

HENRI BERGSON
The Violence Of Intuition

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Introduction

Who Is Henri Bergson?

Taking the first step towards understanding the transcendental empiricism of Bergson is in many ways a hazardous one. Confronted by a body of work comprising philosophical topics diverse as the nature of perception, energy and matter, morality and religion, comedy, intuition, just to name a few, put forward in a, at first sight, haphazard structure, one is not to blame for a slight feeling of vertigo. At stake throughout his works is a radical claim for renewal of metaphysical structures and a mapping of how to acquire valid knowledge as such about the empirical world we live in.

One wonders where Bergson got his incentive for trying to re-mould metaphysics onto a completely empirical model leading him to develop novel methods that would be able to manifest the vision of his particular metaphysics. In an attempt to re-trace his thought throughout the history of philosophy one finds influences of Félix Ravaisson, Jules Lachelier along with his fascination for Spencer's evolutionist theories, further onto Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza and Kant.¹ In the same manner a re-tracing of the historical facts and intellectual landscape of his contemporaries might bring further clarity. Perhaps his upbringing in France and England predisposed him towards a transcendental inclination on the one hand and an empirical on the other. Maybe because he lived through the *semaine sanglante* under the rule of the Paris Commune during the early 20th century he was made so prone to reject any kind of idealism.² Taking all these matters of facts into account will we be able to get any closer to the philosophical core of Bergson? Is the history of philosophy and the time he was living in constitutive parts of his philosophy, or is Bergson trying to say something that might have been expressed regardless of the time or preceding philosophical minds? At a lecture given 1911 in Bologna Bergson addressed this question, not in regards to himself, but towards other philosophers. The

¹ For discussion on Spencer and Ravaisson see: Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans., Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Dover Publications, 2007), 2 and 187-216 respectively. On Aristotle, Descartes, Spinoza, Kant and more on Spencer see: Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans., Arthur Mitchell (New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 315-363.

² For more detailed introduction on Bergson and his life see: F.C.T Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-13.

issue at hand being what he called ‘philosophical intuition’ he turned his attention to Spinoza:

[B]ehind the heavy mass of concepts of Cartesian and Aristotelian parentage, is that intuition which is Spinoza’s, an intuition which no formula, no matter how simple, can be simple enough to express [...] the closer we get to this original intuition the better we understand that if Spinoza had lived before Descartes he would doubtless have written something other than what he wrote, but that given Spinoza living and writing, we were certain to have Spinozism in any case.³

On the question of who Henri Bergson is – we, of course, cannot know, at best, all we can search for is that very particular philosophical intuition which he is trying to convey through his complex writings. To do that one needs to keep in mind that it is not us as readers standing in the way of understanding or contextualizing his main areas of thought, it is Bergson standing in the way, not only of us, but first and foremost of himself. Bearing this in mind one could still contend, on Bergson’s terms, that regardless of his inspiration from evolutionism, pragmatism or mysticism, Bergsonism would still be a vital part of our philosophical heritage today.

Philosophically Where?

In commentaries on his work we are time and time again met with sentiments such as ‘relevant today’, ‘to reintroduce’, ‘forgotten’, ‘our contemporary’ and so on.⁴ The commentaries seem to reveal a certain ambiguity towards how and where to situate his philosophy along with a sense of his writings having now come of age and should, to us contemporary citizens, act somewhat revelatory. One explanation to this is Suzanne Guerlac’s suggestion that a certain resurgence of Bergson came about with the English translation of Gilles Deleuze’s book *Bergsonism* by the end of the 1980’s, but that it also, to a certain extent, had detrimental effects as to how Bergson would come to be read. Instead of gaining original insights through the primary works of Bergson many took recourse through Deleuze to enter into Bergson creating a pseudo-

³ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 92-93.

