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THE CONCEPT OF HABIT AND THE REGULARITIES OF SOCIAL STRUCTURE

abstract

In this paper I discuss the concept of habit from a sociological point of view. My aim, in part, is to consider the ways in which sociologists and social philosophers could use and have used 'habit' in their analyses and explanations. In particular the concept of habit can contribute to our understanding and explanation of the behavioural regularities involved in social structure. In addition, however, I am interested in the limitations of the concept of habit, within a sociological context, when compared against other concepts which are used to do similar work. In particular I contrast the concept of habit with the concepts of 'rule' and 'convention', drawing out the strengths that it has relative to those competing concepts but also identifying important aspects of behavioural regularity which they bring to light and which habit ignores. In the conclusion to the paper I consider ways in which these various concepts might overlap and might be used in conjunction with one another.

keywords

Convention, rule, social practices, habitus, Mauss, Bourdieu, Winch

In this paper I approach 'habit' as a sociologist. I am interested in the way that both 'habit' and the related concept of 'habitus' (see below) are used, particularly in the context of 'theories of practice' and even more particularly in those theories of practice which build upon the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1992), to explain the regular and enduring patterns of social interaction (that is, the social practices) that form a central element of 'social structure'¹. Habit is a crucial concept for these purposes, in my view, but it is a limited concept which only captures one element of what is involved in these regular and enduring patterns. My aim here is to identify and explore some of these limitations, delimiting more precisely the role habit that plays in the reproduction of social life whilst also considering the elements of that process that it doesn't capture. I do this by contrasting 'habit' with two concepts which are sometimes used to do the same analytic work as it but which have fallen out of favour as 'habit' has risen to the fore in sociological thought: rule and convention. I will argue that they do not, in fact, do the same work; that each draws out a distinct aspect of the regular and enduring patterns of interactivity that interest sociologists and that sociologists would do well to attend to these differences and to the range of concepts necessary to adequately grasp them. We need the concepts of rule and convention as well as the concept of habit if we are to fully understand and enjoy the capability to analyse the enduring patterns of interaction which (partly) constitute social structures. From the point of view of specific focus of this special edition, namely, habit, I hope that this offers a useful interrogation of its sociological meaning and scope. I begin with a brief account the concept's somewhat chequered history within sociology and of the role accorded it in explaining social structure.

Sociological Habits

In sociology, as in other academic discourses, the concept of habit has undergone various reappraisals and changes of meaning across time (Camic 1986). Early sociologists used the concept, positively, to denote acquired dispositions of a fairly broad nature, perceiving it to be entirely compatible with their understanding of human action as purposive and intelligent. In the early twentieth century, however, partly as an effect of the rise

1 Other key elements of social structure are patterns of connection between the participants in particular 'social worlds' and the distribution of resources between them.

of behaviourist psychology and physiology, with their mechanistic and reductive explanations of human action, sociologists began to think of habits as largely involuntary behavioural ticks; inconsequential, devoid of meaning and for these reasons sociologically uninteresting (*ibid.*). Elements of the old concept of habit were maintained in such concepts as custom, tradition and even perhaps culture but 'habit' itself was dropped from the lexicon. More recently, however, habit has made a comeback. The work of Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1984, 1992), in particular, has put the concept of 'habitus' at the heart of contemporary sociological thought, and that in turn has prompted a return, in some quarters, to 'habit' itself.

I have discussed the (lack of) difference between 'habit' and 'habitus' elsewhere (Crossley 2013). It very much depends, I have suggested, whose concept of habit and whose concept of habitus one refers to. For every theorist, such as Bourdieu or Marcel Mauss (1979), who develops a concept of habitus, distinguishing it from 'mere habit', there is another, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962) or John Dewey (1988), who has sought to rescue 'habit' itself from a reductive behaviourist understanding, refusing to relegate it to the domain of simple, insignificant and mechanical behaviours. Restoring something of its original meaning, they locate habit within behaviour which is meaningful, intelligent, rational and sometimes strategic. In addition, they discuss collective habits, formed and diffusing within social networks whose members they serve to mark out as distinct social groups: e.g. social classes, nations and ethnic groups.

