

Time, Creativity and Culture: Introducing Bergson

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In this paper we introduce Bergson's philosophy of "action, process and movement" and its relevance for social science and the study of organizational culture. Bergson's philosophy of change argues against the spatialisation of thought in which phenomena are broken down into discrete components to be numbered, sequenced and manipulated: rather he argues for a view of time as qualitative; intuition as situated within experience rather than about it; the importance of the body in social experience and the importance of morality and religion in social life – in short and embodied conception of culture. Bergson's culture is socialised time actualised in experienced duration or *durée* – culture is always in motion, and does not need culture clash to drive change, but cultural expression and formulations are not, which runs counter to functionalist and psychoanalytic views of culture. Creativity, or the *élan vital*, is the human impulse to organise, but to improvise rather than to locate, divide and control. Culture grounded in experienced time and driven by the *élan vital* is in ceaseless motion – it is duration because its is *en-dured* as a multiplicity rather than as a unity. Where heroic leaders in treatments of organizational culture invite us the change our place in the world, in Bergson's thought they invite us to change out *time* – our qualitative experience of duration. We examine these arguments through a review of Bergson's work, concluding that Bergson's resonates with postmodern approaches to culture which shift our attention from signification to implication.

Key words: Bergson; Time; Creativity; Organization; Culture; *Durée*; *Élan vital*

Henri Bergson is known primarily as a philosopher of time, secondarily as a philosopher of creativity, invention or intuition. His most accessible work is a short treatise on laughter. Why then should the writers in this issue and social scientists more generally find his work offering insights for social concepts such as culture, as well as psychological and phenomenological concepts such as consciousness? The answer, we feel, is that both time and creativity are neglected dimensions of culture, and of organizational culture in particular, and that a return to Bergson's work can re-invigorate our thinking about concepts which have, on the one hand, a tendency to become ossified by rationalist and functionalist approaches and on the other, a tendency to become disembodied and virtually unusable when given the attentions of deconstructionist analysis. Bergson's thought is a practical philosophy which resonates with contemporary concerns with understanding the body, affect and consciousness within a world which is irreducibly relational and inherently *organised*, but given its character by action, process and movement.

Bergson's investigations of the phenomenon of time led him to be held at one point as the greatest living philosopher and certainly he was the first modern philosopher to take time seriously. So what was it about his ideas that made his philosophy so revolutionary? Near the beginning of his 1911 lecture, 'Philosophical Intuition', Bergson says that in each philosophical system there is usually only one 'infinitely simple' insight that is central to the philosophy (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 108). It is an insight that the philosopher must continuously reformulate in an effort to express it adequately. Yet this effort can only ever be

an ‘approximation’ to the thinker’s original intuition. When we look then, for the defining insight of a Bergsonism, we are already embarking upon a problematic project. But if it has to be done, then we could do no better than return to the opening passage of this 1911 lecture and recall that Bergson states, quite emphatically, that *philosophy must be close to real life* (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 107). Both Bertrand Russell and Julien Benda labelled Bergson a ‘pragmatist’ and it is certain that, no less than William James, Bergson’s philosophy is *anti-intellectualist*, though without being anti-intellectual: in the place of abstraction, it posits *concrete life as it is lived* as paramount. Intellectual philosophies that are detached from this life are enabled thereby to conjure up such artificial and totalizing world-views as determinism, materialism or idealism so long as they maintain a logical consistency within the terms of their own system. But because they make little recourse to the real world, they are deemed to be of no real philosophical value in Bergson’s view. Does it matter to Idealism that plants exist? Is it significant to Determinism that time moves forwards rather than backwards? Bergson’s is a philosophy of *action, process and movement*, and it is our lived experience alone that validates these as real truths. In various realms to which he turned his attention, including physics, biology, psychology and sociology, Bergson makes it his philosophical goal to argue for the irreducible reality of action, process and movement, not only for themselves, but also as synonyms for consciousness and life. Such a philosophy, then, ought to have considerable relevance for a world which seems set to organize our ways of living and to channel and validate such experience through formal organizations in so many ways; even more so should it have relevance for a world in which forms of organizing are changing so rapidly and extensively that they are being said to be displaced by dis-organization.¹ At least as importantly, however, Bergson’s arguments for time as a qualitative entity, intuition as creative and situated *in* the real world (rather than being *about* it), the importance of the body in sociobiological experience and the concrete dimensions of morality and religion as underpinnings of social life suggest already an *embodied conception of culture*. Given Bergson’s arguments against the spatialisation of thought, which divides and categorizes the phenomena of consciousness into disconnected characteristics which can be measured, numbered, sequenced and manipulated but which we have great difficulty in relating in anything other than mechanical and deterministic ways, this constitutes an understanding of culture which is not abstract but concrete. Culture arises as much from the shared interaction and practice of bodies as from the shared symbols of minds. Embedded in *durée*, or experienced duration, it must be constantly in process and change, affected by and in a movement of tension and relaxation with and between individuals, and characterised by the working out of creative evolution, or cultural innovation, within the wider unfolding of time.

