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In Defense of Mindless Prayer

Abstract
This paper defends the habitual performance of religious rituals, such as daily prayers, against the view that worship must always be mindful and focused on spiritual matters. Teachers in all religions emphasize the need for our minds to be engaged in the worship, yet this view overlooks the experiences of the body. Through habits, our bodies can have experiences that our minds may not recognize, or only partially recognize. Some of these experiences may involve a sense of unity with something greater than ourselves, which, for religious believers, may be interpreted as a religious encounter.

Keywords
habit, religious practice, ritual, embodiment, French spiritualists

There is a widespread effort among many religious teachers to disparage ritual actions carried out in a habitual manner.* We are warned against letting acts of worship become "mere habits" – God, or gods, demand our full attention. To experience a true personal encounter with the divine, we are told, we must remain awake and alert. "Mindfulness" is essential. The problem with habits, critics argue, is that they reside in our bodies rather than our minds, demanding little conscious thought or attention. Habits are too close to instincts, which govern the behavior of animals. But religion is for humans – the beings capable of conscious engagement with the spiritual realm.

In this paper, we will challenge this argument. First, we will argue that habits are indispensable for navigating daily life. Habits handle routine tasks, freeing our conscious minds to focus on more pressing matters. Through repetition, actions that were once consciously performed become embodied and naturalized. This division of labor means that while the mind interprets the world, the body directly feels its qualities and discerns its opportunities and dangers. Second, drawing on Aristotle, we will emphasize that habits can contribute to various desirable ends. By consciously performing and repeating virtuous actions, we cultivate habits that shape our character. Religious practices are an example. The promise is that the practitioners, after years of disciplined, mindful repetition will achieve a sense of transcendence. Yet, as many of us have discovered, practices such as meditation, yoga, and various ascetic exercises demand a level of dedication which is difficult to sustain. Our everyday habits have a power over us which virtuous habits cannot break.

* Thanks to Enes Tüzgen for taking charge of my religious education. Apologies to Betül Avci for never having prayed together.

Religious rituals, we will argue, offer a more accessible way to experience transcendence. Rituals disrupt the ordinary flow of life, transforming mundane moments into extraordinary ones. This applies to rites of passage and communal celebrations as much as to religious ceremonies. By creating a rupture in everyday habits, rituals provide a space where believers may encounter the divine – or so it is argued. Ultimately, whether habitual prayers performed with little conscious attention should be condemned depends not only on what goes on in the mind, but also on what the body experiences. We should consider the possibility that even if the mind is inattentive, the body can remain active and engaged with its environment. If this indeed is the case, then prayers said carelessly and absent-mindedly can take us closer to the transcendent.

All Form and No Content

Salat is the ritual prayer which devout Muslims perform five times a day: at dawn, midday, mid-afternoon, sunset and evening. The prayer is one of the "pillars of Islam" and thereby an obligation for all believers, but it is also a personal engagement with God. It starts with an invocation – *Allahu akbar*, "God is Great" – and proceeds in the form of a series of choreographed movements known as a *rak'ah*. Each *rak'ah* requires the believers to stand, bow, prostrate themselves and sit, while reciting verses from the Qur'an. And every movement has to be carried out in precisely the prescribed manner. You must pay attention. Unless you do your ablutions, cover up your body, and face the Ka'ba in Mecca, the prayer will be invalid. Not all of the world's two billion Muslims pray, of course, but a majority do – several times a day (Katz 2013: 1–43; Pew Research Center 2012: 43–45).

Christian visitors to majority-Muslim countries have long struggled to make sense of the *salat*. In the nineteenth-century in particular, Europeans made fun of the ritual. Islam, Europeans reported, is not a faith as much as a daily routine. "Prayer with them is a simple performance", Josias Leslie Porter, a missionary to Syria insisted. "They pray as they eat, or as they sleep, or as they perform their toilet", but their minds are never properly engaged in any of these activities (Porter 1855: 141). The problem, Robert Durie Osborn, a British officer in India, concluded, is that Islam requires blind obedience to formal rules. Muslims are subject to a tradition "beneath whose tremendous weight, reason, thought, freedom, and progress have literally been crushed to death" (Osborn 1878: 46).

