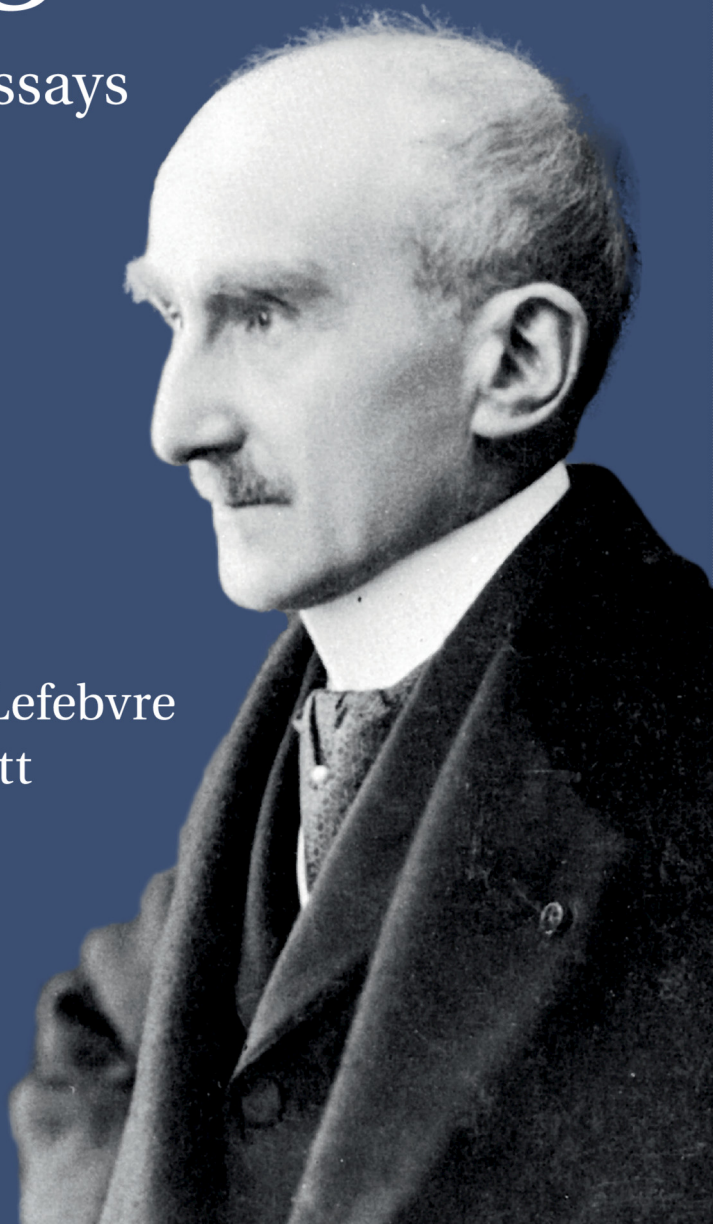# Interpreting Bergson

Critical Essays

EDITED BY

Alexandre Lefebvre
Nils F. Schott

INTERPRETING BERGSON

Bergson was a preeminent European philosopher of the early twentieth century and his work covers all major branches of philosophy. This volume of essays is the first collection in twenty years in English to address the whole of Bergson's philosophy, including his metaphysics, epistemology, philosophy of science, philosophy of life, aesthetics, ethics, social and political thought, and religion. The essays explore Bergson's influence on a number of different fields, and also extend his thought to pressing issues of our time, including philosophy as a way of life, inclusion and exclusion in politics, ecology, the philosophy of race and discrimination, and religion and its enduring appeal. The volume will be valuable for all who are interested in this important thinker and his continuing relevance.

ALEXANDRE LEFEBVRE is Associate Professor of Government and International Relations and of Philosophy at the University of Sydney. He is author of *Human Rights and the Care of the Self* (2018), *Human Rights as a Way of Life: on Bergson's Political Philosophy* (2013), and *The Image of Law: Deleuze, Bergson, Spinoza* (2008). He is co-editor of *Henri Bergson* (2015, with Nils F. Schott) and *Bergson, Politics, and Religion* (2012).

NILS F. SCHOTT is a lecturer in philosophy at the Collège universitaire de SciencesPo. He is co-editor of *Henri Bergson* (2015, with Alexandre Lefebvre) and *Love and Forgiveness for a More Just World* (2015). He is translator of a dozen volumes in philosophy and related fields.

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ALEXANDRE LEFEBVRE

University of Sydney

NILS F. SCHOTT

Collège universitaire de SciencesPo

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Contents

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Figures

Contributors

KEITH ANSELL-PEARSON is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Warwick.

GIUSEPPE BIANCO is a postdoctoral researcher at Lyon III University.

ARNAUD FRANÇOIS is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Poitiers.

SUZANNE GUERLAC is Professor of French Studies at the University of California, Berkeley.

LEONARD LAWLOR is Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of Philosophy at the Pennsylvania State University.

ALEXANDRE LEFEBVRE is Associate Professor of Government and International Relations, and Philosophy, at the University of Sydney.

STÉPHANE MADELRIEUX is Maître de conférences in Contemporary Philosophy at Lyon III University.

NILS F. SCHOTT is a lecturer in philosophy at the Collège universitaire de SciencesPo.

MARK SINCLAIR is a reader in philosophy at the University of Roehampton.

RICHARD VERNON is Distinguished University Professor of Political Science at Western University.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND is a doctoral candidate at Villanova University.

MELANIE WHITE is a senior lecturer in social theory at the University of New South Wales.

Abbreviations

To allow for quick reference to Bergson's works, the following abbreviations are used in inline citations. Page references are, first, to the *Œuvres* edited by André Robinet, and, in the case of *Duration and Simultaneity*, the *Mélanges*, and, second, to the authorized translations published in Bergson's lifetime. The bibliography provides detailed information on the translations and on other works by Bergson referred to in the notes.

DS   *Durée et simultanéité*, 1922; *Duration and Simultaneity*
DSMR   *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932; *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*
EC   *L'Évolution créatrice*, 1907; *Creative Evolution*
ES   L'Énergie spirituelle, 1919; *Mind-Energy*
ESSAI   *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience, 1889; Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*
MM   *Matière et mémoire*, 1896; *Matter and Memory*
PM   *La pensée et le mouvant*, 1934; *The Creative Mind*
RIRE   *Le rire*, 1900; *Laughter*

Introduction

Alexandre Lefebvre and Nils F. Schott

In the years just before the First World War, Henri Bergson (1859–1941) was at the height of his fame. His first two books, *Time and Free Will* (1889) and *Matter and Memory* (1896), had established him as the preeminent philosopher of France. But it was the publication of *Creative Evolution* in 1907 that made him a genuine cultural sensation. Avant-garde artists and writers flocked to his lectures at the Collège de France. As did "high society": so much so that students, tired of losing their place to those able to send valets hours in advance to reserve seats, circulated an (ultimately unsuccessful) petition to ban the general public.[1] And on the day Bergson was elected to the French Academy, he found his lectern showered with flower petals, leading him to protest, "but . . . I am not a dancer!"[2]

With this celebrity in mind, we would like to introduce Bergson with a vignette from one of his later essays. In "The Possible and the Real," he recounts an exchange with a journalist who sought out the famous philosopher's views on the future of literature. Here is how Bergson sets up the dialogue:

> During the Great War certain newspapers and periodicals sometimes turned aside from the terrible worries of the day to think of what would happen later once peace was restored. They were particularly preoccupied with the future of literature. Someone came one day to ask me my ideas on the subject. A little embarrassed, I declared I had none. "Do you not at least perceive," I was asked, "certain possible directions? Let us grant that one cannot foresee things in detail; you as a philosopher have at least an idea of the whole. How do you conceive, for example, the great dramatic work of tomorrow?" (PM 1339–40/118)

Before citing the substance of Bergson's reply, let us pause here. A characteristic feature of his thought is already on display. The journalist

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[1] Azouvi, *La gloire de Bergson*, 13, Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 99.
[2] Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 100.

seems to have taken his initial demurral to pronounce on the future of literature as false modesty. Critical modesty might be a better word for it. Something that greatly annoyed Bergson about intellectuals – philosophers especially – is the liberty they take in giving opinions about anything and everything. In fact, it bothered him so much that he gave a name to it: "homo loquax," that is, he who talks . . . and only talks (PM 1325/100). Thus, when the journalist tries to encourage him by saying, "you *as a philosopher* at least have an idea of the whole," it is a conception of philosophy, and of the philosopher, Bergson is keen to refuse.

When asked his opinion about "the great dramatic work of tomorrow," then, Bergson responds:

> I shall always remember my interlocutor's surprise when I answered, "If I knew what was to be the great dramatic work of the future, I should be writing it." I saw distinctly that he conceived the future work as being already stored up in some cupboard reserved for possibles; because of my longstanding relations with philosophy I should have been able to obtain from it the key to the storehouse. "But," I said, "the work of which you speak is not yet possible." – "But it must be, since it is to take place." – "No, it is not. I grant you, at most, that it *will have been possible.*" "What do you mean by that?" – "It's quite simple. Let a man of talent or genius come forth, let him create a work: it will then be real, and by that very fact it becomes retrospectively or retroactively possible. It would not be possible, it would not have been so, if this man had not come upon the scene. That is why I tell you that it will have been possible today, but that it is not yet so." (PM 1340/118–19)

Bergson says that the idea he expresses here is "quite simple." If that word is taken to mean "easy to understand," we disagree. For in these lines we have not only a summary of the main idea of his philosophy, but that very idea – as Bergson insists time and again – also defies easy comprehension because it rubs against the grain of how our intellect, our understanding, works.

Put yourself in the journalist's shoes, who thinks the way Bergson believes we are naturally inclined to think. From his point of view, the question he asks Bergson is unproblematic. Even though a catastrophic war is raging, it is only a matter of time until another major work of literature is written. The next Gustave Flaubert or Marcel Proust is out there, somewhere. And so, given that the ideas and styles that the next great author will use to craft his or her book are, in some form at least, already in circulation, what is wrong in saying that this work is possible here and now? Why can't the great Bergson just play along and say what he thinks it will look like?

To make our way into Bergson's objection to the question, and thus to the heart of his thought, consider a thought experiment coined at exactly this moment in history and still remembered today: the infinite monkey theorem. The idea, proposed by the French mathematician Émile Borel in 1914, is that, given an infinite amount of time, a monkey hitting random keys on a typewriter will reproduce any and all works of literature. With enough time, for example, it is a virtual certainty that a perfect copy of *Madame Bovary* will be typed out.[3] Fine. But then, we might wonder, why should the monkey be limited to reproducing existing works of literature? Is it not possible, to use that crucial word, for it to produce what a human being would consider – under conditions of double-blind review, no doubt – the great literary work of the future? Absolutely, if we keep with the perspective of the journalist. The necessary elements are in place: the letters of the alphabet are available and ready to be struck on a keyboard. Granted, it would be very difficult to guess what form *that* particular work would take. Still, and in exactly the same sense of the word, right now the great dramatic work of tomorrow is *possible* for either man or monkey. For all that means is that the elements for it – whether the letters of the alphabet for the monkey, or leading ideas and styles for the human – exist in the present. What needs to happen for that work to spring into being is for these elements to be combined in new and interesting ways.

Obviously, this is not how Bergson sees things. Rather than accept that the next great work of literature *is* possible here and now, he replies in the future perfect tense: fully recognizing that the next great work of literature will appear sooner or later, all we can say or, rather, will be able to say only at that point in the future when it actually does appear, is that it *will have been* possible at the present moment in time. What does this shift in perspective allow us to see? In a word, creativity. Or, as Bergson puts it in the opening sentence of the essay, "the continuous creation of unforeseeable novelty which seems to be going on in the universe" (PM 1331/107).

The basic idea, then, is that if something is genuinely novel – and that can be a book or work of art, but equally a new emotion, or institution, or way of living, or life form, or species, and much else – it is, in principle, unpredictable. Certainly, after the fact of its creation, you can always trace out antecedents for it. Schubert's quartets thus seem as if they were already present – already possible – in Beethoven's late work. But, and here is the point, that is only a retrospective view: the view of the future perfect tense, the "will have been possible." It is not what Bergson is after. He is the great

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[3] Borel, *Le Hasard*.

thinker of creativity and difference in the twentieth century because he sought to understand what novelty is, why it defies our existing modes of thinking, and to propose better models and approaches to appreciate it. Indeed, we think it fair to say, and we do so with admiration, that Bergson was a thinker with one big idea.[4] He named it "duration," and his entire *oeuvre* is dedicated to the insight that the future is not given in advance, that novelty and creativity is real (and not just an illusion due to our limited predictive powers), and that, to cite a famous line from *Creative Evolution*, "Time is invention or it is nothing at all" (EC 784/218).

This Bergsonian insight guides this volume and the contributions it contains. In the twenty years that have passed since the publication of *The New Bergson*, edited by John Mullarkey, there have been major developments in Bergson studies, spurred, not least of all, by the 2009 sesquicentennial of the author's birth. These include not only newly available textual material thanks to the 2008 Critical Edition but the exploration of new topics and novel interpretational approaches as well. Taking these "inventions" into account and mindful that collections of Bergson's work published in English over the past two decades have focused on specific topics, *Interpreting Bergson* aims to provide commentary on the major aspects of his *oeuvre*.

In Chapter 1, Arnaud François takes up the insight about time as creation of the new by focusing on what Bergsonian philosophizing – thinking in duration – implies for a theory of truth. However discreetly Bergson presents it, and consequently no matter how much it has been overlooked, truth is a central notion for Bergson: there can be no philosophy without it. François lays out the principal features of Bergson's new conception of truth. Agreeing with William James, Bergson rejects the correspondence theory of truth because the world to be described in our propositions is endlessly changing. Accordingly, truth is not discovered in a quest for knowledge: it is produced or, as Bergson has it, *invented*. To counter the charge that such an invented truth is subjective and arbitrary, he, again like James, insists on its *practical* verifiability. But, unlike James, he does not stop there: he seeks to establish *theoretical* criteria as well. This, François explains, has three consequences: an emphasis on the notion of problems in philosophy; a recasting of the theory of general ideas; and the elaboration of Bergson's well-known theory of intuition. What is true and false in philosophy, for Bergson, is not theses or propositions, not solutions

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[4] As Bergson says in "Philosophical Intuition," any great thinker has, in all honesty, one or two "infinitely simple" ideas that he or she elaborates over the course of a lifetime (PM 1347/128).

but *problems*. But problems do not exist in some eternal realm; they must be stated or, precisely, invented. Rather than discover preexisting truths, philosophers seek to articulate true problems – and denounce false problems, as Bergson never ceases to do. This is a conceptual labor, and the second consequence is thus a recasting of the notion of general ideas. These are not thought contents; they are parts of reality, separated by what Bergson calls the "articulations of the real." They are "real genera" that demand new concepts capable of articulating degrees between the singular and the universal. Finding them, and attaining the moving and temporal real, demands a special effort. Hence the third consequence, the elaboration of the notion of philosophical intuition. Using Bergson's example of literary composition, François brings out three aspects – contemplation, creation, and emotion – that together characterize intuition as a creative act that surveys and expresses the real according to its own articulations and in its temporality. In other words, to create and articulate a true problem is an act of intuition, and the central achievement of Bergson's theory of truth is to "show us how what is true can be new and how what is new can be true."

Whereas François presents a thoroughly original approach to Bergson's philosophy, Giuseppe Bianco (Chapter 2) reminds us, in a rather Bergsonian vein, that things could have been otherwise. In addressing the question of his title, "What was 'serious philosophy' for the young Bergson?" he lays out the immediate reasons for Bergson to abandon his plan to earn a medical degree after completing his studies in philosophy at the École normale supérieure and, in the process, shows Bergson's later accounts of the early stages of his intellectual itinerary to at least be tinged by a retrospective illusion of its own. Although that was what he set out to do, Bergson did not, as he claimed, start out as a psychologist-philosopher to become, via an interest in the philosophy of science, a metaphysician. In a detailed overview of the institutional and intellectual landscape of nineteenth-century France, Bianco shows how the separation of disciplines in independent faculties of the French academy put immense pressure on philosophy to legitimate itself, a pressure that was felt all the more acutely by those who, like the young Bergson, were lacking in economic, symbolic, and cultural capital. The response was to adapt: abandoning the plan to study medicine, Bergson conformed – had no choice but to conform – to the institutional and doctrinal constraints placed on philosophy as it faced the sociopolitics of the Third Republic and the triumph of the empirical sciences, to name but two such constraints. This strategy of adaptation proved to be effective not only in the choice of topics Bergson discussed in

his dissertation, *Time and Free Will*, but in the way he moved toward, appropriated, and recast metaphysics as his career continued.

Bergson's mature philosophy develops at a time when new forms of materialism emerge. As Stéphane Madelrieux argues in Chapter 3, however, Bergson's vitalism constitutes only a pseudo-naturalism that serves as a cover for pursuing a traditional metaphysical project. Bergson seems to work in the same direction as pragmatism in the effort to overcome the entrenched opposition between evolutionist, reductionist, naturalist materialism and exceptionalist, antinaturalist spiritualism. His intermediary position is to underscore the continuity between biological life and human social, moral, and political life, and at the same time to defend the latter's irreducible specificity over against the biological nature of the human species. Yet, as Madelrieux shows, this does not amount to a naturalist position, for two reasons suggested by pragmatist notions. First, with formulations such as a "supraconsciousness," Bergson reasserts the primacy of mind over matter and articulates "a global supernaturalism that fixes the point of departure of nature in supraconsciousness and indicates the point of arrival of culture in the spiritual union of humans through and in the love of God." Bergson's position, on Madelrieux's view, is thus a variant of spiritualism, not an alternative to it – and certainly not a naturalist alternative. Second, an examination of Bergson's method of identifying "differences in kind" as they manifest in dualisms reveals that the way he integrates humanity into the natural evolution of species – via a "triangulation of being, knowledge, and value" – perfectly accords with the foundationalist project of metaphysics to discover a "source," an "antecedent nonhuman reality."

In his essay (Chapter 4), Leonard Lawlor explores the connection Bergson makes between intelligence and invention. Far from dismissing the intellect outright (as many of his readers have tended to believe), Bergson, Lawlor shows, carefully distinguishes between the intellect that understands and the intellect that invents. While the former works with a (retrospective) notion of possibility, the latter, the "true intellect," is best understood by way of virtuality. Centrally important to Bergson's conception of virtuality is the idea of "dynamic schema." Lawlor's chapter focuses on the essay that first introduces this idea, "Intellectual Effort," and articulates the characteristic feature of the inventive intellectual effort in Bergson's terms as "coming and going" between dynamic schema and static image. Lawlor then moves to a detailed description of the dynamic schema, beginning with what it is not: it is not an image, it does not contain images, nor is it a general idea. Rather, it is a singular, unified (but

not uniform), and schematic view of the whole (an intuition) that points in the direction in which the solution to a problem is to be invented. The key aspect is its dynamism, which allows for action and distinguishes the "true" from the "pure" intellect that merely rearranges preexisting images. On the basis of his reading of "Intellectual Effort," Lawlor then proposes a definition of the virtual as actualized through the effort of the inventive intellect: the virtual is the production of a new invention (that is to say, a creation) thanks to the dynamic schema, the force of a problem demanding to be solved (that is to say, a perception), and the memory-images that come in to embody the schema.

Not unsurprisingly, creation is at the center of Bergson's philosophy of art, which Mark Sinclair in Chapter 5 presents in the double sense of philosophizing with and about art and an artistic philosophy. More surprising, perhaps, is the way in which Bergson's philosophical commitment to creation and novelty, which not only influences but shapes his metaphysics, led him to an indefensible voluntarist conception of artistic creation that, Sinclair suggests, prevented Bergson from writing a book of aesthetics. The argument proceeds in three steps. Sinclair begins by examining Bergson's claim that poetry and the visual arts, because they are not bound by practical necessities, have the capacity to reveal fundamental aspects of reality that conceptual thought and our everyday pragmatic concerns are unable to grasp. Nuancing the charge of naiveté frequently leveled at Bergson, he suggests reading him in the sense that if the object or purpose of art is to reveal reality, then what art can bring to our attention is the horizon of memory constitutive of actual experience, and this revelation of a horizon of meaning is not reducible to the means by which it is revealed. While it therefore cannot be characterized as a naive imitation model of art, there remains in Bergson's position an evident tension between a notion of truth in art, of revelation, with a notion of artistic creation. Sinclair addresses this tension in the second part of his essay. He shows how Bergson's idea of creation rests on a broadly Kantian idea of genius as the principle of art production and how this idea is put to work within his metaphysics as a whole, arguing that Bergson tries to stay clear of both finalist and mechanist accounts of biological life by mobilizing an idea of creation drawn from the aesthetic domain. Since every moment of our experience features novelty, living one's life, on this interpretation, is to be understood as creating one's life as work of genius. The tension between Bergson's notions of revelation and creation remains unresolved, however, and in the third and final part of the chapter, Sinclair focuses on the notion of the present's retroactive effect on the past (here in the form of the

problem of successive canon formation) to point out why: the tension points toward a position that would identify the two, equate "creation" and "revelation," and amount to a voluntarist conception of genius as a function of the will that threatens to undermine everything Bergson had written in *Matter and Memory* and elsewhere. Ultimately, then, art for Bergson might be "more a solution than a problem in its own right, more an answer than a question."

In addressing Deleuze's "New Bergson," in Chapter 6 Suzanne Guerlac makes a persuasive case for reading Bergson anew, and his ontology of time in particular. Just as the task Deleuze confronted in the 1960s was to rehabilitate Bergson as a rigorous philosopher, to make him "readable" again, so the combined effect of algorithmic abstraction, the large-scale production and capitalization of life, and the possibility that human activity has irreparably damaged the foundations for its own continuation enjoins us to reread – rethink – Bergson with a view to what we need to think today. Guerlac accordingly sets out to give what she calls a somewhat "reckless" reading, one that brings out Bergson's consistent privileging of concrete experience over abstraction, his thinking of life, in particular in relation to time, and to rectify his image as an anti-philosopher, highlighting how his thought resonates both with the work of earlier philosophers (Schelling and Ravaisson in particular) and the task of thinking today. Rereading *Duration and Simultaneity* against Deleuze's interpretation, which evacuates consciousness from universal time, Guerlac stresses the central importance of consciousness, along with observation, perception, and lived experience, to Bergson's philosophical challenge to Einstein. Relativity theory, according to Bergson, substitutes the abstract (a "clock") for the real (a "flesh-and-blood observer") and produces a conception of time that, while not wrong, fails to express the whole of reality. Einstein dissolved everything into thought and lost touch of the real. But for there to be time, duration, there must be consciousness. Universal time implies consciousness because it involves something like perception, which, as Bergson shifts from the scale of the individual to that of the universe, involves an interaction, or participation, between inside and outside. In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Guerlac argues, Bergson thus seeks to extend, by analogy, individual memory to an impersonal memory of things, a duration of the universe. On the one hand, she points out, such a hypothesis echoes Schelling's notion of participation between nature and consciousness; on the other hand, because this extension passes through the body, it takes up Ravaisson's notion of habit formation as developing a memory of the body and revises Bergson's earlier strict dualism. By no

means, then, is Bergson's achievement in the confrontation with Einstein some kind of abstract articulation of the virtual and the actual; rather, it lies in expanding his ontology of time from individual living beings to a universe that lives, spelling it out in terms of what Guerlac calls "a philosophy of livingness."

Similarly, in Chapter 7, Keith Ansell-Pearson sees in Bergson's "thinking beyond the human condition" the key element of Bergson's conception of philosophy as a way of thinking that seeks to make contact with the creativity of life as a whole. In this conception of philosophy as a way of life, the contemplation of metaphysical questions – novelty, invention, process, duration, and so on – in order to cultivate a different kind of attention to and perception of the world is not an intellectual game but, as Ansell-Pearson argues, an endeavor to alter our vision of the world, and ultimately, our action and sense of being in the world. Philosophy as a way of life, Ansell-Pearson writes with reference to Pierre Hadot, is best understood as a set of practices that allow the self to regain the perspective of the whole, to achieve a "conversion of attention." Noting the importance of Bergson's engaging with art in this shifting of perception, Ansell-Pearson then moves to examine what Bergson calls the "true empiricism" that allows us to experience and think change as that which makes up living reality. The empiricism of science (based on spatializing the world) and the convenience and pleasure promised by the modern technologies derived from it, are to be supplemented with philosophy's promise of joy in going beyond the limitations of the human and intuitively grasping the evolving whole of life. As Ansell-Pearson shows in his reading of *Creative Evolution*, this move beyond the human is conceptualized by Bergson in terms of sympathy, a term employed both descriptively, to develop the notion of a sympathetic whole of life in which philosophy as a way of life resituates the self, and prescriptively, as urging us to overcome our estrangement from "the ocean of life" to which we owe our existence. This effort of sympathy takes the form of a spiritual exercise. Not limited to mere contemplation of the world, it transforms the manner in which we perceive the reality of duration and thus opens the path for a different way of living.

The next two chapters take inspiration from Bergson's social and political thought found in his final book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). In Chapter 8, Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White begin by making the case that Bergson is an under-acknowledged yet first-rate social theorist. To do so, they demonstrate that in *Two Sources* Bergson is in extensive, yet implicit, dialogue with his two great predecessors in the tradition – Émile Durkheim and Auguste Comte – and that his encounter

with them turns on three questions at the heart of sociology as a unique field of inquiry: first, what binds people together in society?, second, what is the origin of society?, and third, what is the nature of social change? By working through Bergson's engagement with these key authors and themes, Lefebvre and White present Bergson's own original theory of society and sociability, which, as with all his work, centers on creativity, but this time in connection with personal and collective transformation.

Richard Vernon's chapter (Chapter 9) explores the rich resonances of Bergson's philosophy in the field of politics and political thought. Despite relative neglect by political theorists and philosophers, Vernon demonstrates how Bergson's later thought provides crucial insights for contemporary problems and debates. Starting from his critique of Durkheim and Renouvier, Vernon shows how Bergson takes up a Rousseauian strand of political theory that exploits the "productive inconsistencies" of the republican tradition. And while Bergson in explaining social obligation does not engage with a certain canon of political theory that aims at norm justification, Vernon situates him within a realist tradition going back to early Christianity (with Pascal as his central reference) that resonates with current realist conceptions of the political. Vernon then moves from such historiographical considerations to ways in which Bergsonian conceptions speak to – and disrupt – debates concerning nationalism and cosmopolitanism in political theory today, and in particular, debates between partialists, cosmopolitans, and dualists. Bergson's views, "agonistic" rather than "dualist," certainly raise questions about nationalism, including its liberal version, but they cannot for all that simply be said to endorse cosmopolitan views in that they argue for the necessity of moral constraints. Highlighting Bergson's personal participation in politics – his support for the League of Nations and other international organizations – Vernon then discusses Bergson's contribution to the thinking of human rights via one of his early readers, the Canadian diplomat John Humphrey. The normative articulation of rights, according to Humphrey, is a manifestation of an evolutionary process, and these rights are correctly referred to as human rights because this process of creative evolution involves the species as a whole. Taking up this notion of process, Vernon concludes with a critical assessment of Bergson's notion of democracy as a work in progress, in which the privileging of fraternity over liberty and equality "can enable the ever-alert closed society to reassert its exclusiveness and its visceral rejection of the intrusive other."

Bergson himself was not immune to such tendencies, for example in denying women a capacity for genuine emotion and thus for creation. In Chapter 10, Mark William Westmoreland examines other such propensities, namely racist and colonial assumptions in Bergson's philosophy, and outlines just what is at stake in the various approaches to these assumptions that recent interpreters have taken. Négritude, Westmoreland usefully reminds us, going far beyond the artistic trend it is often reduced to, articulated an attitude toward the world. Focusing on two readers of Bergson, Léopold Sédar Senghor and Messay Kebede, he shows how this movement deployed a Bergsonian epistemology to challenge the dominance and domination of a European conception of rationality, mobilizing instead what Senghor calls an "embracing reason." Westmoreland then gives voice to recent identifications of racism, the racialization of bodies, and whiteness as a transcendental norm in Bergson's philosophy. While Bergson's thought can be cleared of some of these criticisms, Westmoreland concludes that he cannot altogether escape the charge, given that his central distinction between open and closed in *Two Sources* relies on a notion of "primitives" as an indispensable foil for the achievements of the mystics. The question then becomes to what extent Bergson's thought can be mobilized to remedy the evils it cannot wholly be extricated from. In concluding his essay, Westmoreland surveys contemporary appropriations of the conception of the open society and suggests that Senghor's rearticulation of Bergson's intuition as sympathetic embracing reason offers theoretical and practical ways to address racist and colonial discourses.

To conclude the volume, the chapter by Nils F. Schott on Bergson's philosophy of religion (Chapter 11) seeks to bring out what Bergson calls the "specifically religious element." Summarizing the results of Bergson's inquiry into the realities generally referred to under the heading "religion," the essay's first part presents the notion of static religion as nature's response to the disorganizing and depressing potential that individuals' exercise of reason can have for the community. What makes the "fables" of religion efficacious, however, is not that they derive from the first "source" of religion, social pressure; it is that they also derive from the second, aspiration, which, thanks to exceptional individuals, constitutes a translation of the creative impulse of life itself. This translation into words and deeds characterizes dynamic religion. What makes religion religion, in other words, is love (the mystics' word for the élan vital) in action. But such an opening up of static religion is very rare, and to account for its possibility, Schott, taking up a suggestion of Vladimir Jankélévitch's,

turns to Bergson's use of the term "conversion." Although it is not a concept Bergson makes his own in the way he appropriates "duration" or "intuition," Schott argues, it is consistently used to describe qualitative change. An examination of a number of instances of such a use of the term in *Two Sources* as well as in the books that preceded it shows that the mystic experience, the opening to the élan vital and its translation into action constitutive of dynamic religion, is a conversion that aims at a creative transformation of humanity. The very terms in which Bergson couches this conversion, according to Schott, call up and shed new light on major themes of Bergson's philosophy, including liberty, the élan vital, and philosophical intuition. The conclusion of the essay addresses Bergson's problematic "conversion" to Catholicism, arguing that his assertion of a "moral adherence" to Catholic teaching and simultaneous refusal to join the Roman Church, which would have entailed abandoning the Jewish community in a time of persecution, is love in action and manifests, to use Frédéric Worms's felicitous phrase, a "singular freedom."

Like Bergson's books, the essays assembled in this volume can be read together or by themselves. We trust that their interpretations and critiques not only reflect the richness of his thinking, with all its tensions, but also show some of the many ways, often yet to be invented, in which it is still creative.

Bergson's Theory of Truth

Arnaud François
Translated by Nils F. Schott

The goal Bergson always sets for his philosophy is to "think in duration" (PM 1275/38). This cannot but affect the notion of truth, at least insofar as it implies, as it does in most philosophies, the existence of timeless truths. What I would like to bring out in this chapter, then, are the consequences of Bergson's main invention, the notion of duration, for the theory of truth.

These consequences have largely gone unnoticed. There is very little work on Bergson's theory of truth. Where they exist, such studies tend to be very old and thus difficult to employ in today's critical context; or they set up confrontations that go far beyond the question of truth alone; or they paint a picture of Bergson's philosophy as a whole and consequently reserve but little space for the question of truth.[1] Yet Bergson himself, one single time, alerts us to the importance of the notion of truth. Speaking of Claude Bernard, he attributes to this physician "a certain conception of the truth, and consequently, a philosophy" (PM 1435/241). This means not only that changing the notion of truth amounts to changing, step by step, all of philosophy; it means, also and above all, that to be complete, every philosophy must contain a new conception of the truth. In Bergson's case, as I will show, this new conception includes: a rejection of defining truth as concordance in favor of characterizing truth as invention; a pronounced emphasis on the notion of philosophical "problems"; a recasting of the theory of "general ideas"; and a theory, well known for other reasons, of intuition.

A New Conception of Truth

One reason why the implications of the notion of duration for the theory of truth have attracted so little attention is that Bergson brings them out

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[1] For examples, see, respectively, Stebbing, "The Notion of Truth"; Delhomme, "Nietzsche et Bergson"; and Deleuze, *Bergsonism*.

rather discreetly, in texts that focus on other questions.[2] He devotes only one text explicitly to the notion of truth, and even this short essay is not well known: it is the preface he writes in 1911 for the French translation of William James's *Pragmatism*, entitled "Sur le pragmatisme de William James: Vérité et réalité" (On the Pragmatism of William James: Truth and Reality) and included in the 1934 collection *La pensée et le mouvant* (*The Creative Mind*).

The first point of Bergson's theory of the truth is a criticism, inspired by William James, of the definition of truth as correspondence or concordance between thought and reality. Directly alluding to specific passages in James, Bergson writes: "What constitutes a true judgment? If an affirmation agrees with reality we say that it is true. But in what does this agreement consist? Our inclination is to see in it something like the resemblance of a portrait to the model: the true affirmation would be the one which would *copy* reality." Yet, according to Bergson, such "resemblance" cannot exist or, rather, if it does exist, then only in very special cases from which no general definition of truth can be drawn: "it is only in rare and exceptional cases that this definition of the true finds its application." An "idea," for example, is true when this idea is an image and when this image conforms to its model. But this is not generally the case, for a very precise reason that brings us straight to the starting point of Bergson's philosophy, namely the notion of duration: "What is real is any determined fact taking place at any point in space and time, it is singular – it is changing" (PM 1444–45/253 and James, *Pragmatism*, 96–97). Truth generally cannot be defined as concordance because phenomena are subject to duration and because they are always singular. This is Bergson's *nominalism*, and this nominalism is directly linked to the fact that all phenomena are transitory. Bergson is deeply attached to the representation of the world nominalism implies: consciousness, life, and human history constantly provide new and singular phenomena, and the task of philosophers is to discern and bring to light this newness and this singularity as such.

To illustrate these points, Bergson takes an example, the proposition "heat expands bodies." This truth, he asserts, cannot be a copy of anything. To be sure, "[i]t is possible, in a certain sense, to copy the expansion of

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[2] Most importantly, the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution* (1907), which discusses the ideas of nothingness, immutability, and system; "Introduction to Metaphysics" (1903), which renews the notion of intuition for philosophy; "Retrograde Movement of the True" (1922), which articulates the notion of retrospective illusion; and "The Stating of Problems" (1922), which in addressing the notion of the problem enumerates Bergson's most important contributions to philosophical methodology.

a specific body at particular moments, by photographing it in its various stages." We have then obtained an image of certain states of the iron bar. It is also possible to say that "the affirmation, 'that iron bar is expanding,' is the copy of what happens when I watch the expansion of the iron bar." But in this case, Bergson tells us, we no longer even have an image, only a "metaphor" of certain processes. Finally, the proposition, "heat expands bodies," cannot be a copy of any kind of reality because "a truth which is applied to all bodies without concerning any one in particular that I have seen, copies nothing, reproduces nothing" (PM 1444–45/253–54). What prevents the proposition from corresponding to reality is the fact that it is both eternal and general whereas reality is always temporal and singular.

Throughout this line of reasoning, Bergson rigorously follows the argumentation James proffers in the pages indicated. Both address the same question, and both adopt the stance of the empiricist psychologist. They do not directly ask the question "what is truth?" but, first of all, wonder what we commonly mean when we speak of "truth." Comprehending truth as a "copy" or "reproduction" can apply only in very special cases, James says, because, while our minds might even contain an image of the "dial" of the clock before our eyes, it is very rare that they also contain a precise image of the complex processes of the clock's "'works,'" and it is completely inconceivable that it might contain a sensuous reproduction of complex notions, of the "'time-keeping function' of the clock," for example, or of "its spring's 'elasticity.'"[3] The conclusion James draws is that the truth of a proposition lies not (or only very rarely) in its conformity with reality but in its possible verification; that is, in an *action* to be performed. It is not a *property* of the proposition but an *event* that happens to it.

In Bergson, this critique of defining truth as concordance has a first positive consequence: we should no longer say that a truth is discovered by our affirmation but, on the contrary, that it is, literally, produced by it.

Bergson treats the idea that knowledge (*connaissance*) merely discovers truths already contained in things with a certain irony. Proponents of this conception, which he considers innate to our minds, hold that the truth of a proposition "is lodged in things and facts: our science seeks it in them, draws it from its hiding-place and exposes it to the light of day." For them, "all the work of science consists, so to speak, in piercing the resisting envelope of the facts inside which the truth is lodged, like a nut in its shell."[4] To conceive of truth in this erroneous fashion is to conceive of it as

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[3] James, *Pragmatism*, 96.
[4] PM 1445/254. Bergson develops his criticism of an alleged eternal preexistence of the truth in "Retrograde Movement of the True" (PM 1253–70/9–32). Belief in this eternal preexistence for him is an instance of retrospective illusion.

an already existing territory still waiting to be explored, "just as America was waiting for Christopher Columbus" (PM 1445–46/254–55). For Bergson, however, the truth (though perhaps not every truth), when it comes about, is an authentic event within reality, absolutely irreducible to what could have been found there beforehand. *This* conception, which Bergson considers to be correct, is laid out very discreetly in the fourth chapter of *Creative Evolution* (1907), largely in the form of a critique: the critique of the idea of nothingness, the critique of the idea of immutability, and the critique of all philosophical systems for which truth is already there, in reality, only asking to be brought to light (EC 766/205, 772–73/210, and 794/226).[5]

Bergson goes one step further and assigns a name to the production of the truth, a name that resonates profoundly within his own philosophy and directly evokes the notion of duration: he calls it "invention." This is a great paradox, but for Bergson, a truth can be the object of an invention; a truth can be invented. And it is to explain and gain acceptance for this paradox that Bergson deploys a larger share of the reflections he devotes to the theory of truth.

Bergson is extremely clear: taking up James once more, he writes, himself adding the emphasis: "*while for other doctrines a new truth is a discovery, for pragmatism it is an invention*" (PM 1447/256). But how are we to understand this affirmation?

One objection, indeed, immediately comes to mind, and Bergson makes an effort to articulate it: if the truth is the object of an invention, what is to keep truth from becoming downright "arbitrary" so that it depends on each individual's will (PM 1447/256)? Such an option would risk the ruin of any possibility of science, of philosophy, and even of agreement between human beings.

Bergson must thus spell out the criteria of truth (that is to say: the traits by which everyone can recognize that a proposition is true or that a proposition is false), and these criteria must no longer presuppose the definition of truth as adequation, correspondence, or concordance, which entails that truth differs from resemblance. He finds two such criteria.

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[5] Take the following passage, for example: the metaphysics of the moderns (above all Spinoza and Leibniz) and the metaphysics of the ancients "both suppose ready-made – the former above the sensible, the latter within the sensible – a science one and complete, with which any reality that the sensible may contain is believed to coincide. *For both, reality as well as truth are integrally given in eternity*" (EC 794/226, Bergson's emphasis). Truth and reality are thus said to be immutable, and the perceptible world to consist of a blend between, on the one hand, nothingness (a notion criticized on pages 725–47/174–90) and, on the other, these unchanging principles (criticized as such on pages 747–60/190–200).

The first criterion, which Bergson attributes to William James, is that of practical efficacy (as we saw, James defined the truth of a proposition as its possible verification). In the fields of science and technology, truth cannot be arbitrary because it is subject to a direct sanction: experiments or technical constructions simply do not work when they are not based on a true proposition. Thus Thomas Edison, for example, must have carefully studied the properties of sound before he invented the phonograph. But that does not prevent the phonograph from being a new invention, completely original in comparison to what preceded it: "No doubt the inventor of the phonograph had to study the properties of sound, which is a reality. But his invention was superadded to that reality as a thing absolutely new, which might never have been produced had he not existed." And it would be absurd, according to Bergson, to say that the truth is arbitrary, that it depends on each of us: "we might as well believe that each of us could invent the phonograph." The truth can thus be the object of an invention and yet, for all that, not be arbitrary (PM 1447–48/256–58).

Yet Bergson adds a second criterion of truth to the first, which to him seems to be unsatisfactory in some regards. At the end of his preface to *Pragmatism*, he evokes his "reservations" concerning James's theory (PM 1449/259). According to Bergson, the criterion of truth must not be of a practical order alone because he seeks to make philosophy an activity that remains, and even remains primarily, theoretical.[6] That is to say, in Bergsonian terms, that philosophical truth must be the object not only of a "creation" but also of a "contemplation." These two aspects must remain inseparable. Bergson affirms this indispensable inseparability on numerous occasions. In *Creative Evolution*, philosophical knowledge is at the same time a "seeing" and an "acting"; it rests on a unification of "seeing" and "willing" (EC 707–8/161). And according to a later but definitive text on this point, the philosopher's consciousness must be "spectator and actor alike" in order to "bring ever closer together . . . the attention which is fixed, and time which passes," in order, that is, to capture duration itself (PM 1255/12).[7]

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[6] Commentators noticed this divergence between Bergson and James early on (see Hicks, "The Nature of Willing," 28). Frédéric Worms sums up the question (Worms, "James et Bergson," 56–60 and 64–66).
   The second reservation – which is also attributable to Bergson's conviction that, as a matter of principle, philosophizing is a theoretical activity – finds expression in the reproach that the only possible alternative to scientific truths James sees lies in "truths of feeling" (PM 1449/258). For Bergson, philosophical truths properly so called remain accessible to argument even if they are often accompanied by a halo of emotion and even if they refuse, in part, to be expressed in concepts.

[7] This does not happen, however, without introducing a paradox into the very nature of philosophical knowledge. Such knowledge implies "a simple and in a sense naive vision and yet a demand for

But how is it possible to claim that a truth is created and yet not arbitrary without the sure criterion of experimental or technical confirmation? In philosophy, how can the demand to invent be reconciled with the concern for the truth?

Bergson elaborates a precise response to these questions: what can be said to be true or false in philosophy are problems, not theses (which, for him, are nothing but solutions to problems). Yet a problem does not exist from all eternity; it must be created.

First Consequence: The Creation of Problems

Bergson lays out his theory of the creation of problems, which constitutes the first (of three) consequences of his theory of truth, in a text from 1922, entitled, precisely, "The Stating of Problems," that serves as the second introduction to *Creative Mind*:

> But the truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of *finding* the problem and consequently of *positing* it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is to *un*cover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. Discovery, or uncovering, has to do with what already exists actually or virtually; it was therefore certain to happen sooner or later. (PM 1293/58–59, Bergson's emphases)

Bergson's claims here fully cohere with what we have seen so far: what leads him to say that problems must be "invented" is his refusal of the notion that a truth could exist prior to its discovery (the way the Americas existed prior to Christopher Columbus's expedition). This refusal, in turn, is based on his criticism of truth qua concordance and thus, ultimately, on his conception of duration as the perpetual creation of singularities. But this theory of the creation of problems, as Deleuze has shown, leads him to conceive of the activity of philosophers in a whole new way.[8] Their work now essentially consists in articulating new problems, carefully asking themselves each time whether they are formulating the true problem as a function of a given field of experience.

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intellectual effort; an attitude of submission but also of conquest; a welcoming disposition and yet one critical overall; a procedure that constantly begins anew but, at the end, a certain form of revelation" (Forest, "L'existence selon Bergson," 90).

[8] See Deleuze's *Bergsonism*, 15–16, on the shifting site of truth (from thesis to problem), and his *Difference and Repetition*, 158, on the demand that the philosopher stop believing like a schoolboy that the truth is already there, somewhere, in "the master's book" (cf. PM 1292/59).

Bergson himself constantly gives the perfect example of this new philosophical activity. For, when we read his works, we notice that he never stops, in any of the objects he studies, denouncing false problems in order to seek out instead the true problem that it is incumbent on the philosopher to articulate.

Thus, to name but two examples: in *Matter and Memory*, he takes on associationist theories of the mind. These seek to explain, by means of processes of associating ideas, all the psychological functions of attentive perception, memory, and intellect. Yet according to Bergson, we must not presuppose that mental processes rest on associations between given elements, but rather that they rest on the dissociation of an original totality (the mind of an individual) that is being particularized into the always-specific questions posed by practical activity. And in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* Bergson does not ask how we restrain our impulses and desires to accept a moral, religious, or political obligation, but how, on the contrary, sometimes (exceptionally, even) some among us succeed in inventing new moral, religious, or political obligations when it might have been so much easier to content oneself with obeying the already established ones. There are many other examples of the "creation of problems," of true problems, to be found in Bergson's philosophy.

Bergson's theory of the creation of problems thus offers a firm answer to our question: how can the truth be invented and yet not become arbitrary? The response is that the truth no longer resides in the solution but in the problem: and the problem, clearly, must be posed; it does not exist prior to the operation of the one who poses it.

But Bergson's theory of truth has two further consequences that are just as noteworthy and interesting.

Like the theory of truth itself, the second consequence has not received much commentary: it consists in an extremely rigorous theory of general ideas. This term as used by Bergson comprises both the very notion of genus and the act of the mind referring to it. Canguilhem was one of the first to give this theory its due.[9] Yet, in his entirely legitimate concern to mark the difference between Bergson and Hegel, he tended to reduce every general idea in Bergson to a utilitarian segmentation operated by our understanding and anticipated by the real. Deleuze made the opposite choice. He set out to articulate a theory of essence in Bergson, based on the difference in the latter's work between the "mixed" and the "pure."

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[9] Canguilhem, "Le concept et la vie."

Revisiting the passages in which Bergson discusses "general ideas," I will attempt to articulate a more appropriate intermediary interpretation.

Second Consequence: General Ideas

According to Bergson, the problem of general ideas poses itself as follows: if reality were absolutely indivisible, if it contained no break lines at all, it would be possible to raise about reality the irresolvable questions that have been raised since antiquity (by Plato, for example, in the *Euthydemus*) about Parmenidean Being: how is it possible to distinguish false speech from true speech, given that false speech itself is, after all, a real event? To overcome this difficulty, Plato in the *Sophist* elaborates a concept of non-being that does not signify nothing but rather the "other," which allows for distinguishing different objects within the totality of the real. Bergson, like Plato, refuses to hypostasize the idea of nothing (EC 725–47/174–90). He, too, introduces the principle of a minimal negativity in reality, and he does so in a form that is explicitly inspired by Plato: he speaks of "articulations of the real" exactly in the sense in which Plato tells us that the good dialectician, to divide the real according to its true genera, must proceed like a good cook, who cuts up an animal according to its own articulations.[10]

What, according to Bergson, are these "articulations of the real"? He takes a privileged example: when Achilles runs to catch up with the tortoise, his movement is not absolutely indivisible (even if it cannot be considered a series of positions in space). It is constituted by successive steps, each of which stretches so far and lasts so long; these steps are unique to Achilles and would be different in every other runner; and, finally, thanks to their particular properties, they allow Achilles to catch up with the tortoise, an animal whose steps, precisely, are very different (that is to say, its run is articulated differently). Thus, to refute Zeno's arguments for the impossibility of movement, it is certainly, in a first step, necessary to refuse to treat the movement of the two protagonists the way one would treat the line along which they run. At the same time, however, it is also, and above all, necessary to acknowledge each run's particular articulations. Not doing so prevents any understanding of how one of the two ends up being faster than the other: "When Achilles pursues the tortoise, each of his steps must be treated as indivisible, and so must each step of the tortoise." We might of course divide each step into submultiples to make our calculations ever more precise; but what must be thus divided is indeed

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[10] Plato, *Phaedrus*, 265e. Bergson mentions this passage in EC 627n1/101n14.

the steps, not the course as a whole: "respect the natural articulations of the two courses," Bergson tells us, "or give up speculating on [their] nature" (EC 757–58/198).

"Respect the natural articulations" of reality: that is Bergson's injunction to all philosophers. And it is this injunction of which false speech runs afoul. In philosophy, that speech is true that respects the natural articulations of reality.[11]

On the basis of this notion of "articulations of the real," itself at first metaphorical, Bergson constructs a theory of knowledge, and he does so on several levels of his philosophy.

The notion allows Bergson, in a passage from 1911 that defines philosophical truth not as certainty but as a probability practically equivalent (that is to say, almost equivalent and equivalent in practice) to certainty, to propose a theory of "lines of facts." The real is traversed by "lines of facts," and the following of these lines guarantees philosophers that, even if they have not attained certainty, they are safe from error: in reality, there are "a certain number of *lines of facts*, which do not go as far as we want, but which we can prolong hypothetically ... Each, taken apart, will lead us only to a conclusion which is simply probable; but taking them all together, they will, by their convergence, bring before us such an accumulation of probabilities that we shall feel on the road to certitude" (ES 817/7). Bergson, therefore, is one of those philosophers for whom there is such a thing as philosophical probability and for whom probability is not just a lack of certainty, or a provisional certainty, but indeed a particular modality of the truth that results from the intrinsically temporal, that is to say constantly moving, character of reality.

But above all, the notion of "articulations of the real" is, as I said, the principle of Bergson's answer to the question of general ideas. For if the real is internally articulated, then these articulations delimit genera; that is to say, groups of facts that are related to one another and differ from facts to

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11 Inversely, that speech is false that breaks them or mistakes artificial articulations for natural ones. Thus Bergson writes both critically and pedagogically: "I open an elementary treatise on philosophy. One of the first chapters deals with pleasure and pain. There the student is asked a question such as this: 'Is pleasure happiness, or not?' But first one must know if pleasure and happiness are genera corresponding to a natural division of things into sections. Strictly speaking the phrase could signify simply: 'Given the ordinary meaning of the terms *pleasure* and *happiness* should one say that happiness consists in a succession of pleasures?' It is then a question of vocabulary that is being raised; it can be solved only by finding out how the words 'pleasure' and 'happiness' have been used by the writers who have best handled the language. One will moreover have done a useful piece of work; one will have more accurately defined two ordinary terms, that is, two social habitudes. But if one claims to be doing more, to be grasping realities and not to be re-examining conventions," one is on the wrong track (PM 1293/59).

which they are not related. Yet these genera emphatically are not concepts or ideas; they are not thought contents that, thanks to their ontological status, are totally distinct from the phenomena to which they refer. In Bergson, they are "real genera" (PM 1299/66). To utter a true proposition thus does not consist in "saying something about something" (by using words that themselves refer to concepts said to aim at reality) but – which is completely different – in *doing* something within reality itself (accomplishing a certain kind of act, which is not at all a utilitarian act but consists as it were in indicating, in bringing to light, an articulation of reality).

There is a passage about the question of real genera in the second introduction of *The Creative Mind* (written in 1922) and it, too, is little known.[12] It distinguishes between three types of general ideas: first, those that are "biological in essence" (living species, for example, characterized by the relationships of hereditary transmission) and based on the "resemblance" (within a "genus") between the individuals they contain (PM 1298–99/65–67); second, those that concern the physical and chemical properties of matter (i.e. "qualities, such as colors, flavors, odors; elements or combinations, such as oxygen, hydrogen, water; finally, physical forces like gravity, heat, electricity") and are based on the "identity" (indicated by a "law") of the phenomena that belong to them (PM 1299/66–67 and EC 687–91/146–48); and finally those that belong to human technology and grammar – ideas that, to be sure, are in a sense artificial, but nonetheless refer to the natural conditions of artifice (our principal needs and the main grammatical categories that respond to them, PM 1302/70–71). But thanks to a phenomenon of reflecting on their own practice, humans have finally achieved "the general idea of general idea" (PM 1302/71); that is to say, the possibility of coining, *ad libitum* and without maintaining any contact with reality, an indefinite number of general ideas. This, according to Bergson, constitutes both an opportunity (it is the condition, for example, of the differentiated development of languages) and a threat, that of verbalism (EC 628–29/101–102 and PM 1325/100). Bergson embodies this threat in the figure of the *homo loquax*, which acts as a foil for his argument. *Homo loquax* is neither *homo faber*, who follows the artificial segmentations of reality, nor *homo sapiens*, who finds its natural segmentations. *Homo loquax* is the one who disarticulates and rearticulates the real *for his convenience*, for reasons that are his own and of which we may suppose

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[12] Even though it is at the heart of the above-mentioned commentary by Canguilhem ("Le concept et la vie," 348–54).

that they are neither theoretical nor pragmatic but vain, egocentric, even ideologically determined.

Yet, in all three cases – biological, physical, and chemical, as well as technological and grammatical general ideas – these ideas are not contents of thought; they are *pieces* of reality itself, separated one from the other by the "articulations of the real." This also allows Bergson to reject universal concepts and to ask of philosophers that they, on the contrary, forge flexible, fluid, and even individual concepts (PM 1288/52, 1402/198, 1438/245). In Bergson, genera are real, and as a consequence, concepts must no longer be universals but plurals, capable of intermediary degrees between the singular and the universal.

This aspect of Bergson's philosophy is better known, especially thanks to its broad application by Deleuze in his own philosophy.[13] To understand it properly, however, we must tie it back to the theory of truth that makes it possible.

In the "Introduction to Metaphysics," for example, Bergson writes that philosophy as he conceives of it "cuts for the object a concept appropriate to the object alone" (PM 1408/207); that is to say, an individual concept, one that has not been imported from another investigation, that must be forged for the new object under investigation, and that in turn cannot be imported into any investigation to follow. (This explains why Bergson has always conceived his successive books as independent of each other, to the point, even, of tolerating certain tensions between them.)[14] Yet there is an acute awareness of the problem such a characterization of the concept might pose: are concepts not by necessity universal? Bergson stands firm because for him, philosophers must resolutely continue to use concepts even as they take recourse to "intuition." Yet an individual concept is "a concept one can barely say is still a concept, since it applies only to that one thing" one is studying (PM 1408/207). We must therefore *work* on the concept, not abandon it: make it mobile, supple, "measure," to use an expression of which Bergson is particularly fond (e.g., EC 536/31); try and get to the real genus, sometimes ample, sometimes narrow, to which it is appropriate, and the natural articulations of reality that delimit it: "the new concepts one must form in order to express oneself will now be cut to the exact measure of the object" (PM 1270/31–32). What Bergson demands is

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[13] Deleuze, *Difference and Repetition*, 187–88.

[14] See PM 1329–30/105–106. In this passage, in fact, Bergson underlines that each book is a "completely new effort" that consists of the "tension" or "concentration" required for the philosopher to take on each new problem. For Bergson, discerning the characteristics of the new problem always wins out over a concern with the systematic coherence along the different stages of a doctrine's development.

untiring work on the concept, the work of refinement, and in no way a simple rejection of the concept.

I mentioned "intuition" just now. That is because the third consequence of Bergson's theory of truth, namely the elaboration of a theory of intuition, forms part of the demand to find the "natural articulations of the real" as well.

Third Consequence: Intuition

Bergson's theory of intuition has often been presented independently of the rest of his philosophy, and it is certainly the case that Bergson for the most part elaborated it this way. Nonetheless, several of its particularities cannot but be misunderstood if we do not consider them in relation to the theory of truth with which it accords perfectly.

Against the background of what we have seen so far, the effort of intuition, which according to Bergson is the philosophical act par excellence (it surpasses the grasping of relationships between concepts, abstracting the general from the particular, or formulating a law),[15] consists in perceiving but also in going back over, in underlining the articulations of the real. This real is moving and temporal; the act of intuition, therefore, is moving and temporal as well. This is the origin of the main characteristics of intuition, whose enumeration has often left perplexed those readers who did not have all the preliminary explanations present to mind.

Bergsonian intuition, first of all, is certainly a viewing, a "seeing," but it is also a certain kind of "making," also, in its own way, a creation. We saw this earlier, noting that philosophical truth must be the object not just of a contemplation but also of an invention. This point is explicitly put forward by Bergson in passages where he seeks, precisely, to convince readers of his theory of intuition, to which so many objections have been raised.

