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14

Vitalism, Pragmatism, and the Future of Phenomenology

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The essays collected in this volume are devoted to thinking about the future of phenomenology. It may not seem terribly forward-looking to consider phenomenology in light of Henri Bergson and William James, but part of what I claim here is that phenomenology has a chance to tenew itself by looking at its own roots in light of two thinkers who have been largely neglected or forgotten by the tradition. Both Bergson and James influenced key forefathers of phenomenology and, as I argue, provide a groundwork for a form of phenomenology that has yet to be fully explored or practiced, one that values equally the aesthetic, ethical, and political dimensions of thought and that is committed to addressing urgent contemporary problems. In the opening section of this essay, I describe the historical and theoretical overlap between Bergson and lames and their relationship to (and divergence from) the phenomenological tradition that was beginning to take shape in their own time. I

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In subsequent sections, I explain how retrieving key aspects of their thinking opens up the possibility of a newly pragmatic phenomenology. Such a phenomenology cannot be described as a singular school of thought or methodology, but here are three of its crucial features:

1. Pragmatic Phenomenology takes into account the myriad roots of lill lineage, looking before and beyond the continental/analytic divide

2. Pragmatic Phenomenology embraces and practices creative and experimental writing and methods of description in order to animate thinking beyond narrow conceptualization and to challenge the presumed boundaries of philosophical discourse.

3. Pragmatic Phenomenology is sensitized to the ethical and political implications of philosophy and its relationship to contemporary crisses. It is poised to diagnose and respond to real-life problems, with an emphasis on the ever-changing horizons of lived experience and the psychophysical complexities of various modes of being.

James and Bergson show a way toward this slightly irreverent, massively creative kind of philosophy, which stresses the plural, the fallible, and the artistic/activist possibilities for thinking and for living.

Historical Snapshot

Henri Bergson was a superstar philosopher in his time. His lecture course were attended by nearly all of the rising stars in European philosophy in rooms overflowing with devoted students (in addition to poets like T.S. Elliot, visual artists, and a surprising number of women). William James (17 years older than Bergson and born in the same year as Edmund Husserl) enjoyed a similar international fame and the two men, one in Europe, the other in America, commanded the intellectual stage in the years leading up to the First World War. This period, from the 190 publication of Bergson's wildly popular *Creative Evolution* until 1914 was known in France as 'le Bergson boom'.²

James and Bergson met for the first time in Paris in 1905, but they were aware of each other's thoughts since at least 1889, when Bergson

began reading James's essays on abnormal psychology, citing James's articles 'The Phenomenon of Effort' and 'What is an Emotion?' in the first chapter of Time and Free Will. James similarly cited Bergson's experiments with 'visual hyperaesthesia' in his 1890 publication of The Principles of Psychology in the chapter devoted to hypnotism. The two went on to write letters and serve as commentators on and ambassadors for each other's research, even as they both expressed reservations about conflating their work or completely adopting the other's view. Bergson, In particular, was adamant that the synchronism between his and James's philosophy was all the more meaningful given how independently and variably they had arrived at their own views. Their relationship (as documented in letters) seems characterized by unwavering, perhaps uncritical, affection and admiration. In 1903, for instance, Bergson wrote to James after receiving from him an early copy of The Varieties of Religious Experience: 'I have never passed up an opportunity to express the great sympathy I have for your ideas to my listeners. When I wrote my essay on Les données de la conscience [Time and Free Will], I still only knew of your essay on Effort, but I was led, through an analysis of the idea of time and reflecting on its role in mechanics, to a certain conception of psychological life which is entirely compatible with the one in your psychology.'3 For his part, James wrote to Bergson after reading Creative Evolution in 1907: 'O my Bergson, you are a magician, and your book is a marvel, a real wonder in the history of philosophy....I feel that at bottom we are fighting the same fight, you as a commander, I in the ranks.'4

In spite of widespread fame in his own lifetime, Bergson's influence declined markedly in the inter- and postwar period. Aside from a measured but demanding rehabilitation via Gilles Deleuze's *Bergsonism* in 1966, he has remained a shadowy and mostly forgotten figure in postwar and contemporary philosophy, more so in the USA than elsewhere, but surprisingly so in Continental philosophy and contemporary Phenomenology (in spite of the profound influence of his thinking on Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel Levinas). As Michael Kelly writes, '[t]wentieth-century phenomenology in its relation to Bergson...ranges from the polite to the dismissive to the confrontational. But serious engagement never occurred. The same cannot be said for James, who retained his reputation as the founder of American



Psychology and one of the founding fathers of American Pragmatism. If not as central as he was in his own time, James was never abandoned or forgotten to the same degree. For this reason, my work here is primarily concerned with retrieving certain aspects of Bergson's thinking while keeping in mind the broader aesthetic dimensions and ethos of Bergson and James together.