⁴ See Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backward.*, John Mullarkey, ed., *The New Bergson*, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999)., and John Mullarkey, *Bergson And Philosophy*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999).

bergsonism marked with a Deleuzian stamp.⁵ That, today, seems even more probable taking into account the rapid expansion the scene of cultural theory is experiencing on which Deleuze, among others, is taking centre stage. Not only in academic circles is this happening but also in the field of performing arts where theory and practice is a hot topic for various artistic disciplines.⁶

This is also something I will try to avoid to the best of my abilities. For that reason I will stay clear of engaging in an ‘already full’ interpretation of Bergson. Another kind of ‘fullness’ that will be harder to avoid is that which is already present in Bergson’s own writing, namely the attempt to express somebody else’s meaning and in so doing ‘muddle the water’:

If I wish to explain to someone who does not know Greek the simple impression that a line of Homer leaves upon me, I shall give the translation of the line, then comment on my translation, then I shall develop my commentary, and from explanation to explanation I shall get closer to what I wish to express; but I shall never quite reach it.⁷

This phenomenon informs our reading of him problematic. Not only do we as readers make a rendition of his words, Bergson himself makes a rendition of himself through the process of translating his thoughts into words on paper. This movement of translation will constitute his antithesis of the method of intuition, namely analysis.

With this in mind I will begin my discussion by focusing, in part I, on what precision means for Bergson’s philosophical method. This will lead me straight into the heart of his philosophy where intuition will be juxtaposed to analysis, followed by a search for the vehicle wherein intuition might take place, namely duration and the self, all of which will run through parts II and III. In part IV the pace will be halted to give space for critical reflections on what consequences we are faced with due to his core concepts hitherto discussed, focusing on the possibility of novelty and creation. Finally, in section V and VI, I will engage in a brief discussion on Bergson’s view of the unconscious opposed to that of Ernst Bloch. Despite the fact that the two thinkers are in many ways diametrically opposed to one another; Bloch being a literary heir to

⁵ Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking In Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 173-175.

⁶ This is especially seen in a vast amount of cultural networks online, such as, *PERFmts*, *The Disagree*, *PAF* etc.

⁷ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 135.

Marx hence applying a materialistic-dialectical view on metaphysics, and Bergson approaching from a transcendental empiricist view on metaphysics, they nevertheless have similarities in their view on philosophy as process oriented.

The Blochian notion of the Not-Yet-Conscious together with one of its constituent characteristics, ‘incubation’, will ground the search for how novelty might show itself through the method of intuition, and how that novelty is shaped. By confronting the overtly positive attitude of Bergson with the notions of Net-Yet-Conscious and incubation a more violent process of intuition will emerge which lay hidden in a Bergsonian universe. Those violent processes, I will argue, are not only to be welcomed into the positivity of his thought, but are actual prerequisites for any novelty to spring forth via the method of intuition.

I. Precision

Bergson introduces his work in *The Creative Mind* with a discussion on precision and its role in philosophy. Up until now, he claims, the most fundamental lack in the creation of philosophical systems has been the inability to narrow down a subject matter to actually be concerned with the world we live in.⁸ The world we live in is a world that has contingent facts which needs to be taken into consideration, even if we take them for granted, for they are necessary constituents of our reality. Those contingent facts range from the simple notion that we live alongside plants, to that we walk upright and have the ability to dream.⁹ This kind of reasoning leads Bergson to question the possible development of a satisfactory theory that is precise enough to only include the objects of this world, i.e. a philosophy rooted in the experienced world.

The only explanation we should accept as satisfactory is one which fits tightly to its object, with no space between them, no crevice in which any other explanation might equally well be lodged: on which fits the object only and to which alone the object lends itself.¹⁰

⁸ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 1.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

This precision based on subject-matter Bergson sees present in the natural sciences and begins to reflect upon how, and if, such a model can be created within the domain of philosophy.

On the same issue F.C.T Moore in *Bergson: Thinking Backwards* contrasts the quest for precision in Bergson with that of Descartes. The comparison shows that, while Descartes was searching for a set of rules upon which all philosophical reasoning could be based, his conclusion conforms to two traits; it is formal and analytical. Formal due to the set of rules and analytic because of the method a set of rules imply.¹¹ Moore goes on to show that even if Descartes' precision has its advantages it could be problematic when discussing an object in disregard of its animate or inanimate state by referring to Aristotle's example of the severed finger.¹² Aristotle claimed that a severed finger is not a finger per se since its function is different when still attached to a hand even if the severed finger and the attached finger has the exact same anatomical structure.¹³ As an analogue example Moore mentions Bergson's discussion of a melody and whether one can still say that it is a melody if one would only take recourse to its structure, the notes, by way of explaining the melody. What seems to be at stake is the same as in the severed finger; the notes alone will not make up the melody, only when played as a whole will the melody be a melody. What is being omitted in a Cartesian precision is the living organism, or being of a whole, instead focusing on an analysis of parts, while Bergson is trying to find a way through precision that does not merely analyse but that will be able to grasp all aspects of any subject-matter.

