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Time, Duration and Freedom : Bergson's Critical Move Against Kant

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TIME, DURATION AND FREEDOM – BERGSON’S CRITICAL MOVE AGAINST KANT

– Arjen Kleinherenbrink –

Abstract. Research into Bergson’s philosophy downplays a key development in his first work, *Time and free will*. It is there that Bergson explicitly opposes himself to Kant by arguing that succession is not a temporal concept, but a spatial one. This is the crucial point of departure for Bergson’s entire philosophy, one that allows him to radically dismiss Kant’s notion of freedom in favor of one based on duration and multiplicity. This text has two aims. Firstly to add to Bergson scholarship by explicating the structure and force of Bergson’s initial argument against Kant, demonstrating that his engagement with Kant is much less incremental than has been suggested in secondary literature. Secondly, to reconstruct the consequences regarding freedom that Bergson immediately draws in departing from Kant, which illustrates the profundity and originality of his thought at the very inception of his oeuvre.

Keywords: Time, duration, freedom, Kant, Bergson.

After decades of relative obscurity, recent years are seeing a resurgence of interest in the works of Henri Bergson.¹ Previously seen primarily as an inspiration to philosophers such as Deleuze and Merleau-Ponty, he is now increasingly being acknowledged as the creator of a profound system in its own right. However, research into Bergson’s philosophy tends to overlook or downplay a key development in his first work, the essay *Time and free will*. There, Bergson explicitly opposes himself to Kant by arguing succession is not a temporal concept, but a spatial one. This is the crucial point of departure for Bergson’s further philosophy, allowing him to radically dismiss Kant’s notion of freedom in favor of one based on duration and multiplicity, central concepts in all of Bergson’s later work. Consequently, this text has two aims. The first is to add to Bergson scholarship by explicating the structure and force of Bergson’s argument

¹ This is especially true for the Anglo-Saxon reception. Renewed interest in Bergson started in the late nineties, spearheaded by John Mullarkey (especially his excellent edited volume *The new Bergson*) and Keith Ansell Pearson (see the bibliography for relevant titles). The book by Kolakowski [1985] is a forerunner of this revival. For more on the waxing and waning of interest in Bergson, see the introductions by Guerlac [2006] and Gunter [2005].

against Kant in *Time and free will*, demonstrating that his engagement with Kant is less incremental than has been suggested in secondary literature. In tandem with this, the second aim is to reconstruct the consequences that Bergson’s departure from Kant has for the concept of freedom, so as to illustrate the profundity and originality of Bergson’s thought at the very inception of his oeuvre.

What spurs a great philosopher to radically deviate from established modes of thought? How is he launched into the creation of his own concepts? What motivates one such as Bergson to create remarkable concepts such as duration, multiplicity, becoming, and their corresponding investigations into subjects as diverse as morality, religion and evolution? Deleuze, perhaps the contemporary philosophers most fascinated by Bergson’s work, insisted such questioning is necessary to fully appreciate a philosopher, because it forces us to put his concepts into a proper sequence: ‘...and if you don’t understand the sequence of which a concept is part, you cannot understand the concept.’² So we can ask, what might be the catalyst for Bergson, or the point from which his particular sequence of concepts emerges?

It is no secret that Bergson’s relates intimately to Kant. It has often been said how Kant’s system is a continuous counterpoint to Bergson’s philosophical labors, that ‘scattered throughout Bergson’s writings one finds an engagement with the legacy of Kant’s Copernican Revolution’ and that ‘one could look upon Bergson’s philosophy in general as a reversed Kantianism.’³ However, I would claim that the attention to engagements with Kant *throughout* Bergson’s writings underappreciates the critical move that the latter makes against the former at the very *inception* of his thought: to claim that succession is not a temporal notion, as Kant would have it, but a spatial one.⁴ It is from this single deviation from Kant,

² Deleuze [1980]. For Deleuze’s relation to Bergson, see the section ‘Becoming-Intense, Becoming-Animal, Becoming-Imperceptible’ in Deleuze, Guattari [1987], the sections ‘Theses on movement: first commentary on Bergson’ and ‘The movement-image and its three varieties: second commentary on Bergson’ in Deleuze [1986], the essays *Bergson, 1859–1941* and *Bergson’s conception of difference* in Deleuze [2004] and the whole of Deleuze’s *Bergsonism* [1988]. For Merleau-Ponty’s relation to Bergson, see his various essays and lectures on Bergson [1964, 1988, 2001].

³ Ansell Pearson and Mullarkey [2002] p. 32; Mullarkey [2000] p. 115. The introduction to Ansell Pearson, Mullarkey [2002], chapter five of Ansell Pearson [2002], and especially the book by Barthélemy-Madaule [1966] contain highly interesting elaborations on Kant’s general influence throughout Bergson’s oeuvre. As the latter states: ‘Kant est son adversaire de toujours; de l’*Essai sur les données immédiates aux Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Bergson est resté fidèle à lui-même dans cette animadversion’ [1966] p. 4.

⁴ To illustrate: in Ansell Pearson and Mullarkey’s *Henri Bergson – key writings*, the discussion of *Time and free will* does not mention Kant, instead preferring to compare Russell and Bergson on the topic of continuity. When Kant is discussed, it is in the light of Bergson’s later works *Creative*

performed in Bergson’s first publication *Time and free will*, that subsequent concepts such as duration, multiplicity and becoming derive their sense and purpose.⁵ Hence there are two reasons for writing the present text. Firstly, to add to existing scholarship on Bergson by underlining the foundational role of his specific departure from Kant in *Time and free will*, something which tends to be overlooked. This might contribute to a less skewed interpretation of Bergson’s relation to Kant.⁶ As the text will demonstrate, Bergson’s engagement with Kant is not incremental. Rather, it results from one singular rupture, a Bergsonian ‘master stroke’ that allows him to escape the limits of Kantianism and set off on a development of his own concepts. Secondly, a reconstruction of Bergson’s notion of free will, based upon his rethinking of time, will illustrate how his early break with Kant has immediate consequences that reach far beyond a discussion of time and space itself, and that will resonate throughout his later works.⁷

1. Kant on time and nature

A significant difference between Kant and his predecessors is that he no longer defines space as the order of coexistences and time as the order of successions.⁸ Kant seeks to demonstrate that coexistence is a temporal notion, a modality of time as much as permanence and simultaneity. In themselves, he famously

evolution, Matter and memory, and The creative mind. Similarly, even the section titled *The antinomies of time* in Mullarkey’s *Bergson and philosophy* never explicitly mentions Kant. As a final example, Ansell Pearson’s highly recommendable work *Philosophy and the adventure of the virtual* also tends to discuss Bergson’s engagement with Kant almost exclusively in the light of *Create evolution*. Strikingly, commentators in his own time already overlooked how Bergson overturns the Kantian notion of time in *Time and free will*, and criticized Bergson’s concepts for being entirely irrational from a Kantian perspective, missing the point that it is precisely from a break with Kantianism that his concepts result in the first place (Jordan [1912]; Watts Cunningham [1914]).

