγος], resisting and opposing it [ἄλογος]."[31] Aristotle distinguishes further that in the a-logical or "irrational elements" of our being (ἄλογος) there is that which "in no way shares in reason" (the "vegetative") and that which importantly has the capacity to listen to and thus be guided by principled reflection (the "appetitive").[32] Strictly speaking, it is not that the vegetative elements of the soul lack function or purpose, but rather that they are incapable of being persuaded to act contrarily: no amount of argumentation or habituation will get the heart to stop pumping blood throughout the circulatory system. The vegetative can be externally affected by decisions effected upon the body – as when the consumption of excessive amounts of cholesterol increases the stickiness of the blood, leading to plaque accumulation and a stroke or stoppage of circulation. However, it cannot be incited to change internally and of its own accord; it is thus purposive while being deaf to the power of persuasion. Rather than being a mere contemplative capacity to think the world, the rational (λόγος) functions as a principled or regulative power of the a-logical that moves our bodily and appetitive life. We are thus defined by a complex organic and appetitive existence that does not reflexively think or regulate itself but that can nonetheless *by its nature* be brought into conformity with and *obedience to* rational judgments. The appetitive is grounded in organic processes (as hunger is by digestion), but it is by nature malleable and persuadable. Insofar as desire constitutes an intermediary between the rational and the vegetative, desire is thus the site of ethical and rational governance. Yet as we will see for Aristotle, desire presents a power of operating in the world of its own accord if principles fail to habituate it toward proper ends.

For Aristotle, virtue is neither a static predicate of our nature nor a guarantee that our characters will achieve such a state. "Moral excellence comes about as a result of habit [and] none of the moral excellences arises in us by nature; for nothing that exists by nature can form a habit contrary to its nature … Neither by nature, then, nor contrary to nature do excellences arise in us; rather we are adapted by nature to receive them, and are made perfect by habit [τελειουμένοις δὲ διὰ τοῦ ἔθους]."[33] Habit is not contrary to our essence, but rather designates the extrinsic development of our character through growth to a point of "completion." Yet the scope of habits of which we are composed is extensive and modulating. Conditions of health require

physical habits of diet and exercise, while communicative and intellectual tasks require habits of thinking and study. The physical and cognitive aspects of our being are united by our capacity to grow through habituation, education, and training, and they are also cut through by habits of desire that integrate our life with a world of projects, distractions, aspirations, failures, and growth. On their own, habits do not entail states of ethical excellence: a habit is only as good as a principle that guides it, and a principle is only efficacious insofar as it can apprehend the complexity of a body's situation, inclinations, and needs. Behavioural habits may lead to sickness, and to stunted capacities for action and thought, and in extreme cases they may render us more akin to vegetative existence (the "couch potato") than to a philosophically and culturally capacitated member of the world. Yet it is only through habituation that we can achieve a state of virtue and become anything more than unformed potential; it is through developing new habits that we pass from inadequate states of being to adequate and fuller ones. Habit is not blind mechanism, but a vital adjustment and adaption to a world as the condition of existence.[34]

The goal of ethics, for Aristotle, is not simply to determine which habits we should acquire, as if it was a matter of choosing intellectual or spiritual desires over those of the body. The prior task is to understand the existential situation of human desire itself and the necessary logistical means for navigating the field of forces in which an embodied life is always entangled. Aristotle's famous formula here is a strongly normative and deceptively simple one: in any activity, we should strive to reach a "mean" or "intermediary" state. "Thus the master of any art avoids excess and defect, but seeks the intermediate and chooses this."[35] What is the nature of an ethical mean in relation to desire? Mathematically, the mean designates the point of a line segment that is equidistant from the endpoints. There is thus no middle point without opposed extremes, and every relation between extremities entails its own intermediary. In terms of activity, the mean approximates a degree that is neither *too much* (eating till the point of engorgement) nor *too little* (starvation). Despite their opposition (e.g., between a deficiency or excess of food), the extremes lead to a common state of inadequacy marked by sickness, while the intermediary point promises the opportunity for nutrition, energy, and growth.

Despite the simplicity of this formula, Aristotle notes further that the intermediate of ethical activity, as it pertains diversely to the decisions of life, is "not *in* the object but relatively *to us*."[36] This point

complicates the *exactitude* of ethical determination for two reasons. First, the intermediate for any given activity cannot have the character of a generalizable rule, precisely because the intermediary is not determined by the object or activity itself. The point of moderation, for instance, does not inhere in the food one consumes; there is no predicate in alcohol that denotes a point of excess. The intermediary and its precise extremities are constituted in the relation between the body of the consumer and the organic world to be metabolized. The points of moderation or excess are determined by the quality and power of the situated body and will thus vary between bodies of different constitutions in the way that the necessary food to sustain the power of a swimmer's body will be quantitatively greater than that for a writer. In a similar vein, the habituation or acclimation of an alcoholic's body to the quantity of alcohol can diminish or delay the behavioural manifestation of drunkenness in comparison to those of unaccustomed bodies. While quantity is an important component for judging the intermediary point of an action, it is significantly relative to the quality of the embodied and affective life at the agentive centre of the activity.