"[T]here is nothing mysterious about this faculty" of intuition, he begins by saying. We in fact make frequent use of it, every time our mind produces something new, to whatever degree (sometimes modest, sometimes superior). And Bergson goes on to give an example: "Whoever has worked successfully at literary composition well knows that when the

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[15] That does not mean that intuition is exclusively philosophical. Bergson often attributes it to scientists as well: "I take the view that several of the great discoveries, of those at least which have transformed the positive sciences or created new ones, have been so many soundings made in pure duration" (PM 1425/228). He is thinking, for example, of the discovery of infinitesimal calculus, by Newton in particular (PM 1422n1/305n24).

subject has been studied at great length, all the documents gathered together, all notes taken, something more is necessary to get down to the work of composition itself: an effort, often painful, immediately to place oneself in the very heart of the subject and to seek as deeply as possible an impulsion which, as soon as found, carries one forward of itself" (PM 1431/ 235). Where is intuition here? Not in studying one's subject, not in gathering the documents, not in taking notes, but in the "impulsion" to which all these preliminaries lead without guaranteeing it, an impulsion we must still seek out in an "effort." Intuition is thus not the inspection of the mind that would take place prior to writing but is the impulsion that animates this writing, all the while, indissociably, being the ever more profound view of the problem under consideration.

Bergson clearly and definitively marks this non-dissociation of contemplation and creation within intuition in a passage from *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, where he sets out to add a third (which is also a practical) characteristic of intuition: intuition is also emotion. And he uses the exact same example, that of literary composition. "Creation signifies, above all, emotion." Not: creation *supposes* emotion. Creation *is* itself emotion. Yet "[a]nyone engaged in writing has been in a position to feel the difference between an intelligence left to itself and that which burns with the fire of an original and unique emotion, born of the identification of the author with his subject, that is to say of intuition" (DSMR 1013/45–46). In this very clear passage, Bergson tells us that intuition is emotion; that is, a setting-in-motion not only of the intellect, or any other purely theoretical faculty, but of the will. Intuition is therefore also creation (and not only contemplation), which exactly corroborates Bergson's claim in the passage cited since creation, for its part, is emotion.

Bergson's theory of truth thus yields an original and at the same time very precise understanding of intuition that accords perfectly with even the most difficult passages: intuition is an act that consists in going back over the natural articulations of reality, carefully avoiding breaking them (which allows intuition to link up with concepts rather than reject them); but because this reality is temporal, is permanently creating itself, the act of intuition, every time it is practiced and to varying degrees, is also creation.

Conclusion

We are now able to bring together the main elements of Bergson's theory of truth.

Bergson starts from a criticism, which converges with that articulated by William James, of the definition of truth as adequation, correspondence, or concordance. He concludes that truth does not consist in the resemblance between thought or speech on the one hand and reality on the other but in a certain event that surges up, within reality, when we utter certain kinds of propositions or conceive certain kinds of thoughts. Now, to what thoughts or propositions can we attribute truth without instituting individual arbitrariness? On the one hand, Bergson (still taking a cue from James) tells us, to those thoughts or propositions that have experimental or technical validity. But, on the other hand, and more profoundly, also to thoughts and propositions that consist in new *problems* posed about reality and not in the (always provisional) utterances we articulate to respond to these problems.

The condition of a problem's being true is that it is posed in conformance with the "natural articulations of the real"; that is to say, with the delimitations that exist between real genera, which are not universals but which make "concepts" possible and may contain, as paradoxical as this may sound, a unique individual just as well as a plurality of individuals.

To pose a true problem, to underline the articulations of the real, is the task of what Bergson calls the act of intuition. It is an act of contemplation to the extent that it seeks out the articulations, which it must never undo. Inseparably, it is also an act of creation, to the extent that it results in a problem that did not exist and that, under different conditions, would not have existed.

Bergson's theory of truth, which arises from a theory of duration, thus succeeds in connecting two aspects of reality that were previously incompatible (or belonged to two different domains of the real, science and art, for example): the *true* and the *new*. Bergson shows us how what is true can be new and how what is new can be true.

What Was "Serious Philosophy" for the Young Bergson?

Giuseppe Bianco[1]

In an unpublished letter to a mysterious "Monsieur Pichard," a twenty-one-year-old Henri Bergson lays out the following program of study:

> I am fully into metaphysics, preparing my *agrégation* in philosophy, which I have to pass at the end of the [school] year. I do not know where I am going to be sent when I leave school, but no matter what happens I am decided to do medicine [*faire ma medicine*], as you once advised me. I can see that, without that, there is no way to engage seriously with philosophy [*s'occuper sérieusement de philosophie*].[2]

Bergson wrote these lines at the beginning of 1881, in his third year as a student in the humanities section (*séction de lettres*) at the École normale supérieure (ENS). As announced, he would dedicate the following months to preparing for the *agrégation* in philosophy, the exam that qualifies those who succeed to be high-school teachers and university professors, and would pass successfully at the beginning of the summer. He was not the only trainee philosopher fascinated by medicine. Pierre Janet (1859–1947), his friend and classmate at the École, is traditionally (but erroneously) considered the first French philosopher with a medical degree,[3] and, starting in the 1890s, a group of less than a dozen scholars who, like Janet, were following both a philosophical and a medical curriculum would come to establish a new discipline, psychology, which within just a few decades would become independent of both philosophy and medicine.

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[2] The manuscript is kept at the Bibliothèque interuniversitaire de la Sorbonne, Paris (shelf mark MS 2556 / F. 5–22 / F. 18–19). The addressee, most likely, was Prosper Pichard, the author of a book titled *Doctrine du réel*, and who also translated Herbert Spencer and published two essays on him.

[3] In fact, however, the first *agrégé* in philosophy and doctor of "Letters" to also hold a doctorate in medicine was Louis Bautain (1796–1867), theologian and professor of philosophy at Strasbourg University.

Why was Bergson tempted by medicine and not by mathematics, a discipline in which he excelled as a teenager?[4] What did he mean by "philosophy" and where was he planning to practice it? Why did he not keep his promise to study medicine?[5] What were the models of "serious" philosophy around 1880? How did these models find a temporary synthesis in Bergson's first book, the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*? What did he mean by "metaphysics," an expression he rarely used before 1903, when it suddenly appeared in the title of his essay "Introduction to Metaphysics?" By responding to these questions, this chapter seeks to shed light on the conditions of possibility of Bergson's trajectory.

First, however, we must understand the type of cognitive operation that classifying certain practices of knowledge production as "serious" implies. Since their beginnings, the social sciences have used a genetic and interactionist model to describe the ways in which humans class subjects and objects: the forms presiding over classification are not transcendental but, as the result of subjective dispositions, are influenced by a multiplicity of biological, psychological, and social constraints. These forms change according to agents' trajectories, but they also change according to how agents' peers react to and classify them. This process of reciprocal classing results in tensions and conflicts, or "struggles of classification."[6] By inculcating dispositions, values, and norms,[7] educational institutions play a major role in producing the forms at the origin of the acts of classification, which are structured by axiological oppositions. "Serious" – as opposed to "frivolous," "ingenious," or "astute" – is one of the many adjectives that incarnate a classification deriving from internalized dispositions.

In what follows, I will proceed by analyzing: (1) the main institutions and agents that contributed to establishing the philosophical norm of "seriousness"; (2) the structure and evolution of these norms; (3) the relation between the producers of philosophy and the other knowledge producers; (4) the exclusions (social, professional, doctrinal, etc.) resulting from the evolution of the philosophical norm; (5) the relation between philosophy and the sciences; (6) the conflicting models of philosophical "seriousness" at the end of the 1870s; (7) the ambiguity of Bergson's trajectory at this moment; and (8) what I will call Bergson's strategy of adaptation. The conclusion summarizes the reasons why Bergson

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[4] See Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, and Milet, *Bergson et le calcul infinitesimal*.
[5] See Truchu and Dupuoy, "Pourquoi des 'philosophes de la République' se sont-ils faits médecins?"
[6] See Bourdieu, *Distinction*.   [7] For all these aspects, see Bourdieu, *The State Nobility*.

abandoned the idea of medical studies, as well as examining his notion of "engaging seriously" with philosophy, which set him on a career as philosopher and "metaphysician."

Philosophical Churches

In France, the term "philosophy" began to be used to designate a distinct erudite practice within a set of state institutions only after the Napoleonic reform of the universities of 1808.[8] Unlike the Prussian reformers, who operated "holistically," the French opted for a neat segmentation: the Faculty of Letters, where philosophy was taught, was separated from the other four faculties – Science, Law, Theology, and Medicine – and from the École polytechnique, an institution for training engineers. During the early years of the nineteenth century a small group of agents constituted "philosophy"; they could do so thanks to the "primitive accumulation" of symbolic capital[9] that had been transmitted to growing cohorts of students and progressively fructified. According to their position in more or less central institutions, the recipients held different amounts of this capital and wielded greater or lesser power to inculcate norms and sanction possible infractions. Philosophers in the early 1800s can be classified according to the institutions in which they were operating:[10]

1) Teaching the *classe de philosophie* in the last year of secondary education, high-school teachers, mere reproducers of an established canon, had a considerable power of inculcation and sanction over young students.[11]
2) The two chairs of philosophy at the ENS, an elite institution for training teachers in secondary and higher education, were centrally important as well: their lecturers trained more than 90 percent of philosophy teachers.
3) The occupants of three chairs of philosophy in the Faculty of Letters at the Sorbonne – history of ancient philosophy, history of modern

[8] See Aulard, *Napoléon premier et le monopole universitaire.*   [9] See Bourdieu, *On the State.*
[10] I am systematizing information from different sources here: Ferrari, *Les philosophes salariés*; Ribot, "Philosophy in France"; Fabiani, *Les philosophes de la République*; Espagne, *En deçà du Rhin*; Brooks, *The Eclectic Legacy*; Charle, *Les Professeurs de la faculté des lettres*; Charle and Telkes, *Les Professeurs du Collège de France*; Charle, ed., *Dictionnaire biographique des universitaires*; Landrin, "L'éclectisme spiritualiste' au XIXe siècle"; and Huguet and Noguès, "Les professeurs des facultés des lettres et des sciences en France au XIXe siècle."
[11] See Poucet, *Enseigner la philosophie.*

philosophy, and dogmatic philosophy – gave lectures, evaluated students, and directed doctoral dissertations.

4) The professors of philosophy at the fifteen "provincial" universities (one chair in philosophy per institution), too, gave lectures and evaluated students, but they rarely directed doctoral dissertations.

5) The holder of the chair of Greek and Latin Philosophy at the Collège de France gave lectures to a broader audience, but had little sanctioning power, given that the institution does not grant diplomas.

Some of these agents were also part of other institutions aiming to norm and sanction. These included:

1) the Education Ministry's "inspectors of public education," divided by geographical zones and headed by an inspector general, whose task was to observe, judge, and, if need be, sanction the pedagogical and moral conduct of professors and teachers;

2) the committee writing and grading the admissions examination for the École normale;

3) the committee establishing the topics ("le programme") of and grading the candidates for the highly selective *agrégation de philosophie* examination (instituted in 1825);[12] and

4) the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, created in 1795 within the Institut de France. Its members selected both the topics and the winners of prize essay contests, thereby implicitly articulating standards for what was considered acceptable for publication as philosophy.

While the vast majority of philosophy teachers and professors were seen, and saw themselves, as civil servants, reproducers of a canon,[13] a few were also considered as "authors" publishing original work, producers of new knowledge. Striving to occupy central positions as producers of philosophy, all agents were engaged – following internal vectors – in internal struggles, and – following external vectors – in a defense against other agents outside these institutions who sought to contest the philosophers' legitimacy, or claimed philosophical status for their own work. These struggles were subject to politics, and philosophical norms were influenced by the dynamism proper to the field of power.

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[12] On the *agrégation*, see Chervel, *Histoire de l'agrégation*.
[13] See Canivez, *Jules Lagneau, professeur et philosophe*, vol. 1, chs. 1–2.

Norms and Axioms

In France, as long as the clergy controlled the universities, the producers of new knowledge were agents located outside the academic space: "free thinkers," meeting in salons and academies and members of an international "Republic of Letters." As employed by them, the term *philosophe* served to designate different types of knowledge producers, many of whom were producing what today would be classed as "science."[14] The 1789 revolution disrupted this situation. It provoked a violent clash between the two extremes of enlightened rationalism, embodied by the "free thinkers," and tradition, represented by the agents operating inside the medieval universities. Around 1820, Victor Cousin (1792–1867), unanimously considered a talented politician but a mediocre man of science, came to play a pivotal role in creating, administrating, and reforming a number of educational institutions.[15] With a small group of men including Jean-Philibert Damiron (1794–1862) and Théodore Jouffroy (1796–1842), Cousin thereby also contributed to reshaping the meaning of "philosophy."

At the center of this operation lay, invisible, what I would like to call *philosophy's legitimizing axiom*. This axiom asserted the human mind's unity, agency, and immateriality; its independence from the physical and biological determinations studied by other knowledge producers. Crucially, this axiom justifying the existence of philosophy as a distinct discipline remained compatible with the ideology defended by the religious and juridical institutions: man had to be free and independent in order to be judged both by God and by other men.

The redefinition of the term "philosophy" involved the import and instrumental manipulation of texts coming from Germany and England, synthetized in what Cousin and his disciplines named "spiritualist eclecticism," "eclecticism," or simply "spiritualism."[16]

The doctrine was "spiritualist" because, influenced by Pierre Maine de Biran (1766–1824), it conceived Mind (*Esprit*), or the Self (*Moi*), as a unitary, immortal, universal, and free soul, inaccessible to physiology. This "spiritualist" anthropology was compatible with state ideology and with a division of

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[14] See Gumbrecht, "Philosophe, Philosophie," and Ribard, *Raconter, vivre, penser*.

[15] Cousin had been lecturer at the École normale (1812–15), substitute professor (1815–21) for Royer-Collard, and then professor of philosophy at the Sorbonne (1825–55), member of the Royal Council of Public Education (1830), director of the École normale (1835–40), almost continuously president of the *agrégation* committee between 1831 and 1848, member of the Académie des Sciences morales, and, in 1840, Minister of Public Instruction.

[16] On Cousin and "eclectism," see Vermeren, *Victor Cousin* and *Les enjeux de l'histoire de la philosophie en France au XIXe siècle*, as well as Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self*.

cognitive labor. It postulated an "outer" man, object of physiology, and an "inner" man, reserved for philosophy. The philosophers claimed to employ a peculiar faculty, the "inner sense" ("sens interne" or "sens intime"), to map the human mind, its functioning, manifestations, and relation to the physical and metaphysical realms. Cousin and his collaborators replaced the method of "analysis," characteristic of the works of the so-called Ideologists who played a major role in the aftermath of the French Revolution, with what they called "psychology," a nonphysiological but allegedly "empirical" discipline that served as a foundation for both physical and metaphysical knowledge.[17] For these philosophers, the unity of the self was not the result of the association of impressions, but a quasi-substance, the object of psychology. Cousin introduced psychology into the philosophy curricula in 1832 as a propaedeutic to the study of logic, ethics, aesthetics, and theodicy.

At the same time, the doctrine was "eclectic" because it selected elements from Cartesianism, French Ideology, Scottish Common Sense philosophy, and German Idealism. The philosophers argued that the "doctrines" of the past only yielded partial truths and had therefore to be united in a balanced eclectic synthesis. In this operation, the history of philosophy, a new genre imported from Prussia, played a major role as a pedagogical presentation of humanity's prior attempts at answering a set of recurrent questions. This eclectic conception was the result of the negotiation between the conflicting conceptions of humanity of the clergy and the partisans of the Restoration, on the one hand and, on the other, of republican and often "materialist" authors, constituted largely of the so-called Ideologists (often trained in medicine) as well as social thinkers such as the followers of the socialist doctrines (mostly educated at the École polytechnique).

To succeed in their ideological diplomacy, Cousin and his men introduced philosophy in the last year of secondary education as a "crowning discipline"; as a means to shape citizens' minds in a manner compatible with the postrevolutionary ideology promoted by the Bourbon monarchy.[18] To select trustworthy professors for this operation of "mental policing,"[19] Cousin always ensured that the committee administering the *agrégation* exam was presided over by himself or one of his men. These devices allowed Cousin to establish a certain idea of philosophy vis-à-vis other forms of knowledge in an "ontoencyclopedic" hierarchy.[20]

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[17] On Jouffroy and the creation of French psychology, see Clauzade, "La philosophie écossaise et la fondation de la psychologie."

[18] Goldstein, *The Post-Revolutionary Self*.   [19] Ferrari, *Machiavel.*

[20] Fabiani, *Les philosophes de la République*, 76.

A Contest of Faculties

To ensure the legitimacy of their activity within the institutions outlined above, philosophers had to confront contestation from two sides. On the one hand, many on the clerical right were hostile to the idea of secular education, to the philosophers' use of German authors, and to what they saw as a tendency toward "pantheism." On the other hand, some agents educated at the École polytechnique and in the Faculty of Medicine attacked the philosophers for what they saw as their political opportunism and theoretical incoherence.

Many if not most medical doctors inherited the anti-clerical and some-times materialist positions that prevailed in the Faculty of Medicine[21] but were rarely if ever encountered among the philosophers who had to negotiate with the clergy. Connecting physiology with the analysis of ideas that Ideology had imported from British empiricism, a number of eighteenth-century physicians had advocated an anti-metaphysical holistic approach to the human being they began calling "anthropology."[22] The physician Victor Broussais (1772–1838), chief doctor of the Parisian Val de Grace hospital, played a crucial role in further developing this approach.[23] He publicly criticized the traditional "medical ontology," namely the theory according to which a disease was caused by some *thing*, and substituted it with the thesis according to which all transformations, including those relating to pathologies, could be understood by comparing them to those occurring in a body in its state of "normalcy." Repudiating the existence of the soul and the very possibility of a knowledge obtained through the "inner sense," Broussais openly mocked the philosophers in his popular public lectures at the medical school. Since his materialism might be seen as the source of a "fatalism" that could in turn be used to justify criminal acts committed by madmen, it was considered an attack on the Church and the monarchy. Among Broussais's admirers was the *polytechnicien* Auguste Comte (1798–1857). The growing success of the positivist movement Comte was heading boosted physiological approaches to human cognition and behavior and pushed back against spiritualist philosophy. Comte's law of the three stages of humanity (the theological, the metaphysical, and the positive) treated metaphysics as a cultural form

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[21] On the medical and psychiatric field in France, see Ackerknecht, *Medicine at the Paris Hospital* and *A Short History of Psychiatry*.

[22] On this project, see Straum, *Cabanis, Enlightenment and Medical Philosophy*, and Williams, *The Physical and the Moral*.

[23] On Broussais, see Braunstein, *Broussais et le matérialisme*, and "L'invention française du 'psycholo-gisme' en 1828."

doomed to disappear, rendered obsolete by the natural sciences. In his classification of the sciences, which implied an organization of the disciplines different from the one implemented in the Napoleonic university, Comte left no place for metaphysics, nor for any other type of philosophy other than "positive" philosophy – that is, experimental science.

The philosophers defended themselves and philosophy's legitimizing axiom, arguing for a dualist conception of the human not only to defend themselves against the charge of pantheism but also to legitimize the division of cognitive labor, established in 1808, that separated their psychological competence from medical doctors' physiological competence.[24]

This division was one of the reasons why Félix Ravaisson (1813–1900) was cornered in a peripheral position until 1852. A brilliant *agrégé* in philosophy, at Cousin's instigation he spent some time in Munich in order to follow the lectures of Friedrich Schelling (1775–1854), with whom Cousin corresponded. On his return to France in 1839, Ravaisson won the prize of the Académie for his doctoral dissertation *De l'habitude*. The book was the result of the synthesis of spiritualism and German absolute idealism: following Maine de Biran, he located the forming force of habits in a willing soul but extended this idea to include all of the natural world, hierarchized according to growing degrees of freedom. In the late 1830s, when philosophers were being attacked by the clergy, this was a potentially dangerous view to hold.[25]

Outcasts, Outsiders, Resilient Philosophers

Whereas the context of the Second Republic (1848–51) favored the progressive positions of some of Cousin's pupils, the forceful repression driven by the clergy during the first decade of the Second Empire (1852–63) compelled a mutation of the existing conditions of knowledge production. Cousin's authority had been suspended. Strict control was imposed on all aspects of intellectual life. In secondary education, the teaching of philosophy was replaced with instruction in "logic," while the *agrégation* in philosophy was replaced with one in "letters." This situation forced some

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[24] In 1839, just before his death, Jouffroy published *De la légitimité de la distinction de la psychologie et de la physiologie*, and Adolphe Garnier (1801–65), his successor in the chair of "dogmatic philosophy" at the Sorbonne, published *La psychologie et la phrénologie comparées*. Three years later, the first translator of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, Joseph Tissot (1801–76), professor of philosophy and dean of the Faculty of Letters in Dijon, published an *Anthropologie spéculative générale*.

[25] For the place of "philosophy of nature" and the risk of "pantheism" in early French spiritualism, see Cotten, "Victor Cousin et la 'philosophie de la nature,'" and Moreau, "Trois polémiques."

republican philosophers accused of pantheism – Jules Simon (1814–96), Jules Barni (1818–78), Amédée Jacques (1813–65), Etienne Vacherot (1856–97), Ernest Bersot (1816–80), Émile Saisset (1814–63), and Joseph Ferrari (1811–76) – to give up their posts. Outside the Faculties of Letters, two authors, Augustin Cournot (1801–77) and Charles Renouvier (1815–1903), tried to react to the new institutional situation by promoting Kantian Criticism as a substitute for spiritualist philosophy.[26] Because of their peripheral position, however, their attempt, which implied the abolition of both metaphysics and introspective psychology as well as a reform of the encyclopedia of sciences implicit in the 1808 reforms, did not have much of an impact.

Other challengers, too, had to adapt to the new ideological environment. Because of opposition from the spiritualists, the *normalien* Hippolyte Taine (1828–93) was denied both the *agrégation* and the doctorate. Drawing on lectures he followed in science and medicine, he wrote a savage critique of spiritualism as an empirically unfounded ideology (*Les philosophes classiques du XIXe*, 1857). Appropriating John Stuart Mill's combination of the physiological study of human behavior and cognition, defended by Comte, with the study of the association of ideas obtained through introspection,[27] Taine attempted a reform of psychology, implicitly inviting philosophers to engage with medicine. Not being an *agrégé*, however, his institutional impact was rather limited.

Physicians and others with scientific training were not the only potential enemies of the philosophers. The new discipline of "alienism," too, represented a threat to the axiom that served to legitimize philosophy, since the phenomena it studied – dreams, hallucinations, multiple personalities, insanity, and so on – could lead to notions of a scattered or passive self.

Nonetheless, there was common ground. The alienists' therapeutic action was based in part on Philippe Pinel's (1745–1826) idea of a "moral treatment" of insanity that postulated the existence of an active "will" in the patient. Alienists and philosophers, both interested in defending their own activities, entered into negotiations. In 1852 – five years after its founding – the first psychiatric society, the Association médico-psychologique, allowed non-physicians to join, some of whom were philosophers; some even advanced to the presidency of the association, for example Adolphe Garnier (1801–64) and Paul Janet (1823–99), sometime

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[26] See Cournot's *Essai sur les fondements de nos connaissances et sur les caractères de la critique philosophique* (1851) and Renouvier's three-volume *Essais de critique générale* (1854, 1859, and 1864).

[27] See Richard, *Hippolyte Taine*. The French the word "introspection" was adopted from the English in the nineteenth century.

secretary of Cousin. This new interest in alienism and medicine was reflected in the themes of a series of prizes offered by the Académie des sciences morales and dozens of philosophers' publications dealing with the unity of the self under pathological conditions.[28]

The philosophers also intervened on another front: with a polemic pitting the so-called "vitalist" physicians from the Montpellier medical school against the "organicist" physicians dominating the Paris medical faculty.[29] This confrontation in the first half of the 1860s, concerning, on the one hand, the difference between life and inanimate matter and, on the other hand, the difference between human and organic life, resulted in another set of books authored by philosophers, who interpreted the findings of physiological and pathological research on human and animal life according to philosophy's legitimizing axiom.[30]

Spiritualismus Redivivus

In this new context marked by negotiations with the clergy and the physicians, and by critiques coming from outcasts such as Renouvier, Cournot, Taine, and the members of the positivist movement, the philosophers eventually readjusted their shared norms and the implicit axiom that legitimized them. Félix Ravaisson occupied a central position as gatekeeper in the institutions of the Second Empire. Appointed Inspector General of Higher Education in 1852 and chairing the admissions committee of the École normale almost without interruption, he was named chair of the committee in charge of the *agrégation* when the exam was re-established in 1863. During this second, more liberal phase of the Second Empire, new journals appeared, such as the *Revue des cours scientifiques* or the *Revue des cours littéraires*. Under Ravaisson's protection and guidance, philosophers – Janet, Lévêque, and others – abandoned a strict Cartesian and Platonic dualism neatly separating a *res congitans* from a *res extensa*, human life from animal life, the normal from the pathological, soul from matter, psychology from physiology, and the Faculty of Letters from those of Medicine and Science. They introduced Aristotle as a complement to

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[28] The themes were: "sleep" (1852), "the role of psychology in philosophy" (1860), "madness considered from a philosophical point of view" (1867), "psychological phenomena proper to animal nature, compared to the faculties of the human soul" (1870) and "Aristotle's psychology" (1871). Books included titles on sleep and alienation, as well as the soul–body and brain–thought relationships.

[29] See Reynaud, *Scientific Controversies*, ch. 2: "The vitalism-organicism controversy between Paris and Montpellier"; Andrault, "Définir le vitalisme"; Rey, "Naissance et développement du vitalisme."

[30] Authors included Tissot, Lemoine, Boullier, Waddington, Jeannel, Émile-Auguste Charles, and Saisset.

Plato, Leibniz as a complement to Descartes, the *Critique of Judgment* as a complement to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the final causes as a complement to efficient causes, and vitalism or animism as complements to mechanism.

In 1863, the new minister of education Victor Duruy charged Ravaisson with writing a report on "the state of philosophy in France." Published four years later, Ravaisson's account described how philosophers confronted the work of naturalists, neurologists, physicians, and alienists, and announced the emergence of a new, "positive" form of spiritualism, more attentive to the development of the natural sciences. Most of the philosophers who acknowledged the limits of the old spiritualism and the necessity to update it by engaging with the sciences shared Ravaisson's view, and a new wave of publications set in, asserting the end of an era and the beginning of a new age in philosophy.[31] Philosophers began to talk of a "new" (Janet and Vacherot), more "liberal" (Beaussire), "realist" or "positive" (Ravaisson) spiritualism.

Also, starting in 1863, and especially after the death of Cousin in 1867, a new genealogical narrative gained ground: a type of spiritualism attentive to the sciences, inaugurated by Maine de Biran and continued by Ravaisson, which had been the victim of Cousin. The increasingly violent condemnations of that old *maître*, whom they depicted as philosophically incompetent and politically dictatorial, were accompanied by their praises of Ravaisson as an unjustly marginalized genius.

In many of the works published at this time, Kant played a new and important role. The German philosopher had become acceptable: he had been favorably mentioned by Ravaisson, Barni and Tissot had translated most of his work, and in 1866 he even had been the subject of an Académie prize essay. And Jules Lachelier (1832–1918), as lecturer at the École normale from 1864 until 1875, introduced dozens of young philosophers to Kant.

Lachelier saw an ally in him: the combination of the three *Critiques* was an instrument by means of which to update the axiom legitimizing academic philosophy according to the new values of the Republic. Kant's philosophy endorsed the values of personhood and agency as well as faith in the validity of experimental science, all of which were indispensable for a nation pursuing progress. Kantian Criticism was able to respond to the attacks on the axiom from both physiology and associationist psychology. Kant offered an account of the relative validity of science, denouncing "determinist" claims made by certain scientists. And finally, the *Critique of*

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[31] This wave can be divided into a more critical first phase – books by Vacherot, Caro, and Janet – and a more constructive second phase – works by Lévêque, Desdouits, Alfred Fouillé, and Boutroux.

Judgment furnished proof that nature was not a blind mechanism but was organized teleologically, pointing to a divine plan. Criticism, in other words, was able to legitimize the activity of philosophers, scientists, and the clergy alike.

New Serious Philosophers

During the 1870s, the philosophical norm was re-established in a new, updated form. The Third Republic saw an increase in the number of academic positions and the emergence of new publishing houses and journals. The members of the old spiritualist guard who had survived obtained new positions. In 1871 the republicans Simon and Bersot were appointed, respectively, Minister of Public Instruction and director of the ENS. The chairs at the Académie des sciences morales were occupied by Janet; Ravaisson; Vacherot; Francisque Bouillier (1813–99), who was the former director of the ENS; and by three professors at the Collège de France, Charles Lévêque (1818–1900), Jean-Félix Nourrisson (1825–99), and Adolphe Franck (1810–93). In 1879 the historian of ancient philosophy Charles Waddington (1819–1914) joined Paul Janet and Elme Caro (1826–87) at the Sorbonne. Ravaisson maintained his position as gate-keeper. Teaching at the ENS were Jules Lachelier (until 1875) and Alfred Fouillé (from 1872 until 1875). The philosopher of science Émile Boutroux (1845–1921) and the Catholic philosopher Léon Ollé-Laprune (1839–98), who would become one of Bergson's professors, replaced them. Lachelier, a frequent member of the entry exam committee at the École, joined Ravaisson as an inspector of education in 1875 and succeeded him as *inspector general* in 1879. All these figures were essential, not only in terms of "influencing" Bergson's thought, but in making it possible in the first place.

France's military defeat by the Prussians and their German allies at Sedan in 1870 had been seen as confirming the defeat of its educational institutions. Two imperatives coexisted in the ideology underlying the new educational reforms of the Third Republic: the exercise of duty and freedom, including freedom of expression, and scientific progress.[32] The philosophers, whose activity was based on a legitimizing axiom common to both religion and the state ideology, could not simply ignore the results of the other sciences; in order to be "serious," philosophy had to be able to discuss the logical coherence and the ethical and metaphysical consequences of

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[32] Fox, *The Savant and the State.*

those other disciplines. The doctoral dissertations defended between 1872 and 1900 show this new norm of seriousness and can be classed in two relatively distinct groups that resulted from the confrontation of the Faculty of Letters with, on the one hand, the Faculty of Science and the École polytechnique and, on the other, with the Faculty of Medicine. The first group of dissertations was composed of "epistemological" writings that adopted a more or less explicitly Kantian framework and concerned the logic of the natural sciences. They were authored by pupils of Lachelier and Boutroux who, in some cases, had earned a second diploma in the Faculty of Science. The second group, often claiming to be part of a "new" psychology, defined as "comparative," "applied," "descriptive," "experimental," or "modern," adopted a more empiricist framework and used the findings of neurophysiology and alienism to explain aspects of human behavior and cognition. To each of these two groups corresponded a philosophical journal – to the first, Renouvier's *Critique philosophique* (created in 1871) and, to the second, Théodule Ribot's (1839–1916) *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* – and an extraordinary chair at the Sorbonne – one in philosophy of science, which went to Boutroux, and one in experimental and compared psychology, to which Ribot was appointed.

The new situation also prompted a reform of the high-school philosophy curriculum: the share dedicated to the relation of philosophy with the sciences, but especially with physiology, increased drastically. Paul Janet was, again, behind this reform.[33] In 1879 he published a 1000-page *Traité élémentaire de philosophie à l'usage des classes*, a manual for high-school teachers that discussed, at length, associationist psychology, the physiology of the nervous system and the brain, and the theory of heredity, as well as different psychopathologies and phenomena such as sleep, dreams, somnambulism, and hallucinations. This manual would guide the lectures given during the 1880s by young high-school teachers such as Pierre Janet, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), and Bergson himself.[34]

Despite the new importance of experimental psychology, however, the institutional stability created by the Napoleonic reforms and the set of norms and values grounding the division of faculties prevented any professional conversion. Théodule Ribot is a perfect example of an agent whose trajectory collided with the existing disciplinary divisions. A student at the ENS, *agrégé* in 1866, Ribot had encountered British psychology in the

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[33] Janet played a crucial role in the Conseil supérieur de l'instruction publique and in the Société pour l'étude des questions d'enseignement supérieur, two driving forces behind the educational reforms of 1872 and 1880.

[34] See McGrath, "Confronting the Brain in the Classroom."

books of Hippolyte Taine. In 1870 he published *La psychologie anglaise contemporaine*, in 1872 a translation of Herbert Spencer's (1820–1903) *Principles of Psychology*, and in 1873 he defended his doctoral dissertation on heredity, supervised by Janet. Three years later, while he was still a high-school philosophy teacher, he created the *Revue philosophique* with support from the old spiritualists. In 1879, with *La psychologie allemande contemporaine*, he introduced French readers to the works of physiologists such as Gustav Fechner (1801–87) and Wilhelm Wundt (1832–1920), the founders of psychometrics. The following year he published *Les maladies de la mémoire*. In 1881, he was passed over for the chair of the history of psychological theories created at the École pratique d'hautes études at the instigation of the physician Paul Bert (1833–86); it was given to Bert's friend Jules Soury (1842–1915). Ribot ended up teaching in a chair of experimental psychology, created ad hoc by Janet in 1885, and, four years later, in a chair of the same name at the Collège de France.

Like Taine – and unlike Comte – Ribot accepted the utility of the introspective approach as a counterpart to the physiological approach, which was grounded on the idea of an identity of the normal and the pathological.[35] Introspection was a useful but provisional instrument: given that for Ribot, all mental functions were located in the brain, psychology had slowly to be integrated into the natural sciences.[36] These positions were unacceptable for the philosophers. Because he had not earned a medical degree, Ribot was unable to convert to another discipline and thus had to conform to a minimal version of the legitimating axiom to be able to negotiate with his philosopher peers.

Interiority and Exteriority

What was Bergson's position in this transformation of the norm of philosophical "seriousness?" When he succeeded Ravaisson at the Académie in 1904, he praised the deceased philosopher and his "reform" of spiritualism, and sixteen years earlier, he had dedicated the *Essai* to Ravaisson's favorite pupil, Lachelier, although he had never followed the latter's lectures. Around 1885, Lachelier in his capacity as *inspecteur de l'éducation* visited Clermont-Ferrand with his younger colleague François Evellin (1835–1910) to assess Bergson's teaching there. Both of them judged him highly and

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[35] See Vincent Guillin, "Théodule Ribot's Ambiguous Positivism."
[36] As his Belgian colleague, the physician Joseph Delboeuf (1831–96), suggested in the title of his book *La psychologie comme science naturelle* (1876).

suggested he apply to teach at one of the prestigious Parisian high schools to advance his career toward the Sorbonne or the Collège de France. Many years later Bergson would declare that he had "realized that philosophy could be something serious" thanks to Lachelier's *Du fondement de l'induction*, a book he probably read in 1877 as he was preparing for the École's entrance examination, whose jury included Lachelier. Nonetheless he also declared that, just after having read that text, he plunged into the work of the positivist Cournot and, subsequently, became influenced by Spencer's "mechanistic theories." Bergson declared that at that time his intention was to study time, one of the most "fundamental scientific notions" of mechanics, in order to be a "philosopher of science."[37] In analyzing the notion of time dogmatically used by the scientists, however, he realized that it was nothing but a useful "fiction." In Clermont-Ferrand, while he was explaining Zeno's paradoxes of movement to his students, a topic at the center of Evellin's *Infini et quantité* (1881), Bergson would "discover" duration, "real" time.[38]

Considering the context just presented, Bergson's narrative is only partially convincing: all the doctoral dissertations that could be classed as "philosophy of science" were authored by scholars without any interest in psychopathology but who were instead strongly influenced by Kantian Criticism and especially by Renouvier's version of it. Bergson also states that Kant had never fascinated him, that his ambition was to "react vigorously against the reigning Kantianism," and that his schoolfellows even nicknamed him the "anti-Kantian."[39] There is not a single issue of the *Critique philosophique* in his library, but he did read the *Revue philosophique*. After the publication of Janet's manual, we may surmise, Bergson considered the possibility of following the path of the "new" psychology, rather than that of the "philosophy of science."

In fact, just after the *agrégation*, Bergson started working on a translation of a book quoted by both Janet and Ribot, *Illusions* by the British psychologist James Sully (1842–1923). Bergson's mother was born in England; he lived in London for a few years and often visited the city. He chose the French nationality only in 1877, when he entered the École normale. He could easily familiarize himself with the authors presented by Taine and Ribot. Finally, while Bergson was teaching in Clermont-Ferrand, he started experimenting with hypnosis under the direction of one of the

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[37] De la Harpe, "Souvenirs personnels," 358.
[38] Bergson, Letter to William James, 1908, in *Mélanges*, 765–66.
[39] Du Bos, *Journal*, 64, and Benrubi, "Entretien avec Bergson," 368–69 and 359.

local physicians.[40] From around 1880 onward, the rehabilitation of this healing practice, performed during the theatrical exhibition of hysterical patients at the La Salpetrière hospital, made Jean-Martin Charcot (1825–93) a star. Hypnosis attracted philosophers because it presented alienism as a practice that consisted in the interaction between two subjects, not merely as a natural science involving a researcher and an objectified organ.

The first ten volumes (1876–86) of the *Revue philosophique*, in which Bergson published his first articles, indicate the coordinates of Bergson's trajectory and the possible ways in which he conceived of the interactions between philosophy and psychology. Classing the contributions according to different groups of authors can help in isolating the main currents of this periodical:

1) the old spiritualist guard who kept a foot inside the door of the journal and supported its publication, authors such as Boullier, Beaussire, Lévêque, Vacherot, Bénard, and Janet;
2) German and English authors who represented the new experimental psychology promoted by Ribot and by a number of sympathetic French physicians, neurologists, and alienists;
3) a group of "humanists" writing original articles favoring this new current who had not obtained the *agrégation*, among them Taine, Soury, Léon Dumont (1837–77), and Jean-Marie Guyau (1854–88);
4) scientists trained at the École polytechnique, such as Joseph Valentin Boussinesq (1842–1929) and Paul Tannery (1843–1904), writing on questions of epistemology;
5) a new generation of *agrégés*, who mainly authored book reviews or prudent articles in the history of philosophy but also, toward the end of the 1870s, wrote on epistemological topics of the kind discussed by group 4.

Epistemological conflicts separated the first group from the second and third groups, the last two playing the role of negotiators. The main point of friction was the question of whether or not mental structures, the object of philosophical inquiries since the 1820s, could be studied experimentally and conceived of as the result of a psychobiological genesis. Besides materialist physiologists, who repudiated the legitimizing axiom, the spiritualists' ire was directed at defenders of psychometrics, who claimed to study perceptions, sensations, affects, memory, intelligence, and even

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[40] Bergson, "De la simulation inconsciente."

volition by means of observation and measurement. Most of the essays written by psychometric authors aimed at a posteriori explanations of the categories of space and time as well as of other mental faculties, including the will. The essential notion of personality, traditionally considered to derive from a series of "decisions" taken by the subject, was studied by the physiologists as the consequence of an interaction between the human genetic heritage and the environment.

Beginning with the very first article he published in his journal in 1876, "De la durée des actes psychiques," Ribot showed great enthusiasm for German physiologists' attempts at interpreting the "data of consciousness" to understand how the subjective notion of time was constructed. He welcomed the psychometrical approach of calculating the time lapsed between the transmission of a sensation and the muscular reaction, concluding that "consciousness . . . like any other phenomenon" had "a precise, variable, and measurable duration." Ribot opposed this approach to the "universally admitted" philosophical idea that "internal phenomena" "take place in time." For him, such a notion was antiscientific since it relegated mental phenomena, "inaccessible to measurement," to a "mystical region."[41] In an article on memory published three years later, Ribot defined "duration and intensity" as the two conditions to be studied to understand the data of consciousness.[42] Others, too, published on time and space in the *Revue philosophique* from 1878 to 1888.

These essays provoked reactions from the authors in the first group, especially Janet. As early as 1876, in an article published in the *Revue scientifique*, Janet, one of the guardians of philosophical power, had objected to the physiological explanations of personality. In another article a year later, he contrasted the different speeds of duration perceived by test subjects, all of different ages, and affirmed the essentially subjective nature of time perception.[43] Janet's article provoked a violent reaction from Delbœuf and other physiologists, who affirmed that while there was an internally perceived "relative" duration, it could be studied only in relation to the "absolute time" shared by external observers. They affirmed an objective time as the condition for measuring subjective time, which prompted Janet to reply that psychometrics was arbitrary and logically incoherent. While he granted "a relation between apparent duration and total duration" he denied the possibility of "formulat[ing] this relation in

[41] Ribot, "De la durée des actes psychiques," 286.
[42] Ribot, "La mémoire comme fait biologique," 529 and 530.
[43] Janet, "Une illusion d'optique interne."

numerical terms" and warned against an illusory and "false exactitude."[44] Like his colleagues, Janet had to admit the utility of psychopathology, but he could not accept psychometrics, which threatened both philosophy's area of competence, the mind, and its method, introspection. A young philosopher writing his dissertation, like Bergson, had to conform to this rejection.

In keeping with philosophy's legitimizing axiom, the defense of internal life and of its duration had been a constant shared by philosophers from the birth of spiritualism all the way to the 1860s. To name but two: Lemoine and Lachelier, both lecturers at the École normale, educated dozens of students, including the psychologists of the 1870s. Lemoine claimed to demonstrate the validity of Ravaisson's updated legitimizing axiom – according to which repetitive phenomena associated with habit are signs of freedom and cannot therefore fully be understood by the natural sciences – in a 1875 book that drew on physiology, pathology, and evolutionary biology to show how the will perpetuated itself through the successive moments of duration.[45] Lachelier proceeded similarly, deploying a set of irreconcilable oppositions: the qualitative, durational, intensive internal world proper to subjectivity, which could be explained only through reflexivity or introspection, was opposed to the quantifiable, extensive, segmented world of objects, which could be explained only through observation and experimentation.[46] A few years later, in his 1881 doctoral dissertation *La parole intérieure*, Victor Egger (1848–1909) followed the path of his professors Lemoine and Lachelier. Using a language reminiscent of Bergson, he distinguished "the non-self [*non-moi*] and extension" from "the self [*moi*] and duration." The latter, consisting in a "pure succession," was described as an "internal" language.[47]

Adaptation

Writing his dissertation, the *Essai sur les données immédiates*, under these conditions, Bergson had to conform to the norm of philosophical "seriousness." This meant he had to accept the findings of positive science within the framework of the legitimizing axiom. The first crucial achievement of science that could not be ignored was the a posteriori explanation of what

[44] Janet, "Les mathématiques et la psychologie," 309–10.
[45] Lemoine, *L'habitude et l'instinct*, and Sinclair, "Habit and Time in Nineteenth-Century French Philosophy."
[46] Lachelier, *Du fondement de l'induction* and "Psychologie et métaphysique."
[47] Carroy, "Le langage intérieur."

had formerly been considered the a priori form of space. The second was the repudiation of a dimension of subjectivity likely to be described in the same terms as the objective world: either as a thing, or as a space, or as a peculiar type of monolog.

According to the advances made by physiologists and mathematicians, Bergson had to accept that Euclidean space could no longer be conceived as a universal transcendental form but had to be understood as one of a virtually infinite set of possible spaces, albeit one according to which human beings structure their everyday experience. In *Time and Free Will* Bergson also echoed the view, popularized by Boutroux and Tannery in the 1870s, that language, including that of the natural sciences, was pragmatic and composed of arbitrary symbols disposed on a fictional space. If space, on which the categories of science were based, had to be considered a useful pragmatic convention, the natural sciences could not be fully speculative and were thus unable to grasp the deepest truth of our experience of the world. This also made it possible to conceive of a form of knowledge that accessed this reality directly, avoiding the obstacles of everyday language. This form of knowledge, philosophy, focused on what the sciences ignored, namely the dimension of reality that was irreducible to space, a pure time emancipated from space and quantity: duration.

A comparison with contemporary works by "serious" philosophers reveals the other elements Bergson mobilized in the *Essai*, too, to be far from being completely new. The critique of psychometrics and associationism, laid out in the first chapter, was shared by virtually all the philosophers. The analysis of the notion of intensity in the same chapter responded to a discussion imported in the early 1870s from German authors who had worked with a set of Kantian notions from an experimental standpoint. The association of the notion of number with that of space, present throughout the book, and the idea that language was pragmatic were topics that authors like Evellin, Liard, Noel, Tannery, and Boutroux had addressed in the decade following 1876. The dualism of internal experience/external description had constituted a classic structuring opposition since the birth of philosophy. And, finally, the problem of free will was at the center of virtually *all* philosophical dissertations written since the 1870s because philosophers had to defend both the possibility of human agency and the validity of scientific knowledge. Bergson's dissertation belonged to a long tradition.

But why did he abandon the idea of studying medicine? And why did he turn to "metaphysics?" Even before Ribot did the same, Bergson's professor and Ph.D. supervisor Paul Janet had invited his students to acquire the

medical knowledge – and degree – he regretted not having himself.[48]
Nonetheless, the career paths open to a doctor-philosopher were few and
narrow: a complete curriculum in medicine implied a first year dealing
with mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology, followed by three years
of medical training *strictu sensu*, including internships, and a fifth year
reserved for the preparation of the doctoral dissertation. This type of
training required time, money, and proximity to a Faculty of Medicine.

The examples of Taine, Soury, and Ribot were far from encouraging.
Taine and Soury were born into modest families and could not afford
proper medical training but Soury, trained as a philologist and a historian,
parlayed his proximity to Paul Bert (then minister of education) into
a position at the École pratique. Ribot, for his part, had a chair
created ad hoc as a result of the prestige he had gained through his journal,
which he managed to publish thanks to a small family fortune. Bergson did
not come from a wealthy background, spent more than a decade outside of
Paris, and, teaching at Louis le Grand high school in Paris, was busy trying
to support his family. The two first *agrégés* to pursue a medical career,
Georges Dumas (1866–1946), *agrégé* in philosophy in 1889 and Doctor of
Medicine in 1894, and Pierre Janet, *agrégé* in philosophy in 1882 and
Doctor of Medicine in 1893, had started from much more advantageous
positions. The first had belonged to a wealthy family of physicians.
The second was in an even more comfortable position, benefiting from
the patronage of his uncle Paul.

Conclusion

Starting in the 1890s, Bergson adapted to the changing situation by slowly
adopting a more "metaphysical" approach. In the 1881 letter to Monsieur
Pichard, he seems to denigrate "metaphysics" as a form of knowledge that
shies away from a confrontation with medicine or natural science, the only
guarantors of philosophy's "seriousness." This is entirely in keeping with
the secularized climate of the 1870s, in which empirical "psychologists"
working with experimental data dispensed with traditional metaphysical
questions about God and the soul and "philosophers of science" were
ridiculing such questions outright. In *Time and Free Will*, the term
"metaphysics" appears six times – with negative connotations.[49]

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[48] See Ohayon, *L'impossible rencontre*, 49.
[49] See ESSAI 3/xxiii, 76/114, 103/155, 115/174, 137/209–210. The one instance of a positive connotation is
      the first mention, echoing Émile Boutroux who, at the beginning of his doctoral dissertation *The*

The situation began to change in 1885, with the publication of Lachelier's "Psychologie et métaphysique," and especially after 1893, thanks to a new philosophical journal promoted by Ravaisson, the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. Once more, Bergson adapted. In 1900, after years of teaching at the Lycée Henri IV and the ENS – including giving lectures on Fichte and Plotinus that familiarized him with metaphysics[50] – Bergson, with Ribot's help, obtained a temporary lectureship in Charles Lévêque's chair at the Collège de France. Over the last decade, his courses on Fichte and on Plotinus had already made him acquainted with metaphysics. In 1903, he applied to both the new chair of modern philosophy at the Collège and to Ravaisson's chair at the *Académie des sciences morales*. His reintroduction of the notion of "intuition" and the more Ravaissonian metaphysical twist he gave his philosophy, as well as his diminishing interest in questions of physiology, neurology, and alienism, were all part of this new, winning strategy of adaptation.

Contingency of the Laws of Nature (5), claimed that the question of causality pertained to both "metaphysics and the positive sciences." In *Matter and Memory* (e.g. 345–46/280–81), metaphysics features as a synonym of "dogmatism."

[50] I thank Marcos Camolezi for alerting me to the importance of Bergson's change of direction. See his "La causalité chez Henri Bergson."

Bergson and Naturalism

Stéphane Madelrieux
Translated by Nils F. Schott

Nature, Matter, and Life

Is Bergson a naturalist philosopher? If we take "naturalism" in a methodological sense, then Bergson clearly is not a naturalist. Methodological naturalism holds that there is no specifically philosophical knowledge outside of or beyond empirical knowledge and that within empirical knowledge, there is no absolute heterogeneity between the knowledge of the natural sciences and the knowledge of the human sciences. Bergson on the contrary defends the idea of a dualism between the philosophical and the scientific ways of knowledge ("intuition" and "analysis") and asserts that transposing schemata of scientific thinking elaborated for the purpose of knowing matter into knowledge of the human mind only leads to distortions and illusions.

If, however, we take "naturalism" in the ontological sense of the word, the question becomes more complex, for it does make sense to say that Bergson's vitalism is a form of naturalism. What may prevent us from seeing this immediately is the common identification of naturalism and materialism (or physicalism). Bergson's philosophy, though, unfolds precisely at a historical moment in which this type of materialist naturalism appears insufficient and new forms of naturalism see the light of day. The ontological naturalisms developed since the seventeenth century take the form of great metaphysical systems that seek to generalize the results obtained by physics (which, since the discovery of the laws of motion, had been the most advanced natural science) to include all phenomena, thus human phenomena as well. Their first limitation is their dogmatism. They take certain results of the contemporary sciences as if these represented final truths about nature and, absolutizing them, install them as metaphysical truths on which to build a new systematic view of the whole of nature. The naturalisms of the eighteenth century thus absolutize the laws of mechanics, whereas those of the nineteenth century set up the laws

of thermodynamics as new principles of the system of nature. The second limitation is their reductionism. By subjecting the whole of nature to scientific laws set up as metaphysical principles, these naturalisms fatally end up wanting to reduce all the results obtained by the other sciences to the basic science from which they have drawn their fundamental principle. Most of the time, then, they seek to explain the whole of natural and human phenomena by the regulated redistribution of matter in movement.

Against the mechanicist spirit of this old naturalism, the new naturalisms that emerge in the second half of the nineteenth century see in the life sciences and their new discoveries a strategic link between the physical sciences and philosophical reflection on human being. They conceive of life as an intermediary and a mediator that both testifies to a point of contact or transmission between matter and the human being and at the same time marks the impossibility of reducing the products of the mind to a mere redistribution of moving matter. The stakes thus consist in elaborating an ontological naturalism that is no longer reductionist and capable of reinserting mind into nature without purely and simply identifying it with the body, a body itself reduced to being merely a part of physical matter. Among these new naturalists, the pragmatists in particular insist on this irreducibility of life to matter, and thereby mark the autonomization of biology vis-à-vis physics. Thus, in his analysis of reflex action, James explains that the reflex defense action of a living organism, such as a frog, even when deprived of a brain, is not a simple mechanical effect of the stimulus but an adjusted response that aims at removing the irritation. The frog's behavior is thus a finalized behavior, and it cannot be explained in terms of efficient mechanical causality alone.[1] Contrary to what mechanicists have affirmed since Descartes, animals are not machines.[2] It is nonetheless possible, despite this antimechanicism, to argue that James's psychology is naturalist because he thinks that the mind can be studied only from the perspective of life and that the psychologist's basic principle is to take into consideration "the fact that minds inhabit environments

[1] James, *Principles 1*, 21–23 and 27–32.
[2] In *La formation du concept de réflexe*, Canguilhem shows how, despite appearances, reflex theory is not by nature mechanicist. On the contrary, the formation of the concept of reflex owes more to antimechanicist vitalists, from Willis to Pflüger and Prochaska, than to mechanicists, from Descartes to Hall. This antimechanicism goes hand in hand with the emergence of a veritable physiology that is no longer merely an anatomy animated according to mechanical principles (see his "La constitution de la physiologie comme science" and "Le concept de réflexe au XIXe siècle"). On the role of the antimechanicist interpretation of reflex action in understanding the nature of the human mind and, more generally, on the antireductionist naturalism of James's psychology, see my *William James*.

which act on them and on which they in turn react."[3] Human beings are indeed part of nature, albeit not because they are reducible to a material body but because they are, above all, living organisms.

The Vitalism and Naturalism of Bergson

It seems that Bergson's vitalism corresponds to this type of nonmaterialist naturalism. In keeping with the pragmatists and with functional psychology, he declares, for instance, on the subject of psychology: "In the labyrinth of acts, states and faculties of mind, the thread which one must never lose is the one furnished by biology. *Primum vivere*. Memory, imagination, conception and perception, generalization in short, are not there 'for nothing, for pleasure.' . . . [I]t is because they are useful, because they are necessary to life, that they are what they are" (PM 1295–96/61). The intellect is not a psychological faculty distinct from memory, imagination, perception, generalization, and so on; it is the capacity to use these different psychological functions to solve the problems the environment poses to the individuals, problems to which instinct cannot respond. And like instinct, the intellect serves the fundamental needs of the life of the organism. In the same vein, Bergson in his last book affirms, on the subject of sociology and the other human sciences (historical, moral, political, and religious studies), that "we must search below the social accretions, get down to Life, of which human societies, as indeed the human species altogether, are but manifestations . . . [A]ll morality, be it pressure or aspiration, is in essence biological . . . Intelligence and sociability must be given their proper place back in the general evolution of life . . . [A]t bottom, the social is of the vital [*le social est au fond du vital*]" (DSMR 1060–61/100–101, 1073/116, and 1075/119 [modified]).[4] When we read these formulas literally, it does indeed seem we are dealing with a naturalism. Here, everything human is natural: not only the human species biologically defined, but, also and above all, human societies and moral values, which do not overlay the level of nature as entities of a different ontological order. There is continuity, not absolute rupture, when we pass from the biological level to the human level. In that sense, there is no dualism between nature

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[3] James, *Principles 1*, 19.
[4] Compare his commentary on Loisy: "On the subject of this [moral] obligation, I tried to establish that the philosophers never succeed in explaining it, in engendering it, because, without noticing, they always give it to themselves first . . . *It is there* because it is a *biological* given. The correspondence of the social instinct of Hymnoptera and human societies is one of my fundamental findings" (Belloy, "Une mise au point de Bergson sur Les deux sources," 133).

and human experience: the latter is a phase in the development of the former or one of its "manifestations."[5]

But the thesis I would like to defend here is that Bergson's naturalism, despite these quotations and proximities, is really a pseudo-naturalism – in just the way that Bergson himself denounced Spenser's evolutionism as a pseudo-evolutionism. This pseudo-naturalism seems convincing and derives its persuasive force from the fact that it appears to propose a true alternative to reductionist naturalism without running into the old difficulties of spiritualist antinaturalism, which introduces supernatural entities into nature from the outside. Bergson's philosophy and pragmatism thus join hands in the undertaking – a promising project, in my view – to find a third way that would allow them to go beyond the frontal opposition between materialism and the old spiritualism, reductionism and antinaturalism. Both seek to do justice to the specificity of human reality (which the spiritualists absolutize by separating it from nature) as much as to the naturality of its mode of existence (which the materialists reduce by identifying it with another mode of natural existence, that of physical phenomena). Bergson's solution, however, only appears to be one; it does not constitute a true alternative.

An Expanded Naturalism?

The Symmetrical Shortcomings of Reductionist Naturalism and Exceptionalist Spiritualism

Let me begin by showing the appeal Bergson's position has when we resituate it within the field of the theoretical options of his age. Bergson seems to avoid two symmetrical pitfalls. On the one hand, he dismisses unilinear evolutionism, embodied at the time by Spencer's system, which seamlessly derives the complex social forms of human societies from the rudimentary social forms observable among animals. On the other hand, he rejects an exceptionalism according to which nothing that is (properly) human can have a natural origin.

