

Henri bergson

[Science](#), [Biology](#)



HENRI BERGSON History of Ideas 2012 To: Sir Asad Shahzad 10/21/2012

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Introduction: Henri Bergson (1859-1941) was one of the most famous and influential French philosophers of the late 19th century-early 20th century.

Bergson was born in Paris on October 18, 1859; he was the second of seven children of a Polish Father and English mother; both of his parents were Jewish. Bergson was a notably exceptional pupil throughout his childhood.

Like his German contemporary, Edmund Husserl, Bergson's original training was in mathematics.

Although his international fame reached cult-like heights during his lifetime, his influence decreased notably after the Second World War. While such French thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Levinas explicitly acknowledged his influence on their thought, it is generally agreed that it

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was Gilles Deleuze's 1966 Bergsonism that marked the reawakening of interest in Bergson's work. Deleuze realized that Bergson's most enduring contribution to philosophical thinking is his concept of multiplicity. Bergson's concept of multiplicity attempts to unify in a consistent way two contradictory features: heterogeneity and continuity.

Many philosophers today think that this concept of multiplicity, despite its difficulty, is revolutionary. It is revolutionary because it opens the way to a reconception of community. (www. plato. stanford. edu) BERGSON'S INTUITION BY: SYEDA AREEBA TARIQ HENRI BERGSON: He wrote a book 'THE CREATIVE MIND' in 1946. This book is an introduction to metaphysics which consist of collection of essays and lectures concerning the nature of intuition, explaining how intuition can be used as a philosophical method. Metaphysics is the branch of philosophy in which the nature of being and world is taken into context.

Whereas, two important questions are answered 1. what is there? And 2. what is it like? I would be explaining what intuition according to Bergson is and why it is called philosophical method. INTUITION: DEFINITION OF INTUITION: * An immediate cognition of object not inferred or determined by a previous cognition of the same object. * Untaught pure knowledge. EXPLANATION: Philosophical definition of intuition says that it is an immediate process of knowing of some object not by reasoning or analyzing the previous knowing of the same object.

It is therefore, said to be pure or untaught knowledge that one acquires at an instant. ACCORDING TO BERGSON: According to Henry Bergson intuition is described as a method of 'thinking in duration' which reflects the continuous <https://assignbuster.com/henri-bergson/>

flow of reality. A SMALL PRACTICE THAT LED TO INTUITION: Once he was rolling and unrolling thread and said that this represent man's sense of mortality and the continual gain of new memory; a spectrum of a thousand shades with a current of feeling running through them, collecting and retaining them, to represent how all the moments are heterogeneous.

The human has tendency to build new memories and retain them. He said that human memory has stored thousand of new things different from the one formed and the one that will form every time if they go through the process of knowing. EXAMPLE: Example that he gave was of a piece of elastic which is contracted than drawn out to its limit and we can observe that there is a flow. The elastic produces a line which grows long and long presents that something is pure indivisible mobile unit. SINKING INTO INTUITION: He says that this is duration which can't be divided.

It is the qualitative not quantitative it has multiplicity yet unity and is mobile and continuously penetrating itself. He even says that duration can't be represented by concept. One cannot experience the feeling if just a concept is there. One can't grasp duration with concept. But duration is grasped only by intuition. By which one is transported into an object to grasp what is unique and ineffable (can't describe in word) within it. Intuition is a complete philosophical method that involves placing oneself within the Duration, and expanding it into a continuous heterogeneity.

EXAMPLE: Take an example a person has captured lots of picture of CBM from different angles and a poet has composed a poem over life here but one cannot replicate the feeling of being in CBM itself whereas the poem can never give the dimensional value of walking in CBM. EXPLANATION: Thus any

concept given cannot grasp duration flow of real time but intuition can grasp duration. One can sink into the other object by having intuition an instant knowledge which is unique can't be explained is gain by person which forms a new memory.

Thus intuition is a direct perception and experience of the continuous flow of reality, without the use of any concepts the flow of time as real duration can be experienced only by intuition. ANOTHER EXAMPLE: He uses the example of an artist who makes a series of sketches of Notre Dame in Paris. “ Now at the bottom of all the sketches made in Paris, the stranger will probably write ‘ Paris’ by way of reminder. And as he has really seen Paris, he will be able, by descending from the original intuition of the whole, to place his sketches in it and thus arrange them in relation to one another.