⁵ This point is acknowledged in recent French publications on Bergson, for example when Worms states ‘‘Bref, la distinction entre la dur e et l’espace donne lieu dans l’oeuvre de Bergson   un mouvement qui conduit vers une philosophie de la vie, de l’univers, de la morale et de la religion...’’, [2009] p. 39. Even in *Duration and simultaneity*, published thirty-three years after *Time and free will*, Bergson clearly emphasizes how his initial move of disengaging succession from temporality (and hence from simultaneity) underlies all of his work.

⁶ Bergson must be considered as much of a post-Kantian as Schelling or Fichte, in the sense that his philosophical endeavors start by an augmentation of Kant through Kant himself. It was Kant who demonstrated that space was not the order of coexistences, and it is Bergson who demands further precision by, in turn, reproaching Kant for still maintaining that time included a modality of succession. As such, this text might contribute to the ‘correction of Bergson’s erasure from our image of post-Kantian philosophy’ (Ansell Pearson [2002] p. 2).

⁷ Bergson immediately realizes in *Time and free will* that his new conception of time allows him to redefine not just Kant’s notion of freedom, but the *entire debate* on freedom up to that point, concerning determinists and compatibilists alike (‘mechanists’ and ‘dynamists’ in Bergson’s terms).

⁸ Deleuze [1980].

concludes, space and time are nothing but empty forms through which phenomena are apperceived.⁹ Therefore, our daily experience is one of being ‘in the centre of a spatially extended world, travelling equably and unidirectionally [...] along a temporal extension.’¹⁰ Time, in this view, stretches into infinity and can be chopped up into discrete parts. The present of the phenomenal world must be thought as a narrow temporal slice, extending *ad infinitum* in space, yet restricted to the shortest possible discrete moment of time. This implies thinking in terms of ‘quantities of time’ that succeed each other.¹¹ Indeed, Kant argues that ‘[we] represent the course of time by a line progressing to infinity, the content of which constitutes a series which is only of one dimension, and we conclude from the properties of this line as to all the properties of time.’¹² Time being ‘of one dimension’, it is a homogeneous medium much akin to space. For Kant, ‘causality is the relationship between events on [that] time continuum.’¹³

Given Kant’s conception of time, freedom in nature becomes outright impossible, as every single action necessarily results from earlier states of affairs in the world.¹⁴ Every event in nature will be caused by previous conditions which are themselves caused by previous conditions, *ad infinitum*. Human actions, thoughts, and desires are no exception to this rule, leading Kant to famously dismiss any notion of freedom situated fully within a deterministic world as a ‘wretched subterfuge’, granting an agent no more freedom than a ball once thrown. Kant emphasizes that

[...] as the causality of phenomena is subject to conditions of *time*, and the preceding state, if it had always existed, could not have produced an effect which would make its first appearance at a particular time, the causality of the cause

⁹ A precise exposition of this departure from philosophical tradition is beyond the scope of this text. One of the most interesting comparisons concerning this topic can be found in Deleuze’s 1980 and 1987 seminars on Leibniz, in which Kant and Leibniz are contrasted concerning their concepts of space. Especially worth mentioning is the seminar of 20.05.1980 (Deleuze [1980]).

¹⁰ Beets [1988] p. 3.

¹¹ Cpur A32/B49.

¹² Cpur A33/B50.

¹³ Beets [1988] p. 7.

¹⁴ Kant’s analysis of freedom as presented here is mainly based on the arguments found in the *Critique of pure reason* [1998], the *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals* [1959] and the *Critique of practical reason* [1956]. These works will be referred to as ‘Cpur’, ‘G’, and ‘Cpra’, respectively. Kant’s *Religion within the limits of reason alone* contains an elaboration of his theory of freedom and addresses problems such as ‘why would I ascribe to the categorical imperative?’ and ‘how can we be immoral?’. However, since the *Religion* contains no significant changes to the structure of Kant’s conception of freedom (Guyer [2005]), the work is considered to be outside the scope of this text.

must itself be an effect – must itself have begun to be, and therefore [...] itself requires a cause.¹⁵

As he considers all events in the phenomenal world to be necessarily predetermined, Kant, in order to preserve room for the possibility of freedom, requires a theory that allows him to 'ascribe the existence of a thing so far as it is determinable in time, and so too its causality with the law of natural necessity, only to appearance, and to ascribe freedom to the same being as a thing in itself.'¹⁶ In other words, the idea of freedom requires something external to the natural realm of phenomena: the noumenal realm containing the things that phenomena, as mere appearances, are appearances *of*. If there is nothing beyond phenomena as they appear to us, then there is no such thing as freedom: 'if phenomena are things in themselves, freedom is impossible.'¹⁷ This requires a subtle theory of freedom, as freedom must now become the ability to have an effect on the series of events in the natural world without entering into the causal chain of that natural world. It requires a type of causality separate from phenomena, yet guaranteed to be their cause in some meaningful sense. As Kant explains:

[...] we must understand [...] by the term freedom [...] a faculty of the spontaneous origination of a state; the causality of which [...] is not subordinated to another cause determining it in time. Freedom is in this sense a pure transcendental idea, which, in the first place, contains no empirical element; the object of which, in the second place, cannot be given or determined in any experience, because it is a universal law of the very possibility of experience, that everything which happens must have a cause, that consequently the causality of a cause, being itself something that has happened, must also have a cause.¹⁸

It is worth emphasizing that above all else, Kant makes his move to transcendental freedom *because there is time in nature*. He emphasizes that '[a free subject] would be subordinate to no conditions of time, for time is only a condition of phenomena,'¹⁹ that 'no action would begin or cease to be in [a free] subject; it would consequently be free from the law of all determination of time,'²⁰ and that

¹⁵ Cpur A532/B560, emphasis added; cf. A534/B562.

¹⁶ Guyer [2009] p. 195–196.

¹⁷ Cpur A536/B564.

¹⁸ Ibidem, A533/B561.

¹⁹ Cpur A539/B567.

²⁰ Ibidem, A540/B567.

freedom is only conceivable because 'time is only a condition of phenomena, not of things in themselves.'²¹

Kant seeks to escape time and nature in order to explain how we would be able to conceive of freedom. As is often noted in the relevant literature, Kant's work contains several lines of arguments through which he arrives at his theory of freedom. One author goes so far as to despair over the 'bewildering number of ways in which Kant characterizes freedom.'²² There are, however, two lines of argument concerning freedom usually interpreted as being the most relevant.²³ To show how Kant's theory of freedom *always* retains the basic assumptions concerning time in nature, a concise account of both arguments follows. This will also serve to demonstrate how Bergson's critique does not merely concern one reading of Kant, but his philosophy *as such*.

2. The first argument: from transcendental idealism to freedom

The first argument is found in the *Critique of pure reason* and the *Groundwork of the metaphysics of morals*, in which Kant ventures forth from the idea of transcendental idealism.²⁴ This is the idea that phenomena registered by our senses are mere appearances. Hence, there must be more to reality than just nature and the way in which phenomena succeed one another in time: there must be things which appearances are appearances *of*. These things in themselves (the noumena) provide the possibility that 'the history of our behavior in time, and the natural laws that hold sway here, are all a matter of appearance, and that, as we are in ourselves, we may always be able to initiate any course of action, regardless of the appearance of our histories and the natural laws of behavior.'²⁵ Kant emphasizes that transcendental idealism is a given, stating that it is a 'conclusion [to which] a thinking man *must* come.'²⁶ Kant therefore posits transcendental idealism as the basic idea from which a further theory of freedom can be deduced. After all, if transcendental idealism is even possible, then 'no one can prove that determinism in the empirical world amounts to the whole truth about human existence.'²⁷

According to Kant, the very fact that one can conceive of transcendental idealism grounds the rationality of human beings. One cannot arrive at the idea of

²¹ Ibidem, A539/B567.