The neglect of Bergson is striking for several reasons. He lived at historical and philosophical crossroads between two world wars. He wrote about (among other things) time, evolution, memory, freedom, creativity, intuition, religion, and war. He debated Einstein, helped to enligh the USA into the First World War and to found the League of Nations (which was replaced by the United Nations in 1946). In 1927 he was even awarded the Nobel Prize in literature. But by the time of his death in 1941 he was already a fading light in philosophical circles, eclipsed by Martin Heidegger and his followers in Germany, the rise of analyse philosophy in England and America, and the existential phenomenology of Jean-Paul Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in France. The publication of his last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1937), cemented his reputation among his critics as an irrational mystic and even baffled his defenders, who longed for a more purified, less socially or politically motived Bergsonism.⁷

Flux

Bergson's conception of psychological life included a stress on the durational, interpenetrating nature of psychic states. In the first chapter of *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousnes* (1889), he described the psycho-physical nature of various emotions (Joy sorrow, grace, pity), which change as they develop and are impossible to locate in any single state or experience. Writing about the feeling of motor effort that accompanies physical movements and the feeling of intensity in 'deep-seated psychic feeling', he explained that '[i]n both cases there is a qualitative progress and an increasing complexity, distinctly perceived But consciousness, accustomed to think in terms of space and to translate its thought into words, will denote feeling by a single word and will

localize effort at the exact point where it yields a useful result.'8 The crux of this quotation is Bergson's overarching thesis that consciousness tends toward verbalization, spatialization, and utility (three words for the same tendency). Time and Free Will diagnoses the philosophical/historical suppression of time and the effects that suppression has on the life of the mind. In the second chapter he introduces the now famous notion of durée, insisting on the difference between a spatial, numerical multipliclty and a temporal, qualitative multiplicity that defies verbalization or conceptualization. We think and speak according to the first multiplicity, multiplicity neatly delineated and laid out like a sorted tray of beads. But we feel, move, and live according to the second multiplicity, which never resolves into ordered, disparate parts but remains 'that heterogenety which is the very ground of our experience' (TFW, p. 97). The problem Bergson posed was how to theorize this second, durational multiplicity without translating it into the deadened and abstracted spatial forms that thinking typically assumes. It was a question of how to make philosophy resonate with life.

Bergson's foundational idea of duration dovetails with James's early descriptions of the ever-moving 'stream of thought', described in the pivotal chapter of the first volume of *The Principles of Psychology*, where James explains: 'Consciousness...does not appear to itself chopped up in bits. Such words as "chain" or "train" do not describe it fitly...It is nothing jointed; it flows. A "river" or a "stream" are the metaphors by which it is most naturally described.'9 Both James and Bergson sought to emphasize the fluid nature of thinking and of life, believing that an embrace of the 'despised sensible flux'10 might dispel some of the most stubborn philosophical problems and save philosophy from mechanistic scientism.

A shared concern about scientism animated much of Bergson's and James's thinking in the early 1900s. Both of them worried about the social and ethical implications of Darwinism and reacted against the mechanistic philosophy of Herbert Spencer. Against increasingly technical philosophies of their age, they each advocated a style of philosophizing that privileged an artistic sensibility for their listener's/reader's personal affections. James talked openly about the importance of capturing an audience's attention through forging some emotional connection with

them. In 1908 he delivered a set of lectures on psychology to teachers telling them that in order 'to keep [your students] where you have called them, you must make the subject too interesting for them to wander again'. 11 He continued: '[T]he genius of the interesting teacher consists in sympathetic divination of the sort of material with which the pupill mind is likely to be already spontaneously engaged, and in the ingenuity which discovers paths of connection from that material to the matter to be newly learned' (TT, p. 70, my emphasis). As Bergson noted, '[f]or [James] those truths it is most important for us to know are truths which have been felt and experienced before being thought' (KW, p. 330) James's writings are full of aesthetic/rhetorical techniques for priming his audience for his work. These are not insignificant or arbitrary ornaments to his theory. Rather, they exemplify the open and creative spirit of his thinking and his commitment to a pluralism that entails devising infinite methods of appeal. There are many roads to the heart, and James sought to travel as many of them as he could imagine.

Bergson was less concerned with the particularity of his audience, but he, like James, privileged the incommunicable aspects of the personal, stressing the mysterious depths of personhood, of which one only ever glimpses the outer edge. In *Time and Free Will* he described a 'second self...which obscures the first, a self whose existence is made up of distinct moments, whose states are separated from one another and easily expressed in words' (TFW, p. 138). The second self masks an older 'fundamental self' that must be retrieved and appealed to through novel (nonlinguistic) means, by a 'vigorous effort of analysis' (TFW, p. 129). The 'fundamental self' remains inarticulate and immune to the defining powers of language, and Bergson is one of the earliest theorists of a post-structural subject who cannot be captured by any proper name. Bergson's philosophy attempts a retrieval of the first self through the deployment of images and poetic and metaphorical passages, conjuring the surplus of life that resists direct examination or full disclosure.

The poetic/aesthetic aspects of Bergson's and James's philosophies troubled many critics. As one example, Judith Shklar, in her 1958 article on the social implication of Bergson's philosophy, critiqued his 'escapist motivations', called his work 'the last hope of a desperate age', and concluded that 'he was simply a poet in prose, heaping image upon image without

much philosophic meaning'. 13 James faced similar criticisms after the publication of The Principles of Psychology, with one reviewer calling him an 'impressionist in psychology', writing as follows: 'His portfolio contains sketches old and new, ethical, literary, scientific and metaphysical, some exquisite and charming in detail and even in color, others rough charcoal outlines.'14 The very passages that exemplify the spirit of Bergson's and James's creative philosophies seemed to critics like proof that theirs was the work of quasi-religious, romantic mystics wed to irrationalism and destined to inspire weak-kneed relativism or vicious (even misogynist) Individualism. 15 Yet to those inspired by them, the aesthetic components of their work stood as proof that philosophy could be something else than dry academicism and a game of wits. Both saw their own work as devoted to dispelling false philosophical problems, and they viewed themselves as motivators and protectors of genuine complexity. In this way, they were pioneers of a phenomenological impulse to examine life in its intricacy as It exceeds and overflows the bounds of abstract conceptualization.