This appreciation of culture stands against those structural functionalist approaches which still dominate mainstream research in the area. As that other great binarising theorist Claude Levi-Strauss (1972) remarked, myths are machines for the suppression of time. In other words, they attempt to turn difference into repetition. Unfortunately, much of the work on myth and symbol in studies of organizational culture never fully understood this remark and thus never really moved past it. Cultural formulations such as myth attempt to capture anthropological problems and responses and symbolically project both problem formulation and response as though they are not specific to a time or culture but are perennial, to reassure by suppressing difference and contingency. Being formulated in symbolic terms allows a sufficient degree of ambiguity to be incorporated into the formulation for interpretative customization – or *bricolage* – to take place as the myth is made meaningful by successive

¹Recent attempts to extend Bergson’s approach to organization studies include Calori (2002), Chia (1996; 1999), Chia and King (1998), Letiche (2001), Linstead (2002), O’Shea (2002), Wood (2002).

generations, such that difference is easily reconstructed as repetition. That this is an ideological process – in that it depoliticises situation-specifics originating in a particular set of power relations by generalising them and rendering difference hegemonic – was pointed out by Roland Barthes (1972), yet the majority of studies of organizational culture continued to ignore the ideological dimension of their own research by reproducing this blindness. Bergson is suspicious of language and symbolic representation because of their effect of alienating us from our own constantly unfolding experience, and therefore would have been receptive of this argument – even more so given the propensity of mainstream organizational culture studies to objectify, spatialise and measure culture. Where such approaches suppress time and then have enormous difficulty reinserting it into analysis as a variable, Bergson's approach begins *in* time, with culture as a socialised dimension of time, actualised in and never independent of, *durée*. Time is experience – if culture is shared experience, as most anthropological interpretations accept with or without some qualification, it is shared experience not of things or events, but of *time itself*. Myth attempts to capture shared dimensions of that experience *outside* time and deploy them to *control* or suppress time's *duration*. Culture then, is always in motion, always creative, but cultural formulations and expressions are not – which makes a significant break with Edgar Schein's (1985) widely used Freudian model of levels of culture. Culture therefore does not need the experience of culture clash in order to generate change and innovate, a dilemma with which much functionalist anthropological literature has struggled, as James Clifford (1988) argues, and which is a characteristic concern of contingency-based organization theory which considers the degree of 'fit' between culture and strategy to be the heart of the problem. Perhaps surprisingly, then, Bergson's critique of representation would give him some common ground with both critical realist and postmodern critiques of organizational culture. But Bergson himself does not fit neatly into any intellectual camp, nor is his own approach consistent or easily labelled. To understand how this characteristic itself is the cornerstone of Bergson's value to social theory, we will now look at the unfolding of Bergson's work.