Muslim prayers, the European travelers concluded, are all form and no content. As long as the believers carry out the right movements in the right way, they have fulfilled their religious duties, but their minds are not engaged and no spiritual encounters ever take place. The *salat* is not a conversation with a higher power – "not the happy communing of a child with its Father, nor the child's cry of sorrow or need" – but simply a blind submission to conventions (Bird 1899: 7). In fact, most believers are unlikely to even understand the words they recite. Many Muslims do not know Arabic, and even those who do are unlikely to know much of the classical Arabic of the Qur'an.

These European verdicts are obviously prejudiced, and they tell us little about Islam. At the same time, they are quite similar to arguments which Islamic teachers and theologians already had been making for centuries. Al-Ghazali, the eleventh-century Persian philosopher and mystic, repeatedly warned

against the loss of attention, against mindless repetition and empty formalism. A proper prayer, he explained in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, starts with *niya*, a declared intention to approach the divine. The *niya* aligns the mind and the body, and focuses both on the ritual about to be performed. And as the *salat* is carried out, al-Ghazali demanded *khushūq*, spiritual engagement or immersion. *Khushūq* makes the believers aware of the presence of the divine, and attunes their hearts to God's magnificence and compassion. If these steps are not carried out, "[h]is prayer is rejected and does not ascend to God, for God does not accept the prayer which is not offered with presence of mind and humility" (Al-Ghazali 1992: book 1; Katz 2013: 44–74). "Don't sleep", as Rumi, the poet and Sufi teacher, reminded his readers – "O watchman, be wakeful; the whole city could be lost if you fall asleep!" (Rumi 2008: 62).

But Christians are not necessarily any better. All too often, Søren Kierkegaard, the Danish philosopher, complained, the clergy only read their required lines and the members of the congregation only go through the required motions. But it is not enough to be baptized, to learn your catechism, to go to church on Sunday and sing along with the hymns. You must demand more from life and from your faith. Faith must be an event and a personal experience, and above all, it must be the result of a conscious choice. There is a world of difference between a person who prays as a matter of habit, and another person who each time chooses to pray. To an outside observer, the two actions look the same, yet they are radical opposites. It is only by actively choosing one alternative over another, Kierkegaard explained, that we can come to live an authentic life. This emphasis on choice and will is what has aligned Kierkegaard with the existentialist tradition in the philosophy of history. Or, in religious terms, it is choice and will which allow a believer to maintain a living, immediate relationship with God (Kierkegaard 2003; Carlisle 2014: 127–128).

Teachers in other religious traditions have issued similar warnings. Buddhists talk about "mindfulness". To be mindful is to maintain an active and intentional focus on what is happening in the mind and body, as well as in the external environment, without attachment, aversion, or delusion. "With this sharpened awareness", the renowned meditation teacher S. N. Goenka pointed out, "you can begin to see the truth of your own nature" (Goenka 1999; cf. Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, MN 10, DN 22).

Inhabiting the World

Before we can understand the issue at stake here, we need to learn more about habits. A habit, it is said in the Oxford English Dictionary, is "[a] settled disposition or tendency to act in a certain way, especially one acquired by frequent repetition of the same act until it becomes almost or quite involuntary" (OED 2023). By means of a process of habituation actions consciously chosen and performed gradually becomes ever more instinctive. Over time, through constant repetition, we gradually stop paying attention to what we are doing, and the reasons which once motivated us become increasingly obscure. Eventually they become "second nature" – a naturalized disposition to act and think and say some things rather than others. Habituation is possible because of the brain's plasticity. Plasticity refers to the capacity of a material, like clay, to be reshaped and retain its new form. Similarly, the brain's plasticity enables neural connections to change and adapt in response to new experiences, learning, and even injuries. Neuroplasticity is particularly prominent

during childhood, facilitating rapid learning and development, but it continues throughout life, providing the flexibility to adapt to new circumstances and challenges as they arise (James 1890: 1:121).

It is this process of habituation to which Al-Ghazali, Kierkegaard, and many other religious teachers have objected. Habituation has turned what should be a conscious act communication with the divine into a formality, something we do without thinking too much about it. And yet, it is impossible to object to habits as such. In fact, it is more than anything by means of our habits that we come to inhabit the world. On the most basic level, habits make it possible to judge distances and speeds, understand weights, heights and trajectories, movements, shapes and sounds. In this way, habits guide our behavior, make choices for us and help us make sense of things and other people; they allow us seize opportunities and protect us from harm. If we continuously, and fully consciously, had to process all this data, it would constitute an overwhelming computational task. Since most functions are carried out by our bodies more or less by themselves, we can use our conscious deliberation for more demanding tasks. Habits save us cognitive resources and attentional bandwidth, and allow our minds to focus on matters that require their attention. As a consequence of this division of labor, minds and bodies come to experience the world in quite different ways. Most obviously: while the mind interprets the world, the body feels qualities and discovers opportunities and dangers (Kahneman 2011).