Images

What happens when philosophy embraces images? Phenomenology is sometimes criticized for being overly wedded to imagery and descriptions that lack critical edge. It is not hard to see links between phenomenology viewed in this way and rampant solipsism, subjectivism, or relativm-charges that James and Bergson also battled in their time. These concerns reflect a desire for philosophy to be something harder-hitting and more objective; something ultimately true. James's radical empiricism condemned any monist conception of 'The Truth' and replaced it with a more pluralistic, fallible sense of truth. In his pragmatic view, truth is always in the making and never fully made. 'In no case,' he argued, 'need truth consist in a relation between our experiences and something archetypal or trans-experiential.'16 James preferred the language of the real to my notion of truth, since the sense of something being real entails a feeling of its animating 'warmth' or being alive. This meant that philosophy for James was a practice of kindling a feeling of reality in others in order to bring things that may have initially seemed mute or dead back to life.

James saw Bergson as a crucial ally in the quest to make philosophy practice of revival and vivification. In his chapter devoted to Bergson in *The Pluralistic Universe*, he writes: '[A]ltho...concepts give us knowledge and may be said to have some theoretic value (especially when the particular thing foretold is one in which we take no present practical interest); yet in the deeper sense of giving *insight* they have no theoretic value for they quite fail to connect us with the inner life of the flux, or with the causes that govern its direction. Instead of being interpreters of reality concepts negate the inwardness of reality altogether' (PU, p. 246). He commended Bergson for 'the lucidity of [his] way of putting things', adding that 'it seduces you and bribes you in advance to become his disciple. It is a miracle, and he a real magician' (PU, p. 227). In opposition to logically purified, conceptual philosophies, James and Bergson experimental with alternative methods of description, methods that gave images and imagery a central place.

Bergson goes farther than perhaps any other philosopher of his time in resuscitating the dignity of images and granting them a central technical role in his own thinking. In Matter and Memory, he uses the term 'image' to denote all matter. He begins the book thus: 'Here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are open to them, unperceived when they are closed.'17 We find that images are not the dim shadows of real things (as we learned from Plato). Instead, everything in the material world stands halfway between a thing (out there, objective, in the world), and a representation (internal, subjective, in one's mind). This puts us in the midst of a world that has lost the blunt solidity supposedly characterise tic of matter as well as the ethereal translucence of a world reduced to ideas. The world Bergson describes shimmers and vibrates with matter of varying opacities and intensities. Late in Matter and Memory has admits that one consequence of a world recalibrated to the equilibrium of images is that 'the separation between a thing and its environment cannot be absolutely definite and clear-cut; there is a passage by insensible degree from the one to the other' (MM, p. 209). Reacting against the Kantian subject majestically perceiving objects, Bergson dethrone the ego of its unifying powers and strips matter of its impenetrable gravity. Descending from the heights of any transcendental ego, he

gives us a more horizontal plane of images perceiving other images—all of them pliable, porous, and intensely real.

In addition to the central role the word 'image' plays in Matter and Memory, there are countless images, or pictorial devices, in the text. In the first chapter, a compass and a kaleidoscope serve as metaphors for the way in which everything changes relative to the centrality of one's own body and its turning toward or away from other bodies, while a 'central telephonic exchange board' illustrates Bergson's view of the brain as an organ that facilitates or delays communication. 18 In subsequent chapters he includes diagrams to illustrate the progressive deepening and widen-Ing of perception (Fig. 1: drawn to look like a clam shell opened to reveal concentric circles radiating above and below a central object), the interpenetration of pure memory, memory image, and perception (Fig. 2: Illustrated by a continuous horizontal line along which thought moves), the relationship of consciousness to time and space (Fig. 3: shown as a horizontal line intersected by a vertical line), and the relationship between perception, bodily memory, and pure memory (Figs. 4 and 5: an inverted cone with its fine point intersecting a plane). Added to these geometric diagrams are passages in which Bergson employs a variety of literary devices to help us picture things more vividly. These include narrative accounts of taking a walk in a new town, different ways of drawing, overhearing someone speaking a foreign language, and the hypothetical consciousness of an amoeba in a drop of water. 19 Lastly, the text is riddled with poetic and painterly descriptions, such as the image of the body as a series of threads 'beautifully stretched from periphery to periphery' (MM, p. 173) along which currents pass. The poetic interludes differ from the analogies with everyday objects so prevalent in Bergson's work, as they ask us to imagine something that has no determinate name or precedent.

Matter and Memory is unique in the degree to which Bergson pursues multiple methods of image-making and visualization. Indeed, it is the only text in which he employs visual diagrams. Yet it is reflective of a methodology characteristic of all his thinking, which relies on analogy, metaphor, and poetry to animate language beyond its usual bounds. In Creative Evolution, he uses fireworks as an image for the explosive force of élan vital and a pond covered in leafy plants to describe the subject's suspension between surface and depth. In Time and Free Will he uses a

sugar cube dissolving in a cup of tea to describe the elongated and visceral durée of lived experience. These images sometimes have the effect of locating us in definite times and places. At other times, they have the effect of spurring us on to other images connected with our own experiences (historical or imagined) of waiting, waking, dreaming, or swimming.