BERGSON'S METAPHYSICS

In many ways, Bergson has been seen as an antithetical writer whose work consists in opposing the primary assumptions of the mechanistic and rationalistic philosophies of the post-enlightenment era. Socially and politically, Bergson was writing at the time of the dawning of high modernism – the rise of the military industrial complex; the collapse of empires of aristocracy; the emergence of Taylorism and Fordism as ways of standardising both products and people; mass production providing the methodologies for both mass media and mass extermination. Bergson's own principled and ultimately fatal stand against the oppression of the Nazis might be held dramatically to emphasise his antithesis to the modernism which has been said to have reached its apotheosis in the Holocaust and Auschwitz. But if such a characterization has any validity at all, it is in respect to his first work, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, in English, *Time and Free Will*.

The English title is a better representation of the book's contents, for it attempts to validate the reality of human freedom by an analysis of real time or what Bergson calls 'duration'. It makes a detailed attack upon the 'dogma of quantitative perception' whereby both 'inner' and 'outer' experience is deemed to consist of quantitative, homogeneous units. In contrast to this idea, Bergson attempts to recover the immediate experience of consciousness duration. Central to *Time and Free Will* is the distinction between this inner duration and space. Duration is real time, it is the time of conscious experience. It is

heterogeneous, qualitative, and dynamic. It is the difference between an hour spent by a condemned prisoner waiting to be executed, an hour spent by a child waiting for the start of their birthday party, an hour spent undergoing interrogation, an hour spent in a traffic jam, an hour walking in the forest, or an hour making love. By contrast, science emphasizes the concept of 'space' which is an abstract construct that is homogeneous, quantitative and static. Its parts are identical and can be described mechanistically. It is clock time or diary time, time that can be represented on dials, inscribed on pages and captured in formulae where one instance of 't' is the same as any other. Such a notion as this space is vital for the determinist, for it is the basis of a *spatialised time* – time stripped of its intrinsic heterogeneity – which represents the unfolding of a hidden destiny that exists pre-determined in the present conditions of the world. Free creativity is outlawed in such a world-view. But duration, on the other hand, is a creativity whereby a new and unpredictable entity appears at each and every moment. The components of duration (our memories, perceptions and affections) are all different, yet they also interpenetrate and cannot be sharply distinguished. Duration is history, experience and anticipation – past, present and future, real and virtual. In contrast, the artifice of spatialised time consists of segments which preserve nothing in themselves of any previous segment. They are all juxtaposed in an abstracted succession. This artificial time is created and thrown beneath real time for the practical purposes of action, of manipulating the world.

As such, duration cannot be measured and its progress is not predictable. For example, take the movement of your own arm – reaching for the telephone across a crowded desk or waving to attract someone's attention through a window. It passes in one indivisible act, one duration. But though it passes through space, the movement itself is not the space it passes over, for space is quantitative and immobile. Movement, like real time, is qualitative and processual. It cannot be analyzed into motionless parts that are sequenced together. Yet for the purposes of manipulation, we are forever throwing this diagrammatic space beneath movement and attempting to prove that the former truly describes the latter. But it is an attempt that is in vain, for it leads to the paradoxes of movement such as those posited by Zeno. These paradoxes are based on the illusion that space is prior to movement, that we move in a container called space. But it is the opposite view, *movement as prior to space*, that Bergson aims to champion.

It is in duration that we live, act and are free. But in space we are 'acted' upon mechanically and so our freedom appears to be a chimera. Associationist psychology unwittingly phrases the question of freedom in terms of space rather than in terms of duration. Psychological determinism can therefore appropriate the methods of theoretical physics and, utilizing a spatialised reality, portray a subject that is determined by its states, an entity which has forces acting upon it. The truth, however, is that the self is not determined by these states, it *is* these states. It does not make a pre-determined choice between pre-existing alternatives, rather, *it creates* these alternatives by its free action. It is only in reflection that it appears that the possible alternatives to what it actually enacted pre-existed and so were alternatives that it *could have chosen* but was determined not to. The real is prior to the possible; it creates the latter that is only seen as an existent in *retrospect*. Bergson's concept of freedom in *Time and Free Will* is grounded upon these distinctions between real and possible choices, real and spatialised time. It is because the former in each of these oppositions is prior to the latter and is qualitative, heterogeneous and irreversible, that the world is unpredictable and we are free.