²² Allison [1990] p. 1.

²³ Velkley [1989]; Guyer [1993]; Rauscher [2009].

²⁴ Guyer [2009].

²⁵ Guyer [2005] p. 122.

²⁶ G 452, emphasis added.

²⁷ Guyer [2007] p. 167.

transcendental idealism through the senses, as it, by definition, transcends the sensible world. This means that where there is the idea of transcendental idealism, there must also be the faculty of reason, that is, the faculty that provides 'the ability to form transcendental ideas of things that are grounds for other things.'²⁸ For Kant, reason 'compels' human beings to think transcendental objects and subjects.²⁹ Consequently, human rationality is proven by the ability to think transcendental idealism and anything that applies to rational beings, applies to us humans. This divides human cognitive powers 'into the 'lower' power of sensibility and the 'higher' power of intellect.'³⁰ Through our rationality we recognize our membership of not just the sensible world of phenomena, but also of the intelligible world of noumena. As Kant argues:

[...] man [...] cognizes himself not only by his senses, but also through pure apperception [...] He is thus to himself, on the one hand, a phenomenon, but on the other hand, in respect of [reason], a purely intelligible subject – intelligible, because its action cannot be ascribed to sensuous receptivity.'³¹

From transcendental idealism and the rationality it grounds, a conception of freedom emerges. Rational beings are beings that regard themselves as acting according to reasons. This, as opposed to acting on impulse, means that rational beings perceive themselves as the authors of their actions. As a consequence, they must consider themselves free, since only under the idea of freedom can the will of a rational being be conceived of as being a will of its own. Kant first asserts that freedom would amount to actions not being necessitated by sensuous inputs: 'as will is a kind of causality of living beings so far as they are rational, freedom would be that property of this causality by which it can be effective independently of foreign causes determining it.'³² This is a negative conception of freedom, a conception of what it should not be. It is *practical* freedom, emphasizing that humans have what Kant calls *arbitrium liberum*, as opposed to *arbitrium brutum*. The latter concerns actions that are necessitated by sensuous inputs, whereas the former amounts to 'freedom [as] the independence of the will of coercion by sensuous impulses.'³³ From this follows a positive conception of freedom that is based on 'causality according to immutable laws, but of a peculiar kind.'³⁴ This

²⁸ Ibidem, p. 29.

²⁹ Cpur A533/B561.

³⁰ Guyer [2007] p. 29.

³¹ Cpur A546/B574–A547/B575.

³² G 446.

³³ Cpur A534/B562.

³⁴ Ibidem.

is the *transcendental* freedom that warrants autonomy, that is, the freedom of the will in the sense of being subject to laws given by itself but still universal.³⁵ The 'peculiar kind' of law is the moral law, or as Kant clearly states:

[...] the proposition 'Will is in all its actions a law to itself' expresses [...] the principle of acting on no maxim other than one which can have for its object itself as at the same time a universal law [...] thus free will and a will under moral laws are one and the same.'³⁶

This results in two types of causality, the first being that of nature, the second being that of free will in the sense of reason initiating a series of events by adhering to the moral law of the categorical imperative. As Kant puts it: 'the question, therefore is, whether an effect, determined according to the laws of nature, can at the same time be produced by a free agent, or whether freedom and nature mutually exclude each other.'³⁷ Kant's answer is that as *phenomena*, all things are subject to the causality of nature, yet simultaneously, rational beings belonging to the intelligible world of the *noumena* can be conceived of as exercising a 'non empirical and intelligible causality [...] which is [...] not phenomenal [...] although it must, at the same time, as a link in the chain of nature, be regarded as belonging to the sensuous world.'³⁸ As Guyer states it, though the determining grounds of intelligible causality are not found within the world, their effect nevertheless should take place in the world.³⁹

This concludes the first argument to show how human beings can conceive of freedom. Having the idea of transcendental idealism grounds human rationality. Rationality makes us think ourselves as originators of our actions. Rational beings can therefore think that they belong to an intelligible world that is independent from the necessary determination of events in nature. From this *practical* notion of freedom follows a conception of *transcendental* freedom: through rationality, the will can willingly subject itself to universal law, that is, the moral law of the categorical imperative. In this conception of the idea of freedom, rational beings can be free, because even though all events in nature are predetermined, reason 'will not follow the order of things presented by experience, but, with perfect spontaneity, rearranges them according to ideas, with

³⁵ G 447.

³⁶ Ibidem, 446–447.

³⁷ Cpur A536/B564.

³⁸ Ibidem, A544/B572.

³⁹ Guyer [1993] p. 27.

which it compels empirical conditions to agree.⁴⁰ To summarize: one can conceive of freedom thanks to the ability of adhering to an intelligible realm, granted by rationality, thus willingly subjecting oneself to the universal moral law 'under the sign of which' our actions in nature unfold. It is, therefore, in the intelligible world that man is his 'proper self'.⁴¹ As Guyer puts it:

[...] the free agency of the noumenal self could not be seen as intervening in particular moments in the history of the phenomenal world, but we could nevertheless rest assured in the conviction that the phenomenal realm of nature as a whole is always subject to the freedom of the will, no matter how recalcitrant to the demands of practical reason any sequence of events in the natural formation of a character might otherwise seem [...]. Freedom of our will implies total control over the phenomenal realm, in spite of [...] the total subjection of the latter to causal laws of nature.⁴²

3. The second argument: from moral law to freedom

The argument for freedom in *Critique of practical reason* is different from that in *Critique of pure reason* and the *Groundwork*.⁴³ Here it is not transcendental idealism, but the moral law which is argued to require no deduction, thus coming to function as the departing point for a theory of freedom.⁴⁴ Where the *Critique of pure reason* and the *Groundwork* argue for the mere possibility of the conception of the idea of freedom, the *Critique of practical reason* argues 'that purely rational cognition of the practical laws of freedom implies the *actual existence* of free will.'⁴⁵ Kant argues that humans, being rational, can conceive of the universal moral law of the categorical imperative: the moral law 'is declared by reason to be a law for all rational beings in so far as they have a will.'⁴⁶ One can act according to the imperatives of reason, as opposed to the contingent inclinations caused by sensuous inputs. The idea of an 'ought' is not found in nature, as nature is only concerned with what 'is'. The idea of the moral law provides a 'way out' of nature and necessitated succession of events in time, as its universal character renders it immune to any contingency. As with transcendental idealism, the existence of the moral law grounds our being rational,

⁴⁰ Cpur A548/B567.

⁴¹ G 457.

⁴² Guyer [1993] p. 29.

⁴³ Guyer [2009].

⁴⁴ Rauscher [2009] p. 203.

⁴⁵ Guyer [1993] p. 29.

