

## Deleuze's Bergson (Part I)

**Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York: Zone, 1991.**

Bergsonism: Intuition as Method

Intuition as method entails: 1. stating and creating problems; 2. discovery of genuine differences in kind; 3. apprehension of real time (duration) (14).

First rule: Apply the test of true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile truth and creation at the level of problems (15).

We are wrong to believe that true and false only refer to solutions—the Schoolmaster gives problems that we are forced to solve, but the true freedom lies in a power to decide and constitute problems themselves (15).

For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated [This sounds close to Wittgenstein and language-games] (15).

Discovery vs. invention—we must invent new ways of posing the problem (15).

The solution is what counts, but problems have the solutions they deserve depending on the terms in which they are stated (16).

The history of man is theoretically and practically the construction of problems (16).

Becoming conscious of that activity is like the conquest of freedom (16).

Complementary rule #1: False problems are of two sorts: 'nonexistent problems' that arise from the confusion of the 'more' and the 'less'; and 'badly stated' questions, so defined because their terms represent badly analyzed composites (17).

Bergson's analyses are famous:

In the first case, they consist in showing that there is not less, but more in the idea of nonbeing than that of being, in disorder than in order, in the possible than in the real. In the idea of nonbeing there is in fact the idea of being, plus a logical operation of generalized negation, plus the particular psychological motive for the operation (such as when a being does not correspond to our expectation and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us) (17)

[This quote reminds me of Sartre's Being and Nothingness.]

Again, Bergson complains:

We mistake the more for the less, we behave as though nonbeing existed before being, disorder before order and the possible before existence. As though being came to fill a void, order to organize a preceding disorder, the real to realize a primary possibility. Being, order or the existent are truth itself; but in the false problem there is a fundamental illusion, a 'retrograde movement of the true,' according to which being, order and the existent are supposed to precede themselves, or to precede the creative act that constitutes them, by projecting an image of themselves back into a possibility, a disorder, a nonbeing which are supposed to be primordial. This theme is a central one in Bergson's philosophy: It sums up his critique of the negative and of negation, in all its forms as sources of false problems (18). What Bergson will come to critique again and again is the determination to reduce quality to quantity, difference in kind to difference in degree:

Here again, Bergson's analyses are famous: for example, the one in which he condemns intensity as such a composite. Whether the quality of the sensation is confused with the muscular space that corresponds to it, or with the quantity of the physical cause that produces it, the notion of intensity

involves an impure mixture between determinations that differ in kind, so that the question ‘by how much does the sensation grow?’ always goes back to a badly stated problem. Likewise the problem of freedom, in which two types of ‘multiplicity’ are confused: that of terms juxtaposed in space and that of states which merge together in duration (18-19).

Negation is not added to the action but indicates a half-willing; negation is not added to what it denies but only indicates a weakness in the person who denies (19).

There are two or more irreducible orders (organism/mechanism) and problems arise when we retain only a general idea of order [rather than coextensive, coexisting orders] (19).

Thus the idea of disorder emerges from the idea of order as a badly analyzed composite (20).

Seeing nothing but difference in degree where there are differences in kind is the error common to science and metaphysics (20).

The illusion of false problems arises from Kant’s assertion that reason engenders not mistakes but illusions deep within itself for thousands of years (20).

Thus, in many ways we cannot dispel these illusions, only repress them (21).

The intelligence states problems in general, the instinct is the faculty for finding solutions, but only intuition as method distinguishes between true and false problems, even if this means driving the intelligence to turn against itself (21).

Second Rule: struggle against illusion: find true differences in kind or the articulations of the real (21).

Intuition as method is similar to Platonic division (22).

We mix space and time creating 4-dimensions, but we are unable to separate duration and extensity: same problem with perception—memory (22).

Intuition as method is similar to transcendental analysis: however, Intuition focuses on the conditions of the real and not with possible experiences (23).

Deleuze writes:

His fundamental criticism of metaphysics is that it sees differences in degree between a spatialized time and an eternity which it assumes to be primary (time as deterioration, relaxation or diminution of being...): All beings are defined on a scale of intensity, between the two extremes of perfection and nothingness. But he directs a similar criticism at science; there is no definition of mechanism other than that which invokes a spatialized time, according to which beings no longer present anything but differences of degree, of position, of proportion (23).

The brain does not manufacture representations, but only complicates the relationship between a received movement (excitation) and an executed movement (response) (24).

We only take from the object what interests us, and so we get not the object plus something, but the object minus something (24-25).

We perceive things where they are, perception puts us at once into matter, is impersonal, and coincides with the perceived object (25).

There cannot be a difference in kind between the faculty of the brain and the function of the core, between perception of matter and matter itself (25).