The problem of evolutionism is that it lacks a *sufficiently complex conception of the social*. It unfolds the transition from animal societies to human societies along a single line of evolution. But evolution works by

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[5] As Worms puts it, "in confronting obligation, fabulation, or domination, Bergson operates a *naturalization* in the strict sense, seeking to explain [them] by their biological function, their evolutionary and adaptive function, if you like, and he does so in opposition to other explanations, sociological or philosophical, by society or by reason, which are replaced by life as a primitive fact or principle of explication" (Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie*, 342, Worms's emphasis).

differentiation. In particular, Bergson shows how evolution differentiates into two great diverging lines at the end of which there are two great types of societies, that of human beings and that of Hymenoptera. From *Creative Evolution* onward, Bergson thus argues that there are not one but two ways of passing from the biological to the social or of rooting the social in the biological, and that one therefore cannot simply, without further qualification, reduce human forms of social organization to nonhuman animal societies. The division of human societies into closed and open societies in *Two Sources* further highlights this complexity. It is worth pointing out, however, that human closed societies, including in their naturalness, are unique in one way; namely in that intellect takes the place of instinct as the mode in which activities are divided and coordinated among individuals.

The symmetrically inverse problem of exceptionalism is that it lacks a *sufficiently rich conception of the biological*. It does not see that "life" does not only mean conservation, reproduction, passive adaptation, or imperceptible variations, but also creation and the appearance of discontinuous novelties, and it fails to see that even the simplest living organisms, such as amebae, already manifest this creative élan. To trace human societies back to life thus does not necessarily imply reducing moral obligations and political institutions to their pragmatic function, which is to ensure the survival of the human group. To set human beings on a course of a moral progress that distances them from their violent instincts, there is no need to invoke the idea of a transcendent spirit. Provided it is understood correctly, life itself, or biology in "the very wide meaning it should have" (DSMR 1061/101), suffices to justify the idea of a possible spiritual progress of humanity by turning this progress into the extension of the progress that biological evolution in its creative movement already manifests.

Lacking in both these cases, evolutionist naturalism and exceptionalist spiritualism, is the concrete thickness of the relation between the biological and the social. It is sacrificed for the benefit of an identity of or an abstract opposition between two far-too-large terms, nature and society, so much so that finding the continuity between the biological and the social again demands not only filling in the gap between the terms but their simultaneous, joint reconstruction. Such a reconstruction allows for salvaging what is true in each of the opposing positions without being encumbered by their limitations.

The Third Way of Bergson's Philosophy

From Bergson's point of view, the idea of a difference in kind (*différence de nature*) between the human and the animal must be defended, with the

exceptionalists, against the reductionist evolutionists. But unlike the exceptionalists, Bergson in his defense does not rely on the representation of a fixed and ready-made division – such as between Reason and Instinct – as if such a division separated two classes already given outside any evolution or whose essence would have been defined beforehand. On the contrary, this difference moves all along the process of evolution. Properly speaking, it is even that which is evolving, beyond the species, by multiplying itself: a difference that differentiates itself into the animal and the vegetal, the vertebrate and the arthropod, and finally between the human vertebrate and the nonhuman vertebrate.

Correlatively, the idea of a unity of the living, be it human or nonhuman, that is more than simply a disparate collection of species and individuals must be defended, with the evolutionists this time, against the exceptionalist thesis of a rigid and absolute difference between human and animal. But unlike the evolutionists, Bergson holds that we must not look for this unity of all the living in a product of evolution, however far back in the past it may lie. We must not look for it, that is, in what has evolved but in what is evolving; in the primitive unity of a movement that prolongs itself and can only prolong itself by differentiating into divergent tendencies. The unity of the impulse of such a movement – that is to say, the unity of life making itself, rather than the unity of any individualized living being already made, however ancient and shared it may be – explains that we sometimes find convergences within diverging lines of evolution, such as the presence of an organ of vision or the very existence of societies among ants and among human beings. The differentiation of human beings relative to all other living beings thus does not prevent them from appearing to recapitulate the entire process of the differentiation of life, in the form of vestigial tendencies, so to speak, that testify to an origin they share with what they have differentiated from. The tendency toward vegetative life, toward the unconsciousness into which life falls every time the effort required to be conscious and mobile slackens, bears witness to its kinship with the vegetal (EC 591/73). And habits for their part, as quasi-automatic tendencies to obey rules, bear witness to a fringe of social instinct that surrounds the individual intellect and recalls our kinship with the Hymnoptera (DSMR 995–1000/25–30 and 1075/118).

Bergson's intermediary position thus amounts both to underscoring the continuity between biological life and human social, moral, and political life, and to defending the irreducible specificity of this social, moral, and political life over against the biological nature of the human being, understood only as

the sum of its instinctive tendencies to act, which are related to the constitu-
tion of its organic structure. Bergson demonstrates the irreducibility twice:
first according to the differentiation of human beings' naturally closed society
over against animals' naturally closed society (following the divergence intel-
lect – instinct), then according to the difference between human open society
over against human closed society (here following the divergence between
intuition and intellect, understood as tendencies that espouse the "two senses
of life," the creative-spiritual and the adaptive-pragmatic). But these tenden-
cies are tendencies of life itself. Bergson not only makes the intellect just as
natural as instinct by turning it into the mode of knowledge and action the
human species has developed in its interaction with its environments, and in
accordance with the anatomy and physiology of human living beings (the
emergence of the brain). He naturalizes intuition as well, turning it into the
development (the "enlargement"), in human beings, of that instinctive fringe
that testifies to its shared origin with other animals, a development that allows
for completing and counterbalancing the work of the intellect.[6] Like pragma-
tism, Bergson's philosophy would thus offer a nonreductionist form of
naturalism, even if it is constructed in its own particular way. It would then
be a kind of expanded naturalism based on considering nature not only in
terms of its natured aspect (to which the reductionist naturalists confine
themselves) but in terms of its naturing aspect as well.[7]

A Philosophical Conservatism

I would nonetheless like to show that in reality, Bergson is *not a naturalist
at all*, even an "expanded" one, and that the integration of biology into
social, moral, and political philosophy he operates is in fact only a means of
salvaging a very traditional philosophical project. Over against the life
sciences and the intellectual revolutions they trigger throughout the nine-
teenth century, Bergson finds himself in a situation similar to that of

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[6] "[I]t is to the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us. By intuition I mean instinct that has
become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it
indefinitely" (EC 645/114, Bergson's emphasis). When the unconscious knowledge of well-defined
living beings (the larvae in the case of *Sphex*) becomes a conscious knowledge of life in general and
not restricted to the good of the particular organism that obtains it – an enlargement that,
incidentally, has its necessary, albeit not sufficient, condition in the intellect and its power of
reflection, which detaches the human being from its immediate and particular interests – instinct
becomes intuition.

[7] "[I]n passing from social solidarity to the brotherhood of man, we break with one particular nature,
but not with all nature. It might be said, by slightly distorting the terms of Spinoza, that it is to get
back to *natura naturans* that we break away from *natura naturata*" (DSMR 1023–24/58).

seventeenth-century philosophers seeking to minimize the shock of discoveries in the physical sciences about the infinite. Deleuze, after Merleau-Ponty, is undoubtedly right to consider one of the characteristic, if not constitutive traits of classical philosophy to be that it begins with the infinite.[8] But in reality, the projects of Descartes, Malebranche, Pascal, Spinoza, or Leibniz have none of the innocence he ascribes to them because, for these philosophers, the task is to integrate the scientists' infinites into philosophy the better to be able to subordinate them to a higher-order infinite of perfection and reality, an infinite that is metaphysical, properly speaking, beyond any physical, quantitative, or numerical infinite (and is identified with God). Such a hierarchization of infinites allows for once more endowing the values and ends of the human being, the meaning of human life, with an absolute foundation, a foundation threatened by the scientific revelation that nature has no absolute center.

In the same way, Bergson seeks to minimize the shock that the biological discovery of evolution constituted for representing what the place of humanity means by subordinating this evolution of the living to a higher-order life (which may be identified with God). The dose of naturalism thereby integrated into the system is thus being integrated only the better to preserve a fundamentally antinaturalist metaphysical position. In support, I would like to develop two arguments, both of which draw on the kind of naturalism suggested by pragmatism to find a counterpoint and mark the difference between naturalism and Bergsonian pseudo-naturalism.

A Supernaturalized Nature

The Primacy of Mind over Life

The first argument I deploy concerns Bergson's conception of nature and of life. Jean-Louis Vieillard-Baron has rightly responded to Henri Gouhier's thesis – according to which *Creative Evolution* constitutes the completion of the trajectory of Bergson, who, at first a disciple of Spencer's, is said finally to have managed to substitute a real philosophy of nature or of life for the latter's pseudo-philosophy of life or of nature – that *Creative Evolution* instead seeks to unveil "the breath of spirit in nature."[9] It would be wrong to count Bergson among the philosophers

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[8] See Merleau-Ponty, ed., *Les philosophes*, 455, and Deleuze, *Foucault*, 125.
[9] Gouhier, *Bergson et le Christ des Évangiles*, 18, and Vieillard-Baron, *Le Secret de Bergson*, 225.

of nature or of life: he is, first of all, a philosopher of the spirit or of Mind, someone for whom the philosophy of mind is the first philosophy, the one to yield the true ontology. He is interested in nature and in life (and later in moral, political, and religious history) only insofar as he finds there the different degrees of manifestations of Mind that endow them with their reality and their own value.

The guiding thesis of *Creative Evolution*, indeed, is that "[i]n reality, life is of the psychological order" (EC 713/165). Life is secondary to mind, according to Bergson; it can be explained only if we posit, at the origin of life, a form of consciousness. Certainly, to make sense, the notion of such a consciousness must be nuanced in two ways. On the one hand, it is not a consciousness of the kind actualized, thanks both to biological speciation and individuality, in human beings: the part cannot explain the whole. Bergson thus accounts for the evolution of species by an "immense current of consciousness" (ES 829/25), a suprahuman and supra-individual consciousness. Such a "supraconsciousness" (EC 703/158) is said to run through matter to produce, one after the other, the living species, all of them thereby constituted out of a union of consciousness and matter. This is how he explains that plants are *de jure* conscious, even if this consciousness is in fact dormant (EC 590/73). It also accounts for the way in which the human being "might be considered the reason for the existence of the entire organization of life on our planet" (EC 652/119): in the human, the supraconsciousness has succeeded in producing a species conscious of itself (free and intelligent). On the other hand, mind must not be understood like a thing, as if it were a substance united with another substance, organic matter. The mind, according to Bergson, must be understood as an activity, namely a twofold activity. It simultaneously retains or conserves the past in the present (memory) and stands in creative tension toward the future (will and power of choice). Matter, in turn, is the effect of the interruption or relaxation of this double effort.

But these two precisions only reformulate the thesis of the primacy of mind over matter; they do not overturn it. Bergson, speaking of the meaning of evolution, does not hesitate to conclude that "[p]hilosophy introduces us thus into the spiritual life." The old "doctrines of the spirit" were "right to attribute to man a privileged place in nature" due to the existence and the nature of the human mind. They were only wrong to think, as we saw, that to protect the dignity of such a spiritual life from the encroachments of science and the claims of materialism, it was necessary to "isolat[e] the spiritual life from all the rest, [to] suspend . . . it in space as high as possible above the earth" (EC 722–23/172). On the contrary, it is by

delving back into the details of the evolution of life on earth that Bergson thinks he can confirm, on a more secure empirical basis, the intuitions of ancient spiritualism. The effect of the third way Bergson's position gives rise to is due only to this change of *method* vis-à-vis ancient spiritualism; in fact, it aligns with the latter's fundamental theses and therefore does not proffer an alternative as regards the *content* of the doctrine. Bergson's third way is a variant of spiritualism, not an alternative path between materialism and spiritualism.

The Inexplicability of Consciousness

In Bergson, there is one thing the evolution of species does not and cannot explain: consciousness itself. It is certainly possible to account for the emergence and development of *human* consciousness in naturalist terms, as a function of the degree of complexity of nervous matter that allows the "current of consciousness" to free itself from matter in ways it had never been able to before. But it is not possible to explain the emergence of consciousness itself since it is, on the contrary, consciousness that explains life and its evolution. Nervous systems – and the brain in particular – are like wind organs whose tubes allow for the conversion of currents of air into musical sounds. The resulting sounds, with their different pitches, represent different types of consciousness, and they depend on the dimensions of the tubes, the tone holes, and, generally, the complexity of the machine. The organ does not itself produce the current of air that preexists and animates it, however. Indeed, the musical sound is but the channeled and modified – individualized – movement of this pure current through the material instrument whose function and value consists in rendering it ever more sonorous, actualizing all the harmonies of the wind – the way prisms, in a sense, manifest "all the colors of the rainbow," which are virtually contained in pure white light (PM 1455/267).

Taking up other images Bergson uses, we might say that the history of nature (matter and life plus the human mind) is but the history of the sudden falling asleep and of the slow, progressive awakening of a consciousness numbed by matter, an awakening that leads to its opening its eyes: the history of the emergence of human consciousness. While the determinate form of consciousness in this or that living species, the human among them, can thus be explained in terms of natural, physical, and biological conditions (physical matter, the organic body) – which explain the correlation of mental activity and brain activity, just as there is a correlation between the sounds produced and the pipes of the organ –

consciousness itself, in turn, escapes all these conditions. Consciousness is a supernatural, a supranatural phenomenon because nature cannot be explained without the Mind that animates it while the Mind can *de jure* be grasped without nature and outside of nature.

Dewey's naturalism is of an entirely different kind.[10] When he invokes a principle of continuity and even growth in nature, we must guard against the equivocity of similar expressions in Bergson, for example, "the idea of creation ... is merged in that of growth" (EC 699/155). In Dewey, the meaning of the term "continuity" is first of all negative, and it "excludes complete rupture on one side and mere repetition of identities on the other; it precludes reduction of the 'higher' to the 'lower' just as it precludes complete breaks and gaps ... What *is* excluded by the postulate of continuity is the appearance upon the scene of a totally new outside force as a cause of changes that occur."[11] To explain this change, produced in the course of evolution, that consists in the emergence of consciousness in certain animal species such as the human, Bergson takes consciousness already as a given. Human consciousness exists only because suprahuman consciousness exists already and limits itself. There is thus no empirical condition for the emergence of consciousness itself. Neither the physical properties of matter nor the biological properties of living beings, no matter how complex they might be, furnish such conditions since they are on the contrary conditioned by the retentive and creative properties of consciousness. The emergence of human consciousness is thus not explained: what makes this consciousness, what makes it so that it retains the past and is pregnant with the future, escapes all conditioning by existing physical and biological properties. The only thing that does not evolve in *Creative Evolution*, and the one thing that has no origin, therefore, is consciousness in itself; only its various empirical manifestations in the physical, organic, and psychological realms are changing and evolving.

To propose an alternative between materialism – which reduces the higher to the lower – and spiritualism – which, as is the case in Bergson, absorbs the lower in the higher – Dewey seeks to show how it is possible to think nature as developing in several great stages, where each stage emerges

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[10] James on the contrary agrees with Bergson on the idea of such a supraconsciousness; see the organ metaphor I have borrowed from his "Human Immortality" (*Essays*, 86) and the acknowledgement in their correspondence that their conceptions converge: "it may amuse you to see a formulation like your own that the brain is an organ of *filtration* for spiritual life" (James to Bergson, 14 December 1902, *The Correspondence of William James*, vol. 10, 167–68, here 168, James's emphasis, cf. my comments in Bergson, *Sur le pragmatisme de William James*, 125–26, notes 60 and 68).

[11] Dewey, *Logic*, 30–31, Dewey's emphasis.

from the preceding stage without being reducible to it. Contrary to Bergson's top-down schema, Dewey's bottom-up schema is truly natural-ist. "Mind" does not refer to a substance any more than it does in Bergson, but that is because it names a kind of specific interaction that emerges when certain physical and biological conditions are met, the way life emerges when a certain degree of complexity appears in physical interactions. Dewey thus distinguishes the three "levels" of matter, which is empirically (chronologically) first, as scientific induction proves; of life; and then of the mind. He aims to make mind a specific mode of the behavior of the living (and to make life a specific mode of the behavior of matter) without erasing the irreducible difference designated by the term "mind" in the interac-tions of an organism with its environment (or by the term "life" in the interactions of a physical object with the objects with which it associates). This so-called "emergentist" position amounts to defending the thesis that there is no need to set up matter and life against the mind to sustain the idea that unforeseeable newness can appear in nature: change, aleatory variation, non-predetermined interactions suffice – which, unlike Bergson's philosophy, makes this a philosophy of nature and of mind in tune with Darwinism.[12]

From Supernature to Superhumanity

Let us draw out the moral and political implications of this first argument. Because the explanation of natural phenomena of the living, of the evolution of plants and animals, depends on a supranatural force, there is no reason why the transition from the biological to the social and the political should be qualified as naturalist in this sense: the dice are loaded from the outset because nature has been supernaturalized. Since Bergson introduces supernaturalism already in the explication of natural phenomena, he can derive properly human – social, moral, and political – phenomena from the biological with-out fear of naturalizing the human being. So much does nature in its existence and evolution depend on supernature that culture itself, when thought in extension of nature, only continues (and cannot but continue) the movement of the mind, both in the élan driving forward and in the entanglements and stops that are due to the material conditions of humanity. The positive sense of human history is thus all traced out, even if the stages and details of its path

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[12] For a more detailed exposition of Dewey's naturalism, see my *La philosophie de John Dewey*, 41–95. For a critique of Bergson's psychological conception of life founded on a different kind of nonreductionist naturalism, namely Canguilhem's, see Le Blanc, "Le problème de la création."

are not filled in. The movement of universal self-consciousness awakening and becoming conscious of itself must lead to the idea of a fraternal communion of human consciousnesses, of a true community in which the consciousness of each is no longer prevented from communing by the individuation that the separating bodies impose (which, as Bergson writes at the end of *Two Sources*, is what the research on telepathic communication is already telling us).

The naturalism Bergson seems to propose at the end of the first chapter of *Two Sources* is thus only local. Even if it is rich in insights that may contribute to a truly naturalist and nonreductionist perspective on moral and political matters, it is framed by and integrated into a global super-naturalism that fixes the point of departure of nature in supraconsciousness and indicates the point of arrival of culture in the spiritual union of humans through and in the love of God. As Darwinism and the naturalization of psychology threaten the exceptional place of the human in nature, Bergson seeks to endow human life with an *absolute* sense once more by situating the appearance of the human among living species directly in the lineage of the unconditioned. In its physical and biological determinations, including the human being as biological species, nature is but a necessary detour: an obstacle the mind needed to clear in order to come into its own once more in the superhumanity constituted by the mystic community.

The Certainty of Difference

Differences in Kind in Nature

My second argument concerns the idea of a "difference in kind." Deleuze recasts Bergson as a philosopher of difference and stresses that intuition is above all a method by which to "rediscover the true differences in kind."[13] This reading strategy allows him to minimize Bergson's spiritualism[14] and one might therefore think that it would allow for bringing out his naturalism. I would now like to show that, on the contrary, taking differences in kind as a starting point for understanding Bergson's naturalism is one more way of confirming that Bergson brings back the most classic of metaphysical projects under the cover of biologizing human phenomena.

In Bergson, differences in kind correspond to dualisms, which, as readers are well aware, are quite numerous in his works. Dualisms present themselves as couples of logically exclusive concepts (to assert a dualism of

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[13] Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference" and *Bergsonism*, 21.
[14] Compare my "Lire James, relire Bergson."

mind and body is to assert that a property X cannot simultaneously be spiritual and corporeal); they are, most of the time, axiologically hierarchized (the dominant tradition in ancient, medieval, and early modern philosophy values the mind more highly than the body); and they can be charged with performing methodological operations, such as an algorithm of division or a method of dichotomy (it is thus possible, for example, to divide the mind in turn into a more spiritual part, reason, and a more corporeal one, the passions). What properly defines a dualism, though, is its ontological dimension. A dualism is a conceptual opposition that has an ontological foundation to the extent that the conceptual opposition corresponds to the "articulations of the real," to a "difference in kind," to tendencies within being itself. These are categorial in the metaphysical sense of the term, that is to say, logical predicates that correspond to genera of being even if Bergson thinks of these genera as dynamic tendencies, as currents among which reality is divided, rather than as static classes.

And it is this ontological foundation of the categories that explains the three other characteristics. The dichotomy method corresponds to the discovery of the genus of being to which this or that particular being belongs. Translated into Bergson's dynamism, this amounts to knowing on which divergent line of being this or that particular living being is to be placed. There are tendencies where the materiality of the body wins out and others that go in the direction of liberating spirituality. Logical exclusivity, in turn, reflects the heterogeneity of classes or currents of being. Even if there are empirical mixtures on the level of an individual or a species, there is no mixing of genera on the level of tendencies themselves, which do not blend and exclude each other in their divergent directions. Thus, even if the terms of the dualism are tendencies and imply changes (contrary to the ancient metaphysics of classes), the *difference itself* between tendencies is fixed and absolute. The discovery of intermediate empirical mixtures, between the vegetal and the animal, for example, or the human and the nonhuman, will *never* throw the dualisms into question because the tendencies are primary over against the mixtures, which are only a blend of *pure* tendencies that, *de jure*, exist separately. Axiological hierarchization, finally, depends on the degree of reality that can be assigned to each genus or current of being. For example, "it is the evolution of the animal, rather than that of the vegetable, that indicates, on the whole, the *fundamental* direction of life" (ᴇᴄ 594/76, my emphasis). The animal has a degree of reality higher than that of the vegetal, which is more material and thus less living to the extent that consciousness is coextensive

with life. Within evolution, degrees of consciousness thus correspond to degrees of reality.

Ontological Source and Hierarchization of Living Beings

To trace the different currents of consciousness within the evolution of species, some currents more dormant, some more awake, is thus *ipso facto* to find the genera of being, expressed in the great dualisms. And to employ them as means to parse and classify the entirety of living beings is to assign to each its rank in the chain of being according to its ontological dignity, which is measured by its lesser or greater distance from the source. Bergson does not think this proximity or distance chronologically. Unicellular organisms are ontologically more distant from the source than humans are, even if they are chronologically closer to the empirical origin of life while humans are evolution's latecomers. This once again confirms for us Bergson's supernaturalism: if we seek to, in his words, understand the "meaning of life" (as the title of the third chapter of *Creative Evolution* has it), we must subordinate the empirical chronology of species to the onto-logical hierarchy of beings. And this goes very far, so far that it is the mystic being – a species *sui generis*, one who goes beyond the limits of the human condition, that is to say, the natural conditions of life, by his or her communion with supernature (DSMR 1056/95 and 1203/268) – who reveals the ultimate meaning of life on earth. Contrary to Darwin, who subordinates the classification of species to empirical genealogy, Bergson continues the program of subordinating empirical genealogy to the onto-logical classification in the chain of being.

Bergson thus operates a synthesis between the classical schema of the chain of beings, which places the human being in a superior position to the animal rest, and the Darwinian tree, which makes the human the end point of one evolutionary line among others, without any ontological privilege. The illustration (fig. 1) resituates the mystic superhumanity in its proper place as the continuation of the élan vital beyond humanity as a biological species: Saint Teresa of Avila is "closer" to the ontological source than bacteria are, although they are closer to the empirical origin of life. Of the chain of beings, Bergson retains the unity of vectorialization (even if only in the form of a weak finalism that points in only one direction, that of the liberation of the mind); and from the Darwinian tree, he takes the temporalized production of differences. The integration of humanity into the natural evolution of species can thus take place without sacrificing the exceptional meaning of its form of life, the only one, properly speaking, to
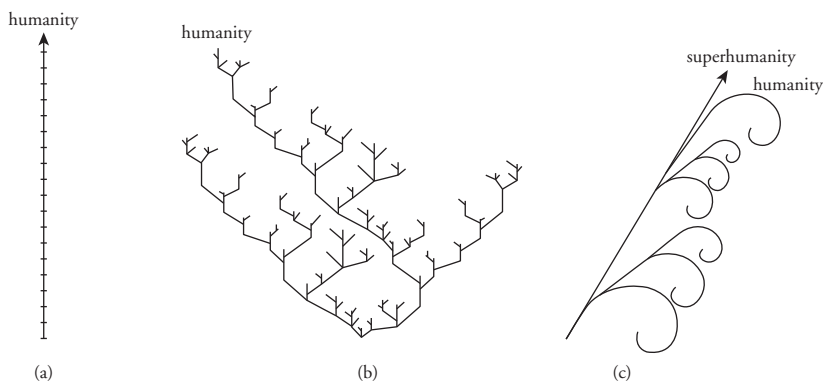
Figure 1 (a) Chain of being (b) Darwinian tree (c) Bergsonian sheaf

constitute a "success." (Bergson considers the other lines to be waste or failures because, due to their materiality, they stray too far from the gradient of the spiritual vector [EC 720–21/170–71].)

Moral and Political Foundationalism

When we now return to Bergson's naturalism as articulated on the limited subject of the transition from the biological to the social, we see that Bergson, with new means, only perpetuates the old metaphysical tradition that consists in founding ethics and politics on ontology and even, in this particular case, on ontotheology. Dewey characterizes the project of metaphysics by noting that for metaphysics, ultimate reality is at the same time the object of higher knowledge and the source of moral authority. This triangulation of being, knowledge, and value explains why metaphysics develops in the form of an ontology that hierarchizes the genera of being; an epistemology that hierarchizes the types of knowledge; and a morality (in the wide sense) that hierarchizes the types of good. In such a triangular setup between being in itself, epistemic certainty, and moral values, the principles that must guide our moral and political conduct come to depend on the type of knowledge being discloses to us beyond its phenomenal manifestations. The direction of human behavior thus depends on an antecedent nonhuman reality humans are tasked with discovering.[15]

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[15] Dewey, *Quest*, 27 and 41.

The historical trajectory Dewey sketches in *The Quest for Certainty* of the different ways in which modern philosophers have attempted to continue such a metaphysical project ends with Spencer. In fact, we find the same triangular setup in Spencer's system, in the sense that the principle of evolution is at the same time the very principle of reality such as the authoritative knowledge shows it to be necessary *and* the source that guarantees the moral direction of human action. Moral authority (the good understood as perfect adaptation of the human to its environment) is thus founded on being itself, and humanity finds its efforts in that direction *guaranteed* by the very nature of reality:

> The doctrine that universal evolution is the highest principle of the physical world, one in which all natural laws are brought to unity, is accompanied with the idea that the goal of evolution marks the ideal of moral and religious beliefs and endeavours ... All evils are the fruits of transitional maladjustments in the movement of evolution. The perfect adjustment of man, personal and collective, to the environment is the evolutionary term, and is one which signifies the elimination of all evil, physical and moral ... In objection to this or that phase of the Spencerian system it is easily forgotten that fundamentally he is occupied with the usual quest for a certainty in which a warrant of necessary knowledge is employed to establish the certainty of Good in reality.[16]

Despite the numerous adjustments he makes vis-à-vis the content of traditional metaphysics and despite his criticism of Spencer's pseudo-evolutionism, Bergson retains their general project. The ontological *source* of nature and humanity indicates the direction human moral and political action is to take in the future. And this source is revealed by a specific mode of knowledge, intuition, whose certainty flows necessarily from its immediacy. The very idea of an immediate knowledge obtained through a total or partial identification with the object known – which is authoritative, that is to say, leaves no space for doubt in the moment of its being given, and on which the inferential (conceptual, propositional) modes of knowledge depend – belongs to the metaphysical setup.[17] Even if, in Bergson, the details of political organization are not given, the general direction is there; it exists already, it is already given, and it suffices to "get back into the very impetus of life" (DSMR 1208/273) to make society progress. The metaphors of a path to be taken again – "by setting out once more we are merely

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[16] Dewey, *Quest*, 52.
[17] Long before Sellars, Peirce (in his anti-Cartesian writings) and Dewey both criticized the idea of immediate consciousness. Dewey's originality lies in showing that this idea goes hand in hand with the effort to endow values with an ontological foundation.

willing again what we had willed at the start" (DSMR 1241/312) – indicate clearly enough that the political goal and the moral ideal of evolution are to be sought in its still-acting source and that all the ills of humanities arise only when it strays from this path. If, then, societies are led in the direction indicated by the vital élan, they cannot go wrong, for such actions would be guaranteed by being itself, by its very movement, which societies would but extend. We would thus have the *absolute* guarantee of being in the right.

Under the cover of naturalism, then, Bergson has but proposed a particularly subtle variant of foundationalism.[18] At this point we observe the extreme difference between Bergson's philosophy and pragmatism: the simple fact of posing the problem of moral and political conduct in terms of an ultimate metaphysical *source* that serves as a foundation, rather than in terms of predictable empirical *consequences* that serve as factors of revision and correction is sufficiently eloquent on this difference. Bergson's philosophy thus merely takes up traditional foundationalist metaphysics because metaphysics was the first philosophy of difference in kind: the postulate that there is a difference in kind, that is to say, that there are two natures in nature, two orders of reality in being, and that the truly good must be founded in being and not in appearing, a postulate that thus recognizes two types of value and two sources of morality, a natural and a conventional morality, is even the postulate from which he starts. Bergson's originality is to interiorize this ancient dualism within life and experience, so much so that the natural goods of the closed society (protection, egotistical survival) are inferior – by nature and intrinsically, not relatively – to the true moral goods of the open society (love, fraternity), as the superior mode of knowledge of intuition, rather than the social sciences, reveals to us.

In conclusion I would say that Bergson never really attempts the effort to account for the relationships between the biological and political in naturalist (but nonreductive) terms and thus to confront the difficult question of the articulation between natural instincts and the moral and political norms to be recommended. Instead, he short-circuits the problem by setting aside a nonnatural or supernatural foundation for the truly moral

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[18] In this sense, I cannot agree with Camille Riquier's reading of Bergson as an antifoundationalist (see the first chapter of his *Archéologie de Bergson*, 25–117). It is not a change in the characteristics of the foundation when compared with classical, "fixist" metaphysics, the replacement of an immobile with a moving reality, the Cartesian "solid rock" with a "fluid current," that makes it lose its function as the ultimate guarantee of values. The "current" only becomes an adequate image of antifoundationalism once it is detached from the idea of a source that sends the flowing water in the right direction once and for all. Antifoundationalism generally is incompatible with a thinking of the absolute and an epistemology of immediate consciousness.

and political values (those of the open society). The natural war instinct may explain the lower political order of closed societies very well, but the higher political order of open societies is founded on a love that has nothing natural and even nothing human about it, not in its true object, God; not in its origin, supraconsciousness; and not in its vector, the mystic superhuman. When we take the dichotomy method back to its ontological foundation, the incorporation of biology and evolution theory into Bergson's system appears secondary and derivative, a new means for an old end, which renders his general perspective unable to respond to our modern questions about the natural continuity of the biological with the political.

Bergson on the True Intellect

Leonard Lawlor

In "The Possible and the Real," Bergson distinguishes between two meanings of the word "possible." On the one hand, something is possible when there is no insurmountable obstacle to block its realization. Here one calls possible what is not impossible. This is a negative sense of the possible. One falls prey to an illusion however, according to Bergson, when one surreptitiously passes from this negative sense to a positive sense.[1] Here, one thinks that the possible is "a kind of pre-existence under the form of an idea." Bergson claims that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was doubtless possible prior to its realization, but only in the sense of there being no insurmountable obstacle blocking that realization. There is no illusion in thinking this kind of possibility. But, Bergson argues, it is "an absurdity" to think that a mind in which Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was "drawn under the form of the possible" as a pre-existing idea would thereby have created *Hamlet*'s reality. You might imagine this prior mind having the idea of *Hamlet* as a kind of pre-existence, but then, as Bergson says, "you are not thinking of all the details in the play." "Gradually," this mind, which seems to precede Shakespeare himself, completes the details, but then it ends up thinking, feeling, perceiving all that Shakespeare thought, felt, and perceived. This prior mind would be then identical to Shakespeare himself. Once the play has its "precise and complete idea," the play is made (PM 1341–42/120 and 1262–63/21–22).

To think that the play precedes its reality as a pre-existing idea is an act of the faculty of the intellect. But to think this way is to miss, and misunderstand, true change and creation. This apparently prior mind amounts to an exaggeration of the human faculty of the intellect. Because of the intellect missing true change, Bergson, throughout his writings, but especially in the second Introduction to *The Creative Mind*,

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[1] In *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson makes the same argument in regard to simultaneity (66/44).

seems to denounce the intellect (PM 1272–73/34–35).[2] ("Intellect" is the Latin translation of the ancient Greek philosophical term, "nous" [DSMR 1029–30/65]). In distinction from instinct (and intuition), the intellect concerns matter, solids, immobility, relations, and discontinuity (PM 1308/78). In its "natural state," as Bergson says, the intellect concerns utility (EC 627/100). It seeks relations of means and ends, which implies that it seeks necessary connections.[3] In fact, it seems a superhuman intellect – or at least, how the intellect pictures a superhuman intellect – would be able to completely predict the future like a mathematical deduction (ESSAI 121/183).[4] This kind of causality, for Bergson, puts the effect into the cause, as if the cause were a container or receptacle. In other words, the intellect follows a simple law, which states that "the present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect is already within the cause" (EC 504/9, also 526/24, 789/222). The effect, in a word, pre-exists in the cause. When the intellect detaches itself from action, when it turns to speculation and becomes "pure intelligence," it composes a metaphysics "in which the totality of the real is postulated complete in eternity" (PM 1320/93; compare EC 527/25). The intellect thinks that there is more in eternity, more contained in it, than in time. With the intellect, time becomes nothing more a realization of a pre-existing model. According to Bergson, the intellect cannot understand life and its creative evolution. And even though the intellect bases itself on our industry, it cannot understand the "upsurge" of invention (EC 538/51 and 634/106).

However, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, a book Bergson conceives as a sequel to *Creative Evolution*, he stresses "the difference between the intellect which understands, discusses, accepts or rejects . . . and the intellect which invents" (DSMR 1012/45).[5] And, returning to "The Possible

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[2] Beside *Creative Evolution*, see, for example, *The Creative Mind* (1263/22): there is a "principle deep-rooted in our intellect that all truth is eternal." See also Chevalier, *Entretiens avec Bergson*, where Bergson says: "In general, I do not speak of reason, because the term is ambiguous. I say 'intellect' for the discursive faculties, and 'intuition' for the superior function of thought" (148; the comment dates from December 1931).

[3] In his 1904–1905 course on the evolution of the problem of freedom, Bergson says, "the natural atmosphere of the intellect is necessity" (Bergson, *L'évolution du problème de la liberté*, 99). There, Bergson also suggests that *nous* is the hyphen between God and the soul (125).

[4] See also Bergson, *L'évolution du problème de la liberté*, 248–49.

[5] In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson also says, "An intellect bent upon the act to be performed and the reaction to follow, feeling its object so as to get its mobile impression at every instant, is an intellect that touches something of the absolute" (EC 491/xxxvi). The difference to which Bergson is pointing here is the difference between an acting intellect and a contemplating intellect. As Bergson says in the 1904–1905 course on freedom, we have a "natural instinct" for the contemplating intellect, and it is the contemplating intellect that thinks it "knows everything" (Bergson, *L'évolution du problème de la liberté*, 342).

and the Real," Bergson says that "the attention of the artist, what I should call his *intellectuality*, is concentrated on creation" (PM 1334/111, my emphasis). If there is an intellect that creates and invents, then this intellect, "the true intellect," does not simply rearrange elements which are pre-given; it does not start from a determinate and complete model (*Mélanges* 556 and ES 942/167). This intellect must have a kind of power or virtuality to it that makes it able to produce novelty. There must be a portion of the unforeseen in intelligence. Intelligence and invention must somehow be connected.

The distinction between the intellect which understands (as in the faculty of the understanding [*l'entendement* or *der Verstand*]) and the intellect which invents makes the status of the intellect in Bergson's thought more uncertain than is usually thought. Although much has been written concerning intuition, and the method of intuition, the status of the true intellect, I think, is largely unknown. For instance, William James thinks that Bergson, with *Creative Evolution*, has "inflicted an irrecoverable death-wound upon Intellectualism."[6] More recently, David Lapoujade reduces the intellect down to its negative or anti-life function. In his classic *Bergson and Philosophy*, John Mullarkey opposes intuition and intelligence. Idella Gallagher presents only Bergson's criticism of the intellect.[7] Therefore, the purpose of this chapter consists in presenting Bergson's different conceptions of the intellect, but especially his conception of the true intellect.

The true intellect is inventive. In order to understand how the true intellect is inventive, we must turn Bergson's concept of the virtual.[8] Let us return to Bergson's example of Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Shakespeare did not have the play in his mind as a pre-existing idea. Yet, it is impossible to imagine this great writer creating the play unless he had some idea of the

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[6] James to Bergson, 13 June 1907, in James, *Correspondence* 11:376–78, here 376.

[7] See Lapoujade, "Intuition and Sympathy," 81–84; Mullarkey, *Bergson and Philosophy*, 159–61; and Gallagher, *Morality in Evolution*, 21–26. There are some exceptions to the negative presentation of the intellect in Bergson. Frédéric Worms indicates the complex status of the intellect in Bergson when he says that the intellect "traverses in depth all the regions of our experience" (*Le vocabulaire de Bergson*, 35). Vladimir Jankélévitch, in *Henri Bergson*, discusses not only intuition but also intellectual effort and the dynamic schema (89–94). Finally, Léon Husson provides a very helpful summary of the development of Bergson's thought on the intellect; he sees a "relativity" between the intellect and intuition (*L'intellectualisme de Bergson*, 133–34). See also, Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, 123–26; Barnard, *Living Consciousness*, 242–44; Grogin, *The Bergsonian Controversy*, 157.

[8] Deleuze of course has alerted us to the importance of the virtual in Bergson and its importance in philosophy generally (*Bergsonism*, 96–97, and *Difference and Repetition*, 201–14). Here, however, we shall not rely on any help from Deleuze's thinking; we shall attempt to define virtuality in terms of Bergson's thought alone. For a study of Bergson on the virtual and Deleuze's appropriation of it, see Renouard, "Virtuel et réminiscence," 285–300.

play. Thus, to speak like Bergson, we can say that *Hamlet* was virtually present in Shakespeare's mind. Without some idea, he would not have had any direction for the creation of the play. He must have had some idea of it. What is this "some idea"? What is this virtuality? Bergson provides an answer to the question in his 1902 essay "Intellectual Effort." The virtual idea is what Bergson calls a "dynamic schema" (ES 936/160).[9] The dynamic schema is a kind of glimpse of the whole thing being considered. The dynamic schema is not a pre-existing idea because it is *only* a view or an outline; it is *not* the complete idea of the whole. When it invents, the true intellect then makes an effort to fill in the schema with content. The content comes from both memories and perceptions. Thus, as we shall see, Bergson's concept of virtuality consists in three aspects: (1) a dynamic schema; (2) perceptions; and (3) memories.[10]

Because the 1902 text "Intellectual Effort" introduces the idea of the dynamic schema, we are going to concentrate on this text. In the first section of this chapter, we shall study the text itself, focusing on the experience of invention. Through the description of the dynamism of intellectual effort, this text defines the true intellect. Bergson states that "Intellectual Effort" concerns the "highest kind of intellectual effort," which is invention (ES 946/172). In the second section, we shall draw on our study of "Intellectual Effort," the results of which will be to offer precise definitions of the dynamic schema and its movement. Finally, in the conclusion we shall return to the three aspects of virtuality we listed above. Here they are again, in the terminology of "Intellectual Effort": the true intellect starts with (1) this specific memory called the "dynamic schema," which is (2) motivated by the current perception, which Bergson calls a "problem," and which is (3) filled in with images, that is, with memory-images. The actualization of the virtual schema in memory-images is a solution to a problem. The virtual schema is a response to obstacles and resistances; in a word, a response to matter. There is invention or creation only in a movement, which goes from the dynamic schema down to memory-images across, around, or through

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[9] In *Time and Free Will*, even though he does not mention the dynamic schema or a schema as such, Bergson's descriptions of the "second meaning of the word causality" closely resembles the process that he describes in "Intellectual Effort" (ESSAI 139–40/211–14). In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson anticipates the dynamic schema when he speaks of a "schema" of the sounds of a language (MM 260/144). In general, in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson associates the word "schema" with the Kantian idea of a schema (MM 344–45/277–78; also see Worms, *Introduction à Matière et Mémoire*, 238). This Kantian association indicates the importance of the adjective "dynamic" in "Intellectual Effort."

[10] My thanks to Tano Posteraro for his insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay.

obstacles.[11] Unfortunately, the definitions themselves are schematic, mere outlines, and virtuality is the attempt to imagine what these are. At the end, we shall present what we think is the best image for these ideas – through which we shall see that the virtual idea possessed by true intellect resembles the vision a mother has of the future of her child. This resemblance is not surprising, since Bergson's entire philosophy concerns the evolution of life.

Clarification of Terminology in "Intellectual Effort"

Before we turn to the study of "Intellectual Effort," we need to clarify some of the terms Bergson uses in this text. In his 1901 discussion of philosophical terminology with André Lalande, Bergson argues that one should not fix the meaning of philosophical terms once and for all.[12] However, in order to answer the questions we are posing – the true intellect and virtuality – we must fix some definitions. As we indicated already, the most important term in "Intellectual Effort" is "dynamic schema." When Bergson introduces the idea of the dynamic schema, he stresses the Greek root of the words "dynamic" and "schema," with *dynamis* meaning potency and movement, and *skhema* meaning the figure of a thing (ES 936–37/160). Minimally, then, a dynamic schema is something like a sketch or drawing, which can be fulfilled or, so to speak, colored in in different ways. The schema is not, to use the terminology of "The Possible and the Real," "a kind of pre-existence in the form of an idea," that is, an idea which is completely filled in with details and needs only existence or reality added to it. Because it is not this kind of complete idea, and because the dynamic schema is only a sketch, it has the potency or potentiality – *the dynamism* – to become what it will become.[13] In other words, the dynamic schema is

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11 There is another reason to focus on "Intellectual Effort." "Intellectual Effort" is a kind of bridge from *Matter and Memory* to *Creative Evolution*, and then to *The Two Sources*. "Intellectual Effort" extends the analyses of memory in *Matter and Memory* and it anticipates the definitions of life that we find in *Creative Evolution*, definitions which guide Bergson's reflections on morality and religion. See Riquier, *Archéologie de Bergson*, 362–71. Bergson cites *Matter and Memory*, 229–71/95–162 (ES 941/ 166). But the seed of "Intellectual Effort" seems to be at MM 260/144, where Bergson speaks of "mental effort" and a "schema." However, the movement of intellectual effort seems to be anticipated in chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory* (307–8/220–21). Effort in invention, which is really creativity, leads to *Creative Evolution*. The unity and operation of inventive intellectual effort is, as Bergson says near the conclusion of "Intellectual Effort," the very unity and operation of life (ES 955/184 and 958–59/188).

12 Bergson, *Mélanges*, 503.

13 In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson opposes dynamism to mechanism (ESSAI 93–94/140–42).

virtually what it will become, but because it is mutable, what it will become is qualitatively different from the original schema.

In his attempt to explain the concept of dynamic schema in "Intellectual Effort," Bergson uses the terms "idea" and "representation" interchangeably with "schema." I propose to treat these three terms as synonymous, which means that we should add the qualifier "dynamic" to "idea" and "representation." These dynamic schemata, ideas, and representations, then, are different from the ideas and representations that Bergson discusses in *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*. In these two books, especially when Bergson is discussing Platonism and Kantianism, ideas and representation are not dynamic; they are static. By contrast, in "Intellectual Effort," images are static. On the one hand, in "Intellectual Effort," we have the dynamic schema and its synonyms, dynamic representations and ideas. On the other, we have static images. In "Intellectual Effort," images are primarily memory-images, which have been copied off of the images of material things; images, then, are materialistic. As material, images are closed and immutable; they are the contours of what is already done (ES 957/186). To summarize, in "Intellectual Effort," schema (and its synonyms) are dynamic and open (to change), immaterial, and in the process of being done. Memory-images, however, are static and closed (immutable), materialistic, and already done. In "Intellectual Effort," images are "the external crust, [the] superficial skin" of a thing (MM 186/28; cf. ES 957/187).[14] As we proceed, we must keep this duality between dynamic and static, between unmaterialistic schema and materialistic images in mind.

We need to add one more remark prior to turning to "Intellectual Effort." If we look again at Bergson's 1901 discussion of the use of philosophical terms, we see that he thinks that we should reserve the word "representation" for ideas that bear the mark of a prior work done by the mind.[15] In "Intellectual Effort," Bergson describes one way in which such prior work takes place. When we try to learn a text by heart, he says, that is, when we try to memorize something, "we read the piece

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[14] Here, Bergson seems to be following the distinctions he made in *Matter and Memory*, which starts out from a dualistic position between memory and matter. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson distinguishes images from pure memory, which is un-imagistic: "To imagine," he says, "is not to remember [*Imaginer n'est pas se souvenir*]" (MM 278/173). In "Intellectual Effort," Bergson seems to accentuate the distinction into a duality and, in fact, he admits that he is making a sort of duality between schema and image (ES 957/186).

[15] Bergson, *Mélanges*, 506.

attentively, then we divide it into paragraphs or sections, paying particular attention to its *internal organization*. In this way, we obtain a schematic view [*vue*] of the whole" (ES 935/158, my emphasis).[16] This intellectual work is prior to the intellectual effort investigated in "Intellectual Effort." This is the intellectual work of *obtaining* a dynamic schema. A virtual idea does not come from nowhere; it must be obtained. But what is really important is that the dynamic schema's view of the whole is a view of the whole's internal organization. We must not forget that the view of the whole is a schema of its internal organization.[17]

Intelligence and Invention: A Study of "Intellectual Effort"

Most generally, "Intellectual Effort" concerns thought, or what Bergson calls the "play of representations." [18] But as the word "effort" suggests, Bergson is concerned only with the play of representations in which thinking is tense and concentrated. Moreover, Bergson is not seeking to explain intellectual effort by means of bodily reactions to stimuli, as many psychologists of his time are.[19] Bergson wants to discover "the intellectual characteristics" of tense, concentrated, and forceful thinking. The question is: what is the "mark" of intellectual effort? To anticipate, the mark of intellectual effort is the "coming and going between the schema and the images which are trying to materialize it" (ES 931/153 and 953–54/181–182).[20]

To discover the mark of intellectual effort, Bergson first focuses on efforts of memory. He investigates two kinds of memorial experience. One experience is unfamiliar to most of us, while the other is familiar to most of us. Few of us have ever played several games of chess blindfolded, while many of us have had to converse in a foreign language that we do not know well (ES 937–38/161 and 944–45/169–171). The two experiences serve somewhat different purposes in Bergson's discussion of memory. The blindfolded chess player experience introduces

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[16] Bergson discusses learning by heart in *Matter and Memory*, 225–26/89–90 and 228–31/94–98.

[17] Bergson says in *Creative Evolution* that organization is the coordination of parts, the special role each plays in relation to the others, toward an end or an action (EC 636/107).

[18] This section expands on the third chapter of my *Challenge of Bergsonism* (60–79 and, especially, 75–78) and the first chapter of my *Early Twentieth Century Continental Philosophy* (5–37 and, especially, 30–37).

[19] See Ribot, *Psychology of Attention*, 43. Also see MM 240/111–12.

[20] In his 1904–1905 course on the evolution of freedom, Bergson (in a discussion of Leibniz) defines effort as passage (*L'évolution du problème de la liberté*, 271).

Bergson's idea of the "dynamic schema" (ES 936–38/160–61). The experience of the foreign language introduces the direction in which intellectual effort goes. The question for Bergson in both the experience of the super chess player and in the person who understands a foreign language is *how*. How does the blindfolded chess player play multiple games without getting confused? What does he or she remember? How do we come to understand a foreign language we do not know well? How do we recognize the foreign words?

Let us start with Bergson's investigation of the unfamiliar experience. The super chess player is able to play several games at once without being able to see the chessboards. Because he or she is playing "blind," someone attending the games indicates to the blindfolded player each move the opponents make. Then this super player moves a piece on his or her side. He usually wins. According to Bergson, the blindfolded chess player wins not because he or she has the memory-image of each chessboard "just as it is, 'as if it were in a mirror,'" nor does he or she have "a mental vision of each piece." Instead, Bergson claims that the blindfolded chess player "retains and represents to himself … the power, the bearing, and the value, in a word, the function of each piece." And, for each game, the blindfolded player retains and represents to him- or herself "a composition of forces or better a relation between allied or hostile powers." Then, at every move, on the basis of the retained representation, the blindfolded player makes an effort of "reconstruction." In other words, the blindfolded player "remakes" the history of each game from the beginning or "reconstitutes" the successive events which have led to the present situation. Therefore, as Bergson says, what the blindfolded chess player remembers is "a representation of the whole [game] which enables him at any moment to visualize the elements." The representation of the whole, which Bergson qualifies as abstract, is like a "physiognomy" (ES 937–38/161–62). The physiognomy of each game is singular and unified, although the elements of that game are reciprocally implicated in this single representation. The single physiognomy of each game gives him or her "an impression [of each game] *sui generis*" (ES 939/64). It is the physiognomy of each game that allows the blindfolded player to retain all of the games without getting confused. This physiognomy is the dynamic schema, a dynamic idea of the whole, which the images will develop into parts coordinated with one another, that is, into the relations the chess pieces have to one another on the board.

Few of us have ever played several games of chess at once while blindfolded. However, many of us have had to converse in a foreign language we have not mastered.[21] When we hear sentences in a foreign language we do not know well, we cannot perceive each word distinctly.Under these conditions, our understanding is really an interpretation of the sounds we are unable to perceive distinctly. One might think, then, that we start from the sounds and go to the ideas or meanings of the sentences. However, Bergson argues, this way of proceeding is only an appearance. In truth, we make use of the sounds we can discern as "guiding marks." They "suggest" a corresponding order of abstract ideas, that is, they suggest what seems to be the *sense* of the sounds. The initial contact with the sounds "impress on abstract thinking its direction." Despite the appearance of starting with the perceived sounds, in truth, according to Bergson, our interpretation starts out from the impressed direction, and it materializes the sense imaginatively in hypothetical words, which try to position themselves upon what we actually hear. As Bergson says, "if the interpretation is to be exact," then it must be possible for the "conceived sense" to join "the perceived images." The sense comes to overlap and be superposed, as it were, on the perceived images (ES 944–45/170).

In our native language, we do not have to make this effort of interpretation because it is easy to recognize the words and to perceive them distinctly. Nevertheless, Bergson claims that the same direction of "understanding" (*compréhension*) takes place in hearing our own language. Bergson provides several reasons for this claim. In any language, the words of a sentence do not have an absolute meaning; their meaning is based on the context, which introduces contingency. In addition, some of the words of a sentence do not evoke an independent idea. Many of these words and prepositions, for example, express relations by means of their place in the whole. If intellection had to go from each word to each idea, without a sense of the whole, it would find itself wandering around without finding the destination. If intellection is to be clear and sure, it must start from the supposed sense, and then descend from the sense to the fragments of the words actually perceived, which in turn act as signposts to keep us on the right path to the recognition of the words, either in a foreign language or in our own. On the basis of the experience of recognition in linguistic experience, Bergson formulates a "law" for the movement of intellectual effort: "the

[21] Bergson analyzes this experience in *Matter and Memory*, 254–55/134–36.

feeling of effort, in intellection, is produced on the passage from the schema to the image." Bergson is going to "verify" this law – that is, to find out if it really holds – through the experience of invention (ES 944–46/170–72).

In the experience of invention, a problem appears to the inventor.[22] The problem arises from a need. Perhaps, some sort of labor needs to be done more quickly or more efficiently. The inventor is the one who finds a solution to the problem, the creation of a machine to do this specific labor. What makes the inventor creative is that he or she is able, in one bound, according to Bergson, "to catch sight of" (*apercevoir*) a solution. As we shall see, this "catching sight of" is what Bergson calls an intuition. In any case, the insight into the problem provides the "abstract form" of the labor to be done. The abstract form of the labor to be done is the dynamic schema. It is an "ideal," which the inventor represents to him- or herself. The inventor then follows the continuous thread of the means which will realize the end, which is the machine doing the specific kind of labor. Here with invention, we find the same descending movement we saw in the experiences of memory. Not yet knowing how to invent the machine, the inventor starts with a dynamic schema of the labor to be done. The schema evokes successively the concrete form of the different elementary movements to be performed. Then the concrete elementary movements realize the total movement in the machine. It is precisely at this moment of realization, Bergson says, that the schematic representation is "embodied" (ES 947/173).

With invention, Bergson stresses what he calls "the descending move-ment," which he had omitted in the discussion of the experiences of memory. With the descending movement, there is a "back-and-forth" movement between the two poles of the schema and the images. There is a "back-and-forth" movement because inventing is difficult. We had seen these difficulties in the experiences of the blindfolded chess player and of the understanding of a foreign language. The chess player has opponents, and the sounds of the language are really foreign. Similarly, in invention, there are always obstacles encountered, which produce a kind of disequili-brium in the development of the schema into the image. The disequili-brium causes delays and hesitation. The inventive effort takes time. The inventor makes attempts and experiments with images. As diverse

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[22] In "Intellectual Effort," Bergson also speaks of the musician, poet, and writer. The musician, poet, and writer do not confront a problem. The musician and the poet want to express a "new impression," while the writer wants to express a "thesis" (ES 947/173–74). In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, the new impression of the musician and the poet becomes "the creative emotion" (DSMR 1008–10/40–41).

elementary images appear, they try to organize themselves according to the schema. But the images "compete" with one another; they contradict one another, and even struggle with one another. In short, the images "react" to the schema. The schema is gradually modified, transformed, and sometimes, when the impossibility of reaching a living form of organization appears, the schema even has to be abandoned. Eventually, through the competition of the images, there is a "reciprocal adaptation" of the schema and the images, resulting in an equilibrium in the new organization. We now have, as we anticipated above, the intellectual characteristic of intellectual effort: "the coming and going" between the dynamic schema and the images which are trying to materialize it. Bergson says that the "coming and going" donates the "portion" (*la part*) of the unforeseen (ES 953–54/ 181–82 and 947/174).

Schema and Dynamism: The Results of the Study of "Intellectual Effort"

On the basis of our study of "Intellectual Effort," we are able to assemble the central features of the dynamic schema. Here we are retracing the duality between dynamic schema and static image we established in our opening terminological clarification. We shall begin with the negative features, *what the dynamic schema is not.* The dynamic schema is not an "extract" of the images, which would be obtained by impoverishing each of the images. The extract would be the contours of the perceived image. The dynamic schema is also not a general idea, which is formed by extracting resemblances, common properties, or common qualities (PM 1295–97/ 62–64). This general idea would be, as Bergson says, an abstract, fixed, desiccated, and empty idea (PM 1270/31). Similarly, it is not a logical signification or meaning (*signification*), which is able to be applied to different series of images. Finally, the dynamic schema is not a container (or a receptacle) for the images; it is not imagistic at all. The dynamic schema is, as Bergson stresses, "always distinct" from images. The dynamic schema may be the "expectation of images" in which it will be embodied, but it is "completely different" (*tout autrement*) from images. With its fixed or "stopped" (*arrêté*) and concrete or solid contour, the image "designs" (*dessine*) what has been (ES 957–58/186–87 and 950/177). Not being an image of what has been, the dynamic schema is not a pre-existence to which we need only add existence or reality. As Bergson says, "the schema presents in terms of becoming, dynamically, what the image gives us

statically as already made." While the dynamic schema is "open," the image is "closed" (ES 957/186).

Here are the positive features of the dynamic schema, *what the dynamic schema is*. Most importantly, the dynamic schema is a solution to a problem. Without the obstacle of a problem, intellectual effort would not be engaged. As a hypothetical solution, the dynamic schema is a sense; it is a pointer indicating the direction through which one will be able to find an actual solution. As a hypothesis, the dynamic schema is an "impression" or a "view" of the whole. As only a view, it is abstract, ideal, and incorporeal or immaterial, a sketch or drawing of the whole. Because the dynamic schema is a sketch, it is somewhat indeterminate; but as one sketch of one whole, it is somewhat determinate. The dynamic schema is indeterminately determinate. It is abstract (or somewhat indeterminate), singular (determinate enough), and, like a physiognomy, unified. Moreover, like a physiognomy, the dynamic schema's parts are reciprocally implicated in one another. There is a concentration or internal complication within the dynamic schema.[23] It is, as we said above, the "internal organization" of the whole.