⁴⁶ Cpra A57

as only the faculty of rationality would be able to conceive of something outside of nature: the form of a law can only be thought by reason and is not an object of the senses.⁴⁷ As Guyer states, both arguments essentially show how a conception of freedom flows forth from rationality. The difference between the arguments is that in the first, our rationality is proven by the fact that we can conceive of noumena, whereas in the second it is proven by the fact that we can conceive of a universal moral law that exists independently of contingent events in nature.

Because the universal legislative form can be the determining ground for the will, it is independent from natural law. Such independence is then called freedom in the strictest, transcendental sense. As Kant states it: ‘a free will [finds] its ground of determination in the law.’⁴⁸ We *are* free when we act in accordance with this universal law, when we ‘so act that the maxim of your will could always hold at the same time as a principle establishing universal law.’⁴⁹ Naturally, any such action would still unfold in the phenomenal realm, but it would be free because it adheres to the moral law. As subsequent authors have noted, Kant now equates moral law as pure practical reason with pure will, meaning that moral law and freedom imply one another.⁵⁰

4. From Kant to Bergson

The entire edifice of Kant’s theory of freedom rests upon the assumption that freedom cannot exist within nature, because there, events necessarily succeed one another *in time*.⁵¹ In this sense, Kant’s arguments mentioned earlier are alike

⁴⁷ Guyer [2005] p. 124.

⁴⁸ Cpra A52.

⁴⁹ Ibidem, A54.

⁵⁰ Beets [1988]; Guyer [2009].

⁵¹ It will be noted that there are remarkable points within Kant’s critical project in which time is treated differently. One notable moment is Cpur B158, in which Kant asserts that ‘In order for that manifold to be given, self-intuition is required, and at the basis of this self-intuition lies a form given a priori, viz. time, which is sensible and belongs to the ability to receive the determinable. [...] I cannot determine my existence as that of a self-active being; instead I present only the spontaneity of my thought, i.e. of the [act of] determination, and my existence remains determinable always only sensibly i.e. as the existence of an appearance’. Here, time becomes the form under which undetermined existence is determinable. When one takes this as the ‘lens’ through which to read the Critical project, everything changes. Arguably, Deleuze’s entire ontology as set out in *Difference and repetition* is the result of precisely such a move. In his words: ‘The consequences of this are extreme: my undetermined existence can be determined only *within time* as the existence of a phenomenon, of a passive, receptive phenomenal subject *appearing within time*. As a result, the spontaneity of which I am conscious in the ‘I think’ cannot be understood as the attribute of a substantial and spontaneous being, but only as the affection of a passive self which experiences its own thought – its own intelligence, that by virtue of which it can say I – being exercised in it and upon it but not by it. Here begins a long and inexhaustible story: *I is another*, or the paradox of inner sense’ ([1994] p. 86). Obviously, this radically alters the

in arriving at a radically transcendental notion of freedom.⁵² For freedom, an entire transcendental and intelligible world is required, independent from and yet influencing the natural world. As Guyer emphasizes:

[...] to carry Kant’s thought to completion, everything in the phenomenal world that would appear to be a determinant of an agent’s actions must in fact be a reflection of his noumenal choice, so [...] the laws of his character which link his prior condition to his present choices must in fact reflect his noumenal will.⁵³

Bergson uses Kant’s theory as a catalyst to demonstrate how the entire debate on free will rests on a flawed conception of time. As stated, Bergson’s move consists of arguing, against Kant, that succession is not a temporal notion and immediately demonstrating the consequences of that insight for our notion of freedom.⁵⁴ Bergson uses three distinct steps to form an argument for the existence of real time (duration) and real freedom (freedom in duration), seeking to demonstrate why one does *not* need a realm outside nature for freedom, simply because there is no such thing as homogeneous time in nature, *except* as an artificial, man-made construct that has very little if not nothing to do with what living beings truly are. If Bergson’s argument holds, he will have shown why Kant’s theory of freedom is pointless, as its very point of departure (‘escape time in nature’) would be invalid. The three steps of his argument are 1) an argument concerning intensity and magnitude, 2) an argument concerning multiplicity and duration, and 3) a concluding argument concerning freedom of the will.

5. Intensity and magnitude

We usually think that a sensation, which for Bergson is anything experienced by the mind, including the ‘effort’ of physical tasks, can grow and diminish in intensity, that we can become ‘twice as angry’ or that we can ‘double our effort’. Intensity, then, is a property of a sensation in consciousness. It is common sense that leads to thinking in these terms of intensive magnitudes: the

standard reading of the Critiques as the chronicles of the sovereign, synthesizing subject. However, unorthodox readings of Kant resulting from this passage and others, ones in which Kant is already closer to Bergson than either of them would be willing to admit, are obviously *not* the mainstream interpretation and *not* the most impactful interpretations of Kant, and it is the latter with which the present text is concerned. It is, after all, more instructive and interesting to lay out the differences and contrasts between philosophers than to merge them into a Bergsonian Kant and a Kantian Bergson.

⁵² Guyer [2009] p. 179; Beets [1988] p. 73; Velkley [1989] p. 89.

⁵³ Guyer [2009] p. 196.

⁵⁴ ‘If we introduce an order in what is successive, the reason is that succession is converted into simultaneity and is projected into space’ (Bergson [2001] p. 102).

more intense a sensation becomes, the 'bigger' we call it, thus ascribing quantity to it. Quantity, Bergson argues, is based on the 'principle of container and contained.'⁵⁵ It is based on the idea of the *less* being inside the *more*, which also entails that quantities are divisible and therefore extended by nature ('three' containing three distinct units of 'one', with each unit of 'one' being divisible into ten discrete 'tenths'). However, Bergson argues that the view of sensations as intensive magnitudes (quantities) is seriously mistaken, and through a series of examples ventures to bring forth the true nature of the intensity of our sensations.

Starting with the sensation of 'effort', Bergson invites us to press our lips together, first slightly, then tighter and finally as tight as possible. Such a process is usually conceived in terms of an quantitative increase in the same medium: lips are pressed together increasingly tight. However, Bergson argues that upon closer examination, something entirely different is happening. What really happens is that more and more elements are being added to the pressing together of the lips. As we try to press harder, more parts of the lips get involved, then the cheeks, the jaws, the tongue, the muscles in the neck, the skin below the eyes and, eventually, the entire cranium. Alternatively, but less recommendable, Bergson invites us to prick a pin into our hand more and more deeply:

[...] at first we shall feel as it were a tickling, then a touch which is succeeded by a prick, then a pain localized at a point, and finally the spreading of this pain over the surrounding zone. We are dealing with [many] qualitatively distinct sensations, so many varieties of a single species.⁵⁶

Continuing with the sensation of pain, he argues that as pain becomes more intense,

[...] consciousness distinguishes a larger [...] number of sensations arising at different points [...], muscular contractions, organic movements of every kind: the choir of these elementary psychic states voices the new demands of the organism [...] in other words, we estimate the intensity of a pain by the larger or smaller part of the organism which takes interest in it [...] we should define the intensity of the pain by the very number and extent of the parts of the body which sympathize with it and react, and whose reactions are perceived by consciousness.⁵⁷

⁵⁵ Ibidem, p. 3.