For Moore the historical example of precision in Descartes aims at showing the novelty of Bergson's view on science, subject-matter, and its role in metaphysics. To take Moore's argument further it seems that one does not merely have to look at the rules by which Descartes put forward but to look deeper into his view on the role of metaphysics as such. Descartes, in the height of the scientific revolution of the 17th century, not only had a very restricted view on metaphysics but saw it as something one should not delve into at large for fear of getting lost in questions which are not of any practical use. I think we can contend that Bergson would agree with such a view on the grounds that metaphysics claims to cover all areas of abstract knowledge.

¹¹ Moore, *Bergson*, 14-15.

¹² *Ibid.*, 15.

¹³ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 1035^b 23-5: "A finger cannot in every state be a part of a living animal; for the dead finger has only the name in common with the living one."

Nevertheless, as we know, Descartes does not exclude absolute knowledge, he simply, from the hyperbolic doubt in the third meditation, retracts back into the positing of God's existence as overpowering human reason which in turn acts as incentive for him to develop the philosophical areas which human reason can claim to know something about.¹⁴ This attitude safeguards Descartes from having to question why metaphysics only deals with abstract notions which have a tendency to fall into relative conclusions (by the human intellect) which is what Bergson in turn will question.

Bearing in mind the distinction between parts and wholes will enable us to unfold how metaphysics relies on a precision found only through the method of intuition in Bergson.

2. Intuition and Analysis

2.1 Ways Of Seeing

To make an attempt at unravelling what intuition means for Bergson one first has to define two ways of seeing.

The first way of seeing would be to try and look at an object from different points of view. I might move around it, look beneath it and inspect it via different angles allowing me to derive some truth of the object. Likewise if I stay still and the object moves around me I will attain different angles of knowledge. By perceiving an object outside of myself I seem to be putting it in relation to both myself and other things around it. I, as Bergson calls it, "interpret it according to symbols".¹⁵

If, instead, I were to use the second way of seeing and by so doing adopt a viewpoint from inside the object I would not have to depend on an external point of view. By disregarding an external point of view the possibility arises of entering into an act of "imagination" in which I could follow the movement of the object as it undergoes changes of states, or "states of soul" as Bergson describes it. This, then, if possible, would let me know something absolutely. So far, we have two ways of

¹⁴ Rene Descartes, *Meditations On First Philosophy*, transl. John Cottingham, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 25: "And since I have no cause to think that there is a deceiving God, and I do not yet even know for sure whether there is a God at all, any reason for doubt which depends simply on this supposition is a very slight and, so to speak, metaphysical one."

¹⁵ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 133.

seeing, one of which I put myself, and the surrounding, in relation to the object, and another whence I coincide with the object.¹⁶

To illustrate further this point of seeing(s) Bergson recalls the complexity of a fictitious character.¹⁷ Conjured up by the fancies of an imaginative author one could easily get an image of how a character acts. Perhaps he, the character, is grotesquely huge, with large feet, voluptuous arms and dark eyes. Maybe he cries when he ponders on how many blades of grass there are in the world and secretly desires to be as proud as the rooster he sees running after the hen. All the things an author might ascribe to him in order for the reader to know him better, all different points of views, will still render the elusiveness of his actual being further and further into darkness.

If instead by imagination one would coincide with that man all his actions, desires and feelings would no longer be a succession of events but a constant movement giving me a simple insight of him. One would know him absolutely and all details that one had read about would seem superfluous from the inside point of view.

2.2 Absolute As Perfection

The way of seeing which is an absolute, or, in other words, one's coinciding with an object, could then be called perfect. Or, in Bergson's own words, "the absolute is perfect in that it is perfectly what it is."¹⁸ While all the shades of a character add up to a personage it remains imperfect in that it is not self-contained. The absolute, on the other hand, is like the sphere was for the Greeks. It is the most perfect of forms; it is absolutely what it is.¹⁹

Yet, what is the difference between an infinite and an absolute?²⁰ Again, a difference of focus seems to be at play. While perfect is wholly contained, as when I turn my head from right to left and perceive it from my absolute point of view, the infinite seems to always add more to its infinity. That is, if you were to look at me while I turn my head, you could intersect my going from looking to my right to my

¹⁶ Ibid., 133-134.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid., 135.