Affectivity gives the subject volume in space (beyond being simply a point). Recollections of memory link instants together and interpolate the past in the present. Memory again, in the form of a contraction of matter that makes the body something other than an instantaneous point, gives it a quality through duration (26).

Affectivity—recollection-memory—contraction-memory [let’s try to think these three together with connective—disjunctive—conjunctive (production, recording, consumption)].

Representation takes two directions that differ in kind—perception that puts us at once in matter and memory that puts us at once in mind (26).

Intuition allows us to go beyond the state of experience to the conditions of real experience: Intuition leads us to go beyond the state of experience toward the conditions of experience...Bergson speaks of going "to seek experience at its source, or rather above that decisive turn, where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly human experience." Above the turn is precisely the point at which we finally discover differences in kind. But there are so many difficulties in trying to reach this focal point that the acts of intuition, which are apparently contradictory, have to be multiplied. Bergson, thus, sometimes speaks of a movement that is exactly appropriate to the experience, sometimes a broadening out, sometimes a tightening and narrowing. For, in the first place, the determination of each 'line' involves a sort of contradiction in which apparently diverse facts are grouped according to their natural affinities, drawn together according to their articulation. But, on the other hand, we push each line beyond the turn, to the point where it goes beyond our experience: an extraordinary broadening out that forces us to think a pure perception identical to the whole of matter, a pure memory identical to the totality of the past. It is in this sense that Bergson on several occasions compares the approach of philosophy to the procedure of infinitesimal calculus: When we have benefited in experience from a little light which shows us a line of articulation, all that remains is to extend it beyond experience—just as mathematicians reconstitute, with the infinitely small elements that they perceive of the real curve, 'the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them' (27). The point is to open us up to the inhuman and the superhuman (durations which are inferior or superior to our own); to go beyond the human condition (28). Real experience deals with pure percepts, and not with concepts (28).

Deleuze writes:

After we have followed the lines of divergence beyond the turn, these lines must intersect again, not at the point from which we started, but rather at a virtual point, at a virtual image of the point of departure, which is itself located beyond the turn in experience; and which finally gives us the sufficient reason of the thing, the sufficient reason of the composite, the sufficient reason of the point of departure. So that the expression 'beyond the decisive turn' has two meanings: First, it denotes the moment when the lines, setting out from an uncertain common point given in experience, diverge increasingly according to the differences in kind. Then, it denotes another moment when these lines converge again to give us this time the virtual image or the distinct reason of the common point. Turn and return. Dualism is therefore only a moment, which must lead to the re-formation of a monism. This is why, after the broadening out, a final narrowing follows, just as integration follows differentiation. 'We have alluded elsewhere to those lines of fact, each one indicating but the direction of truth, because it does not go far enough: Truth itself, however, will be reached if two of them can be prolonged to the point where they intersect...In our opinion this method of intersection is the only one that can bring about a decisive advance in metaphysics' (28-29).

Complementary rule #2: The real is not only that which is cut out (se decoupe) according to natural articulations or differences in kind; it is also that which intersects again (se recoupe) along paths converging toward the same ideal or virtual point (29).

Discussion of the problem of the immortality of the soul: this tends to be solved by a convergence of two different lines: that of an experience of memory and that of a quite different, mystical, experience (30).

The three lines that converge to form consciousness are even more complex: we must consider these lines as having qualities—thus a qualitative probabilism. In order to understand the disarticulations of the real, we need to constitute a superior empiricism that is able to extend the lines beyond their turning points—conversely, in order to create a superior probabilism, we have to plot the lines that converge in the creation of true and false problems (30) [This last part is the vaguest in the first chapter, and so it

needs a lot of unpacking—what does the dualism empiricism/probabilism produce?].

Third rule: State problems and solve them in terms of time rather than of space (31).

All the other dualisms of Bergson resonate with a primary dualism: duration/space (31).

Deleuze writes:

The division occurs between (1) duration, which ‘tends’ for its part to take on or bear all the differences in kind (because it is endowed with the power of qualitatively varying with itself), and (2) space, which never presents anything but differences of degree (since it is quantitative homogeneity) (31).

Thus there is not a qualitative division: the qualitative difference is entirely on one side (31).

Deleuze again: “on the one hand, the aspect of space, by which the thing can only ever differ in degree from other things and from itself (augmentation, diminution); and on the other hand, the aspect of duration, by which the thing differs in kind from all others and from itself (alteration) (31).

We must wait for the sugar to dissolve (in terms of Duration) to understand the alterations it undergoes as constituting its essence (32).

There are no differences in kind except in duration—while space is nothing other than the location, the environment, the totality of differences in degree (32).