James also drew on multiple kinds of description and image-making in his own writings, often including whole blocks of poetry or prosecor guiding his audience through an intense visualization of a particular scene, as he did in the opening passage of 'On a Certain Blindness in Human Beings', recounting his trip through the mountains of North Carolina, or later quoting several pages of Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Lantern Bearers*. For both Bergson and James, the literary and artistic dimensions of their thinking rendered their thought particularly vibrant making their philosophies at once lucid and uniquely prone to exaggeration or caricature. As with beautifully illustrated books, one can be seduced by the pictures. Or as Ludwig Wittgenstein warned: 'An *image* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.'²⁰

Bergson explicitly advocates for reading philosophy by finding and attending to the guiding image of a philosopher. In his view, this is the best way of getting to the animating spirit and enduring idea of a given thinker. In his 1911 lecture on 'Philosophical Intuition', he explained such an image as 'a phantom which haunts us while we turn about the doctrine and to which we must go in order to obtain decisive signal, the indication of the attitude to take and of the point from which to look. Discerning the image entails something more than reading a text, since reading alone (understood in a simplistic way) can only grapple with the words on the page. Deep reading would have to include reading between the lines, the interpretive efforts that H.G. Gadamer associates with 'authentic' reading in Truth and Method, and the erasure Jacques Derrida practices in deconstructive reading and writing.²² This kind of reading demands something more from a person than just the comprehension of what is being said. It entails a subtle form of listening for the ghostlike undertones of prose, sensitivity to the imagistic quality of the writing an informed historical sensibility, and an acute receptivity to the poetic dimensions of everyday speech. If there are (at least) two ways of reading

one proceeds at close range by scrutiny and consumption, while the other proceeds at a distance by hesitation and uncertainty. These two forms relate to the different tensions of being Bergson describes across his work, one contracted to a point (perception/action) and the other widening out indefinitely (memory/dreams). Such are the poles of attention. But as Bergson stresses, the living of life (as well as a capacity for fluent reading) goes on largely between them at a middle speed, neither reckless consumption nor dreamy suspension.

It seems odd that Bergson would advocate finding *the* image of a philosopher (and in his lecture on intuition he in fact locates several images to explain Berkeley's thinking). Bergson's own work is so awash with images that one would be hard-pressed to isolate just one, though many have tried in their efforts to distill his thought.²³ But in advocating for the excavation of a guiding image, Bergson was not talking about the isolation of a singular picture, like a snapshot taken from an album. The image itself would be something complex (and not necessarily visible or visual).²⁴ It would be so enmeshed with other images that in trying to retrieve one, all the others would invariably glide along. Finding the image would also not be a matter of collecting and sorting discrete bits of language, as if the image only needs careful archeological excavation (reading as digging). The problem is that the image is there everywhere ('haunting' us), but it is nowhere to be found as such.

How can one locate a ghost? This is the question Bergson poses when he asks his audience to consider various methods for gleaning the animating, but invisible, spirit of a text. In Bergson's terminology the image has as much reality as anything else, even though it resists illumination and remains impossible to pin down. In fact, a whole realm of quasi-visible 'periphenomena' occupy a central place in Bergson's philosophy, introducing us or reminding us of a universe perforated with instability. Such phenomena include images, ghosts, dreams, memory, hallucinations, and the unconscious, as well as seemingly more distinct phenomena such as ourselves, others, and the entirety of the material world. Once we accept the ubiquity of dark matter in the universe, everything begins to tremble. The resistance of 'periphenomena' to scrutiny makes it impossible to subject them to traditional (Husserlian) phenomenological reduction. But their resistance to scrutiny also signals the urgency of devising multisensory,

highly sensitized methods of inquiry (ones that go well beyond visual examination to include a radical, whole-bodied engagement). This is one reason that Bergson (like James) sees philosophy so closely aligned with art, since each of them has the potential to disrupt entrenched patterns of thinking and to usher us into wider, wilder margins of life.

Intuition

Bergson and James, in their styles of writing and in their deployment of images, invite us to practice more experimental and creative registers of reading, which are linked to more experimental and creative registers of living. Put simply, the aesthetic dimensions of their thought cannot be dissociated from the ethical dimensions. Images, especially in the expanded way we are invited to understand them by Bergson are ethically significant and uniquely motivational. But finding the image is never simple, and attention to images requires something more complicated than sensible perception alone.

'The method of intuition' is the name Bergson gives to the practice of reading and philosophizing he associates with finding an image. As with his description of finding *the* image of a philosopher, the use of the word 'method' has the unfortunate consequence of making it sound as if there is a singular and methodological way of intuiting. ²⁶ Understood in this way finding *the* method of intuition would be akin to learning the method of changing a tire or playing Suzuki piano. It then seems as if Bergson's philosophy is a handbook to such a method, and by understanding Bergson one acquires intuition. Perhaps such a misunderstanding about intuition fed the fad of Bergsonism, which reached a frenzied pitch among those who thought Bergson himself held the key to life.

Instead of mastering any single method, intuition involves continual practice and invention. This is clear from Bergson's myriad descriptions of intuition across his work, from the earliest intimation of it in *Time and Free Will*, where he describes 'a simple and indivisible intuition of the mind' (TFW, p. 80) through the explanation he provides in his 'Introduction to Metaphysics' of 'the *sympathy* by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what

there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it' (CM, p. 135), and culminating in the elaborate treatment he gives in *Creative Evolution* of a 'painful effort which we can make suddenly, doing violence to our nature, but cannot sustain for more than a few moments.'²⁷ Indivisible, sympathetic, painful: in each case, intuition coincides with a unique and arduous act, an attunement to the singularity of something that cannot be repeated in another context and therefore can never be mastered once and for all.