¹⁹ The play on words are merely figurative. For Bergson there is no easy relation to the Ancients, and it is not to be taken literally that the Bergsonian absolute in any way is analogous to the Ancient view of absolute nor to Parmenides' notion of 'circle' and 'what is'.

²⁰ Ibid.

left and claim that it passes through several points. Hence, the points could go on in infinity, while my inner turning would be perfect in that it is perfectly what it is following its trajectory from right to left. Bergson, therefore, takes caution in confusing the two and clearly distinguishes them from one another.

The distinction also makes it clear that if one speaks of absolute knowledge as perfect it does not necessarily entail that what is being known is perfect. It is only the knowledge from inside that carries the stamp of perfection. However, it does raise the question of how something can be perfectly what it is without being static, or in other words, only fitting one form – the perfect form. We will return to this later.

2.3 Two Methods

Having discussed the differences between seeing as relative as opposed to absolute it still remains ambiguous how one might attain knowledge from perception. In other words what or which method(s) does one need to reach these insights?

Looking at the relative knowledge, which by virtue of its being known through a reflection of many sides, would yield forth through the method of analysis, while the absolute is a simple and perfect knowledge, it can only be grasped via an intuition. For Bergson intuition becomes the method one uses when one ‘sympathizes’ with an object and what gives way for the ‘inexpressible’ in an object.²¹ Analysis becomes its contrary by explaining an object in concepts that is similar to it and other things. It becomes a movement of translation of symbols.

We have, in short, two opposing methods; an infinite analysis and a simple, absolute, act of intuition. Analysis, because of its nature, is what pushes forward the natural sciences. It deals with symbols and measure, leaving room for what Bergson would consider imprecision. Intuition on the other hand wants to get rid of symbols and is, for Bergson, the method by which one can know being absolutely. It also acts as the only method whence a new creation might emerge from. That new creation, possible only through intuition, relies on a precision found in knowing the absolute of each thing. It is, in other words, that which enables metaphysics.²²

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid., 136.

3. Duration and The Self

So far intuition and analysis as methods of knowledge have been established but the ambiguity remains. How can I know reality from inside? Are different ways of seeing all there is to it? Bergson bids us to start with ourselves. To start with what we, at least, can call an absolute knowledge: the knowledge of ourselves.

When I perceive myself I do so absolutely. I am given to myself at once without any means of analysis. This self which am I subsists through time and I identify with it completely, a movement Bergson calls “sympathize with spiritually.”²³

According to Bergson this must be our starting point for an investigation of intuition; the self that subsists through time.

Bergson finds two things that define the viewpoint of internal consciousness. Firstly, the consciousness should recognize its “perceptions, memories and motor habits/tendencies.”²⁴ These are all linked to one another and form the “periphery of our being.”²⁵ They define our person but only at a superficial, pragmatic, level. Beyond the periphery another level is to be found; the core of consciousness which is constituted by a constant flow. A flow of states that are constantly changing, forever ungraspable, indefinable, until they have passed becomes our secondary discovery. The complete mobility that has moved beyond and under the periphery of our being is what Bergson calls duration.

The discovery of duration poses problems, one being the question of how to represent it adequately:

It is, if you like, the unrolling of a spool, for there is no living being who does not feel himself coming little by little to the end of his span; and living consists in growing old. But it is just as much a continual winding, like that of thread into a ball, for our past follows us, becoming larger and larger with the present it picks up on its way; and consciousness means memory. To tell the truth, it is neither a winding nor an unwinding, for these two images evoke the representation of lines or surfaces whose parts are homogeneous to and superposable on one another.²⁶

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid., 137.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Ibid.