It is by means of our habits that much human interaction proceeds. Consider what it is like to engage in a conversation, to dance or play games together with others. In order to successfully engage with another person, we pay attention to their bodies and learn to predict their next move. In the process we quite unconsciously come to adjust ourselves to their posture, mannerisms, and ways of speaking, and we prepare our own contribution to the shared interaction well in advance of the others having completed theirs. The interaction then unfolds as steps in a joint process. Such collaborative sense-making can be studied by the tools of neuroscience, and it is clear that our conscious minds only are aware of a small portion of this intricate process (Tarde 1903; De Jaegher & Di Paolo 2007: 485–507; Collins 2004).

Although human beings take great pride in their conscious deliberations, most of our lives takes place in that murky, indistinct and badly lit region where consciousness leaves off and the body picks up. If called upon, we may perhaps unearth the reason which originally guided us, or we may make up new reasons on the spot, yet much of what we do, we do mainly because we have done it before. It is more than anything our habits that give substance and permanence to our selves. In this way, habits connect the psychological with the physiological – the mind with the body. We are determined by our physiology, that is, but through habituation our minds also have the power to determine that physiology. The place of human consciousness in this body-mind loop is that of a cause, but also that of a consequence (Carlisle 2014: 60–61, 121–213; de Biran 2006).

Forming and Reforming Ourselves

It is not only religious teachers who dismiss habits, philosophers have dismissed them too. Ever since René Descartes' radical separation of *res cogitans* from *res extensa*, conscious deliberations have occupied a privileged

position in Western accounts of what it means to be a human being. It is our ability to reason, Immanuel Kant argued, which allows us to establish a moral code that can guide our actions. Human beings give reasons for what they do and they act with deliberation and foresight. Habits constitute a threat to this self-description. Even good habits, Kant argued, cannot count in our favor as long as they are not consciously chosen by us. A moral person must be able to explain themselves, and habits, as we have seen, are often not always amenable to explanations (Kant 2006: 38; Carlisle 2014: 94–104; cf. Camic 1986: 1039–1087).

But not all philosophers have taken an equally dim view of habits. A counter-trend in modern philosophy has sought to reunite what Descartes, Kant, and their many followers, sundered. Often associated with the Continental tradition and American Pragmatism, these attempts have inevitably returned to the writings of Aristotle. Aristotle took habits seriously, and they featured prominently in his moral philosophy. Habits, Aristotle argued, are integral to the character of the human soul. The soul, as he describes it in De Anima, is not some mysterious spiritual substance, but instead the form of the body, its organizing principle. As such, it can be directly influenced by habits. Habits give shape to the soul and dispose us to act in dependable and predictable ways. Conscious deliberations and explicit choices are not sufficient here since they may be swayed by fleeting desires and flaring emotions. In order to fulfill our human potential, Aristotle concluded, we must cultivate the kinds of virtuous habits that give our soul a virtuous character. Only in this way can we attain *eudaimonia*, a flourishing life (Aristotle 2000: 23–24; cf. MacIntyre 1984).

Religious teachers, we said, complain that fully habituated prayers are "all form and no content", but Aristotle's discussion of the soul questions this distinction. If the form in question is the organizing principle of the body, then whatever influences that form will also influence how the body operates – what it perceives, makes sense of, reacts to and remembers. Depending on the form, a certain content is possible and not another. This makes it possible to manipulate the form in order to achieve a certain content. What Aristotle points to here is the process of habituation which we already have discussed. The brain is plastic, neuroscientists would say, and it changes in response to our interaction with the environment. Compare the idea of "character". In ancient Greece, *kharakter* referred to the grooves which an engraver creates with his chisel, such as the letters inscribed on a monument or a stela. In much the same fashion, a person's character is formed when actions, practices and thoughts which are repeated on a daily basis gradually come to take on a certain pattern. The habits create grooves, as it were, in the plastic material of the neurophysiological system (Smiles 1889: 15; James 1890: 1:122; Collini 1985: 29–50). Such character-building is hard work. Self-discipline and patience is required in order to stick to the chosen routine. You must watch yourself carefully, not falter, get lazy or cut corners. And there is always a risk that our bad habits will reassert themselves. "Don't sleep", as Rumi repeatedly reminded his readers.