However, if it is *enduring* consciousness alone that is real and spatialised time is an artificial construct, why is it that each of us has a spatial dimension to *our own* existence? Why do we possess a body? It was in his next work that Bergson would broach this question.

BERGSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF MIND

Matter and Memory, which appeared eight years later, was called for by the obvious Cartesian leaning that could be seen in *Time and Free Will* in its opposition of an inner duration and an outer spatial world – indeed the kind of thinking which is perpetuated in organization theory's construction of organization and environment, where whole fields of theory concentrate on particular sub-sections of each. Bergson attempts to overcome these difficulties while also retaining the previous work's major insights. In *Time and Free Will* memory was little discussed, but in *Matter and Memory* it becomes central. Duration is only possible, now, because of memory, in that by memory the past is accumulated in its entirety. In memory, in effect, not one element is lost and every moment that it retains carries within itself the entire flow of the past and so is, as such, irreversible and unrepeatable. This is so despite the fact that the matter that constitutes the observable counterpart of these memories perishes and decays. From this Bergson speculates that memory is entirely independent of matter, that is, that it is in no way constituted by it. In thinking so, he opposes the reductionist point of view which takes memory, and with that all of consciousness, to be merely an epiphenomenon of the material brain. Consciousness, in this view, is seen as an unextended by-product of an extended material world, with memory differing from perception only by degree. However, for Bergson, this creates an irreconcilable and incomprehensible gap between mind and world and even more so between mind and body. In reply to this, he argues that the only way to understand the relationship between mind and body is through time (the past and the present) rather than through space (the extended and the unextended).

For Bergson, mind is primarily *memory* (a position shared with other philosophers such as Gilbert Ryle), but by memory, Bergson means the past in itself. The crucial point to be retained is the distinction between 'actual' recollections and 'virtual' memories: whereas a perceived recollection actualizes the past in the present, virtual memory *is* this past. The philosophical orthodoxy against which Bergson waged his own thesis held that memories were only copies of sensation. Bergson wanted to argue, however, that perception and memory were qualitatively different and, as such, that our sensory mechanisms were connected only with the faculty of recollection, having nothing to do with the creation of memories. But without Bergson's crucial *ontological* distinction (between perception and memory), *and* identification (of pure memory with the past), it would be impossible to understand the emergence of *novelty* (we would only have repetition), and so the theory of duration. The body, on the other hand, understood as either the brain or our entire nervous system, cannot produce memories, thoughts, or representations: rather, belonging entirely to the material present, it can only serve to channel the actualization of our memories as they enter into and 'colour' our perceptions. Hence, the covariance between mind and brain. There is clearly a correlation between the two: but it would be a metaphysical leap to add that the latter causes or produces the former entirely. The more complex our brains, the more choices we have in how to colour our material present with the influence of our past, the more open to subjective variation we are in terms of our species-specific interpretations of our present perceptions, and, ultimately, the more are we free. Our body is the means through which our subjectivity is given a purchase on the material world: its greater complexity is our greater freedom.