Intuition is not duration itself. Intuition is rather the movement by which we emerge from our own duration, by which we make use of our own duration to affirm and immediately to recognize the existence of other durations, above or below us (33) [It is this notion of other durations, of a coexistence and coextension that traverses different modes of time or duration (thinking across ‘epochs’ or ‘ages’: Renaissance to Classicism to Romanticism to Victorianism to Modernism to Postmodernism all are unstable de/reterritorializations, and we also have to consider the coexistence of trends such as Dadaism, Futurism, Impressionism, etc.)].

Deleuze writes:

There are very varied general ideas that themselves differ in kind, some referring to objective resemblances in living bodies, others to objective resemblances in inanimate bodies, others to objective identities in inanimate bodies, and others again to subjective demands in manufactured objects. But we are quick to form a general idea of all general ideas and to dissolve differences in kind in this element of generality (33).

Deleuze on Bergson:

The two major aspects of his evolution are the following: Duration seemed to him to be less and less reducible to a psychological experience and became instead the variable essence of things, providing the theme of a complex ontology... The absolute, said Bergson, has two sides (aspects): spirit imbued with metaphysics and matter known by science... science is part of ontology, it is one of ontology’s two halves... If the illusion can be repressed it is because of that other slope, that of duration, which gives us differences in kind corresponding in the final instance to differences of proportion as they appear in space, and already in matter and extension (35).

Problematizing method (a critique of false problems and the invention of genuine ones)

Differentiating (carving out and intersections)

Temporalizing (thinking in terms of duration)

## **Bergsonism, or Philosophy of Sub- and Superhuman Durations**

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*Bergson on several occasions compares the approach of philosophy to the procedure of infinitesimal calculus: When we have benefited in experience from a little light which shows us a line of articulation, all that remains is to extend it beyond experience—just as mathematicians reconstitute, with the infinitely small elements that they perceive of the real curve, ‘the curve itself stretching out into the darkness behind them.’ In any case, Bergson is not one of those philosophers who ascribes a properly human wisdom and equilibrium to philosophy. To open us up to the inhuman and the superhuman (durations which are inferior or superior to our own), to go beyond the human condition: This is the meaning of philosophy, in so far as our condition condemns us to live among badly analyzed composites, and to be badly analyzed composites ourselves (Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism* pg 27-28).*

Deleuze’s project in *Bergsonism* is to render a systematic understanding of Bergson’s concepts in their interrelations. Of course, this book is an experiment in philosophical buggery, and so there is a clear Deleuzian ring to it. There is much in here that is strictly related to Deleuze’s project, but in itself it still retains a lot of theoretical value and stands as a concise and intriguing reading of Bergson. The first chapter on intuition as method lays out clearly Bergson’s project in three moves: (1) state and create problems; (2) discover the genuine differences in *kind*; (3) apprehend time in its reality as duration. To construct this method in its rigor, we must set out some rules as we go along.

*Rule #1:* Apply the test of true and false to problems themselves. Condemn false problems and reconcile truth and creation at the level of problems (15).

Like Bachelard’s insights in *The Formation of the Scientific Mind*, Bergson argues that true and false are always unsuccessfully applied to solutions because it is the figure of the schoolmaster who gives the problems with presupposed answers. It is in this sense that true freedom lies in a power to decide and constitute problems themselves. Properly stating a speculative problem is the first step to solving it, in the same way that problems get the solutions they deserve based on how well they are formulated.

This line of argumentation is so fundamental to Bergson’s project that he will claim that the history of mankind revolves theoretically and practically around the construction of problems. Becoming conscious of this activity is the undertaking of a conquest of freedom. The goal is not to discover problems, for to *discover* something is the same as saying that it has always already been there *in actuality*. The truly creative aspect of thinking confronts the task of *inventing* new ways of posing the problem, for invention is an actualization of a reality that could have always remained only *potential* in nature.

*Complementary Rule #1:* There are two types of false problems: ‘nonexistent problems’ that arise from the confusion of the ‘more’ and the ‘less;’ and ‘badly stated’ questions, so defined because their terms represent badly analyzed composites (17).

*To illustrate the first kind of problem Bergson cites the problems of nonbeing, of disorder or of the possible (the problems of knowledge and being)...His analyses...consist in showing that there is not less,*

*but more in the idea of nonbeing than that of being, in disorder than in order, in the possible than in the real. In the idea of nonbeing there is in fact the idea of being, plus a logical operation of generalized negation, plus the particular psychological motive for that operation (such as when a being does not correspond to our expectation and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us) (17).*

Bergson here critiques the common understanding of negation because it automatically assumes that nonbeing is quantitatively less than being or that disorder less than order, when in fact these questions are misdirected. He argues that this type of false problem involves a fundamental illusion wherein being, order, and the existent are thought to precede themselves and “project an image of themselves back into a possibility, a disorder, a nonbeing which are supposed to be primordial” (18). Therefore, questions like “Why is there something rather than nothing?” or “Why is there order rather than disorder?” or “Why is there this rather than that (when that was equally possible)?” are false problems because they assume that the negative types pre-exist the positive, as though nonbeing existed before being or the momentary void before the self-generation of God (which contradicts ‘Its’ perfection, theologically and non-anthropomorphically speaking).

