

Fluxibility: Consciousness and Nature in Bergson

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Abstract:

Intensity, duration, freedom, these are the three notions which constitute the motto of bergsonian speculation and the three notions which need to be decanted in order to fully understand the philosophy of life of Bergson, which culminates in his *magnum opus* – *L'Évolution créatrice*. Thus, we will try to clarify each one of them, interconnecting them consecutively in a coherent whole of an account which, being made from the exterior – as all and any analysis of life -, still delineates the method of a philosophy which has the desire to comprehend pure consciousness and what is proper of life in a strict sense, and, more precisely, life as analagous of consciousness.

Key Words: Bergson - Consciousness - Intensity - Duration - Freedom - Human life

Resumen:

Intensidad, duración, libertad, son las tres nociones que forman el núcleo de la especulación bergsoniana y las tres nociones que hay que decantar para comprender, en su totalidad, la filosofía de vida de Bergson que culmina en su obra magna -*L'Évolution créatrice*. De este modo, se intentará esclarecer cada uno de ellos, entrelazándolos consecutivamente en un todo coherente cuya consideración, es realizada desde un exterior que -como todos y cada uno de los análisis sobre la vida-, no deja de delinear la Método por el que deben regirse todas las filosofías que pretenden comprender tanto la conciencia pura, como lo propio de la vida en sentido estricto y, más precisamente, la vida como análoga a la conciencia.

Palabras clave: Bergson - Conciencia - Intensidad - Duración - Libertad - Vida humana

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1.- Quality, intensity, quantity, extension

The preface to the *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*² starts by saying that quarrels between the adherents of some form of determinism and those who oppose them derive from an original confusion between duration and extension, succession and simultaneity, quality and quantity; but, ultimately, all these misunderstandings are consequence of taking qualities, or intensities – the terms are used interchangeably by Bergson -, as quantities, which belong to the order of magnitudes. The first step to untangle the problem which involves conscious experience consists, therefore, in demonstrating that there is no similarity whatsoever between quantity and quality, the extensive and the intensive. In fact, what proximity could there be between these two *orders* of reality? Is there any sense in speaking of a «growing intensity», mixing up the two spheres, or is that a vice of common sense language that has been accommodated between philosophers and that needs to be denounced? Can one speak of magnitude when both content and continent – that is, relations based on overlapping – disappear and, in that way, of a quantity that is deprived of extension?

There is no intention here of compartmentalizing life in two distinct spheres, but, rather, of demonstrating that the true human existence, the domain of which derives self-fulfillment, and life itself as *conditio sine qua non* for that experience – which exceeds the first³, and of which it is an emanation -, belongs solely, strictly speaking, to one of them, which, as we will see further ahead, is the order of intensity, of quality, of pure duration.

There certainly are reasons which offer plausibility and which have often served as basis for the application of categories of quantity to the scheme of emotions, of intensity. The act of suddenly opening one's eyes and mouth, together with a series of other muscle contractions, universally suggests surprise⁴. The surprise is considered of a «higher intensity» the more wide open the eyes are, the higher the position of the eyebrows is, the

² Henri Bergson, *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (Paris: Alcan, 1908).

³ Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1908), Introduction.

⁴ H. A. Elfenbein, N. Ambady, "On the universality and cultural specificity of emotion recognition: A meta-analysis", in *Psychological Bulletin*, 128 (2002), 203-235. J. A. Russell, "Is there universal recognition of emotion from facial expression? A review of the cross-cultural studies", in *Psychological Bulletin*, 115 (1994), 102-141. Cf. Rainer Reisenzein, "Evidence for strong dissociation between emotion and facial displays: The case of surprise", in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 91(2), 2006, 295-315.

higher the surprised subject jumps, etc; and we say that these involuntary actions of our organism derive from an internal tension. Thus, the intensity of an emotion would be defined solely by the physical shakes which it generates on the surface of the subject's body: a «restrained» or «contained» surprise would just be the fight engendered in the attempt to avoid its physiological manifestation.