⁵⁶ Ibidem, p. 42.

⁵⁷ Ibidem, p. 35-36.

He concludes that what we usually call an increased *quantity* of one singular sensation, is in reality a process of additional *qualitatively* distinct sensations 'entering the mix'.

It is the same with emotions as with effort. Bergson argues there is no such thing as a singular emotion increasing in quantity (magnitude). What happens when we say that an emotion becomes more intense, is that more qualitatively distinct elements are becoming involved. Citing a description by Charles Darwin, Bergson points out that in anger

[...] the action of the heart is much accelerated [...] the face reddens or may turn deadly pale. The respiration is labored, the chest heaves, and the dilated nostrils quiver. The whole body often trembles. The voice is affected. The teeth are clenched or ground together and the muscular system is commonly stimulated to violent, almost frantic action.⁵⁸

In another example, Bergson examines the notion of pity, arguing that it starts by mentally putting oneself in the place of another, after which the horror of realizing his predicament is added, then the need of helping him, the dread of evil, a desire to share the suffering of others, self-abasement, generosity, et cetera, showing that 'the increasing intensity of pity thus consists in a qualitative progress.'⁵⁹

With these examples, Bergson demonstrates that sensations are not things of *quantity*. We tend to think so because the causes of sensations are often extensive magnitudes, leading us to 'associate the idea of a certain quantity of a cause with a certain quality of effect; and [...] we transfer the idea into the sensation, the quantity of the cause into the quantity of the effect.'⁶⁰ Rather, the singular names we use to designate sensations are born from the demands of language and from practical considerations concerning everyday life, but they do not reflect the true nature of sensations.

Bergson also argues that distinguishing sensations from each other with language can only happen in retrospect: 'strictly speaking [sensations] do not constitute multiple states until I have already got beyond them, and turn around to observe their trail. [...] In reality none of them do begin or end; they all dovetail into one another.'⁶¹ The intensity of sensations is a thing of *quality*, a 'multiplicity of simple states which consciousness dimly discerns in them.'⁶² This

⁵⁸ Ibidem, p. 29.

⁵⁹ Ibidem, p. 19.

⁶⁰ Ibidem, p. 42.

⁶¹ Ibidem, p. 192.

⁶² Ibidem, p. 30.

is, in turn, also true for those simple states. What we call an element of 'horror' in 'pity' is nothing but the linguistic representation for another multiplicity of simple states. The names of our sensations do not refer to distinct things. According to Bergson, they refer to a collection ('multiplicity') of qualitatively different ('heterogeneous'), permeating ('not clearly discernible') states. Indeed, if one was to remove all qualitatively distinct sensations that perceived in a thing such as 'anger', then all that remains is a mere 'intellectual representation'.⁶³ What really happens when the intensity of a sensation increases, is that it 'little by little [...] permeates a larger number of psychic elements, tingeing them, so to speak, with its own color', or alternatively '[alters] the shade of a thousand perceptions or memories, and in this sense it pervades them.'⁶⁴ Understandably, the 'contamination' of sensation by language and practical necessity creates a methodological problem for Bergson. He continuously struggles with the limitations of (space-bound) language. When he argues, as will be shown, that conscious states are organized into a whole, permeate one another and gradually gain richer content, he has to use the spatial terminology of number with the words 'several' and 'one another'. As such, 'these terms are thus misleading from the very beginning, and the idea of a multiplicity without relation to number or space, although clear for pure reflective thought, cannot be translated into the language of common sense.'⁶⁵

This concludes the first step of Bergson's argument. He shows that when sensations become more intense, they do not themselves increase in magnitude or quantity. Rather, what increases is the amount of qualitatively distinct psychic elements that are involved. There are no single sensations, not even simple ones, there are only multiplicities: collections of distinct elements involved in a sensation. In addition, since all psychic elements permeate one another, they do not admit to extensity. As Bergson hopes to show with his examples, one cannot clearly draw lines around sensations. It is impossible to experience exactly where anger stops and where frustration starts, or where the line between sadness and melancholy lies. All our sensations are permeating blends of psychic experiences. Intensity (of sensations) has nothing to do with magnitude (quantity), save for the quantity *of* qualitatively distinct elements that are involved. One can compare this to grabbing a very cold can of soda from the fridge. When holding it, it seems to become colder and colder, until we finally have to put the can down. Of course in reality, an increasing amount of distinct parts of one's hand is becoming involved

⁶³ Ibidem, p. 30.

⁶⁴ Ibidem, pp. 8, 9.

⁶⁵ Ibidem, p. 122.

with 'being cold' and it would be ridiculous to think that the can is actually getting colder. In the same sense, Bergson argues any sensation has to be understood in terms of waxing and waning, of constant permeation, blending and involvement, and *not* in terms of rigid beginnings and endings.

6. Multiplicity and duration

Having shown that sensations are *not* extended quantities, but heterogeneous multiplicities of permeating psychic states, Bergson then probes the nature of these multiplicities by examining the notion of 'number' (by which he means *amounts*), and this is where Bergson will start to get to the heart of Kant's system.⁶⁶ A number is a collection of units that are identical on whatever aspect makes them a collection. 'Fifty sheep' can only be called 'fifty *sheep*' because every single one of them is a sheep. In order for them to be '*fifty sheep*', there has to be difference between them as well, the very minimum being the position they occupy in space. Bergson argues that 'either we include them all in the same image, and it follows that we place them side by side in an ideal space, or else we repeat fifty times in succession the image of a single one.'⁶⁷ So the idea of number *necessarily requires the idea of space*. Though there might not literally be a space (I do not have to mentally position every single sheep on my desk), this does not diminish the fact that 'every clear idea of number implies a visual image in space.'⁶⁸ Numbers are therefore quantitative multiplicities: collections that contain a certain distinct amount of discrete units in space. So, one battalion is a quantitative multiplicity of five companies, each company is a quantitative multiplicity of five platoons, and so on, and we can only make this distinction because we have the idea of space: 'the very admission that it is [always] possible to divide the unit into as many parts as we like, shows that we regard [numbers] as extended.'⁶⁹ Summing up: counting and number require juxtaposition in space.

Now, though material objects can be included in quantitative multiplicities, as they are extended in space and can be perceived simultaneously, 'the case is no longer the same when we consider purely affective states.'⁷⁰ According to Bergson, it is impossible to count psychic states, because in consciousness, one is 'confronted by a confused multiplicity of sensations and feelings.'⁷¹ It simply

⁶⁶ As Worms states: 'le problème du nombre oblige Bergson à revenir sur les thèses plus générales de la critique kantienne, sur la distinction entre l'espace et le temps...', [2009] p. 155.

⁶⁷ Bergson [2001] p. 77.

⁶⁸ Ibidem, p. 79.

⁶⁹ Ibidem, p. 82.

⁷⁰ Ibidem, p. 85.