We can now summarize the positive features of the dynamic schema. It is a schematic (or somewhat indeterminate) view of the whole; it is singular (or somewhat determinate); it is unified, with its parts reciprocally implicated in one another, or in relation to one another; and it is therefore a sense or a kind of pointer to the direction by means of which we can materialize its parts so that the parts come to correspond to the perceptions, to the actual images and sounds.

Crucially, the dynamic schema is also dynamic; it has potentiality or virtuality. It is a mobile and elastic schema, with "unstopped" or open contours. Mobility and elasticity appear in the movement of the dynamic schema, in the effort being made, with and against the material images. The movement of the effort is not ascending from the images to a general idea, even though it always seems that we start from the concrete perception and proceed to the abstract. It only seems that we start from the images because we misunderstand what the perceptions and memories actually do. As we saw in the experience of the foreign language, the words actually heard are, according to Bergson, only suggestions for the materialization of the dynamic schema into specific words. What we hear is only a signpost

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[23] The reciprocal implication or interpenetration of the parts refers to Bergson's idea of qualitative multiplicities, presented in *Time and Free Will* for the first time. See also Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, 9–42.

leading us to the concrete images. In fact, as Bergson tells us many times, the intellect that works only with concrete, solid, and immobile images ends up only rearranging these images in a different order. Starting from the images does not lead to invention and creativity. In contrast, the inventor does *not* have – and must *not* have if he wants to invent – the hypothetical solution to the problem represented to his mind as a fully formed and content-full image. If he had the hypothetical solution represented as such an image, then the inventor would know already how to produce the invention. To return to the opening example, *Hamlet* would already be written down to its last details in his mind. But that, of course, is not how invention works. As Bergson says, "[the] image would make us *see* (*voir*) the effect being accomplished"; it would "*show* us, within the image itself, the means by which the effect is obtained" (ES 947/173, my emphasis). However, as we saw, the inventor only "catches sight of" (*apercevoir*) the solution. To say this again, the dynamic schema is only a view or an impression. It is not knowledge; it is not a pre-existing model or plan; it is not a fully determinate end or purpose (EC 538/33 and 583/67). As an indeterminate view or impression, the hypothetical solution is only a sense or indicator of direction toward its fulfillment in actual or material images. Following the determinate enough indicated direction, the hypothetical solution descends, in a kind of "procession" (as Plotinus would say), to the material images. The movement of intellectual effort is vertical, moving downward through several planes of the mind. It is the movement down from the plane of ideal, incorporeal, or spiritual representations to the sensible, corporeal, or material images. However, the descending movement encounters obstacles. The encounter with obstacles is very important for understanding the schema's dynamism, that is, for understanding its ability to be transformed. *These obstacles are matter*, either the memory-images of things actually perceived or the perceptual images of things.[24] The heard words in the foreign language are only partly based in laws. Knowing the laws of the language allows us to understand, but the contingency in the words produced results in obstacles to understanding. In order to circumvent the obstacles, memory-images come forth to actualize the schema. The memory-images enter into competition with and struggle with one another in order to fill the schema. Some of them react against the descending movement of that schema. Although the

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[24] Matter here, for Bergson, contains contingency. Contingency in nature and matter is a major theme in Bergson's 1905 lectures on the evolution of freedom (Bergson, *L'évolution du problème de la liberté*). See my study of this lecture course, "Machine à contingence."

images adjust themselves in order to fulfill the schema, the images' reactions "convert" (as Plotinus would say), transform, and modify the schema.[25] The reaction even results in the parts of the schema being abandoned. The schema therefore is only "relatively one" and only "relatively invariable" as it descends through planes of the mind toward the complete and final solution to the problem; as it descends, in other words, toward action (ES 955/184 and 953/181).

Importantly, the "procession" of the schema and its "conversion" is not, for Bergson, a relation of direct resemblance. What the inventor catches sight of is the "reciprocal implication" of the parts in the whole; he or she gets a view of the whole's "internal organization." As Bergson says, "[a] representation ... which figuratively [or in outline] presents relations rather than things, resembles a lot what I am calling a schema" (ES 950/178). Similarly, the material images attracted by the dynamic schema do not resemble each other in terms of their external, apparent, or concrete forms: their relation, Bergson says, "is wholly internal." What is wholly internal is the image's coordination of its parts. It is this internal coordination that provides the image's "potency to solve" the problem posed. The image is able to fill the schema, help the schema avoid the obstacles, and solve the problem, because the image's internal organization holds an "analogous or complementary position" in relation to the hypothetical solution to the problem (ES 952/180).[26] When, therefore, the dynamic schema comes into fulfillment, the details and richness it acquires from the images *do not resemble* the external shapes of the memory or perceptual images that come into it. The complete solution to the problem *does not resemble* any one of the memory-images or any combination of them. And, if there is some sort of a resemblance between fulfilling images and the fulfilled schema, it comes from an analogy of internal organization between the schema and the images. The lack of resemblance between the actual solution and the hypothetical solution, and between the actual solution and the memory-images, implies not only that the actual solution was not foreseen, but also that the effect is incommensurate with the causal effort.

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[25] See Bergson's 1898–99 course on Plotinus (*Cours sur la philosophie grecque*, 17–78), also his course on the history of the idea of time (*Histoire de l'idée de temps*). Camille Riquier's excellent study of Bergson's thought emphasizes the role of Plotinus (Riquier, *Archéologie de Bergson*, 210–12). See also Mossé-Bastide's exhaustive study of Bergson's relation to Plotinus, *Bergson et Plotin*.

[26] Analogy plays an important but hard-to-notice role in *Matter and Memory* (338/268; the English translation renders *analogie* as "likeness"). It also plays a role in the later *Duration and Simultaneity* (30/22).

As we can see now, the movement of intellectual effort in Bergson is complicated. How are we to imagine it? In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson speaks of the Newcomen steam engine. In particular, he tells us that the original steam engine designed by Newcomen required a person whose sole task was to turn on and off the taps, one tap or valve to allow steam from the boiler to enter the cylinder and another tap to allow a cold spray of water to enter the cylinder in order to condense the steam. The piston inside the cylinder would go up and down with the insertion of the boiler steam and its consequent condensation. The cylinder going up and down would make a rocker arm, which Newcomen called "the great balanced beam," oscillate and thereby achieve the desired work; Newcomen invented the steam engine in order to lift water out of a mine. According to Bergson, people recount that a boy, employed to open and close the taps, became bored with this chore; he then "got the idea of tying the handles of the taps, with cords, to the rocker arm of the engine. Then the machine opened and closed the taps itself; it worked alone" (EC 651/119).[27] The boy then became free to do other things.

If we recall how Bergson describes the movement of invention, then we can see that the problem for the child is boredom. The question is how not to have to open and close the valves. *How am I to get my hands free?* thinks the child. "The idea" of a solution to the problem of getting his hands free comes to him: the machine should do the opening and closing itself. The idea comes to him *not* because he has observed the *external shape* of the machine or its parts. What he has observed is *how* the parts of the machine work together, their *internal coordination*. He realizes that, when the boiler steam enters the cylinder, the piston goes up; when the inserted cold water makes the steam condense, the piston goes down. And each time the piston goes up and down, the rocker arm oscillates. Now we can imagine that the child, in his process of thinking about the idea, recalls past experiences of other machines. Some memory-images interfere with the intellectual effort in which the boy is engaged. Those images of machines that require a living being to supply the energy have to be rejected, since the idea is to release the boy's energy for other tasks than opening and closing the taps. For instance, there is the memory-image of grain mills working by means of oxen. Because the movement of the machine requires the oxen, this image has to be rejected. And if the boy had thought that the solution lies in getting a beast of burden to open and close the

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[27] In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson seems to allude back to this story, when he says that "mechanical invention is a natural gift." He then speaks of the invention of the steam engine (1234–35/304–5). Moreover, in *The Two Sources*, Bergson says that the mystical calls forth the mechanical in order to free humans from needs such as sustenance (1238/308; the French word rendered as "calls forth" or "evokes" is "appelle").

taps, the idea itself has to be modified. A beast of burden would not know when to open and close the taps. However, there are other sorts of grain mills, ones driven by rushing water or blowing wind, watermills and windmills. The relation of a steam's rushing water to turning the wheel is similar to the rocker arm's relation to the work being achieved, pumping water out of the mine. In particular, the constant rushing of the water is analogous to the constant oscillation of the rocker arm. Therefore, just as the rushing water turns the wheel, the oscillating rocker arm could not only do the work for which it was designed but also open and close the taps. One need only attach ropes to the rocker arm. Consequently, the analogy is between the internal coordination of the parts of the water mill and the internal coordination of the parts of the steam engine. The shape of the rushing water bears no resemblance to the shape of the steam engine's rocker arm. There is no external resemblance between the watermill and the boy's improved steam engine. The material solution to the problem did not come about by means of rearranging memory-images of watermills and windmills. Rearranging these images would result only in different kinds of watermills and windmills; they would not result in the boy's improved steam engine. At the beginning, all the boy had was the internal coordination of the parts of the whole machine. The boy did not have the actual solution when he started to think, and in this way, he gave what he did not have: the boy's freedom. But any invention, according to Bergson, gives more than it has. There are immediate advantages, like the boy's freedom, from any invention. These are the advantages the inventor sought. However, the invention also gives rise to "new ideas and new feelings ... in every direction." With invention, there is a disproportion between the effect and the cause so that "it is difficult to regard the cause as the *producer* of the effect" (EC 650/118, Bergson's emphasis). As Bergson says in *Creative Evolution*, five years after "Intellectual Effort": "A century has elapsed since the invention of the steam-engine, and we are only just beginning to feel the depths of the shock it gave us" (EC 612/90).[28]

Conclusion: What Is Virtuality?

The true intellect, then, is very different from the pure intellect. The pure intellect always works with solid, immobile, and inorganic matter. It only ever rearranges past images; it never comes into contact with novelty and the unforeseen. The pure intellect never comes into contact

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[28] Thomas Newcomen invented the steam engine in 1712. Perhaps with "a century" Bergson is referring to the refinements the steam engine underwent in the nineteenth century.

with the fluid, the mobile, and organisms. In short, it never comes into contact with life (EC 635/105). The pure intellect withdraws from action and is nothing but the contemplation of ideas. Yet, beside the pure intellect, there is the intellect itself. The intellect itself presides over action and practical utility (EC 747/191 and 627/100). As Bergson points out in *Creative Evolution*, the intellect's "original way of proceeding" (*démarche originelle*) is fabrication. It manufactures, from unorganized matter, instruments, and instruments to make more instruments (EC 613/90). The fabrication "costs an effort" (EC 614/91). And "the very essence" of intelligence is "to undergo conflicts" (*subir des contrariétés*) and a "thousand difficulties" (EC 618/94). The "essential function" of the intellect is to unravel the means to find a way out of the difficulties. The intellect seeks to find what is best to be applied to a proposed framework. "Essentially," it concerns relations of means and ends (EC 623/97). Therefore, most fundamentally, intelligence is inference. But, as Bergson says, "inference which inflects past experience in the direction of present experience is already the beginning of invention" (EC 612/89). Invention underway requires, as we have seen, a dynamic schema. Therefore, we can say that, in addition to the pure intellect, there is also the dynamic intellect.[29] The dynamic intellect is the true intellect.

What makes the intellect dynamic is the *view* of the whole; therefore, what makes the intellect dynamic is what Bergson, famously, calls an intuition. As Bergson points out at the end of "Introduction to Metaphysics," an intuition does not appear spontaneously; it appears after an intense period of learning (PM 1431–32/235–37). We described this work of learning in our terminological clarification above. The work and effort of learning required for an intuition explains why Bergson says in the second introduction to *The Creative Mind* that we "value effort above everything" and why he says that "not one line of what I have written could lend itself to an interpretation" of intuition as instinct or feeling (PM 1328/103). Nevertheless, repeatedly Bergson defines intuition as sympathy (PM 1392–96/187–91). Not every individual makes the effort of learning,

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[29] In his last great book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Bergson describes the intellect as a mixture. Within the mixture, he distinguishes two different directions toward which the intellect is able to go. The intellect, he says, is more than "static morality," which is defined by "a whole group of habits" (and which resembles instinct), and less than open morality, which is defined by inspiration, intuition, and emotion. Bergson says, "Between the two [moralities], there is the intellect itself" (DSMR 1029/64). In other words, the intellect can lower itself to the static, which is automatism, or it can raise itself to the dynamic, which is invention and genius.

especially for certain areas of study. Bergson explains that one individual makes an effort of learning some certain subject matter rather than another because the individual has "an innate sympathy with the subject-matter."[30] Perhaps we have to imagine that the boy who reinvented the steam engine had a "knack" for machines. It seems certain that Bergson himself had an innate sympathy with life. There is no intuition without this prior sympathy. It is the sympathy with the subject matter that eventually gives one an insight into the internal complication and reciprocal implication of the whole. It is an intuition into the organization of the whole. Finally, although the insight is fleeting, the intuition leaves an imprint on the mind, in memory. This memorized imprint or impression is the dynamic schema. As memorized, the dynamic schema is virtual; it must be actualized.[31]

What is virtuality? In "Memory of the Present and False Recognition," Bergson provides a terse but essential definition of the virtual: "Every moment of our life presents two aspects; it is actual and virtual, perception on the one side and memory on the other" (ES 917/135). Being past is the essential characteristic of virtuality.[32] This memory, however, cannot be a preformed and pre-existing possibility requiring only the addition of existence or reality. With a preformed and pre-existing possibility, there is no virtuality, no potentiality, and no dynamism. If the memory were already fully formed – an image, as we described earlier – then there would be no portion of the unforeseen. There would be no incommensurability and disproportion between the cause and the effect. As Bergson argues repeatedly, the whole is not given (PM 1272/35, 1333/109–10, 1335–36/112–13; EC 539/33–34 and 781–82/216). Only the schema impressed by the intuition on memory is first and foremost virtual, really potential and dynamic; it contains the seed of the unforeseen, the new, the inventive, and the creative. The seed of the creative is the schema's internal organization of the whole. However, if there is a portion of the unforeseen in the dynamism, it comes from the internal organization.[33] Something of the schema's organization remains through the whole back-and-forth process of actualization. The actualization of the schema starts from an obstacle or difficulty encountered. There is no actualization without the

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[30] Bergson's 1898 *Cours de psychologie*, quoted in Riquier, *Archéologie de Bergson*, 367.

[31] In *Two Sources*, Bergson says that "the intellect doubtless helps [an indivisible emotion] to be explicated into music" and "the philosopher must bear the emotion in mind when he compresses mystic intuition more and more in order to express it in terms of intelligence" (1190/253).

[32] Riquier, *Archéologie de Bergson*, 332, and Ansell-Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual*, 180.

[33] See ES 941/165, where Bergson speaks of two portions, one of effort and the other of automatism.

force of the problem. In the attempt to solve the problem, the schema attracts memory-images. But the memory-images react against the hypothetical solution, forcing it to transform itself, even to the point of the schema being abandoned. One has to find a different schema. Finally, it is not the memory-images as such that fill in the schema with details and, so to speak, color it in. It is their internal organization, how their parts fit together and imply one another. Consequently, the effect of the dynamism and effort does not resemble any one memory-image and because of the filled-in details, the effect does not even resemble the schema itself. *The definition of the virtual therefore is*: the production of a new invention (or creation) or the cause of an unforeseen effect – by means, *first*, of the not completely given schema; by means, *second*, of the force of a problem that demands to be solved (perception); and by means, *third*, of the memory-images which come to embody the schema, allowing it to solve the problem. In short, the definition of the virtual is: (1) the schema, animated (2) by a perceived problem, filled in with (3) memory-images, whose details produce what has never been seen before. These are the three aspects of the virtual we presented above in the introduction.

   As it was difficult to imagine the dynamism of intellectual effort, it is difficult to imagine how the virtual works. Earlier we looked at the example Bergson give us in *Creative Evolution* of the Newcomen steam engine. In "Intellectual Effort" itself, Bergson provides three images to help us understand the dynamic schema and its movement. Yes, even the schema of the dynamic schema must be filled in. First, according to Bergson, the dynamic schema resembles "the single coin" (*la pièce unique*), and the movement, the single coin being broken down into smaller coins, which are the actual images (ES 936/160). This image helps up understand the division of the one coin into many images. However, it is misleading insofar as it implies that the schema is a container of the images. In fact, in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson will return to this image, specifying that the coin is a gold coin symbolizing eternity where the whole is given completely (EC 770/207–8).[34] The second image is the pyramid, with the dynamic schema being the summit, and perceptual images being the base (ES/159). The image of the pyramid is a variation on Bergson's famous cone image of memory in *Matter and Memory*.[35] The pyramid image allows us to see that the dynamic schema is spiritual (like the dead buried in

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[34] For this image, see also Bergson, *Histoire de l'idée de temps*, 181.

[35] The pyramid image resembles the famous cone provided in *Matter and Memory* (302/211). In fact, in that book, Bergson speaks of an inverted pyramid (312/226). The pyramid image also appears in "Dreams" (ES 886/94). However, here in "Intellectual Effort," the pyramid is right-side up, while in *Matter and Memory* and in "Dreams" the pyramid is upside down. Probably, the right-side-

the tomb), while the base itself is material. To the coin and the pyramid, Bergson adds a third image, that of a piece of rubber (ES 953/181). The piece of rubber is able to stretch in different directions and shrink in others in order to take on the shape of a polygon. In order to make the piece of rubber fit, we may have to modify the kind of polygon on which we want it to fit.[36] Nevertheless, intellectual effort is able to donate, as we mentioned earlier, the portion of the unforeseen through the stretching and shrinking of matter.

To help us understand the dynamic schema, we might also think of the famous image, in *Creative Evolution*, of the hand thrusting into iron filings. The shape of the hand is a kind of schema, and the consequent arrangement of the iron filings was unforeseen. However, there is one image that really helps us think about the virtual. We find it in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Bergson says, "How many things arise in the enraptured eyes of a mother gazing at her little child. . . . The mother sees in the child not only what he will be, but also what he could be, if he were not obliged at every step in his life, to choose, and therefore exclude" (DSMR 1012n1/44–45n2).[37] The mother, of course, does not really see all of what the child could be. Certainly, she does not see the future of the child in the form of a pre-existing idea. She has an insight only into a sense of what the child could be. And as the child grows up, encountering many obstacles and difficulties, the child will choose among possibilities based on his or her own sense of who he or she is. He or she will also be required to exclude some possibilities, and perhaps he or she will be obligated to transform his sense of who he or she is. As the details come to fill in his or her character, the mother, undoubtedly, will be surprised at the person the child grows up to be.[38] But even more, the mother will be surprised at all the unforeseen effects the child's birth caused.

up pyramid derives from Bergson's study of Plotinus. See Bergson, *Histoire de l'idée de temps*, 229, where he draws a right-side-up cone to explain the movement of procession in Plotinus.

[36] In "The Possible and the Real," Bergson speaks of the growth of life as a rubber balloon (PM 1335/112). In *Creative Evolution*, he compares the organism to rubber (EC 709/162).

[37] In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson makes use of the same image of the child (EC 579–80/65).

[38] As Levinas admits, the Bergsonian idea of the unforeseeable resembles what he calls fecundity (*Time and the Other*, 91–92).

Bergson's Philosophy of Art

Mark Sinclair

The title of this chapter may seem to promise more than Bergson ever offered, for he never wrote a work solely dedicated to art, and he gave no systematic or programmatic account of art in general and of the different arts in particular. Nevertheless, richly suggestive and original views on the epistemological and metaphysical significance of art feature in all his major works. These views are part of the fabric of Bergson's thinking and must have helped to draw so many writers and artists to his ideas in the first decades of the twentieth century.[1] That art is not a peripheral topic for Bergson is one reason why – and the paradox here is more apparent than real – he did *not* devote a particular work to it. Instead of treating art as an issue apart, Bergson rather appeals to experience of the arts in order to defend fundamental philosophical claims and to ground truths that resist and transcend conceptual thought. Already in *Time and Free Will*, his doctoral thesis of 1888, the unity of temporal experience in its most fundamental, nonlinear sense as *la durée réelle,* real duration, is like that of a "phrase in a melody," just as our acts are free when they "spring from our own personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it that one sometimes finds between the artist and his work" (ESSAI 74/111 and 120/172). Such analogies shape more explicitly Bergson's mature philosophy: his conception of life, biological as well as psychological, according to ideas of novelty and creation, his critique of the modal category of possibility, and his later doctrine of retroactivity in history – to name three interwoven aspects of his mature metaphysics – all derive from an interpretation of fine art and its production.

What Bergson writes in 1904 of his teacher, Félix Ravaisson, the leader of the spiritualist school in late-nineteenth-century French philosophy, is therefore also a profession of his own doctrine: "Ravaisson's whole philosophy derives from the idea that art is a figurative metaphysics, that

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[1] In this connection, see Pilkington, *Bergson and His Influence*, and Antliff, *Inventing Bergson*.

metaphysics is a reflexion on art, and that it is the same intuition, diversely employed, that produces the profound philosopher and the great artist" (PM 1461/274). If Bergson offers a "philosophy of art," this is less as a *genitivus objectivus*, whereby philosophy takes art for its object and clarifies it by its own lights, and more as a *genitivus subjectivus*, according to which the philosophy, as an "artistic philosophy," belongs to the art and is an expression of it. In this sense, art, for Bergson, is more a solution than a problem in its own right, more an answer than a question.[2]

It is perhaps an exaggeration to claim that Bergson uses art and beauty as "immediate givens [*données vécues, immédiates*] supposed to clarify all the analogies by their incontestable evidence, which is never to be brought into question,"[3] but it is certain that in order to elucidate the conception of art that has such import for his metaphysics, it is necessary to bring into question what, at least in some measure, he took for granted, what he posited rather than discussed, and what often remains ambiguous, even confused in his texts. Given that much of what Bergson takes for granted comes to him from his nineteenth-century context and the history of modern philosophy more broadly, an elucidation of his conception of art has thus to examine his own sources in the history of, to use the terms interchangeably, aesthetics or the philosophy of art. But an adequate elucidation also has to explain why it was that he was never motivated to develop his disparate views on the meaning and function of art as a full-blown aesthetics. When asked in 1934 if he had the intention to work on "aesthetic problems," he put it down to old age: "these problems are of the greatest interest, but I am too old to gather material on them, as I did when I was composing my other works, in order to treat them in depth."[4] This, of course, does not explain why he had not dwelled on "aesthetic problems" previously, and in the 1940s French critics argued that there were more fundamental infirmities in his aesthetics that had arrested its own development.[5]

This chapter interprets Bergson's philosophy *of* art, in both senses of the genitive, and it advances in three stages. The first section examines his claims concerning the truth-function of art, according to which poetry and the visual arts have the capacity to reveal fundamental aspects of the perceived world that conceptual thought and our everyday pragmatic concerns are unable to grasp. Here I argue that although critics such as

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[2] For these formulations, see Laro, "Promesses et carences," and Lorand, "Bergson's Concept of Art."
[3] Laro, "Promesses et carences," 305–6.   [4] Benrubi, "Entrietien avec Bergson," 368.
[5] See Laro, "Promesses et carences," and Bayer, "L'Esthétique de Henri Bergson."

Raymond Bayer and Charles Laro were justified in suspecting a certain naivety in Bergson's appeals to the artist as possessing an immediate intuition of the real, his account of artistic revelation implies a defensible "hermeneutic" position whereby the truth in art is always a function of interpretation; art, for Bergson, offers points of view on a perceptual reality that is always constituted by points of view. The second section examines the notion of creation that Bergson contrasts with artistic revelation, and that comes to prominence in his 1907 *Creative Evolution*. This notion of creation, including Bergson's critique of the modal category of possibility, is based on a broadly Kantian idea of *genius* as the principle of art production, and the section shows how this idea is put to work within his metaphysics as a whole. The third section of the essay focuses on a still-neglected aspect of Bergson's "artists' metaphysics," one that he arrives at in reflecting on canonical succession in art history. This is the idea that the present has a retroactive effect on the past. Here I show again that the evident tension between his notions of revelation and creation points to a hermeneutical position, one whereby history is always a function of interpretation, whereby "creation" is "revelation." But if Bergson does not develop this thought explicitly, it is necessary to ask why, and it is ultimately, I argue, a voluntarist conception of genius as a function of the will that prevents him developing his own fecund insights.

Truth in Art

Remarks on fine art are scattered throughout Bergson's major works, but a long passage of *Le rire* (*Laughter*) presents one of his most developed accounts of the "purpose [*objet*] of art." "If reality came to strike our senses and consciousness directly," Bergson begins, "if we could enter into immediate communication with things and with ourselves, I think that art would be pointless [*inutile*], or rather that we would all be artists, for our soul would vibrate forever in unison with nature" (RIRE 458–59/150). This is a counterfactual conditional, to which Bergson contrasts his view that art has a purpose precisely because reality does not strike our senses and consciousness directly. Art gains access to a truth, to "reality" and to "nature," that is veiled in and by everyday experience.

Reality does not strike, first, our *senses* directly because, he argues, sense perception is not neutral, value-free observation of the given, and is rather governed by our practical concerns: "what I see and what I hear of the external world is simply what my senses extract from it to guide my conduct." Ordinarily, we see what we want to see and not, in truth, what

there is; ordinary perception is a "practical simplification" of the world, and our practical life inserts a veil between ourselves and reality (RIRE 459–60/151–53). Bergson does not justify these claims here, but they seem to depend on the pragmatist account of "pure perception" in the first chapter of the 1896 work *Matter and Memory*, according to which what we perceive is a function of action and "measures the reflecting power of the body" (MM 205/57). Reality does not strike, second, our *consciousness* directly because of a simplification that belongs to the nature of thought and language. As Bergson had argued in *Time and Free Will*, language is the vehicle of concepts, and concepts are inherently general, which entails that language, in the guise of ordinary prose at least, fails to capture and even betrays the singularity of things. Thanks to the generality of our language, Bergson claims, "we are limited, more often than not, to reading the labels that have been placed on them." Even of our own psychological and emotional states, normally "[w]e grasp only the impersonal aspect . . . the one that language has noted once and for all because it is more or less the same, in the same conditions, for all men," while "the thousand fugitive nuances and the thousand deep resonances" of the state escape us (RIRE 459–60/151–53).

Bergson claims, then, that practical necessities and the linguistic conventions they serve to produce veil the truth of the perceived world. Fortunately, artists exist who are able to "bring us face to face with reality itself," the reality of our own feelings as well as the reality of the perceived world, and, in the case of poetry or creative language, make language express "what it was not made to express," namely individuality and singularity. Nature inspires "souls more detached from life," souls in which nature "forgets to attach perception to need," and who possess "a virginal manner, in some sense, of seeing, of hearing or of thinking." The fine artist perceives for the sake of perceiving – in different ways, in privileging different senses, according to the different forms and media of art – and thus achieves a "more direct vision of reality." Fine art can make us see things *as if* for the first time, and its "highest ambition is to reveal nature to us" (RIRE 459–60/151–52). This, to be sure, is not necessarily to promote, Bergson underlines, a narrow form of naturalism in art, since he admits that some form of "idealism" is an integral element of breaking with pragmatic convention and turning to the truth of and in experience. The artist somehow has to turn away from the world before turning to it in more depth; and what we might describe as more abstract, less naturalistic forms of art may gain access to reality in Bergson's sense.

Artistic vision, therefore, stands in the closest proximity to what Bergson describes in "Introduction to Metaphysics" as the method of metaphysics: *intuition* which attains the fundamental truth of reality veiled to *analysis* (PM 1392–1432/187–237). It is, as we saw Bergson write concerning Ravaisson, the "same intuition, diversely employed, that produces the profound philosopher and the great artist" (PM 1461/231). It would be easy, following Raymond Bayer, to criticize these claims for underemphasizing, even entirely ignoring, that particular arts are always mediated by their own forms of technique, and thus are pragmatic each in their own way; for ignoring that the painter, for example, sees more for the sake of painting than for the sake of seeing, according to the capacities and possibilities of painting; that the fine artist is *homo faber* as well as a visionary; that the arts are in large part analytic rather than simply intuitive; that art is in some sense symbolic in its very essence, and that it produces and delights in appearance, rather than dissipating it.[6] But such a critique remains external to Bergson's approach[7] because he is account-ing for what distinguishes fine art from art, that is, craft in general. In modern philosophy, what, since Kant at least, had traditionally been taken to distin-guish the species of fine art is *genius* understood as a kind of natural talent, whereby nature, in contrast to technique, culture, and skill, works through the artist. Bergson's appeal to nature operating through the artist indicates that his thinking is rooted in this tradition, and, as we will see, the term *genius* recurs in his later texts. Hence Bergson does not have to marginalize or minimize the mediating role of technique in art, and his position is simply that fine art is the result of something more than that technique, and that this additional element consists in a better, a truer apprehension of reality than the one that conventional conceptual experience can grasp.

But does not Bergson's account of art as revelatory of nature remain naive, as Bayer claims, in that it seems to suppose, despite its rejection of a narrowly defined "naturalism" in art, a faithful reproduction – a "more direct vision" – of a pre-existing reality? Reflecting again on the purpose of art in the 1911 Oxford lectures, "The Perception of Change," Bergson even compares the poet to the liquid developing agent in a photographic dark room, which seems to presuppose a quasi-mechanical view of art and the artist as a passive registering of the real and thus to exclude points of view and interpretation in art.[8] Bergson clearly ties the object of art to an idea of

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[6] See Bayer, "L'Esthétique de Henri Bergson," 254–66.
[7] Bayer recognizes this, but Lalo does not; see section IV of "Promesses et carences."
[8] PM 1370/159: "The poet and the novelist who express a mood certainly do not create it out of nothing; they would not be understood by us if we did not observe within ourselves, up to a certain point, what they say about others. As they speak, shades of emotion and thought appear to us which might

imitation when he states that "nowhere is the function of the artist shown as clearly as in that art which gives the most important place to imitation, I mean painting." The original painter, and Bergson writes here of the proto-impressionism of Turner and Corot, shows us what we have not noticed, what we "have perceived without seeing [*perçu sans apercevoir*]." Painting focuses, as Leibniz might have said, on our *petites perceptions*, and in so doing it makes them *grandes*: "the great painters are those to whom belongs a certain vision of things that has or will become the vision of all men." It on this condition that art can be more than mere fantasy and that we can speak of paintings as "true." This is not to deny, as Bergson also states, that the painter has "created" a painting, and that it is a product of her "imagination," but if it did not show us something of our own experience, there would be no truth in painting (PM 1370/159–60).

There is, then, an evident tension in Bergson's position in that he is attempting to reconcile a notion of revelation and thus truth in art with a notion of artistic creation. This task is rendered more difficult by Bergson's emphasis – which we examine in the following section of this essay – on "absolute" novelty in creation; if art has to be absolutely new, it is hard to see how Bergson could also allow that it reveals what, at least in some sense, was already there. Bergson may well be operating with conceptions of revelation and creation that are both too strong, and that contradict each other. That said, if his account of artistic revelation appears sometimes naive and positivistic, he is able in other passages to recognize the necessity of selection and interpretation in art. In "Introduction to Metaphysics," Bergson describes an artist sketching Notre Dame in Paris who "substitutes for the real and internal organization of the thing an external and schematic reconstitution, in such a way that his drawing responds, in sum, to a certain point of view on the object and to the choice of a certain mode of representation" of it (PM 1404/201). It is hard to reconcile this position with his earlier, apparently positivistic idea of art as the revelation of a pregiven reality.

Moreover, we should also ask: what exactly is this reality with which the arts are supposed to bring us "face to face"? Caution is required with Bayer's claim that Bergson promotes an aesthetics of "pure perception," since in *Matter and Memory* pure perception is already a pragmatic world of the habituated, machinic body's commerce with things, where things reflect

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long since have been brought out in us but which remained invisible; just like the photographic image which has not yet been plunged into the bath where it will be revealed. The poet is this revealing agent."

what I can do to and with them. Bergson's theory of pure perception, in abstracting from everything memory and thus mind contributes to perceptual experience, is already an account of a pragmatic reality to which he now opposes artistic intuition. In this connection, if we recognize, and this seems to be Bergson's position, that the idea of pure perception is a theoretical abstraction, since in truth the difference between perception and memory is always a difference of degree, then the reality that art can reveal is and can only be a reality inhabited and thus constituted by memory. For Bergson, memory forms a horizon that is constitutive of the singularity of things, and thus our reality is one haunted by our personal histories, in the way that Proust's narrator in À *la recherche du temps perdu* finds his past in the very real experience of eating a *madeleine*; the cake does not make him think of his past but is rather imbued by and with it. Memory in this Bergsonian sense can be understood to constitute what Proust will describe as a "*milieu* that we do not see, but by the changing and translucent means of which we see . . . that is to say the beliefs that we do not see but which are no more reducible to pure emptiness than is the air that surrounds us."[9]

Hence, if the object or purpose of art is to reveal reality, it is the horizon of memory constitutive of actual experience that it could bring to light; but given that this horizon of meaning is not one of the things constituted within it, revealing it in art can hardly be understood on the model of the imitation of things. Painting, to take Bergson's leading example, could have for its task an illumination and excavation of the layers of memorial meaning, sense, and organization that are constitutive of the perceived world. Bergson does not say this explicitly, but his notion of art bringing us "face to face with reality" can easily accommodate it, and it is merely a development of his claim that art can grasp the singularity of things veiled by the generality of language. From this perspective, the fact that Bergson did not develop his views on art and truth would not, *pace* Bayer and Lalo, be due to unresolvable difficulties in his approach. Bergson advances a worryingly positivistic notion of artistic revelation, but the movement of his own thought implies a less absolute understanding of it that may be reconcilable with his account of creation. In this sense, his approach is not unrelated to later philosophies of art in the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology – in the work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, for example[10] – which emphasize the interpretative nature of both sense experience and the art that serves to reveal it.

9 Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu* III, 655.
10 See Johnson, ed., *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader*.

Creation and Genius

How, then, does Bergson understand creation in art? And how does this understanding of art production as creation inform his wider metaphysics? As I stated above, Bergson already appeals to an idea of creation, and genius as its principle, in *Time and Free Will*. On the basis of his argument that libertarian conceptions of free will, according to ideas of rational deliberation and alternative possibilities, just as much as determinist positions, interpret experience according to a spatialized notion of time that masks an original sense of temporal freedom, Bergson claims that attention to fine-art production can help us to grasp something of a more primitive and indefinable sense of freedom. The analogy supposes, following Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, that the fine artwork, the work of genius, unlike the craft product, is not wholly the realization of a conceptual intention. This is why, as Bergson remarks, the relation between artist and work is itself "undefinable" and not the relation between an archetype in the artist's head and a copy (ESSAI 120/172). In this sense, fine-art production, though purposive (it does not happen by accident), is not the realization of an express, conceptual purpose; there is a "purposiveness without purpose" in the production of the work just as there is in the finished artwork. Bergson, then, seems to gesture toward such a conception of fine-art production in 1888 as a means of conceiving freedom in its primitive sense – a form of freedom that would be purposive without being a function of conceptual purposiveness – and in so doing his approach recalls that of F. W. J. Schelling in his 1800 *System of Transcendental Idealism*,[11] which also attempts to think beyond modern oppositions of abstract freedom and causal necessity, of mind and mechanical world, on the basis of a Kantian notion of genius as "purposiveness without purpose."

   This gesture becomes the basis of a philosophy of life in general almost twenty years later in *Creative Evolution*. Here Bergson attempts to steer between finalist and mechanist accounts of biological life with an idea of creation drawn from the aesthetic domain. Bergson was not the first French philosopher to extend an idea of creation to nature in this way, and in a crucial footnote he acknowledges his debt to Gabriel Séailles's 1883 *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*. For Séailles, a "creative principle [*puissance créatrice*]" unites and underlies thought and biological life, such that thought "can be defined, as much as the life of the body, as 'a creation.'"[12] It is

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[11] See the final, crowning part of Schelling's *System of Transcendental Idealism*.
[12] Séailles, *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*, ix.

important to note, however, that Séailles aims to demystify and to bring back down to earth the modern notion of genius as the principle of artistic creation: rather than a quasi-divine ability to create something from nothing, genius amounts to a talent in the selective appropriation of material furnished by nature and history. It is for this reason that later in the text Séailles admits that genius, as a principle continuous with life, is not, *sensu stricto*, creative; genius "does not create, in the strict sense of the word; it does not produce new forms from scratch [*de toutes pièces*]."[13] There is, then, a "creative" principle underlying all the manifestations of life, but this principle cannot be taken in any strict sense – according to which, in the Middle Ages and still in the Renaissance, *creatio* and *creare* applied to divine rather than human acts[14] – as the production of an absolute novelty, a novelty emerging *ex nihilo.*

Bergson does not directly comment on Séailles's reservations, but he responds to the demystified and deflated sense of production that the latter attaches to "creation":

> do we have to understand by "creation," as [Séailles] does, a synthesis of elements? Wherever there are pre-existing elements, the synthesis that will be made of them is given virtually [*virtuellement*], being only one of the possible arrangements: and this arrangement, amongst all the other possibilities that surrounded it, could have been apprehended in advance by a superhuman intelligence. We hold, on the contrary, that in the domain of life, the elements do not have a real and separate existence. These are but successive views of the mind on an indivisible process. And this is why there is radical contingency in progress, an incommensurability between what proceeds and what follows – that is, duration. (ec 518–19n2/19n9)

That creation is not *ex nihilo* or wholly *de novo* does not, Bergson holds, entail that it is synthetic or combinatorial. Such an approach, he argues, would reduce creation to mere making and fail to recognize the extent to which there is novelty in the course of life. If the new thing is only an arrangement of already separate elements then that thing was, in principle, even if only in the divine mind, foreseeable, and thus, as Bergson claims, "possible" or "virtual" (Bergson here and often uses these terms as synonyms). But life in its progress cannot be foreseen, Bergson contends, because it involves radical contingency and incommensurability between past and future. Unforeseeability, incommensurability, and indeterminism

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[13] Séailles, *Essai sur le génie dans l'art*, 154.
[14] In this connection, see Nahm, "The Theological Background."

do not, however, necessarily imply discontinuity. Creation occurs not as a synthesis but as a process of disassociation from a primal unity.

It seems that Bergson considers Séailles to have taken a step too far in his concern to demystify genius, and to have, in effect, reduced art production to craft production. That said, Bergson is still broadly sympathetic to Séailles's rejection of the idea of creation *ex nihilo*, and his claims in *Creative Evolution* and elsewhere concerning a "radical" and "absolute" novelty should be treated with caution. "Radical" and "absolute" are to be taken primarily in an epistemological sense: something is radically or absolutely new, on Bergson's account, when it has no precedents such that its advent could be foreseen; and "to foresee," argues Bergson, "consists of projecting into the future what has been perceived in the past" (EC 499/4). According to this epistemological sense of novelty, Bergson is able to treat "maturation" and "creation" as synonyms: after stating that "the more we dwell on the nature of time, the more we will understand that duration signifies invention, creation of forms, continuous elaboration of the absolutely new," he describes time as the "internal work of maturation or creation" (EC 503/7). Of course, if creation did involve an idea of absolute novelty and thus discontinuity, the very idea of a creative *evolution* would become a contradiction in terms.

That said, it cannot be denied that a more radical intention emerges elsewhere in Bergson's work. His later *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932) describes "the unforeseeability of forms that life creates from scratch [*de toutes pièces*], by discontinuous leaps, all along its evolution" (DSMR 1072/115). What Séailles had denied, that creation operates "from scratch," Bergson now affirms, and he therefore seems to entertain the apparently contradictory idea of a discontinuous evolution. Does this mean that, as Newton Stallknecht supposed in 1934, "Bergson's philosophy really contains two accounts of creation"?[15] Perhaps not if the opposition of continuity and discontinuity presupposes the image of a line that at a given point is either joined or cut, and thus a spatialized time. Understood thus, the opposition would be unable to account for duration and evolution in their primitive senses. Bergson would thus not have two distinct and incompatible senses of creation, but rather a single notion of creation approached and articulated in different ways. Understood from this perspective, "from scratch" and "discontinuous" would not mean *ex nihilo* or *de novo*, from nothing other than the act of creation itself, and the phrases

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[15] Stallknecht, *Studies in the Philosophy of Creation*, 53.

would only serve to underline that creation does not occur as a synthesis of pre-existing elements and that novelty is genuinely unforeseeable.

In any event, the crucial footnote of *Creative Evolution* responding to Séailles features an early expression of the critique of the modal category of possibility presented in "The Possible and the Real," an essay published in French in 1934 but based on a lecture given at the University of Oxford in 1920. If events were possible before they occur, Bergson argues, "they would be able to be represented in advance; they could be thought before being realised" and thus nothing genuinely novel would occur in the event. But fine art shows that novel events cannot be represented before they occur. *Hamlet* was conceivable, and thus possible, only when it was written by a person of "talent and genius": "it is clear that the person in whom Shakespeare's *Hamlet* came forth in the form of the possible would have created in this way its reality; this would have been, by definition, Shakespeare himself." If the artwork of the future were already possible, if I could conceive it, "I would," Bergson says, immediately "make it (*je la ferais*)." In fact, I would already have made it, for "as soon as the musician has the precise and complete idea of the symphony he will create, his symphony has been created" (PM 1339–42/117–21). This is not to admit an idealist conception of creation according to which the artist first has an idea of the finished product that she then realizes in the work. On the contrary, "a free action or a work of art . . . can be expressed in terms of ideas only after the fact and in an approximate manner" (EC 685/144). For this reason, original works of art in their irreducible singularity and particularity, and thus in their novelty, are not possible before they occur. To think they are possible before their realization is to import ideas "from the domain of fabrication" – where, after an initial act of creative invention, concepts, plans and schemata can be realized identically many times over – into "that of creation" (PM 1337/115).

This argument concerning possibility is prefigured in Kant's *Critique of Judgment*. Within art in general, Kant writes, what is to be produced must first be "represented as possible [*als möglich*]"[16] in the producer's mind, after which the physical process of production makes this representation actual. The design of the product occurs according to a process of rational, conceptual deliberation, according to "rules" which can be learned and applied in different cases, but fine art "does not permit of the judgment of the beauty of its product being derived from any rule that has a *concept* for its determining ground, and that depends, consequently, on a concept of

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16 Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 5:307/*Critique of Judgment*, 136.

the way in which the product is possible [*wie es möglich sei*]."[17] Fine-art production, as opposed to craft production, does not consist in the actualization of a pregiven conceptual possibility. Later, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion,* Bergson will provide a positive account of what in the artwork transcends the cold clarity of conceptual meaning, a positive account that echoes Kant's doctrine of aesthetic ideas, as ideas associated to a given concept but irreducible to it. The creative work, Bergson argues, necessarily expresses emotion, which is "pregnant with representations, of which none is fully [*proprement*] formed." In this sense "creation means, above all, emotion" (DSMR 1012/44 and 1013/45). But in 1907 Bergson's "artistic philosophy" wins out over his philosophy of art (*genitivus objectivus*), for rather than offer a theory relating only to a particular mode of experience, Bergson extends his account of artistic creation to psychological experience in general and then to the biological domain. Life is lived as a continual work of genius, as the continual irruption of "génialité" (EC 634/106),[18] insofar as there is something qualitatively unique and original in every state of mind, in every moment of phenomenal experience, in every action. This idea of "geniality" offers the guiding thread according to which Bergson steers between mechanism and finalism in conceiving the force of life as an élan vital.

Art History and Retroactivity

Despite his claims concerning "radical" or "absolute" novelty," the notion of genius that underlies Bergson's critique of the category of possibility and his account of art production is not *metaphysically* absolutist. As we have seen, it is not a notion of *creation ex nihilo*, it does not presuppose discontinuity, and Bergson puts it to work in his general metaphysics of life as the idea of a purposive principle that is nevertheless not governed by a conceptual purpose. However, when Bergson comes to reflect in "The Possible and the Real" on the role of history in art production, in a way that has fundamental implications for his conceptions of possibility and time and thus for his metaphysics as a whole, it is clear that the tension between his notions of revelation and creation remains unresolved.

   Bergson argues that although an original work was not possible before it happened, it *will have been possible* once it has happened. The original work in the present, that is, changes the past in allowing us to see past works as

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[17] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 5:308/*Critique of Judgment*, 137.
[18] Arthur Mitchell's translation of the term as "fervor" veils Bergson's method and motivations.

constituting the possibility of the present. "Let a man of talent or genius come forth," writes Bergson, "let him create a work: it will then be real, and by that very fact it becomes retrospectively or retroactively possible. It would not be possible, it would not have been so, if this man had not come upon the scene . . . it will have been possible today, but . . . it is not yet so." Although one can cannot "insert the real into the past and thus operate backwards in time . . . there is no doubt that the possible can be lodged in it, or rather that the possible comes to lodge itself in it" (PM 1340/119). It is natural to think that a present that becomes past becomes a necessity because now we can do nothing about it, but Bergson now claims that the past is the realm of possibility insofar as the present places it there.

What exactly does Bergson mean by "possibility" here and how can it retroactively be lodged in the past by the original work in the present? He pursues the thought in the introduction to the volume *La pensée et le mouvant* with an example drawn from Émile Deschanel's 1882 *Le romantisme des Classiques*. We may well talk now, following Deschanel, of the Romanticism of Racine or Boileau, but

> the romantic aspect of classicism became clear [*ne s'est dégagé*] only due to the retroactive effect of romanticism . . . If there had been no Rousseau, no Chateaubriand, no Vigny or Hugo, not only would we never have noticed, but there would never really have been any romanticism in the Classics of old, for this romanticism of the Classics is realised only by the lifting-out [*découpage*], in their work, of a certain aspect [*aspect*], and this aspect [*la découpure*], with its particular form, existed no more in classical literature before the apparition of romanticism, than exists, in a passing cloud, the amusing sketch that an artist perceives in it by organising the amorphous mass according to his imagination. Romanticism operated retroactively on classicism, like the artist's sketch on this cloud. Retroactively it created its own prefiguration in the past, and an explanation of itself by its antecedents. (PM 1264–5/24)

The Romantic aspects "lifted out" of Classicism mean that we can now talk of Classicism making Romanticism possible, yet possibility in this sense is no longer foreseeability or conceivability without contradiction but a real quality, an "aspect" of things. Bergson's position on these aspects is, however, delicately poised. On the one hand, he asserts that the idea that the Romantic aspect of Classicism was there all along is merely a retrospective illusion – an illusion ignorant of the way that the present retroactively shapes the past. The illusion is a function of what Bergson terms the "retrograde movement of truth," and though a "natural tendency" of the human mind, it is an "error," the "mirage of the present in

the past" (PM 1253/9, 1264/23, and 1340/119). Original artists often suffer the effects of this illusion when critics, once the shock of the new has receded, claim that the work was prefigured in the past.[19] But the truth is that "the present introduces something into the past, that action goes back in the course of time and comes to impress its stamp on it retroactively." The "new qualities" stamped on the past did not preexist the present; they are rather "created from scratch [*de toutes pièces*] and absolutely unforesee-able; and consequently an aspect [*côté*] of the present exists as an 'aspect' only when our attention has isolated it" (PM 1264/23).

On the other hand, if Bergson's position is that the new aspect revealed in Classicism by Romanticism did not previously exist in any sense, it is not obvious why he uses the verb *isoler*, and then a reflexive verb in a passive sense, *se dégager*, and a noun, *découpure*, with privative prefixes to describe the action of the present on the past: the *découpure* or "cutting," *s'est dégagé*, was revealed in, or "lifted out of" as Andison translates it, Classicism by Romanticism. These terms suggest that the aspect is *revealed* rather than *created*.[20] This, of course, could be taken as a residual expression of the very retrospective illusion that Bergson criticizes, but it seems rather to express the difficulties of his "creationist" position. He explicitly considers only two options: either the aspect was already and actually there in the work of the past, or it is "created" in it by the work of the present. Yet his own apparent hesitations indicate that the latter option is hardly convincing enough to combat the allegedly illusory attractions of the former. Moreover, when he admits, in extending his reflection on art history to political history, that "*not just any* [*non quelconque*]" (PM 1264/23) novel reality is able to emerge from a specific historical conjuncture, he gives the lie to the claim that the present is created "from scratch." In the end, "creation" still means here what, as we saw, it meant in 1907: dissociation from a primal unity that, prior to the creative act, does not yet possess real and separate elements. Bergson would only be forcing, unhelpfully so, his emphasis on novelty by affirming that creation occurs "from scratch," and his real position would be that the present work of genius dissociates, and thus reveals, aspects or elements in the works of the past.

Bergson thus seems to reach out toward the idea of a repetition of the past that would be different from the sterile (if not necessarily "bad"),

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[19] As Pierre Bayard has put it, original work is *le plagiat par anticipation*; that is to say, anticipatory or retroactive plagiarism rather than actual plagiarism.

[20] In the new critical edition of *La pensée et le mouvant*, Arnaud François emphasizes that these *découpures* are in fact created (314), but without seeing the tensions in Bergson's position.

habitual repetition of the past that he describes elsewhere in the essay;[21] a repetition not of the *same*, but of and with a *difference.* Kant may have preceded him in this also, for in discussing canonical succession in the history of art, the *Critique of Judgment* contrasts mere copying of past works of genius with a more original succession, whereby originality is a function of inheritance and vice versa – but "how the latter is possible," Kant admits, "is difficult to explain."[22] Canonical succession would be constituted by a reciprocal play between present-day genius and the exemplarity of past works. The original work in the present would emerge not *ex nihilo*, but *ex historia*, and yet this is not to say that the possibility of the original work simply preexisted the present in the great work of the past. Bergson, after Kant, seems to point to the idea that the original work in the present reveals what the past made possible – *and* that this possibility is nothing without the original work in the present. On this basis, creation would be nothing but revelation, and vice versa. It would be pointless to wonder whether the historical possibility of the original work chronologically precedes its actuality or vice versa, for both arrive together and co-constitute the "shock of the new."

If Bergson's thinking does point in this direction, his later doctrine of retroactivity would substantially transform what he had previously written about time. *Matter and Memory*, of course, was concerned with how the past returns to constitute the present; but the idea of historical retroactivity brings into question the idea of the past in itself, a "pure past" that is fundamental to Bergson's approach to personal memory in *Matter and Memory*. In this light, Bergson appears to stand in a hitherto unnoticed proximity to the "hermeneutic" conceptions of history and "ecstatic temporality" advanced by German thinkers such as Nietzsche and Heidegger, according to which, as *Being and Time* puts it, "the future is not later than having-been, and this is not earlier than the present."[23] It would thus not be

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[21] Although Vladimir Jankélévitch underlines the importance of Bergson's notion of retroactivity and claims, in fact, that Bergson had developed it in response to reading the first edition of his *Henri Bergson* published in 1930, he does not draw out the positive significance of the doctrine that I highlight here; see Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 2.

[22] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 5:310/*Critique of Judgment*, 139.

[23] Nietzsche had already advanced a notion of retroactivity, although there is no direct evidence to suggest that Bergson borrowed it from him. See Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke* 3:404/*The Gay Science*, §44: "*Historia abscondita* – Every great human being exerts a retroactive force: for his sake all of history is placed in the balance again, and a thousand secrets of the past crawl out of their hiding places – into *his* sunshine. There is no way of telling what may yet become part of history. Perhaps the past is still essentially undiscovered! So many retroactive forces are still needed!"

entirely fair that, as Jean Hyppolite noted, "modern philosophies of temporalisation have criticised Bergson for making nothing more of duration than 'cohesion,' for not having recognised the separations and the reunifications of the ecstasies of the past, present and future."[24] Bergson may well often say more about what time as duration is *not* than about what it *is*, but his doctrine of retroactivity, more so than the account of memory in 1896, belongs to the "modern" philosophies of temporalization.

To conclude, it is necessary to ask why Bergson did not further elaborate the doctrine. What might have encouraged him to affirm that genius in the present is untouched by the past while also supposing that it touches the past retrospectively? The conclusion of "The Possible and the Real" is revealing in this regard, for Bergson adduces ethical motivations for his doctrine of "absolute novelty." Bergson suggests first that the doctrine produces "greater joy." Novelty, he argues, breaks the spell of the dull, monotonous repetition of the same, and allows those without easy access to original art to share in the joy of those who do; "the reality invented before our eyes will give each one of us, unceasingly, certain of the satisfactions that art at rare intervals procures for the privileged; it will reveal to us, beyond the fixity and monotony which our senses, hypnotized by our constant needs, at first perceived in it, ever-recurring novelty, the moving originality of things" (PM 1344/124). Of course, if novelty is a source of joy, then one can understand why Bergson might seek its purest form and affirm a present absolutely and radically new, and this even to the point of denying the intrinsic historicality of art production. The idea, however, that novelty is desirable per se is scarcely defensible, and one does not have to be a political reactionary to see that novel things can be bad and that constant novelty leads to distraction. In this regard, Bergson could have attended more to the history of aesthetic theory. Although the early 1700s saw novelty, along with the sublime and the beautiful, promoted as an aesthetic category – as a "pleasure of the imagination" – in its own right, in opening his *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful* Edmund Burke attacks this position: "those things, which engage us merely by their novelty, cannot attach us for any length of time" and "curiosity is the most superficial of all the affections; it changes its object perpetually; it has an appetite which is very sharp, but very easily satisfied; and it has always an appearance of giddiness, restlessness, and anxiety."[25] Many early-twentieth-century writers and artists will return to the idea of novelty and celebrate it for its own sake, but

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[24] Hyppolite, "Various Aspects of Memory," 114.   [25] Burke, *A Philosophical Inquiry*, 27.

Burke's argument in the eighteenth century was nevertheless decisive in the formation of aesthetics.

In this concluding passage, Bergson announces a still more fundamental motivation for his emphasis on radical novelty: appreciating the novelty in our actions and experience will "above all" make us "stronger [*plus fort*]," "for we shall feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes." We will gain strength in recognizing that our creative power is one with a more general creative power that underlies life and the movement of time as such. Hence: "humbled heretofore in an attitude of obedience, slaves of certain vaguely-felt natural necessities, we shall once more stand erect, masters associated with a great Master" (PM 1345/124–25). This invocation of a great Master is vague, but Bergson's fundamental approach is less so: the goal of philosophical reflection and life itself is strength and mastery, even if we can never gain a monopoly on this power. The idea or ideal of creation that, at bottom, guides Bergson is one of the heroic self-creating creator who would only be weakened by historical inheritance.

This ideal of mastery is an expression of Bergson's fundamental metaphysical position, for his philosophy of life as creation is, at bottom, a philosophy of *will*. We are artistic when "we want to be [*quand nous le voulons*]," (PM 1334/110) he writes in "The Possible and the Real," and this is not an inadvertent remark given that he holds elsewhere that "the principle of all life" is "a pure willing [*un pur vouloir*]" (EC 697/153), and that there exist "*volontés géniales*," genial acts of will, volitions that are at once acts of genius; "the will has its genius, as does thought, and genius defies all prevision" (DSMR 1023/58). Bergson does not develop his views in this connection, and he seems to be led to them more by accident than design, by combining his two fundamental commitments: that life is will *and* that life is creation. It is hard to see how the position can make sense of experiences such as "writer's block," where no amount of effort, as it might seem, can facilitate creation, and this is perhaps another reason why Bergson was never motivated to write an aesthetics or philosophy of art (*genitivus objectivus*): his fundamental philosophical commitments had led him to an untenably voluntarist conception of artistic creation.

