

Chapter 1 of *Time and Free Will*: “The Intensity of Psychic States”  
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[protevi@lsu.edu](mailto:protevi@lsu.edu) / [www.protevi.com/john/Bergson/TFW1lecture.pdf](http://www.protevi.com/john/Bergson/TFW1lecture.pdf)

Form: Notice the wonderful “dialectic” in the beginning: stating the opinion of common sense, then revealing its presupposition, posing questions to the presupposition, entertaining possible responses by common sense, in turn revealing the presupposition of that answer, and finally revealing the contradiction at the heart of common sense’s position.

Content: TFW is the tracking down of the consequences, noted in the Preface, of our tendency to think in terms of space, which means our language presents the same sharp dichotomies between ideas as between things.

Bergson’s endlessly repeated formula: “this is good for practice, but bad for philosophy.” (This inversion or opposition btw practice and philosophy is ancient, perhaps fundamental for a certain, Platonic, style of philosophy.)

What happens is that philosophy poses bad problems on the basis of transposing time into space, quality into quantity. As Deleuze notes, one of B’s great achievements is to focus on the structure of the problem / question. D will say that B shifts the locus of truth from the answer to the problem: we can have false problems, and false questions. That’s where philosophy has to go: to the presuppositions of the question in a false problem. That’s what B does in the opening pages of Chapter 1.

D opens his *Bergsonism* with a chapter on B’s method of intuition:

1. Focus on the level of the problem (often badly posed by thinking in terms of space. Acting in terms of space is fine, but not thinking in terms of space.)
2. Discover genuine differences in kind (confusing difference of degree and difference of kind is a major source of bad / false problems)
3. Apprehend / intuit / activate pre-reflective awareness of real / concrete time (duration must be disentangled from spatialized time)

So in the opening of Chapter 1, B posits that common sense often thinks in terms of quantity of intensity of states of cness (feelings, sensations, passions, efforts), so that one is greater than the other by a numerical factor (twice as much, three times as much, etc.)

But this greater / lesser relation presupposes that states of cness have a container / contained relation, as do numbers.

It’s no answer to posit a difference btw extensive and intensive magnitudes and to say that while intensive magnitudes cannot be measured, we can relate them as greater or lesser, since this presupposes a horizon of identity: that they are both magnitudes.

But how can there be an identity btw extended magnitudes and unextended / intensive “magnitudes”? We still presuppose a container / contained relation, but that’s inapplicable to intensive states of cness.

B then sets out to explain the genesis of the illusion that we can use a greater / lesser relation with regard to states of cness. We imagine a coiled spring as representing intensity; we thus have translated the intensive into the extensive (we compare more or less tightly coiled springs).

B now dismisses two objections:

1. That we compare intensity of states of cness by quantity of objective causes.
2. That we compare intensity of states of cness by quantity of atomic motion of brain / nerves.

He then moves to the level of the problem: we haven’t made the difference in kind btw inner states (feelings) and “surface of cness” states (sensations and efforts). The difference is that the former have purely internal psychological sources while the latter are related to physical conditions and through them to movements or perception of external objects.

B’s analyses of inner states in this section are celebrated and rightly so. He shows that psychic states cannot be compared side by side as to an alleged greater / lesser relation, but that psychic states permeate each other, changing the quality of all states as a particular feeling progresses.

Implicitly he’s distinguishing two means of relating to ourselves:

1. inner awareness of temporal change of quality of inter-related / inter-permeating states. This is “intuition” or what contemporary phenomenologists (e.g., Dan Zahavi in *Subjectivity and Selfhood* [MIT, 2005]) call “pre-reflective awareness”
2. “reflective cness” which thinks in terms of externality and space.