⁷¹ Ibidem, p. 87.

makes no sense to say that one has 'six happy' or 'eight angry'. Bergson emphasizes that psychic states are different kinds of multiplicities, not quantitative, but qualitative in nature. It is not possible to count them, because they all 'permeate one another, and each of [them], for its part, takes up the whole soul [and] we cannot count them unless we represent them by homogeneous units which occupy separate positions in space and consequently no longer permeate one another.'⁷² That is, by counting or even naming sensations, one already loses track of what they truly are. Their names are nothing but symbolic representations in space. Also, if the true nature of psychic states is the heterogeneous, permeating multiplicity, then number and space must be anathema to it.⁷³ That is, psychic states do not admit to amounts, cannot be set apart in extended space and cannot even be distinguished from one another: 'states of consciousness, even when successive, permeate one another, and in the simplest of them the whole soul can be reflected.'⁷⁴ Again, such permeation becomes clear when realizing that any attempt to separate 'anger', 'frustration', and 'despair' into clean-cut, distinct things is futile. They permeate one another, and, in a sense, reflect each other.

Having established this, Bergson starts to make his real move to undercut the assumptions underlying Kant's theory of freedom. He argues that we consider space to be 'an empty homogeneous medium.'⁷⁵ As has been shown, this is exactly how Kant perceives time. Time is what enables us to distinguish any number of identical and simultaneous sensations from one another. It allows us to make clean-cut distinctions and to think amounts. Bergson also points out that 'when we speak of time, we generally think of a homogeneous medium in which our conscious states are ranged alongside one another.'⁷⁶ This is strange, as this would allow the division, counting, and numbering of conscious states, which has, according to Bergson, just proved to be illegitimate. The solution, of course, presents itself automatically. Bergson argues that

[...] if time [...] is a medium in which our conscious states form a discrete series so as to admit of being counted, and if [our] conception of number ends in spreading out in space everything which can be directly counted, it is to be presumed that

⁷² Ibidem, p. 87.

⁷³ This also undermines the very notion of psychic *states*, as will become clearer when the notion of duration is introduced later in this text.

⁷⁴ Bergson [2001] p. 98.

⁷⁵ Ibidem, p. 95.

⁷⁶ Ibidem, p. 90.

time, understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, *is nothing but space*.⁷⁷

Or again:

[...] if space is to be defined as the homogeneous, it seems that inversely every homogeneous and unbounded medium will be space. For, homogeneity consisting in the absence of every quality, it is hard to see how two forms of the homogeneous could be distinguished from one.⁷⁸

Like width, length, and depth, time as it is commonly understood is nothing more than another axis of space. Of course, if time is an axis of space, then psychic states are also not extended in time. That is, saying that one is first happy and then became angry is possible in reflection, but in experience one can never distinctly separate two psychic states and say that one ends and another one starts. Just like heterogeneous permeating psychic states do not admit to number on the 'usual' axes of space, neither do they do so on the 'time' axis of space.

Separating conscious states in terms of space and time is an artificial move, mostly for the benefit of making conscious experience intelligible in terms of language. It must now be clear that this is not the mode in which consciousness truly exists according to Bergson. For Bergson, consciousness exists in what he calls *duration*: 'pure duration [is] the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when our ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states.'⁷⁹ It consists in 'interconnection and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and cannot be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought.'⁸⁰ Duration is characterized by constant change, a constant 'becoming' of ourselves, and hence by 'succession without mutual externality.'⁸¹ To better grasp the mode of duration in which consciousness truly exists, it is worth to quote at some length an example that Bergson gives concerning the way we could perceive a pendulum beating sixty seconds with sixty oscillations:

If I picture these sixty oscillations to myself all at once by a single mental perception, I exclude by hypothesis the idea of a succession. I do not think of sixty strokes which succeed one another, but of sixty strokes on a fixed line, each one of

⁷⁷ Ibidem, p. 91, emphasis added.

⁷⁸ Ibidem, p. 97.

⁷⁹ Ibidem, p. 100.

⁸⁰ Ibidem, p. 101.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 108.

which symbolizes, so to speak, an oscillation of the pendulum. If, on the other hand, I wish to picture [them] in succession, but without altering the way they are produced in space, I [...] think of each oscillation to the exclusion of the recollection of the preceding one, for space has preserved no trace of it; but by doing so I [...] give up the attempt to think a succession or a duration. Now if, finally, I retain the recollection of the preceding oscillation together with the image of the present oscillation, one of two things will happen. Either I shall set the two images side by side, and then we fall back to [thinking in terms of space], or I shall perceive one in the other, each permeating the other and organizing themselves like the notes of a tune, so as to form what we shall call a continuous or qualitative multiplicity with no resemblance to number.⁸²

This example illustrates that according to Bergson, space, including the time axis, is homogeneous and knows only simultaneity, and that it is only in duration that succession takes place. That is, only by memories of previous states in their consciousness are human beings able to connect different occurrences in the world to each other: '[only] in duration, nothing is lost, as each moment stands under the sign of the entire flow of the past'⁸³. Hence there cannot be real time in matter:

[...] when I follow the movement of a hand on a clock, [...] without [...] the observer, there would be no real transition from one position of the hand to another: the interval of the *durée* exists only for us, and because of the mutual penetration of our conscious states; outside us one would find nothing but space, and thus simultaneities, of which one may not even say that they objectively succeed each other, as any succession is conceived of by comparing the present to the past.⁸⁴

Without the observer, each state of the world is completely distinct, and therefore nothing can be said to result from anything else:

[...] each of the so-called successive states of the external world exists alone; their multiplicity is real only for a consciousness that can first retain them and then set them side by side externalizing them in relation to one another. If it retains them, it is because these distinct states of the external world give rise to states of

⁸² Ibidem, p. 105.

⁸³ Kolakowski [1985] p. 3.

⁸⁴ Ibidem, p. 16.

consciousness which permeate one another, imperceptibly organize themselves into a whole, and bind the past to the present by this very process of connection⁸⁵.

To put it shortly: 'outside us, mutual externality without succession; within us, succession without mutual externality.'⁸⁶

Bergson uses the metaphors of the spool, the color spectrum, and the elastic band to get a better sense of duration within the limitations of language. First, imagine a tape rolling between two spools. This represents duration in the sense that consciousness is in a perpetual state of becoming: with every moment, it changes because something new is added to it. However, the image of the tape is still too homogeneous. Therefore, he adds the metaphor of the color spectrum, in which each section is qualitatively different from every other section. This represents duration as a heterogeneous multiplicity. Finally, he adds the metaphor of the elastic band, imagining it being stretched from every single point onto every single other point. This represents the permeation of states. So, the 'unrolling of our duration [the tape between the spools] on one side resembles the unity of a movement which progresses [the elastic band], on the other hand a multiplicity of states spreading out [the color spectrum].'⁸⁷ This turn to metaphors in order to grasp the notion of duration again illustrates how Bergson is constantly at odds with the very language he is forced to employ:

[...] let us take our mind off the space subtending [...] movement itself and concentrate solely on the movement itself, on the act of tension or extension, in short, on pure mobility. This time we shall have a more exact image of our development in duration. [...] And yet the image will still be incomplete, and all comparison furthermore will be inadequate, because the unrolling of our duration in certain aspects resembles the unity of a movement which progresses, in others, a multiplicity of states spreading out, and because no metaphor can express one of the two aspects without sacrificing the other. If I evoke a spectrum of a thousand shades, I have before me a complete thing, whereas duration is the act of completing itself.⁸⁸

For Bergson, then, there is a real space, containing a width, length, depth, and time axis. In space, phenomena are present simultaneously. There is also a real duration, a heterogeneity of moments that permeate one another. In

⁸⁵ Bergson [2001] p. 121.