Second, while the terminology of the mean suggests a mathematical exactitude, it is not a mathematical concept (at least not in the logic of Euclidean geometry). The mean is a dynamic concept, a fluxion of habituated and vital life. The mean is determined not simply by physical need, but by the complex desires that activate our bodies in the world. Our desires are constituted in part independently of norms of excellence, by habits that push and pull our decisions toward and away from things. Aristotle thus notes that "it is no easy task to be good. For in everything it is no easy task to find the middle … Hence he who aims at the intermediate must first depart from what is the more contrary to it … We must consider the things towards which we ourselves also are easily carried away … We must drag ourselves away to the contrary extreme; for we shall get into the intermediate state by drawing well away from error, as people do in straightening sticks that are bent."[37] Aristotle's crucial insight here is that if rational reflection (thought, cognition, understanding) were sufficient to recognize the location of the mean, then an adequately rational agent could achieve virtue simply by knowing the state to be achieved, in the way a satellite might triangulate a destination. This procedure, however, is problematized by the fact that ethics is a conjunction of both knowing and desire as quasi-independent faculties. Our very

capacity to determine the intermediary point occurs while always being affected by inclinations away from it.[38] The decision to eat more moderately must be made simultaneously with the hunger to consume excessively, and the mean must function as a counterforce to this excess by which we are affected. Thus the point of departure for the journey to virtue is one that is affected by the state of being capacitated or debilitated by extremes. Hence Aristotle's point that, rather than approximating the mean directly, it may often be necessary to overshoot the mean, to aim for a contrary excess, as a way of counteracting the excess one is.[39] Like the alcoholic who quits "cold turkey" rather than by immediate moderation, one tries to straighten the warped, habitual self by pulling it not to a position of straightness, but rather far away from the inclination of the warp.

If our primary nature involves the capacity for intellectual coordination and end-oriented development, then this nature plays itself out always in relation to desires that affect us independently of our capacity to coordinate them. From inception to maturation, we are a plexus of habits and desires held together or contracted by the embodied soul. We may experience certain needs, habits, and behaviours as foreign to us to the extent that they present us with undesirable or harmful tendencies, but they are nonetheless apprehended negatively only by virtue of being modulations of the self that we have become, that we sustain, and that we anticipate the possibility of augmenting. Practical ethics must thus be an ethics of embodiment, since, as Aristotle notes importantly in *On the Soul*, "all the affections of the soul involve a body – passion, gentleness, fear, pity, courage, joy, loving, and hating."[40] The "concurrent" unity of affections that condition our actions and body means that both ethics and the "study of the soul" must be "enmattered accounts" and thus "must fall within the science of nature." Changing desire requires changing the habits that have sedimented our choices and actions. Ethics opens us to the possibility of becoming something other than determined by a finite set of affections. It is insufficient to oppose thought to desire as much as it is to separate an active desire from passive habits. Habit may sediment us in past choices or behaviours, but desire also gives habit a direction, a purpose, a goal. Desire orients us toward an outside.

Through modes of habituation, the living being is an envelopment of the world. Habits of taste develop from the ingestion of alien material that is metabolized into our own physical constitution. What results is not merely nutrition and the closed fulfilment of need, but

the restructuring of our senses of both need and the future: our desire is shaped and reshaped by intensive pleasures and repulsions, repeated and compounded associations, expectations, and the desire for what is foreign to us. For instance, the eye is not merely a passive organ; it both shapes or contracts the perceptual data it processes as much as it is shaped by the visions it has. Through habitual need, the eye remakes the territory of the foraged forest according to vectors of possible affections to be plucked or avoided: the ripeness of the berry, the poison signalled by the spines of a leaf. Habits are the product of our stepping outside ourselves, our becoming relational with and reliant on a world. If ethics is irreducible to theoretical knowing, it is foremost because it originates in a geography or "mapping" of sense and affection, in the logistics of the self and its worlds.[41]

3. DELEUZE AND THE HABITS THAT WE ARE

Before turning to Deleuze's account of the habitual and differential self, it is necessary to outline a problem at the centre of the encounter between Aristotle and Deleuze. We have argued that habit formation is the essential process of ethical becoming and development, and that habituation attests to a reality of the human self in which it involves other realities that exceed its human form. However, in the interpretation of Aristotle's ontology no less than in our common ways of approaching reality, there is a tendency to mark a distinction between the primary and secondary natures of something. For instance, we might say that an individual remains a human despite developing a cellular or behavioural dependency on an organic or synthetic material, as is the case in substance addictions ranging widely from sucrose to opiates. In these cases, behaviour, perception, judgment, need, pleasure, and pain – in short, the affective terms of ethical decisions – are rooted in a foreign material that has come to define the self. However, we do not ordinarily conclude, for instance, that the human individual has "become-heroin" or "become-fructose." We envision human nature as split between an enduring form of our humanity or selfhood, and a level of change where we engage with and become defined and influenced by a foreign world. In short, we subordinate our becoming different to our remaining the same. In this section we show how a significant part of Deleuze's work on habituation aims to free habit from being simply an inessential component or

afterthought in the accounts we give of the reality of things, and how this insight is anticipated in Aristotle's own ethics.