But there is no way of performing the opposite operation; even with an infinity of sketches as exact as you like, even with the word ‘ Paris’ to indicate that they must bear close connection, it is impossible to travel back to an intuition one has not had, and gain the impression of Paris if one has never seen Paris (201). ” EXPLANATION: Here he says that if an artist has sketched a model of a city which he has actually seen and drew him would have knowing of the place which he has transferred to his sketches. He is descending from original intuition in order to place his sketches in it.

But if a person who has never seen Paris he cannot enjoy Paris sketches as much as the one who saw in actual would transport himself to the sketches and intuit it as an object. The person never seen Paris can never feel like walking into the place rather he would make a new intuition of his one within the duration. A person can form an immediate knowing of object different

from the knowing of the same object before by actually being in duration through intuition. Why intuition is called as philosophical method-of transporting into object to grasp what is ineffable????

Intuition is a method through which one cast off or throws his habits of mind that tries to break duration and thus convert the duration into space. To know anything as whole it's necessary to intuit rather breaking into bits of pieces. Experience can only come from intuition. We hear melody; we hear the whole, not a series of notes one after another. When we analyze the melody, we may indeed break it into a number of notes, but we are then analyzing the notes, not the melody. The melody, to be known, must be grasped as a whole. In other words, it must be intuited. Thus, the method of intuition is at essence the task of metaphysics.

Metaphysics is not a synthesis of knowledge, a sort of piecing together of the notes to form a melody, nor is it analysis, the breaking down of a melody into its component notes. Metaphysics is the experience of melody. Thus concludes Bergson in his "Introduction to Metaphysics": "Metaphysics has nothing in common with a generalization of experience, and yet it could be defined as the whole of experience (l'expérience intégrale)." BERGSON'S TIME AND FREE WILL BY: ASFIA AZIZ TIME AND FREE WILL (1889) - HENRI BERGSON Henri Bergson in his book has explained various different ideas amongst which the most studied are of * Time and Space The Idea of Pure Duration * Free Will and Determinism I will explain each point in detail. This book has influenced Sartre towards Philosophy. This book is also considered to be an anti-thesis to Immanuel Kant. Kant proposed that Freedom is something beyond the circle of time and space. Time and space is

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considered as ‘ same’ to Kant i. e. being homogenous. Bergson on the contrary, differentiates time and space and gives forward the concept of duration, a state in which freedom is experienced. (www. stanford. edu) The explanations have been extracted from his book “ Time and Free will- An essay on the immediate data of consciousness” SPACE:

Henri Bergson defines space as being homogenous. It is the same and identical to everyone perceiving it. He says that multiplicity exists in space. Multiplicity is the psychic state of being multiple at the same time. It has a connection with the human mind and reason, because reason enables a person to understand the state of multiplicity. Bergson demonstrates two kinds of multiplicity: 1. Quantitative Multiplicity: When we count physically existing materials and we localize them in space, it is called quantitative multiplicity.

No symbolic representation and mental images are formed to perceive this kind of state, because things exist physically in front of our eyes. (Key Writings, Bergson, continuum, p53) Example, when we count the number of sheep in a flock of sheep, we save images of the previous sheep in our minds as our counting progresses. These images are involuntarily fixed by us at a point in space. 2. Qualitative Multiplicity: This is the analysis of the states of consciousness being multiple when we perceive intangible materials or qualities. Here, formation of mental images and symbolic representation is important.

Example, when we hear a noise of footsteps, our minds form a mental image of somebody walking and each of the successive sounds of the steps are localized in space; we count our sensations by localizing them into space and <https://assignbuster.com/henri-bergson/>

this leads to the demonstration of qualitative multiplicity. (Key Writings, Bergson, continuum p53) By defining the existence of multiplicity in space, Henri Bergson then defines space as: “ Space is what enables us to distinguish a number of identical and simultaneous sensations from one another; it is thus a principle of differentiation” Some people say that simultaneous sensations are never identical.