Now, the problem resides precisely in the notion of «internal tension», in the idea that the motor is what imprints movement to the body. That psychological fact is irreducible, it is not possible to equate it with the somatory of the organic movements which normally are associated with it, that is, with the *quantity* of movements. That is infeasible, but not because the psychic fact is the *cause* of the muscle tensions which are correlative to it – which would make us incur in what Ryle calls a categorial mistake⁵ -, they're just different domains. From the point of view of the pure intensity of the psychological fact, that is, as soon as we dissociate intensity from quantity, there is no difference between the depths of a great love or the violence of a boiling hate: "To say that love, hatred, desire, increase in violence is to assert that they are projected outwards, that they radiate to the surface, that peripheral sensations are substituted for inner states"⁶.

So, if there is some plausibility to the idea of a «growing intensity», of a measurement of the violence of a sensation according to the quantities of movement which happen in the surface of the body, there is not, however, legitimacy in doing it, for the consideration of intensity as quantity always involves the annulment and the appropriation of the first category by the second – it is the transformation of a sensation, which does not occupy space, into a series of magnitudes which overlap in a homogenous space. *Actual or past magnitudes*, for, in that perspective, the intensity of a psychological occurrence would always be measured by the quantity through which it expresses itself: anger would be more «intense» the faster the heart rate, the more the nostrils dilate, the harder the teeth clench, etc; on the other hand, it would be an anger of a «smaller intensity» if all these epiphenomena would be less pressing. Now, in what way is resistance to automatic physiological reactions possible if in the sensation itself, which is pure quality, is not already constituted the nature of the consecutive movements which are approaching – and

⁵ Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Classics, 2000), 20.

⁶ Henri Bergson, *Essai*, 23.

that, therefore, were not yet given, nor are being given? If corresponding to any quantity, intensity would have to refer as well to a future quantity – which is obviously a self-refuting idea. The emotion as an idea, and the idea as pure intensity of pure quality, whatever one prefers, must belong, therefore, to another range of phenomena than quantity. Of all this, Bergson derives that sensation is «a beginning of freedom»⁷.

Thus, it is already evident that the bergsonian proposition – unlike what Radhakrishnan will later say⁸ – does not rest on a monistic postulate, in such a way that reality would be reduced to an idea or an absolute principle (whether spiritual or material). There is not here a «philosophy of identity» attributing one unique component to life, whether permanence or constant becoming – doctrines which are riddled with problems difficult to solve: those who adhere to the first version (of permanence and immutability) face the Gordian knot of justifying change, those who advocate the second version, the problem of stability and subsistence. What Bergson is calling attention to can, in truth, be regarded from different angles, but all of them transcend the tedious and aseptic wordplay of the attribution of adjectives to philosophies. If, however, we would like to do it, the classification of James D. Collins⁹ seems adequate: the bergsonian philosophy is situated, always faltering, between a psychological monism and a functional dualism; we might say that it is as if it is in the middle of a bridge, distant from one side and distant from the other.

Still, and to summarize the fundamental objective of what has been said up until now, it is perfectly possible that the intensity of a sensation is in some form – in some obscure and ineffable form – related to the work of the body, but what is given to the subject in experience, through consciousness, is the sensation itself, that which, since the XX century, in the discussions regarding the philosophy of mind and the facts of consciousness, has been called *qualia*¹⁰ – not the mechanical processes which occur in the body, but the

⁷ Ibid, p.26.

⁸ S. Radhakrishnan, “Is Bergson's Philosophy Monistic?”, *Mind*, Vol. 26, No. 103 (Jul., 1917), 329-339. Cf. Hervé Barreau, “Bergson face à Spencer. Vers un nouveau positivisme”, *Archives de Philosophie*, vol. 71, no. 2 (2008), 219-243.

⁹ James D. Collins, *A History of Modern European Philosophy* (Milwaukee: The Bruce Publishing Company, 1954), 819-831.

¹⁰ Clarence Irving Lewis, *Mind and the world-order: Outline of a theory of knowledge* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons., 1929), 121.

sansations which form affective life. In this way, Bergson is clearly the precursor of phenomenology and of the «philosophy of existence», as Merleau-Ponty will later admit¹¹.