With reference to David Hume's moral psychology, Deleuze notes that "the real dualism … is not between affection and reason, nature and artifice, but rather between the whole of nature which includes the artifice and the mind affected and determined by this whole … Justice is not a principle of nature; it is an artifice. But to the extent that humanity is an inventive species, even the artifice is nature" (ES, 44/32–3).[42] The ethical self does not stand independent of the culture that only shapes it secondarily.[43] Ethics proceeds from a position of immanence that grasps nature, the affections of the body and mind, and consequential actions in a common process of modulation. The natural (biology) and the artificial (culture) collapse into an immanent world without losing their difference in series. The question is no longer what there is naturally given to be known, but rather: how have I come to be given as I am? (ES, 87/92).[44] We thus find a thesis in Deleuze, attributed to Henri Bergson, that reflects an important insight into Aristotle's account of ethical life: "[Habits] are not themselves natural, but what is natural is the habit to take up habits. Nature does not reach its ends except by means of culture, and tendency is not satisfied except through the institution. History is in this sense part of human nature. Conversely, nature is encountered as the residue of history … Nature and culture form, therefore, a whole or a composite" (ES, 44/33–4).[45] It is insufficient to posit what the nature of a form demands over and against the inessential and contingent properties that will affect a subject capable of acquiring behavioural or cultural habits. A crucial task of ethics is to determine how the form of something realizes itself in a milieu of historical and cultural acclimation and adaptation. Moreover, it requires seeing how the "natural" posture of an ethical being is this very adaptation and "contraction" of a world in which it realizes anything at all.

The self, Deleuze argues, is primarily a "synthesis" (DR, 73–9/99–108) of contracted habits and elements that are "passive" before they "render possible both the action and the active subject" (DR, 75/103). The syntheses of habit are the "the primary sensibility that we *are*" (DR, 73/99), the "thousands of passive syntheses of which we are organically composed" (DR, 74/101). The smoker often does not contract her addiction on first contact, but only after a long repetition in which a milieu of social association overpowers the disgust of the smoke. It is only after the fact that one realizes that what was at its

inception disgust and indifference has become, below the level of perception, a pleasure or a need; for the addict, at a certain threshold, "becoming conscious counts for little" (DR, 19/30). Thus the experiential self is foremost a "multiplicity," an "assemblage" of relations, for instance, between nicotine, membranes, the affective rush, the image, and the external arrangement of supply and occasion. The multiplicity is "machinic" insofar as its "assemblage" (*agencement*) defines a determinate system of bodily configuration (TP, 406/506, 257–8/314–15), that is, a "system of the self" (DR, 78/107). However, every assemblage is also open to, interactive with, and reconfigured by outside milieux (TP, 313/384–5). As Deleuze and Guattari insist, every assemblage is also an "inter-assemblage" (*inter-agencement*) (TP, 323–33/397–412). The taste of tobacco in the mouth might deter a partner, or the erratic actions of an addict might ruin other possible relationships. Whatever the situation, the fact is that every action or disposition happens between milieux, between the multiplicity of a self and the multiplicity of an outside encountered. Rather than being an abstract and focal centre that grounds and stabilizes experience, the self is always a decentred set of relations, a bundle of otherness whose "unity" of composition is defined only by the force or "contractile power" (DR, 70/96). "We speak of our 'self' only in virtue of these thousands of little witnesses which contemplate within us: it is always a third party who says 'me'" (DR, 75/103). It is easy to synthesize all our experiences as *ours*, but more difficult to recognize what was *other* in all that happened in us.

The physical sciences recognize the significance of this more than philosophical ethics has prepared itself to. For instance, when molecules of hydrogen and oxygen are destabilized under the conditions of heat, they agitate, speed up, and pull apart to change the state of liquid water into steam. It is thus not merely in relation to the world that we form habits; the habit is not merely an effect of some inhuman material on us and to which we stand both opposed and distinct in our influenced state. Habit pervades both our levels of action and our molecular composition. "The self does not undergo modifications, it is itself a modification" (DR, 79/107). To contract a habit in the world is to become that world and thus to become other than oneself. Addiction, as an intensified habit, is thus not merely the habit of repeating the consumption of a substance. The opiate addict does not merely *use* heroin with a quantitative regularity, but has, at the threshold of addiction, in part become molecularly defined by the substance

itself; the neural and cellular levels of the addict's brain, demonstrating its "plasticity," become "adapted" to the effects of the drug on cellular reception, leading to symptoms of need, withdrawal, and tolerance.[46] At an experiential level, withdrawal symptoms attest to this confluence of habit and the cellular body in which the absence of the contracted material is experienced as a becoming vacant of the self, of the self's own inadequacy, its "withdrawal" from itself under the condition of being "held" together by a foreign element. What Deleuze and Guattari allude to as "becoming-plant" (TP, 4/10, 275/339; cf. 10/17) here gains a literal value, not as an exercise of "imitation," but as the lived reality of organic and habituated life. In the moment of habituated action – when action is "contracting that from which we come" (DR, 74/101), that is, when we are effectuated from heterogeneous becomings or compositions – the "*I* is an other" (DR, 86/116).