To support this point, Henri Bergson states that when we talk about homogenous medium we are talking about the simultaneity of terms which are identical in quality but are distinct from each other. Henri proposes that the higher the intelligence in a human, the more clear the understanding of homogenous space will be. Men have the special faculty of conceiving space without quality and hence we say that the medium where men localize simultaneous sensations and objects are the same for everyone. (Key Writings, Henri Bergson, continuum, pg 57) TIME:

Usually many philosophers take time and space to be the same. But Henri Bergson, differentiates between time and space. For him, there are two kinds of time: * Mathematical time: Mathematical time is the time which is used in sciences by scientists. It is homogenous time which is the same for everyone. This is the time which many philosophers consider as space, as it is homogenous. (ibid, p63) Example, the time in hours, minutes and seconds used to calculate speed of a moving body is mathematical time. It can also be called the clock time. * Real Time or Real Duration:

According to Bergson, real time is the time that we experience and it is continuous and flowing. It is heterogeneous as it is the qualitative representation of time that differs from person to person. It is also called the <https://assignbuster.com/henri-bergson/>

state of real duration defined by Bergson as: “ Pure duration is the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes when ego lets itself live, when it refrains from separating its present state from its former states” To understand this, Bergson said that real duration is the state of mind where our ego dominates.

Ego is the self of a person and directs the person’s mind to amalgamate the past states with the present states in an organic whole. In this conscious state, all states of mind permeate into one another to form it as a whole. (ibid, p60) Example, when we hear successive rings of a bell, we perceive that sound to be in a continuous rhythm and do not distinguish each ting of the bell. This amalgamation and permeation of the successive rings of bell into one organic whole is what real duration is all about. Past and Present:

When Bergson speaks of the past, he does not mean the past, but our present memory of the past. Present is the only moment in the whole history of the world. Past resides in the present and that also changes the aspirations for future. This permeation of former and present states demonstrates real duration. Example, a man has a best friend and he believes him to have all good characteristics. One day, if he sees his best friend lying to him, all his perceptions about the good characteristics would change.

This shows that his present will change his past and future too. This is how real duration is experienced in real life. Quotations by Henri Bergson, “ The present contains nothing more than the past, and what is found in the effect was already in the cause. ” “ The idea of future, pregnant with infinity of possibilities, is thus more fruitful than the future itself, and this is why we

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find more charm in hope than in possession, in dream than in reality" FREE WILL AND DETERMINISM: Real Duration vindicates human freedom and disposes off the path of determinism.

To understand this, we must first understand these two doctrines separately. Determinism: It is a doctrine that all human choices, events and actions have sufficient causes and are pre-determined by the states of mind. For a determinist, freedom of choice is an illusion. This illusion can be presented as, that if a person has to select one branch from a lot of branches; the branch that he selects is a choice that is fully predictable because somewhere at the back of his mind he has the idea of which branch to select. (www. informationphilosopher. com) In response to this example, Bergson proposed the idea of free will and said that the above choice is a choice through the formation of a mental image localized in space, which is inadequate to symbolize a choice. Choice is a temporal act for Bergson as it is pertaining to the present and conscious state of mind. Free Will: It is a doctrine that the events and actions of human beings are expressed through personal choices and are not governed by other forces or states of mind.

Henri Bergson proposes that through experiencing real duration we can be free. The freedom of choice is fully certified by direct experience says Bergson. He describes free will as, " A man is free when his act springs spontaneously from his total personality and it has evolved up to the moment of action. If this spontaneity is absent, his action will be stereotyped" When man experiences real duration, he gains possession of himself and once self possession is attained, the man acts freely and creatively.

Freedom has a strong association with personality or character of an individual. Character and personality changes from different situations which in turn changes our self. To demonstrate this idea, Bergson uses the saying of an English writer Stuart Mill: “ To be conscious of free will must mean to be conscious, before I have decided, that I am able to decide either way” Bergson and other defenders of free will would be of the opinion that, when we perform an action freely, some other action is ‘ equally possible’ which we leave and make a choice willingly.