2.- Time and duration

The notion of number plays a crucial role in all the considerations about time and duration throughout bergsonian thought. Defining it in general terms, we can say that number is “a collection of units or, speaking more exactly, as the synthesis of the one and the many”¹²; number is, therefore, on one hand, one, since it is represented by a «simple intuition of the spirit», and, on the other hand, it is one only in the sense that it is the unity of a multiplicity of parts, i.e. that it comprehends the sum of a series of elements – and what is important to understand is that these atomic unities are absolutely identical to each other. The elementary unity which transports me from the number 2 to the number 3 is the same which takes me from the number 435 to the number 436.

The problem consists in ascertaining if in the construction of number – that is, that of a given number from the elementary unity, adding each one to the precedent in order to attain the pretended number -, if in the exercise of consecutive addition which is in the genesis of the number, by which we think to count duration, space intervenes or not. For Bergson, the answer is evident: “it is possible to apprehend in time, and only in time, a pure and simple succession”¹³, that is, a succession which is not the product of a sum. The sphere of pure temporality is safeguarded of any contamination from space. Time and space are completely different domains – the first heterogeneous and the second homogeneous, homogeneity meaning here the absence of any quality.

We may consider the bergsonian proposition from the point of view of the rejection of time as a collection of instants – a problem which haunts Philosophy at least since

¹¹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, “La Philosophie de l'existence”, in *Dialogue: Revue canadienne de philosophie*, Vol. 5, Iss. 3, 1966, 307-322. Michael R. Kelly, “Bergson's Phenomenological Reception: the Spirit of a Dialogue of Self-Resistance”, in *Bergson and Phenomenology* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 1-21.

¹² Henri Bergson, *Essai*, 58.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 60.

Parmenides¹⁴. The dilemma is well known¹⁵: a time made up of instants, or, to use the Stagirite's formulation, of «nows» (the « $\nu\acute{\nu}$ »), is an impossibility because multiple instants cannot (1) follow each other consecutively, which would mean their immediate mutual annihilation, and then there would be no time, (2) succeed each other in a mediate non-consecutively way, otherwise the intervals would be concomitant with those who should precede them, which means the nullification of time, (3) nor, finally, subsist in the same instant, for then all things would have to be produced simultaneously, at the same time, which is equally absurd. The idea of a pure time, of a pure duration, in which there is no intervention of space is the attempt at resolving that Gordian knot which is the result, ultimately, of the insertion of a uniquely spatial category – that of a distinct multiplicity – in the domain of heterogeneity where there is not any exteriority between the parts.

By adding to the present instant those which precede it, which is what happens during the making of a given number, we are not working with any instants, for those, since they are not, have already been abrogated -we are just making reference to durable traces, which seem to us to be in space. It is necessary, therefore, “to distinguish between the unity in which one thinks and the unity we objectify after having thought of it, as also between number in process of formation and number already formed”¹⁶, that is, to distinguish between the unity of pure duration, which has nothing in common with numeric unity which is accounted for by calling on space, from the reconstructed unity -which is *a posteriori*-, as also to differentiate the movement which generates number from number itself.

The multiplicity of states of consciousness, given in duration, has no analogy with numeric multiplicity, given in space¹⁷. It is just through an appeal to reflexive consciousness that to the succession of personal facts we attribute the aspect of a number through the intermediary of a symbolic representation – which is only done by using space. Every made-up number, and, by extension, every addition, requires a multiplicity of parts simultaneously perceived, or, in other words, a dispersal in space; taking time as countable means, therefore, introducing there the idea of space. In space, as with everything material, things

¹⁴ Parmenides, Περὶ Φύσεως, specially VIII (B8). John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy* (London, Adam and Charles Black, 1908), 199. For Aristotle's take on the problem see *Physics*, 208-223b.

¹⁵ I follow Derrida's mode of exposition. Jacques Derrida, *Marges de la Philosophie* (Les Éditions de Minuit, 1972), 65.