Deleuze's reading of the ethical import of Spinoza's ontology provides us an important illustration of this point. The "consciousness" that the self maintains an autonomy from nature, according to Deleuze, attests to a kind of "illusion" in which the self, in taking itself as a fundamental cause, fails to see the extent to which it is an "effect" of a complex world of ulterior causes and processes:

> When a body "encounters" another body, or an idea another idea, it happens that the two relations sometimes combine to form a more powerful whole, and sometimes one decomposes the other, destroying the cohesion of its parts. And this is what is prodigious in the body and the mind alike, these sets of living parts that enter into composition with and decompose one another according to complex laws. The order of causes is therefore an order of composition and decomposition of relations, which infinitely affects all of nature. (SPP, 19/29)[47]

Spinoza's claim that "nobody as yet has learned from experience what the body can and cannot do, without being determined by the mind, solely from the laws of its nature"[48] should be understood as a fundamental insight that our understanding of ethical action is wedded to an "inadequate" conception of mental autonomy. As Spinoza illustrates, the gossiper has already disclosed the other's secret before having cognitively decided to do so, and in the clamour of the bar, the drunk believes that what he is doing or saying is a free and conscious act. The point is not that freedom is impossible, as interpreters

have long held, but rather that localizing freedom solely in the mind fails to grasp the extent to which the habitual body itself acts below the level of consciousness. The theft executed in the pangs of withdrawal, the drink consumed past the point of moderation, the outburst under waves of grief, cannot be divorced from the "decompositions" of bodily and mental relations, whether it is cellular dependency, intoxicated euphoria, or crippling loss. This is not to suggest that action and ethical judgment be reduced to these causes; in fact, this is rendered impossible since every action is open to a future, to multivalent consequences, and to possible deviations. If freedom and decision are to have any meaning, ethically or otherwise, they must proceed from the situation in which they are effectuated. Ethical consciousness must be grasped in its "constitution," that is, in relation to the causes of its affections (of hunger, desire, fatigue) and its capacities for action. It is from this position that action is grounded. The ground is the world of differential processes that give rise to individuated situations of actions. The question then, for Deleuze, is not whether the ethical subject is the autonomous agent of her own actions or a mere habitual effect of determinate conditions outside her (cf. TP, 130/162). When the ethical self is apprehended in an effectuated and affected state, what matters is whether she has an "active" or "reactive" power of action (NP, 40-2/63–7, 53–5/82–6, 176/276–7)[49] and whether this action is capable of leading to a more diversified life.

Habit is not the passive derivative of determinate life. Habit is the limit that links the living being to the world, the experiential hinge between a "larval subject" (DR, 78/107) and its conditions for difference. Félix Ravaisson, drawing from the early struggle to conceptually define the terms of the calculus, provides a resonant account of habit that emphasizes its differential character within an immanent "*naturing* nature": "Like effort between action and passion, habit is the dividing line [*la commune limite*], or the middle term, between will and nature; but it is a moving middle term … which advances by an imperceptible [*insensible*] movement proper to habit. Habit is thus, so to speak, the infinitesimal *differential*, or, the dynamic *fluxion* from Will to Nature."[50] When we take on a new habit or break an existing one, difference is introduced into the self. We contract the tic of another person in our prolonged contact with them – the twitch of an eye, the turn of the jaw, the wisp of a hand. This is not a matter of imitation primarily, even if it may appear so at certain moments. It is properly a "contagion" between things (TP, 241–3/295–7), the

"communication" or communion that links the terms of life in a "double" becoming (TP, 293–4/358–60, 305/374). Habit is not brute mechanism, but a vital and differential reality. If habits have the character of the involuntary and inactive, this attests first to the intensive nature of the body to be shaped by its world, the degrees in which an affect is stronger or weaker given the force of the original encounter or the strength of its hold. Habit is "affect," and the affect is the differential relation between the self and its world: "Affects are becomings" (TP, 256/313). Every habit is a sort of "claim" (*pretension*) on the constitution of the self (DR, 79/107), determining the intensity of sensations, responses, and expectations. In short, the self is less a mere receiver of habits than it is a territory that is carved out in experience; it is the process of habituation that defines this experiential zone in which the scope of our choices and decisions are "territorialized" and determined. Yet by virtue of being a contraction, every habit is also a "deterritorialization" (TP, 306/375–6), that is, a change of the assemblage that the self is. Even mechanical habits or repetitions intensify the degree of our need or expectation, while the acquisitions of new habits change the capacity of the organism for new tasks or desires. Every contraction introduces a difference into the self. What would it mean for ethical judgment to operate in terms of a subject that is foremost a complex, differentiated product or "fold" of a world?

4. A MILIEU WITHOUT A MEAN

We do not wish to resolve the problem of primary and secondary natures in Aristotle's thought, nor to dismiss the distinction altogether. For Aristotle, this problem is at once ontological and experiential: in the course of an individual's life, from childhood education to adulthood, we are compelled to assert that she remains the same individual through the diverse habits acquired and abandoned. Moreover, the significance of her life cannot be divorced from the human faculties that capacitate and define the scope of her actions (whether it is language, sociability, or responsibility), nor from the human communities in which these actions will materialize. In terms of the changes that will affect her, the "essence" of a substance can endure "accidental" changes to its body and desires; her being subtends, supports, and determines her becoming. Rather than accept the mutual opposition of these sides of reality, what we aim to underscore is the fact that

for Aristotle's ethics, the primacy of forms can be realized only through habitual becomings in a world. It is with this insight that we can appreciate the ethical value of Deleuze and Guattari's appeal to a "milieu" of ethical becoming.