Bergson, the Time of Life, and the Memory of the Universe

Suzanne Guerlac

After the New Bergson

We can imagine that even Deleuze, who emphasized the need to read Bergson "in relation to the transformations of life and society, in parallel with the transformations of science," might agree that the New Bergson he gave us in the 1960s is perhaps not the one we need today.[1]

Major transformations have taken place not only since Deleuze published *Bergsonism* in France (1966), but also since the appearance of its English translation (1988) and the publication of *The New Bergson* (1999).[2] Take for example the impact of high-speed abstraction on our experience. We "understand … phenomena via the automated analysis of data"; algorithmic interfaces have become gateways to everyday practices and social exchanges, formatting our knowledge of the world and filtering its transmission.[3] Abstraction, we could say, has become the very stuff of experience. Or take the current status of the question of life. In the early twentieth century, the physiologist Hans Driesch buttressed his vitalist perspective with the claim that "the biologist is not able to 'make' life as the physicist has made … electromagnetism."[4] This is no longer true: today "the laboratory has become a kind of factory for the creation of new forms of molecular life."[5] Devitalized, construed as code, life is now manufactured, patented, and capitalized on a grand scale.[6] And finally, even as artificial life has thrown us into confusion about what life is, we have known since 2016 that we belong to a new geological age, one in which the *conditions* of life on our planet have been systematically altered by human

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[1] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 115.   [2] Mullarkey, ed., *The New Bergson*.
[3] Provost and Fawcett, "Data Science and Its Relationship to Big Data and Data-Driven Decision Making."
[4] Driesch, *The Science and Philosophy of the Organism*, 10.   [5] Rose, *The Politics of Life Itself*, 13.
[6] See Cooper, *Life as Surplus Value*, as well as my "Emergence of Time/Time of Emergence."

activity such that the continuation of life can no longer be taken for granted.[7]

Reading Bergson will not change any of this, of course, but reading him with these transformations in mind might inform our attitude toward these developments. In any case they invite us to read Bergson differently. They invite us to appreciate that Bergson's thought consistently challenges abstraction in favor of concrete experience. They invite us to attend to the question of life in his work, as it pertains to time. And finally, they invite us to bring him out of the intellectual isolation that afflicted the New Bergson (the anti-philosopher) and to read him in dialogue with other thinkers, even at the risk of encountering traditions of thought we tend to disapprove of (often for good reason) such as vitalism or spiritualism.[8] It is more important than ever to read Bergson rigorously (to return to his texts) but I would also recommend reading him a bit recklessly, with less concern for systematic coherence (which tends toward abstraction) or for purifying his thought of objectionable associations, and more attention to what we need to think today and to how features of Bergson's work – his ontology of time, for example – might help us do that.

Deleuze, Einstein, and Bergson

"To continue Bergson's project today," Deleuze wrote, "means . . . to constitute a metaphysical image of thought corresponding to the new . . . openings . . . discovered by a molecular biology of the brain." The "metaphysical image of thought" he proposes is a "logic of multiplicities," a term taken from the mathematician Bernard Riemann, specialist in analytic number theory, whose work contributed to the mathematical foundations of the theory of general relativity. Bergson, Deleuze writes, "intends to give multiplicities the metaphysics which their scientific treatment demands."[9]

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7 See Hamilton, *Defiant Earth*.
8 Lebovic cites Lukacs to the effect that *Lebensphilosophie* was "the dominant ideology of the whole imperialist period in Germany" and that Ludwig Klages, the "founder of modern vitalism," "transformed vitalism into an open combat against reason and culture" (*The Philosophy of Life and Death*, 4); see also his article, "The Beauty and Terror of 'Lebensphilosophie.'" According to Max Horkheimer, however, "life philosophy expressed a legitimate protest against the growing rigidity of abstract rationalism" (cited in Jos de Mul, *The Tragedy of Finitude*, 45). According to Jean-François Braunstein, Georges Canguilhem held that Bergson "was able to make life into a proper metaphysical concept" and defend it against "the assimilation mysticism – romanticism – fascism." Braunstein also notes a "French tradition of indifference but also of hostility and of suspicion toward [the question of] life" ("Canguilhem, lecteur de Bergson," 1 and 4). On vitalism, see also Worms, "Qu'est-ce qui est vital?"
9 Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 116–17.

That Deleuze cast his New Bergson in a scientific light in the 1960s perhaps had to do with the repercussions of Bergson's intellectual contest with Einstein in the 1920s. The highly publicized exchange played out as a gladiatorial combat between two intellectual giants concerning a most fundamental question: the nature of time. Einstein maintained there are a number of different times, which ultimately amount to a fourth dimension of space; Bergson maintained there is one independent time. The consensus was that Bergson lost the debate, a defeat that impugned not only his own intellectual standing but the authority of philosophy itself. When Bergson received a Nobel Prize in *literature* in 1927, it was widely seen as a humiliating consolation prize, one that implicitly affirmed that science had displaced philosophy as the repository of truth – and that the rest was storytelling.

It was widely believed that Bergson had intended to invalidate the theory of relativity but failed to do so because he "could not understand" Einstein's physics.[10] Bergson claimed he had never intended to challenge the science of relativity and had made a *philosophical* argument concerning the nature of time that Einstein failed to grasp.[11] From Bergson's point of view, Einstein had made a philosophical error (not a scientific one) by adhering to a classical model of time (one that reduces time to space) when his theory of relativity invited going beyond this.[12] Einstein maintained that there is no such thing as philosophical time, a response that called into question Bergson's life's work, which had been devoted to establishing a philosophy of time against a philosophical tradition that had long suppressed the force of time and reduced it to a dimension of space.

Bergson's very public (perceived) failure in the contest with Einstein precipitated an eclipse of the old Bergson, which enabled (and, perhaps necessitated) a return that yielded a New Bergson in the 1960s. In what follows we will contrast the way Deleuze treated the Bergson–Einstein dispute with the way Bergson presented his argument against Einstein in *Duration and Simultaneity*; a decisive account of his thought, I would

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[10] Canales, *The Physicist and the Philosopher*, 58. The issue is whether time is altered according to the velocity of the system (61).

[11] "I do not raise any objection against your theory of simultaneity, any more than I do not raise them against the theory of Relativity generally," Bergson reportedly declared to Einstein (cited in Canales, "Einstein, Bergson, and the Experiment that Failed," 1170).

[12] Bergson's apparent defeat was not the last word on the question. Theorists of quantum mechanics would go on to challenge "the reduction of time to space performed by relativity theory," thereby supporting Bergson's perspective (see Murphy, "Beneath Relativity: Bergson and Bohm on Absolute Time," 70), and Driebe writes that "the flow of time is a real, objective property of our physical world" ("Time, Dynamics and Chaos," 222).

suggest, given how much was at stake. We will then turn to *Matter and Memory* to examine how Bergson writes the memory of the body and what it might have to do with the elaboration of a "time common to all things," that is, a duration of the universe or living time (DS 45/32).

In a chapter of *Bergsonism* entitled "Is Duration One or Many?" Deleuze addresses Bergson's claim that there is one independent time. He tries to make sense of apparent discrepancies between various accounts of duration Bergson has given, reminding us that Bergson initially limited duration to the experience of living beings (*Time and Free Will*) and subsequently affirmed an infinity of specific durations (*Creative Evolution*) before arguing for a single independent time in *Duration and Simultaneity*. Deleuze suggests that Bergson initially posed duration as a psychological phenomenon but then recast it as a "springboard for an 'installation' in Being," a phrase which refers us to Heidegger where "installation" signifies the incorporation into a material medium (as in a work of art) of a "disclosure of disclosure," or of "being itself."[13] Deleuze proposes, in other words, that Bergson abandoned a psychological explanation of duration for one that depends upon an ontology of being. He answers the question "one or many durations?" by appealing to the "logic of multiplicities" already mentioned and reconciles the positions of Bergson and Einstein through it.[14] Both Bergson and Einstein are thinkers of multiplicity, he maintains, but each is committed to a different *type* of multiplicity. Whereas Einstein works from a logic of Actual Multiplicity (concluding that there are multiple times) Bergson's hypothesis depends upon a logic of Virtual Multiplicity, "a position where division has not yet been carried out" such that "it is obvious that there is only a single time."[15] Deleuze brings order to Bergson's thought. "There is only one time (monism)," he concludes, "although there is an infinity of actual fluxes (generalized pluralism) that necessarily participate in the same virtual whole (limited pluralism) ... Not only do virtual multiplicities imply a single time but duration as virtual multiplicity is this single and same Time."[16] Problem solved. The question of the one and the many has been redistributed across the divide of the virtual and the actual, which also holds Bergson and Einstein in balance.

In order to make this case, however, Deleuze has to evacuate consciousness from Bergson's account of universal time. In order to demonstrate that Bergson abandons consciousness in the passage from a psychological

[13] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 76; see also Sheehan, "Heidegger," 363.   [14] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 117.
[15] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 81.   [16] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 83.

to an ontological argument concerning time, he cites Bergson to the effect that

> A single duration will pick up along its route the events of the totality of the material world; and we will then be able to eliminate the human consciousness that we had initially had available, every now and then, as so many relays for the movement of our thought: there will now only be impersonal time in which all things flow.[17]

Duration and Simultaneity: The Livable

Readers introduced to Bergson by Deleuze will be surprised, then, to find Bergson insisting on consciousness, observation, perception, and lived experience in *Duration and Simultaneity*. When Bergson asks, "in what measure Einstein's times are real times," this is not a trivial question, given that, as Bergson writes, "we require the property of being perceived . . . for everything held up as real" (DS 39/28 and 67/46). The Real implies perception, consciousness and lived experience, and of course duration, "the very stuff of our existence and of all things" (DS 62/43).

Whereas Einstein proposed a scenario that included two observation posts from which the time of an event would be registered, one occupied by a person and the other by a clock, Bergson insists that both positions be occupied by "flesh-and-blood observers, conscious beings" (DS 39–40/28).[18] In the physicist's scenario, Bergson explains, mathematics requires that one of the two observation posts be designated as frame of reference. The events as they pertain to the other system will be construed in its terms – hence the disparity of times and the challenge to simultaneity. He points out that unlike mathematicians (or physicists who rely on mathematics), philosophers do not have to make this choice. They can alternate the points of view that attach to the two living observers without establishing one or the other as frame of reference for both. If both observers can be considered in relation to their own experienced frame of reference, then one can argue in favor of a single time – the time of the frame of reference.

Bergson's philosophical challenge to Einstein, then, hinges on the difference between what is livable and what is not, between a "flesh-and-blood observer" and a clock, between what is real and what is abstract. It is

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[17] Cited in Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 82. Note that Einstein had charged that Bergson's account of time (or duration) was merely psychological.

[18] In this passage, Bergson does not limit these conscious beings to humans; he explicitly mentions the limitations of considering only "a certain entirely human way of perceiving and conceiving things."

not the truth of the theory, he suggests, that determines the validity of Einstein's demonstration but rather the formal structure of mathematics that abstracts out these differences and in so doing produces a "mirage effect," a conception of time that is not real (DS 76/53). Because it requires abstraction to attain its truth, the theory of relativity is not wrong, but "cannot express all of reality" (DS 65/45). This is why "what matters at the moment," Bergson writes, "is not allotting shares of truth or error but seeing clearly *where experience ends and theory begins*" (DS 43/31, my emphasis). It is "for not having kept close to the passage from the physical to the mathematical that we have been so seriously mistaken about the philosophical meaning of time in the theory of relativity" (DS 40/28). Bergson couldn't be clearer: what is at stake is the difference between the register of mathematics and a concrete register of the real. "A thing," he insists, "remains separate from its measurement" (DS 180/124).

Reality (what he calls "the physical" in the passage just cited) is determined by perception and therefore requires some minimal consciousness. As we learn in *Matter and Memory*, however, consciousness for Bergson is not a cognitive faculty. It designates memory, which assures the survival of the past, defined as "what no longer acts" (MM 216/74).[19] This survival is required for the idea of time, which implies "a *before* and an *after*" (DS 66/45, Bergson's emphasis). Time, in other words, requires memory to happen, and memory implies consciousness. This is the core of Bergson's argument, and it will not change as he passes from individual experience to the level of the universe.

In chapter 3 of *Duration and Simultaneity*, Bergson returns to the figure of melody he introduced in *Time and Free Will* to convey what he called the "confused multiplicity" of individual duration and its heterogeneous continuity (ESSAI 59/87).[20] He elaborates it here not to convey individual duration but to introduce what he calls "basic time," a first step away from inner duration in an account that travels analogically to the duration of the universe. He explains basic time by inviting us to imagine hearing a melody without "the distinctive features of sound itself," an experience that would yield an awareness merely of "the continuation of what precedes into what follows." To have such an experience, he affirms, would be to "rediscover basic time," to immediately perceive duration "without which we would have no idea of time" (DS 41–42/30). The *idea* depends upon the *perception*, Bergson maintains, but he has shifted from a notion of perception tied to

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19 Note that all translations from MM and ESSAI are my own.
20 For melody as a figure of confused multiplicity, see my *Thinking in Time*, 66.

action (one where bodies "'have been cut out of nature's cloth by a *perception* whose scissors follow the stippled lines over which *action* would pass'" – Bergson here cites himself from *Matter and Memory* where he introduces a notion of "*pure* perception") to the immediate perception of intuition (DS 35/25 and MM 185/26, Bergson's emphasis). Bergson takes advantage of this slippage as he passes, analogically, from individual duration to the duration of the universe.

Before our very eyes, then, Bergson is prying duration loose from the framework of individual consciousness (the framework set up in *Time and Free Will* and developed in *Matter and Memory*) without relinquishing the stipulation of consciousness per se. If memory must be involved for there to be time – a before and an after – what is at stake when it comes to the duration of the universe "is memory, but not personal memory." It is "memory within change itself" that introduces what Bergson calls a "time of things." Consciousness does not drop away when it comes to this time of the physical world. Instead of abandoning a psychological account of duration to take up an ontological one that depends on a notion of being, Bergson affirms that the physical world and consciousness are inseparable. "This perception of the physical world," he writes, "appears, rightly or wrongly, to be inside and outside us at one and the same time." Crucial to his account of inner duration in *Time and Free Will*, the opposition between inside and outside falls away when it comes to the duration of the universe. But consciousness is not elided. Perception of the physical world, Bergson writes, is "in one way . . . a state of consciousness; in another, *a surface film of matter in which perceiver and perceived coincide*." It is because matter "participate[s] in our conscious duration," that we "gradually . . . extend this duration to the whole physical world" (DS 42/30–31, my emphasis).

This account of the "time of things" brings us to the "duration of the universe." And it is in relation to this duration that Bergson proposes the hypothesis of "a physical time that is one and universal." But this universal time does not amount to what Deleuze calls an "'instalation' in Being" that would be independent of consciousness. "Let us put aside the question of a single time," Bergson insists; "what we wish to establish is that we cannot speak of a reality that endures without inserting consciousness into it" (DS 43–46/31–33). Bergson takes pains to clarify that it is not a question of *human* consciousness, however: "We may perhaps feel averse to the use of the word 'consciousness,'" he explains, "if an anthropomorphic sense is attached to it. But to imagine a thing that endures, there is no need to take one's own memory and transport it, even attenuated, into the interior of

the thing . . . It is the opposite course we must follow." The consciousness that adheres to universal duration implies something like a memory of reality itself; it coincides with transition, with the movement through the interval between a before and an after. "We cannot conceive time without imagining it as perceived and lived" (DS 47/33). Universal time implies consciousness because it involves something like perception, which, as Bergson shifts from the scale of the individual to that of the universe, involves an interaction, or participation, between inside and outside. It is here that Bergson clarifies what he understands by the impersonal consciousness that attaches to the duration of the universe: it is "the link among all individual consciousnesses, as between these consciousnesses and the rest of nature." This is where Bergson was headed when he spoke of the "impersonal time in which all thing flow," associated with an "elimination of individual consciousness" (DS 43/31), in the passage Deleuze cited to support his view that Bergson abandoned a psychological treatment of duration for one that involved an "'installation' in Being."[21] What is at stake here is the difference between an ontology of being and an ontology of time, which refers us to life. For it is here that Bergson links the continuity of time, given to (impersonal) consciousness, to a "continuity of life" (DS 49/35). "Is time alive?" we might ask, with Nina Simone. Bergson suggests it is inseparable from livingness.

Other Voices: Schelling

"Duration therefore implies consciousness," Bergson writes. "[W]e place consciousness at the heart of things for the very reason that we credit them with a time that endures" (DS 47/33). We can follow the analogical movement from individual duration to the duration of the universe, from individual consciousness to universal, or impersonal, consciousness, but, frankly, we don't quite know how to think it. To a certain extent this is because we have lost touch with the traditions of thought that it carries.[22] Notes from a course on nature that Merleau-Ponty taught at the Collège de France beginning in the 1950s suggest the broad lines of a genealogy that includes representatives of German philosophy of nature (Schelling) and of

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[21] Aware, perhaps, that this might seem opaque to readers, Bergson references a number of his most important previous writings: *Time and Free Will, Matter and Memory, Creative Evolution*, and *Mind-Energy* in a note (42n1/47n1).

[22] For filiations between Schelling, Ravaisson, and Bergson see Mark Sinclair's introduction to *Ravaisson* as well as Dominique Janicaud, *Ravaisson et la métaphysique.* These filiations tended to be effaced in the structuralist and post-structuralist contexts.

French spiritualism (Ravaisson), as well as Bergson, and then continues on to von Uexküll, Whitehead, and, implicitly, Merleau-Ponty himself.[23] Retrospectively, we could project this filiation further forward toward Canguilhem, Simondon, Deleuze, and Brian Massumi.[24]

   Bergson is not thinking alone. When he declares duration to be "the very stuff of our existence and of all things" (DS 62/43), for example, we hear an echo of Schelling who affirmed that First Nature [*erste Natur*] was "the fundamental stuff of all life."[25] For Schelling, this First Nature is the horizon of pre-reflexive experience construed as what Merleau-Ponty characterizes (in strikingly Bergsonian terms) as the "qualitative synthesis in the heterogeneous"[26] – which is just what reappears in *Time and Free Will* in the account of "confused multiplicity" that Bergson identifies with the experience of duration (ESSAI 59/87). For Schelling, Merleau-Ponty writes, "*Naturphilosophie* is in no way a theory but rather a *life* within Nature."[27] This perspective lingers in Bergson's emphasis, already noted, on the importance of "seeing clearly where experience ends and theory begins" (DS 43/31). Schelling would also inform our understanding of Bergson's emphasis on perception in his response to Einstein, one that Deleuze neglects, most probably, to avoid contamination by the register of phenomenology from which both structuralism and post-structuralism are eager to take their distance in the 1960s. "Quality is not a thing," Schelling maintained, "but a thing seen."[28] If we are to avoid "dissolv[ing] everything into thought," he added, we have to trust perception, for "we rediscover nature in our perceptual experience prior to reflection."[29] The risk of dissolving everything into thought is very much at stake in Bergson's philosophical challenge to Einstein's mathematical theory of time. The perspective of Schelling helps dislodge the "psychological" label that both Deleuze and Einstein imposed on Bergson's account of the experience of inner duration and displaces it to a pre-reflexive register of the real, one that matters to thinkers as varied as Merleau-Ponty, Georg Simmel, Gilbert Simondon, and Jean-Paul Sartre and cannot be reduced to subjective experience. What is at stake, then, is the value one gives to the order of

[23] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*.
[24] I am not suggesting direct influence here; Bergson apparently did not read Schelling, but read Ravaisson, who read Schelling. This list is not exhaustive (one could mention William James and Georg Simmel). I do not want to suggest that the more recent philosophers I mention are followers of Bergson; the relation to Bergson's work was often both intense and ambivalent, notably for Canguilhem, Simondon, and Merleau-Ponty.
[25] Schelling, cited by Merleau-Ponty in *Nature*, 38.   [26] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 40.
[27] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature,* 47, Merleau-Ponty's emphasis.   [28] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 41.
[29] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 39.

reason and the place one gives it in the order of things. For Bergson, what is abstract, or rationalized, is less real than what is concretely experienced; for Kant, it constitutes a phenomenal real, which is to say a real as the knowable. So it is that, in response to Kant's evocation, in the "Critique of Teleological Judgment," of an autonomous force of nature that he could not know but could only dream of, Schelling reportedly declared: "What Kant, at the end of his sober discourse, conceived as a dream, I want to live and feel."[30] Finally, Bergson's notion of a participation between nature and consciousness, crucial to his expansion of duration toward universal time (and impersonal consciousness), recalls Schelling's position, which Merleau-Ponty characterizes in the following terms: "in one sense all is interior to us, in another sense we are in the Absolute," to which Merleau-Ponty adds, in parentheses and without further commentary, "(cf. Bergson)."[31]

This reciprocity between consciousness and nature, Merleau-Ponty further observes, is possible because, with Schelling, "we are no longer in a philosophy of Being . . . but rather . . . in a philosophy of time."[32] Deleuze read Bergson from the perspective of an ontology of being, in which "ontological difference" imposed a limit between the ontic and the onto-logical. The New Bergson is a philosopher of difference. The appeal to Schelling (as read by Merleau-Ponty) suggests the importance of distin-guishing an ontology of being from an ontology of time. For, as Georg Simmel put it in his last work (in which his proximity to Bergson is keenly felt): "Time is real only for life. This temporal existence is what we call life."[33] What Bergson adds – and this is part of his interest for us today – is precisely the expansion from living beings to a universe that lives. An ontology of time implies a certain philosophy of life – a *critical* vitalism – or, as I would prefer to say, a philosophy of livingness.[34] As Merleau-Ponty points out, from the vantage point of an ontology of time the positions of the virtual and the actual as Deleuze deployed them in speaking of Bergson and Einstein are reversed: from the perspective of Schelling's Nature Philosophy, what Deleuze calls Virtual Multiplicity would coincide with the actual or the real, grounded in experience, perception, and action, all of which makes possible an intuition of time as passage between before and after.[35]

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[30] Cited in Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 39.   [31] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 48.
[32] Merleau-Ponty, *Nature*, 48.   [33] Simmel, *The View of Life*, 8.
[34] For the notion of "critical vitalism" see Worms, "Pour un vitalisme critique."
[35] In his *Nature* lectures, Merleau-Ponty passes from a discussion of Schelling to Bergson. Here he has more to say about the "reciprocal envelopment" in Bergson between perception and Being (55).

Impersonal Memory and the Memory of the Body: Habit and Life (Bergson and Ravaisson)

In *Duration and Simultaneity* Bergson proposes the hypothesis of a universal duration that implies a consciousness, characterized by an impersonal memory, a memory of things. He arrives at this memory of things through an (analogical) extension of individual memory, which conditions our experience of time by linking a before and an after. There is one detail in this account that easily slips by without notice. The interaction between consciousness and nature, which marks the passage from the lived experience of duration to "*physical* time" (or the duration of the universe), passes through the body. "There is no doubt," Bergson writes, "that our consciousness feels itself enduring . . . and that something of our body and the environing matter enters into our consciousness." More strikingly he affirms:

> To each moment of our inner life there corresponds a moment of our body and of all the environing matter that is 'simultaneous' with it; this matter then seems to participate in our conscious duration. Gradually we extend this duration to the whole physical world . . . The universe seems to us to form a single whole . . . Thus is born the idea of a duration of the universe, that is to say, of an impersonal consciousness that is the link among all individual consciousnesses, as between these consciousnesses and the rest of nature. (DS 42–43/31, my emphases)

I cited part of this passage earlier, in connection with Schelling's notion of participation between nature and consciousness; what I want to emphasize here is the explicit appeal Bergson makes to the body in relation to consciousness, one that invites us to reconsider his treatment of the memory of the body in *Matter and Memory*. Here it will be Félix Ravaisson, the French spiritualist philosopher and author of the celebrated work *Of Habit*, who will enrich our understanding of Bergson's argument concerning the relation of the body not only to memory, but also to life.

You will remember that Bergson's principal task in *Matter and Memory* is to demonstrate that mind cannot be reduced to brain. In chapter 2, he affirms that there are two types of memory, a memory of the mind and a memory of the body. He introduces them according to a traditional dualist perspective: the mind implies spontaneity and freedom, the body mechanism. He then presents a number of events that engage what he calls the "motor mechanism" of the memory of the body to examine them more closely: perception of an external stimulus, the event of memorizing a lesson, and the act of listening to speech in a language one does not

understand. As he moves through these examples, the memory of the body becomes less and less mechanistic. Instead of being opposed to mental memory, it will become its supplement, as Bergson moves closer and closer to the account of mental memory as attentive recognition (the focus of his next chapter of *Matter and Memory*), where memory-images, which are virtual, need the body to come to life or actualize themselves.

When he speaks of learning a lesson by heart, for example, Bergson explains that each act of reading the lesson (which contributes to our memorization) is unique and produces a mental memory – a memory image or *souvenir*. But he adds that the experiences of reading lodge themselves in the body (*se dépose dans le corps*) because of movements the body receives, which create "new dispositions for action" (MM 227/92). He explains that the motor mechanism, which inscribes movement in the body, *supplements* the mental memory or memory image – is *capable de la suppléer* (MM 231/98, my emphasis).[36] At the end of this account Bergson rephrases his explanation of two types of memory. The memory of the body, he revises, is not really memory, but rather habit – habit "illuminated by memory [*éclairée par la mémoire*]" (229/95).

But how does Bergson understand habit? We could say he understands it in Ravaisson's terms, as he construed these, namely as mechanistic. Scholars have noted, however, that Bergson appears to have misread Ravaisson. "Bergson," one critic writes, "denies habit the character of life, even though Ravaisson's orientation is just the opposite of this."[37] As we will try to show, Bergson does sound a lot like Ravaisson in chapter 2 of *Matter and Memory*, but not the Ravaisson that Bergson acknowledges. Perhaps Bergson returns to Ravaisson – Ravaisson the philosopher of life – without even knowing it, or perhaps he does so strategically.

In his analysis of the act of perception Bergson suggests that the body undergoes a kind of shock (*ébranlement perceptif*) as it receives impressions from the outside; these transmit movements to the body which it conducts through itself, imprinting in it a certain bodily attitude (*imprime ... au corps une certaine attitude*, MM 245/119). With repetition, the body produces channels of movement, motor mechanisms that sketch out bodily

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[36] As we shall see, as his discussion advances, Bergson approaches something similar to what Derrida called the logic of the supplement in *De la grammatologie* (*Of Grammatology*), according to which the supplement both adds to and substitutes for the term it supplements. In chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory*, it will be the body that gives life to, or actualizes, the merely virtual memories of the mind.

[37] Janicaud, *Ravaisson,* 43. In what appears to be a classic case of anxiety of influence, Bergson misreads Ravaisson's theory of habit as mechanistic when it is just the opposite, and then (72) credits Ravaisson with being his own precursor once his own thought had moved closer to that of Ravaisson.

attitudes, generating habits. This is another way of saying that the body becomes imprinted with "new dispositions for action" as the word "attitude" signifies a way of holding one's body, a kind of bodily tendency, a manner of comportment or disposition for action. This is how the body – through motor mechanisms – stores, or registers, the past through habit. This is how the memory of the body works.

In another example, Bergson discusses aphasia as it pertains to understanding spoken language. Here, since speech occurs in time, attention sustains the operation of the motor mechanism in a continuous perception that draws (*en dessinent*) the "main lines [*grandes lignes*]" of the channels of movement that compose the bodily attitude we encountered in relation to perception of an object (MM 247/123). Attention passes back over the lines inscribed in the body by perception and retraces them through what Bergson calls an effort of synthesis, as if transforming the traces of a passive reception of movement into a quasi-voluntary reinscription of its lines of force.

A final example of the memory of the body (or habit formation) concerns listening to a language one does not know and trying to learn to understand it. This involves parsing the sounds one hears in order to discern syllables, words, and, eventually, significations. When the other speaks, Bergson writes, the sounds the ear hears are converted into a sequence of movements in the body of the listener that Bergson calls a "motor schema [*schème moteur*]." It amounts to a "motor accompaniment" to the received speech that strives to "decompose" and then to "recompose" the sound sequences so as to retrieve (*retrouver*) the total movement of this speech, "the lines that mark its internal structure" (MM 255/136).

The motor schema suggests a more dynamic version of the bodily attitude evoked in relation to perception of an object. Here the body becomes a sort of artist as the motor schema retraces the movement of another's speech, "marking out its most striking contours," sketching the movements and articulations of sounds. The motor schema, Bergson writes, is to the speech itself "what the sketch [*croquis*] is to the final work [*tableau achevé*]." The metaphor of the sketch, latent in the term "schema" (which signifies *esquisse*, sketch), becomes interesting when Bergson ties it to what he calls the *"intelligence* of the body," adding that a "movement is learned [*appris*] as soon as the body has understood [*compris*]" (MM 257/139 and 256/137, my emphasis).

The attribution of intelligence to the body is shocking from the perspective of Bergson's initial dualism that spoke of two ways of retaining the

past, one through a memory of the body, which operates through repetition, and the other through a mental memory of images. But it no longer surprises us if we read what Bergson calls an "attitude" of the body through what Ravaisson calls *tendency,* for, as Ravaisson affirms, "every inclination toward a goal implies intelligence."[38] Bergson declares his motor schema to be a tendency in just this sense. It is, he writes: "a *tendency* of the auditory impressions to prolong themselves in movements of articulation, a *tendency* . . . which implies perhaps even a certain rudimentary discernment, and which ordinarily amounts to an inner repetition of the striking features [*traits saillants*] of the speech. Our motor schema is just this [*n'est pas autre chose*]" (MM 258–59/141–42). The movements of "inner repetition" associated with the motor schema "are like the prelude to voluntary attention," Bergson adds; "they mark the limit between will and automatism." This is the heart of Ravaisson's philosophy of habit, which precisely mediates between activity and passivity as between the voluntary and the involuntary (MM 260/145). Here is Ravaisson leading up to the sentence quoted above:

> Even in becoming a habit, and in leaving the sphere of the will [*volonté*] and of reflection, the movement does not leave intelligence [*ne sort pas de l'intelligence*]. It does not become the mechanical effect of an external stimulus [*impulsion*], but the effect of a penchant [*penchant*] that takes over from volition [*succède au vouloir*]. This penchant forms itself by degree, and as far as consciousness can follow it, it recognizes in it a tendency toward the end that the will [*la volonté*] proposed to itself. Therefore [*or*] any tendency toward an end implies intelligence. . . . The law of habit can only be explained by the development of a spontaneity that is both passive and active at the same time, equally different from mechanistic inevitability [*la fatalité mécanique*] and from reflexive Freedom.[39]

Here we hear echoes of Schelling concerning the participation of consciousness and nature, which is not surprising given that Ravaisson studied with Schelling. But we also hear anticipations of Bergson's argument in *Duration and Simultaneity* for the extension of individual duration to universal duration – a single independent time – when, in the spirit of Schelling, he speaks of the duration of the universe as the "link among all individual consciousnesses as between these and the rest of nature" (DS 42/31).

In *Matter and Memory* Bergson alludes to an obscure intelligence of the body – a "rudimentary discernment" (159/142) – when it comes to the

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[38] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 55.   [39] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 55.

memory of the body and its motor schema, which draws and redraws the lines of force of the movement it receives upon hearing speech in an unknown language. It is just such an "obscure activity" that comes into play when Ravaisson enters into a debate against mechanism in a quite different context, and does so in the name of life.[40] Blocked in his academic career by Victor Cousin, whose rationalism he had challenged from the perspective of Schelling's philosophy of nature, Ravaisson became a civil servant in charge of educational programs and institutions. After the Franco-Prussian war, the Third Republic made learning to draw mandatory; it was hoped that drawing would focus the attention and so strengthen the will of the young, thereby enhancing the nation's military capability. A debate ensued concerning pedagogical method. The prevailing training was mechanistic; it involved copying images by breaking up the task of representation into geometric elements that, transposed onto a grid, could be mechanically traced so as to practically guarantee successful imitation. Against this Ravaisson advocated an expressive method based on the principles of Michelangelo and of Leonardo, who had famously declared drawing to be a *cosa mentale.* Here it is a question of discerning the *grandes lignes,* or principal lines of force, of masterpieces of art (especially Greek sculpture) felt to transmit the force of living forms and of attempting to freely reenact their tendencies. Ravaisson's drawing pedagogy substitutes for the spatialized model of mechanical imitation a durational experience of guided improvisation as attunement to lines of force.

The expressive method of drawing was of a piece with Ravaisson's theory of habit. Habit, for Ravaisson, is a way of coping with change, that is to say with time in its double movement of becoming – its becoming past and becoming future. This is why he theorized habit as a "double law" that includes a moment of repetition, which refers us to the past, and a moment of invention, which breaks with the past and opens to the future, allowing for grace in learned skills or gestures, and new capabilities.[41] His method of drawing harnesses this double law into one practice that simultaneously repeats and invents.[42] This is why it is important to attend to Bergson's metaphors of sketching and retracing in his treatment of the memory of the body, which breaks with the mechanistic framework initially set up, moving closer to Ravaisson's philosophy of habit, one that involves an ontology not of

[40] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 51.   [41] Ravaisson, *Of Habit,* 37.
[42] Janicaud writes that Bergson "attributed great importance to Ravaisson's ideas on drawing and its methods"; Janicaud, *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, 51; Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 31.

being but of time, and a philosophy of life: "life," Ravaisson writes, in anticipation of Bergson, "implies a determinate, continuous duration."[43]

When we consider the strategy of *Matter and Memory* with this in mind, we realize that Bergson needed both to distance himself from Ravaisson and to come back around to him. We remember that the principal thrust of Bergson's argument is to demonstrate that memories are not stored in the brain, in order to refute the more general view that would reduce mind to brain. This requires asserting the radical separation between body and mind from a dualist perspective as a first move to block the absorption of the mind into body. But this metaphysical position is useless against new clinical evidence, undertaken in connection with studies of aphasia, of memory impairments that accompany brain lesions – evidence that supports the view that memories are lodged in the brain. Bergson's strategy is to concede that memory pathologies might indeed be a function of physical damage, without conceding that this is because memories are stored in the body. He will argue that the physical brain lesion destroys not memory-images themselves, but rather the physical infrastructure of the operations of attention or spontaneous memory. By appealing to a nonmechanistic notion of the motor schema (resonant with Ravaisson's theory of habit), he can argue that it is the bodily attitudes, or motor mechanisms, that are disturbed by the lesion, not the memory-images themselves, even as he demonstrates the importance of these mechanisms in precisely the kind of memory operations that the clinical studies pertain to – operations of speech and reading. Without the complicated interrelations between body and spirit he has theorized as retracings that engender attitudes of the body, he would not have been able to explain how physical damage to the brain could affect mental operations that depend upon the kind of obscure intelligence of the body Ravaisson elaborated in connection with habit. In the end Bergson defends himself best against those who would reduce mind to brain by proposing habit as what Ravaisson called "the shared limit [*commune limite*] or intermediate term between will [*volonté*] and nature" – indeed something like the continuity between the physical world and consciousness that Bergson will propose in *Duration and Simultaneity*.[44]

Conclusion

By giving us a "new" Bergson Deleuze made him readable again. This Bergson, however, tended to become absorbed into the broader reach of Deleuze's own philosophical project (much as Ravaisson had been

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[43] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 35.   [44] Ravaisson, *Of Habit*, 59.

absorbed by Bergson) or isolated in its precinct. Bergson's pertinence today is enhanced when we consider the ways in which his thought carries features of minor philosophies, philosophies of nature and of life, which did not survive the push and acceleration of rational abstraction that yielded the geological age in which we now find ourselves. These aspects of Bergson's thought, which depend upon an ontology of time, not of being, support our resistance to the abstractions of algorithmic reason. Instead of adjusting to definitions of life as code and the deployment of it as commodity, they invite us to entertain ideas of life as livingness, which does not require that we choose between human beings and other beings, or even between living beings and nonliving ones. In Bergson, such distinctions cease to matter on the level of the universe. "The concept of the Anthropocene," Clive Hamilton writes, "applies to the . . . new Earth system thinking that emerged fully in the 1990s and 2000s . . . the integrative meta-science of the whole planet understood as a unified, complex, evolving system beyond the sum of its parts."[45] In *Duration and Simultaneity* Bergson already affirms that "the earth is a system," but the system he proposes is not meta-scientific and does not consist of measurements; it lives concretely in time, that is, in the transition from a before to an after (DS 38/27).

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[45] Hamilton, *Defiant Earth*, 11.

Bergson and Philosophy as a Way of Life

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Introduction

In this essay I explore Bergson's relation to the conception of philosophy as a way of life. I take my cue from Pierre Hadot, who has revealed that for him as a young student of philosophy at the Sorbonne, "Bergsonism was not an abstract, conceptual philosophy, but rather took the form of a new way of seeing the world."[1] From the beginning of his intellectual career, Bergson has an interest in philosophy as a way of life and in the practice of the art of life. This is first made manifest in his commentary on Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura* of 1884.[2] Moreover, even when Bergson is seeking to illuminate the character of the fundamental philosophical categories, such as we find in his essay on "The Possible and the Real," he is keen to convey the idea that the endeavor has a bearing on the practice of the art of living: thinking about metaphysical matters is not, Bergson says, to be regarded as a simple game but is a preparation for that art of living (PM 1345/125).

I focus on a particular aspect of Bergson's thinking, namely, his insight into what we can call "the sympathy of life," and how this is related to the ancient Plotinian and Stoic conceptions of the world.[3] Bergson thinks that we can establish contact with other forms of life and with the evolutionary movement as a whole. As he puts it in the opening section of chapter 3 of *Creative Evolution*, "Philosophy can only be an effort to dissolve again into the Whole [La philosophie ne peut être qu'un effort pour se fondre à

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[1] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 278. For attempts to interpret Bergson in terms of philosophy as a way of life see Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*; Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie*; Foley, *Life Lessons from Bergson*; and Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*.

[2] For insight see my chapter, "A Melancholy Science: Bergson on Lucretius."

[3] For relevant insight into Plotinus see Emilsson, "Plotinus on *sympatheia*," 36–61. For insight into Stoicism and its appreciation of cosmic sympathy see Murray, *The Stoic Philosophy*, 42–43. Bergson is mentioned on page 38. Bergson's lectures on Stoicism can be found in *Cours sur la philosophie grecque*, 115–36. For instructive insight into Bergson's lecture course on the Stoics see Kotva, "The God of Effort."

nouveau dans le tout]" (EC 658/123). His idea is that we are immersed in an "ocean of life" in which a beneficent fluid bathes us and from where we draw the force to labor and to live. It could be said that when we make the effort to go beyond the human condition we overcome our alienation from life. To practice philosophy as a way of life in the sense of cultivating a new attention to, and perception of, the world is to experience something of the character of this overcoming: it seeks to make contact with the Whole of life possible. In a certain sense Bergson is returning us to an ancient conception of the world and the doctrine of the sympathy with the Whole. Of course, he does this in an original manner and within a modern context, namely, that of an appreciation of the neo-Darwinian conception of the evolution of life. Bergson provides a conception of philosophy as a way of life in this sense: he does not simply offer his readers the possibility of acquiring abstract knowledge, but instead his work aims to encourage the cultivation of a special mode of perception (intuition and intellectual sympathy) that will dramatically transform our vision of the world and in the process change our comportment and sense of being in the world.

Philosophy for Bergson has two main aims: (1) to extend human perception; (2) to enhance the human power to act and live. I wish to suggest that Bergson is a significant figure in the modern reinvention of philosophy as a way of life because he attends to both a care of the self and the care of life as a whole.

Pierre Hadot and the Vision of Philosophy as a Way of Life

Pierre Hadot (1922–2010) was a formidable scholar of classical thought and of the history of philosophy and is best known for his conception of philosophy as a way of life (*manière de vivre*). For Hadot, academic philosophy has essentially lost sight of the ancient conception and practice of philosophy as a set of spiritual exercises that includes dialogue, meditative reflection, and theoretical contemplation. The goal of philosophy is to cultivate a specific, constant attitude toward existence and by way of a rational and perceptual comprehension of the nature of humanity and its place in the cosmos. This cultivation of the self through philosophy involves conquering the passions and overcoming the illusory evaluative beliefs that they, along with habits and upbringing, instill in us.

Consider Stoicism as an example. Stoic physics, like Stoic logic, was not simply an abstract theory but the occasion for spiritual exercises. As Hadot notes, to put theory into practice requires the exercise of recognizing oneself as part of the Whole and elevating oneself to cosmic consciousness.

Thus, while meditating on physics, we are to see all things from within the perspective of universal reason, and to achieve this we need to practice a specific imaginative exercise, namely, that of seeing all human things from above. We can also see things as being in a perpetual state of transformation or metamorphosis. When we contemplate how all things transform themselves into one another, the focus on universal change leads to a meditation on death, which we need to accept as a fundamental law of universal order: "physics as a spiritual exercise leads the philosopher to give loving consent to the events which have been willed by that Reason which is immanent to the cosmos."[4] In addition to consenting to the events that happen, we need also to prepare ourselves for them. Thus, a key spiritual exercise for the Stoic consists in the pre-meditation of so-called future evils, which is an exercise that prepares us for facing the trials of life in which we imagine in advance various difficulties, reversals of fortune, sufferings, and even our own death and that of others. The idea is that such exercises will enable us to deal better with the blows of fate when they inevitably come. In Stoic ethics the aim is to reduce the shock of reality, so as to maintain some peace and tranquillity of mind. To do this requires that we overcome the fear that would stop us thinking about events in advance (such as our death and that of others). The task for the Stoics is, in fact, to think about such events often so as to disclose to ourselves that future evils are not really evils since they do not depend on us. As Hadot puts it: "The Stoic's fundamental attitude is this continuous attention, which means constant tension and consciousness, as well as vigilance exercised at every moment. Thanks to this attention, the philosopher is always perfectly aware not only of what he is doing, but also of what he is thinking and of what he is – in other words, of his place within the cosmos. This is lived physics."[5]

As John Sellars points out, the phrase "spiritual exercise," which denotes the transformation of one's entire way of being, is derived from Ignatius of Loyola, a sixteenth-century Spanish priest and theologian.[6] For Ignatius a spiritual exercise is an exercise for the soul just as physical exercise is an exercise for the body. But is it not anachronistic to apply a sixteenth-century Christian concept to the praxis of ancient philosophy? Hadot's argument in favor of the adoption of the phrase is to suggest that the exercises of Ignatius stand in a Christian tradition that stretches back to antiquity and that is ultimately indebted to ancient philosophical practice. Hadot writes:

[4] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 136.   [5] Hadot, *What Is Ancient Philosophy?*, 138.
[6] Sellars, *The Art of Living*, 111.

Spiritual exercises can best be observed in the context of Hellenistic and Roman schools of philosophy. The Stoics, for instance, declared explicitly that philosophy, for them, was an "exercise" . . . philosophy did not consist in teaching an abstract theory . . . but rather in the art of living. It is a concrete attitude and determinate lifestyle, which engages the whole of existence. The philosophical act is not situated merely on the cognitive level, but on that of the self and of being. It is a progress, which causes us to *be* more fully, and makes us better. It is a conversion which turns our entire life upside down, changing the life of the person who goes through it. It raises the individual from an inauthentic condition of life, darkened by unconsciousness and harassed by worry, to an authentic state of life . . . an exact vision of the world, inner peace, and freedom.[7]

Hadot notes that although each school had its own therapeutic model, they all linked their therapeutics to a profound transformation of the way in which the individual sees and experiences the world, and it is the object of spiritual exercises to bring about such transformation.

The best way, then, of understanding the idea of philosophy as a way of life is through the notion of "spiritual exercises." Just as there is a gymnastics of the body, so we can entertain the idea of exercises of the soul as a form or mode of mental training. Here philosophy is not simply to be conceived as a set of written doctrines but as a set of practices or exercises that seek to transform one's way of life, indeed, one's entire way of being and fundamental orientation in the world. Although we may have reservations over the word "spiritual," Hadot thinks that none of the other adjectives we could use, such as "psychic" or "ethical," cover all the aspects of the reality we wish to describe with this term. In essence, by means of such exercises the individual is meant to elevate himself to the reality of objective spirit, which is to say, "he replaces himself within the perspective of the Whole."[8]

Bergson and Philosophy as a Way of Life

The extent to which Bergson adopts aspects of this ancient conception of philosophy in his thinking on life is striking, and it is today an underacknowledged aspect of his philosophy. Of course, one cannot simply claim that Bergson is a Stoic: he eschews both fatalism and determinism, and in his final published text of 1932, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, it is clear that for him what is to be prized in life is not Stoic

[7] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 82–83. Hadot develops the concept of spiritual exercises from Rabbow, *Seelenführung*.
[8] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 82.

apatheia but action, that is, the attempt to change the world in the direction of its progressive accomplishment of an open morality and an open society.[9] Moreover, even without this stress on the primacy of dynamic and vital action, it is clear that Bergson's conception of the Whole of life is different to the ancient one, such as we find in Stoicism. For Bergson the Whole is not given and it does not precede the parts that make it up. Rather, the Whole is the ever-changing, ever-mobile openness of reality, and as such, it does not cease to evolve and to become. Nevertheless, having noted this key difference, the extent to which his notion of the sympathy of life, which resides in the Whole, is congruent with an ancient conception remains striking. As Plotinus puts it, the "All" is "one universally comprehensive living being, encircling all the living beings within it."[10] At the same time, one might propose that Bergsonian intuition, as a unique mode of extended perception, can be practiced as a "spiritual exercise." Again, though, the mode of contemplation is of a specific kind: the aim is to not to attain a beatific state of *ataraxia* but to extend human perception and to think beyond the human condition (that is, beyond the dominant modes and habits of representation that we have acquired in the course of our evolution). The ultimate aim of this quest is to restore us to the élan of life itself, and this is what motivates us to undertake it.

With respect to altering and extending our perception of the world, it is important to note that Bergson sees a close alliance between art and philosophy. He argues, for example, that both literature and philosophy are involved in a search of time gone by, shifting our attention from the plane of action, where the past is contracted into the present and only the present is of interest to us, to the dream plane, where "indivisible and indestructible, the whole of the past is deployed." Still, Bergson draws a distinction between literature and philosophy: if the province of the former is to undertake a study of the soul (*l'âme*) in the concrete and focused on individual examples, then it is the task of the latter "to lay down the general conditions of the direct, immediate observation of oneself by oneself" (PM 1268/29). And why is it important for philosophy to do so? Because its task is to defeat both spatial and social habits of representation, which are habits that make it impossible for us to have an immediate

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[9] For Bergson's critique of ancient philosophy see DSMR 1025–28/60–63.
[10] Plotinus, *Enneads*, IV, 4, sect. 32. It should be noted that Plotinus's theory of cosmic sympathy is heavily indebted to Plato's *Timaeus.*

contact with life. For this to take place we need to cultivate intuition as a philosophical method.

Now, Bergson admits that "intuition" is a word that caused him some degree of hesitation (PM 1271/33). His hesitation is due in part to its use by previous philosophers, such as Schelling and Schopenhauer, to search for the eternal. By contrast, Bergson wants a mode of intuition that will find for us true duration. He thus speaks of an "intuitive metaphysics" that would be able to follow the real in all its undulations. He adds an important set of qualifications as to just what this metaphysics will give us, and it is worth citing him at length so as to gain a sense of the unity of life that he is after: an intuitive metaphysics

> would not embrace in a single sweep the totality of things; but for each thing it would give an explanation which would fit it exactly, and it alone. It would not begin by defining or describing the systematic unity of the world: who knows if the world is actually one? Experience alone can say, and unity, if it exists, will appear at the end of the search as a result; it is impossible to posit it at the start as a principle. Furthermore, it will be a rich, full unity, the unity of a continuity, the unity of our reality, and not that abstract and empty unity, which has come from one supreme generalization, and which could just as well be that of any possible world whatsoever. (PM 1272/35)

With "intuition," Bergson makes the bold claim that we move from representation to an absolute, providing us with "a vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the object seen, a knowledge which is contact and even coincidence" (PM 1272/36).

For Bergson, then, change is the stuff of reality and it is possible for us to experience this in a vital way. He thus appeals to a "true empiricism," which he defines as the genuine metaphysics, as a way of seeking to capture what we fundamentally know, namely, that all living things are the subjects of a mobile and changing reality. It is only when we think in a superficial manner that we deem reality to be something inert, mechanical, and repetitive. It is not just misguided to see the world in these terms; it is also a profound spiritual loss. Bergson wants, then, a philosophy of life that will have a deep effect on our lives and how we actually live these lives. For philosophy to do this, for it to make contact with life, it is necessary to break with our fundamental mental habits – to think beyond the human condition or human state, as he puts it – and to ensure that philosophy does not degenerate into a merely scholastic exercise, divorced from the existential efforts of human beings to be equal to the durational conditions of their existence.

In his corpus, then, Bergson is deeply preoccupied with the reformation of philosophy. He is inspired by the ambition of taking philosophy out of the school, as he puts it, including the disputes between the different schools of philosophy, and bringing it into more intimate contact with life. Indeed, if we follow the contours of intuitive life with its special kind of knowledge, then the promise is opened up of bringing an end to inert states and dead things: "nothing but the mobility of which the stability of life is made" (PM 1363–64/151). Such knowledge will do two things. First, it will enrich philosophical speculation: we see for the sake of seeing and the enrichment an enlarged perception offers us. Second, it will nourish and illuminate everyday life, and enhance our power to act and live.

The task is to extend perception and to effect a conversion of attention. The method for doing this is intuition, and the overriding aim is to become accustomed to seeing all things *sub specie durationis*: in this way what is dead comes back to life, life acquires depth, and we come into account with the original élan of life that attunes us to the vital and dynamic character of life and also serves to encourage us to create new things. The task of philosophical education is to become a master in the art of living.

Bergson's contribution to our reengagement with philosophy as a way of life consists primarily of his attempt to provide an enlarged perception of the universe. For Hadot, Bergson's thinking effects a displacement of attention – similar in character to the phenomenological reduction or epoche as articulated in the work of Merleau-Ponty[11] – and that amounts to a "conversion," that is, a "radical rupture with regard to the state of unconsciousness in which man normally lives." What is being overturned is the "utilitarian perception we have of the world," which conceals from us the world qua world. Hadot contends in closing his discussion of Bergson: "Aesthetic and philosophical perceptions of the world are only possible by means of a complete transformation of our relationship to the world: we have to perceive it *for itself*, and no longer *for ourselves*."[12] This statement is in accord with a core tenet of Hadot's thinking, constituting one of the main features of the cosmic consciousness he associates with the Stoic way of living, in which we make the conversion from prosaic subjective every-dayness to the standpoint of universality and objectivity.

Bergson has his own unique gloss on this conception: the effort is to be made to make contact with the reality of duration, to even coincide with it. However, we need to properly understand Bergson on this point about

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[11] See especially the Preface in Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*.
[12] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 254.

coincidence, and here an insight developed by Merleau-Ponty is, I think, especially helpful. He argues that the famous coincidence with the real promoted by Bergson's new thinking does not mean "that the philosopher loses himself or is absorbed into being." No, the experience is quite different to this: "It is not necessary for him to go outside himself in order to reach the things themselves; he is solicited or haunted by them from within." Merleau-Ponty adequately appreciates the key insight: every living thing that exists is implicated in duration as an immanent reality. This means, then, that "[t]he relation of the philosopher to being is not the frontal relation of the spectator to the spectacle; it is a kind of complicity, an oblique and clandestine relationship."[13] The task at hand is one of embodying this relationship to oneself as a way of life and learning to appreciate the implication of one's own *durée* in a reality of universal duration that is made up of different tensions and rhythms. The solution to the problematic of being, then, is *within* us, and we go astray in our thinking and living when we posit an exterior being that is then supposedly discovered by an observing consciousness.

For Bergson it is primarily art and philosophy that exist to extend our perception. Although detached from reality in its ordinary, prosaic form, the artist is the one who is able to see in it more things than is customary. Normally we are so attached to life, and on account of the needs of living and acting, that we do not perceive it. Philosophy takes up the aesthetic mode of extended perception and seeks to effect "a certain displacement of our attention ... This conversion of the attention would be philosophy itself" (PM 1373–74/163). Here it is a matter of turning attention aside from the part of the universe that interests us practically and turning it back toward what serves no practical end.

I have argued that throughout his writings Bergson is concerned to reform philosophy in a fundamental manner, seeking to take it out of the school and wishing to connect it intimately with life. He does this in a unique way by developing a close rapport with the sciences of his day, especially the study of life, so as to ensure that philosophy remains modern and does not lose contact with advances in knowledge. For example, Bergson wants to show how, through an appreciation of the evolution of life, philosophy can expand our perception of the universe. How, though, is it possible to think beyond the human condition and outside of its particular framing of reality? This is where Bergson appeals to evolution itself and stresses that the line of evolution that has culminated in the

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[13] Merleau-Ponty, *In Praise of Philosophy*, 15.

human is not the only line. His idea seems to be a radical one, namely, that there are other forms of life-consciousness that express something immanent to and essential in the evolutionary movement, and the critical task is to then bring these other lines of evolution into contact or communication with the human intellect. Bergson poses the question: would not the result be a consciousness as wide as life?

What does he have in mind? Bergson suggests that it is possible to cultivate, through intellectual effort, a perception of life where we experience something of the very impetus of creative life itself or what he describes as the push of life and that has led to the creation of divergent forms of life – such as plant and animal – from a common impulsion. In short, philosophy is that discipline of thinking that tries to make the effort to establish contact with the vitality and creativity of life and involves novelty, invention, process, and duration.

In the introduction to *Creative Evolution* Bergson tackles the objection that may be raised against the project he is inviting us to pursue: will it not be through our intellect and our intellect alone that we perceive the other forms of consciousness? In answer to this objection he points out that this would be the case *if* we were pure intellects, but the fact is, he thinks, we are not. Around our conceptual and logical modes of thought, which have molded themselves on certain aspects and tendencies of the real, it is possible to find powers of insight and perception the nature of which we have only an indistinct feeling of when we remain shut up in ourselves and exist as closed beings. The task of philosophy is to make these powers clear and distinct, Bergson says in a clear reference to Descartes.

Typically, we exist – both in terms of our species history and our individual development – as slaves of certain natural necessities. Philosophy is a practice and a discipline that can enable us to go beyond the level of necessities and to become "masters associated with a greater Master" (PM 1345/125). We exist as masters in two main forms: through science and the mastery of matter, and through philosophy and the mastery of life. One is more free than the other for Bergson: the mastery of matter is part of the human condition and is a necessity for us, but the mastery of life takes us beyond the human condition and represents a free activity. Moreover, while the former activity serves to provide us with security and is bound up with securing a life of convenience(s), the latter is something altogether different. Philosophy can become complementary to science with respect to both speculation and practice. More than this, it supplements science since science offers us only the promise of well-being and the pleasure of it – philosophy can give us *joy*, and this joy

is bound up with the move beyond the limited character of the human condition.

Sympathy and the Evolution of Life

Bergson places the emphasis on sympathy and on intuition as the method by which we enrich our connection to the whole of life. I should perhaps make it clear that in Bergson's account sympathy plays both a descriptive and a prescriptive role: there is a level of sympathetic communication between forms of life within evolution *and* it is to be cultivated as a mode of intuition and a new style of aesthetic-cum-philosophical intelligence. Bergson's argument is that we are estranged from evolutionary life and from the creative conditions of our existence; sympathy, then, has the effect of reconnecting the human to the nonhuman and to the whole of life. This is in accord with Bergson's conception of what philosophy is: an effort to expand our perception of the universe.

