From Habit to Monads: Félix Ravaisson’s Theory of Substance

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ABSTRACT: In this article I argue that in his 1838 *De l’habitude*, Félix Ravaisson uses the analysis of habit to defend a Leibnizian monadism. Recent commentators have failed to appreciate this because they read Ravaisson as a typically post-Kantian philosopher, and underemphasize the distinct context in which he developed his work. I explore three key claims made by interpreters who argue that Ravaisson should be read as a Schellingian, and show [i] that these claims are incompatible with the text of *De l’habitude* and [ii] how they have obscured from view the monadism at the heart of this work. This article is divided into two sections. First, I explain the importance of Victor Cousin and Maine de Biran for the development of nineteenth-century French philosophy. Second, I argue that to understand the structure of *De l’habitude*, it should be read as a critique of Cousin’s philosophical method and a demonstration of the superiority of Biran’s Leibniz-inspired introspective method. Like Biran, Ravaisson believes that the introspective method leads to a pluralist metaphysics of forces, but he uses the introspective analysis of habit to go further back to Leibniz than Biran does and develops a pluralist substance metaphysics.

KEYWORDS: Ravaisson, Leibniz, Biran, Monadology, Habit