Once activated, intuition facilitates a momentary and intense contact with life, one that has been sundered by the speculative, long-range gaze of intellect. In Creative Evolution, Bergson characterizes intellect as the evolutionary hallmark of human beings that has distanced them from the whole of life and oriented them toward 'the contemplation of inert matter' (CE, p. 104). The contact with duration facilitated by intuition serves as a jolting realignment, an unnerving and potentially dangerous Intensification. Life is suddenly felt impinging in its moving complexity rather than contemplated from a distance in any static abstraction. Instead of opposing reason and emotion as so many have before him, Bergson posits intuition as a process of unclenching the tenacious grip of intellect in order to reanimate the sensible core and receptive range of the whole body. In this sense, intuition is at odds with thinking, since it shortcircuits the mind's ability to survey from on high. Bertrand Russell railed against what he took to be a stark division between thinking and action In Bergson, identifying intuition with 'action for the sake of action' and complaining that 'all pure contemplation he calls "dreaming," and condemns by a whole series of uncomplimentary epithets: static, Platonic, mathematical, logical, intellectual'.28 But in another sense, intuition is its own kind of thinking, a close-range thinking characterized by an immersion in the very object of thought to such a degree that the conceptual boundary between subject and object no longer holds. In Matter and Memory, Bergson describes intuition as a method of placing oneself back at the 'turn of experience', prior to the bifurcation of immediacy into the useful (which calls out for my action and answers my needs) and the useless (which, in failing to interest me, ceases to exist for me) (MM, p. 185). He associates intuition with the experience of a reality that is not reconstructed in thought but 'touched, penetrated, lived' (MM, p. 69).

Intuition entails activating a receptivity with ancient origins tied in instinct, to infancy, and to animal life, without thereby engendering return to some previous state. In fact, intuition signals the growth and elaboration of a creature rather than its regression to or repetition of a previous evolutionary stage. This is clear in Creative Evolution, which details the dramatic bifurcation of life along two 'highways': plant and animal. Plants display instinct in its most intense modes, while animals develop capacities that allow for ever-greater mobility and delayed responsiveness to their physical surroundings. Along the animal line human beings stand at the outer edge, emblematic of life's insinuation in material that has given it the most room for hesitation and creative play Adaptations facilitating mobility reach their climax in human beings and the development of intellect, which allows for the formation of language, concepts, complex societies, and tools. As humans become more intellectual, their evolutionary line diverges from other forms of life. This has positive and negative consequences. The very capacity that Bergson claims distinguishes human beings and is a significant source of creative power has the potential to eclipse the instinctual sympathy originally shared with plant and animal life. Intellect, which seemed to be the root of creative freedom, can be a source of deadening immobility.

As much as humans might aspire to transcend their bodies or the material necessities of being flesh and blood, they remain bound in one degree or another to a physicality that perpetually delays or detours the possibility of a purely intellectual existence. This could be experienced as the interminable frustration of being at the mercy of one's own and other bodies, but it is also a potentially life-saving resurgence of humanity ancient physicality, which gives rise to a sensibility for the surplus and precariousness of life. Although humans cannot recapture instinct in lin original form, Bergson describes intuition as a distinctly human potential for suspending intellect's forward momentum by a sudden, painful awareness, a weakening of confidence. Bergsonian intuition is, therefore something more risky and complex than the pedestrian understanding of intuition as a gut feeling, insight, or foreknowledge. It entails an active posture of hesitation on the part of a subject, who, not merely a passive receptacle to what George Santayana criticized as 'lyrical feeling', must athletically contort herself (psychically and physically) into an uncom-

fortable, ill-fitting form.²⁹ Claire Colebrook aptly writes that through Intuition, 'the intellect achieves a different relation between speed, expenditure, survival, and strategy'. 30 Intuition is immanent to the human, but It inaugurates a quasi-transcendent possibility by drawing a person out of herself and toward the world in a sudden awareness that one's own duration is not the measure of all durée.31 The spirituality in Bergson's universe, a spirituality so many critics worried committed Bergson to mysticism and condemned intuition to a quasi-religious experience of grace, remains tied to an original porousness of matter-a seepage between things that frustrates every attempt to form a hermetically closed or self-sufficient system. Intuition is a radical form of openness to life's multiple orders and intensities, which means that Bergson's supposed 'spiritualism' must be understood not as a simplistic valorization of the nonphysical over the physical (one of several dualisms he contests), but through the Latin root of spiritual: spirare (breathe). Intuition enlivens a person to the wider world, giving her a second wind.