Furthermore, they identify the sociological importance of habit as a mechanism which anchors socially and historically variable forms of conduct, physically, lending the society or social world to which they belong durability and a relatively stable structure. Society persists on a day-by-day basis, they suggest, because its forms have become habitually engrained within the behavioural repertoires of its members. William James captures this in a widely cited passage, adding the important further observation that habit contributes to social reproduction because it entails desensitisation to inequalities and hardships which, were they to be experienced with full force, rising to the forefront of consciousness, might provoke discontent and uprising:

Habit is the enormous fly-wheel of society, its most precious conservative agent. It alone is what keeps us all within the bounds of ordinance, and saves the children of fortune from the envious

uprisings of the poor. It along prevents the hardest and most repulsive walks of life from being deserted by those brought up to tread therein. It keeps the fisherman ... at sea It dooms us all to fight out the battle of life upon the lines of our nurture or our early choice ... it is too late to begin again. It keeps different social strata from mixing. (James 1892, 143)

James anticipates many of the key elements of Bourdieu's theory of habitus in this passage, not least the sense that habits are formed in particular social worlds, whose structure they subsequently reproduce. Actors adapt their behaviour to fit the social worlds in which they find themselves. This gives rise to habits which both attach the actor to that world and contribute to its reproduction; shaping the actor's behaviour in a way which then shapes the world in question. To quote Bourdieu himself, habitus are:

... durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and representations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. (Bourdieu 1992, p.53)

Pragmatists (Dewey in particular) and phenomenologists (Merleau-Ponty in particular but also Husserl (1973, 1990)) make a crucial contribution to this renewed focus upon 'habit', opening up and exploring the nature of habit to a far greater extent than Bourdieu. They ground the concept by illuminating and exploring its place in everyday activity and experience. They challenge its behaviourist framing both with detailed critiques which reveal the inadequacy of behaviourist theory to explain even its own experimental findings (Merleau-Ponty 1965, Dewey 1896) and also through careful phenomenological analyses of familiar habits which refute any notion of mechanical repetition and show rather how habit enables skilled improvisation and how it can be transposed to novel situations. Furthermore, they understand habits as open to revision in the context of an engagement between the organism and its environment, and they expand the scope of the concept beyond simple motor functions to the realms of perception and reflective thought, simultaneously exploring how these realms are intertwined (Crossley 2001, 2013).

Finally, connecting with the key sociological theme identified at the outset

of this paper, they explore the key link between habit, history (and thus temporality) and identity (both individual and social). Habit, they argue, lends continuity to our lives, making me the same person tomorrow as I was today and allowing projects begun at one point in time to be completed at another. As such it contributes to our freedom and capacity for choice. Choice is meaningful because it achieves traction and anchorage in my life through force of habit. At the collective level, this same mechanism ensures the continuity of history and the distinctiveness of particular periods within it. The human organisms who populate different historical periods do not differ greatly qua organisms but their habits do and this makes a huge difference.

Note that habit facilitates both conservation and change in this account or rather the conservation that is integral to change. Habit preserves aspects of the past within the present, facilitating actions which build upon that past in pursuit of a future. It is because of habit that our activities, individual and collective, never emerge *ex nihilo*. As James emphasises in the above-cited passage, we cannot 'begin again'. The present must always build upon the past as preserved within habit and the clock is never, can never be turned back.

It will be apparent that I deem habit or habitus (I will use 'habit' to refer to both hereafter) a crucial mechanism in the reproduction of the social world. As noted in the introduction to this paper, however, it is, like any scientific concept, selective, drawing certain aspects of the empirical world into the foreground of our attention, at the expense of others which may also be important. We must reflect upon these others too if we are to achieve a satisfactory account.