Although Bergson makes it clear that the intuition he will deploy bears above all upon an internal duration, this does not mean that he is restricting its use to a solely psychological reality: the method of intuition is intended to provide access to an ontological reality, even a cosmological one. Or, at least Bergson seems to be suggesting this in *Creative Evolution* (1907). In the "Introduction" (Parts 1 and 2, 1922) that forms the beginning of the collection of essays, *Creative Mind*, he elaborates his position quite carefully. Let me note the two key points he makes. First, he asks whether through intuition we only intuit ourselves in our mobile and fluid reality. It is here that we encounter an important appeal to sympathy, as when Bergson suggests that "[u]nreflecting sympathy and antipathy ... give evidence of a possible interpenetration of human consciousnesses," so providing possible evidence of the existence of psychological endosmosis (PM 1273/36).[14] Second, Bergson now asks after a possible extension of sympathy *beyond* the level of human consciousnesses. Allow me to quote him: "But is it only with consciousnesses that we are in sympathy? If every living being is born, develops and dies, if life is an evolution and if duration is in this case a reality, is there not also an intuition of the vital, and consequently a metaphysics of life, which might in a sense prolong the

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[14] The dictionary definition of "endosmosis" concerns the flow of a substance from an area of lower concentration to one of greater concentration, or the inward flow of a fluid through a permeable membrane toward a fluid of greater concentration. As John Mullarkey has noted, Bergson uses the language of interpenetration and endosmosis with the aim of exemplifying the mixed nature of the real. See Mullarkey, "Henri Bergson," 35.

science of the living?" (PM 1273/36). Bergson appears to be suggesting that through an expanded consciousness we can recapture the "élan of life" (*l'élan de vie*) that lies within us.

Let me now turn to the equally rich presentation of sympathy we find in *Creative Evolution.* The crucial distinction here is between intelligence as a faculty of understanding, and of action and intuition as the method and mode of perception that affords us access to duration and so to an absolute. The intellect has not been made to apprehend evolution conceived as the continuity of a change or pure mobility. Rather, it represents becoming as a series of states in which each is taken to be homogeneous and therefore as something that does not change. For Bergson, the intellect is not meant for pure theorizing, which would allow it to assume its place within movement; rather, the intellect, which is an instrument of manufacture, starts with immobility as if this was an ultimate reality. If the intellect does form an idea of movement it does so by constructing it out of immobilities put together. The intellect fabricates reality by thinking it can carve out matter at will. On account of the fact that it is always seeking to reconstitute with what is given, the intellect allows the new in each moment of a history to escape from its grasp, and therefore it does not admit the unforeseeable and the creative dimension of an evolution. Bergson reaches the conclusion that "*[t]he intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life.*" The turn to instinct, which, Bergson claims, is molded on the form of life, is necessitated by this inability of the intellect to think life. We now get another key contrast: between treating things mechanically, as does intelligence, and treating things organically, as does instinct. Instinct, if it could provide us with knowledge, "would give up to us the most intimate secrets of life." Bergson adds: "The most essential of the primary instincts are really, therefore, vital processes. The potential consciousness that accompanies them is generally actualized only at the outset of the act, and leaves the rest of the process to go on by itself. It would only have to expand more widely, and then dive into its own depth completely, to be one with the generative force of life" (EC 635–36/106–07). This valorization of the vital character of instinct leads Bergson to a consideration of sympathy, as when he declares: "Instinct is sympathy" (EC 645/114). He once again reiterates his point that if this instinct qua sympathy could extend its object and reflect upon itself, then we would have the key to life's vital operations, just as intelligence guides us to the other half of the absolute, namely, the operations of matter. If intelligence, in the form of science, lays open the secrets of physical operations, and goes around life so as to take from outside the greatest possible number of views of life, intuition, which is

now introduced into Bergson's account, discloses to us the "inwardness of life." He makes clear that by intuition he means instinct that has become disinterested and self-conscious, and so "capable of reflecting upon its object and enlarging it indefinitely" (EC 645/114).

How is such an effort possible? Bergson provides the example of an aesthetic faculty that exists along with normal perception. Whereas our eye perceives the different features of a living being as merely assembled, not as mutually organized, the artist seeks to regain the original intention of life, that is, the simple movement that runs through the lines and binds them together. The artist does this precisely through an effort of intuition in which she or he is placed back within the object by a kind of sympathy, and so breaks down the space that separates subject and object. Bergson holds that it is possible to conceive an inquiry that is turned in the same direction as art but which takes as its object life in general, not simply, as in the case of the artist, the individual case. What would be the result of such an exercise of our mental capabilities? On the one hand, the mechanism of intelligence would be utilized so as to show how our intellectual molds cease to be applicable to the phenomena of life; on the other hand, intuition would bring the intellect to a point of recognition where it would acknowledge that life does not readily go into our categories, such as the one and the many, or that of mechanical causality and intelligent finality. But more than this, intuition would transport us into life's own domain, "which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation" (EC 646/115). It would do this precisely through a sympathetic communication that is established between ourselves and the rest of the living. Here our consciousness is expanded and we think beyond the human condition, that is, beyond the limits of intelligence that closes us off from life and the evolutionary movement as a whole. The alienation of ourselves from nature and from life, from the Whole, would be overcome.

For Bergson, then, the problem of knowledge is one with the metaphysical problem, and the two in fact depend on experience. We reach a decisive insight that shows us why Bergson takes so seriously, as the fundamental component in his effort to think life, the study of evolution:

> On the one hand, indeed, if intelligence is charged with matter and instinct with life, we must squeeze them both in order to get the double essence from them; metaphysics is therefore dependent upon the theory of knowledge. But, on the other hand, if consciousness has thus split up into intuition and intelligence, it is because of the need it had to apply itself to matter at the same time as it had to follow the stream of life. The double form of consciousness is then due to the double form of the real, and the theory of

knowledge must be dependent upon metaphysics. In fact, each of these two lines of thought leads to the other; they form a circle, and there can be no other centre to the circle but the empirical study of evolution. (EC 647/115)

Bergson expresses his position in quite clear terms in his lecture of 1911 on "Philosophical Intuition." The key point that needs grasping is this: what is outside us in the form of the real is equally inside us. Bergson writes: "the matter and life which fill the world are equally within us; the forces which work in all things we feel within ourselves; whatever may be the inner essence of what is and what is done, we are of that essence. Let us then go down into our own inner selves: the deeper the point we touch, the stronger will be the thrust which sends us back to the surface" (PM 1361/147). In making the effort, then, to think beyond the human condition, we come into contact, through intuition, with movements, memories, and a nonhuman consciousness deep within us. Deep within the human there is something other than the human. This means that for Bergson the sources of human experience are more obscure and distant than both common sense and science suppose, and these are sources that, Bergson contends, Kant failed to penetrate in his attempt to philosophize about the conditions of the possibility of experience. In essence, this is what Bergson means when he writes of "dissolving into the Whole" and experiencing "the ocean of life." Although this dissolving experience may approach the insights of poetry or mysticism, Bergson is after philosophical precision and clarity. He never ceases to emphasize the extent to which intuition requires long and stubborn effort.

As David Lapoujade notes, Bergson accords primacy in reality to alterity: "it is because the other is within us that we can project it outside us in the form of 'consciousness' or 'intention.'"[15] What we project onto the world is our own alterity. However, it is clear that for Bergson, when we experience sympathy, it is not merely sympathy for others we subject ourselves to but equally sympathy for one's self and recognition of the alterity that lies concealed within ourselves. As Bergson puts it, "one thing is sure: we sympathize with ourselves [*nous sympathisons sûrement avec nous-mêmes*]" (PM 1396/191). Such an insight perhaps allows us to reconfigure the in-itself: "The in-itself no longer designates the way in which things will never be 'for us' but the way in which, on the contrary, things will be very much within us."[16] This is one way in which we can grasp how Bergson configures philosophy as a way of life in his writings: his new

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[15] Lapoujade, "Intuition and Sympathy in Bergson," 11.
[16] Lapoujade, "Intuition and Sympathy in Bergson," 12.

modes of thinking provide us with an expanded perception both of the self and of the universe it inhabits. As Hadot notes, the task is to undo oneself from the artificial, the conventional, and the habitual, so as to return us to an elementary perception of the world, one removed from all prejudice. As he rightly notes, this effort of a renewed perception amounts to a spiritual exercise: "For me the essential of Bergsonism will always be the idea of philosophy as transformation of perception."[17]

For Bergson, then, the key move for thought to make lies in the direction of sympathy. By means of science, intelligence does its work and delivers to us more and more the secret of life's material or physical operations. But this gives us only a perspectivism that never penetrates the inside, going "all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it" (EC 645/114). By contrast, metaphysics can follow the path of intuition, which affords insight into the durations of life. Rather than knowledge properly so-called, intuition provides us with a supplement that enables us to grasp that which intelligence fails to provide. More than this, it is intuition that can disclose to us in a palpable form what the discoveries of modern biology have established, namely, that living systems are implicated in an evolving Whole of life.

When Bergson thinks about the sympathy of life, he is engaging with modern accounts of evolution, but in order to do so he draws upon an ancient conception. He has two sources to draw upon – Plotinus and the Stoics – and it is Plotinus he refers to in the extended treatment of sympathy we encounter in *Creative Evolution*. He writes as follows: "Thus the instinctive knowledge which one species possesses of another on a certain particular point has its root in the very unity of life, which is, to use the expression of an ancient philosopher, a 'whole sympathetic to itself.'" Of course, Bergson has to acknowledge that life becomes caught up in particular species and, as such, it "is cut off from the rest of its own work, save at one or two points that are of vital concern to the species just arisen" (EC 637/108). Nevertheless, having acknowledged this aspect of the evolution of life, Bergson wants to shows that sympathy between different forms of life is operative in this evolution, and he gives the example of the *Ammophila hirsuta* (a species of parasitoidal wasp) and its prey. We do not need to follow the details of his account here. Rather, we need simply note that it serves for Bergson as an example of how evolution can only be partially understood by intelligence and that it needs the supplement of a philosophy of sympathy. What truly interests Bergson is how in the

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[17] Hadot, *The Present Alone Is Our Happiness*, 126.

phenomena of feeling, we experience in ourselves, albeit in a much vaguer form, something of what takes place in the consciousness of an insect acting by instinct. "Evolution," he writes, "does but sunder, in order to develop them to the end, elements which, at their origin, interpenetrated each other" (EC 644/113).

The extent to which *Creative Evolution* is an extraordinarily bold and ambitious work that seeks to marry the new science of evolution with the concerns of ancient philosophy has been forgotten. For Bergson, there is a Whole of life and of evolution, which he conceives in terms of universal interaction. The task, as he sees it, is to reintegrate the systems that science isolates into this Whole. We need to do this in order to adequately conceive of reality itself and to give ourselves the chance of reconnecting with the Whole of life. For Bergson this Whole is a natural system. He concedes at one point in his argument that life is a kind of mechanism. However, he asks whether it is the mechanism of parts artificially isolated within the whole universe or "the mechanism of the real whole," and this real whole would be that of an indivisible continuity (EC 520/20).

Bergson wants us to appreciate the complicated and implicated character of evolution. On the one hand, divergent lines characterize it, and, on the other hand, there is reciprocal interpenetration between the parts. The movement of evolution is complicated precisely because the evolution of life has not been characterized by a single direction. Rather its movement can be compared to that of an exploding shell bursting into fragments, shells that in turn continue to burst into other fragments. Continuing this analogy further, Bergson speaks of evolution in terms of the breaking of a shell that involves both an explosive force (the powder it contains) and the resistance it encounters (in the metal). Thus, the way life itself evolves into individuals and species depends on two similar causes, namely, the resistance of inert matter and the explosive force that life holds within itself owing to an unstable balance of tendencies. Life enters into the habits of inert matter and from this learns how, little by little, to draw from it living forms and vital properties. The complex and quasi-discontinuous organism arises from smaller, more elemental prototypes, but in advancing in complexity such an organism introduces into life new components and evolves via new habits. The evolution of life for Bergson is characterized by divergent tendencies. Unlike an individual life that must choose between the interwoven personalities that characterize it, nature preserves the different tendencies that bifurcate. There is abundant evidence that there exists sympathetic communication between the different forms of life that

shape evolution on earth, from the examples of insects and their prey that Bergson gives to modes of symbiosis (655/121–22).[18]

Conclusion

As Lars Spuybroek has noted, and as we have seen ourselves, Bergson places his philosophy of perception or intuition in the framework of an old notion of sympathy.[19] The Stoics have a cosmological appreciation of sympathy since it applies to the world as a whole. For Epicurus, for example, sympathy is essentially psychological, and can explain the relation between mind and body; for the Stoics, by contrast, it is a feature of the world as a whole: the entities that exist in the world are in sympathy with one another.[20] Having noted this, however, it is important to appreciate that Bergson is developing his conception of the sympathetic Whole in terms of an engagement with modern evolutionary theory and the effort of developing a novel philosophy of life, one that we can incorporate as a way of life. To do this may require of us that we practice the method of intuition as a "spiritual exercise." Such an exercise would not only allow us to contemplate reality in a new way, one that is attuned to its durational character, but it would also enhance our power to act and live. It would do this by showing the extent to which our acting in the world is of a dynamical character, which is the character of time as duration: time is something real (at least for a living system); the portals of the future remain open; and creativity and novelty are real features of our existence and of life itself.

   I have sought to show in this essay that for Bergson the principal way in which we can deepen ourselves in our lived existence is through sympathy. Intuition is a mode of sympathy and is to be conceived as a mode of feeling-knowing that operates in the interior of things. In contrast to "analysis," which is an operation that reduces the object to elements already known, intuition aims to place us into contact with what is unique and inexpressible in it. More than this it aims to "live again in creative evolution by being one with it in sympathy."[21] This is quite different to the mode of mimesis, which, as Spuybroek notes, is too dependent on dualistic notions.

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[18] It should be noted that contemporary science, for example in the form of complexity theory, is in tune with Bergson's conception of intuition as a mode of privileged access into the sympathetic character of life and its evolution. The best example I know of is the work of the late Brian Goodwin. See his *Nature's Due* and the memorial collection, *Intuitive Knowing*, Lambert and Chetland, eds.

[19] Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 117.   [20] Brouwer, "Stoic Sympathy," 22.

[21] Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 119.

In Bergsonian sympathy, "What takes place in each case is that a mobile, transforming, behaving creature synchronizes its own behavior with that of another."[22] I agree with Spuybroek when he argues that it is necessary to resist what we have learned about sympathy in our own modern times, since it has turned it into a weak notion of mere identification, placed solely in the domain of psychology. There is a need to show that human psychology is one with the real physicality of things – two people dancing are just the same as two stars orbiting around each other – and in this way we can give ourselves back that which we are so alienated from, namely, the very life of things. For this to take place we need to grant an importance to intuition as a novel and special mode of attention since it is "an extension of sympathy through a floating and modulating attention, a specific effort of gradation."[23] Sympathy, then, is not an extra that is added on top of our relations with things but lies at the core of these relations: "Sympathy is the power of things at work, working between all things, and between us and things."[24]

For Bergson the enterprise of dissolving into the Whole ends by expanding the humanity within us and so allows humanity to surpass itself.[25] This is accomplished through philosophy, for it is philosophy that provides us with the means – such as the method of intuition – for reversing the normal directions of the mind (instrumental, utilitarian), so upsetting its habits. As Deleuze notes, to "coincide with duration always necessitates a painful effort . . . The coincidence is a privileged moment of contraction. When it succeeds in this endeavor, philosophy has fulfilled its purpose. Then one has truly exceeded the 'human condition.'"[26]

It is with this idea of thinking beyond the human condition that Bergson can be seen to be making a novel contribution to the modern reinvention of philosophy as a way of life. Michel Foucault is well known for his attempt in his late writings to reawaken interest in ancient ethical practices of the care of the self. He has been roundly criticized by Pierre Hadot for the manner in which he does this. For Hadot, a key element of the psychic content of the spiritual exercises of ancient philosophy is the feeling of belonging to the whole, or a cosmic consciousness of feeling oneself part of the cosmic whole, and he argues that this dimension of ancient thought is absent in Foucault's appreciation and impairs our reception of it. For Hadot, this is what is crucial in ancient thought in

[22] Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 121.   [23] Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 123.
[24] Spuybroek, *The Sympathy of Things*, 129.
[25] Deleuze, "Lecture Course on Chapter Three of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*," 79.
[26] Deleuze, "Lecture Course on Chapter Three of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*," 86.

the concern with self-care: to ensure that the movement of interiorization, in which self-mastery is practiced and inner independence attained, is accompanied by another movement that raises the self to a higher level in which one is part of nature. The self and its perspective may even be surpassed in this spirituality. The aim and task are not purely or largely aesthetic: self-transformation is involved but not simply to cultivate the self but to surpass it. There is a conversion to self that is a precondition of the spiritual transformation that constitutes philosophy. However, this conversion should not be confused with the kind of psychologization or aestheticization that reduces the world to the size of oneself.[27]

Bergson is a unique modern figure with regard to this set of concerns since he teaches both the creation of self by self and, through his teaching on sympathy, the care of life as a whole. In *Creative Evolution* Bergson does not develop at any length an ethics out of his dual concern (he would not publish a work on ethics until twenty-five years later with *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, published in 1932). In spite of this lacuna I wish to suggest that the mode of thinking he unfolds in *Creative Evolution* at least indicates the need for both a care of the self and a care of life.

One final point is worth making, which concerns the anxiety Bergson expresses over the nature of philosophy in his last work, *The Two Sources*. As I have shown in this essay, Bergson's ideas provide a rich set of resources for thinking about philosophy as a way of life in a novel manner: philosophy is a mode of extended human perception that can reconnect us to the Whole of life. However, it needs to be acknowledged that Bergson is also a thinker who sees a limit to philosophy's power and a danger in its practice as a way of life. The danger is that there is too much contemplation in philosophy, to the point where the philosopher becomes utterly self-absorbed in pursuing the task of living a life of wisdom. Although Bergson admires the Stoics for their cosmopolitan ideals, he is also keen to acknowledge that "Stoicism is essentially a philosophy," and as such it was unable to draw humanity after it (DSMR 1026/60). Ultimately, then, for Bergson it is necessary to turn to dynamic religion and to the religious mystic as a way of breaking out of the limits of philosophy and the self-absorption of the philosopher.

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[27] Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, 211.

CHAPTER 8

Bergson and Social Theory

Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White

> I consider my last book a sociological book.
>
> Henri Bergson, letter to Paul Masson-Oursel, 1932

Henri Bergson's name is not usually found among the great social thinkers of his time. This is a shame, because he offers an interesting and sophisticated theory of society in his last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate that this book warrants sustained attention as a major contribution to the field of social theory. We want to show that Bergson's contribution is not simply that of a philosopher engaged with questions about the nature of society, but also a deep and specific engagement with problems that constitute the discipline of sociology as a unique field of inquiry. We identify three in particular: first, the problem of social cohesion and what binds people together in society; second, the problem of the origins of society and what is the ground of the social; and third, the problem of social change and what instigates social transformation.

This chapter is not the first to explore Bergson's debt and contribution to social theory.[1] It is, however, the most explicit attempt that has been made so far to link his social thought to his immediate great predecessors in the tradition. In this chapter, we argue that Bergson develops an original social theory through sustained dialogue with two founders of the French sociological tradition: Émile Durkheim and Auguste Comte. This is a somewhat difficult task because Bergson rarely refers to either Durkheim or Comte by name in *Two Sources* (or anyone else for that matter, save for a handful of great religious figures). Even so, we will show

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[1] In English, see Lefebvre and White, "Bergson on Durkheim"; White, "Habit as a Force of Life in Durkheim and Bergson"; Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, 32–48; Keck, "The Virtual, the Symbolic, and the Actual in Bergsonian Philosophy and Durkheimian Sociology"; and Power, "Freedom and Sociability for Bergson." The most extensive treatment of this topic in French is Sitbon-Peillon, *Religion, métaphysique et sociologie chez Bergson*.

that Bergson's argument is derived from core ideas associated with each thinker yet reconstituted in such a way that the theory of society that he develops is irreducible to either one. In short, we show that *Two Sources* demonstrates Bergson's commitment to a tradition of scholarship within the discipline of sociology, and that his innovative social theory builds on the terms found within that tradition.

Social Cohesion

Sociologists have long been interested in determining what connects individuals together given the experience of diverse cultural heritages, economic backgrounds, and religious affiliations in modern societies. One of the most famous responses to this question is given by Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who was a classmate of Bergson's at the École normale supérieure.[2] For Durkheim (and for Bergson, as we will see), social cohesion results from the many obligations we develop through our association with others. If we keep in mind that the etymology of the verb "to obligate" derives from the Latin "*ob*" (toward) and "*ligare*" (to bind), we begin to appreciate how, for Durkheim, obligations are a kind of glue that binds individuals to each other, especially those who are not already attached by kith or kin.

We intimated above that Bergson accepts Durkheim's claim that social cohesion is fostered through obligation, but we have yet to demonstrate it. In what follows, we argue that although Bergson accepts Durkheim's description of social obligation, he claims that Durkheim is mistaken in his claim that obligation's force comes from an outside, that is from society understood as an external reality. First, however, we need to show that Bergson is indeed in conversation with Durkheim. To do so we need only turn to the opening page of *Two Sources*. Although he does not explicitly name Durkheim, anyone familiar with Durkheim's ideas will see that Bergson employs them in a rather heavy-handed manner. Just look at the following lines of Bergson's book, where he begins by recalling the pain of being forbidden a desire in childhood and his eventual resignation to obedience:

> Why did we obey? The question hardly occurred to us. We had formed the habit of deferring to our parents and teachers. All the same we knew very well that it was because they were our parents, because they were our teachers. Therefore, in our eyes, their authority came less from themselves

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[2] See Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 41–44.

than from their status in relation to us. They occupied a certain station; that was the source of the command which, had it issued from some other quarter, would have possessed the same weight. In other words, parents and teachers seemed to act by proxy. We did not fully realise this, but behind our parents and our teachers we had an inkling of some enormous, or rather some shadowy, thing that exerted pressure on us through them. Later we would say it was society. (DSMR 979/9)

This passage is replete with Durkheimian themes such as obligation, pressure, habit, and authority. As a starting point, we observe that Durkheim ties the theme of obligation explicitly to social practices in *Rules of Sociological Method* (1895). For him, obligations infuse routine social activities with a moral tone: "[w]hen I perform my duties as a brother, a husband or a citizen, and carry out the commitments I have entered into, I fulfil obligations which are defined in laws and which are external to myself and my actions."[3] These commitments we have to others are not duties in an abstract sense, but are actual lived realities that organize our everyday "ways of acting, thinking and feeling" because they "are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control" over our conduct.[4] The fact that we each repeatedly enter into and discharge obligations with one another produces a collective reality that Durkheim calls a "society, *sui generis.*" Society, understood in these terms, is more than an aggregate collection of individuals. It forms, rather, a new reality distinct unto itself, as something external to the individual and irreducible to any given one. That, we believe, is what Bergson is referring to in the last line of the passage quoted above: the idea that a Durkheimian understanding of society is distinct from and external to the individuals that comprise it.

Society is, continuing with Durkheim, a shared reality that creates the conditions for each of us to discharge our obligations. Failure to comply with societal expectations engenders the threat of sanctions, whether formal or informal. Given that people tend to fall into line most of the time, we can appreciate that society encourages us to behave "similarly under like circumstances," something that can only be achieved if our "ability to develop habits" is nurtured by society.[5] Now, if we return to the opening passage of *Two Sources,* Bergson's emphasis on our habitual deference to authority implies the presence of obligations to parents and teachers that immediately recalls Durkheim's ideas. Just as Durkheim observes that

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[3] Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, 50.   [4] Durkheim, *Rules of Sociological Method*, 50.
[5] Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 27.

customary habits have normative expectations, so too does Bergson acknowledge that we internalize habitual rules of conduct that express normatively laden relations of authority and compliance. For both thinkers, collective conduct consists in customary habits that do not express individual preferences. They are ways of acting that, in Durkheim's words, "we do not feel free to alter according to taste."[6] For both Bergson and Durkheim, it would seem that we obey because of the pressures rooted in our habitual ways of acting and thinking, and which serve to reinforce our obligations to one other.

So far so good: Bergson agrees with Durkheim and the opening page of *Two Sources* employs an array of Durkheimian ideas and concepts without apparent objection. Yet, we need only to read a little further in *Two Sources* for Bergson's criticism to arise. It concerns the assumption made by Durkheim that a painful dualism organizes human nature: one half is "purely individual, which has its roots in our organism, the other social, which is nothing except an extension of society."[7] The idea that we experience a tension between our personal inclinations and the obligations that we have to others is a hallmark of Durkheim's sociology. This is because the interests of the individual are not necessarily those of society as a whole. For Durkheim, "this is why society cannot form or maintain itself without requiring of us perpetual sacrifices that are costly to us."[8] We feel the force of society acutely – it pulls us away from satisfying our individual desires and insists that we meet the demands of others. This is why obligation is no easy thing for Durkheim: it requires effort to overcome the struggle between self-interest and social expectation.

Without naming Durkheim directly, Bergson challenges the truism that we feel torn between what we want to do and what we should do. He maintains that "[w]hen, in order to define obligation, its essence and its origin, we lay down that obedience is primarily a struggle with self, a state of tension or contradiction, we make a psychological error which has vitiated many theories of ethics" (DSMR 991/20). Even though Durkheim is not mentioned by name, Bergson's choice of language is telling – for as we saw above, the tension between personal desire and social expectation is a cornerstone of Durkheim's conception of social obligation. It thus seems fair to suggest that Bergson has Durkheim in mind when he retorts that obligation is, in fact, the easiest and most natural thing in the world. The crux of his argument is simple: experience shows time and time again that

[6] Durkheim, *Moral Education*, 28, 29.   [7] Durkheim, "Dualism of Human Nature," 44.
[8] Durkheim, "Dualism of Human Nature," 44.

we tend not to question or challenge the demands of someone in authority. Granted, occasionally we experience periods of individual disobedience and even social disruption. As a general rule, though, the truth is that we tend to obey. Bergson rests his claim on the ease of repetition made possible by habit: "[I]n the ordinary way we conform to our obligations rather than think of them. If we had every time to evoke the idea, enunciate the formula, it would be much more tiring to do our duty. But habit is enough, and in most cases we have only to leave well alone in order to accord to society what it expects from us" (989/18). Habits are useful not simply because they encourage a regularity of conduct, but because they allow us to act without pause or hesitation. Just imagine how difficult it would be if we had to pause and reflect on every potential course of action in our day-to-day lives! We would be arrested, not to mention overwhelmed, by the sheer range of possibilities open to consideration. That is why, according to Bergson, we rely on habit to cultivate a sense of self that allows us to move through the routine and regular aspects of life. And indeed, the implication is not just that obedience is simply the easier path among others: it tends to be the only path that we consider, for this well-trodden path has shaped our sense of identity, and consequently is the only one compatible with our own self-conception (986/15).[9]

Here we can state the first great challenge that Bergson presents to Durkheim's social theory. Once we dispense with the idea of a conflict between individual and society, there is no longer a need to posit an external reality – such as society *sui generis* – to ensure compliance. Obedience to duty is straightforward and comes naturally. Thus, Bergson's observation that "[o]bligation is in no sense a unique fact, incommensurate with others, looming above them like a mysterious apparition" can now be seen in its true light: as a veiled yet pointed response to Durkheim (DSMR 991/20). In one fell swoop, he dispenses with two ideas that Durkheim considered indispensable to the sociological study of society: the notion that there is a constitutive struggle between self and society, and the related idea that society is an external reality that places limits on individual desires.

The second great challenge of Bergson's takes aim at another pillar of Durkheimian sociology, namely his (i.e., Durkheim's) claim that only human beings are capable of forming obligations, and with it, the implication that only human beings have societies properly so-called. According to Bergson, society and the individual – and here we mean not just the human individual, but the individual as a specimen of any species that might be

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[9] See Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 111–32, and Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 151–66.

recognized as a social animal, including ants, bees, wolves, sea mammals, primates of all kinds, and many more – are made for one another. The only difference concerns the particular mechanism of social cohesion found in each society. For humans, social cohesion is made up of moral obligations and habits, whereas instinct takes on that role for nonhuman animals. But once habits and instincts are considered in this light, they appear to be functionally analogous (even though habits are susceptible to change whereas instincts are relatively immutable). The similarity between them allows Bergson to argue that the general tendency of social beings to cede to pressure lies in the "substratum of instinctive activity, originally implanted there by nature, where the individual and the social are well-nigh indistinguishable" (DSMR 1006/37). In other words, the pressure of obligation is found in both the ant who conforms to instinct and the human who obeys out of habit. Regardless of whether the activity is driven by instinct or habit, both exhibit relations of command and obedience that produce what Bergson terms the "totality of obligation" (996–97/26–27).

The effect of Bergson's, once again implicit, criticism of Durkheim is to establish a continuity between human and nonhuman societies, along with the totality of obligation that each defines. In the end, not much distinguishes the habits of human societies from the instincts of nonhuman societies. Each totality exercises a pressure over their individual members which ensures obedience, and in so doing, establishes a continuity between individual and society. Consequently, society is not, contra Durkheim, an independent reality that looms above us. Nor is society, contra Durkheim, in perpetual struggle with the individual. Nor is it an exclusively human affair. Rather – and here is Bergson's first major contribution to social theory – pressure and obligation foster social cohesion; however, these characteristics are not exclusive to human societies, but are to be found in all societies, regardless of whether they are human or nonhuman.

Origins of Social Life

The way Bergson resolves the problem of social cohesion has implications for how he approaches the question of the origins of society, the answer to which gives us his second major contribution to social thought. Rather than adopt the approaches of earlier philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes (1588–1679) or Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–88) who argue that individuals come together to form a social compact, Bergson returns to a sociological thinker who precedes Durkheim: Auguste Comte (1798–1857). Comte is

well known as the founder of positivism, understood as a method of scientific inquiry that limits itself to the examination of observable phenomena.[10] Plenty has been written on the two pillars of Comte's positive philosophy: the law of the three stages (which details the development of the human mind through theological, metaphysical, and positive stages); and the law of the classification of the sciences (which identifies six distinct sciences that build upon one another beginning with mathematics, astronomy, physics, chemistry, biology, and then ultimately, sociology).[11] We will bypass this commentary to focus on some key points of overlap between Bergson and Comte in *Two Sources*. Just as we showed that Bergson accepts Durkheim's claim that social cohesion is fostered through obligation (with important caveats), we will show that Bergson does something similar with respect to Comte. We claim that Bergson relies on Comte to argue that any theory of society must be joined to a theory of life (which entails the corresponding idea that the social presupposes the biological). We further claim that, just as Bergson had a crucial point of disagreement with Durkheim, so too does he challenge one of Comte's central ideas, namely the belief that human society is the vehicle through which humanity achieves moral perfectibility. This discussion will help us to present the terms of Bergson's own social theory in the third and final section of the paper.

  As we said at the outset of this chapter, virtually all of Bergson's engagements with other authors in *Two Sources* is implicit. Thus, just as we had to show that a deep engagement with Durkheim runs through the book, we must do the same for Bergson's dialogue with Comte. It turns on the issue of the relation between society and biological life. Readers may be familiar with one of Comte's governing principles, namely that all phenomena are subject to natural laws.[12] And here, Bergson raises no objection. He even accepts the implication that living things, and any of their corresponding attributes (such as sociability) must have a naturalistic explanation. Bergson would agree, for the most part, with Comte's claim that "all the principal attributes which pride and ignorance have imagined to be monopolised by the human race are seen to be possessed in a more or

[10] Comte, *System of Positive Polity* 1, 17.
[11] See Lévy-Bruhl, *The Philosophy of Auguste Comte*; Simon, *European Positivism in the Nineteenth Century*; Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography* (vols. 1 & 2); Gane, *Auguste Comte*; Schmaus, "A Reappraisal of Comte's Three-State Law," and "Lévy-Bruhl, Durkheim, and the Positivist Roots of the Sociology of Knowledge"; and Wernick, *Auguste Comte and the Religion of Humanity*. For two recent collections, see Wernick, ed., *The Anthem Companion to Auguste Comte*, and Bourdeau, Pickering, and Schmaus, eds., *Love, Order, & Progress*.
[12] Comte, *Positive Philosophy* 2, 74; *System of Positive Polity*, 17.

less rudimentary form by the lower animals."[13] For both thinkers, society is far from a uniquely human achievement, as Durkheim might argue.[14] To the contrary, it is an evolutionary phenomenon found in several species.[15]

It should be clear that Bergson accepts the general thrust of Comte's evolutionary argument. Doing so gives him crucial resources to resolve the dilemma of the origins of society. As we saw above, if society is an evolutionary phenomenon, then biological life is the condition for society. But, just as we saw with respect to his engagement with Durkheim, apparent agreement with Comte leads quickly to difference and disagreement. Here, Bergson's criticism turns on Comte's understanding of evolution as a gradual, continuous series of transformations that reaches its final destination in human society. As Comte says above, humans and animals can be arrayed on a continuum of attributes possessed to a greater (by humans) or lesser (by animals) degree of sophistication. As a staunchly antiteleological thinker, Bergson objects to any such idea. He rejects the possibility that we can forecast evolutionary directions and tendencies, that it progresses step-by-step in linear developments, and that life could reach a final perfected form. In contrast, he argues that evolution consists of "a series of leaps" and insists that any variations which constitute a new species must be understood as the result "of a multitude of differences complementing one another, and emerging altogether in the organism formed from the germ" (DSMR 1073/116). To assume otherwise – to assume in the manner of Comte that evolution has been driven all along by its destination in human beings and human society – is simply part of our inveterate tendency to think spatially and to deny time and creativity. In Bergson's words, this is to consider "all forward movement as a progressive shortening of the distance between the starting-point (which indeed exists) and the goal, which only comes into being as a stopping-place when the moving object has chosen to stop there. It doesn't follow that, because it can always be interpreted in this sense when it has attained its end, the

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[13] Comte, *System of Positive Polity* 1, 487. Our claim is qualified because Bergson would not agree with the final clause, namely that nonhuman animals possess human attributes "in a more or less rudimentary form." We return to this point shortly.

[14] To be clear, Durkheim does not dispute evolutionary arguments. Yet he is aware of the costs associated with claiming that human societies are continuous with animal societies: doing so, he believes, effectively undermines the specificity of human society and the moral obligations that sustain it.

[15] Bergson also accepts Comte's observation that a functional similarity exists between societies and individual organisms. Both are organic totalities that have component parts that work together to ensure the functioning of the whole. In short, societies and individual organisms have the capacity to maintain a unity amongst a diversity of component parts. It is this observation that inspires Comte to call society a "social organism."

movement consisted in a progression towards this end ... even then we should have to add that there had been, not gradual progress, but at a certain epoch a sudden leap" (1036/73).

Bergson's commitment to a discontinuous evolution has significant implications for one of Comte's central claims about human society. Although Bergson accepts that societies are conditioned by the evolution of life, he rejects the implication that is central to Comte's theory of society: that human society is the zenith and endpoint of evolution. For Bergson, human society certainly marks a stop on the evolution of life; but there is a big difference between acknowledging this fact and claiming that it is the end (or worse, the destination) of the evolutionary process. As is his wont, Bergson does not cite Comte directly in this regard. But there is much to suggest that Comte is one of his key opponents, particularly when we consider Comte's belief that society is the condition for human perfectibility. Consider the following lines, in which he argues that the advance of society renders human beings increasingly peaceable: "[i]t is unquestionable that civilization leads us onto a further and further development of our noblest dispositions and our most generous feelings, which are the only possible basis of human association, and which receive, by means of that association, a more and more special culture."[16] Moreover, on Comte's account not only would the evolution of society engender the "growing preponderance of the noblest tendencies of our nature," but it would also give way to a love encompassing all of humanity.[17] And what would that mean? Nothing less than that the development of human society prepares the elimination of war.

At this point, Bergson's earlier nod of agreement to Comte about the evolutionary underpinnings of human society gives way to a vigorous shake of the head. Just consider the facts from his historical position. As a twentieth-century thinker who lived to see the Great War, and who anticipated the horrors of the Second World War and the Atomic Age, surely Comte's argument looks like magical thinking for Bergson (DSMR 1219/287). Overwhelmingly, the opposite seems much truer. Human beings continue to live in society, and yet there is no end to the violence and war that we are capable of.

That is the empirical case against Comte's optimism, as it were. But what is Bergson's explanation for the fact that human beings are as if fated

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[16] Comte, *Positive Philosophy* 1, 150.
[17] Comte, *Positive Philosophy* 1, 89; see also *Positive Philosophy* 2, 115. For recent reflections on Comte's conception of love for humanity, as well as on his "religion of humanity," see Nussbaum, *Political Emotions*, 57–69.

to antagonism, conflict, and war? It pertains to biology, the very ground on which there was putative agreement between Bergson and Comte. A central claim of Bergson's in *Two Sources* is that there is an ineluctable relation between moral obligation, social cohesion, and self and group preservation. The purpose of our duties – that is to say, the evolutionary function of moral obligations and moral feelings – is to bind members of a society together as a group in the face of a potentially hostile outside world. Against the threat of war, sociability offers advantages of survival that are too obvious and too deep to mention: protection, security, and fellowship. Clearly, then, beings with evolved capacities of cooperation, solidarity, empathy, and moral sense have a much greater chance of survival. And that is precisely what Bergson argues. "Our social duties," he states, "aim at social cohesion; whether we will or not they compose for us an attitude which is that of discipline in the face of the enemy. This means that, however much society may endow man, who it has trained to discipline, with all it has acquired during centuries of civilisation, society still has need of that primitive instinct which it coats with so thick a varnish" (DSMR 1001/31–32). In contrast to Comte, therefore, Bergson argues that human sociability, no matter how cultivated or civilized, will never supersede the basic instinct to protect and defend those dear to us when confronted by an enemy. Indeed, the situation is far worse than that. For society does not simply protect its own members from war. It also organizes, channels, and deploys their aggression. It wages war. Thus, far from allowing the human species to transcend the problem of war, our very sociable nature, and with it the moral bond at the heart of human society, ensures the perpetuity, yet also the manageability, of the problem of war and conflict for the species.[18] As Bergson states, "The closed society is that whose members hold together, indifferent to the rest of humanity, always at the ready for attack or defense, bound in fact, to a combative disposition. Such is human society fresh from the hands of nature" (1201/266). We are far from Comte's picture of human perfectibility.

Put simply, Bergson argues that the totality of obligation is a natural state of society: it binds members of the group together such that they feel a sense of belonging; and it encourages a feeling of hostility toward those who threaten the group. This attitude of closure is found in human and nonhuman societies alike (precisely because moral obligations, whether organized by habit or instinct, are found in human and nonhuman

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[18] See Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, 6–31; Lefebvre and White, "Introduction"; and Soulez, "Bergson as Philosopher of War and Theorist of the Political."

societies alike). The attitude of closure, in other words, consists in feelings of obligation that preserve the social form and seek to defend the group against an enemy (DSMR 1001/31). And clearly, on this issue, Bergson was ahead of the biological sciences of his time. Today the presence of natural us-versus-them social groups is an observation borne out by studies in primatology: Michael Campbell and Frans de Waal, for example, have shown that chimpanzees empathize with other members of their group, and display hostility to baboons and unfamiliar chimpanzees.[19]

We might pause for the moment to acknowledge that, for Bergson, both Durkheim and Comte present conceptions of human society that remain stuck, albeit for different reasons, within the confines of the closed society. Durkheim's conception of moral obligation affirms the feeling of belonging that binds group members together, and yet, he provides no mechanism to escape the sense of exclusion it implies. Similarly, Comte presents a conception of human society that is continuous with nonhuman societies, but he too fails to provide an adequate account of how human society manages to temper our ignoble tendencies to war and violence. Comte's theory of society seems to exhibit an irresolvable contradiction of an evolutionary account of the origins of society coupled with a belief (for Bergson, a mere wish) that human society will overcome its natural tendency to closure. As we will see in the next section, what makes Bergson's contribution to social theory so distinct is that he offers a way out of the strictures of the closed society, and in so doing, puts forward a unique response to the problem of social change.

Social Change

So far we have demonstrated that Bergson is in tacit dialogue with both Durkheim and Comte, and that he selectively adopts elements of their social theories in order to offer a distinctive answer to the problems of social cohesion and the origins of society. In this final section, we consider his response to the problem of social change. The question of social change has preoccupied social theorists from Comte (who worried that revolutionary activity was inherently destructive for society),[20] to

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[19] Campbell and Waal, "Chimpanzees." This paper is one in a growing corpus of evidence amassed by Waal in particular to show that nonhuman primates exhibit empathy toward members of their own group. The significance of this insight for de Waal and his other collaborators is to claim that empathy is an evolutionary building block for morality. See also Waal, *The Age of Empathy*.

[20] Comte, *Positive Polity* 1, 16 and 325.

Marx (who called for revolution to wrest ownership of the means of production out of the hands of the bourgeoisie and into those of the proletariat),[21] to Weber (who observed that charismatic leaders have the revolutionary capacity to inspire followers to believe in the legitimacy of their authority by nonrational means).[22] Bergson's own response to the problem of social change in *Two Sources* builds on his engagement with Durkheim and Comte. Unfortunately, as we saw in the previous section, neither provides adequate resources to account for how social change comes about. And yet, as Bergson observes, clearly something must change: it *does* change, on the one hand, because human societies exhibit tremendous variability in their social practices and moral attitudes toward violence; and it *must* change, on the other hand, because modernity will give rise to ever more cataclysmic wars. So how does Bergson account for social change? Or how, more pointedly, can societies escape the violence of closure, exclusion, hatred, and war that is built into the very nature of social cohesion?

First, we must take care to distinguish between small "c" change and capital "C" change. A small "c" change might be rendered as a change that doesn't change much at all. It is that kind of change that simply rearranges the furniture. Colloquialisms aside, for Bergson, this is a kind of change that amplifies extant tendencies of the closed society: it reaffirms intense in-group solidarity and widens out-group divisions with anxiety and fear. Certainly, in such moments, one feels as if things change. Life doesn't seem quite the same anymore because one is increasingly sensitive to new reports and threats of potential attack. But for Bergson, such an experience of fear is far from transformative. It simply extends our natural tendencies for self-preservation. As he puts it in *Two Sources*, captured by an attitude of this kind "the soul moves round in a circle" (DSMR 1006/38). Individual and society alike remain static.[23]

For Bergson, there are no means within the closed society to generate genuinely transformative social change, that is, of the capital "C" variety. Closed societies are entirely natural in this regard, and there is no functional difference here between a society of humans and a society of ants. Both circle endlessly in the enclosure that is society, reinforced as they are by the totality of obligation and the instinct toward group and

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[21] Marx and Engels, "Manifesto of the Communist Party."   [22] Weber, *Charismatic Domination.*
[23] We note that Bergson himself was not immune to such attitudes and in his *The Meaning of War* (1915), written during the First World War, reproduces this attitude of in-group solidarity (with France) and out-group othering (of Germany). For commentary, see François et al., eds., *Bergson, l'Allemagne, la guerre de 1914.*

self-preservation. And yet, Bergson acknowledges that moral "progress" and moral "advance" is possible, both on behalf of individuals and of society (DSMR 1018/51–52). Such progress is indicative of genuine change, that is to say, qualitative change which changes everything. But because social change cannot be initiated by features and affects of the closed society (such as moral obligation and sympathy), it can only be realized by a force that escapes capture by the closed society.

Where might we find such a force of social and collective change? Bergson returns to the evidence borne by experience which shows us that, from time to time, exceptional individuals have broken free from social constraints and inspired great masses – and enduring social and religious movements – to follow them. Societies have, he writes, "consented, at rare intervals, to increase their effort in order to follow a pioneer, an inventor, a man of genius" (DSMR 1091/136–37). Bergson cites examples such as the saints of Christianity and the sages of Ancient Greece among others (1003/34), just as we might cite the more contemporary examples of Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama. To use Bergson's term, such individuals are "mystics." They express an impulse of feeling that is fundamentally different from the surface agitations associated with the closed society, for they cause an upheaval in the depths (1004/35). The former change without changing much, whereas the latter change everything.

The idea that feelings or emotions can motivate action is not unique to Bergson. In modern philosophy, for example, we need only point to sentimentalist moral philosophers such as David Hume and Adam Smith. But what is particular to Bergson is that he centers his moral philosophy, and also his social theory, on a single affect: love. What Bergson means by love is complicated. The condensed version is that he adopts and reworks the Christian conception of *agape*. At the heart of Christianity is the idea that God creates a new relationship with humanity by loving us in a way that we cannot love each other unaided. In *Two Sources*, Bergson preserves this scheme, but he makes a crucial substitution and addition. Instead of God enabling love, it is what Bergson calls "life," "evolution," or the "élan vital" that performs this role. "Love" is the name he gives to the emotion (*sentiment*, in French) that accompanies our power to tap into and realize the essence of life itself: interconnection, mobility, creativity, and movement. "By going deeply into this new aspect of morality," says Bergson in reference to love, "we should find the feeling of a coincidence, real or imaginary, with the

generative effort of life" (DSMR 1020/54). And more succinctly: "[Love's] direction is exactly that of life's *élan*" (1174/235).[24]

Love is the sentiment at the basis of what Bergson calls the "open society" (1000/30). This kind of love is different from the experience we have of loving our partners, family, friends, and communities. That kind of love, object-attached and object-directed love, presupposes partiality and exclusion, and is thus associated with the closed society.[25] But open love – what Bergson calls mystical love – is fundamentally open. As he emphatically puts it, "Suppose we say that it embraces all humanity: we should not be going too far, we should hardly be going far enough, since its love may extend to animals, to plants, to all nature. And yet no one of these things which would thus fill it would suffice to define the attitude taken by the soul, for it could, strictly speaking, do without all of them. Its form is not dependent on its content" (1006–7/38).

What does this have to do with a theory of society? Just this: for Bergson, love is not merely a private "feeling" or "sentiment" that could be confined to what we might wish to call personal, private, or subjective experience. It is, instead, a genuine force, "capable of crystallizing into representations and even into doctrine" (1015/47). That means that love is capable of creating doctrines and institutions that embody and channel it in enduring and widely disseminated forms. Christianity is his paradigmatic example: not, of course Church history, which at times can become paradigmatic of closed morality; but instead, the message of love and universality that we find in the Sermon on the Mount (1025/59–60). Human rights are another such example: in this discourse and institution, one which Bergson personally championed throughout his life, we find a conception of human attention, sympathy, and protection that extends beyond the strictures of closed community.[26] Indeed, for Bergson, it is as if this institution were capable of transporting individuals, however temporarily, beyond their own closed moral nature.[27]

Modern societies, existing as they do in the wake of every kind of crystallization of open love, are thus informed and infused by tendencies toward love and openness, and hence creativity and dynamism. At the same time, make no mistake, modern societies are also and equally driven

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[24] See Schott in this volume (Chapter 11), "Bergson's Philosophy of Religion."

[25] Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 188–89 and 192.

[26] See Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, 73–144, *Human Rights and the Care of the Self*, 85–104, and "Bergson, Human Rights, and Joy."

[27] For a complementary discussion of the open and closed tendencies in society, see Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 111–32.

by tendencies toward closure and staticity. That is why, for Bergson, there are no such things as "closed societies" on the one hand, and "open societies" on the other. These terms are only what a sociologist would call an ideal type. Only composite societies exist: societies made up by both, and pulled and pushed between, the open and closed tendencies of life and morality. What Bergson says for individuals thus holds true for the social collective: "Between the closed soul and the open soul there is the soul in process of opening. Between the immobility of a man seated and the motion of the same man running there is the act of getting up, the attitude he assumes when he rises. In a word, between the static and the dynamic there is to be observed, in morality too, a transition stage" (1028/63). That in-betweenness, that tension between staticity and dynamism, and between love and closure, is characteristic not only of the human condition, but also of our social condition.

We can now appreciate how Bergson's answer to the question of social change continues his engagement with Comte. As we saw previously, Comte argues that human society realizes the evolutionary impulse of the human species, for "[o]nly humanity can invert the priority of organic life."[28] Bergson accepts something of the spirit of this observation, but for him, it is only individual members of the human species who can invert the priority of social life and thereby lead others toward a similar personal transformation:

> The appearance of each one of them was like the creation of a new species, composed of one single individual, the vital impulse culminating at long intervals in one particular man, a result which could not have been obtained at one stroke by humanity as a whole. Each of these souls marked then a certain point attained by the evolution of life; and each of them was a manifestation, in any original form, of a love which seems to be the very essence of the creative effort. (DSMR 1056/95)

The capacity for individuals to exceed the form predetermined by society affirms Bergson's claim that there are two tendencies of life: one is closed in order to ensure social preservation; and the second is open, expressed by heroic individuals, who alone are capable of inspiring others, and in so doing to transform society. One of the qualities of heroism is that it is unpredictable and uncertain. Even so, it is perhaps the only means to resist society's tendency to close in on itself. "Such effort requires a kind of emotion," Bergson states. "Look at it how you will, you must always come

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[28] Comte, *Positive Philosophy* 2, 71.

back to the conception of moral creators who see in their mind's eye a new social atmosphere, an environment in which life would be more worth living, I mean a society such that, if men once tried it, they would refuse to go back to the old state of things" (DSMR 1042/80).

We can now summarize the basic elements of Bergson's theory of society. It is grounded in an evolutionary conception of life that has two basic attributes: the tendency toward social cohesion that is reinforced by an instinct toward self-preservation and organized by a substratum of pressure; and the tendency to change that is expressed by the inexpressible appeal of the mystic or hero who pulls others in their wake. Social pressure and the impetus of love are not experienced separately, as if they represented two distinct forms of society. Rather, as Bergson reminds us, they "are but two complementary manifestations of life, normally intent on preserving generally the social form which was characteristic of the human species from the beginning, but, exceptionally, capable of transfiguring it, thanks to individuals who each represent, as the appearance of a new species would have represented, an effort of creative evolution" (DSMR 1057/97). This is what Bergson has to offer social theory: society is a manifestation of life that exhibits tendencies toward stability and mobility. It is neither one, nor the other, but consists in the experience of enduring social pressure and occasional transformation.

Bergson and Political Theory

Richard Vernon

For more than half a century after its publication, it seems safe to say, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* was Bergson's most neglected book, for the political bearing of his thought was not a primary focus of enquiry. More recently, however, Bergson scholars have done much to remedy the situation, exploring important politically relevant themes in that text. It has to be said, though, that among political theorists who have not made a special study of his work, Bergson remains a distinctly remote figure. So in this chapter I want to ask: why might a political theorist, uncommitted to any prior view of Bergson's importance, be persuaded to take an interest in his work? The purpose of the chapter is not to provide an overview,[1] but to suggest that political theorists would find much in Bergson to engage with on their own ground. Philippe Soulez may well be right to have reservations about using the term "Bergson's political theory,"[2] but that is not of course a reason for neglecting the political resonances of what he has to say.

Bergson in the History of Political Thought

If we consider the development of political thought, even in France, in the years after Bergson's death, it is hard to see any residue of his influence. His name is barely present in the famous postwar French debates, whether participants in those debates drew on Marxism or on German phenomenology of the interwar period. If there are some connections with Levinas and, more extensively, Deleuze, they are moral and epistemological rather than political.[3] So from that standpoint we are likely to conclude that Bergson, in his political thought at least, was too much himself to be

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[1] For such an overview, see Lefebvre and White, eds., *Bergson, Politics, and Religion*, and Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*.

[2] See Soulez, *Bergson politique*, 297.

[3] See Vernon, ""Pascalian Ethics?" and Lefebvre and White, eds., *Bergson, Politics, and Religion*, 11.

a precursor to anything, in any definite way. If we reverse the historical perspective, however, we can see more connections. True, from the standpoint of historians of political thought, it would be quite a challenge to locate Bergson's book within any recognizable or canonical tradition. We cannot fit him into a tradition of discourse of the sort that historians of political thought seek out, that is, one that establishes a shared universe of speech acts and thus creates a continuous framework of meaning.[4] Nevertheless, we can see *The Two Sources* as the work of a public intellectual engaged with important themes of political legitimation in the context of French republican thought.

We may certainly see it in large part as a critique of the French republican ideology of his own century, as that is portrayed for example in two classic historical accounts by Brubaker and Schnapper.[5] In that ideology, the republic was presented as a national embodiment of the ideals of the Enlightenment, local in its scope but universal in its moral content. Summing up this view, Durkheim wrote, "[In France] all contradiction between cosmopolitanism and patriotism disappears."[6] Alexandre Lefebvre has clarified the unmistakable though inexplicit critique of Durkheim in *The Two Sources*.[7] Bergson's line of critique would apply also to what may have been the most influential republican text of the later nineteenth century, Charles Renouvier's *Manuel républicain* (1869), a work that, like Durkheim's some decades later, had explicitly civic-educational purposes.[8] We may see those writers as committed spokesmen for the "society" to which Bergson attributes the view that he emphatically rejects, that is, the view that a political society or nation is simply a local vehicle for an essentially universal human project. "Oh I know what society says," Bergson writes, "it says that the duties it defines are indeed, in principle, duties towards humanity, but . . . they are for the time being inapplicable." Questioning "society's" view, Bergson urges us to consider what happens in time of war, when violence against outsiders becomes praiseworthy, and asks pointedly, "Would this be possible, would this transformation take place so easily, generally and instantaneously if it were really a certain attitude of man towards man that society had been enjoining on us up till then?" (DSMR 1000–1/31)

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[4] See Skinner, "Meaning and Understanding in the History of Ideas," for the classic formulation.
[5] Brubaker, *Citizenship and Nationhood*, and Schnapper, *La Communauté des citoyens*.
[6] Durkheim, *Professional Ethics and Civic Morals*, 74.
[7] Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, 32–48.
[8] For the deep connection between Renouvier and Durkheim, see Lukes, *Emile Durkheim*, 54.

Might we say, though, that Bergson's view here belongs to a Rousseauian line of critique? After all, that sardonic question about the implications of war recapitulates a precisely similar question posed by Rousseau in his work on Saint-Pierre, *Perpetual Peace*: "If, as people claim, society were the work of reason rather than passion," Rousseau had asked, "would it have taken us so long to see . . . that in uniting with some men we have actually become enemies of the human race?"[9] They both ask this question in the course of insisting that the very existence of exclusive societies places severe limits on the moral claims of cosmopolitanism, for exclusive societies reproduce within themselves deep instincts of closure. Bergson writes: "It is primarily as against all other men that we love the men with whom we live" (DSMR 1002/33); compare Rousseau in *Émile*: "The patriot hates foreigners, for to him they are only men."[10]

Moreover, the central methodological argument in the first chapter of Bergson's book recapitulates and deepens Rousseau's radical complaint about the natural law tradition: that, in exaggerating the role of reason, it mistakes the effects of social evolution for its cause, reading back what has resulted into its origins.[11] The speculative evolution outlined in *The Two Sources* may in that respect be seen to parallel the conjectural history that Rousseau offered in the *Discourse on Inequality* – a demonstration that human society comes to be what it was not at the beginning, and that it is a retrospective fallacy to read its finished character back into its beginnings. "The retroactivity of the present is at the origin of many philosophical delusions," Bergson writes (DSMR 1237/308). Both Rousseau and Bergson deploy their brilliant narratives as deconstructive devices aimed at the habitual defects of reason, which, they both say in their different ways, has difficulty in coming to terms with time.

But of course, nothing about Rousseau is simple, and in other respects Rousseauian themes are, like those of later French republican theorists, the target of Bergson's critique. When for example Rousseau maintains, in *Political Economy*, that shared citizenship embodies the idea of "humanity" itself, in local form,[12] he is open to exactly the objection that Bergson developed in relation to the Durkheim/Renouvier position. And *Social Contract*'s eventual elimination of conflict between individual and collective will, absorbing personality within the civic self so that we become social creatures without moral residue, runs fundamentally counter, as we shall see below, to Bergson's own purposes. So if *The Two Sources* can be

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[9] Rousseau, *Political Writings* I, 365.   [10] Rousseau, *Émile*, 7.
[11] Rousseau, *Political Writings* I, 141.   [12] Rousseau, *Political Writings* I, 251.

called "Rousseauian," that is so because it works in a space created by the productive inconsistencies that Rousseau passed on to the republican tradition. We shall see more of those inconsistencies below, when we turn to the issue of nationalism.