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, *Essai*, 63.

¹⁷ Henri Bergson, *Matière et mémoire* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1929), Chapitre IV.

are mutually exterior. Spatial homogeneity delineates their limits, their contours are defined by intervals. In the facts of consciousness, on the other hand, there is reciprocal penetration -even though they are also successive-, every one of them dyeing the other with its own color and, thus, every one being seen in the others. There is not any juxtaposition between states, as happens with points in space, but a kind of *melodic organization*. In fact, in a melody, notes can be distinguished from each other, they succeed each other, and, yet, each one refers to the other, in a movement of pure *solidarity*. Each note represents the whole in which it merges, and it is not possible, from a certain perspective, to distinguish it from the whole¹⁸. It is possible, thus, to conceive something like an indistinct succession in which the organization of its elements -which must be thought as blended together and not side by side- only differentiates itself through an operation of abstraction by the reflexive consciousness. This is the domain of pure duration.

Bergson illustrates this idea through the image of a point which moves in an indefinite straight line: «if this point were conscious of itself, it would feel itself change, since it moves: it would perceive a succession; but would this succession assume for it the form of a line? No doubt it would, if it could rise, so to speak, above the line which it traverses, and perceive simultaneously several points of it in juxtaposition : but by doing so it would form the idea of space, and it is in space and not in pure duration that it would see displayed the changes which it undergoes»¹⁹. In order to see the line of a trajectory in the form of a line, it is necessary to abandon the line, to see the line from outside, and, therefore, to think of a tridimensional space. If the point has no notion of space -let us think about it-, then its itinerary would never be faced as taking the form of a line, but, instead, as a melodic organization, in which the successive parts dynamically and mutually penetrate themselves, forming a qualitative multiplicity and not a numeric multiplicity. The only difference to our case, as human beings, is that, as opposed to our fictitious point A, we possess the notion of space and tend to transfer spatial categories to the experience of pure duration.

¹⁸ The matter is quite complex and, given the domain of our exposition, we can't dwell extensively on it. For a mereological discussion on the problem of the whole see: . Daniel Köhler, *The Mereological City: A Reading of the Works of Ludwig Hilberseimer* (Transcript-Verlag, 2016), 2.3.3. Jonathan Schaffer, "Monism: The Priority of the Whole", in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 119, No. 1 (2010), 31-76.

¹⁹ Henri Bergson, *Essai*, 78.

In truth, there is not, strictly speaking, any duration in space. Let us use the same example, only this time taking the point of view of the spectator. When we follow the movement of the point sliding through the line, we do not measure duration, contrary to what one may think, we merely count simultaneities in space. In space, there exists only one unique position in space, nothing remains of previous positions -it is only through the chaining and the interconnection of states of consciousness, therefore, of a mental synthesis, that duration is made. If the subject did not last in time, he would not simultaneously represent the past and the actual positions of the point, that is, movement. If we suppress the consciousness which stores and continuously achieves these processes of organizing the elements of perception, in an unique position of our point there would only remain that same position. Thus, in space, there is only reciprocal exteriority without succession: reciprocal exteriority because every actual position is distinct from that which precedes it - and this one disappears as soon as it stops being actual-, and without succession in the sense that succession only exists to a consciousness which interconnects past and actual facts. In consciousness, on the other hand, there is succession without reciprocal exteriority, for, as has already been seen, in consciousness the different states muddle together, mirroringly fusing themselves in a progressive whole, just like the notes in a melody. The cause of confusion that leads to thinking of duration as working in spatial *things* -and by thing we understand that which is already done, the static and inert-, says Bergson, is “a kind of exchange very similar to what physicists call a phenomenon of endosmosis”²⁰. Being that every one of the successive phases of conscious life corresponds to a determinate position of the point in the line, in other words, both being concomitant phenomena, and keeping in mind that in space, where there is not any kind of duration, the positions of our point are mutually cancelled, consciousness acquires the habit of establishing a relation of similitude between the two spheres, where, in reality, there is no possible equivalence. There is, in this way, a space without effective duration, and a real duration where the different moments are interconnected, there existing only an approximation between contemporary phenomena.