One particular concern that I have with habit is that it locates 'social structure' entirely within the individual failing to engage with the intersubjective and more broadly relational nature of the social world qua social. Habits are individual dispositions and even collective habits are mere aggregations of individual habits. They can and I believe that they usually do take shape within the context of social interaction but this social dimension is not captured within the concept of habit itself, which, as noted, tracks it back into the individual. This individualised element is important and I will defend it. However, it is not the whole story. Social worlds are networks of interacting and interdependent actors, both human and corporate² (Crossley 2011). The structure of these networks is a further

² By 'corporate actors' I mean such as organizations as firms, trade unions and governments, which involve mechanisms of collective decision making and means of implementing their decisions.

element of social structure, and the behavioural regularities focused upon in this paper are not only anchored by means of habit but also by relational means, within these networks.

In what follows I will tease this out by contrasting the concept of habit with the concepts of 'rule' and 'convention' respectively. In contrast to habit, both 'rule' and 'convention' imply interconnection and a discussion of them allows me to demonstrate why connection is important. I will not be arguing against 'habit', however. Where habit, rule and convention are discussed together theorists typically argue for one over the others. Bourdieu (1990) famously argues for habitus over rule, for example, and Peter Winch (1958) argues in favour of rule over habit. I briefly review both arguments, identifying merit in them but the either/or framing is problematic and unnecessary in my view because each concept identifies a different and important mechanism at play within regular patterns of behaviour. Furthermore, though the three mechanisms are often found together each is sometimes found in the absence of the other, and they can conflict, such that we must distinguish between them in our analytic toolbox. I begin by considering Winch's critique of 'habit'.

Habit and Rule

Winch draws a comparison between habits and rules in his path-breaking study, *The Idea of a Social Science*. Having argued for the importance of rules, drawing upon Wittgenstein (1953), he observes that much of the work which he assigns to 'rules' in his account is assigned to 'habit' in the work of his contemporary, Michael Oakeshott (1991, 1999). Winch accepts a broader and richer account of habit than was typical at his time of writing and is not, therefore, entirely dismissive of Oakeshott. However, he does not believe that 'habit' can play the role which he attributes to rules:

Oakeshott appears to think that the dividing line between behaviour which is habitual and that which is rule-governed depends on whether or not a rule is consciously applied. In opposition to this I want to say that the test of whether a man's [sic] actions are the application of a rule is not whether he can *formulate* it but whether it makes sense to distinguish between a right and a wrong way of doing things ... Where that makes sense then it must also make sense to say that he is applying a criterion in what he does even though he does not and perhaps cannot formulate that criterion. (Winch 1958, p.58, emphasis in original)

His first objection, outlined above, is that social practice has a normative aspect which is captured by 'rule' but not 'habit'. Social behaviour can be and often is judged right and wrong, either in a moral or a technical sense, by those involved. 'Rule' entails this normative element, 'habit' does not and 'rule', therefore, is the preferable concept. His second objection is that the regularities of interaction that these normative judgements refer to and which I have previously referred to in this paper are not mere repetitions of a set behavioural pattern, as 'habit', on his interpretation of that concept, would imply, but rather appear regular in virtue of their adherence to an underlying principle, as the concept of 'rule' would suggest. Following a rule does not always mean acting in an identical fashion across time and different social contexts, he observes. It entails understanding the rule, and understanding, as Wittgenstein famously claims, entails the capacity to 'go on', extending and/or applying a rule beyond the limited range of examples involved in one's learning of it. Like the individual who is able to continue a number series further than they have heard it recited, continuing '12, 15, 18 ..' after hearing '3, 6, 9 ...', social actors act in accordance with rules which they have learned and understood without exactly replicating forms of conduct which they have seen others perform in the past. Their interactivity manifests understanding of a rule rather than habitual repetition.