Neither do concepts give room for an eventual explanation of what duration is, or might be since the concepts we use habitually contain a lack of precision, as seen above. The only recourse we have to duration thus seems to be the sensation of our own flowing through time, of which Bergson puts crudely; “[t]o him who is not capable of giving himself the intuition of the duration constitutive of his being, nothing will ever give it, neither concepts nor images.”²⁷

However, if one wants to engage in philosophical discourse Bergson emphasizes the utmost necessity to sense this flow and through it break with the habits of mind that want either representations or ready-made concepts in order to aim for a method of intuition that will be able to grasp the underlying duration of being. The exercise of representation might, nevertheless, for the philosopher, act as a first step to direct consciousness towards the intuition of duration which will place it in a position where consciousness might be revealed unto itself. In other words, even though images cannot tell us what intuition is, they might, if done attentively, put our mental focus into a starting point of an attempt at getting towards intuitive knowledge.²⁸

Concepts, on the other hand, are more dangerous for they assume new wholes from analysed parts thus admitting to a higher degree of generality. In order to explain duration through ready-made concepts we would have to apply concepts such as mobility- immobility, unity – multiplicity etc. Whichever one we would choose as starting point would be arbitrary and would only give us “the shadow of its body”, hence failing to tell us what duration is absolutely.²⁹

The blind use of habitual concepts is in Bergson’s view the root of all philosophical divisions. That root is questioned when he asks if it is not better to do away with metaphysics as “a game of ideas” or, on the contrary, “transcend concepts in order to arrive at metaphysics.”³⁰ The transcending concepts aimed at are concepts that can only be reached once we surrender to our own duration in which intuition might be grasped. It is by this surrender that creation can yield forth. The creation of concepts, as Deleuze put it in his last work *Qu’est-ce que la philosophie?* dating back to 1991, is the occupation of philosophers.³¹ Although not identical to transcending

²⁷ Ibid., 139.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid., 140-141.

³⁰ Ibid., 141.

³¹ Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What Is Philosophy?*, transl. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 20.: The concept being described as a “variation” and “processual, modular”.

concepts it still renders visible the Bergsonian influence on Deleuze. It is not concepts as such that needs to be disposed of, only the ready-made ones according to Bergson. He calls forth for the creation of concepts that are as flexible and fluid as our intuition is. Intuition might be evoked by representations, but can nevertheless never be evoked by ready-made concepts, for they are the instruments of analysis and the nature of intuition will not let itself be, as he puts it, “enclosed in a conceptual representation.”³²

The scientific model of analysis is thus seen as a valid inference for its particular field, but fails to be innovative enough for the science of metaphysics, if such a science is to be developed.

4. Duration and Otherness

Up until now we have seen the major concepts underlined in Bergson, a brief discussion of each has enabled us to get a rough sketch of what the Bergsonian enterprise aims at. What seems to be the significant traits of intuition as method is that it will constantly produce something new and that we can know ourselves, i.e. our own inner flow. These preliminary conclusions raise some troublesome issues.

Firstly, is it possible to create new creative concepts? As things are in constant mobility the substratum for intuition is duration. As a constant flow it is something always in the becoming. In other words, while metaphysics is to be based on mobility there is a constant which preserves the possibility for intuition, namely duration. If intuition depends on finding duration it seems as if we have a mobile constant to rely on. The concepts we thus will create will be able to ‘mould themselves onto intuition’. Yet, if we have a constant, our duration, will the new not turn upon itself, creating nothing more than an empty promise of progress?

Secondly, a prerequisite is that we can actually know ourselves. That we can feel our own duration. Yet, is it not possible for us to have dark sides, in the shades of ourselves, which we cannot know and which pertain to a hidden form? Allow me to address the first concern at length and then turn to the second.

³² Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 141.

4.1 Novelty In Multiplicity

It is not a question of whether or not duration is a constant within a species; as we have seen, duration is the pure mobility of a continuous flow of consciousness. It is rather how one is to reconcile the contingency of the world mentioned earlier, which mirrors the question of how my duration coincide with the duration of the plants that go to make up the world we live in. It is a question of multiplicity within the same genus producing specific species’.

[I]ntuition [...] is not a single act but an indefinite series of acts, all doubtless of the same genus but each one of a very distinct species.³³

Already we are getting a hint towards how the intuition might connect with a multiplicity of acts, which we shall see, will attain to different quality and quantity. This would thus entail, since duration is the vehicle for intuition, that duration itself might be possible in a variety of attitudes.