Yet to this double account of things, in which the being of a substance undergirds and limits becomings, Deleuze and Guattari pose a philosophical reversal: "A body is not defined by the form that determines it nor as a determinate substance or subject nor by the organs it possesses or the functions it fulfills" (TP, 260/318). Prior to becoming a determinate subject (a self that recognizes all of its experiences as its own) or an organized system (a biologically normalized body), a body is defined by a variable assemblage of elements with a certain degree of power of acting, that is, of being affected by and affecting things in the world based on its composition. In this way, for Deleuze and Guattari, habitual embodiment is a condition for the generation of determinate forms themselves. Becoming attests to an independent reality that occurs "between" that of "substantial forms and determined subjects," a "whole operation" or "natural play of haecceities, degrees, intensities, event, and accidents that compose individuations totally different from those of the well-formed subjects that receive them" (TP, 253/310). The central thesis here is that processes of "becoming" are not derivative of stable, enduring forms or substances that can hold them together. For Deleuze and Guattari, becoming presupposes neither an ideal, enduring form nor a foundational subject; becoming is prior to, independent, and constitutive of forms:

> Becoming produces nothing other than itself … What is real is the becoming itself, the block of becoming, not the supposedly fixed terms through which that which becomes passes … [A] becoming lacks a subject distinct from itself [and] has no term, since its terms in turn exists only as taken up in another becoming of which it is the subject, and which coexists, forms a block, with the first … Becoming is a verb with a consistency all its own. (TP, 238–9/291–2)

With this ontological or meta-ethical account, we face a distinct problem for the condition of ethical action as Aristotle conceives it. Without a determinative form, are we not left without a stable object

of normative concern, without a principle to which the diversity of our actions can be guided, oriented, or "meaned"? As we saw for Aristotle, the mean of ethical life requires a form to determine its approximation. The twist is that, rather than abandoning the notion of a "middle" along with form, Deleuze and Guattari mobilize it in a different way. "A becoming is always in the middle; one can only get at it by the middle" (TP, 293/359). Becoming is not the unfolding, realization, or actualization of a pre-given form. By virtue of occurring always in relation to a world of otherness, becoming occurs in the relation itself, in the encounter between things. "Becoming is always double" (TP, 305/374), and the determination is relational and shared. Becoming happens between things while also giving rise to the terms that constitute the relation. "The middle is by no means an average: on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed. *Between* things [designates] a transversal movement that sweeps one *and* the other away, a stream without beginning or end that undermines its banks and picks up speed in the middle" (TP, 25/37). The middle is no longer a goal of moderation or the perfection of a form, but rather the orientation that allows a body to change. Becoming, taken universally, is a vector of change, just like the acquisition of habits orients us beyond our current and settled dispositions and characters toward something else. For both Aristotle and Deleuze, ethical life involves becoming, and this becoming plays itself out in a world where we must become other than ourselves, to uproot the self from its situatedness and to live out something where our present form is not guaranteed.

There are two consequences to Deleuze and Guattari's approach that are confluent with and of interest to Aristotle's account. First, this account of a milieu of becoming emphasizes that the ethical life, decisions, and capacities of an individual are fulfilled, in any fashion, only through a world. At a social level, an adequately nutritional body, differently "meaned" for the athletes and intellectuals of a society, requires adequate conditions of harvest, market values proportionate to incomes and standards of living, and production regulated to align with health and distributive ideals. At an individual level, this means recognizing that the habits we acquire are more than our own personal properties; they are also becomings with natures different than our own, adaptations in a plexus of "intra-assemblages." Viruses do not simply produce symptoms in us, but also mutate as they infect our bodies and transmit between species members. It is

possible that our prolonged metabolic becoming in relation to ethanol or diamorphine may not only affect our ethical judgments, but also fundamentally alter our sense of and capacity for being human. We may retain the potential for achieving virtue, but it is equally possible that our behaviours in the world may leave our bodies too fatigued, bent, and poorly affected to achieve this.

Second, Deleuze and Guattari's suggestion is that a life lived at the extremity of form, at the "cutting edges [*les pointes*] of deterritorialization" (TP, 57/74, 88/112, 109/138, 191/233, 244/298), has an ethical quality. It is from their redefinition of the body that Deleuze and Guattari define ethics as a "pragmatics" of "experimentation" according to the following problem: "[H]ow can we unhook ourselves from the points of subjectification that secure us, nail us down to a dominant reality?" (TP, 160/198). As we have seen, we are continually "subjectified," or made into subjects, by the complex milieux in which we are embedded: biological, familial, social, and political worlds that habituate us to the distinct norms of being a particular kind of self in a territory or a world. What movements of "deterritorialization" or "desubjectification" indicate in terms of a pragmatics of working on the self, for Deleuze and Guattari, does not involve a wholesale destruction or demolition, but rather "necessary caution" and

> the art of dosages, since overdose is a danger. You don't do it with a sledgehammer, you use a very fine file. You invent self-destructions that have nothing to do with the death drive. Dismantling the organism has never meant killing yourself, but rather opening the body to connections that presuppose an entire assemblage, circuits, conjunctions; levels and thresholds, passages and distributions of intensity, and territories and deterritorializations measured with the craft of a surveyor. (TP, 160/198)

Why dismantle, break down, or harm the self? Every self, as a living thing, is capable both of growth and of becoming rigid in the habits that define it. There is no becoming virtuous, whatever we decide this means in the end, without the venture out to both comprise and compromise the self: to file away at the frivolity of the child's play, the teenager's stubbornness, the adult's ideology, or the elderly's rigidity. Ethics needs virtue, ends, a goal, but it also needs a pragmatics of tools for dismantling the self in all the ways it risks becoming ossified, for the sake of the becoming-different entailed by every growth.