Curiously, Bourdieu uses a very similar observation to Winch to argue against the concept of rules and in favour of habit. For him 'rule' implies rigidity of conduct whilst habit or at least habitus implies a flexible disposition and 'feel for the game' which allows the actor to spontaneously improvise in unfamiliar situations. The strategic action of the footballer, who is constantly innovating and improvising in response to the state of play is an example of habitus for Bourdieu. Furthermore, most of the revisionist accounts of habit that I referred to above equate habit with understanding and knowledge, bringing 'habit' much closer to 'rule' than Winch's account suggests. Merleau-Ponty, for example, views habits as forms of embodied understanding and know-how:

We said earlier that it is the body which understands in the acquisition of habit. This way of putting it will appear absurd, if understanding is subsuming a sense datum under an idea, and if the body is an object. But the phenomenon of habit is just what prompts us to revise our notion of 'understand' and our notion of the body. To understand is to experience harmony between what we aim at and what is

given, between intention and the performance – and the body is our anchorage in the world. (1962, 144)

Habit is embodied know-how for Merleau-Ponty, which allows the actor to spontaneously adapt to unfolding situations in a manner intelligently and rationally adapted to those situations, given the actor's goals.

It follows from this, contra Winch, that the same habit may give rise to a variety of behavioural responses, across different situations, unified only by their manifestation of the same basic understanding. In Winch's defence, however, we might argue that understanding is always necessarily understanding-of something or other and we would therefore have to ask what is understood in habit? The answer will vary according to the habit in question. However, if that habit is amongst those which are constitutive of social structure then it seems inevitable that what it will grasp is a rule of some sort. Indeed the concept of understanding seems logically to entail 'rules', in Winch's Wittgensteinian sense, because it must entail the possibility of misunderstanding or not understanding and therefore right and wrong ways of going on. Furthermore, we might ask whether Bourdieu's 'feel for the game' does not necessarily entail constitutive 'rules' of the game. What does an actor have a feel for when they have a feel for the game if not rules which define the objectives and constraints of the game?

Equally importantly, Winch's insistence that 'rule' implies that there is a right and a wrong way of doing things does identify an important element of social structure that is not captured by the concept of habit. Social practices are not only regular and enduring. They have a normative character such that those involved sometimes correct both themselves and others, drawing a distinction between right and wrong ways of going on. 'Rules' captures this but 'habit' has no such normative implication. Habits might be good or bad but only in relation to a rule or standard which is extraneous to them.

The point here is not to deny that rule-following is sometimes habitual. It is and this doubtless contributes to the survival of particular rules. The point, rather, is that there is an important normative aspect to social structure which 'habit' does not capture. I return to this. Presently, however, I will continue the critique of habit.

Though Winch is careful to allow that social actors may not be able to formulate the rules they understand and orient to, breaches of rules in

social circumstances are likely to be noticed by those who understand the rule and may occasion reflective attempts at correction. Likewise for the individual actor who confronts a situation where application of the rule is not straightforward:

...questions of interpretation and consistency, that is, matters for *reflection*, are bound to arise for anyone who has to deal with a situation foreign to his previous experience. (Winch 1958, 64, emphasis in original)

Most rules are not subject to reflection for much of the time, on Winch's understanding, but in the context of a rapidly changing social world any rule might be elevated into conscious reflection. In this respect Winch balances the attention to pre-reflective activities often afforded in accounts of habit with a focus upon the role of reflective intelligence and understanding. Our patterns of interaction are not completely habitual. Periodically they come into question and what we reflect upon in such circumstances –i.e. how to go on– bears upon the principle underlying our action; that is to say, rules.

Building upon Winch I would add that rules are also important because, at least as defined by Wittgenstein (1953), they are irreducibly social. They exist not within but between individuals, within a social network. They rest upon 'agreement in forms of life' and therefore presuppose at least two actors who 'agree' upon them (often more, of course). Habits, by contrast, even where shared and therefore collective, are properties of individuals. Even collective habits are only aggregations of individual habits. A collective habit is an individual habit that happens to be shared, and habits can be strictly individual (at least in theory). By contrast a rule exists only in the context of social relations between multiple individuals. Rules are relational and, as such, they permit us to explore the genuinely social nature of social life.