⁸⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 227.

⁸⁷ Lawlor [2010] p. 30.

⁸⁸ Bergson [1971] p. 194.

duration, there is a succession of these moments, but it remains impossible to clearly distinguish these moments from each other. However, since the course of a life necessarily 'unfolds' within a spatially extended world, Bergson argues that we inevitably 'translate' moments of duration into terms that pertain to space and distinct amounts. For Bergson, language itself relies on space. Therefore, whenever one tries to articulate moments of duration, they are automatically molded into shapes that are intelligible in terms of space, that is, in terms of extension and amount. By perceiving objects that have clear beginnings and ends in space, we come to think of our own mental sensations as having these clear beginnings and ends as well. For example, we necessarily think of a moment of joy as something that starts at a given point ('when I laid eyes upon the Mona Lisa') and then ends at another one ('when other visitors blocked my view'). It is when we relate such a moment of duration to a state in the world that we create the time-axis of space: 'duration [then] assumes the illusory form of a homogeneous medium, and the connecting link between [...] space and duration, is simultaneity, which might be defined as the intersection of time and space.'⁸⁹ In other words, time is what *we* create in order to 'fit' duration onto space, but the price paid is that true duration will then always be misrepresented, as its articulations in terms of time will always be 'contaminated' by space.

In true duration, consciousness exists in states of permeating, heterogeneous multiplicity that do not allow for extension in time or space, and hence cannot be counted, organized, or numbered. Thus, sensations occur under what Bergson calls 'two aspects: the one clear and precise, but impersonal, the other confused, ever changing, and inexpressible, because language cannot get hold of it without arresting its mobility or to fit it into its common-place forms without making it into public property.'⁹⁰ In addition, Bergson warns that not all conscious states are incorporated into the second aspect. That is, many or even most sensations float on the surface of consciousness-in-duration, like dead leaves on the water of a pond. The more we affirm living in a world of extensive, distinct, concrete ideas and articulations, the more we remove ourselves from our deepest selves. These warnings foreshadow the theory of freedom that results from Bergson's conception of consciousness as being outside of time and (its axis of) space.

⁸⁹ Bergson [2001] p. 110.

⁹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 129.

7. Freedom in duration

Finding that time is a man-made addition to space, our sole yet flawed way of articulating the succession of moments in duration or ‘real time’, Bergson now has reason to do away with Kant’s theory of freedom and, by proxy, the whole debate on the freedom of the will. The fundamental assumption that human consciousness resides on a homogeneous, infinite, and divisible ‘line’ of time has turned out to be an illusion. Time and representation of things within it is a human construct used to adapt conscious states ‘to the requirements of social life in general and language in particular.’⁹¹ If time is artificial and duration is real, then there is no need for the Kantian escape to an intelligible realm. On the contrary, once we realize that time has nothing to do with the fundamental nature of human consciousness, we can stay well within nature when considering the question of human freedom. After all, the very thesis of determinism in nature rests upon a juxtaposition of states. As Bergson argues: ‘determinism represents the self as a collection of psychic states, the strongest of which exerts a prevailing influence and carries the others with it. This doctrine thus sharply distinguishes co-existing psychic phenomena from one another.’⁹² Determinism requires clear-cut causes and distinct effects, for instance frustration causing anger. However, when we relate to conscious states in those terms, we are not talking about the states themselves, but their symbolic representations, the words that express them (poorly). That this is an illegitimate move becomes clearer when trying to articulate deep-rooted emotions like love. The harder we try, the more we notice that love is indeed a multiplicity of numerous heterogeneous psychic states, each one permeating the other, making it impossible to provide an adequate description or definition. As Bergson concludes: ‘there is no common measure between mind and language.’⁹³

This is exactly where both determinists and non-determinists go wrong. As Bergson explains, they usually draw a series of conscious states from point M to point O. At point O, we have to make a choice between X and Y. This can be represented by two lines diverging from point O. When we choose X, the determinist will say that previous states necessitated the choice. The indeterminist will say that one could have chosen any of the two branches. The mistake they both make is assuming that in deliberation, the feelings, desires and sensations associated with X and those associated with Y are distinct, different things. Bergson argues that the aforementioned arguments prove that ‘the very question

⁹¹ Ibidem, p. 128.

⁹² Ibidem, p. 159.

⁹³ Ibidem, p. 165.

[of which side of the debate is right] is meaningless, because there is no line MO, no point O, no path OX, no direction OY. To ask such a question is to admit the possibility of adequately representing time by space and a succession by a simultaneity.⁹⁴ The usual participants of the debate think that deliberating a choice lies in comparing two distinct, separate sets of motivations. In truth, while deliberation is going on, the self changes and constantly modifies. This means that a dynamic series of permeating states is formed, leading 'by a natural evolution to a free act.'⁹⁵ After all, if the self would not grow and change in the process of deliberation, but merely review the data presented to it, how could it ever make a choice? Participants in the debate represent the deliberation as an oscillation in time, and therefore in space, which has nothing to do with the inherent nature of human consciousness. For Bergson, this is also why one can never fully predict another man's thoughts and actions: at best, they can be anticipated. He emphasizes that the only way of predicting another man's actions would be to assume not only his coordinates in space, but also to assume his consciousness in duration, including his memories, which would in sum amount to *being* that other man. This would no longer boil down to predicting, but simply be acting. As Harris argues, 'actual prediction is possible only if some antecedent occurs again and again, but that is impossible in [duration].'⁹⁶ Again, duration and consciousness residing within it do not allow for space and its time-aspect, therefore the very notion of causality as it is usually understood is utterly meaningless for Bergson. Duration and its modes of perpetual change and movement cannot be divided. Bergson compares this to a melody, in the sense that, like duration, a melody is constituted by *change as such*, without a thing, a second term, that it is departing from or arriving at.

Having shown how the 'usual suspects' of the free will debate are misguided, Bergson posits his own conception of freedom, stating that freedom is 'the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs.'⁹⁷ We are free because consciousness endures, because it is a constant becoming, unrestrained by space and its time axis. We are free 'when our acts spring from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.'⁹⁸ Therefore, freedom admits to intensities and, again, Bergson insists that not all conscious states blend with

⁹⁴ Ibidem, p. 180.

⁹⁵ Ibidem, p. 171.

⁹⁶ Harris [1933] p. 513.

⁹⁷ Bergson [2001] p. 219.