5. CONCLUSION: THE WARP THAT WE ARE

There are a number of philosophical questions that follow. First, the traditional concern is whether Aristotle and Deleuze provide distinct accounts of the grounds of ethical action. Should the human form be understood as the regulative origin and goal of ethics, or should ethical becoming be grounded in a world of life decentred from the fixity of essential forms themselves? Second, how does the latter thesis push our thinking beyond the limits of an exclusively human ethics, and what can be accomplished by doing so? Rather than stripping ethics of its normative appeal, we argue that Deleuze gives us a broader relational ontology for ethical consideration. How can one understand the violence of the inmate when the action reflects and repeats, in conjunction, the violence of the guard's club and the walls of the enclosure? Or the drug addict's relapse when the experience of an autonomous self has been overridden by cellular need? Ethics, we argue, needs a more complex, dynamic, and relational conception of the "world." Third, the stakes of Deleuze's thought are to replace the question of what the "right" action is with the following: What kind of life does an action or decision make possible, not just for the individual, but for the worldly milieux in which the individual is assembled? As we have shown, this is a question that is hardly foreign to Aristotle's ethical thought. Yet answering this question requires being attuned continually to the minor foothold of ethical decision in a world that is, at every moment, a constitutive limit of our action and our judgment. When ethics abandons the false security of foundations that transcend the world of becoming, it can open as an experimental site for the production of new ethical values "beyond morality" (SPP, 17–29/27–42).

Perhaps Kant is correct that the warp of our nature is irremediable. Perhaps the promise of straightening ourselves to a perfect mean of character, to which Aristotle's ethics directs us in principle, can remain only an indefinite project or orientation bereft of absolute fulfilment. But this impossibility is not the more profound point about an ethical subjectivity that is by nature warped, distorted, bent out of shape, irreparable in its empirical life. Before it becomes a moment of despair, or a limit of ethical accomplishment, this warp is also the malleability that opens us onto difference, the capacity that inclines our becoming in a world. Is it not this warp that inaugurates the question of ethics most perennially?

My soul itself may be straight and good;
ah, but my heart, my bent-over blood,
all the distortions that hurt me inside –
it buckles under these things.
It has no garden, it has no sun,
it hangs on my twisted skeleton
and, terrified, flaps its wings.

Rainer Maria Rilke, "The Dwarf's Song"

NOTES

1 "The excellence of a thing is relative to its proper function." Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, vol. 2, 6.2.1139a17. Hereafter *Ethics*. All references to Aristotle's works are to the Barnes edition and translations, unless otherwise noted. Page references are to the Book. Section.Bekker numbers preceded by the title of the work. References to the Greek are to the Loeb Classics collection.

2 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1103a14–1109b26.

3 The positive connection between these thinkers is challenging because Deleuze situates his project as a departure from the "organic" model of life, the teleology of ends, and the "representational" determination afforded by what he characterizes as classical Aristotelian thought (DR, 29–35/44–52). Somers-Hall provides a rigorous analysis of Deleuze's engagement with Aristotle's thought in *Hegel, Deleuze, and the Critique of Representation*, 41–66; and *Deleuze's* Difference and Repetition, 21–30.

4 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.2.1103b25–30.

5 Ibid., 1103b30–31.

6 Ibid., 2.2.1103b25–30.

7 Ibid., 1.6.1096a12–1098b8.

8 Aristotle makes this distinction between "things that exist … by nature [and] some from other causes" – that is, between self-moving and inanimate things – in *Physics*, 2.1.192b9–23.

9 Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* 9.3.1047a14.

10 For Aristotle, "being" is equivocal or "said in many ways," that is, in terms of substance, quality, quantity, and so on (*Metaphysics*, 4.2.1003a33; 7.1.1028a10; and *Categories*). Cf. Deleuze's critique of the categorical nature of this account of being (DR, 29–35/44–52). For Aristotle in the *Metaphysics*, what "is" fundamentally is "substance" (7.1.1028a10–35), the "indwelling form" (7.11.1037a29) of independent things in their

"becoming." The point we wish to emphasize here is that to "be" a substance involves a "movement," the potential or "matter" in a process of self-fulfillment of the "form" or "actuality" that is logically, temporally, and substantially prior (ibid., 9.8.1049b1–1051a3).

11 For Aristotle's account of causality, see *Physics*, 2.3.194b16–195b30.

12 See Aristotle, *Parts of Animals*, 1.1645b25–37.

13 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.2.1104a3-5; cf. ibid., 1.3.1094b12–27.