In sum, it is perspicuous that, from this point of view, the spatial object outside duration maintains some kind of reality. There is not here, unlike in Berkeley, any form of *esse est percipi*, a situation where the reality of objects is delegated by perception in duration. The existence of the homogeneous quantity of space travelled by our point in its

²⁰ Ibid., 83.

line is not reduced to its actuality in a given percipient. On the contrary, the only «insulated» reality is, for Bergson, that of duration -which “is only real in our consciousness”²¹. The *act* by which the point travels the line, which is a quality, is not translatable to the language of space, even though the categories of space may be transferred (yet, unduly) to the domain of temporality as pure duration. On one hand, the movement, on the other, the travelled interval of space – the first is not given in the second, just like the distance in space does not exist just *for* a consciousness which apprehends it, on the contrary, «it is there». In other words, there is (1) a duration *coexistent* with space -it is here that most of our existence takes place-, (2) a space *oblivious to* duration, that is, a mathematized space where there exist only points (which, it is worth to remember, exist independently of our perception of them), and (3) a pure duration *dissociated* from space and which has nothing to do with it. We will see in which domain freedom exists.

3.- Freedom

The debate on freedom and free-will has historically been done around two theoretical positions: mechanism, or determinism, and dynamism. Dynamism starts from the presupposition of voluntary action, conceiving both a conscious and autonomous mobile and a matter subject to laws. Mechanism, inversely, postulates the necessity of all occurrences and of all actions; in other words, from this point of view, both inert physicality and complex conscious organisms are subject to necessary laws and every ramification of these two spheres is, ultimately, predictable – there are no «accidents» or contingencies.

The mechanist crusade invokes many reasons to sustain its position: “[s]ometimes it is asserted that our actions are necessitated by our feelings, our ideas, and the whole preceding series of our conscious states; sometimes freedom is denounced as being incompatible with the fundamental properties of matter, and in particular with the principle of the conservation of energy”²². Which is to say, sometimes an argument is put forward based on psychological grounds, claiming that every human action finds its *raison d’être* in an anterior *motive* which determines it necessarily, and sometimes a physiological stance is adopted, raising the

²¹ Ibid., 85.

²² Ibid., 109.

problem of *interaction*, i.e. of the introduction and initiation of a new chain of causality in the world, in order to conclude the inadmissibility of a violation of nature's uniformity. For Bergson, every argument of this last sort grounds itself in psychological determinism, and only makes an appeal to the natural sciences in order to look for justification. What the adherent to the mechanistic doctrine does is peremptorily affirm the apodictic nature of the principle of the conservation of energy in relation to the totality of phenomena, *including psychological ones* -at least insofar as these don't contradict that elementary axiom. In this way, and tending to the interpretation of Bergson as a personalist²³, the discussion must take place at the epistemological level of the facts of consciousness.

From there, that is, from the point of view of the conscious subject, it is easy to verify the unreasonability of the extrapolation of physical discourse and its abstract principles into the realm of personality²⁴. What we find is that the time of the mathematician and the astronomer, homogeneous time, is entirely neutral to a conservative system, while it constitutes a gain for the living conscious being. The action of time works through the free force which, storing duration, completely escapes mechanical laws such as the conservation of energy -which is not an universal law, and it is only a psychological vice which makes us transfer it from the realm of physic phenomena to the flux of consciousness. The time which goes through inert matter is absolutely different from the time and duration which run through the subject. In the first case, nothing changes in matter; in the latter, the whole self changes through every moment, interlacing itself not only with reality but with the chain of possibles that derives from it.

Still, from here we can't rule out the fact that some actions of conscious subjects are explainable by motives; in other words, it is perfectly acceptable that some actual states may be, in some way, explained by previous states. However, from the fact that a state may be, eventually, in some way, determined by a state which antecedes it, does not seem to follow that the determination is *necessary*, contrary to what occurs in physical relations of causality, in which the clash between two billiard balls, in normal circumstances, determines necessarily the movement of the balls -for the contrary, according to laws of nature, could

²³ Mary Whiton Calkins, "Henri Bergson: Personalist", in *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 21, No. 6 (Nov., 1912), 666-675.