[B]y the effort of intuition, one has the feeling of a certain well-defined *tension*, whose very definiteness seems like a choice between an infinity of possible durations, all very different from one another, even though each one of them, reduced to concepts, that is to say, considered externally from two opposite points of view, is always brought back to the indefinable combination of multiple and the one.³⁴

The multiple and the one here refers to the image Bergson gives of beads on a thread. The beads representing all the instantaneous moments of existence, much like the *creatio continua* of Descartes where everything is born and dies again ad infinitum. Meanwhile the thread neglects the momentariness of the multiple and is described as an “eternity of death”. This eternity becomes a place where duration has been stripped of its creation and is posited as a “dead” substratum for duration itself. Here an allusion to a Spinozistic worldview seems plausible, where all is determined following one guiding principle which interconnects all past, present and future events.

³³ Ibid., 155.

³⁴ Ibid., 156. Emphasis in original.

What Bergson is aiming towards is the tension of a singular multiplicity that only allows itself to be felt via our own duration. A singular multiplicity in the sense that the genus of duration remains the same, yet its manifestations, its species', multiply.

[T]he intuition of our duration, far from leaving us suspended in the void as pure analysis would do, puts us in direct contact with a whole continuity of durations which we should try to follow either downwardly or upwardly [...] in the first case, we advance towards a duration more and more scattered, whose palpitations, [...] dilute its quality into quantity: at the limit would be the pure homogeneous, the pure *repetition* by which we shall define materiality. In advancing in the other direction [...] a duration which stretches [...] at the limit would be eternity. This time not only conceptual eternity, which is an eternity of death, but an eternity of life [...] Between these two extreme limits moves intuition, and this movement is metaphysics itself.³⁵

Could one, based on this description, place duration as a spectrum of different intensities? Above I described duration as the vehicle in which intuition finds itself. This is exactly the vehicle, which I just now imaged as a spectrum, where intuition moves from the bottom where pure repetition occurs, and materiality is manifest, towards an eternity of life where a perpetual act of creation is manifested. Keeping in mind that the method of intuition is aimed at the creation of new, more fitting, concepts, and that we, as habitual intellects, easily conform to the more downward side of the scale rather than the up, get stuck in the repetition of materiality by adopting a view of our mind as that of a material object.

If looked at from this viewpoint it seems that our mind being stuck in the duration of repetition, finds it harder and harder to distinguish any truly new, original, insight about the world since the thoughts themselves are looped and moulded onto the quotidian pragmatic concepts habitually employed. The multiple intensities on the scale of duration then seem to be the gateway for discovering, not only our own duration, but yields forth several other accounts of duration that our intuition might grasp. This leads us back to the original question of how new creative concepts can be created in a mind that seems to be determined by its own duration.

Bergson seems to answer that question by referring to the multiplicity of durations. Namely, through the scale of intensity ranging from materiality to pure

³⁵ Ibid., 158. Emphasis in original.

spirit, or repetition to eternity, are we able to align our own duration in accordance with durations other than ourselves. The creation as such thus demands an integral spirit in which reality becomes lucid. That hint of integral spirit is to be found in the constant flow of ourselves since it is the only interior reality we know anything of: “[t]he consciousness we have of our own person in its continual flowing, introduces us to the interior of a reality on whose model we must imagine the others.”³⁶

If this is so, it would mean that all new creation via intuition would be moulded on only one form – namely ourselves. It would, in other words, contradict the pursuit of a new metaphysics intended at by Bergson. This leads us straight to the heart of the second question concerning the (un)certainty one might have of knowing oneself through and through.

4.2 The Wilted Man

We already saw what Bergson thought of the man who could not experience his own duration. Discarded as a lost cause Bergson leaves him to wilt like a flower on a sand dune. Instead turning his attention towards how an able consciousness might stay open, or rather attentive, towards the fluctuations of his mental proceedings.

Those proceedings connect with what we saw above as the “periphery of being”, namely, our memories, both mental and visceral, of things that have a pragmatic importance to us. Those memories created and ‘piled up’, so to speak, in our mental make-up act as the directors of our conscious lives. The materiality of our minds seem to carry with them certain tokens, or symbols, of knowledge. Without being of cardinal importance for our duration they do play an important role in as much as they are the informers of our past, and in a sense, the shapers of our future. The man whom Bergson left wilting on the sand dune is lacking this notion of awareness, he is lacking the ability to distinguish the memories etc., from his inner duration, disabling him from experiencing that same duration. His confusion of “the periphery of being” as actual duration inhibits his mind from going deeper.