Bergson on Realism and Obligation

If Bergson disappoints the expectations of historians of political thought in refusing adherence to a tradition, so too, at first sight at least, he violates the philosophical expectations that political theorists entertain. In fact, in *The Two Sources* Bergson lays down a (likely unwelcome) challenge to the very enterprise of political theory – as political theorists generally understand their enterprise. One of the most time-honored ambitions of mainstream political theory has been to give a convincing account of why members of a political society have an obligation to obey commands made in its name. Many solutions have been proposed, and a summary account of proposed solutions – from Plato in the fifth century BCE through Hobbes and Locke and Rousseau in the early modern period to John Rawls in our recent past – is what is generally offered to students as an introduction to the discipline. All of those successively paraded theorists give reasons for obedience to political institutions. They take it to be their task to explain and justify obligation. It is here that they would find a possibly insuperable stumbling block to engagement with Bergson's views. For what Bergson tells us is that while obligation can be explained, it cannot be justified in the way in which political theorists would expect it to be, that is to say, it cannot be shown to exhibit or correspond to any independent structure of normative argument, such as might be provided by, for example, a (Rousseauian) theory of social contract, or a (Lockean) theory of rights, or a (Benthamite) utilitarian calculus of overall advantage, or a (Platonic) transcendent model of justice.

There is however a historical point of departure for this view of Bergson's, not in the mainstream tradition of political theory as such but in a moral and religious tradition whose importance historians of French political thought cannot ignore,[13] that is, a realist tradition traceable to St. Augustine but connected mediately to *The Two Sources* by the manifest influence of Blaise Pascal ("The greatest of our moralists," Bergson says: DSMR 1131/183–844). For Augustine, in intellectual rebellion against classical or pagan sources that valorized political community, states (whether

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[13] Keohane, *Philosophy and the State in France*, 262–82.

kingdoms or empires) are the creation of force and chance, imposing burdens on us that we have to conscientiously bear, but which we must not confuse with ultimately significant purposes. Empires are essentially equivalent to large-scale and successful piracy operations. Taken together, kingdoms and empires comprise one (metaphorical) "city," that is, a terrestrial association founded upon our susceptibility to worldly compulsions that both attract us to its opportunities and render us vulnerable to its sanctions. Among the members of this "city," some are also members of the "city of God," that is, they are destined by grace to have a life other than an earthly life. This intermingling of "cities" may perhaps distantly presage the intermingling of (closed and open) "societies" in Bergson's book (DSMR 1032/68) – more on this distinction below. But it is through the mediation of Pascal that the Augustinian realist tradition makes itself most strongly felt.

On the very first page of *The Two Sources*, Bergson advances the idea that we should think of members of a society as parts of an organism, and hence subject to compulsory direction, but with the difference that members of a society have at least the latent capacity to reflect on their circumstances. At once we should recall Pascal's account of society as "a body of thinking members," members who are as it were predestined to conform and to fulfill their socially prescribed roles, but who can also form a picture of themselves and their place, a picturing that gives at least an opening for resistance. But that potential opening is massively obstructed by – another Pascalian theme – the power of custom in forming our expectations and the limits of possibility that we can entertain. Pascal wrote: "Custom is the whole of equity for the sole reason that it is accepted. That is the mystic basis of its authority." Although members of political society are "thinking" members, what they can think is profoundly shaped by what Pascal called the "second nature" comprised by habit and custom.[14]

It is exactly this "second nature" that Bergson took to be the counterpart of the "first" nature of other social creatures, whose obligation to obey is directly inscribed in their genetic makeup, and who for that reason can be still more plausibly compared to cells within a single organism. The principal difference is that, since acquired characteristics cannot be genetically transmitted, human learning is transmitted through habit or custom instead (DSMR 1044/82, 1206–7/272). Habit is the form that instinct takes in creatures endowed with intelligence. But whether it is genetic

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[14] See Pascal, *Pensées*, 136, 46, and 61.

endowment or socialization that does the work, society is, in the first instance at least, *closed*, in that its members are automatically (or unreflectively) disposed to endorse and value the customs and institutions that they share and to reject what is alien to their common identity. Like bees and ants, in the last resort "we must because we must," and no further reason can be given. That, essentially, is why the rationalizing claims of French republicanism (and by implication the larger tradition of political theory) are to be so firmly resisted.

As noted above, we may regard this line of thinking as anathema to what canonical political theorists have attempted, in that it depicts political obligation as a brute fact of common social (or sociobiological) life rather than as something that can theorized or shown to exhibit independent meaning. But there is something of a sympathetic connection here with a recent school of political theory that terms itself "realist" in rejecting the canonical ambitions of the tradition.[15] To be sure, those who identify with this school share few if any antecedents with Bergson, but there is a certain structural symmetry between their points of departure. Just as we may make the best sense of Bergson's view as a rejection of a Rousseauian or Durkheimian point of view, so too we may make the best sense of recent "realism" as a reaction against (what its advocates regard as) the overreach of liberal political theory. For whereas liberal political theorists of the recent past have tried – following John Rawls – to find a common normative ground for people with rival political views, realists are deeply skeptical of the possibility of finding it and propose that we value political institutions simply as going concerns that enable a common life together to continue. The reasoning that theorists rely on for the task of justification is essentially circular, as both Bergson and the realist school complain: the values that emerge at the end have to be covertly inserted at the beginning. So it's a good thing that "we must because we must" because in the last resort, no universally compelling reason can be given for doing so. In that (limited) respect there may be some resonance between the realists' central theme of modus vivendi and Bergson's "life."

But the parallel is imperfect, for another theme of Bergson's qualifies it significantly, and in a way that may raise questions about the current realist model. For according to him, the demands made by (modern) political societies *have already been modified* by "open" moral beliefs originally external to them, so that those demands no longer stem in an unmediated way from convention and the imperatives of order. So a different kind of

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15 See Galston, "Realism in Political Theory," for an illuminating summary and analysis.

justification is already in play. Consider, for example, an influential realist text by the English philosopher Bernard Williams. What political society can require of us is subject to a test that is termed the Basic Legitimating Demand, which is a demand that "those who claim political authority over a group . . . must have something to say *to each person* whom they constrain."[16] But in what sense, we can imagine Bergson asking at once, is that *basic*? It appears "basic" in a historical context that has already undergone far-reaching religious and political revolutions from which we have learned that everyone counts, that there is a *basic* human equality requiring respect, that "person- ality" (DSMR 1037/74), or personhood, must be addressed in the claims that we make on one another, and that human individuals are not simply sub- sumed within the roles that the closed society imposes on us. Williams can plausibly build all that into the very idea of "the political," as he tries to do, only because what we take to be political has been so drastically changed, from ancient times, by irruptive ideas of human equality. But, for Bergson, if political society makes use of those ideas – while of course neutralizing their cosmopolitan potential – it is because, being more "abstract" (DSMR 990/19) in nature than family or friendship ties, political society needs to get us to recognize shared identity with co-citizens whom we never meet. And so the idea of equality, but only up to a point of course, is useful to identity beyond family or tribe.

Turning now directly to the "open society," Bergson confronts the model of unreflective solidarity with a model that is different in every possible respect. What he calls the "open society" is not even a "society" in the same sense as the closed society is – the open/closed distinction is not political but religious in origin, deriving from the French philosopher of religion Ernest Renan, who drew a distinction between religions connected with ascriptive identity (such as Judaism) and evangelical religions (such as Christianity). In a once-influential work Karl Popper appropriated Bergson's dichotomy in the course of validating a (nascent) Cold War project that set liberal institutions against totalitarian ones.[17] For Popper (who of course also approaches things by way of his own philosophy of science), the crucial distinction is between organizations that permit knowledge claims to be critically revised and organizations that forbid epistemic critique, and that distinction is said to carry over to the distinction between liberal and totalitarian regimes. While Bergson's own distinction is not wholly uncongenial to Popper's – a Bergsonian would certainly prefer liberalism to totalitarianism – what his

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[16] Williams, *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, 135.
[17] Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, 202.

own distinction proposes is not a categorical distinction but a permanent conflict. Any set of institutions that we adopt and endorse will be basically closed but also "open" to amendment or rejection. Moreover, whereas Popper and those whom he influenced are concerned to distinguish between types of political society, Bergson's concern is with a conflict that may occur *within every person*, who is subject to both the "pressure" of the closed society and the "appeal" of the open. Thomas Nagel once wrote that "the hardest problems of political theory are conflicts within the individual,"[18] and it is hard to think of any twentieth-century thinkers who explored those problems more vividly than Bergson, or of course Freud.

   The tension that centrally concerns Bergson, as he repeatedly says, is the tension between the "pressure" exerted by the closed society and the "appeal" exerted by the open one. The closed society makes itself felt within us by definite and role-specific demands while the open society makes itself felt by a powerful, irruptive and indefinite "appeal." But while the conceptual distinction is clear, the two influences interpenetrate to the point of becoming indistinguishable at a given moment. The closed society conscripts the open imagination for its own purposes: it tells us, as we have seen, that while there is such a thing as undifferentiated humanity, the moral appeal of that notion must be, as it were, locally confined, just as French republican ideology maintains. But the influence is mutual: the voice of the open morality is lacking in consistent power unless it can express itself in the language of closed morality, that is, the language of imperatives or commands. While that is (apparently) necessary, it leads to paradoxes. Driven by the powerful ideal of self-abnegation, for example, Christianity demands that we give our money to the poor: but if money is a burden to our spirit, why is it good that the poor should have it (DSMR 1024–25/59)? There is something at work here that formulas cannot capture – just as spatial coordinates cannot capture movement – but the paradoxes appear only because we are habituated to expressing things in the form of commands if they seem important to us. Not only that but, obedient creatures as nature has made us to be, only the moral heroes among us can sustain a commitment to the good without representing it in terms of the imperatives or "pressures" that we are habituated to.

From Political Obligation to Political Identity

Where Bergson's relevance may most clearly come into focus is in connection with debates that have taken place among political theorists in the last

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[18] Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, 4.

years of the twentieth century and subsequently: debates about the particularity of political societies (or nations) and the universality of moral obligation, and about what to make of the relation – or lack of it – between those two things. As someone acutely aware of what (external) war reveals about the (internal) character of societies, Bergson naturally viewed a political society as one among (potentially rival) others, and thus drew attention to the moral problem of its members' relation to those outside it. Here he was well ahead of the political theory profession, which – to an extent that now seems incredible – once took a one-state focus, as though understanding the internal character of a polity would tell us all we need to know about it. All that has radically changed, and there is by now an enormous body of critical literature on nations and nationalism on the one hand and (various kinds of) cosmopolitanism on the other.[19] What might Bergson contribute to this? We may summarily divide the participants in this debate into partialists, cosmopolitans, and dualists,[20] and ask where Bergson stands in relation to those categories.

Partialists contend that we should look for the origin of moral obligations in the lived experience of belonging to unchosen relationships, that the constellation of unchosen obligations comprises (or, at least, basically comprises) the moral life, and that the moral life thus conceived stands in no need of further validation by principles to be adduced from some external standpoint. Cosmopolitans, on the other hand, take our initially locally situated condition to be only a matter of fact, and maintain that how we are to behave to one another, including those with whom we share a local situation, must (at some justificatory level) connect with what we share as human beings. Dualists accept both of the above claims and maintain that there is nothing we can do to render them consistent. So, as a theorist of the "inextricably double,"[21] we might initially suppose that Bergson belongs, if anywhere, with them. But the overall message of *The Two Sources* tends to disrupt all three of these positions.

It must be said at once that no one, within this constellation of views, is a "closed society" theorist. Those who identify as partialists need not of course deny that some important kinds of moral concerns apply outside the boundaries of the associations that they value. Thus the leading nationalist

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[19] See, for example, Brooks, ed., *The Global Justice Reader*.
[20] For examples of partialism, see Miller, "Reasonable Partiality," and Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty"; for examples of cosmopolitanism Jones, *Global Justice*, and Brock and Brighouse, *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*; and for examples of dualism Nagel, *Equality and Partiality*, and Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*.
[21] Lefebvre and White, "Bergson on Durkheim," 463.

theorist David Miller, for example, after maintaining that his ethical view rejects universalism for a picture of a world in which "agents are already encumbered with a variety of ties and commitments to particular other agents," goes on to maintain that "it is relatively straightforward to include the claim that I owe something to my fellow human beings considered merely as such" or "by virtue of our common humanity."[22] Richard Rorty's partialism, while initially posing a question about the relation between our local loyalties and the wider claims of justice, reconceptualizes the matter by proposing that we think of justice simply as loyalty to a large group – "Could we replace the notion of 'justice' with that of loyalty to that group – for example one's fellow-citizens, or the human species, or all living beings?"[23] That idea had been given an earlier formulation in a classic article by Andrew Oldenquist, who bizarrely hypothesized that Kant, had he confronted even fully rational aliens, would have seen them as outsiders, not being part of his human loyalty-group.[24]

These proposals run up against one of the most prominent themes of *The Two Sources*: we cannot treat moral differences as differences of scale only. The ancient (Stoic) model of concentric circles of association is deeply misleading, yet another fallacy of the retrospective workings of intelligence, in obscuring the difference between the closed and the open. The closed cannot become the open by a simple process of enlargement: "We are fond of saying that the apprenticeship to civic virtue is served in the family, and that in the same way, by holding our country dear, we learn to love mankind." The first of these steps, he says, happens to fit the facts, for family and nation are alike in being exclusive, defining insiders in contrast to outsiders; but the second step involves a leap from the bounded to the unbounded (DSMR 1001–2/32–33; see also 1006–7/38, 1019–20/53, 1202/267). The appeal to common humanity is not an appeal to associational ethics, equivalent to the ethics of those ties of kinship or friendship that "encumber" us. For while humanity may be seen as a category, Bergson insists that it is not an association in the relevant sense.

The continuity between national partiality and general justice might be preserved, however, if we supposed that the moral claims of partial association could be guaranteed, in advance, to be consistent with what justice would come to demand. Here defenders of the nation take different paths. On the one hand, according to a well-known defense by Alasdair MacIntyre, defenders must in last resort face up to the fact that conflicts

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[22] Miller, *On Nationality*, 50 and 53.   [23] Rorty, "Justice as a Larger Loyalty," 47.
[24] See Oldenquist, "Loyalties."

over resources face nations with zero-sum conflicts, such that to sustain our way of life we may have to deprive others of the means to sustain theirs.[25] On the other hand, in his own defense of national partiality, Miller makes a claim for the consistency of national identity and justice.[26] While associations contain local and specific goods, they must not define their aims in ways that involve violating the rightful claims of other groups: while nurturing our own family is an intrinsic good, for example, it cannot justify stealing what belongs to other families. Here Bergson would take MacIntyre's view to more correctly represent what nations are really like, which as we have seen in *The Two Sources* is disclosed in and through war. As for the consistency claim, what Bergson would have to say relates, once again, to the theme of interpenetration. Just as political society, as we now see it, has already been deeply modified (though not fundamentally transformed) by the impact of equality, so too have familial relations. Consider what has happened to the definitions of familial roles over the past century or so. It is quite true that "she is my wife" or "he is my son" are still statements encumbered with moral meanings, ones that do not involve any further appeal to general ideas of justice: but the meanings that encumber them are not the same as the meanings embedded in them in Victorian times. That we do not (always) need to invoke larger principles is *exactly because,* as Bergson says, larger principles have exerted a deep influence already. It is only because of this, one would say – following Bergson's line of argument – that the partialists' claims seem plausible.

Another important theme linking Bergson's discussion of the nation state to later debates concerns the important topic of myth. Others, since Bergson's day, have also drawn attention to the crucial role that myth plays in the constitution of national groups. In *Sapiens*, for example, Yuval Harari argues that the step from kin or tribal groups to groups on a national scale could only have been facilitated by mythmaking. "Large numbers of strangers can cooperate successfully by believing in common myths," he writes. "States are rooted in common national myths. Two Serbs who have never met might risk their lives to save one another because both believe in the existence of the Serbian nation."[27] Bergson's account of myth gives us an interesting explanatory angle on its importance. Intelligence, he says, poses a risk to the closed society, because by seeking reasons for our various duties and obligations it tends to undermine the (ultimately unreasoning) force of *you must because you must*. But the closed society – slipping here into Bergson's way of ascribing purpose to it – finds

[25] MacIntyre, *After Virtue*.   [26] Miller, "Reasonable Partiality."   [27] Harari, *Sapiens*, 27.

a solution in narratives. Intelligence respects facts: mythic narratives create facts, purported events, that intelligence can work on and derive practical conclusions from. "If intelligence was to be kept at the outset from sliding down a slope which was dangerous to itself and society, it could only be by the statement of apparent facts, by the ghosts of facts; failing real experience, a counterfeit of experience had to be conjured up. A fiction, if its image is vivid and insistent, may indeed masquerade as perception" (DSMR 1067/109). Now defenses of the nation state today exhibit a certain tolerance for myth, accepting it for its benefits in terms of political solidarity. What actually happened at Dunkirk, for example – to cite a famous British case – may be less important than the "Dunkirk spirit" that, valuably, derives from the story.[28] But the tolerance of myth is obviously vulnerable to democratic views that place a premium on "public reason," or on open critical debate.[29] In that disagreement we may see an exact replica of the conflict that Bergson posited between the open and the closed. The closed seeks to safeguard solidarity. The open seeks to do away with all conditions. So a Bergsonian view attaches a large question mark to the influential idea of "liberal nationalism." It cannot, the view would suggest, achieve permanent stability.[30]

If in these ways Bergson casts doubt not only on nationalism but also on its currently influential liberal version, then we may place him among the cosmopolitans. And of course in some sense he does belong there (DSMR 1055–56/95). There are several kinds of cosmopolitan: Samuel Scheffler suggests a basic distinction between "cosmopolitans about culture" and "cosmopolitans about justice,"[31] and if that distinction applies here we would take the latter option. Bergson takes it for granted that "custom" (to use his term) will – like language (DSMR 998/28) – be locally constructed, whatever elements may be common to different societies' customs. But one of the most powerful passages in *The Two Sources* tells us that justice is something that, in the last resort, is entirely unconditioned by local circumstances and the local requirements of social or political order. To be sure, elements of justice play their part in everyday episodes of dispute resolution and adjudications of liability: injustices are, in origin, simply breaches of social rules. But a moment comes (one strongly reminiscent of *The Brothers Karamazov*) when it might be asked, "What should we do if we heard that for the common good, for the very existence of mankind,

[28] Archard, "Myths, Lies and Historical Truth," and Miller, *On Nationality*, 35–41.
[29] Abizadeh, "Historical Truth, National Myths, and Liberal Democracy."
[30] For a fuller account, see my *Friends, Citizens, Strangers*, 162–80.
[31] Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances*, 111–12.

there was somewhere a man, an innocent man, condemned to suffer eternal torment?" and the answer would come, from some, "no! a thousand times no! Better to accept that nothing should exist at all!" (DSMR 1038–39/75–76). Here, Bergson says, we come face to face with something new, something for which our natural tribalism has not prepared us, and which of course contains the potential to explode social and political conformity altogether. It would be hard to think of anything more profoundly cosmopolitan than that. But matters are not so simple. For Bergson also tells us that for all its power to move us, the idea of justice must, to find its place in social and political life, mimic the imperatives of social morality and assume expression in the form of *you must*.

That relates very directly to the third position to be mentioned here, that of moral dualism. In the best recent statement of that view, Samuel Scheffler distinguishes between duties that are simply inherent in associational ties, and duties that flow from accepting a basic principle of equality. The former simply do not need the support of the latter: relationship terms (such as "brother," "friend") carry their own moral weight – to say "he is my brother" is enough to explain and justify an act with regard to him. But from the standpoint of an ideal of equality, actions depend for their justification on satisfying the demands of a principle in a critically defensible way. Hence the dualism.[32] But *The Two Sources* offers a somewhat different take on these moral data, one that we might term "agonistic" rather than "dualist."[33] Bergson often describes the relationship between closed and open moralities as symbiotic, as we have seen: the open gives the closed the greater scope that it needs, the closed gives the open its peremptory character (DSMR 1203/268). But turning to the topic toward the end of his book, Bergson asks why "nature" should have "intended" this twofold project, instead of proceeding directly to the end that it appears to prefigure. His answer is that the eventual result will have been made possible only by a process of competition. Had nature pursued a single project, not one differentiated into open and closed tendencies, "this would not have given the maximum of creation, in quantity and in quality. It is necessary to go on to the bitter end in one direction, to find out what it will yield; when we can go no further, we turn back, with all that we have acquired, to set off in the direction from which we had turned aside . . . Such are the workings of nature; the struggles that she stages for us do not indicate pugnacity so much as curiosity" (DSMR 1227–28/296–97). Such a view might ally itself with critiques of Enlightenment rationality that

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[32] Scheffler, *Boundaries and Allegiances.*   [33] See Mouffe, *Agonistics.*

deplore its lack of any sense of essential contestation. Perhaps it needs to be said, though, that such views can be affirmed only from outside the process, by appreciative observers, for it is hard to see how they could consistently be endorsed by engaged political actors who, committed (as the process requires) to the rightfulness of their cause, are motivated to win rather than to advance the objective benefits of the process.

On Human Rights and Democracy

Bergson made a direct contribution to the politics of the later-twentieth and twenty-first centuries through his personal interventions in the movement to establish the League of Nations.[34] After his death, his philosophy continued to influence the development of the discourse of human rights, through the medium of the Canadian diplomat John Humphrey. Humphrey, the subject of an informative monograph by Clinton Timothy Curle, was Director of the Human Rights Division of the UN Secretariat from 1945 on and an influential member of the group that had drawn up the 1948 *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. Humphrey sought a way of conceiving of human rights that was neither merely pragmatic nor rooted in an essentialist and Eurocentric version of natural law of the kind favored by his colleague Jacques Maritain, the Thomist. It was reading *The Two Sources*, Curle shows, that inspired Humphrey's subsequent work. But to arrive at it he had to negotiate what he first saw as a disjunction between the essentially open nature of "humanity" and the idea of rights, an idea that finds its natural home within the political or juridical context of specifiable and enforceable claims. How could it be, he initially wondered, that Bergson insisted that "society" required closure in the form of definite prescriptive rules, while also pointing toward a universal and hence open society? It then came to Humphrey that society necessarily depends on "instrumentalities" of action in forms to which it is habituated by obedience. The rule-like formulations of human rights are to be seen as moments in a process of creative evolution, and they are "human" in the sense that the process "englobes all of humanity." According to Humphrey's interpretation of Bergson, "we can see the contemporary human rights project primarily as an intention. Naturally, there is a translation of this intention into concepts and categories, of which the *Declaration* is the first. But these translations must be seen as approximations of the intuition which forms them from the dust of the

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[34] Soulez, *Bergson politique*.

earth and breathes life into them."[35] Humphrey's way of making sense of the matter is broadly confirmed and extended by later scholarship, which likewise stresses the place of Bergsonian human rights within a longer-term moral (or religious) evolution.[36]

The political theory of human rights is many-sided and rich and involves many strands of thinking.[37] We may roughly distinguish between functional views that present human rights as essentially pieces within a juridical and political framework, and views that (somewhat resembling the older natural rights tradition) take as their starting point some feature of the human. Among the latter, perhaps the closest to Bergson's own view would seem to be "dignitarian" theses that attach some fundamentally important status to being human (rather than, for example, taking some interest, or else some vulnerability, as the starting point, as other approaches do).[38] Such a view might initially be suggested by Bergson's explosive response, in the passage on "justice" cited above, to the proposition that great benefit might be extracted from the torture of an innocent person. It would also fit well with the theme of "personality." Moreover, it would appear to connect with the radical disjunction made in *The Two Sources* between the two lines of evolution that life has taken and the distinctiveness of the line taken by human life. At first sight, that may seem to open Bergson to an important critique of the dignitarian position by Will Kymlicka, who sees in it a troubling implication of "human supremacism."[39] To say that there is something about humans that means they cannot be treated as animals is apparently to license the way that animals are treated, and Kymlicka cites some chilling examples of this line of thinking. But to apply this critique to Bergson would be to miss an important distinction. He arrives at human rights not by way of any distinction between the human and the nonhuman, but by way of the openness that irrupts into human life. And while this openness leads us to recognize and value human personality, that recognition is not, as it were, the initial *ground* of openness, but, rather, one of its resultant *perceptions*: Bergson makes it clear that "the open soul" will extend its love "to animals, to plants, to all nature" (DSMR 1006–7/38), since love is defined by a disposition, not by an object. (Perhaps we may note that, intriguingly,

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[35] Curle, *Humanité*, 45, 48, and 151.
[36] Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, especially 110–42.
[37] See, for example, Cruft et al., *Philosophical Foundations of Human Rights*.
[38] See Waldron, *One Another's Equals*.
[39] Kymlicka, "Human Rights without Human Supremacism."

this brings Bergson closer to the original meaning of *kosmo-polites* than human rights cosmopolitans would generally aspire to be!)

What, finally, should we make of Bergson's political writing in the light of democratic circumstances today? While his point of departure, it was claimed above, was in some sense a realist one, it was qualified, as we have seen, by a profoundly critical vision according to which there is nothing that we take to be part of the political order of "pressure" that cannot in principle be swept away by the "appeal" of justice, which in the last resort gives no moral weight to order at all. Let justice be done though the heavens fall. Institutionally, the idea of justice principally leaves its mark, as we have seen, in the idea of human rights, which can come to play a global role, as a sort of side-constraint on national political behavior, if it can secure the sustained support of transnational publics. While Bergson is optimistic, he holds out no illusory guarantees (see DSMR 1219–20/287). But in another respect his optimism may overstep the mark. In the final chapter of *The Two Sources*, he introduces, for the first time in that book, the idea of democracy. While human rights are presented as a side-constraint on what states may do, advocating democracy amounts of course to offering a view about their necessary internal character. That view, he now claims, follows from the very idea of the open society itself. "Of all political systems, it is indeed the furthest removed from nature, the only one to transcend, at least in intention, the conditions of the 'closed society'" (DSMR 1214/281). We are left to speculate about the nature of the deep connection that Bergson evidently sees. He goes on at once to say that democracy confers "rights" on members of society, and of course some democracies do, but it is not obviously clear that democracy, by virtue of its very character, must confer more than the political rights (expression, association, voting) that are necessary to its operation. I think we may perhaps say, though somewhat speculatively, that Bergson had in mind the idea that the progressive "opening" of society, in recognizing "personality" or personhood, would necessarily lead to a model of politics in which all that would count would be personhood, regardless of social place or gender or ethnicity, and that the most obvious (or only) way to institutionalize that model was by giving power to the undifferentiated popular vote. If so, that is entirely acceptable logic. But subsequent history would lead us to resist the connection that Bergson makes. Far from representing the culmination, so far, of the idea of the open society, democratic votes – like any application of power – may express the idea of closure in its most stark form. In policies of exclusion and aggressive national self-preference, democratically adopted or not, we may see the very type of Bergson's closed

society, ancient though it is in origin, made violently manifest today, in a form almost as hideous as it ever was. From our later standpoint, we may forgive, but still regret, the elevation of fraternity over liberty and equality in Bergson's account of democracy (DSMR 1215–16/282). It is motivated, understandably, by his sense that democracy is a work in progress, that the adjustments between liberty and equality cannot be made by any formula but must be recurrently revisited, and that the sense of fraternity (community) is fundamental to this ongoing process. But evidently that very sense can enable the ever-alert closed society to reassert its exclusiveness and its visceral rejection of the intrusive other, although of course that represents a (mistaken, but evidently easy) slippage from open to closed ideas of what fraternity means.

Bergson, Colonialism, and Race

Mark William Westmoreland

The recent resurgence of studies of Henri Bergson challenges us to consider new ways of understanding his philosophy, as well as implications and extensions of his thought into areas not previously discussed in the scholarship. Suzanne Guerlac claims that "both too much and too little have been said about Bergson. Too much, because of the various appropriations of his thought. Too little, because the work itself has not been carefully studied."[1] In the following chapter, I investigate the themes of race and colonialism, that is, Bergson's racist and colonial assumptions, within his philosophy – two themes on which too little has been said. Those familiar with Bergson's writings might find such an investigation curious given that neither race nor colonialism plays a significant role within his work. There are few references to race and colonialism, few comments about *les races inférieures, les peuples barbares*, and *les primitifs*, scattered throughout his lectures and texts, which span many decades.[2] Since the references are few, I will not be systematic with regard to my treatment of specific texts but instead will sketch different approaches or ways of reading Bergson and the stakes involved with each.

Even though Bergson played an active role in the League of Nations and the International Commission for Intellectual Cooperation, he was not a political philosopher according to common rubrics.[3] That said, sprinkled throughout speeches and letters, we find references to the contemporary political scene.[4] Moreover, although not explicitly political, there are

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[1] Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, 13. In *Inventing Bergson*, Mark Antliff has documented the multifarious paths that Bergsonism, particularly its political inclinations, took. See, also, Burwick and Douglass, eds., *The Crisis in Modernism*.

[2] The focus in this chapter is on Bergson's monographs. This is not to say that Bergson does not reference themes of race or colonialism elsewhere. For example, in "Politeness," Bergson briefly mentions "*beaucoup de sauvages*" who are more polite than we are. He also claims that "the most civil people are not always the most civilized" (3).

[3] See Lefebvre, "Bergson and Human Rights" and "Human Rights and the Leap of Love."

[4] For examples, see Bergson, "Lettre sur le Jury de Cour d'Assise" and "La Spécialité."

comments in his formal writings that show Bergson's attempts to diagnose his contemporary milieu. "The greater part of the time," he writes in *Time and Free Will*, "we live outside ourselves, hardly perceiving anything of ourselves but our own ghost, a colorless shadow . . . we live for the external world rather than for ourselves; we speak rather than think; we 'are acted' rather than act ourselves" (ESSAI 151/231). Bergson's concern is that the modern era has produced superficial selves, that is, selves stripped of personhood and reduced to data.[5] Put differently, qualitative heterogeneity is subsumed by quantitative homogeneity. John Ó Maoilearca summarizes the point: "According to Bergson, modern, social, and mechanized existence has cleaved our consciousness in two."[6] Bergson was writing in a time of rapid technological innovation and significant scientific discovery. He was also writing in a time of widespread anxiety and mass destruction, a time of nationalism, anti-Semitism, trains, automobiles, telegraphs, telephones, machine guns, and chemical weapons. Yet one will search in vain for lengthy discussions of colonialism or race within the pages of Bergson's *oeuvres*. It is peculiar that Bergson does not show any concern for the worldwide destruction of non-European peoples through ongoing colonialism and racism.

In this chapter, I show how we might read the themes of race and colonialism within and alongside Bergson's texts by considering interpretative approaches that are sometimes overlapping and, at other times, divergent. I present instances of where our themes appear in Bergson and consider the extent to which his comments are intrinsic or accidental to his argument, as well as the possibility that his interpreters have misunderstood Bergson's references to race and colonialism. The interpretations discussed should be viewed heuristically since they often merge into one another. In order to highlight the stakes, I will parse them according to what I take to be their most salient and unique characteristics. My first section begins with two thinkers – Léopold Sédar Senghor and Messay Kebede – who focus on how the colonized might use Bergson's epistemology to challenge Eurocentric thinking. Next, using the work of Donna Jones, I consider Bergson's unfortunate comments about so-called primitive peoples. Last, I turn to Alia Al-Saji's interpretation of the methodology of *The Two Sources on Morality and Religion* as revealing Bergson's colonial assumptions about primitive peoples.[7] My hope is that, by sketching several approaches to the themes of race and colonialism within

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[5] See Westmoreland and Karas, eds., "Bergson(-ism) Remembered."
[6] Mullarkey [aka Ó Maoilearca], *Bergson and Philosophy*, 19.   [7] Al-Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson."

Bergson's philosophy, this chapter will be a launching point for others to explore these themes in more detail.

The Dominance of Reason

Bergson's philosophy had a great impact on the Francophone intellectual traditions both inside and outside of Europe ranging from literature, visual art, and political theory to the sciences. Most notably, in Africa and the diaspora, Négritude was largely influenced by Bergson and it stands as an example of how to read him against the tradition of Enlightenment reason. Proponents of Négritude – poets, philosophers, politicians, and cultural theorists – championed a common but non-essentialist Black identity, both in Africa and the diaspora, challenged positivism and the racism of Europeans, and created a new rebellious, political imaginary in which all life held value. Senghor, a poet and cultural theorist who was the first president of Senegal (1960–80) and, in 1983, the first African elected to the Académie française, is exemplary of a Bergson-inspired rejection of the dominance of European rationality.

What presently concerns us is how Senghor employed Bergson's epistemology against the philosophical establishment. For thinkers such as Senghor and Aimé Césaire, Bergson was most useful in shattering the legacy of European rationalism, which he criticized for conceiving of reality as a homogenous discrete multiplicity that could be carved up, examined, and classified (allegedly without any loss). Senghor praised Bergson's doctoral dissertation and first book *Time and Free Will* as "the revolution of 1889" due to its profound impact on the arts and sciences, particularly the epistemological critique that it provides. Senghor expresses Bergson's criticism like this: "Facts and matter, which are the objects of discursive reason," only get at what is superficial, and "intuition [is needed] in order to achieve a vision in-depth of reality."[8]

The challenge that Négritude gives is not simply a critique of colonialism and imperialism. No doubt, it does this, but it does so by primarily dismantling the epistemology of scientific reason that colonizes reason and universalizes whiteness as the transcendental norm, that is, whiteness is posited as the universalizable, quintessential representative of what it means to be human. Put differently, Négritude theorists like Senghor employed Bergson's epistemology in the service of an anticolonial project. "The best way to connect Négritude with Western philosophical

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[8] Senghor, "Négritude," 181.

positions," according to Kebede, "is via the debate opposing the defenders of reason and those who rebelled against its dominance."[9] In this instance, Bergson is the paragon rebel. Abiola Irele writes, "To Bergson, Senghor owes the concept of 'intuition' on which revolves his explication of the African mind and consciousness. Bergson abolished with this concept the positivist dichotomy of subject–object, and proposed a new conception of authentic knowledge as immediacy of experience, the organic involvement of the subject with the object of his experience."[10]

We turn now to Kebede's discussion of *Creative Evolution* in order to understand how Bergson anchored his epistemology in his evolutionary theory or, put differently, how he brought together and fused knowledge and life. The scientific reason of European intellectualism, Kebede writes, "is at a loss when it turns its attention to the underlying reality. The divergent movement of life explains the inability of intelligence: during the evolutionary journey, intelligence abandoned the complementary function of instinctive apprehension."[11] Scientific knowledge fails to explain all of life, especially since it cannot know through its own means the qualitative multiplicity of reality. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson writes: "The intellect is characterized by a natural inability to comprehend life," as it is "the very mobility of things" that "escapes the hold of scientific knowledge" (EC 635/106 and 780/215). This is a particularly relevant point in the context of race and colonialism within which the European gaze of the racial Other classifies human racial difference as if races were fixed, stable categories referring to some essential and unchanging biological reality.

Kebede explains that, from a Bergsonian perspective, societies that do not conform to the European mode of being-in-the-world are not primitive, wayward, or backward. Rather, because evolution proceeds in a multidirectional manner, there are no genuinely superior or inferior societies. In light of this evolutionary pluralism, each society reveals some aspect of humanity that is not revealed by another. "Evolution," Kebede writes, "is not the unfolding of humanity according to a stage-producing-stage process resulting in inferior and superior social formations, but the creation of diverse personalities through the emphasis on particular traits drawn from a common stock of virtualities."[12] Influenced by Bergson, Senghor takes this idea to mean that various races or populations have particular virtues. For example, it was the African peoples, Senghor claims,

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[9] Kebede, "Negritude and Bergsonism," 1. [10] Irele, *The African Experience*, 80.
[11] Kebede, "Negritude and Bergsonism," 3. [12] Kebede, "Negritude and Bergsonism," 4.

that built civilization on intuition whereas Europe built itself on a colonizing rationality.[13]

Kebede unpacks Bergson's linkage of epistemology and evolution within the context of Bergson's refutation of Lévy-Bruhl's comments in *Primitive Mentality*, specifically the notion of prelogicality. Lévy-Bruhl was a philosopher contemporary with Bergson who sought to understand the radical otherness or difference of peoples, in particular primitive peoples. Primitive people possess a primitive mind, he argues, in so far as they employ a prelogic, that is, a childish reasoning that cannot grasp logical principles such as non-contradiction. Chapter 2 of Bergson's *Two Sources* can be read as a sustained engagement and refutation of *Primitive Mentality*. Summarizing the disagreement between Lévy-Bruhl and Bergson, Souleymane Bachir Diagne writes:

> Although we can compare Lévy-Bruhl's philosophy to that of Bergson in that they both explore a non-logical approach to reality, a way of understanding things that is not analytic and which does not begin by separating them *partes extra partes*, [we should take note of one crucial difference, that is, where Lévy-Bruhl] envisions humanities separated according to the structure of their minds, the author of *Creative Evolution* envisions the becoming of a humanity that, overcoming its inner separation, accomplishes itself in the equality and "full development" of the two forms of its conscious activity.[14]

According to Bergson, "there is nothing illogical, consequently nothing 'prelogical'" in the epistemology of either primitive or civilized peoples (DSMR 1098/145). At the same time, both primitive and civilized peoples have moments when they appeal to mystical beliefs, most notably in response to death or the desire to find meaning in pain and suffering. Any differences in the degree to which mystical beliefs are utilized are due to contexts in which sociocultural significance is emphasized over appeals to the raw physicality of a phenomenon, for example, death. A word of caution is in order: we should not view Bergson as saying that intuitive knowledge and rational knowledge map on to specific races, lest we slip into Lévy-Bruhl's essentialist notion of a prelogical mentality of so-called primitive peoples. Commenting on Senghor's use of Bergson, Kebede writes: "To articulate his idea of Africa as the seat of a different civilization, [Senghor] interpreted racially the Bergsonian distinction between

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[13] Senghor offers an alternative epistemology to that of European rationality through many of his works; for examples, see the volumes of the *Liberté* series.

[14] Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*, 118–19.

intuition and intelligence while knowing perfectly that the original distinction referred to two human faculties, less so to different races."[15] While Senghor employs what some might take to be essentialist rhetoric, he does so strategically to combat the rhetoric of the colonizer. Senghor also uses the language of cosmopolitanism, creolization, hybridity, and *Eurafricanité*. In short, Senghor does not affirm racial essentialism as a biological reality. All human beings are capable of both kinds of knowledge even if intuitive, sympathetic knowledge is, according to Senghor, found to an elevated level among primitive peoples.

While both Senghor and Kebede mine Bergson's work for what is useful in challenging European rationality, Jones faults them both for overlooking the racism of Bergson's response to Lévy-Bruhl. Jones illustrates the overlooking of racism by turning to a particular passage discussed by Bergson, where Lévy-Bruhl describes how primitive people demonstrate ingratitude by expecting to receive payment from attending physicians. In response, Bergson recollects childhood memories of his dentist giving him a 50-centime piece. He admits that, as a child, he could have guessed that the dentist and his family were bribing him for his silence. But, such a conclusion would have required more energy than he was willing to give and, instead, chose to view the dentist as "a man who loved drawing teeth, and [who] was even ready to pay for this the sum of half a franc" (DSMR 1104/152). Jones concludes that Bergson's reduction of the primitive mind to that of a child exemplifies a racist mind-set.[16] However, while sympathetic to Jones, Al-Saji notes that Bergson's point is that the "civilized" mind is just as prone to magical thinking as the "primitive" one. "Let us not," Bergson writes, "talk of minds different from our own. Let us simply say that they are ignorant of what we have learnt" (DSMR 1103/151). The difference between the civilized and the primitive is not to be found in any essential characteristic – there are no inherited acquired traits – but in the contingencies of history.

Critics often mischaracterize Bergson-influenced Négritude as merely a literary movement obsessed with identity, or a political agenda contaminated with an ideology marred by essentialism and/or self-hatred.[17] But, for Senghor, Négritude speaks of a particular affective attitude of a people toward the world. According to Senghor, "[i]t is the attitude towards the

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[15] Kebede, "Negritude and Bergsonism," 13.
[16] While I take issue with several of Jones's moves, I find *The Racial Discourses* to be one of the most worthwhile texts written on Bergson as well as "Négritude" in the last decade.
[17] See Towa, *Léopold Sédar Senghor: Négritude our Servitude*, and Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 127.

object – towards the external world, the Other – which characterizes a people, and thereby their culture."[18] Readers of Bergson might quickly compare this with what Bergson says about intuition. One illustrative passage from *Creative Evolution* is worth quoting in full. Here Bergson contrasts science with what, in *The Creative Mind*, he calls "true empiricism" (PM 1408/206): "[Intelligence] goes all around life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it, drawing it into itself instead of entering into it. But it is to the very inwardness of life that *intuition* leads us – by intuition I mean instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and of enlarging it indefinitely" (EC 645/114). Intuition, for Bergson, is not a feeling. An intellectual effort or method, intuition unifies the experience of senses with one another and with the conditions for their experience and does so without recourse to mechanism or teleology. Unlike the intelligence of science, the intuition that grounds true empiricism does not reduce the world to mere data.[19] It brings together the whole of the object, or, in the words of Ó Maoilearca, "instantiates the Real rather than represents it."[20] Senghor claims that the European knower "distinguishes himself from the object [and] keeps it at a distance, immobilizes it outside of time and in some sense outside space, fixes it and slays it. Armed with precision instruments, he dissects it mercilessly."[21] The African, Senghor explains, "does not keep the object at a distance, does not analyze it [but] takes the object, all alive [and] turns it over and over in his supple hands, touches it, feels it."[22] European rationality relies on manipulation, reduces outcomes to economic or political efficiency, and values the world instrumentally. Both Bergson and Senghor challenge scientific reason for its inability to think in terms of duration. Only intuitive reason can go beyond the superficiality of appearances. Senghor writes: "The vital force of the African negro, that is, his surrender to the Other, is thus inspired by reason. But reason is not, in this case, the visualizing reason of the European white, but a kind of embracing reason."[23] The problem of racism, or, more specifically, the failure of whiteness is the problem of remaining on the surface of race. In short, it is the lack of sympathy for the racial Other.

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[18] Senghor, "On Negrohood: Psychology of the Negro African," 2.
[19] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 47.   [20] Mullarkey [aka Ó Maoilearca], "Equally Circular," 62.
[21] Senghor, "On Negrohood," 2.   [22] Senghor, "On Negrohood," 3.
[23] Senghor, "On Negrohood," 7.

Colonizing Images of Race

Let us consider the (pseudo-)scientific attempts at racial classification as an example of how European rationality collapses into racism. What function does the category "race" serve? What possibilities does the concept of race provide? In short, violence. The attempts to naturalize race in the early modern era and then rationalize it in the Enlightenment developed into the politicizing of race. Put differently, as Europeans traversed the globe, there was a desire to classify human difference. Such classification was intrinsically value-laden, aligning whiteness with the divine, the good, virtue, truth, reason, order, law, and so on. Other racialized populations were described as lacking or deviating from these qualities. The racial hierarchies of (pseudo-)science led to oppositional differences in Western societies such as, for example, the black/white binary and the one-drop rule in the United States.[24]

As Bergson explains, a "veil of ignorance, preconceptions and prejudices" exists between one and the Other, and this veil leads to all manner of injustice, particularly in a world where whiteness is the transcendental norm (DSMR 1218/285). From a Bergsonian perspective, we might say that the domination of others is grounded in a lack of sympathy for "them" given that, for Bergson, sympathy for and obligation to "us" is what maintains social cohesion and protection.[25] Put differently, sympathy for "us" or the "in-group" is necessary; but racialized sympathy toward a particular race is strange in that race has no biological basis. Racism cannot be rooted in immutable biology since race is not a fixed, transhistorical reality. Racial classification remains stuck in instrumentality – to give one racial group an advantage – and the superficiality of appearances, that is, in seeing the part but not the whole. Content is assigned to the part, which, in turn, undermines the whole. For instance, the Black body vis-à-vis whiteness will be given the content of threatening, criminal, deviant, vicious, or sinful.[26] At the same time, the lack of attentive perception will obscure the particularities and personhood of individuals assigned a nonwhite race.[27] This bifurcated mode of evaluating Blackness helps establish and enforce us/them distinctions. "Intuition," Elizabeth

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[24] The one-drop rule was an institutionalized way of racially classifying people in the United States, with the goal of maintaining an ideology of racial purity, and assigning advantages and disadvantages depending on how one was classified. The general idea was that if a person had any nonwhite ancestor, then that person could not be legally or socially considered white, which meant that such a person would be barred from the advantages that whiteness granted.

[25] See White, "The Politics of Sympathy."   [26] See Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes.*

[27] For a discussion on the ethical nature of intuition, see Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism.*

Grosz explains, "is not simply the discernment of natural differences, qualitative differences, or differences in kind."[28] Neither is it discerning the parts; rather, intuition gathers the parts into a whole – a whole that indeed is fundamentally a mixture. The notion of racial groups as an essential, biological phenomenon is built on the idea of pure races. However, no pure races have ever existed. Humankind is mixture: it has no natural racial essences. "It is irrelevant," Ó Maoilearca maintains,

> whether the analysis is liberal or conservative in political orientation: the error of false sociobiology is its search for legitimizing natural essences, when in truth the "sources" of society only provide us with natural tendencies, one of which will actually be the tendency to renounce all notions of natural essence in favor of the continual creation of new social forms – what Bergson will dub "open morality."[29]

Perception is not passive, and perception of value-laden racial differences provides ripe conditions for violence against "them," a telltale sign of closure. The reductive nature of racial classification, that is, to ascribe content to bodies without reference to personhood, is not about classifying racial groups in themselves or even their mere appearances. Instead, racial classification is about the social significance people will have in a society racially coded in hierarchical form. As the racialized body moves through social space, it becomes coded by other bodies. Perceptions are in the domain of action, not knowledge, according to Bergson. We can turn to *Laughter* for a case study of this.

In *Laughter*, Bergson considers the conditions for laughter rather than laughter itself. One example is striking. Bergson asks, "Why does one laugh at the negro?" The answer: disguise. Bergson recounts hearing a cab driver refer to a Black passenger as unclean: "Does not this mean that a Black face, in our imagination, is one daubed over with ink or soot?" A disguise can indeed give rise to laughter, but in this instance, the concept of disguise is applied incorrectly to the Black body. Insofar as the driver evaluates the passenger as a white person in costume or a white person made filthy by ink or soot, the driver's remark ought to remind us of blackface theater, which exaggerated and mocked Blackness. "Although the black color," Bergson writes, "is indeed inherent in the skin," the white Parisian driver perceives it as "artificially laid on" despite the fact that the thought that "'a negro is a white man in disguise' [is] also absurd to the reason which rationalizes" (RIRE 406/40–41).[30]

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[28] Grosz, *Becoming Undone*, 50.   [29] Mullarkey [aka Ó Maoilearca], *Bergson and Philosophy*, 89.
[30] For an excellent discussion of this passage and its reception among Black intellectuals, see Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel's "The Spectacle of Belonging."

Bergson's vignette highlights the extent to which whiteness stands as a transcendental norm. The social spaces in which white persons can move unencumbered are, furthermore, also sites of violence for People of Color.[31] Locating the Black *body* within a social space constructed by and for white normativity is the condition for laughter here. I emphasize "body" since skin color is the most salient feature perceived by the driver. The passenger's particularity as a person, in other words, the passenger's personhood, is invisible to the driver. The perception of Blackness as dirty (i.e., as caused by the presence of ink or soot) by the driver closes off the driver's ability to sympathize with the personhood of the Black passenger. The misrecognition of Black bodies vis-à-vis whiteness – the hypervisibility of Blackness as deformity or perversion – provokes laughter, which instantiates the lack of sympathy for the racial Other.

Racial Discourses

While we have been focused on more positive appropriations of Bergson's philosophy, let us now turn to more critical engagements with his work and our two themes. Jones, giving perhaps the strongest criticism against Bergson's account of race within the anglophone scholarship on Bergson, charges Bergson with racism and claims that Bergsonian vitalism has racial and colonial dimensions that permeate the interworking of his philosophy. In *The Racial Discourses of Life Philosophy*, Jones considers the relation between discourses of vitalism and racialism with a particular focus on Bergson, whom Jones views as a monist and a defender of mnemic vitalism – life requires the harvesting of the past into the present – as opposed to a metaphysics of change, and proponents of Négritude such as Senghor and Césaire.[32] Summarizing the aforementioned passage in *Laughter*, Jones writes,

> Bergson not only evades the roots of mechanical behavior in the class and
> racial divisions in society but also offers racist ruminations himself. In

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[31] In six issues between 1931 and 1932, *La Revue du monde noir* ran a series of conversations in reply to the question "How Should Negroes Living in Europe Dress?" with particular reference to Bergson's *Laughter*. The conversations exceeded the question of fashion by engaging with concerns of race and colonial power. The focus was not so much on Bergson the person but rather on how whites perceive Blackness and how Black folks ought to respond, particularly in Parisian public spaces, which were coded as white.

[32] For a contrasting view on monism/dualism in Bergson, see Kebede, "Beyond Dualism and Monism." Jones's worry about Bergson's mnemic vitalism is that the return to and collection of the past for the present is reminiscent of ethnic nationalists and fascists in the first half of the century.

a discussion that is disturbing and nearly incoherent (as well as ignored in the secondary literature), Bergson wonders why "we" laugh at blacks. He emphasizes that blacks are thought of as unwashed, which to him somehow means that they are thought to be appearing in disguise. He also suggests that "we" laugh at blacks for the same reason we laugh at [clowns]. The joke seems to be not only that the person is simply wearing the clown suit of black skin but that he cannot take it off and regain the suppleness and freedom of the underlying active white subject. Black people are for Bergson tragic comedy.[33]

Jones might overstate the case since it is unclear whether Bergson is affirming this response, that is, if he shares this belief, or if he is making an observation, in other words, a descriptive claim. Nevertheless, the association with the theatrical performances of blackface should not be lost on us. Whiteness as the transcendental norm occurs within a context of colonialism, imperialism, and the resulting diaspora. The lack of sympathy for the racial Other illustrates norms regarding inclusion and exclusion, norms of who counts as a human person and who counts as deficient.[34]

In a footnote to her discussion of *Laughter*, Jones refers to a peculiar passage in *Matter and Memory*. "Bergson," she writes, "thought African 'savages' incapable of mobilizing the past for the purposes of the present; their memory was putatively only spontaneous, as their intellectual development had not gone beyond that of children."[35] Bergson writes: "*des hommes dont le devéloppement intellectuel ne dépasse guère celui de l'enfance*" (MM 294/199). I think a better translation would be "hardly goes beyond childhood" or "hardly exceeds that of childhood." Bergson is referencing a passage in David Kay's *Memory: What It Is and How to Improve It*, in which Kay writes,

> Dr. Moffat, the distinguished missionary, after preaching a long sermon to a number of African savages, saw at a distance a simple-looking young man holding forth to a number of people, who were all attention. On approaching, he found to his surprise that he was preaching his sermon over again, with uncommon precision and with great solemnity, imitating as nearly as he could the manner and gestures of the original.[36]

Bergson's point is that conscious memory loses its strength as one cultivates the intellect. This is a statement more about the human condition than it is about privileging one racial group over another.

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[33] Jones, *The Racial Discourses,* 53.
[34] While outside of the scope of this chapter, the normativity of inclusion and exclusion can also be explored in the context of Bergson's discussion of war; see Shuster, "The Language of Closure."
[35] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 190n89.   [36] Kay, *Memory*, 18.

For Jones, the problem of Bergson, beyond any specifically racist comments and colonial assumptions, is that his vitalism leads to closure rather than novelty, to spiritualist racialism and nationalistic irrationalism rather than freedom. "We are free," Jones writes, "only when our act springs spontaneously from the intuition of the whole continuity of our personality, including our virtual memories, which may include the race's as well, as it has evolved up to the moment of action."[37] But Jones does not provide textual evidence for where Bergson speaks of race and memory. Instead, while admitting that Bergson speaks of integral, personal memory, she extends Bergson's idea to include the virtual field of a race's memory. She takes this to be foundational for Négritude theorists who, with Bergson, "share the syntax of a revolutionary traditionalism, the attempt to recover a sedimented African tradition."[38] It is in this sense that Bergson is conservative rather than progressive. According to Jones, even duration is racialized in Bergson. It would seem that each race has a fixed, transhistorical essence, so much so that, for example, Black people, everywhere and for all times, persistently remain the same – stuck in a childish, primitive mode of living. She writes, "There are clear indications in Bergson's own writing that by duration he meant the whole virtual field not only of a single subject's memory but of the race to which he belonged, which now finds its home not in society but on the inside."[39] Here is a key passage that clarifies the stakes of her criticism:

> By creating a philosophical basis for a subjective racial self . . . Bergsonism may have contributed more to racialism than even social Darwinism, which posited the differences of each group not in terms of internal racial essences but in terms of diverse adaptations to differential external environments. If once the positing of an inside self allowed for the claim of common humanity despite apparent physical differences, the turn to the internal came to put race beyond science and disconfirmation in a way that social Darwinist discourse would prove not to be.[40]

Despite Jones's claim, the single subject or the "self" is not an entirely clear concept in Bergson. On the one hand, it is clear that for Bergson we mostly live as automatons. To this point, Keith Ansell-Pearson suggests that "we should not overlook the fact that for Bergson most of us, and for the greater part of our lives, do exist as automatons, acting out of the inertia of habits and the pressure of social conventions."[41] For Ansell-Pearson also, we

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[37] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 107.   [38] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 115.
[39] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 110.   [40] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 117.
[41] Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 69.

already live most of our lives as automatons whereas, for Guerlac, we ought to be skeptical of scientism and its influence in terms of viewing ourselves as mere things. Guerlac provides a word of caution: "If we try to measure and count our feelings, to explain and predict our motives and actions, we will be transformed into automatons – without freedom, without beauty, without passion, and without dreams. We will become mere phantoms of ourselves."[42] On the other hand, the free self is one that "challenges in its actions everyday social reality."[43] This tendency manifests itself in the transgression of social closure, in the reconfiguration of a social matrix.

Jones leans on the notion of noumenal race described by Stephen Asma. According to Asma, "A noumenal racism, where physical traits and customs are expressions of some internal occult quality, claims that race is a cause of history, not simply an effect."[44] Jones speaks of racial spirit and racial culture but does not quote Bergson for these concepts. For Jones, "[o]nce race is understood as the Bergsonian God of the evolutionary process, vitalism is no longer a form of primitivism; it is rather a form of reactionary – nay racial – modernism."[45] Al-Saji, however, reminds us that, for Bergson, there are no inherited acquired traits. There is nothing essential or universal about populations that are classified as race X or race Y. According to Clevis Headley, Jones incorrectly reduces Bergson's vitalism to biological vitalism and injects vulgar vitalism back into Bergson's philosophy. Headley suggests that Jones's reduction is partly due to her failure to grasp "the fact that, within consciousness, past, present, and future interpenetrate."[46] Al-Saji acknowledges Jones's attempt to take seriously Bergson's colonial context and her criticism of Bergson's account of "primitives." But she also finds that Jones mischaracterizes Bergson's view of race by interpreting it as biological or noumenal rather than, as Al-Saji thinks, cultural. Furthermore, Jones's description of Bergson's notion of the past falls flat insofar as it does not recognize, to borrow from Vladimir Jankélévitch, the half-open aspect of the past.[47] Rather than closed, the past remains half-open in so far as it can be etched into the present in creative ways – creating new possibilities that earlier may have been unknown or considered unfeasible. In other words, rather than binding a particular race to a locked past and an inevitable future, the half-open nature of the past conditions the potential for a more just sociopolitical horizon. In sum, while Jones challenges the racial

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[42] Guerlac, *Thinking in Time*, 42.   [43] Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 69.
[44] Asma, "Metaphors of Race," 23.   [45] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 121.
[46] Headley, "Bergson, Senghor, and the Philosophical Foundations of Négritude," 92.
[47] See Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*.

underpinnings of duration, Al-Saji "reveal[s] how colonizing and racializing frames may be implicitly at work [in the methodology of the open/closed structure], no matter his intentions."[48]

Colonial Methodology

Before addressing our two themes in *Two Sources*, it would be prudent to lay out Bergson's agenda in that text. Seeking to diagnose the problem of war, Bergson examines the origins of morality and religion and in turn describes two tendencies in all societies. The tendency toward closure manifests itself in the genuflection to authority, the exclusive circumscription of "us," put differently, the in-group, the accompanying defense against "them," and the foreclosure of the possibility of love of or obligation to humankind. Moral obligation that is apt for kin and nation, Bergson believes, cannot evolve into an inclusive love for all humankind. That kind of love comes from the second tendency, which is rarely actualized. The tendency toward openness shows up as inclusiveness, freedom, creativity, and the love of all as a way of being-in-the-world. Both primitive and civilized societies are closed. According to Bergson, it is the figure of the mystic who transcends the limits of closure and illuminates a path toward universal love. Considering Al-Saji's work in more detail, we will entertain the extent to which it is the use of this figure that reveals the racial and colonial underpinnings of Bergson's method.