In his Confessions, 397–400, Augustine of Hippo recounts how he fought, and won, this battle. It was his bad habits, he confessed, that held him back in his spiritual pursuits. He was drinking, gambling, and fornicating, and these habits had a remarkable power over him. He wanted to leave his past life behind, but he just could not do it; it was as though there were two wills

within him, or as though his personality was cleft in half. After his crisis and conversion, however, he embarked on a new life that included daily prayers and meditation. By diligently engaging in these practices, he could soon carry them out perfectly effortlessly. Augustine had finally united his will and his personality, and achieved a state of rest and ease in his communion with his God (Augustine of Hippo 1867; Cf. Kotva 2022: 183–95)

Such character formation is also the aim of various religious practices, often with their origin in East Asia. Practices such as Vipassana meditation, Zazen, yoga and tai chi, require their practitioners to embark on long processes of discipline and training. But similar practices exist also in Christian and Muslim traditions. The exercises designed by Ignatius of Loyola, for example, provide detailed instructions for how to discipline the body and focus the mind on spiritual matters. And the swirling dervishes of Sufi Islam are teaching their bodies to take them ever closer to God. In all cases, the aim is to shape the habits of the body in order to influence the content of the mind. But for this endeavor to be successful, the mind must be watchful and alert. We must monitor ourselves in order to make sure that we only engage in the officially sanctioned behavior (Ignatius of Loyola 1922; Schimmel 2007: 273–78).

A travel metaphor is often invoked to describe this process. The practitioners are "seekers" and "wayfarers" who embark on "journeys", "pilgrimages", and "quests". And it is crucial that we focus on the road ahead. "Awakening is like a mountain on the horizon", Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu, a Buddhist meditation teacher, explains.

> "Mindfulness is what remembers to keep attention focused on the road to the mountain, rather than letting it stay focused on glimpses of the mountain or get distracted by other paths leading away from the road." (Ṭhānissaro Bhikkhu's introduction to Pali Canon 2023)

The ultimate goal, if the travelers are successful, is a state of mindlessness. You lose yourself in the divine. This is a paradoxical outcome given how much mindfulness that went into the practice in the first place. In Buddhism, for example, becoming "aware" is above all the realization that there is nothing to be aware of in the first place, and this dissolution of self, in turn, leads to a sense of liberation. In Catholic Christianity, mystics like Teresa of Ávila or John of the Cross insisted, the practitioner will eventually unite with the divine, beyond the conscious striving of the individual. Sufis achieve a similar outcome by means of dhikr, "remembrance of God". Here the swirling, or the continuous repetition of God's name, leads to a forgetfulness of self and an awareness of God's presence (Teresa of Ávila 1921; cf. Underhill 1911: 198–213). Religious teachers objected to habitual behavior, but they never objected to character formation through virtuous habits. On the contrary, individuals who enter on spiritual journeys and reform themselves are to be praised and admired. They are the decorated athletes of the religious race. Mindlessness here is the mindlessness of the successful travelers who have reached their goal and no longer have a need for their individual minds. As a result, the argument cannot be that all habits are to be condemned. Habits are praiseworthy as long as they form a character which can keep its mind focused on a path towards the divine. And mindlessness too is quite acceptable if it is the mindlessness of the saint, the holy man or the enlightened one.

What remains to be investigated is whether this is viable a distinction. That is, is it only mindful practices that have this effect? Do you really have to pay

attention to what you are saying and doing in order reach out to the divine? Why is it that attentive minds are given this privileged position?

Standing Beside Ourselves

Most religions insist that God is a transcendental being. God is not of this world, but of another world. While the divine certainly may intervene in our lives, God dwells elsewhere, often in a location referred to as "Heaven". This may also be where we go after our deaths. As a result, it is this transcendental realm that we must reach if we are to have an encounter with the divine. Virtuous habits, we said, can help us here. Through intense practice, over many years, we may finally master the art of transcendence. However, as we saw, not all habits are of this virtuous kind. There are also everyday habits which teach us how to cope with the here and now. As a result, we have no reason to turn towards the yonder and beyond. Everyday habits, for this reason, are obstacles to a search for the transcendent.