Where is that deeper? Even though the movement of experiencing ones own duration sounds, in Bergson’s words, very accessible, ambiguity remains as to where this accessibility can be sought when searching for an origin which goes beyond all our conscious, aware, capacities. And where does one place the form of an absolute

³⁶ Ibid., 159.

knowledge as perfect if it is neither in our “periphery of being” nor in the constant flow of duration? The Bergsonian unconscious, where a darker origin might have been found, also leaves us empty-handed as all it resembles is a loop of death and birth:

“A consciousness which had two identical moments would be a consciousness without memory. It would therefore die and be re-born continually. How otherwise can unconsciousness be described?”³⁷

The question asked was whether we can know ourselves. Clearly, the only knowledge we might have of ourselves is in memories etc., (periphery of being) or the experience of ourselves which is the bottomless pit we are left with. It does not seem reachable for everyone (the wilted man) and we cannot explain it accurately in words without admitting to an act of analysis. If this is true it will also render the multiplicity of durations problematic, as the only duration we surely should be able to know is our own.

The remaining option to safeguard the creation of new and the ability to know oneself seems to consist in maintaining the scale of intensities within our own being. Meaning that the movement between repetition and eternity is possible within the domains of one self. If that movement were possible one would be in need of a stronger force than aware consciousness gives us. The force required needs to be sought in a movement that goes beyond the rational, which here equals habit, to transcend its own limits of pragmatic concepts.

5. Intuition As Violence

The notion of Not-Yet-Conscious in Bloch has already been anticipated and it is now that we can give it the attention it deserves. Bloch’s discussion in *The Principle of Hope*³⁸ of the unconscious culminates in a distinction between the No-Longer-Conscious and the Not-Yet-Conscious. The former being in line with a Freudian unconsciousness of the repressed whilst the latter figures as a pre-consciousness in

³⁷ Ibid., 138.

³⁸ Ernst Bloch, *The Principle Of Hope*, transl. Neville Plaice, Stephen Plaice and Paul Knight, (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986).

which the possibility for the completely New (Novum) might emerge. The Not-Yet-Conscious is characterized by three events: “youth”, “time of change” and “productivity”, in which the last, productivity, consists of three stages.³⁹ Those stages are “incubation”, “inspiration” and “explication”.⁴⁰ The Not-Yet-Conscious is characterized by the sensation of intoxication, of being in love, connecting it so strongly with youth where these emotions are most acutely felt. This movement is the “dawn” of thought; it is the impossible made possible.

“In *incubation* there is a powerful intending, it aims at what is sought, what is dawning, on the advance.”⁴¹ Bloch continues with describing it as a “mist” where one is unsure of where the advance is towards and that at any moment a “flash” might hit us with a clear view – inspiration has struck. The light of the “flash” is nevertheless only made possible due to the preceding incubation.⁴² Further, the explication process is when thought is set to action and youth realizes his revolution.⁴³

Could it be possible for the concept of ‘incubation’ to redeem a problem that might not have been so apparent in Bergson, namely; the uncertainty of where to place the potential form of absolute knowledge as perfect? I mention that it might not have been apparent since it is not what Bloch himself criticizes Bergson for. His criticism goes beyond any positing of form denying Bergson the capacity of creation. Hence the Not-Yet-Conscious for Bloch acts as a form revealing itself within the pre-conscious, enabling the New (or novelty) to blossom.⁴⁴ Having that said, I will not engage in arguments pro or contra Bloch’s view against Bergson but instead elaborate on the fundamental issue of finding a form in which novelty might arise.

This leads us back to the original question of how, and if, ‘incubation’ might act as a redemptive concept in the positing of form and creation in Bergson. The intuition which is Bergson’s relies on the concept of absolute knowledge as perfect, being modelled upon a flow of duration, most concretely that of our own. The most viable suggestion seems to be what Bergson calls “the turn of thought upon itself”.⁴⁵ To overcome the difficulty of actually doing that Bergson only mentions the mental

³⁹ Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 115.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁴¹ *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 124.

⁴³ Bearing in mind that the project of Bloch is a Marxist metaphysical view on how to reach a Utopian State the categories he employs will have little importance for our discussion, yet does carry some harsh critique on Bergson, as we shall see.

⁴⁴ Bloch, *Principle of Hope*, 200-203.