Do race and colonialism surface within the pages of Bergson's last great work, which was written at the dawn of the Führer's coming? Readers of *Two Sources*, which extends *Creative Evolution* and explores the sociality of life, should be careful to note that Bergson uses both *le primitif* and *les primitifs*, the former referring to what is natural and foundational for humankind whereas the latter refers to specific peoples.[49] "Colonies" or any derivation of it occurs once in *Two Sources* (1221/289). Guerlac suggests that Bergson conveys an anticolonial perspective in so far as he

> emphasizes that colonial rivalry leads to war . . . where conflict over energy resources was a prelude to the First World War. In other words, he criticizes colonialism from a perspective that remains pertinent in a postcolonial context, one that concerns the pillaging of nations in a competition for the energy resources required by a global economy that, according to his

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[48] Al-Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson," 14.
[49] For discussions of Bergson's colonial context and his use of "the primitive" in the French literature on Bergson, see Sitbon-Peillon, "Bergson et le primitif," and Keck, "Le primitif et le mystique."

analysis, produces comfort and profit for the few instead of addressing the basic needs of all.[50]

Al-Saji pushes back against Guerlac's claim that Bergson is criticizing colonialism, explaining that Bergson's reference to colonies occurs within the broader problem of how states will justify colonial expansion in order to acquire more luxuries, which, from the vantage point of the privileged, are understood as necessities. "The craving for luxuries," Bergson states, "aris[es] from a mechanical invention" (DSMR 1234/303–4). To some extent, both Guerlac and Al-Saji describe what Bergson claims. It is true that colonial expansion and imperialism perpetuate war and also that these two are criticized with regard to how luxuries become false needs. But, in the end, Al-Saji is correct that Guerlac exaggerates the degree to which Bergson is criticizing colonialism as such.

A few pages later, Bergson hones in the problem of imperialism. In *Bergson politique*, Philippe Soulez asserts that Bergson in *Two Sources* affirms his patriotism at the same time as he rejects imperialism, which he understands to be a counterfeit of true mysticism. By true mysticism, Bergson means "the feeling which certain souls have that they are the instruments of God who loves all men with an equal love, and who bids them to love each other." Imperialism, Bergson continues,

> decks itself out in this garb [i.e., of true mysticism]; it endows the God of the modern mystic with the nationalism of the ancient gods. It is in this sense that imperialism becomes mysticism. So that if we keep to true mysticism, we shall judge it incompatible with imperialism. At the most it will be admitted, as we have just put it, that mysticism cannot be disseminated without encouraging a very special "will to power." This will be a sovereignty, not over men, but over things, precisely in order that man shall no longer have so much sovereignty over man. (DSMR 1240/311)

This speaks directly to concerns of imperialism and colonialism. But, does Bergson reveal his own colonial assumptions elsewhere?

Rather than investigate the handful of examples where Bergson makes reference to race, Al-Saji challenges – rereads – Bergson's methodology in order to decolonize his thought, that is, to take stock of the colonial formations of the past that conditioned Bergson and to reconfigure the habits produced by those formations even if they remained elusive to him. By giving a methodological treatment of Bergson, Al-Saji attempts to uncover the implicit assumptions of race and colonialism operative in his

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[50] Guerlac, "Bergson, Void, and Politics of Life," 51.

work regardless of his political activities or intentions. The colonial past continues to impress itself onto the present and, according to Al-Saji, ought to be rethought in order to move beyond deep-seated, insidious habits. Racism and colonial stereotypes are not accidental or secondary features of an otherwise pure philosophy; rather, they play a more significant structural and methodological role. Al-Saji locates her criticism in the context of Bergson's dichotomy of open/closed. The dichotomy refers to tendencies and these tendencies mix together within all societies. Bergson's method, Al-Saji explains, "is grounded in the dichotomy of the open/ closed. But if, as Bergson seems to suggest, this distinction is not possible without the mystic–primitive couple, then their role becomes one that haunts any reading of Bergson's text."[51] While most commentators have assumed this dichotomy undermines any project that tries to establish a hierarchy of societies, with European civilization at the top, Al-Saji identifies as least one problem, namely, that the references to primitives and mystics get mapped onto the dichotomy so that primitives are associated with the closed society, which is understood to be deficient, while the mystics, coming from civilization, are linked with the progressive open society.

For Bergson, both "primitive" (*les primitifs*) and "civilized" societies (by which he means advanced industrial societies) align with the closed. In particular, both societies share in the necessity of having obligations, and both societies use religion as a means of keeping in check attempts to circumvent those obligations. On the one hand, it would seem that Bergson forecloses any attempt to establish a normative hierarchy of societies. On the other hand, Al-Saji argues that Bergson cultivates a new rubric for assessing the differences of degree among various societies. More than once Bergson speaks of "'primitive' peoples we observe today" (DSMR 1068/110, 1082/127). According to Bergson, "primitives" exist contemporaneously with civilization. Al-Saji isolates the key passage, which I quote at length:

> But we must not forget that the primitives of today or of yesterday have lived as many centuries as we have, have had plenty of time to exaggerate and to aggravate, as it were, the possible irrationalities contained in elementary tendencies, natural enough though they be. The true primitives were probably more reasonable, if they kept to the tendency and its immediate effects . . . As, nevertheless, they do not change, there takes place within them not that intensification which would be a qualitative progress, but

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[51] Al-Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson," 20.

a multiplication or an exaggeration of the primitive state of things: invention, if we can still use the word, no longer requires an effort . . . Marking time, they ceaselessly pile up additions and amplifications. Through the double effect of repetition and exaggeration the irrational passes into the realm of the absurd, and the strange into the realm of the monstrous. (DSMR 1090–91/136–37)

According to Jones, "What Bergson writes here is actually more racist and insulting than anything he quotes from Lévy-Bruhl."[52] Al-Saji explains that, while Bergson admits both societies share the same duration, they develop or cultivate themselves quite differently. Notably, Bergson has the primitives marked by laziness and the use of magic, which both Al-Saji and Jones highlight as a subtle justification for colonialism. While Jones tends to portray Bergson as a biological essentialist with regard to race, Al-Saji correctly describes Bergson as rejecting the notion that acquired traits are due to inheritance. Instead, acquired traits show up within and are conditioned by a sociohistorical matrix. So what, then, grounds the different modes of being-in-the-world, experiencing the same duration? Al-Saji identifies the answer in Bergson at the point where he bifurcates the closed society into stagnant societies on the one hand and mobile societies on the other (DSMR 1084/129).

Bergson explains that there are no purely closed or open societies. And yet his method, Al-Saji argues, functionally relies on thinking about primitives as exemplary of the most extreme degree of closure. Bergson needs a notion of primitives, and not only of mystics, to make his project work. "A surveyor," Bergson writes, "measures the distance to an unattainable point by taking a line on it, now from one, now from the other, of two points which he can reach" (DSMR 1186/248). From these two vantages of experience, the surveyor, that is, Bergson, can move toward their intersection with the intent of unearthing the conditions for their experience. Using these two notions, Bergson can plot a course to locate humankind's natural and mystical tendencies. Put differently, Al-Saji's argument is that while Bergson understands all of us to be of a mixture, he nevertheless uses the figures of the mystic and of the primitives as surrogates for the two most extreme points. Al-Saji claims that "this method instrumentalizes both 'primitives' and 'mystics' in order to guide introspection to find the natural and mystical tendencies within the self."[53] One better understands the human tendency toward openness through evaluating particular mystics. At the same time, one better understands the tendency toward closure by

[52] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 126.   [53] Al-Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson," 26.

sorting through accounts of contemporary primitives. The figures of the primitive and the mystic methodologically serve Bergson by being, as Al-Saji puts it, "empirical mirrors."[54]

We should notice a nuance in Bergson. The mystic is not on the side of the civilized necessarily. Civilized society is closed and cannot morally evolve into a love for humankind; yet, the mystic does precisely this. And, while it is true that his examples come mainly from Christianity, we ought not to take this fact as proof that Christianity as an institutional religion is necessary for openness. According to Jones, "[h]aving rejected reason as a means to political and social insight, Bergson predicated tolerance and peace not on rational interfaith dialogue but on the success of Christian mystics calling us to one putatively universal faith."[55] In response to the criticism that Bergson privileges Christianity, we ought to tread with caution. "Pure mysticism," Ansell-Pearson writes, "is rare (this is not by chance but by the reason of its very essence), and is not reached in a series of gradual steps from static religion, since a leap is involved."[56] It is not the content of Christianity that Bergson defends; openness does not equal Christianity.[57] His examples were those who leaped beyond the norms of their social matrix by protecting the weak and poor even at their own expense or under threat of their own death (DSMR 1186/228). They urged leaders to pursue peace rather than violence and tried to break down social hierarchies that worked to the benefit of a few at disadvantage of many. And St. Francis, for instance, extended love to other species. According to Ansell-Pearson, "[f]or Bergson, the great Christian mystics achieve complete mysticism: they radiate an extraordinary energy, superabundant activity, in short, accomplishments in the field of action (e.g., St. Paul, St. Teresa, Joan of Arc). Instead of turning inwards and closing, the soul could now open wide its gates to a universal love."[58] The mystic is a rare figure and her interventions are too readily subsumed into the closed society.

Society of Violence/Society of Embrace

Two Sources was Bergson's attempt to address the problem of violence, specifically war. By way of conclusion, we will ask, given that racism and colonialism are extensions of the logic of war, to what extent we ought to

[54] Al-Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson," 27.   [55] Jones, *The Racial Discourses*, 82.
[56] Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 138.   [57] See Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*.
[58] Ansell-Pearson, *Bergson*, 141.

think that *Two Sources* can be claimed for practical purposes of alleviating these social ills. "The First World War," Guerlac writes, "confirmed for Bergson that the evolutionary story of development from the primitive, or barbaric, to the modern – the story of civilization as a narrative of moral advancement – was but a fable."[59] On the one hand, Bergson views primitive and civilized societies as equal. Social cohesion and obligations remain foundational for both societies. On the other hand, his description of primitives suggests that this particular society remains closed whereas the civilized has the potential for openness. We should move carefully here. Bergson is not claiming that such societies are discrete; rather, all societies are mixtures of tendencies toward closure and openness. All of us, Bergson suggests, are primitive. Alexandre Lefebvre clearly explains that "the purpose of Bergson's concept of 'primitive humanity' is not to describe the starting point of society in general, nor to designate a natural kind of society that more closely corresponds with its source. Rather, the purpose of the concept is to identify tendencies that no society can move beyond."[60]

The natural tendency is toward survival, which is the aim of closed societies. Paola Marrati points out that societies are built "on a biologico-evolutionary 'social instinct,' of which the closure of the social group is the essential aspect."[61] Societies are not built upon a social contract or a utilitarian calculus but on biology. Social cohesion, which is established by individuals' conformity to the group, is a desired good for both closed societies and static religions. Each closed society has its own set of codes, norms, and values, and the differences between one society and the next are showcased in the event of war. According to Bergson, our obligations toward cohesion are ultimately for the purpose of cultivating in individuals "an attitude which is that of discipline in the face of the enemy" (DSMR 1001/31). Here is Bergson's prefatory remark on the political imaginary of a world without war: "Anyone who is thoroughly familiar with the language and literature of a people cannot be wholly its enemy. This should be borne in mind when we ask education to pave the way for international understanding" (DSMR 1218/286). Would this have held true during the height of colonialism? Would this hold true for quotidian racism? According to Soulez, "[r]acism is, in this sense, the most prevalent thing in the world. It is the backside of the unwillingness to know the other, that

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[59] Guerlac, "Bergson, Void, and Politics of Life," 43.
[60] Lefebvre, *Human Rights as a Way of Life*, 30.
[61] Marrati, "Mysticism and the Foundations of the Open Society," 599.

is, to acknowledge the other. By naturalizing difference (by biologizing it), one opens the way to extermination. And science provides one means."[62] To balance war, civilization develops colonies for luxuries, but this also leads to global poverty (DSMR 1228–29/298, 1235/305). On the one hand, those who suffer, Bergson explains, are those who indulge in luxuries themselves in so far as their souls are enervated. On the other hand, what we well know but is not stated by Bergson is that those who suffer from both the pursuit of luxury and the creation of poverty are populations of the Global South and People of Color within Western nations.

Civilized societies are characterized by science. And, we might note that science tends to be aligned with forms of domination – technological, colonial, racial, and so on – culminating in weapons of mass destruction as well as the mechanical rationalization of the factory and gas chamber. Put differently, science lends itself to technologies of violence. At the same time, Bergson speculates that primitive societies likely had few to no neighbors, particularly no neighbors with greater weapons. Consequently, there was no impetus for advancement. One might argue that when Bergson speaks here of the laziness of primitive societies, he is building on the idea that, where conflict is absent, science remains ignored. Put differently, a less threatened society will pursue more leisure, whereas a society continually under threat of scarcity or harm will pursue science. Only with violence, not intelligence, does one get civilization. Even so, the mention of laziness and the inaccurate ethnography brings to light Bergson's ethnocentrism and colonial assumptions, despite his statement that "the intelligence of 'primitive' peoples is not essentially different from [the European]" (DSMR 1084/128).

The open society is not, as Jacques Derrida might say, a society "to come." Rather, the tendency, however rarely actualized, is present in all societies. Nevertheless, closure manifests itself so much as to be a given. Diagne writes: "For the moment, Bergson says, we are an unbalanced humanity led by intelligence in which intuition does not shine all of the light it is capable of in order to illuminate our human destination."[63] It is not a matter of passing from the closed society to the open or from the city to humankind: "The two things are not of the same essence" (DSMR 1202/267). "Change, transformation, and evolution," Ansell-Pearson writes, "are bound up with living and open systems, and the features of novelty that characterize such systems will always elude a mathematical treatment."[64] There is no predetermined script for openness. Each mystic

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[62] Philippe Soulez, *Bergson politique*, 283–84.   [63] Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*, 119.
[64] Ansell-Pearson, "Bergson's Encounter with Biology," 59.

calling us to make more manifest our tendency toward openness is unique. "Between the closed soul and the open soul," Bergson explains, "there is the soul in process of opening" (DSMR 1028/63). Races do not pose threats. Racism is not necessary for survival. "The open society," Guerlac writes, "neutralizes the opposition between 'us' and 'them' not because it reaches beyond this distinction to all humanity but because it reaches beyond humanity altogether to embrace all living beings."[65] This is easier said than done, for the vast majority of us are not mystics. At the same time, we should not be pessimistic about justice but, instead, cultivate an open disposition toward the Other.

I would like to end with a reflection on Senghor's appropriation of Bergson's criticism of science and European rationality and the privileging of sympathy, in the hope that we can see the start of a Bergsonian solution to the problems of racism and colonialism. "Science," Bergson writes, "cannot deal with time and motion except on condition of first eliminating the essential and qualitative element – of time, duration, and of motion, mobility" (ESSAI 77/115). Racism, with its (pseudo-)scientific justifications, is a product of what Senghor calls "eye-reason" and follows from the scientific need to immobilize a phenomenon – in this case, race – in order to dissect and assign value. Diagne summarizes this well:

> That which is always in the process of becoming otherwise escapes the intelligence which is then understood as the capacity to fix, to hold being within one's gaze, thereby keeping it within the realm of the identical. One will thus choose to the way of reason, this reason that we can call (using an expression of Senghor's) *eye-reason*, because it is the look that freezes.[66]

By ignoring the fluidity of human difference, European rationality (past and present) seeks domination rather than truth. It seeks to control and manipulate the world, including the racial and colonized Other. The faculty that embraces change and grasps the whole of a phenomenon is what Senghor calls "embrace-reason" and Bergson calls "intuition." It does not fragment or distort, but sympathizes or links the knower with the object. Furthermore, it allows one to suffer-with. I began by claiming that race and colonialism are two themes in Bergson for which too little has been said. A Bergsonian remedy to the problems of racism and colonialism would find an invaluable resource in the sympathetic embrace-reason that breaks up racial and colonial discourses of human difference.

[65] Guerlac, "Bergson, Void, and Politics of Life," 44.   [66] Diagne, *African Art as Philosophy*, 99.

Bergson's Philosophy of Religion

Nils F. Schott

[T]here has never been a society without religion. (DSMR 1061/102)

When it finally appeared in 1932, Bergson's work on religion had been eagerly awaited, in fact, anticipated.[1] For those who wanted him to write the book that would become *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, there was reason to be anxious: as Bergson confirms in a footnote to the last line of the second introduction to *Creative Mind*, "[o]ne is never compelled to write a book" (PM 1330/106 and 1330n1/304n15). He had never been a builder of systems and explicitly, and publicly, rejected the idea that philosophy is synthetic (PM 1359–60/144–45). But write it he did and it was quickly and widely received in France and beyond.[2]

In outlining Bergson's "philosophy of religion,"[3] this chapter intends to bring out what Bergson calls the "specifically religious element" in religion that allows humanity to live up to its vocation as "a freely creative energy" (DSMR 1059/99 and 1154/211). I therefore do not offer an account of *Two Sources* as a whole, nor of the detailed argumentation that draws on the history of religion and discusses myths, magic, prayer, and so on. Instead, I follow Bergson as he presents various real referents of "religion" and defines what makes religion what it is.

Taking a cue from Vladimir Jankélévitch, in the second part of the chapter I lay out how the centrally important question of the mystical

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[1] Interest in the moral and religious implications of Bergson's philosophy had been intense and had prompted works such as Miller's 1916 *Bergson and Religion*. Nor did it take a specific book for Bergson's thought to have an impact on religious thinkers, as Vieillard-Baron notes ("La conversion de Bergson," 92–93).

[2] Examples include Lossky's review ("Henri Bergson, Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion"), Loisy's *Y a-t-il deux sources de la religion et de la morale?*, Lyman's "Bergson's Philosophy of Religion," and Moore's *Theories of Religious Experience*.

[3] For a criticism of "the philosophy of religion" (as of "natural theology") as intrinsically anthropomorphic, see Feneuil, "Connaitre philosophiquement Dieu?" esp. 459. Feneuil describes Bergson's redefinition of "philosophie de la mystique" as a two-way genitive (467), and insofar as it allows for *action*, this can be said of "the philosophy of religion" as well.

opening, the qualitative transformation of dynamic religion, can be comprehended by a concept of conversion and how this concept, in turn, can open up a new perspective on central themes of Bergson's work as a whole, themes concerned, precisely, with qualitative change (creation of the new, spatialization of time, freedom, intuition, etc.).[4] Against this background, I conclude by addressing the problem of Bergson's conversion – or non-conversion – to Catholicism.

The Meanings of "Religion": Bergson's Philosophy of Religion According to *Two Sources*

In his work on religion as elsewhere, Bergson seeks above all to articulate the realities he addresses by sticking to the facts established by biologists, anthropologists, sociologists, historians of religion, and others. This labor of articulation (or, rather, this rearticulation) implies an arduous forging of concepts – philosophizing properly speaking – to undo the dearticulations already operated by language, which is oriented not so much by the reality of the world but by the demands of the intellect and of action in the world (DSMR 1122/173–74, cf. 1199/263). To sidestep the danger of a rationalism that loses contact with the real, Bergson, moreover, does not ask, *what is religion?* or *what do we mean when we say "religion"?* but inquires into the origins of the realities that variously fall under the heading "religion," a "spectrum" ranging from the extreme of magic to that of Christian mysticism. He finds these realities to "arise directly" from the élan vital and articulates "two sources of morality and religion": social pressure on the one hand and aspiration on the other (1123/17, 1094/140, and 1017–18/51–52).[5]

The word *source* is an important indication of this origin in creative evolution: the habits that embody social obligation are not settled once and for all, they must be actively reproduced. What Bergson calls "closed societies" do not simply conserve timeless values but actively preserve,

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[4] Concentrating on the figure of conversion, this approach therefore differs from the famous studies by Henri Gouhier, *Bergson et le Christ des Évangiles*, and Louis Lavelle, *La Pensée religieuse d'Henri Bergson*, not only in scope but also in its aim of refocusing rather than re-systematizing Bergson's philosophy as a whole. For Gouhier, inquiring into the meaning of the words "philosophy of Christianity" in Bergson amounts to "asking how they signify Bergson's philosophy as a whole" (9). Nor is the argument here, as Vieillard-Baron puts it with reference to Louis Lavelle, that "all of Bergson's thinking is marked or tinted by religiosity" ("La conversion de Bergson," 90).

[5] As Gouhier, *Bergson et le Christ des Évangiles*, 10, points out, the very title is a challenge on Bergson's part, rejecting a Kantian framework "within the limits of reason alone" as much as refusing a purely sociological explanation, and working to undo the separation of metaphysics and mysticism.

maintain, and seek to perpetuate them. In that sense, the adjective "static," which he also uses to describe types of morality and religion that serve this purpose, is misleading. Societies that produce "static" religion (and to preserve themselves, all societies do) are not at a standstill. They are spinning in place or going in circles, Bergson says, and constantly (re) institute an ostensibly eternal order. What constitutes the dynamism of "dynamic" morality and religion in "open" societies, in turn, is that it is a progress, an "advance," so there is no fixed goal of aspiration, no progress towards ... What there is, rather, is the sheer "joy" of moving forward (1018/51).

The book's title is thus not to be construed as suggesting a Manichean struggle between open and closed, good and evil energies. Both pressure and aspiration are forms taken by the élan vital as it comes to terms with matter (in that sense, they are "in essence biological," 1061/101), and both are manifest in all societies and their moral and religious practices. "Purely" closed or open societies do not exist and have, in fact, never existed (1046/84). On the one hand, this makes comparing the two moralities difficult (1017/50–51). On the other hand, however, the great variety of human social formations as it has evolved in the course of human cultural development is largely superficial.[6] Acquired characteristics (language, customs, etc.) are not hereditary and the biological basis – the natural – has not changed (1111/160). That is why, Bergson writes, it is possible to speak of a "duality of origin" on display in the great variety of human social formations, a duality that "merges into a unity, for 'social pressure' and 'impetus of love' are but two complementary manifestations of life" (1057/96).

As manifestations of life, the physical, the social, and the religious are inextricably linked. When we treat physical laws as commandments and social and moral commandments as laws, we do so not just metaphorically. No matter how often they are repeated, we treat violations of the social order the way science treats monsters, as aberrations and inadmissible exceptions. Religion "fill[s] the gap" between social commands and physical laws because it provides, at the very least, a justification of order, a divine institution of order as foundation of our institutions, and, sometimes, thanks to exceptional individuals, a glimpse of the possibility of perfection (983–85/11–13).

This connecting function of religion, which allows for an account of life as we, as social animals, live it, introduces religion as more than a "helpmeet" of morality. It is also that, of course; a store of stories to raise hopes and fears that is employed to enforce discipline, to extend

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[6] Bergson repeatedly speaks of "scratching the surface" (DSMR 1083/127 and 1217/284).

human justice. Yet that is not what makes religion what it is. Religion acts effectively on our will. That is why, as Bergson insists time and again, religion as a reality must not be confused with religious dogmata and the metaphysics they imply. And it is not reducible to the fact that humans are social beings, either: if sociality accounted for religion, religion would be found in animal societies, too. To get at the source, we must not stop at philosophical theory or social practice. We must dig deeper, to life (1059–61/98–101). Only then will we find answers, for example to the question how it is possible, given human rationality, that we are the only species "to pin its existence to things unreasonable," why, in other words, life or nature *produced* religion (1062/102).

Bergson responds to the question from two points of view based on the conclusions of *Creative Evolution*, chief among them "the fact that life is a certain effort to obtain certain things from raw matter, and that instinct and intelligence, taken in their finished state, are two distinct means of utilizing a tool for this object," with humans having "to invent, make and learn to handle" their tools (DSMR 1074–75/118, cf. EC 609–23/88–98).

One of the "certain things" obtained from matter is the creation of social forms of life. In nature, the interests of the group (and ultimately, the species) always trump the interests of the individual, and in animal societies, "the inventive efforts manifested throughout the domain of life" take the form of "the creation of new species." Not so in the case of human beings, where the effort of invention "has found … the means of continuing its activity through individuals, on whom there has devolved, along with intelligence, the faculty of initiative, independence and liberty." Exercising these faculties guided by the interests of the individual, however, risks running counter to the interests of society and therefore to the interests of nature, always "more concerned with society than with the individual" (1075–76/118–19). In human beings, then, the intellect has taken the place of instinct in other animals. It is a formidable tool, but it also poses a number of threats. First, the intellect individualizes the effort of invention that characterizes life everywhere. It thereby runs the danger of prioritizing the interests of the individual and threatens disorganization, the dissolution of social bonds. Second, reflection – the exercise of rationality beyond immediate utility – gives rise to a notion of death that paralyzes our action, and our "two-fold shortcoming" (hesitation due to uncertainty whether our actions will succeed and the fears and hopes that ensue, 1149/204) gives rise to an, again paralyzing, feeling of ignorance and powerlessness, a "depression" (1085–86/130–31). To oppose these threats to the survival of society, "there must be a counterpoise," and since in humans, intellect has replaced

instinct, this counterweight can only be the intellect itself, which, indirectly, via representations, undoes (or prevents) its own effects: "it cannot exercise direct action, but, since intelligence works on representations, it will call up 'imaginary' ones, which will hold their own against the representation of reality and will succeed, through the agency of intelligence itself, in counteracting the work of intelligence." This explains "the myth-making faculty [*fonction fabulatrice*]" (1076/119). This function translates or manifests the fact that the élan vital is being slowed down by matter, but it also ensures that life goes on. To this end, it "elaborates religions" that are "a precaution against the danger man runs, as soon as he thinks at all, of thinking of himself alone" and "a defensive reaction of nature against intelligence" (1154/210 and 1079/123–24, cf. 1078/122).

In Bergson's sociobiological account of religion, the mythmaking function thus counteracts the dissolving effect of the intellect on social life, and on the perpetuation of society (which as noted operates at the very core of closed societies and their static morality by "tightening up . . . solidarity," 1146/201). This is the first threat religion serves to parry. The second threat is wider; it concerns the question of life itself, of life as creative *action*. The intellect allows for reflection, a distancing that leads to a representation of an inevitable death. This idea cannot but slow down the movement of life; it is depressing and acts against the intention of nature. Yet life will have its way, and nature counters "the idea of inevitable death" with "the image of a continuation of life after death." Such a "neutralizing of the idea by the image," such a recalibration is, of course, religious, and it is what makes religion indispensable: "The intellectual representation which thus restores the balance to nature's advantage is of a *religious* order" (1086/131 and 1084/129, Bergson's emphasis). That is why religion is present in all societies: it ensures the possibility of creative action where the creative tool par excellence, the intellect, threatens to undermine the very purpose of its own deployment. Hence Bergson's more comprehensive definition of religion that immediately links life with human action:

> The vital impulse is optimistic. All the religious representations which here arise directly from it might then be defined in the same way: *they are defensive reactions of nature against the representation, by the intelligence, of a depressing margin of the unexpected between the initiative taken and the effect desired* (1094/140, Bergson's emphasis).[7]

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[7] In this wide sense, magic – as a means to counteract the "ransom" of the intellect (the "double imperfection" that flows directly from its advantages: reflection, projection, learning, etc.), that is, the hope of success and the fear of failure – is part of religion as well.

This defense operates on all levels, from the individual via the family, clan, and tribe to the nation. The mythmaking function translates the stopping of the élan vital by matter, performing in human societies the role instinct serves in animal societies. This entirely *natural* tendency of groups to close in on themselves for the purpose of preservation – most palpably, perhaps, in nationalism – however, also means, as history shows time and again, that religion and morality do not necessarily coincide (1150–51/205–7).

In defining static religion as "a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual, and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence," Bergson has succeeded in undoing the "cutting up [*désarticulation*] of reality by speech" operated to satisfy "the needs of the city" (1150/205 and 1122/173).

Yet how does this mesh with the fact Bergson stresses that religion thus understood serves the purpose of *life*, the interests not just of groups (closed like the city) but of the species, especially given that, as he never tires of emphasizing, from the very first page of *Two Sources*, the difference between groups of people (or even groups of groups) and *humanity* is a categorical one, a difference "in kind," not one of degree?

The answer lies in the second source of religion, which – unlike social, that is, limited and closed static religion – aims at all of humanity. Through the mystic transformation of exceptional *individuals*, the entire *species* is to be transformed. This *dynamic* religion expresses the aspiration of humanity. Bergson discusses it and its relationship with static religion on the one hand and life on the other in the third chapter of *Two Sources*, which begins with an elaborate account of the findings of the preceding chapters against the backdrop of his philosophy of life. Static religion, he says, "is called upon to make good any deficiency of attachment to life," to undo the distancing operated by the intellect. To this end, static religion tells "tales on a par with those with which we lull children to sleep," but these tales are stories unlike any others: "Being produced by the myth-making function in response to an actual need and not for mere pleasure, they counterfeit reality as actually perceived, to the point of making us act accordingly [*au point de se prolonger en actions*]." This is what distinguishes the representations of religion: they *oblige* us, they make us act, they are "ideo-motory." They convey that "it is the act of placing in matter a freely creative energy, it is man ... which is the purpose of the entire process of evolution." Things might have happened otherwise, they might equally well not have happened at all; the fact is, at least for Bergson, that for all we know we are the greatest achievement of life, however precarious this success might be. That is why, Bergson says, life is something desirable for us. Whatever

confidence in our actions the exercise of the intellect has deprived us of, we can regain it by going back to the élan (1154–55/210–12).

But how? The intellect gives us only fables, representations of possibilities, not reality. Religious fables, and a fortiori religious metaphysics, like all other theories and pure ideas, act on "our will only to the extent which it pleases us to accept them and to put them into practice." They affect us and move us to act not because of their content but because of "some undeniable efficacy [*je ne sais quelle efficace*]" that constitutes "the specifically religious element." And this "element" is experiential, it is

> mystic experience taken in its immediacy, apart from all interpretation. True mystics simply open their souls to the oncoming wave. Sure of themselves, because they feel within them something better than themselves, they prove to be great men of action, to the surprise of those for whom mysticism is nothing but visions, and raptures and ecstasies. That which they have allowed to flow into them is a stream flowing down and seeking through them to reach their fellow-men; the necessity to spread around them what they have received affects them like an onslaught [*élan*] of love. (1059/99)

What is specifically religious – the essence of religion according to Bergson – is *love in action*. The empirical fact of the mystic experience and the fact that "a word of a great mystic . . . finds an echo in one or another of us" – which means many, if not all, among us have a potential for such an experience – show that aspiration exceeds the social and cannot be explained simply by the existence of society (1060/100).To account for the mystic experience and its echo, Bergson brings in another central concept of his: "[A]ll around intelligence there lingers still a fringe of intuition, vague and evanescent. Can we not fasten upon it, intensify it, and above all, consummate it in action . . . ?" (1155/212).

The answer is yes, though not an unqualified yes. Few are capable – and, Bergson adds, worthy – of such a seizing and operationalization of intuition, in which the soul is "pervaded . . . by a being immeasurably mightier than itself." This encounter of the individual soul with the immeasurable makes the most singular intuition of mysticism a turn toward the universal: the soul's

> attachment to life would henceforth be its inseparability from this principle, joy in joy, love of that which is all love. In addition it would give itself to society, but to a society comprising all humanity, loved in the love of the principle underlying it. The confidence which static religion brought to man would thus be transfigured . . . Now detachment from each particular thing would become attachment to life in general. (1155–56/212)

Mysticism thus appears as very different from the usual conception of a one-off mystic experience of rapture and visions. It is an effort, an act of intuition that, via a detachment from particulars (personal comfort, national interest, and the like) leads to an attachment to life *in action*, i.e., a love of *humanity* and not just of the self or the closed community.

To be sure, Bergson goes on to explain, "ecstasies, visions, raptures," and like "abnormal states" "accompany the mystic experience," yet they but "prelude . . . the ultimate transformation" (1169/228–29). They are merely incidental and must be left behind. Shaken to its core by being taken up in the creative current, the soul of the mystic stops spinning in place and lets itself be taken, rejoices but soon realizes that this signifies a loss of former certainties. This disquieting realization culminates in the "darkest night" of despair. In the great mystics, this is followed by a transition whose coming-about is inexplicable – for lack of evidence:

> To analyze this ultimate preparation is impossible, for the mystics them-selves have barely had a glimpse of its mechanism. Let us confine ourselves to suggesting that a machine of wonderfully tempered steel, built for some extraordinary feat, might be in a somewhat similar state if it became conscious of itself as it was being put together. . . The mystic soul yearns to become this instrument. (1172/231)

Although he immediately cautions against the images conjured up by the terms "machine" and "instrument," Bergson maintains them to insist on the overcoming of mere contemplation, which, as intellectual activity, is a distancing overcome or left behind "to reach" – as Bergson writes in an odd echo of Loyola (whom he does not cite) – "to reach the goal, which was identification of the human will with the divine will," to *act* in keeping with the *éffort créateur* (1170/229):[8]

> In our eyes, the ultimate end of mysticism is the establishment of a contact, consequently of a partial coincidence, with the creative effort which life itself manifests. This effort is of God, if it is not God himself. The great mystic is to be conceived as an individual being, capable of transcending the limitations imposed on the species by its material nature, thus continuing and extending the divine action.[9] (1162/220–21)

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[8] Compare the fifth of the "Annotations" that precede Loyola's *Spiritual Exercises*, 5–6.

[9] A word about God. Bergson repeatedly attacks the "philosophers'" abstract notion of God (e.g., DSMR 1179–83/240–44, cf. PM 1289–91/54–55) and focuses on the evidence of anthropology and the history of religions to describe the realities of belief in spirits, totemism, and the like. That is why he speaks of God only in *experiential* terms, as the name of that which, according to the "agreement among the mystics" (DSMR 1184–85/246–47), is being experienced by them and which, according to his notion of *lignes de faits* and probability (cf. above, 21), corresponds to his notion of the creativity

Mysticism thus not only apprehends life as such in a singular vision, it translates this insight into actions that guarantee "the soul, to a pre-eminent degree, the security and the serenity which it is the function of static religion to provide" (1156/213) – the link of the physical and the social that Bergson describes as essential to manifestations of the religious in the opening pages of *Two Sources*.

Yet "pure mysticism" is very rare (1156/213), and dynamic religion is dissolved, as it were, in static religion. Since, as Frédéric Worms points out, the dualism of open and closed is not one *between* religions but *within* each religion,[10] and since the admixtures of the two types of religion manifest along a "spectrum," it makes sense, Bergson writes, to discuss them – however categorically different they may be when taken in isolation – under the same heading (1123/175 and 1203/268).

And if we place things in the right order – that of genesis, not of analysis, which is always retrospective (1152/208) – there is no contradiction in such combinations or in calling them "religion," that is, the "je ne sais quelle efficace." Abstractions such as moral doctrines (which can be based on just about any arbitrary principle), theological dogmata, indeed the very notion of god developed in philosophical and theological metaphysics will hardly give rise to a "faith that moves mountains" (1177/238, cf. 1203–6/268–71 and 1180–81/241–42). But the opposite is not true. As it "cool[s]" and "solidifies," the mystics' "glowing enthusiasm" can be shaped into "doctrine," and religion in the wide sense appears as a "crystallization" – the manifestation in religious representation, thanks to the mythmaking function, of the contact with the élan vital (1177/238). And that is not only in the interest of those who do not have the privilege of a mystical experience, but also in the interest of mysticism, for "dynamic religion is propagated only through images and symbols supplied by the myth-making function" (1203/268). Indeed, this propagation or "popularization," as Bergson writes in analogizing religion and popularization, mysticism and science, constitutes the very essence of the Christian enterprise (1204/239).

To summarize: in organic life, the vital impulse launched across the universe manifests itself in the creative evolution of ever new and different species. In the crowning achievement of this evolution so far, the human being, this creative effort is transformed: it is manifest no longer in the creation of new species but in the creative actions of individuals. This is

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that pervades or even constitutes the universe, which "is a machine for the making of gods" (1245/317). If there is a basis for asserting the existence of God, it must be creation, creativity, the élan vital.

[10] Worms, "Présentation," 15.

instrumental reason properly so called,[11] which allows for reflection, a distancing from the immediate necessities of life. But this comes with inevitable dangers. On the one hand, individuals will make use of this faculty for their own ends, thereby weakening social bonds – the pressure of obligation – instituted by nature for the preservation of the species. On the other hand, in leading to the insight into the inevitability of death, reflection, the distancing from immediate needs, risks turning into a detachment from life, an inertia that counteracts the creative impulse. Yet, as life will have its way, it deploys the powers of the intellect against the intellect's deleterious tendencies. The mythmaking function elaborates "fables" that counterbalance, for example, the representation of an inevitable death with the representation of an afterlife. Such are the representations of static religion.

What makes them different from all other representations (myths, literature, etc.), what makes them efficacious and therefore religious, however, is not to be found in the sphere of social obligation, not in "pressure," but in "aspiration," in the contact with and continuation of the creative impulse of life itself that characterizes dynamic religion.

Yet even if the élan vital is absolutely prior, the natural is "what it has always been" and "nature is utilitarian" (1111/160–61). It strives for preservation and thus tends toward closure – albeit not toward arrest: the static does not denote an absence of movement but an absence of progress, not a standstill but a spinning in place. Accordingly, the mystical opening of open religion is a *qualitative* change that is exceedingly rare and does not, cannot, last *as such*. If the move from the dynamic to the static, the closing that preserves the species, takes place by itself, if it is entirely natural, how does the opening – which precisely goes *beyond* nature (1162/220) – come about? And just as importantly, how can its openness, its contact with and continuation of the élan vital be maintained?

Conversion

These questions address a problem with a long tradition in philosophy and in theology, where it is discussed under the heading *conversion*.[12]

With the notable exception of the *Essai*, Bergson uses the words "conversion," "convert," "convertible," and so on throughout his oeuvre but does not articulate it conceptually the way he reforges the concept of intuition, for example. Nonetheless, where it is not used in the mathematical sense (one unit to another, for example), conversion for Bergson always denotes a *qualitative change*, a change in kind and not of degree, and most often a negatively connoted movement of spatialization, reification, or closure.

Thus perceptions are converted into intermediary images (MM 192/38, EC 631–32/103–4, PM 1356/140–41)[13] that in turn are converted into representations of the real – concepts, and so on – rather than capturing the real itself (MM 185–86/26–29). Bergson also uses the term in such a mathematical-scientific sense when he speaks of conversion from one kind of energy to another, or of a sort of processing, for example when he evokes "microbes that . . . convert the ammoniacal compounds into nitrous ones" (EC 594/76). He also speaks of the convertibility of different kinds of simultaneity in *Duration and Simultaneity*. Conversions of this kind are characterized by a reversibility expressed in equations, mathematical, chemical, or otherwise, that conforms to "a mathematical vision of the universe in which everything will be converted from perceived reality into useful scientific representation" (DS 149/70).

This is an *impoverishment* of the real, a reduction that makes reality manageable by settling it, as it were, in the form of things (MM 185–86/26–29, PM 1369/156–57). Most palpable in the operation of language (EC 631/103; cf. ESSAI 88–90/133–37), this reification also entails the risk of substituting our approach to the world for the world itself, of "convert[ing] a general rule of method into a fundamental law of things" (EC 789/222; compare PM 1422/225).

Reifying conversion is found everywhere: it takes place when the élan vital encounters matter. Such ontological closure is pervasive, so much so that it features centrally in one of Bergson's definitions of life: "From our point of view, life appeals in its entirety as an immense wave which, starting from a centre, spreads outwards, and which on almost the whole of its circumference is stopped and converted into oscillation" or, more succinctly: "the current is converted by matter into a vortex" (EC 720–21/170 and 723/172).

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[13] On the notion of the image in *Two Sources*, and especially the image of the élan vital, see Goddard, "Fonction fabulatrice et faculté visionnaire."

These terms from *Creative Evolution* are of course taken up in *Two Sources*, where Bergson writes that "the rectilinear movement was converted into a circular movement" and describes the operation of the intellect as tending "to convert the dynamic into the static, and solidify actions into things" (DSMR 1193/257 and 1084/128).

Nonetheless, there is a major difference between the conception of this conversion of the dynamic into the static in *Creative Evolution* and in *Two Sources*, as Keck and Waterlot point out.[14] In the earlier work, humanity is the one exception to the general rule, a biological manifestation of freedom that escapes the ontological closure (EC 720–21/170–71 and 723/172). In *Two Sources*, as noted earlier, an opening to the élan vital is reserved for a few privileged souls – the great mystics.

But: in principle, an opening, a conversion from the static to the dynamic, is possible. Such a positively connoted conversion is intimately tied in with *action*, the hallmark of the great mystics' attachment to life.

This is apparent early on, when Bergson speaks of a "conversion of the will" that cannot be prompted by abstract consideration but must be borne by an "original and unique emotion" or at least an echo thereof (DSMR 1014/46 and 1015/48). Similarly, in the context of his definition of static religion as defensive reaction against the dangers of an unbridled exercise of the intellect, Bergson evokes the "image of a conversion of things and elements toward the human," that is, the overcoming of our insight into our insignificance (1125–26/177). Such images – including those that result from a conversion of "elements of personality" into *personnages* (spirits, later gods, etc., 1124/175) – and the conversion of representations into things (again operated, most importantly, by language, DSMR 1147/202) structure reality according to our practical needs and make action in the world possible.[15]

Indeed, action is the result of a conversion, the conversion of accumulated potential energy into movement (EC 601/181). In *Creative Evolution*, the ability to operate this conversion is the very definition of animality (597/121). In *Two Sources*, Bergson takes this organic mechanism one step further by working with a more abstract – and at the same time very concrete – notion of the machine. In the paragraph that famously asserts the need for a *supplement d'âme*, Bergson writes that mechanical devices in general convert potential energy into movement (1238/309).

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[14] Keck and Waterlot, "Dossier critique," 479n162.
[15] On images as the result of a conversion (of the "schema") and as making a conversion into action possible, see ES 940–41/201–3 and 947–51/212–17, as well as Leonard Lawlor's essay, Chapter 4 in this volume. In this context, see also PM 1374/163, where Bergson speaks of a "conversion of attention," and, on this point, Ansell-Pearson above, 127–28.

Yet what does this kind of closed input/output system have to do with, precisely, overcoming the ontological closure? Simply put, all depends on the input. To facilitate the conversion of the will and make it succeed, there are two approaches, which, as Bergson explicitly points out, correspond to the two sources of morality, the static and the dynamic, the closed and the open. The first is discipline or "dressage," which works to create habits by means of rote learning and other repetition techniques, for example, but also with rewards and punishments. It is by far the most common and as it were automatic way for us to operate. The second is what Bergson calls *mysticité*, "the mystic way." Crucially, though, despite its pervasiveness and preponderance, the former does not exclude the latter, rare though the mystic way may be (DSMR 1057–60/97–100).

In another discussion of teaching in *Two Sources*, Bergson describes how a merely quantitative, machinic repetition of static doctrines can allow for a qualitative change, a resurgence of the dynamic mysticism deposited or crystallized, as it were, in those doctrines:

> An indifferent schoolmaster, mechanically teaching a science created by men of genius, may awaken in one of his pupils the vocation he himself has never possessed, and convert him unconsciously into an emulator of those great men, who are invisible and present in the message he is handing on. (1158/215)[16]

Nothing is created here; rather, the mechanism of instruction opens up the possibility, without guarantee, of shaping habits and attitudes such that what we already have in the depths of the self (life, duration) can be awoken and translated into action. We might remain unaffected by mathematics, but we cannot remain unaffected by the words of the mystic that echo "within" ourselves and prompt a reorganization of our beliefs: "the same elements will subsist, but they will be magnetized and by this very magnetizing process be diverted into another direction" (1158/215–16). This is an *état d'âme*, a "state of soul," which results from what Pierre Gisel calls a "conversion to interiority," "a coincidence, thanks to a concrete intuition, that attains [*touche à*] the

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[16] This is what Althusser takes Pascal to be suggesting ("Idéologies et appareils idéologiques d'état," 28). The example of Pascal is particularly pertinent, not only because of Pascal's own famous conversion – the *Mémorial* quotes Psalm 119:6, *Non obliviscar sermones tuos*, evoking a divine message; rejects the "God of the philosophers" in favor of the God of the Fathers and "of Jesus Christ"; and speaks of "Joie, joie, joie et pleurs de joie [*Joy, joy, joy, and tears of joy*]" – but also because it illustrates the analogy Bergson establishes (DSMR 1127/179) between the "conversion" from the static to the dynamic and that from magnitudes to infinitesimal calculus, which Pascal's work helped prepare and which, as Keck and Waterlot point out ("Dossier critique," 439n129), marks an introduction of time.

universal."[17] And it is in discussing the propagation of such a state of the soul thanks to a conversion that Bergson operates a subtle but significant shift in the broad definition of religion toward the dynamic aspect, toward what crystallizes, and away from the compromise, the crystallization: "We cherish or we dismiss a story which may have been found necessary for inducing a certain state of soul which propagates; but religion is essentially that very state. We discuss its definitions and its theories; and it has, indeed, made use of a metaphysic to give itself a body; but it might, at a stretch, have assumed a different body, or even none at all" (1203–4/268–69).[18] Now, the *état d'âme* of the great mystics, as we saw, is in touch with the élan vital and translates this contact into new creations, actions, taking on a body, as it were, which also includes the creation of new forms of social organization (religious orders, etc.), spiritual exercises, and doctrines, that is to say, new crystallizations. What happens, or can happen in teaching these external manifestations, then, in trying to "induc[e] a state of soul," is a getting in touch with what is most profound and, hence, the most simple: even in its rigidified form, the "mystic word," as Bergson has it, still "echo[es]" in us and it can do so only because what it appeals to is already active in us (1158/215).

Crucially, this response to the mystics' "call" reveals to us something that goes "beyond us," and it cannot manifest itself other than in going beyond itself (DSMR 1157/214). In Paulinian terms – fully applicable here, given the centrality of love and of the figure of Christ as the "beginning" of mysticism – we receive the gift of love, and the only way to reciprocate is to hand on this gift.[19] Bergson's "formula," "God is love, and the object of love," thus describes what Anthony Feneuil calls an "open reciprocity" that "bursts the dike of humanity's division into individuals." This is the decisive opening, the "breach" that unsettles the divisions and hierarchies of static societies described in the book's first chapter that condition us and our actions:[20]

> Shaken to its depths by the current which is about to sweep it forward, the
> soul ceases to revolve round itself and escapes for a moment from the law

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[17] Gisel, "Bergson en regard du christianisme," 293 and 293n3.
[18] Compare PM 1285/48: "Intuition will be communicated only by the intelligence."
    Compare also the discussion of literary composition in *Two Sources* (1014–14/45–46 and 1190–91/253–54) and of literature generally in *Time and Free Will* (88–89/133–37).
[19] Paul's terms are taken up in Augustine's theory of teaching, which resonates with Bergson's; see my "Love and the Stick" and "A Mother to All."
[20] Feneuil, "Connaître philosophiquement Dieu?" 463. In the theological terms in which Feneuil makes the point, the mystic experience is not about faith as a relation (as in Karl Barth) but about an experience of a relation that preexists its terms, subject and object, human and God (460). The mystics' call thus exists in the response (462–64, cf. Marion, *Being Given*, esp. 282–96), and the only way to respond is to hand on the call. Also compare Chrétien, *The Call and the Response*.

which demands that the species and the individual should condition one another, circularly. It stops, as though to listen to a voice calling. Then it lets itself go, straight onward. (DSMR 1170/230 [modified])

Thanks to the mystic's radically individual or rather (because it is de-individuating, as it were) singular experience of the élan vital, thanks to its immediate translation into action (1172/240), into an appeal to *all* of humanity, it becomes possible to reawaken, in an echo, an awareness of ourselves as manifestations of the élan vital. Such an echo of the "shock" to the mystic's soul, "the passing from the static to the dynamic, from the closed to the open, from everyday life to mystic life," in other words, responds to – by handing it on – the universal appeal of divine love: "For the love which consumes him is no longer simply the love of man for god, it is the love of God for all men. Through God, in the strength of God, he loves all mankind with a divine love" (1170/229 and 1173/233).

And a universal appeal it is: the mystic's experience, the "shock" or "disturbance is a systematic readjustment with a view to equilibrium on a higher level" – and what better way to characterize a conversion experience than such a "restructuring of the mystic's personality"?[21] – that removes or rather ignores all obstacles (thus, in the most general form, matter) in a singular simplicity and unity of vision and action in order for love to "convert into creative effort that created thing which is a species, and turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop" (1170/229 and 1174/235).

If conversion is such a qualitative change, from the created to creation, from the static to the dynamic, the conversion of the mystic aims at the conversion of humanity. The very terms in which Bergson couches this conversion – the freedom that consists in the coincidence of the mystic soul's action with divine activity, the experience of a "superabundance of life ... a boundless impetus" and the simplicity and unity of the soul's vision, words, and action (1172/232) – call up major themes of Bergson's philosophy, from the discussion of liberty in the third chapter of *Time and Free Will* via the élan vital of *Creative Evolution* to the central notion of "Philosophical Intuition."[22] Moreover, if it is fair to characterize Bergsonian mysticism as resulting from and aiming at a conversion, then we may rearticulate Bergson's

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[21] Vieillard-Baron, "La conversion de Bergson," 89, with regard to Jean Baruzi.
[22] "In this point is something simple, infinitely simple, so extraordinarily simple that the philosopher has never succeeded in saying it. And that is why he went on talking all his life" (PM 1347/128). Compare my "Intuition, Interpellation, Insight."

claim that the novelty of *Two Sources* lies in the introduction of mysticism into philosophy and Worms's characterization of the mystic experience as the book's "intuition," to say: the intuition of *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* is conversion.[23]

Conclusion: Bergson's Conversion

On the last page of the last book he wrote, Bergson speaks of conversion. In bringing the volume to a close, he says of psychic phenomena (telepathy and the like) that, whatever else they do or do not do, they hint at "an 'outside' which may be a 'beyond.'" This "lowest degree of spirituality," he writes, is all it takes "to convert into a live, acting reality a belief in the life beyond, which is apparently met with in most men," that would in turn allow us to "scoff at death" and open the path to joy, the "simplicity of life diffused throughout the world by an ever-spreading mystic intuition" (1243–45/315–17).[24]

Against this background and in light of the argument I have presented, I would like to turn by way of conclusion to the question of Bergson's own conversion to Catholicism.[25]

In a conversation with Jacques Chevalier less than three years before his death in 1941, Bergson describes the effect his reading of the mystics provoked in him: "There wasn't, for me, a conversion in the sense of a sudden illumination. Little by little, I made my way toward ideas that probably were never completely absent in me but that I was not fully aware of, that I was not preoccupied with . . . And yet there was a trigger: it was reading the mystics."[26] Though denying that the term "conversion" in its common acceptation as sudden reversal applies to his experience, Bergson depicts his path toward Catholicism in the same way that, in the book published six years earlier, he speaks of the "mystic way" and the qualitative change I have characterized as conversion. The trigger, reading the mystics,

[23] See Chevalier, *Entretiens*, 152, and Worms, "Présentation," 10; on the implications of introducing mysticism into philosophy – that it extends philosophy (cf. *Mélanges*, 1182) but also shows it, at least qua knowledge of God, to be the inverse or reverse of mysticism (like matter of spirit, for example) – see Feneuil, "Connaître philosophiquement Dieu?" 466. On mysticism as procedure and method in philosophy, see also Waterlot, "Le mysticisme," and Vieillard-Baron, "La conversion de Bergson," 132–35.

[24] On joy, see Jankélévitch, *Henri Bergson*, 191–210.

[25] On the relationship between *Two Sources* and Bergson's life, see Frédéric Worms's excellent chapter, "Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion dans la vie de Bergson," in Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 205–39. For a recent discussion of Bergson's conversion, see Vieillard-Baron, "La conversion de Bergson."

[26] Chevalier, *Entretiens*, 272–83.

works by activating – provoking an echo in – something that "probably" was there all along. Hearing them speak, he responds. The implication seems to be that this trigger stands at the beginning of a gradual process, not at its end – the way it does most famously in the garden scene of Augustine's conversion narrative, presented as the culmination of a long spiritual quest – and is thus not a conversion properly so called. But if what counts is a "conversion of the will," if conversion as qualitative change consists in an *opening* and "systematic readjustment with a view to equilibrium on a higher level" (DSMR 1014/46 and 1170/229) that allows for the prolongation of the mystical experience's intuition in words and deeds – in action, in *love* – then Bergson's path toward Catholicism appears precisely as a conversion *especially* because of his denial of having converted in his *Testament*:

> My reflections have led me ever closer to Catholicism, in which I see the completion of Judaism. I would have converted had I not seen the formidable wave of anti-Semitism that will wash over the world prepare itself for years now (in large part, alas, through the fault of a certain number of Jews completely bereft of moral sense). I wanted to stay among those who tomorrow will be persecuted. But I hope that a Catholic priest, if the Cardinal-Archbishop of Paris authorizes him to do so, will come to say prayers at my funeral.[27]

On his own account, Bergson did not convert in the sense that he did not have a sudden illumination. And he did not convert in the sense of joining a community. No matter how, precisely, catholic its aspirations and claims, the Roman Church is an institution and as such manifests the closing or static tendencies of all societies. Having come to understand the core of the mystics' message – openness, dynamism, love – why would Bergson deny this insight by closing himself off, by a closing down that he refers to as "conversion" here? For that is what joining the Church and abandoning the Jewish community in a time of ever-increasing persecution would amount to. In the place of such a conversion, Bergson chooses to "stay among" the Jews but to be open to the message of Christianity.[28] He asserts his "moral adherence" to Catholicism,[29] which against the background of his insight into the meaning of mysticism appears as an adherence to "a dynamic morality which is *élan*, and which latches onto [*se rattache*]

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[27] Bergson, *Correspondances*, 1670–71.
[28] Bergson here voices the view presented in DSMR 1178–79/240; compare 1176/237. On Bergson and Judaism more generally, see Jankélévitch, *Bergson*, 211–37. On Bergson faulting "Jews completely bereft of moral sense" for anti-Semitism, see Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 268–69.
[29] Bergson, *Correspondances*, 1671.

life in general, creative of nature which created the social demand," an adherence that, as he goes on to say, is an *obligation* as well as an *aspiration* (DSMR 1204/269). It enjoins action in the creative sense of the élan vital, "a harmony [*accord*] of thinking and the real, of the man who thinks and the being in which he inscribes himself."[30] And it is this harmony, this opening, this move from contemplation to action, this conversion without the traditional trappings that constitutes, in keeping with but without ever being encumbered by the philosophy he has developed throughout his life, a "singular freedom."[31]

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[30] Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 274.
[31] Soulez and Worms, *Bergson*, 269. On freedom, compare the third chapter of the *Essai*, 93–145/140–221.

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Index