14 John Dewey notes succinctly that "experience" entails an "active and alert commerce with the world." *Art as Experience*, 18. "[Life] goes on in an environment; not merely *in* it but because of it, through interaction with it. No creature lives merely under its skin; its subcutaneous organs are means of connection with what lies beyond its bodily frame, and to which, in order to live, it must adjust itself … The career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way." Ibid., 12.

15 Cf. one of Aristotle's many accounts in *On the Soul* of the self-moving soul (ψυχή) and its reliance on its environment: we can speak of things as "living" insofar as they "possess an originative power through which they increase or decrease in all spatial directions," and this "holds for everything which is constantly nourished and continues to live, so long as it can absorb nutriment" (2.2.413a22–413b4; cf. his account of "reproduction" at 2.4.415a22–30).

16 See Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1.8.1099a32: "[Happiness] needs the external goods as well; for it is impossible, or not easy, to do noble acts without the proper equipment." The examples of the external conditions of happiness include: the health and fate of one's family and friends (1.8.1099b9–17), one's reputation after the death of the body (1.10.1100a10–b11), and social and material accessibility (1.8.1099a32).

17 Ibid., 1.7.1097b20–1098a20.

18 Ibid., 1098a16–17.

19 Ibid., 1098a18–19.

20 While Aristotle provides one of the most sustained investigations of the animal and plant world in Western philosophy, it is necessary that we continue to think deeply about how our metaphysical and normative thinking relies on a categorical exclusion of certain forms of life and a failure to grasp their singular complexities non-analogically. See Karen Houle's important intervention in "Animal, Vegetable, Mineral."

21 For Aristotle's definition of "capacity," see *Metaphysics*, 5.12.1019d15–30.

22 Aristotle's account of substance is nuanced, sophisticated, and central to his wide-ranging thought, and we do not aim to do justice to it here.

Substance as the "form" or "actuality" of a being is primary over the "potentiality of matter" (*Metaphysics*, 9.8.1049b1–1051a3). As a self-generative activity, however, it is not indifferent to either its "matter" or to its process of self-actualization in which its potential to be itself reaches, or fails to reach, its "fulfillment" in life; "actuality in the strict sense is identified with movement" (ibid., 9.3.1047a31). The "soul is inseparable from its body" (*On the Soul*, 2.1.413a4) in the way that one cannot separate the "wasp" from its buzz or sting. The substantial and formal distinction of thought or essence from matter later finds an expression in Cartesianism, and Spinoza's "substance monism" has significant consequences for how Deleuze's project mobilizes an immanence of being against the Aristotelian and Cartesian traditions (DR, 35–42/52–61).

23 See John Russon's "Aristotle's Animative Epistemology." Russon charts the importance of holism as "life" between Aristotle's metaphysics and epistemology: "In the natural body one and the same subject is present throughout, and it is the simple genus of which all the organs are species. The natural substance, then, is a whole as an organized, active, self-moving totality," that is, an "activity of self-actualization" (242). "Animate existence," according to Russon, is thus "desire" insofar as it is a "situation which is an activity of a complex, organized body opposing itself to an other where this other is the *immediate* object of its desire and the desire is *ultimately* the desire of self-maintenance" (ibid., 244).

24 It is clear to Aristotle that ethical capacity does not pertain to all beings in the world, as is the case with merely physical things that cannot act "contrary to [their] nature" (*Ethics*, 2.1.1103a20). Consequently, it would be inappropriate to pass ethical judgment on the behaviour of a thing that lacks the agency and possibility of doing otherwise: "It is natural, then, that we call neither an ox nor horse nor any other of the animals happy; for none of them is capable of sharing in such activity" (ibid., 1.9.1099b32–1100a9). Aristotle later claims that desirous, sensuous animals without intellect have "no share in action," as the "origin of action – its efficient, not its final cause – is choice, and that of choice is desire and reasoning with a view to an end" (ibid., 6.2.1139a18–35).

25 Ibid., 1.7.1098a3.

26 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Irwin, 87 (6.2.1139a35–1139b5).

27 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 6.2.1139b5.

28 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Rackham, 5 (1.2.1094a22, our emphasis). For a systematic study of *Nicomachean Ethics* in terms of practical philosophy, see Francis Sparshott, *Taking Life Seriously*. Rather than reading the text according to the more speculative concerns of "morality,"

Sparshott follows Aristotle in terms of the "straightforward problem of how to live a lifetime" given a "social set-up and political organization and the necessary psychophysical equipment of humanity" (ibid., 8–9).

29 We refuse the connotation of the term of "relativism" here to emphasize that judgment always occurs in a worldly context from which it draws both a condition of relevance and a limit of achievement. Howard J. Curzer argues in "Aristotle's Mean Relative to Us" that Aristotle's relativity of the mean entails a "situational relativity" and not a relativity to character or social role, with the latter two running the risk of unjustifiable asymmetries in ethical action (like those between members of social classes). See our discussion of the mean's "relativity" below. For an excellent discussion of relativity and Aristotle's virtue ethics, see Martha Nussbaum, "Non-Relative Virtues."

30 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.1.1103a20.

31 Ibid., 1.13.1102b15–25. Cf. Aristotle's analysis of the soul in *On the Soul*: "if there be a movement natural to the soul, there must be a counter-movement to it, and conversely" (1.3.406a21).