Furthermore, where rules are supported by sanctions this too adds a relational dimension to structure. Actor A acts as she does, following a rule, because actor B will punish her if she does not. This situation may be reciprocal. A and B may each be in a position to sanction one another for rule violation. In some cases, however, only one of the two may have the means to sanction the other, a position which arguably allows her also to impose the rule to which the other must adhere. In this case we would deem the power balance within the relation between A and B to be asymmetrical.

Whatever the precise details, however, the key point is that relations matter and that relations are not captured by 'habit'.

The various advantages of the concept of rule do not amount to an argument for using it instead of the concept of habit, however. On this point I disagree with Winch. Just as 'rule' captures certain aspects of regular patterns of social interaction missed by 'habit' so to 'habit' captures aspects that are neglected by 'rule'. Not only is it perfectly meaningful to refer to habits which are individual and therefore not rule-following, it is equally meaningful to distinguish between instances of rule following which are habitual and instances which are not. Though it does not occur to Winch that rule following may sometimes be habitual, for example, we have seen that he distinguishes between situations where rule following involves reflection and situations where it does not. Furthermore, where rule following is habitual there will always have been a time at which it was not; that is, a time at which some degree of conscious effort was required to follow the rule.

The concept of rules captures the pattern adhered to by actors in particular situations and the normative aspect involved but it does not explain why actors adhere to rules. There may be many such explanations, from the desire to do the right thing through to fear of punishment for doing the wrong thing, but these all presuppose that rule following is a reflective activity; that an act of decision and a degree of conscious effort is involved. Habit adds a further possibility. It alerts us to the way in which certain patterns or principles of conduct, that is to say, certain rules, are conserved within the pre-reflective 'structures of behaviour' which underpin our reflective life such that they become, from the point of view of the actor, automatic. Habit is a mechanism which explains some (but not all) instances of rule following.

As 'rule' and 'habit' each do a different job in explaining and rendering social practices intelligible I would suggest that we do not consider their respective merits in either/or terms but rather look to keep both in our analytic toolbox. In the conclusion to this paper I return to this suggestion. Before I do, however, I want to introduce a third concept into the discussion: convention.

Convention Like 'habit' and 'rule', 'convention' is defined in a variety of ways both within and outside of social science. We find an interesting use, however,

in the philosophical work of David Lewis (1969) and the sociological work of Howard Becker (1982), who draws (selectively) upon Lewis. Conventions, for Lewis are solutions to ‘coordination problems’ and involve mutual expectations between actors as to how each will interact in a given situation. In many circumstances in social life social actors need to coordinate their activity, Lewis observes. Various possibilities for acting are open to them, any of which would equally well serve their purposes, as long as the others involved make a complementary choice. Thus, in the UK, we drive on the left side of the road. We could drive on the right, as is common elsewhere, but as long as we all drive on the same side it doesn’t matter. Where a particular option is settled upon, Lewis argues, we may speak of convention. A convention is a course of action, integral to the solution of a coordination problem, which all (or at least most) relevant actors within a given population orient to.

Lewis’ concept of convention is important because, like ‘rule’, it draws out a relational aspect to social structure which is not entailed in ‘habit’ (even collective habit) and which habit arguably ignores; namely, that social activity requires coordination and thus ‘agreement’³ between those involved. Social activity is inter-activity, interaction, and its regularities cannot therefore be grasped entirely by reference to a concept (habit) which captures the manner in which forms of conduct are conserved within the action repertoires of discrete individuals. Just as the concept of habit does not entail that action might be right or wrong, as suggested by rule, neither does it address the issue of coordination and the intersubjective agreement this involves. ‘Conventions’ are ways in which we act together rather than, as in the case of habit, individual instantiations of action which may or may not be found across multiple individuals.

Furthermore, like rules, conventions necessarily exist between people, in interaction. A convention only exists when at least two people ‘agree’, often tacitly and in practice, about how each will act in certain situations.