⁴⁵ Bergson, *Creative Mind*, 147.

exercise of applying several visual images as dissimilar as possible so that the mental capacities might distinguish better concepts from things, as seen above. Moreover, this process entails that the thought is actually rationally and consciously aware of that it is turning upon itself – enclosing itself in what it believes to be in search of, namely an absolute knowledge that will manifest itself completely and render new concepts possible. This seems rather hard to grasp, mainly because of the contradictory claim that reason can turn upon reason (light upon light).

In the process of establishing a new way of thinking that will render novel concepts possible there seems to be a movement similar to the concept of ‘incubation’ even in Bergson. Although it is not explicitly mentioned in Bergson’s rendition of thought turning upon itself it still, I would argue, lays hidden in the vacuum of thought whilst struggling with the ‘difficulty’ of the movement itself. Meaning that once the mind has conquered the visual imagery exercise it would have to leap into unknown territories where reason begets the process of renewing itself. If looked at closely the very difficulty itself becomes the incubation stage of which Bloch renders visible in his own metaphysics. It also makes Bergson’s metaphysics pass through a violent night before ever reaching the twilight which is the shore of new concepts. Exactly because the insistence on absolute knowledge as perfect is emphasised, Bergson cannot be made susceptible to a ‘feeling of spring’ as seen in Bloch. There is no ideology or further aim which is on Bergson’s horizon except the violent night of reason turning on reason. This does not entail a disadvantage to his philosophy if the violence is here taken as a re-discovery of the absolute in a perfect form.

The ‘begetting’ of a renewal of reason, of new concepts, is one constituted by the person who is making violence onto himself. By ‘incubating’ the violence an inverted effect is produced which will release the intuition into the creation of new concepts. Obviously, this argument would not satisfy the needs of form posed by Bloch, but it does suffice for our purposes as it renders visible the violent night of intuition which re-instates the entirely new, perfect concept. A concept that will always be subject to change and must, out of necessity, repeatedly endure the violent nights of transformation imposed by intuition.

6. Epilogue Of The Twilight

A thread has been traced through all topics discussed. From precision and Descartes, through analysis and intuition, into duration in relation to self and otherness arriving at the stage of violence which intuition subjects us to. That thread has been strung between a movement within a movement, between scientific and philosophical reasoning, and further between a philosophy of light and darkness, aiming at a twilight where both might be welcomed.

By avoiding an ‘already full’ interpretation of Bergson the aim of this essay has been to discuss the various topics from a perspective that would show the ambiguous character of Bergson’s enterprise without stating the obvious difficulties a method of intuition would entail. Thus evading the trap of placing his metaphysics in various “ready-made” categories. Instead focus has been directed towards what his philosophy and method of intuition would entail if thought of seriously and actually practised.

It also goes to show that the very want to classify him as either empiricist, rationalist, vitalist or mystic, depending on which side the attack is coming from, is due to i) the ambiguity of content in his texts, and ii) the self-evident rhetoric used. This, I believe, has sadly attracted a lot of dispute concerning the form in which it is presented rather than the content of his thought.

What is left after the discussion just made is the further exploration of how the violence of intuition might function, what it consists of, how it acts upon our minds other than being a violent force nurtured by reason trying to re-define itself. Questions remain unanswered; How to awaken the wilted man? Which concepts are to be sought by the philosopher? etc. All the argumentation above has aimed at showing is the violent factor of intuition in the process of creation. That violence opens up questions on how much one mind might be able to renew itself. It would seem fair to say that concepts reached by this kind of intuition might come far apart, but that each time a new concept is arrived at the creator might savour it even more intensely after the hard labour of giving birth to it. Leading on to meditations on whether or not the actual quality of the concept lives up to its supposed predecessors, or if its status only remains high due to how it came to be. Due to lack of space that discussion cannot be

continued here but the thesis put forward in this essay will, at least, have opened up for the possibility of such a discussion to take place.

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Abstract

The method of intuition in Bergson is a method which promises novelty in creation. This essay focuses on the openness found in Bergson's writing and puts forward the thesis that underneath the rhetoric of clarity broods a darker violent concept of intuition. Borrowing from Marxist philosopher Ernst Bloch the concept of 'incubation' the thesis will emerge as a reconciliation of light and dark in Bergson. Emphasising the rarity of radical new concepts I will argue that the road travelled towards the coming of the new is all the more present in Bergson than might at first be evident. In so doing the prerequisite for novelty will become a method of intuition marked by a sign of violence.