²⁴ Ralph Barton Perry, "Notes on the Philosophy of Henri Bergson: II. Indeterminism and Dynamism", in *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, Vol. 8, No. 26 (1911), 714.

not happen. Nothing similar seems to occur with psychological facts and the actions of conscious subjects, on the contrary, says Bergson, “a more attentive psychology sometimes reveals to us effects which precede their causes”²⁵.

If, unlike what is here being postulated, that is, if, according to the determinist point of view, the self is identical with inert matter and does not change as time works through him, and if, in the same way, the multiple sentiments which are presented to consciousness remain unchanged, how is it that, according to the principle of causality, can there be any decision at all? No. What happens in deliberation is, rather, a constant enrichment; the self is modified as soon as he experiments the first option, and is already in a different state when he considers the second one, and so on; by extension, he changes the colouring of the option itself. In this way, the self must be faced as a dynamic series of interconnected moments and sentiments which interpenetrate themselves, mutually reinforcing each other as time passes through them.

Thus, the mechanist’s aprioristic resolution that “to a given antecedent corresponds one and one only possible act” cannot be applied to free conscious action. Let us evoke again our fictitious point A, imagining it travelling through a line which eventually bifurcates, our point having to decide between path B or path C. The determinist’s immediate question is if, having travelled that specific line and having opted for path B, our point could have or could have not chosen to travel path C. Now, the question is obviously absurd, for here the line must be taken as a mere symbol, and not as an image with a value of reality. The figure of the line is not activity, just like the travelled space does not represent movement -which would imply the representation of time through space-, the figure is a *thing*. It is not possible to visualize a progress in the inertia of a thing; nor is time a line through which we can wander with our eyes or travel with the soles of our feet -even if, as we have said, *as soon as time passes* it is possible to represent it spatially, as long as we understand that we are then speaking of a mathematized time and not of the time which elapses.

Furthermore, what happens in the pretense of predicting the outcome of the decision of our point A based on its precedent situation is a retroactive valuation: one attributes a certain value to the precedent condition based on what will happen consequently, meddling

²⁵ Henri Bergson, *Essai*, 121.

the action which one wants to predict in the initial situation of the point A. The precedent is taken in consideration from the point of view of the final act, which is not given in the moment of the prediction and being what one wants to predict. This *circulus in probando* derives, like all deterministic paralogisms, from the conception of time as space. Bergson, going even further, says that even the advocates of free-will fail in this aspect. They think like this: “the path is not yet traced out, therefore it may take any direction whatever”; to what one would answer: “you forget that it is not possible to speak of a path till the action is performed; but then it will have been traced out”. The determinists, on the other hand, say: “the path has been traced out in such and such a way; therefore its possible direction was not any direction whatever, but only this one direction”; to what one can reply: “before the path was traced out there was no direction, either possible or impossible, for the very simple reason that there could not yet be any question of a path”²⁶. To look for freedom in an act that is not or that could have been, is to look for shadows. Freedom has its place, rather, «in a certain shade of action».

4.- Life as evolution. consciousness and nature

Now that we have clarified the three cardinal notions which run through Bergson’s philosophy, we start to understand the majorly significant nature of the idea of fluxibility. An indistinct continuity, that is what characterizes the incessant flux of duration, the *mise-en-scène* of freedom, always safeguarded from the constraints of cartesianism and its derivatives²⁷. Indeed, what Descartes’s «continuous creation» proposes is a world which is reborn at every instant, replacing the precedent. In other words, in such a scenario there is only the presently present, since the past is annulled and does not prolong itself into what is actual. Now, nothing of the likes happens in duration, which is fundamentally *evolution* – that is, a progress from the past which constantly modifies the future, which intervenes at the peak of actuality and over which the present slides. From the point of view of time according to its representation, instead of the point of view of time according to its presentation, that is, in time represented as a collection of instants which mutually cancel each other, in cartesian time, it is not possible to think of nothing close to an evolution, which is the «distinctive trait of life»²⁸. Life implies an effective continuity, a network of

²⁶ Ibid., 139.