Conventions and Rules

In some instances conventions will involve a normative element and thus have a rule-like nature. However, this is not necessarily so. There are two types of counter-example. Firstly, some conventions lack a normative element because their arbitrariness is recognised and/or deviation does not cause huge

³ This is not to say that parties to a convention actually come to a reflective consensus but rather than they act in complementary ways. To paraphrase Wittgenstein, they agree, not (necessarily) in opinions but in forms of life.

coordination problems. Parties to a convention recognise that other ways of behaving in a situation would be entirely appropriate, only sticking to what they do because agreement between their respective ways of behaving is useful to them. Friends who regularly meet at a particular table in a café may be said to have established a convention, for example, which eases the coordination of lunchtime meetings between them but this is unlikely to be regarded as normatively binding. If the first to arrive at the café fancies sitting somewhere else for a change the second will not deem this wrong (either morally or technically), unless it proves particularly disruptive or inconvenient. Similarly, if somebody else is sat at their seat when they arrive they might regard this as an inconvenience but not as a breach of a rule.

Secondly, challenges to convention are sometimes viewed positively, especially in aesthetic domains. The musicologist Leonard Meyer (1956), for example, argues that the pleasure generated by music stems in large part from the composer and/or performer playing with and bending conventions and thereby teasing the audience. The audience expect a passage that has begun like 'this' to finish like 'that', for example, because that is how such sequences conventionally run. Knowing this, however, the performer deviates from the convention, generating tension within their audience which they will later release either by diverting to another convention or establishing a non-conventional pattern which they audience can at least recognise as a pattern and which might become a new convention. 'Convention' is defined here much as Lewis defines it. It involves shared expectation. The audience expect certain things of the performer/composer and the performer/composer expects that they expect it. Furthermore, these expectations facilitate coordination and communication between the two parties. The aesthetic effect is only achieved to the extent that the audience, following convention, react in the way that the composer/performer expects. However, Meyer's composer/performer plays with and deviates from convention herself, and though this may sometimes be met with negative sanctions it can also be an occasion for praise and positive sanctions. Though the concepts of convention and rule sometimes overlap, therefore, this is not always so and we have good reason to keep both, distinguishing between them, in our analytical toolbox. In what follows I will show that the same is true for 'habit' and 'convention'.

Habit and Convention

As with 'rules', the advantages that the concept of convention affords us do not merit our choosing it over 'habit' because 'convention' does not do the work of 'habit' any more than 'habit' does the work of 'convention'. Conventions can be habitual but not always. To give an example which covers both rules and

conventions: when I drive in the UK I follow the convention and the rule of driving on the left hand side of the road, and I do so by force of habit. It does not occur to me to do otherwise. I get in the car and pull onto the left-hand side of the road. If an occasion were to arise in which another road user drove on the right I would be shocked, evidencing a taken for granted (i.e. habitual) expectation about the behaviour of others, as is proper to convention, and I would no doubt feel a sense of moral outrage, evidencing the normative weight (and thus rule-like nature) of this convention, but in most cases in the UK everybody drives on the left, by force of habit, and insofar as we notice at all it feels natural to do so. When in France, by contrast, I drive on the right hand side of the road. This does not come naturally to me. It is not a habit. Indeed it goes against my habitual inclination. I know what I ought to do, have expectations about how others will drive and have expectations about how they will expect me to drive but this largely arises in my reflective consciousness and I find that I have to remind myself what to do, especially when approaching challenges such as those presented by a roundabout. Driving on the right feels strange, at least at first, until I get used to it (habituate to it) and begin to form a habit of driving on the right.

It might be argued that such driving conventions/rules only work because they are habitual for the vast majority of drivers. This is no doubt true but the fact that we can follow such conventions/rules even when they are not habitual indicates that 'habit' adds something to our analysis that neither 'convention' nor 'rule' in themselves entail, just as they each make a unique contribution, covered neither by the other nor by habit.

The work that 'habit' performs in relation to 'convention', to reiterate what I said with respect to habit and rules, is to lend them stability and durability by anchoring them within the individual, beneath the level of reflective decision, where their instigation and execution would always potentially be open to question. Habits may be called into question, of course, and may become subject to conscious attempts at cultivation and/or destruction. However, habitual action, for the most part, is action which is triggered and executed without the intervention of reflective thought.