The fallacy of the ‘more’ and ‘less’ plagues the simple binary opposition of order/disorder. The reason why this embroils the intellect in false problems is because two or more irreducible orders (mechanism/organism) have been reduced to a general idea of order. But there is no order-in-general just as there is no order-in-itself. This illusion emerges whenever a variety of general ideas are reduced to a general idea encompassing all general ideas. Put another way, the common error of science and metaphysics is to see nothing but *differences in degree* (quantity) where there are actually only *differences in kind* (quality). Thus the idea of disorder emerges from the idea of order as a badly analyzed composite, and so the first type of false problem of the ‘more’ and ‘less’ can be considered as a special example of the question of badly analyzed composites.

Like in Kantian critical philosophy, these illusions are due to reason’s own prejudice, so they can not in themselves be removed, only repressed (21). So if the intelligence is the faculty that *states problems in general*, and the instinct is the faculty that *finds solutions*, the role of intuition can be best described as a method that distinguishes between true and false problems, even if this means driving the intellect to turn against itself (21).

*Rule #2: Struggle against illusion, rediscover true differences in kind or articulations of the real.*

With the advent of the theories of relativity in physics, we are quick to mix space and time, constructing a four-dimensional [1] reality. But we find ourselves unable to separate duration from extensity or perception from memory. Intuition focuses on the condition of real (instead of possible) experiences, and this is why it has an obsession with the *pure* as it is constituted by differences in kind. One question of difference in kind arises in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*. Bergson stresses that the body nor the brain are the generating cause behind the faculty of representation; instead, both are involved in a complication of the relationship between a received movement (excitation) and an executed movement (response) (24). Moreover, the brain is not responsible for our representations because it is just another image along with the stimuli in our nervous system and the external world (matter itself being the aggregate of images in their totality). There is no difference in kind between the brain and the body, both are images, and the perception of matter is not different in kind than matter itself (25).

The body's responsiveness/affectivity gives the subject volume in space insofar as recollections form in memory and link instants together through a conservation of the past in the present. Through a selection of these recollections, memory takes on another form (contraction-memory) by contracting the *matter* or images that gives the body something other than an instantaneous point through duration and the conjunction of two types of memory (double articulation of memory: *re-collecting* or assembling fragments and contraction through stabilized *reconnection*).

*Complementary Rule# 2:* The real is not only that which is cut out according to natural articulations or differences in kind: it is also that which intersects again along paths converging toward the same ideal or virtual point (29).

This is because duration is not a psychological experience. It is the variable essence of things and is the theme of a complex ontology (34). This ontology is made of two halves: science and metaphysics. Science and metaphysics correspond to the divide between difference in degree and in kind.

*Rule #3:* State and solve problems in terms of time rather than space.

In its homogeneity, space is nothing but difference in degree, whereas duration takes on all differences in kind because it has the power to qualitatively vary with itself. Thus for Bergson, the qualitative differences *are only on the side of time*. In space, there is only the ability to diminish or enlarge things—in time, a thing differs from all other things, most of all itself. Alteration is the essence of the individual being in relation to duration (we must wait for sugar to dissolve, as Bergson says). We must wait for a change, because our impatience contrasts with other durations that form a rhythm with mine.

Intuition is not duration but the means by which we emerge from our duration and affirm other durations, above and below us. For inferior and superior durations are not simply quantitative, they are differences in kind. This means that the singular durations are themselves different in kind, and so another individual's becoming impinges on my duration and a falling-in-and-out-of-step ensues.

Does this mean that humanity can be characterized by its polyphonic harmonies, its syncopated beats, its (war)drum solos? What sort of rhythm and conjunction of durations does it take to through the individual out-of-step with humanity (to either sub- or super-human ends)?

1. Whitehead's really quick to do this, especially in *The Concept of Nature* published in 1919. There are a number of criticisms that Whitehead levels against Bergson, as well as some positive remarks. However, by the mid-30s in *Adventures of Ideas*, Whitehead warns us that Nietzsche and Bergson are the two primary negative forces of anti-intellectualism plaguing American philosophy (287). This reaction seems quite arbitrary but can readily be explained: Whitehead sees Bergson as a worthy adversary insofar as he represents the philosopher most capable of resonating systematically with the cosmological implications of the theory of relativity. On the other hand, I would wager that Russell influenced Whitehead's conception of Nietzsche (Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* levies a gross misrepresentation of Nietzsche and constitutes probably the most critical and bitter part of the whole book).

–Taylor Adkins