32 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 1.13.1102b29–35.

33 Ibid., 2.1.1103a15–25.

34 In "Personality as Equilibrium," Russon importantly interprets Aristotle's "mean" in terms of the human "self" that, rather than being a neutral substratum, is a "supple mode of plastic responsiveness" to the norms of its natural and interpersonal environment (627). As Russon demonstrates, this plasticity involves not simply "thresholds" of change but also the potentials of rigidity and fragility. The key for our analysis here is that the "identity" of the self is, according to Russon, a "dynamic" process of "interpreting" ourselves "in a way that is inseparably interwoven with how we interpret the world" in a "dynamic system of lived equilibrium" (ibid., 629).

35 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.6.1106b1–5.

36 Ibid., our emphasis.

37 Ibid., 2.9.1109b1.

38 J.R. Urmson argues that Aristotle's mean should not be understood as "moderation," since exhibiting something like a moderate amount of anger might situationally be absurd. For Urmson, the mean is a "settled state of character" that is "without friction." "Aristotle's Doctrine of the Mean," 224–5. Our point is to emphasize that the achievement of this state is one that must continually negotiate the tensions that one's desire necessarily entails, that stasis emerges from an original friction.

39 Aristotle, *Ethics*, 2.9.1109d30–35: In order to reach the mean, we must "first depart from what is the more contrary to it, as Calypso advises

– 'Hold the ship beyond that surf and spray' – For of the extremes one is more erroneous, one less so; therefore, since to hit the mean is hard in the extreme, we must as a second best, as people say, take the least of the evils." For the source of this image, see Homer, *Odyssey*, Book XII.

40 Aristotle, *On the Soul*, 1.1.403a15–30.

41 Deleuze and Guattari designate affects in terms of an experiential "cartography" (see TP, 253/310; cf. TP, 160/198). For Aristotle, this means recognizing that the isolated individual is "not self-sufficing" (*Politics*, 1.2.1253a25), but realized in and through a social world. It is in this sense that we should interpret Aristotle's claim that the study of ethical life is also the "study of politics" (πολιτική) (*Ethics*, 1.2.1094a25–1094b12). In light of our account of habituation here, it would be necessary to explore two important points made by Aristotle. First, that the social formations identified at the beginning of the *Politics* are confluent levels of a single reality, rather than a hierarchical order. Each represents the individual's becoming integrated in, dependent on, and fulfilled through a wider and more extensive environment of living. Second, that the art of politics, for Aristotle, is a "master-art" (μάλιστα ἀρχιτεκτονικῆς) rather than a bureaucratic set of governing procedures. This is to say, the object of politics, Aristotle notes in multiple texts, is the "moulding" of the citizen "to suit the form of government under which he lives" (*Politics*, 8.1.1337a10), and thus "legislators make the citizens good by forming habits in them" (*Ethics*, 1.2.1103b1–5).

42 Deleuze, *Empiricism and Subjectivity*. Hereafter ES.

43 "[Hume] shows that the two forms under which the mind is *affected* are essentially the *passional* and the *social*. They imply each other, assuring thereby the unity of the object of an authentic science" (ES, 21/1).

44 What matters for Deleuze in Hume's empiricist "constructivist logic" is not what defines the mind or subjectivity as a uniform object of knowledge (ES, 21/1), but rather how the mind can *in experience* "become human nature" and a "subject" as a "system" (ES, 22–3/3).

45 While Aristotle's metaphysics maintains this formal distinction between enduring essences (of self, character, or species) over accidental properties (which are acquirable and losable), his ethics complicates it by seeing that the human is "adapted by nature to receive [habits]" (*Ethics*, 2.1.1103a24).

46 See Nestler, "Molecular Basis of Long-Term Plasticity"; and Nestler and Aghajanian, "Molecular and Cellular Basis of Addiction." The neurobiological basis for drug addiction is an extensive and ongoing field of research and should not be taken as an exclusive model for explaining the phenomenon or as overriding sociological, genetic, psychological, and

subjective approaches. We highlight it here to emphasize the molecular level of socially consequential decisions.

47 Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy*. Hereafter SPP.

48 Spinoza, *Ethics*, in *Complete Works*, 280 (III.P.2.Sch.). Deleuze reads Spinoza's thesis of the "parallelism" between the mind and the body not in the traditional terms of a reduction of freedom to causal determinism, but rather as "the reversal of the traditional principle on which Morality was founded as an enterprise of domination of the passions by consciousness … It is a matter of showing that the body surpasses the knowledge that we have of it, *and that thought likewise surpasses the consciousness that we have of it*" (SPP, 18/28). For Deleuze, this entails a "devaluation of consciousness in relation to thought: a discovery of the unconscious, of an *unconscious of thought* just as profound as *the unknown of the body*" (SPP, 18–9/29).

49 Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. Hereafter NP.

50 Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 59. Elizabeth Grosz traces a lineage of vital conceptions of habit, from Ravaisson through Bergson to Deleuze, that contests traditional mechanistic accounts. For these thinkers, according to Grosz, "habit is regarded not as that which reduces the human to the order of the mechanical … but rather as a fundamentally creative capacity that produces the possibility of stability in a universe in which change is fundamental." "Habit Today," 219.