But it is also the case that everyday habits sometimes prove insufficient. Occasionally we experience things that our habits have not prepared us for. Such singular experiences are commonly featured in the biographies of the founders and reformers of various religions. The story of Saul on the way to Damascus is well-known, and so is the spiritual travails of Augustine of Hippo, but Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism provide similar examples. And had Siddhartha Gautama not come across an old man, a sick man, and a dead man, he might never have turned into The Buddha. In these cases, the crises forced the founders and reformers to reconsider the circumstances of their lives, and often they sought to reform their character in the manner we already have discussed. This is also what they taught their first followers: you must break with your past lives; you must start again and start anew. You have to "put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires", in Saint Paul's words, and "to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness" (Ephesians 4:22–24). The house must be destroyed, as Rumi, the Sufi poet, put it, if we are to find the treasure buried beneath it (Rumi 2008: 17; cf. Schimmel 2007: 273–278).

Most of us never experience life-changing crises of such magnitudes, but all of us experience turning-points and transitions of different kinds. Suddenly our lives change and we cannot go on as before; we have to learn to cope with new challenges or seize new opportunities. At times like these many of our established habits can no longer sustain us. If our everyday changes, we must come up with new everyday habits. Such moments of transition are often marked by rituals. Anthropologists like to talk about "rites of passage" and "transition rituals". Examples of the latter are baptism, circumcision and coming-of-age rituals, marriage ceremonies, funerals, and many others. Examples of the former are rituals associated with changes in the seasons – planting and harvest, summer and winter solstice, Ramadan, Hannukah, Lent, and so on. The ritual marks the occasion as a special moment in time and makes it stand out from the moments that surround it. Rituals allow us to temporarily step out of the ordinary and experience something extraordinary (Gennep 1960; Bell 2017: 398; Dissanayake 2005).

This is also why rituals feature prominently in all religions. By participating in a religious ritual, we participate in an event which is not ordinary but extraordinary. The participants are saying and doing things they never normally

would say or do, and they wear unusual clothes and move in peculiar ways. From the point of view of our everyday lives, everything that goes on in the ritual is strange. In this way, the ritual breaks the regular, habituated, flow of everyday life. The religious ritual causes a rupture, as it were, and the hope of the participants is that this rupture will provide them with an opportunity to reach out to the transcendent. Rituals are ecstatic in the etymological sense of *ekstasis*, meaning that they allow us "to stand beside ourselves" or "being removed from our normal state" (Wikitionary 2023). By means of the ritual, we are put in a place where the yonder and beyond suddenly is a lot closer. This, at least, is how it might seem to the participants. From this point of view, rituals constitute an alternative to the religious practices we discussed above. Character formation is a demanding process, we concluded, and the journey to the divine is long and arduous. Not everyone is able undertake such projects, and many of us who have tried, have failed. Rituals, by comparison, are a far easier option. As long as we know the required words and movements, and as long as we do what everyone else is doing, not that much more is needed. Joining the other participants, we are soon standing beside ourselves. The ritual promises us instantaneous transcendence on the cheap.

The only problem, as any number of other religious teachers have pointed out, is that religious rituals too often turn into habits. We are expected to participate, and we do, but often our hearts are just not in it. Before long, we make our offerings in a casual manner; sing the hymns without proper attention to the words; participate in the procession while thinking mainly about the weight of the monstrance on our shoulders. As a result, the religious teachers insist, the whole exercise has become pointless. The extraordinary has been captured by the ordinary, as it were. The potential for a rupture which the ritual opened up abruptly closes and we find ourselves trapped in our own, all-too-familiar, everyday world. Ultimately, whether habitual prayers performed with little conscious attention should be condemned depends not only on what the mind is up to but also on what the body experiences. We should consider that even if the mind is wandering, the body can remain engaged. If this is true, then habitual, mindless prayers may still constitute a genuine encounter with the transcendent.