⁹⁸ Ibidem, p. 172.

another 'as raindrops on the water of a lake.'⁹⁹ An example that he gives is that of an education that is not properly assimilated into one's character. It is only when the whole soul acts that an act can be free for Bergson, because only then does it emerge from the whole of consciousness-in-duration. Thus understood, free acts are exceptional, because we

[...] generally perceive our own self by refraction through space, that our conscious states crystallize into words, and that our living and concrete self thus gets covered with an outer crust of clean-cut psychic states, which are separated from one another and consequently fixed.¹⁰⁰

In other words: the more our actions spring forth from habit, from social conventions, and from routine, the less free they are, because they are then embedded in the everyday life of space and its time axis. On the contrary, it is at 'the great and solemn crisis [...] that we choose in defiance of what is conventionally called a motive, and this absence of any tangible reason is the more striking the deeper our freedom goes.'¹⁰¹ Somewhat disappointingly, Bergson concludes that any attempt to further explain freedom will actually diminish it, as 'any positive definition of freedom will ensure the victory of determinism.'¹⁰² After all, the entire effort was to demonstrate how free consciousness resides in duration, which is outside time, the space-axis of time, *and* language as a space-based medium. Kolakowski has also noted this difficulty (or impossibility) in trying to elaborate on Bergson's theory of freedom: 'in Bergson's analysis freedom is both unquestionably certain and utterly unprovable in the sense which the word 'to prove' has acquired in scientific inquiry.'¹⁰³ As Bergson concludes:

[...] to sum up; every demand for explanation in regard to freedom comes back, without our suspecting it, to the following question: "can time be adequately represented by space?". To which we answer: Yes, if you are dealing with time flown; No, if you speak of time flowing. Now, the free act takes place in time which is flowing and not in time which has already flown. Freedom is therefore a fact, and among the facts which we observe there is none clearer. All the difficulties of the problem, and the problem itself, arise from the desire to endow duration with the same attributes as extensity, to interpret a succession by

⁹⁹ Ibidem, p. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Ibidem, p. 167.

¹⁰¹ Ibidem, p. 170.

¹⁰² Ibidem, p. 219.

¹⁰³ Kolakowski [1985] p. 22.

a simultaneity and to express the idea of freedom in a language into which it is obviously untranslatable.’¹⁰⁴

As one can imagine, this error perceived by Bergson has far wider ramifications than just the debate on free will. Indeed, he has argued for an entire ‘philosophy which sees duration in the very stuff of reality.’¹⁰⁵

8. Conclusions

The preceding sections have emphasized that Kant’s theory of freedom rests upon a fundamental assumption concerning time. In *Time and free will*, Bergson criticizes this assumption, arguing that it, underlying not just Kant’s theory but the entire debate on free will, renders both determinist positions and their rival theories meaningless. He demonstrates how time is not a temporal, but a spatial notion, an argument that allows him to develop his own notions of duration and freedom.¹⁰⁶ In the conclusion to *Time and free will*, Bergson states that ‘Kant’s greatest mistake was to take time as a homogeneous medium.’¹⁰⁷ Kant ignored that duration is ‘moments inside one another’, and that when it assumes the form of a homogeneous whole, it is because it is expressed in space as the mere symbolic representation of the true ego. Kant thought that ‘consciousness was incapable of perceiving psychic states otherwise than by juxtaposition, forgetting that a medium in which these states are set side by side and distinguished from one another is of course space, and not duration.’¹⁰⁸ This led him to believe that our inner and the outer world are subjected to the same causal relations. He

¹⁰⁴ Bergson [2001] p. 221.

¹⁰⁵ Bergson [1998] p. 272.

¹⁰⁶ *Time and free will* is a psychological project, focusing almost exclusively on duration as a lived experience versus time as a measured quantity. In *Matter and memory* and further work, Bergson investigates the possibility of extending duration into matter, making it ‘the variable essence of things’ (Deleuze [1988] p. 34). Or as Bergson asserts ‘homogeneous space and homogeneous time are [...] neither properties of things nor essential conditions of our faculty of knowing them’ [1991] p. 21. By the time of *Creative evolution*, he posits duration as a characteristic immanent to the universe, making our psychological duration merely one aspect or case of a wider notion (Ansell Pearson, Mullarkey [2002] pp. 9–12, 37). As a consequence, Bergson will also dispute the homogeneity of space understood as empty form (see Mullarkey [2000] for an elaboration on this theme). However, it is important to note that none of these developments in Bergson’s thinking deviate from his initial argument on time and the consequences for freedom. For example, *Matter and memory* still squarely affirms that the tension of duration determines the measure of freedom [1991] p. 247–248. The conclusion to *Matter and memory* as a whole clearly illustrates how Bergson’s further work is still pinned on the initial move of moving time away from succession and into duration in *Time and free will*. Similarly, the notion of freedom that finds its inception in *Time and free will* permeates the entirety of *Creative evolution*.

¹⁰⁷ Bergson [2001] p. 232.

¹⁰⁸ Ibidem.

therefore had to elevate freedom to the sphere of the noumena. According to Bergson, this Kantian self is properly outside of space, but it is also outside of duration, ‘and therefore out of the reach of our faculty of knowledge [while] the truth is that we perceive [the] self whenever, by a strenuous effort of reflection, we turn our eyes from the shadow which follows us and retire into ourselves.’¹⁰⁹ The true self resides in duration, a qualitative multiplicity with no likeness to number, a heterogeneity with no distinct qualities. Duration is the stuff out of which conscious existence is made; ‘for a conscious being, to exist is to change and to change is to endure.’¹¹⁰ Whereas Kant built his theory of freedom on the assumption that there is time in nature, Bergson shows that in nature, *there is no time*. There is only space and duration, and time only exists as an artificial tool to support language and everyday existence, spawned by man from a mixture of space and duration and then added to space as a fourth axis. For Bergson, free acts therefore do not emerge from adhering to reason. It is much more likely that well-reasoned actions are part of our superficial self, our character insofar as it resides within habit, routine, and the limits of language. This latter self is the mere ‘social representation’ of the true self that exists in a state of constant originality, creativity, and becoming.¹¹¹ The implication of Bergson’s position is therefore that ‘the future does not exist in the way that, for a determinist, events are mere unfolding of reality already hidden in existing conditions. In contrast, life is a creative process, characterized by unpredictability and newness.’¹¹²

According to Bergson, it thus turns out that it is not just compatibilism that is a ‘wretched subterfuge’, but the entire debate on free will as such, including Kant’s own theory of freedom. Moreover, the latter should be considered an abomination, because in addition to a misconception of time, it also imposes the same form of the moral law on our actions for all eternity, whereas for Bergson, the fundamental characteristic of life is unpredictability, surprise, and originality. By introducing duration, Bergson attempts to liberate us from the constraints of the debate on free will, as well as from ‘scientism, mechanism, determinism, associative materialism and positivism.’¹¹³ Even though he posits freedom as a fundamental condition of consciousness in duration, we should, however, always remember that for Bergson, the free act is exceptionally rare, as it requires ‘the effort to contract as much of our own duration as possible and to push it into

¹⁰⁹ Ibidem, p. 233.

¹¹⁰ Watts Cunningham [1914] p. 526.

¹¹¹ Bergson [2001] p. 231.

¹¹² Kolakowski [1985] p. 2.

¹¹³ Kolakowski [1985] p. 5.

the present, thereby creating a future that is absolutely new.’¹¹⁴ In addition, we pay the price of hardly knowing our true selves, as we ‘mostly perceive nothing but the outward display of our mental states. We catch only the impersonal aspect of our feelings, and that aspect which speech has set down. Thus, even in our own individual, individuality escapes us.’¹¹⁵ For Bergson – however, such is life.

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¹¹⁴ Jacobs, Perri [2010] p. 111.

¹¹⁵ Harris [1933] p. 515.

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