Removing structures of behaviour from the realm of choice and conscious deliberation increases their regularity and durability by rendering them 'automatic'. All things being equal an actor will behave in a habitual manner within a familiar situation. The selection and filtering which reflective deliberation affords is bypassed. In addition, habituation lowers the costs of action, in terms of effort, generating a degree of inertia. It is much

easier to act as we habitually act than to devise new ways of acting, and even where we consider alternatives, therefore, we may still revert to habit unless changes in our situation have significantly reduced their use value. In a further twist, moreover, habits have the effect of naturalising certain behaviours. In part this is a matter of putting them outside of the realm of discourse. If we do not need to think about doing them then we may not even notice that we do them and will certainly be less inclined to think about or question them if we do. Even if we do question them, however, the fact that they come so easily to us will often incline us to suppose that they are 'natural' ways of acting.

Defined in this way 'habit' potentially conflicts with 'convention' as Lewis understands it. A defining feature of convention, for Lewis, is our awareness that we could act otherwise. Patterns of interaction which are believed to be 'natural' and perhaps even those executed without reflective awareness would not qualify fully as conventions from this point of view. Lewis offers no good reason for this particular aspect of his definition of convention, however, and I believe that it has counter-intuitive implications. A convention might cease to be a convention over time, for example, as social actors forget about its arbitrariness and it becomes taken for granted. Conversely a behaviour which is taken-for-granted will only become a convention when its taken-for-grantedness is challenged. More strangely still, the same behaviour might be a convention for some of the people who engage in it (those aware of alternatives) but not for others (those who deem it natural). It is certainly true that, as analysts, we will not recognise a convention as such unless we are aware that other arrangements are possible but the requirement that lay actors share that awareness is unnecessary. Actors need not be aware that an arrangement is conventional in order for it to be conventional.

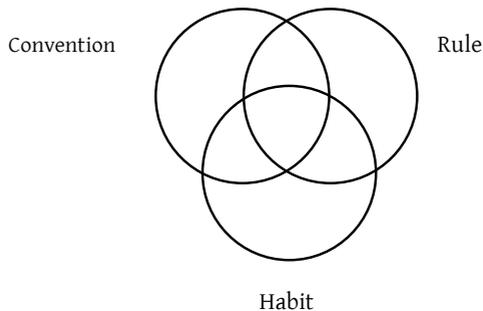
Habit, convention and rule are not, as Bourdieu's and Winch's reflections on habit and rule each seem to suggest, alternative ways of conceptualising the same thing. Rather, each concept picks out a different aspect of social practice. 'Rule' identifies a normative aspect: actors act in a way which their peers deem correct and/or believe that they ought to act. Furthermore, it identifies an underlying principle or criteria which actors understand and apply in their activity. 'Convention' identifies the way in which particular ways of acting resolve coordination problems and involve mutual expectations about the behaviour of self and other. 'Habit' identifies the anchoring of understanding and expectations in the pre-reflective life of the

embodied agent.

Each of these aspects is important and in many cases each will be simultaneously in play, as my UK driving example suggests. However, I hope I have also shown that any one may be absent in a particular situation. This is why we need to distinguish the three. We may elaborate upon this by way of a Venn diagram.

The diagram presents seven possibilities for the possible interplay of habit, convention and rule. Any specific instance of regular and enduring behaviour will fit into one of these seven possibilities. We may use the diagram as an analytic tool for considering the specific interplay of these factors involved in concrete cases of regular/ending behaviour.

Figure 1.1: Habit, Rule and Convention



The reflections offered in this paper only begin to scratch at the surface. A proper understanding of social practice requires further and much more nuanced differentiation of the various mechanisms in play within it. This includes those focused upon here, those gestured towards (e.g. sanctions and balances of power) but no doubt many more besides. I hope that I have at least made a start here, however.

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