Brought into the context of Bergson's last published work, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, the intellect can be seen as a force of encircling and closure—clamping down on things to better examine and work on them. Intuition is a force of erasure and widening. Intellect therefore relates to the first source of morality, to obligation and the utilitarian and biologically inscribed varieties of love Bergson describes In his opening chapter (those that facilitate survival and the perpetuation of social bonds and a species), while intuition relates to the second source of morality, the unbounded love that defies everything natural and deterministic in human nature. The first source of morality yields stable laws and general order, but the second source propels humanity beyond itself: 'it is a forward thrust, a demand for movement; it is the very essence of mobility'. 32 Capacity for a love 'that embraces all of humanity' (TS, p. 38), a love 'capable of transposing human life into another tone' (TS, p. 99), is the emphatic feature of what Bergson describes as the 'open soul', exemplified by those exceptional figures (Socrates, Christ, Joan of Arc) who disrupt the category of the human and inspire new forms of life.33

Thinking about intuition on the model of the open soul brings it quite close to the descriptions of dreams and pure memory from Matter and

Memory, as its value lies in its distance from utilitarian needs and ende and its tendency toward a 'supra-intellectual' (TS, p. 44) depersonalization, dislocating an individual from herself and putting her in touch with a wider swathe of life. Bergson describes dreaming as an act of wandering amid incoherent images, but he also writes that '[t]o call up the past in the form of an image, we must be able to withdraw ourselves from the action of the moment, we must have the power to value the useless, we must have the will to dream' (MM, p. 83). Intuition would then not be coin cident with instinctive, unthinking action (as Russell charged), but more akin to the hesitation or delay in automatic reflex action so central in Bergson's descriptions of consciousness, creativity, and freedom. Russell sensed a parallel between intuition and pure perception, and he was right insofar as intuition facilitates an urgent and pre-reflective contact with life. But intuition is not like pure perception insofar as it de-individuates the subject and suspends her natural inclination to privilege the useful and the expedient. Instead, it more closely resembles the strangely impersonal realm of pure memory in which one can lose oneself among scattered images that fail to cohere. There is something utterly useless about intuition when it is viewed against the urgencies of clear-headed thinking and decisive action, since it does nothing but loosen one's hold on oneself and the world.

The openness of a creature to life is not a matter of doing more, but of doing less, of loosening or relaxing its anxious forward momentum in order to hesitate, listen, or attend. A repertoire of seemingly inactive actions frustrates the distinction between activity and passivity and alerts us to more subtle registers of intensity exhibited in passive activity (the whole realm of ethical action as Levinas conceived it). We exhibit freedom not only in exhibitions of power, but also in withholding power Intuition cultivates the space necessary for creative action that might alter the very being of the organism, elongating it in new directions expanding its reach. Of course, to put this in spatial terms is at odd with Bergson's well-known emphasis on time and duration. In temporal terms, then, intuition disrupts the chronology of a being. In making her ancient, it makes her anew. Intellect, even as it intensifies the human being's idiosyncratic potential for contemplative delay, usurps the human being's capacities for other modes of engagement or entangles.

ment with the wider world. Intuition puts her back in touch with the shifting, durational flux of life. It does this precisely by rendering her less equipped, less definitive and defining, more exposed and at risk of losing herself. Bergson in fact describes intuition as a rekindling of 'this feeling of vulnerability' (CE, p. 112).

Blur

We might think about the difference between intellect and intuition as a difference between focus and blur. Intellect, like perception, seeks clar-Ity and distinction. It is forever carving up life into manageable pieces. Intuition seeks contact with life in its durational flux, preferring the experience of the rush of the landscape passing outside the train window to the clarity of any snapshot, map, or description that would provide more detailed, usable information. What is useful about intuition is this bare contact with life's variable speeds, a way of thinking and being that puts one in touch with rhythms and energies that do not originate with oneself. Bergson often reverts to musical examples to explain the way in which duration envelops us in an experience we find ourselves suddenly In the middle of, swept up. We lose the sense of the music as soon as we focus on a specific note or set of notes, just as we lose the sense of the poem when we get hung up on one word or line. The blur of sound or poetry is often difficult to follow or understand. But it is precisely the experience of being moved without understanding that Bergson argues is crucial to the creative mind and foundational for any supra-human capacity for transformational love.

There are many philosophers who will be unhappy with privileging blur. For them, blurriness equates with confusion and incoherence. It is the opposite of the Cartesian notion of 'clear and distinct' ideas, which have often been lauded as the hallmark of reasonable, rational thought. Yet phenomenology has always had a special relationship with blur and the attempt to examine meaningful yet incomplete or indistinct phenomena as they transpire (and without transforming or extinguishing them by scrutiny). In this arena, Bergsonian intuition coupled with a pragmatic sensibility for pluralism and fallibilism becomes terribly

important. Merleau-Ponty knew this and (despite early doubts) credited Bergson with posing all of the crucial phenomenological questions. Bergson's examination of depth includes descriptions of how things appear obliquely, in movement or by virtue of being partially eclipsed 'like a face in the reeds'. Levinas knew this, and when he cited Bergson as the impetus to his thinking, he had in mind Bergson's sensitivity to phenomena that resist language and visualization. The face was just such a phenomenon for Levinas, one that never appears as such, but that can be felt or heard in the indistinct rustle of one body impinging on another with inarticulate but undeniable urgency. Levinas gives us a phenomenology of dark matter, of things that never fully appear but that press upon us with inordinate weight and wrest us from narrow preoccupations with ourselves.

Intuition is not a matter of depersonalization and dilation for the sales of novel experiences of soft focus-for a more beautiful, impressionistic gloss on life. Intuition has ethical urgency, and this is something Levinas can help us to appreciate in Bergson, as well as something to be taken up more decisively by current and future phenomenologists. Intuition entails the active withholding of intellectual outreach that invariably seizes its material too soon and too hard. If we are talking about the effort to understand an architectural plan by a builder, it might be that we want such seizure, and the faster the better. We want them to get it right and to translate it as efficiently as possible into a material structure But if we are talking about understanding a person, a painting, a poem, a disease, or an international crisis, we might want something else. In these cases, it is not that we don't aspire to understanding, but we need forms of understanding that remain open to revision and never pretend to have captured the whole. This entails a commitment to fallibility that is at the heart of James's radical empiricism. As Bergson writes, '[f]rom the point of view taken by James, which is that of pure experience or of 'radical empiricism', reality no longer appears as finite or infinite, but simply as indefinite' (KW, p. 268).