²⁷ Khafiz Kerimov, “Descartes, Bergson, and Continuous Creation”, in *Methodos*, vol. 18, 2018.

²⁸ Henri Bergson, *L’Évolution créatrice*, 24.

reciprocal influence between the past and the present, and, for that reason, constant organic creation stimulated by the struggle of two antagonistic tendencies²⁹.

Contrary to the cartesian conception, creation does not happen in reference to anything extrinsic to the flux of duration -unless in the sense that life emerges from a confrontation with the inert, the material, the inorganic, but it is not that «foreign» domain that gives it the impulse which propels the several vital sheafs. It is in the very interior of duration that the region of life is drawn: individualization and reproduction are two faces of that movement of reciprocal implication. In this way, again, as we have seen about the facts of consciousness, the laws that govern inert matter are, for Bergson, useless to the comprehension of any essentially vital properties of living beings. Neither the living being nor the background which is condition of possibility of its reality, neither one nor the other find their necessary ground in precedent states -of which is proof the very idea of interspecies transformism³⁰. Only artificial systems, like that of those of the astronomer and the chemist, closed in themselves, are ruled by such principles.

To the question can we go further and say that life, like conscious activity, is invention, is unceasing creation?, the answer is obviously affirmative. Rejecting both finalistic and teleological conceptions of nature -for, in the plan, everything is given beforehand, and creation is at its core entirely free, and for that reason unpredictable-, as well as rejecting the evolutionist theses in vogue at the time, like the one postulated by Spencer³¹, Bergson's philosophy offers to explain vital evolution as the product of an «explosive force», an impulse which he will call, as it is known, «élan vital». Thus, the evolutive movement is not taken as being of a linear nature, contrary to what occurs in most current biological theories, in which life is described as "a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon"³². On the contrary, says Bergson in the same page: "but it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst in their turn into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long".

²⁹ Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (Paris: Félix Alcan, 1937), 265-66.

³⁰ Peter J. Bowler, *Evolution: The History of an Idea* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 48-95.

³¹ Whom Bergson very much respected and admired. Henri Bergson, *La Pensée et le mouvant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1938), 2.

³² Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, 107.

What happens is that from these uninterrupted multiple explosions, we tend to apprehend just the fragments which are closer to us. This will inevitably happen as long as we deem it proficuous and adequate to use intelligence in order to capture life, which is essentially mobility, pure tension between contrary inclinations. "Intelligence is life as seen from the outsider, externalizing itself in relation to itself"³³ and for that reason it surprises itself when, facing the incessant movement of vital creation, it does not comprehend anything of what is going on. Intelligence, in contrast with instinct, has its center of attention in the inorganic, in discontinuity, its purpose is to represent and reconstitute with the what it has previously gathered -it is not made to deal with novelty and the unprecedented, both of which always escape intelligence³⁴. At bottom, the natural direction of intelligence always goes in the way of homogenizing rarefaction, which is, as we have observed, antagonistic to every conception of becoming, which is always novelty -never finished *thing*, but *qualitative progress*, pure mobility. Intelligence invents, and from invention emerges industry, but it does not apprehend the sprouting or the creativity from which invention results. Therefore, "intelligence is characterized by a natural incomprehension of life"³⁵, life meaning movement and creative evolution.

Instinct, on the other hand, "is shaped in the very form of life" and "proceeds, if we might put it this way, organically". Being inassimilable to intelligence, instinct is fundamentally ineffable and inexpressible in terms of pure understanding, even though it does not, for that reason, fall outside the limits of thought. The yellow-winged SpheX stings the cricket because it «knows» -instinct is a peculiar form of knowledge³⁶ -that the cricket has three central nerve-centres which serve its three pairs of legs, or at least seems to know it. "Everything happens *as if* the larva of the Sitaris, from the moment it was hatched, knew that the male Anthophora would first emerge from the passage; that the nuptial flight would give it the means of conveying itself to the female, who would take it to a store of honey sufficient to feed it after its

³³ Ibid., 175.