BERGSON'S PHILOSOPHY OF BIOLOGY

Creative Evolution was by far the most widely read of Bergson's works. It is itself both a reflection upon, and a critique of, the Neo-Darwinian concepts of evolution that were established at the time of its writing in 1907. It has been said that *Creative Evolution* marks

a shift in Bergson's thought from a philosophy of human consciousness towards a type of super-phenomenology for life itself. One might dispute this point – a pluralist ontology of process might seem a more appropriate label than simply an extension of the method of immediate data – but it is certainly true that this book is definitive in Bergson's own philosophical development, not only because of the early and ultimately destructive fame it brought to his work, but also because it does represent the most general extension of his philosophy of time. This last fact must be made clear from the outset: *Creative Evolution* posits a theory of time first and only second a philosophy of life. Even *Time and Free Will* suggested that the past was a reality for living bodies, and it is this temporal property of biological phenomena which draws Bergson towards this area in his third major work. Why it should be evolutionary biology in particular that Bergson tackles is self-evident: in any ordinary sense of the term, evolution means 'change'. That is all there essentially is to Bergson's theory of life: a theory of time generalized.

According to Bergson, mechanistic theories of evolution fail to account for the diverse creativity of nature. They explain the advent of life via the contingent conglomeration of material particles while also assuming a determinism or finalism that understands all future life-forms to pre-exist in the material conditions of the present world. By contrast, Bergson believes that it is the virtual influence of the past that *inclines* (without determining) life to take certain directions. He often uses the term 'organization' instead of life, which is quite appropriate as 'organization' connotes the residual effect of past actions accumulated within the present. Organization is a type of movement rich with history – indeed it has been argued to be a form of *reply* to its own history (Linstead, 2002). Bergson describes it as a continuous change of form linking the embryo with the adult organism, and ageing itself is explained as the further development of the embryo. Life as such, on the other hand, when understood as a mode of organization, is a capacity prior to, or the condition of possibility of, any organic form.

In addition, life, according to Bergson, proceeds by dissociation and division, as of course does organization. Bergson would take issue with the image of the tree of life prevalent in many contemporary versions of evolutionary theory, which Deleuze calls 'root-tree logic' (Deleuze, 1991). As the strong version of this thesis goes, there is a single tree of life with all species branching off from what was originally one common ancestor. This idea remains too Aristotelian and hierarchical for Bergson, for it pictures life as a successive linearity rather than as a network of coincident dissociations in every direction. Bergson's alternative image is of an explosion outward (with each exploded fragment itself generating a new explosion) rather than of growth upwards. It follows that there is no '*life in general*' (*Creative Evolution*, 1983: 26) marching inexorably towards some goal, but simply sporadic currents of life with real creation ongoing at all points along them. Evolution does not operate gradually by slowly (and implausibly) accumulating minute changes mechanically until a new species is created. For Bergson, life is a continuum of heterogeneity, with each species being a sudden emergence of novelty and invention. This is not to claim that the constant creativity of evolution is harmonious or progressive (whatever that 'progress' might entail): disparity, disharmony and failure, Bergson writes, 'seems to be the rule, success exceptional and always imperfect' (*Creative Evolution*, 1983: 136). What unity and coherence there is, is the product not of a movement towards unity, but the disintegration of one 'implied in this movement itself' (*Creative Evolution*, 1983: 102).

The famous theory of the '*élan vital*', the vital spirit, therefore, is not arguing for a teleology so much as confirmation of some (strictly non-theological) anterior source of organization as against the accumulation of traits by pure chance being proposed by mechanistic theories at the time he was writing. Hence, it must be regarded as a type of complex movement rather than a mysterious power. Any specific point on its path, any

organism in other words, represents a forced accommodation between the movement of the *élan* and that of another, inverse movement, that of matter. Bergson clearly shows what his so-called vitalism actually comprises: organic life simply consists of a mutual adaptation between two modes of movement, that is, nothing more substantial than time itself.