Experiences of the Body

Consider something we said about habits. In our discussion we established that it is possible for bodies to have experiences of which conscious minds are not aware, or aware only in part. The conscious mind is off-loading activities to the body, as it were, and we save on mental bandwidth as the body experiences the world on its own. We typically think of these experiences as perfectly ordinary – judging distances and speeds; understand weights, heights and trajectories; reading the posture and intentions of other people, and so on – but we can also imagine that the body has quite extraordinary experiences – of transcendence, for example, and of the divine (Cf. Gallagher *et al*., 2015)

Consider two examples of how this could work. The first example concerns moods. A mood is not an emotion and it is not a feature of an individual psychology. Rather, moods belong to the relationship between a person and the situation in which they find themselves. Moods are an "atmosphere", a "vibe" or something like a filter that colors everything around us in a certain hue. All situations are characterized by a mood of some kind. And even if our minds

cannot quite define them, and might not even be aware of them, our bodies quite automatically attune themselves to them. Entering a psychologist's office, a nightclub or a place of religious worship, our bodies immediately adjust to what is going on. Before we know it, we have assumed the right bodily posture, and a range of appropriate actions has been defined for us. Our habits know what is required and what the situation affords (Ringmar 2018: 453–69). Another example are trance states. All rituals require us to engage in various repetitive movements and in several cases the movements in question go on for a long time. We are moving up and down, swaying back and forth, or walking, step by step, towards a pilgrimage site. And there are others moving with us, synchronizing their movements with ours. In the process, some participants report, they experience a sense of a loss of boundaries between self and other. They lose themselves in the interaction, but losing themselves they gain a sense of being a part of a larger whole. Perhaps we could talk about "muscular bonding" – "a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to the participation in collective ritual" (McNeill 1995: 2).

Attunements to moods and cases of muscular bonding are embodied experiences before they become experiences that engage our conscious minds. What our bodies participate in is always a richer and more immersive experience that what our minds eventually register. The experiences can be translated into words and thoughts, of course, but there is always a lot missing in the translation. And crucially, for the purposes of our discussion, the experiences of the body are always those of joining up with something which is other than oneself. Thus the mood takes you out of yourself as you find yourself responding to what the situation requires. You always find yourself in a certain mood. Much in the same way, the ritual takes you out of yourself as your muscles bond with those of others. Synchronization and repetition creates a sense of lack of boundaries between self and other. These are not necessarily transcendental experiences of course, and there is no reason to believe that they are experiences of the divine. But a religious person is still likely to interpreted them that way. To a believer, in all situations where we come to "stand beside ourselves", we are standing closer to God.

Memory further disassociates the experiences of the body from the interpretations of the mind. Bodies frequently remember things which conscious minds forget, and they remember things to which conscious minds never paid attention in the first place. Our bodies remember moods and they remember human interactions in far greater detail than our minds ever could. While minds mainly remember things that happened and things that we did, our bodies remember how situations felt, how we felt ourselves, and what something meant before they were interpreted into words and sentences (Fuchs 2012: 9–22).

Consider everyday prayers from this perspective. What Al-Ghazali, Kierkegaard, and all the other religious teachers did not consider is the possibility that our bodies engage with prayers even though our conscious minds do not. Our bodies might be perfectly attuned to the mood created by the ritual, and they no doubt feel the presence of all other bodies moving in a synchronized manner all around them. Our bodies, moreover, might remembered these experiences and preserved traces of them even as the ritual ends and we return to our ordinary lives. In this way, the ritual leaves traces in our bodies that help sanctify our everyday lives. We call it a "religious faith", but it is

actually an embodied memory – the memory of having stood beside ourselves and hoped for transcendence.

A God Within Us?

A counter-trend in modern philosophy, we said, is the attempt to reunite what Descartes, Kant, and their followers, sundered. This is one of the themes of Continental philosophy, of Pragmatism, but it was also the aim of a school of philosophers collectively known as the "French spiritualists" – including Maine de Biran (1766–1824), Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900), and later Henri Bergson (1859–1941). They all sought to rescue the human spirit from the deterministic worldview represented by materialism, rationalism, and science. Habits were crucial to this project since habits constitute a link between the spiritual and the material. After all, by means of habits, the mind can influence the body, but the body can also influence the mind. The body is spiritualized while the mind is embodied. This, the French Spiritualists argued, provides us with a way to defend our humanity against the onslaught of determinism (Bergson 1946: 260–99).

There is a religious dimension to this argument. It is a well-established religious trope that God is the origin of all things. God is present at the very beginning, and as a result, prior to all distinctions – between matter and spirit, subject and object, mine and thine, and so on. But if that is the case, it would seem to follow that God is at the origin also of our actions and ourselves. And this is indeed an oft-repeated conclusion. "Thou wert more inward to me than my most inward part", as Augustine of Hippo put it (Augustine of Hippo 1867: 52). "Don't you know", Saint Paul asked, "that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Or, according to the Qur'an: "We have already created man and know what his soul whispers to him, and We are closer to him than [his] jugular vein" (Surah Qaf, 50:16).