Intuition reminds us of the prevalence and value of blur, and Levinar reminds us of the necessarily blurry arena of ethics, an arena in which no single rule or universal law can determine in advance what must be done, and where no one description can capture the infinite plurality

of faces. Consistent with this trajectory, Simone de Beauvoir thought it was the task of existentialism to formulate an 'ethics of ambiguity', one that did 'not attempt to dispel the ambiguity of [man's] being but, on the contrary, accept[ed] the task of realizing it'.37 Bergson acknowledges the 'difficulties which are considerable and ever recurrent [in any method of intuition], because it demands for the solution of each new problem an entirely new effort' (MM, p. 185). Similarly, James cautioned against any premade ethical theory, insisting that 'every real dilemma is in literal strictness a unique situation' (WWJ, p. 626). He continues, saying that books upon ethics, therefore, so far as they truly touch the moral life, must more and more ally themselves with literature which is confessedly tentative and suggestive rather than dogmatic' (WWJ, p. 626). Creativity Is crucial to ethics, which stands in need of constant revision. It would be much easier, more definite and predictable, if ethics were a matter of memorizing rules and applying the right one in each case. But ethics entails the invention of a response in a situation that is singular and has (at best) an utterly abstract precedent. James and Bergson both saw this and argued for the possibility of novel, unprecedented action in addition to practicing methods of thinking and writing that tax the imagination and blur the lines between art and life.

Contact

The relationship between Bergson and James, between intuition and radical empiricism (vitalism and pragmatism), may seem merely historically relevant, reflecting something about the Zeitgeist of an era. But it is more than historically relevant insofar as it provides a model for inclusive thinking that transcends national and disciplinary borders. It is more than historically relevant insofar as it reminds us of the value of methods for thinking that resist codification or classification. As one example, in a time when standardized testing has become the national metric of success and the norm for public school education in America, being reminded about the myriad ways in which thinking and learning transpire has practical implications. There are many ways of knowing things. Some of them cohere to expected models of exhibition

291

and quantification, but others challenge our readymade sense of what knowledge is or looks like. As a culture, we are too quick to dismiss alternative forms of knowing and relegate individuals (and particularly pre- or a-verbal children or those on the Autistic spectrum) to 'special education'. We remain resistant to learning from others whose mode and methods of engagement frustrate our expectations for clarity and lucidity. We forget that creativity is a necessary component of ethics and that children who are not given latitude for self-expression and creative play will lack the flexibility crucial to their development of empathy and vulnerability. We educate the intuition out of them and then test them for their retention of repeatable facts.

In the realm of philosophy, phenomenology seems distinctively poised to counteract the deadening march of intellect as it eclipson the multidimensional potential for knowing and living available in human beings. Armed with an aesthetic sensibility and an attention to the opaque, transitory features of life, phenomenology can reorient in toward life's excessive surge. It does this by moving slowly, by descriptions that compound and analysis that is never finished. In its best rep isters, it also does this with literary grace and a sense of the practical urgency of its subject matter, a pragmatic sensibility of 'the difference that makes a difference', so that in analyzing the features of dependency for instance, one finds oneself rethinking the parameters of mothering, of self-sufficiency, of embodiment, of ableness, of healthcare, and of systems of oppression (as Eva Kittay does in Love's Labors).38 We stand in need of more forms and examples of pragmatic phenomenology: instances of deploying philosophy in its most intense aesthetic and practical dimensions.

Medium

I began with some discussion of the imagistic quality of Bergson and James's philosophies. Let me end with a bit more about this aesthetic dimension of their thinking, as it is tied to the ethical implications of openness and the future of phenomenology. In his 'Introduction to Metaphysics', Bergson was careful to acknowledge the limitation of

any philosophy of images. No image can adequately capture life in its durational flux. Yet he argued that purely conceptual philosophies can do even less. The advantage of images is that, when proliferated, they have the ability to inspire a mind to more thought. He writes:

[T]he philosopher's sole aim should be to start up a certain effort which the utilitarian habits of mind of everyday life tend, in most men, to discourage. Now the image has at least the advantage of keeping us in the concrete. No image will replace the intuition of duration, but many different images, taken from quite different orders of things, will be able, through the convergence of their action, to direct the consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to seize on. (CM, p. 139)

Bergson reminds us that images are not simply ornamental; they are what animate and keep thought from congealing into a closed system. In addition to keeping us focused on concrete examples, they help spur a certain frame of mind characterized by intense receptivity. The goal of an imagistic philosophy is not to deliver knowledge or information, but to prime the mind for the reception of a multiplicity that exceeds articulation, orienting thought in a wholly new, and even unnatural, direction. The motivational methodology of Bergson's images is akin to what Pierre Hadot called 'spiritual exercises', exercises that widen consciousness and prime one for feeling more alert and alive.³⁹