In terms of organization, then, the *élan vital* appears as the human impulse to organise. But this is no simple impulse to locate, divide and control. It is rather an impulse to improvise, experiment, make mistakes, reverse the previous moment, be lucky, have accidents and then to reincorporate them as events through memory. The past is present in the present moment, but does not weigh upon it in a deterministic way, for it is also immanent in the present – that is, it re-emerges and is experienced anew as ‘each fresh occurrence represents the actual realizing of one of the many possibilities presented by the past configuration of events enriching itself with newer and novel meanings, understandings and application’ (Chia and King, 1998: 470). In this multiplicitous movement where events and objects are merely the evidence of process rather than its end-products, culture, or social organizing, is an ‘interminable ontological project of reality-constitution’ where the patterns and interruptions of enactments and re-enactments that take place can be seen to be part of ‘a particular collectivity’s attempts to create and recreate its self-identity’ (Chia and King, 1998: 476). But even this formulation is elusive, for self-identity can so easily become objectified. If self-identity is created in time, in duration, then these attempts are attempts to *experience* that self-identity as *being*, although it only emerges as a becoming. *Élan vital* is ceaseless because there is no place for it to rest and identity is yet another construct which, paradoxically, it melancholically deploys through the workings of human agency in an attempt to arrest its own motion. Constructs of culture, of course, work similarly, and analytically deployed in the abstract in organization studies can appear to be very effective. But from Bergson’s point of view, culture could not be simply understood without the experience of its own embodiment – it is never simply cognitive even though it is shared and communicated. In other words, culture is duration – it is *en-dured*.

BERGSON’S ETHICS

The Two Sources of Morality and Religion is Bergson’s attempt to produce a non-reductive sociobiological explanation of the origin of ethics and religion. Naturally, then, Bergson’s theory of time and life must always be kept in mind when discussing this examination. There are *two* sources of morality and religion and both are biological because there are two major facets to Bergson’s theory of evolution, what he describes as a virtual type of organization on the one hand and the expression of that order in actual organic forms on the other: evolution itself and fragments of the evolved. Two facets of time, in other words, time flowing and time flown. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, these biological influences appear in morality as two types of motivation: moral obligation and moral aspiration, each corresponding to the evolved and the evolving respectively. The first acts as a type of pressure, a centripetal movement of closure, fostering a closed model of society and a static, institutional form of religion. The second is an outward, dissociative and centrifugal movement, bearing within it the seeds of open sociability and dynamic, non-dogmatic spirituality. As neither source of the two is strictly and exclusively moral it would be foolish, Bergson writes, to try to explain either in terms of moral or religious theory. Our sociobiology must be biological.

Now it must be added that both these moralities, closed and open, are only extreme limits, and are never found in any actual society in their pure form. The forces of openness and closure are present in varying degrees in every society and are intermixed in actual morality.

Such actual morality encompasses what Bergson describes as a ‘system of orders dictated by impersonal social requirements’, as well as a ‘series of appeals made to the conscience of each of us by persons who represent the best there is in humanity’ (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 1977: 51, 84). Nonetheless, the two remain distinct while being united in their difference, for they represent ‘two complementary manifestations of life’ (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 1977: 96). There never has been nor ever could be either a truly open society or a fully closed one. These are ideal limits. Where closed morality lies in obedience before the law, open morality lies in an ‘appeal’, ‘attraction’, or ‘call’. But the call does not come from just any one: it requires a privileged personality. What is best in our society is bequeathed to us by individuals Bergson calls heroes, and each hero – living or dead – exerts a virtual attraction on us. The heroism Bergson describes is of a religious order, though one that is dynamic and wholly active rather than institutional and reified. Bergson also calls these heroes ‘mystics’, though again, the notion of some ascetic contemplative is far from what he has in mind. These mystics are creators, transgressing the boundaries of life, mind and society in their inspirational morality. They are now the personal bearers of what also underpins all movement and change in thought, life, and society – the very stuff of time. Nonetheless, religious dynamism needs static religion for its expression and diffusion, and the two are not at all opposed in their common origin, which Bergson alludes to mysteriously as ‘some intermediate thing’ (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 1977: 178). The object of dynamic religion is also its source: the generative action of life, which Bergson periodically describes as ‘God’, though this is clearly an immanent and suprapersonal divinity.