³⁴ ³⁴ Cf. Paola Marrati, "Time, Life, Concepts: The Newness of Bergson", in *MLN*, Vol. 120, No. 5, Comparative Literature Issue (Dec., 2005), 1099-1111.

³⁵ Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, 179.

³⁶ Bergson's «instinct», in this aspect, shares a lot of similarities with the pascalian notions of «coeur» and «instinct» - even though the instinct of Pascal derives, as its known, from a divine inscription. However, both are peculiar modes of accessing reality, contrasting, in Bergson, with «intelligence», and, in Pascal, with «raison». Thomas Parker, *Volition, Rhetoric, and Emotion in the Work of Pascal* (Routledge, 2007), 162. Philipp Sellier, *Pascal et saint Augustin* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1970), 46. Denis Rosenfield, *Métaphysique et raison moderne* (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1997), 273.

transformation³⁷. Instinct is, therefore, a kind of implicit knowledge which is manifested in a field of action, instead of internally revolving itself and thus transforming into a consciousness. The attempt at comprehending the form of instinctive knowledge of the Sphex or the larva of Sitaris is destined to fail if we have the ambition of translating it to the language of intelligence. Equating the Sphex to the entomologist, we will think that the Sphex knows the cricket just like the entomologist knows a beetle, that is, from outside, without any vital interest, *partim partim* – while the Sphex's knowledge has the form of *συμπάθεια*, of *sympathy*.

In fact, instinct, contrary to intelligence, apprehends life from within, through an intuitive movement of divination, whose core is entirely vital, turned towards activity and action. Intelligence moves in the realm of representation, of relations between points of space, it is more in tune with the already done than with what is being made and mainly with the act itself, the very mobility of action. This means that intelligence and instinct, being radically distinct forms of knowledge, constitute divergent forms of facing one same problem -it does not imply the rejection of one in favor of the other. In fact, instinct itself also does not give us the «key to vital operations», since it does not extend its domain to encompass life as such. As it happens with the indivisible flux of creative evolution, in which the current of movement hits off matter and the inert, from there resulting organization, also the subject's life is guided by these two poles of meaning, intelligence and instinct.

Thus, even though both intelligence and instinct are two kinds of knowledge, the first a more conscious kind and the second a less thought-out kind of knowledge, less conscious (in the sense of a consciousness that is annulled by activity, and not of a null consciousness, like that of a rock), yet, intuition can only take us to the acknowledgment that nature is not defined categorically by its unity or by its multiplicity; that, while identical to consciousness which manifests itself in pure duration, it is characterized by its free and unpredictable flexibility, and that, like consciousness, it is more quality than quantity, but also that, as the wellspring of existence, of where every thing emanates and of which they are only an aspect, nature is still a mystery -worthy of being admired by the act of thought, but whose essence remains inaccessible.

³⁷ Henri Bergson, *L'Évolution créatrice*, 158.

From the future we can only predict what resembles the past – that is the world of the chemist and the astronomer as such; from the contemplation of the eternal *fiat* of movement, without which extension is annulled, from the coexistence of creation, relation of relations, can only be expected the exaltation of mysticism -like in every plunge into a reality which amplifies humanity. We will imagine, then, with Leonardo Coimbra, so much influenced by bergsonian philosophy in its multiple forms, that all things speak and that our inability to comprehend what they say results from our faulty ears; but also that it may be possible to listen to a new song, the «conversation of all things»³⁸, not through a formalistic cataloguing, but through the synchronization with the primordial reality of the bergsonian world, Time, which is action, for, just like life emerges out of the clash of the primitive *élan* with matter, we too fulfill ourselves through action, which is only effective through space inside time.

³⁸ Leonardo Coimbra, *A Alegria, a Dor e a Graça* (Porto, Livraria Tavares Martins, 1956), 89.

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