

Felix Ravaisson (1813-1900)

Felix Ravaisson is a complex example of the French spiritualist tradition in philosophy. In his text *On Habit* (1838) he writes of the fundamental condition of presence or 'being here.' (What he writes, in this most widely known of his philosophical works, (1838), *De L'habitude*, is a kind of metaphysics of the daily, whose starting point is taken from ordinary language. He takes no data from the phenomenal world as primary ingredients of his world view. He makes no effort to include what is objectively over against him as a building block in the structure of reality. One thinks at once of the broadbased climate of language philosophies, which dot the landscape of nineteenth and century philosophy in western Europe and which the supergrowth of philosophy as a discipline had traditionally, say in the earlier modern period, chosen to center around particular problems or themes--like the existence of God, or Virtue and Truth, themes built out of the concerns of the waning of the Middle Age--but not with the language which in seventeenth century thinkers like Descartes and Pascal the interiority of the philosopher himself was already demanding attention as part of the thematic of philosophy. Pascal's *Pensees* are the deepest evidence for this inward turn, which makes its way onto the philosophical landscape at the time of Louis XIV and the great monarchies of pre modern Europe. It is still more than a century away, before philosophies based entirely on language analysis were imaginable, The age of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, or Frege was still a half-century away, in the foothills of the series of world wars, which were by our time have become one of the defining conditions of being human.

The kind of linguistic innocence with which Ravaisson addresses the process of self-understanding is evident at every point of his presentation. The first lines of his text on habit will suggest the blend of provocation and tenacity with which he invites us into his conceptual world. 'L'habitude, *dans le sens le plus etendu, est la maniere etre generale et permanente, l'etat d'une existence considere, soit dans l'ensemble de ses elements, soit dans dans la succession de ses epoques.* ' Habitus, rooted in the Latin habeo--hold, grasp-- is being taken, here, in a dual sense, both as the way we place- hold in reality, assume a particular stance, and as the way we persist as integral parts of ourselves. With such a concise but outward flowing definition of 'habitude, 'Ravaisson establishes the foundation of a thought riveting time-positional text.