When a determinist says that our motives determine our action, Bergson says that motives are conflicting. He says that common sense believes in free will, and motives are not a necessity for defining our actions (Time and Free Will, Bergson, p148). To prove that motives are conflicting, Henri Bergson presents the sayings of Stuart Mill as: “ I could have abstained from murder if my aversion to the crime and my dread of its consequences had been weaker than the temptation which impelled me to commit it. ” In response to this Henri Bergson said, His desire to do right and his aversion to doing wrong are strong enough to overcome... any other desire or aversion which may conflict them”(TFW, p150) Through this, the only idea that Bergson intends to provide is that the motives of ‘ desire’ and ‘ aversion’ are conflicting. But when the man decides to select one of them, it demonstrates his free will and freedom of choice. BERGSON’S CREATIVE EVOLUTION BY: AMMARAH MASROOR Let us first start with the basic definition of evolution, MEANING OF EVOLUTION: A process of formation or growth, progressive change or development in the inherited characteristics of biological populations over successive generations” Hence

the term ‘ Evolution’ means that certain characteristics or genes starts transforming in a population which then results in a complete transformation of that population’s characteristics which was once inherited by the preceding populations. So it is said that the growth or development which has been taking place as the generations passed has thus completed and now it can be said that this species has evolved.

This process of evolution can take place in living organisms as well as in non-living organisms. Some general examples could be the evolution of the bottle of coke or the evolution of airplanes, what we once used to see in cartoons and documentaries and what we see now in reality and in which most of us have travelled is absolutely an evolution. The best example for the evolution in living organisms is the evolution of mankind, the theory that Darwin proposed and the idea that he gave that, ‘ Man is the descendant of apes’

CREATIVE EVOLUTION: Henri Bergson proposed the idea of evolution as ‘ Creative Evolution’.

He believed that human beings are primarily to be explained in terms of the evolutionary process and that the mechanical process of random selection is inadequate to explain what occurs. According to Bergson: “ Creative evolution is a sort of inner drive which he calls as “ elan vital”, translated as “ life force” and this life force has a connection with the real time that carries the process of evolution perpetually onward. ” In order to understand this definition of creative evolution first one needs to understand the two concepts that he highlights in here: Essence of Life:

For Bergson the essence of life is duration, the real time – time that is continuously flowing through which we have direct inner experience and is

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connected with life itself, with the life force that is the elan vital because of which goes on the everlasting process of evolution. Elan Vital: Bergson gives an explanation to this terminology as “ an original common impulse which explains the creation of all living species”. The word’s literal meanings are ‘ vital force’, ‘life force’ or ‘ vital impulse’. A combination of both real time and life force causes the process of creative evolution to begin. BOOK – CREATIVE EVOLUTION:

In order to further explain his work and concept about creative evolution Henri Bergson wrote a book in 1907 which provided an explanation against Darwin’s Theory of Mechanism. He was also awarded a Nobel Prize for this work of his. COMPARISION BETWEEN DARWIN’S THEORY OF MECHANICAL EVOLUTION AND BERGSON’S THEORY OF CREATIVE EVOLUTION: In order to understand that why Bergson’s Theory is known as Creative Evolution and Darwin’s Theory as Mechanical Evolution let us have a comparison between the two theories. This comparison includes the 4 main points of both the theories and all the points of each theory are interrelated with each other.

The first and the foremost comparison between the two theories are about the approaches they follow. Bergson’s creative evolution follows the teleological approach of traditional finalism that is everything that starts comes to its natural place which ultimately makes the genuine creative creation. Now here the teleological approach comes from the word teleology which means that things should be explained by the appeal to their goal, purpose or functions. For example if you throw a rock it would go to its natural place – the ground, due to the gravitational pull that exists.

Teleological whereas can be explained for the existence or presence of biological trait, structure or behavior by appeal to its function. In comparison to this Darwin's mechanical evolution follows the mechanistic approach which precludes the possibility of any real change or creativity as the products of evolution is given in advance, in the form of pre-existent possibilities. This explains that this process deprives evolution of any inventiveness or creativity because this process is treated as pure mechanism which simply adds existence to something that already had been in the form of possible.

