

DO NOT CITE. Notes for Intro Lecture

Bergson (1859-1941) was world-famous in the early 20th C. He suffered almost a total eclipse from the 30s through the 90s: not quite Zelig-style, but he was definitely dépassé in favor of the phenomenologists and structuralists. He was also dismissed as a mystic by the analytic camp, after some snide remarks by Russell. His showing against Einstein in 1923 didn't help either. Deleuze wrote on him in 1956 and 1966 at a time when few paid any attention to him. As Deleuze became more important in the Anglophone world in the 1990s due to the translations of LS and DR, he carried Bergson along with him. Today we have a growing interest in him, both as an influence on Deleuze and in his own right.

Bergson wrote 4 main books, along with two important essay collections, and some other things. We're going to start with two smaller pieces which give an overview of B's mature position, then go back to the start and work our way forward. We're going to skip the confrontation with Einstein and relativity, though. "The better part of valor," etc.

1889: *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience* (lit. Essay on the immediate givens of consciousness). Translated as *Time and Free Will*, which is not bad in terms of the book's content. We'll read Chapter 2, on the concept of duration or concrete lived time. This chapter includes the important distinction of qualitative or continuous – heterogeneous [virtual] multiplicity versus discrete multiplicity, which Deleuze sees as a key. A qualitative / virtual multiplicity actualizes itself along divergent lines. These lines are immanent, but not prefigured; they take shape in the very act of divergent actualization. In other words, passing a threshold divides the system, producing a qualitatively new behavior. By contrast, a discrete multiplicity is subject to indefinite divisibility without qualitative change. IOW, it can be subject to a transcendent metric or measure or principle of division that doesn't qualitatively change the system. In this book, Bergson sees this distinction as between inner psychological time and outer material space. We'll see how this position changes, as B comes to see duration in matter as well as in inner life.

1896: *Matière et Mémoire* (Matter and Memory). This is an amazing, daring, intricate work. We'll read all of Chapter 1, on perception. B is what we would today call a "radical externalist": [the content of] perception is in things, not in our heads. B gives us a "naturalized epistemology": bodily needs provide us habits of thought as evolutionary adaptations. This is fine for practice, B will say, but "fatal for speculation." We'll also read excerpts from Ch 3, on memory. I don't want to forecast too much here, but this is a metaphysically daring philosophy. We'll end up with an excerpt from Chapter 4, as B sketches an ontology of duration, with matter and memory consisting in varying rhythms of duration. This is really great philosophy: a "plane of immanence" as Deleuze would say: a monism of time. There are connections with 20th C physics (M. Copek, *B and*

Modern Physics [1971], and with process philosophy, e.g. Whitehead. Even with David Bohm. The question of panpsychism appears here.

1907: *L'Evolution créatrice* (Creative Evolution): this is the book that made B world famous. He develops his ontology of duration, and tackles the big questions of evolutionary biology. He'll posit life itself, in its evolutionary whole, as a qualitative / virtual multiplicity, actualizing itself along divergent lines. Life is an "open system": it brings with it novelty. We'll focus here on the distinction between possibility (pre-formed, waiting for existence) and virtuality (forming in the process of actualization). We'll investigate his (in)famous notion of *élan vital* (vital impulse) in relation to vitalism and mechanism. As always with B, the relation to Kant will be important (this time, the notion of teleology in the Third Critique).

1932: *Les deux sources de la morale et de religion* (The Two Sources of Morality and Religion). B takes the notion of open system into social ontology, distinguishing between open and closed societies. Sociability is placed in the context of biological evolution. This is an important research area today and we'll try to connect Bergson with this contemporary work (de Waal, Hauser, Joyce).