The emphasis on heroes here may have some contemporary resonances in organization theory. Maslow’s self-actualising persons were individuals who pushed back the boundaries for the rest of us, although they seemed to be an élite in whose reflected glory we could only bask. Maslow’s view of betterment was very much of a hierarchy whose standards may be raised but movement within that hierarchy was limited to its lower levels. These heroes were not calling us on through a virtual attraction in Bergson’s sense – they were not breakthrough pioneers. Transformational leaders, in the currently popular terminology, are much closer to Bergson’s view, calling us on to see the potentiality within us, but in a very limited socio-economic or socio-political sphere. But in neither Maslow’s nor transformational leadership theory is inspiration equated with time. The heroes of myriad accounts of organizational culture call us to change our *place* in the world: Bergson’s heroes release us into a new *time*.

BERGSON’S METHODOLOGY

The movement of Bergson’s thought up to this point may have raised some puzzlement – his concern with experience and insistence on coming face to face with reality suggests that he would be an empiricist, but his later more vitalist and spiritual arguments suggest a more intuitive approach. This merits some amplification. In his 1903 essay, ‘The Creative Mind: Introduction to Metaphysics’, Bergson talks of the object of perception as a ‘metaphysical object’. He goes on as follows: ‘a true empiricism is the one which purposes to keep as close to the original itself as possible, to probe more deeply into its life . . . and this true empiricism is the real metaphysics’ (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 175). He argues that true, metaphysical empiricism is not a fall into the passivity of experience but an effort to create experience, to perceive what can *only* be perceived rather than what is a mixture of abstraction and everyday experience: as such, metaphysics becomes experience itself. This effort is its second, positive facet: radical empiricism is metaphysical to the extent that it focuses on the individual specificity of its object – the singularity of the individual that can only be sensed rather than

imagined. Metaphysics is not the contemplation of an alternative reality but the perception of a heightened reality, a perception Bergson eventually calls ‘intuition’.

Pinning down the meaning of this intuition requires a little detective work into the development of Bergson’s thought. Intuition is described initially as a sympathy that seems to imply some type of immediate consciousness; yet intuition is clearly distinguished from immediate knowledge, being described elsewhere as a search requiring prodigious effort. It can also be ‘supra-intellectual’ – Bergson might even have chosen to name this faculty ‘intelligence’ instead of intuition (see *Mélanges*, 1972: 1322). By about the year 1911, though, there is a significant harmonization in Bergson’s writing, its broad import being that ‘in order to reach intuition it is not necessary to transport ourselves outside the domain of the senses’ (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 127). The superior intuition that Kant thought necessary to ground any would-be metaphysics, Bergson (unlike Kant) does hold to exist. But it exists, he says, as the *perception* of metaphysical reality. It is only because Kant pictured this intuition as radically different from consciousness as well as from the senses that he dismissed its likelihood so quickly. Bergson not only accepts its reality, he bases it on the primacy of perception. Rather than attempt to rise above perception as philosophers since Plato have wished, sensuous intuition must be promoted. He encourages us to ‘plunge’ and ‘insert our will’ into perception, ‘deepening’, ‘widening’ and ‘expanding’ it as we do (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 139, 140, 134).