However, it seems quite impossible to communicate with that God who has a presence within us. The connection is not transcendental after all, but immanent, and it is as intimate as anything ever could be. In his De l'habitude, 1838, Ravaisson addresses this problem. It is obvious, he says, that the conscious processes of our minds cannot take us very far. We cannot think our way to the core of our being, and as a result, no immediate communication can be established between our minds and the divine. However, our habits provide a solution. The process of habituation gives a bodily form to our conscious actions, creating what Ravaisson called an "obscure intelligence", a habituated subject which is an embodied, impersonal – or perhaps a prepersonal – version of ourselves. This obscure intelligence, Ravaisson argued, unites the spiritual and the material dimensions of our being. The mind and the body can no longer be neatly divided. In this way habits allow us to overcome Cartesian dualisms (Ravaisson 2009, 71).

This obscure intelligence, Ravaisson goes on to tell us, "is God within us, God hidden solely by being so far within us in this intimate source of ourselves, to whose depths we do not descend" (Ravaisson 2009: 71). God, here, is not the god most commonly featured in scripture; it is not some Supreme Being, the Creator of Worlds, and so on. Instead it is something similar to a life force – an intrinsic source of vitality, unity, and purposiveness. This force pervades being, Ravaisson argues, and it can be expressed through the

habitual actions we perform. And although we cannot reach this god with our minds, we can establish a connection through faith, practices, and devotion. Prayers, even prayers said mindlessly, are an example. As Ravaisson might argue, it does not really matter what our minds are doing, as long as our bodies are engaged. Mindless prayers are presented to an immanent God, not a transcendental; a God who our bodies already intimately know, and for whom our minds always will search in vain.

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Erik Ringmar

U obranu neumne molitve

Sažetak

Članak brani navikovnu izvedbu religijskih rituala, poput dnevnih molitvi, nasuprot gledištu da štovanje uvijek mora biti pozorno i usredotočeno na duhovne stvari. Učitelji u svim religijama naglašavaju potrebu za angažiranjem naših umova u štovanju, no to gledište previđa iskustvo

tijela. Kroz navike, naša tijela mogu imati iskustva koja će naši umovi djelomično prepoznati ili neće uopće. Neka od tih iskustava mogu uključivati osjećaj jedinstva s nečime većim od nas, što vjernici mogu protumačiti kao religiozni susret.

Ključne riječi
navika, religijska praksa, ritual, utjelovljenje, francuski spiritualisti

Erik Ringmar

Zur Verteidigung des geistlosen Gebets

Zusammenfassung
Dieses Paper verteidigt die gewohnheitsmäßige Ausübung religiöser Rituale, wie täglicher Gebete, gegen die Ansicht, dass die Anbetung stets achtsam sein und sich auf spirituelle Angelegenheiten ausrichten müsse. Lehrer aller Religionen bekräftigen die Notwendigkeit, dass unser Geist in die Anbetung eingebunden ist, doch diese Sichtweise übersieht die Erfahrungen des Körpers. Durch Gewohnheiten können unsere Körper Erfahrungen machen, die unser Geist möglicherweise nicht erkennt oder nur teilweise wahrnimmt. Einige dieser Erfahrungen können ein Gefühl der Einheit mit etwas Größerem als uns selbst beinhalten, was für Gläubige als religiöse Begegnung gedeutet werden kann.

Schlüsselwörter
Gewohnheiten, religiöse Praktiken, Rituale, Verkörperung, französische Spiritualisten

Erik Ringmar

En défense de la prière mécanique

Résumé
Cet article plaide en faveur de la pratique habituelle des rituels religieux, tels que les prières quotidiennes, contre l'idée selon laquelle le culte doit toujours être conscient et centré sur les questions spirituelles. Les enseignants de toutes les religions insistent sur la nécessité d'un engagement mental dans le culte, mais cette perspective néglige les expériences du corps. Grâce aux habitudes, nos corps peuvent vivre des expériences que notre esprit ne reconnaît pas, ou seulement partiellement. Certaines de ces expériences peuvent impliquer un sentiment d'unité avec quelque chose de plus grand que nous, ce que les croyants interprètent souvent comme une rencontre religieuse.

Mots-clés
habitudes, pratiques religieuses, rituels, incarnation, spiritualistes français