Hence there is no difference left between the real and possible. Although both the approaches, to some extent are same because they provide us with the notion that " Whole is given". Therefore, neither mechanism nor strict finalism can give a satisfying account of changes in life. The second comparison is about the Tendency Theory. Here Bergson talks about the " complexification" of life, that is, the phenomenon of its evolution from the simple original vital impulse into different species, individuals, and organs.

Here he explains two concepts, firstly he explains that after evolution has occurred species are then differentiated into plants, animals and humans. Then he further explains that life is complex and in order to simplify itself it organizes itself into two great opposite tendencies, namely, instinct and intelligence. Here he then explains the second concept that these tendencies further provides a distinction between humans and animals, that humans have both these tendencies whereas animals only have one that is instinct.

This is the reason why Bergson calls this evolution of mankind as ' Creative Evolution'. In comparison to this Darwin speaks of the ' Natural Selection' - <https://assignbuster.com/henri-bergson/>

the primary mechanism of change over time which includes 4 components * Variation * Inheritance * High rate of population growth * Differential survival and reproduction This is very obvious from the four of its points that he believes that the more the specie is adaptable to change, the variance and tendency to inherit and the more it increases its population through reproduction it has more chances of evolution.

The third comparison is that Bergson believes at the peripheral of intelligence a fringe of instinct survives which helps us to understand the essence of life. This means that at the boundaries of intelligence a border of instinct is present. His concept is that instinct is the primary factor whereas intelligence is the secondary factor. Instinct comes in first and then the intelligence, this is why instinct came first in all living organisms but then some of the organisms further evolved.

Hence because of this evolution they can then be differentiated as animals - with instinct whereas humans - with instinct and then with intelligence (after evolution). Comparing this with Darwin's theory it can be said that he had no concept of the two tendencies hence focused on the concept of " Survival of the Fittest". According to him there exists no such tendencies which helps us to lead our lives, instead there is this concept of " Survival of the Fittest" where only those species survives that are open to changes, open to use available resources and can fit in the present environment whereas others are there to die.

An example could be of the movie Ice Age where all the animals in that movie do not further exist instead they have evolved (the mammoth have now evolved as elephants). The point of Bergson in this comparison can be <https://assignbuster.com/henri-bergson/>

concluded as there is a little bit of instinct surviving within each intelligent being, making it to coincide with the life force. This partial coincidence is what found 'Intuition'. The fourth comparison in actual is not a comparison because it is just a one sided difference.

Here Bergson puts forward his view and connects it with his previous point of tendencies, that combined result of instinct and intellect is "intuition". Through intuition, an individual understands the difference between 'order' and 'disorder'. Intuition means gut feeling, sometimes known as the 6th sense. Bergson says that our way of perceiving and knowing this world when based on the need for living is then an obstacle. To this obstacle he gives the name 'Idea of Disorder'. This idea consists of three notions: 1.

Order: things happening according to our needs and wants 2. Disorder: simply the order we are not looking for. Although this order may be correct for others but for us it is not happening according to what we want. 3. Nothingness: things that exist in space but we do not consider them to be as existing because it had never been our need. To this point of Bergson there is no comparing point of Darwin because he never came to the point of intuition. His theory stopped at the notions of 'Natural Selection' and 'Survival of the Fittest'. LETTER TO HAROLD HOFFDING:

Henri Bergson in one of his letter to Harold Hoff ding which was published in his book key writings said that " someone who gets a complete grasp on the creative evolution would never then believe on the process of mechanism because in that time is useless". CRITICS: Although Bergson made his ideas attractive with analogies and poetic metaphors he did not support them with rational arguments. He left them to the readers to understand it themselves

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on their level of intuition. Furthermore, his critics complained that his ideas did not stand up very well to logical analysis.

His defenders replied by saying that he possessed all these characteristics in common with the best creative writers, and that this was because he was offering insights rather than logical arguments. REFERENCES: * [www. google. com](http://www.google.com)

* [www. googleimages. com](http://www.googleimages.com) * [www. stanfordencyclopediaofphilosophy. com](http://www.stanfordencyclopediaofphilosophy.com) (plato. stanford. edu) * [www. dictionary. references. com](http://www.dictionary.references.com) * Key Writings - Henri Bergson (continuum) * Modern Philosophy by Bertrand Russell * History of Western Philosophers * 20th Century Philosophy