Bergson asserts that the other purpose of metaphysics is ‘*to operate differentiations*’ (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 191). In this respect, intuition can be looked on, in part, as a method of multiplication. Put at its simplest, this is something of a reversal of Ockham’s principle, ‘*entia non multiplicanda sunt praeter necessitatem*’. Instead of emphasizing the fact that the best solution is often the simplest one, the Bergsonian rule states that false problems most often ensue whenever we simplify too much in the face of a true, though unpalatable, multiplication of entities. Of course, our intelligence ‘loves simplicity’: but, ‘while our motto is *Exactly what is necessary*’, Bergson claims that nature’s motto is frequently ‘*more than is necessary* – too much of this, too much of that, too much of everything’ (*The Creative Mind*, 2002: 209, 210). Bergson’s working hypothesis is one of disunity in the active sense of that term: a dis-uniting of the ego, of the present, and even of being. To escape from a false problematic we must multiply the number of variables at work within it. Indeed, the problems of philosophy, in Bergson’s view, most often stem from a set of confusions about which version of an entity one is discussing. However, we would be wrong to view Bergson’s alternative call for multiplicity as a gratuitous predilection for the baroque: the importation of wholly new entities is not being endorsed in his method. On the contrary, it is a sensitivity towards certain subtle differences pertaining to what is already within the ontological economy of the problematic which is at issue: ‘variations on a theme’ so to speak. Thus we have all the famous dualities and pluralities at work in Bergson’s thought: types of time (duration and spatialised); types of memory (virtual and actual); and types of morality (open and closed). Indeed, Bergson’s thought is *organized* according to the principles of multiplicity that he characterised of life itself.

BERGSON’S EXTENSIVE INFLUENCE

For nearly two decades Bergsonism was at the forefront of European philosophy; for half of that time, from 1907 to 1917, Bergson was *the* philosopher of Europe with an influence spreading far beyond his own discipline and into the fine arts, sociology, psychology, history, and politics. The literature of Proust, Woolf and Stein, the art of the Cubists, and the music of Debussy all bear the mark of Bergson’s philosophy of change. It has also been recently

written that French philosophy in the 20th century could well be read as ‘a series of footnotes to Bergson’ (Matthews, 1996: 13). Yet by the end of the Great War, that influence was effectively over. In a manner presaging our contemporary cult of change, Bergsonian thought departed from the scene almost as quickly as it had arrived on it. Amongst a later generation of philosophers he was attacked for what was seen as his residual naturalism by phenomenological thinkers (Heidegger, Sartre, and Bachelard) just as he was criticized by philosophical naturalists for his subjectivism. Yet most of the errors made in criticizing his work stem from confusions between the numerous levels at which Bergson’s analyses operate. Both positions, pure humanism and pure naturalism, distort Bergsonian philosophy and the richer possibilities contained within it. Just as his own philosophy asserts that there are levels to reality, space, and even being, so there are also levels to Bergsonism itself, some naturalist (in his methodological intercourse with science for instance) and some anti-naturalist (in his metaphysics of anti-reductionism).

Recent examinations of his work, moreover, have sought to re-establish the philosophical integrity of Bergsonism, one avenue of research being its status as a precursor to postmodernism. Part of this new enthusiasm must be put down to the influence of Gilles Deleuze and his postmodern appropriation of Bergson’s thought. But this *actualité* of Bergson goes beyond an affinity with Deleuze alone. His critique of the spatialisation of time, for example, has been described as foreshadowing Derrida’s work. More broadly still, others think of Bergson’s thought as an early attempt to articulate such various late 20th century ideas as Ricoeur’s narrative self or Lévinas’ proto-ethics. One commentator has even gone so far as to point to the convergence between Bergson’s treatment of the body and Foucault’s account of power. A number of younger Continental philosophers, no longer so judgmental about the place of science and nature, are also returning to Bergson’s texts as exemplary of a type of non-reductive naturalism, one which is also critical and metaphysical.

In organization studies, which has concentrated for so long on how order becomes possible and how change is created, Bergson can be seen to reverse the problem – how change is possible and how order is created renders the exceptional unexceptionable. Bergson’s understanding of time as experience, and being as a creative and ceaseless becoming, entail that social science, and particularly the social science of organization, has to be *creative* – like philosophy, it has to change with its object (Linstead, 2002; Mullarkey, 1999). The concept of culture can therefore be reinvigorated if it is understood not as a phenomenon of cognition or communication, but of experience and action, much of which cannot be communicated but only perceived. Bergson invites us to *endure* culture – to move our attention from chains of signification to vortices of implication.

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