Later in the same essay, Bergson identifies his philosophy as a 'true empiricism', which he describes as 'one which purposes to keep as close to the original itself as possible, to probe more deeply into its life, and by a kind of spiritual auscultation, to feel its soul palpitate' (CM, p. 147). He continues: 'But an empiricism worthy of the name, an empiricism which works only according to measure, sees itself obliged to make an absolutely new effort for each new object it studies' (CM, p. 147). These lines suggest that 'true empiricism' is a spiritual form of listening for the living pulse of things, a form of listening that will need perpetual reinvention and that cannot be conducted via any readymade instrument or routine. Throughout the end of the essay he compares intuition to a process of sounding the ocean floor, emphasizing the acoustic/receptive dimensions of his philosophy. The upshot of Bergson's imagistic/

aural and radically empirical philosophy of attunement to the concrete and the singular is a surprisingly pluralistic sensibility for the variable durations of living matter: 'contact with a whole continuity of duration which we should try to follow either downwardly or upwardly: in both cases we can dilate ourselves indefinitely by a more and more vigorous effort, in both cases transcend ourselves' (CM, p. 158).

Importantly, the transcending of oneself that Bergson describes is movement toward the world in its multiplicity and density. It is not the arrival at the essence, Truth, or the transcendental ego that characterizes traditional phenomenology. This is one reason why Bergson's and James's pluralistic philosophies remain wedded to a form of empiricism that refuses to get above the fray of lived experience in all its sorted singularity. As James cautions, 'whether materialistically or spiritualistically minded, philosophers have always aimed at cleaning up the litter with which the world apparently is filled' (PU, p. 45). In opposition to this impulse to organize and purge, James and Bergson remind us of the value of being in the midst.

Being-there is neither simple nor given. We are there all the time without being anywhere—especially today, when we are so often virtually present or available to one another, and so rarely face to face. Deleum and Guattari seize on the value of the 'middle' in Bergson and the genue ine complexity of finding the middle ground in life. Their thought often associated with speed and risk, but they, like Bergson and James are thinkers of *mediums* (in every sense of the word). 'It is not easy', they write, 'to see things in the middle, rather than looking down on them from above or up at them from below, or from left to right or right in left; try it, you'll see that everything changes'. 40 Overthink things, and we live at one outer extreme, forever gazing at material we fail to reach Underthink things, and we live at another extreme, so bull-headed we never see the forest for the trees. Somewhere between these lies a band of optimal presence, an attention to life that is thoughtful and active poised and intense. It requires physical proximity and real immersion rather than long-distance speculation or virtual encounter. It is toward this engaged contact with life in multiple registers (and armed with images that challenge and spur the imagination) that I hope pragmatic phenomenology continues to move.

Notes

- 1. On the relationship between James and Bergson, see Paola Marrati's essay 'James, Bergson, and the Open Universe', in *Bergson, Politics and Religion*, eds. Alexandre LeFebvre and Melanie White (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 299–312. For an account of their incommensurability, see Horace Meyer Kallen's *William James and Henri Bergson: A Study in Contrasting Theories of Life* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1914).
- 2. In 1913, three years after James's death, Bergson traveled to the states for a lecture tour that began at Columbia University, where he was hosted by John Dewey. The tour cemented his fame in America, even as it spurred criticisms against his intuitionist philosophy, vitalism, and the infective fad of 'Bergsonism'. His arrival is said to have caused the first documented traffic jam on Broadway. For an account of Bergson's reception in America, see Larry McGrath, 'Bergson Comes to America', *Journal of the History of Ideas* 74, no. 4 (October 2013): 599–620.
- Henri Bergson, 'Villa Montmorency, Letter to William James, January 6, 1903,' in *Henri Bergson: Key Writings*, ed. Keith Ansell Pearson and John Ó Maoilearca (New York: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 438. Hereafter referred to as KW.
- 4. William James, 'Letter to Henri Bergson, June 13, 1907,' in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James*, Vol. 2 (Boston: Little, Brown & Company, 1935) p. 618.
- 5. This has changed somewhat in the past decade with work by Elizabeth Grosz, Leonard Lawlor, Keith Ansell-Pearson, and others, as well as two recent compilations devoted to Bergson: Bergson and Phenomenology, ed. Michael R. Kelly (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), and Bergson, Politics, and Religion, ed. Alexandre Lefebvre and Melanie White (Duham: Duke University Press, 2012).
- Michael R. Kelly, 'Introduction: Bergson's Phenomenological Reception: the Spirit of a Dialogue of Self-Resistance', in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, p. 3.
- 7. Merleau-Ponty drew a helpful distinction between Bergson and Bergsonism, writing that 'Bergson was a contact with things; Bergsonism is a collection of accepted opinions'. He also emphasized the paradoxical fate of Bergsonism noting that '[t]his philosopher of freedom...had the radical party and the University against him; this enemy of Kant had the action française party against him; this friend of spiritual life had the religious

- party against him. Thus not only his natural enemies but the enemies of his enemies ranged against him.' Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, Trans. Richard C. McCleary (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964) p. 183 and p. 182.
- 8. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: As Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F.L. Pogson, M.A. (Mineola: Dover Publications 2001) p. 26. Hereafter referred to as TFW.
- 9. William James, "*The Principles of Psychology, Volume I* (Cambridge: Harvand University Press, 1981) p. 233. Hereafter referred to as PP:1.
- 10. William James, "Bergson and Intellectualism," in *A Pluralistic Univers* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) footnote 1 to p. 250, p. 339. Hereafter referred to as PU.
- 11. William James, Talks to Teachers and to Students on Some of Life's Ideal (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983) p. 68. Hereafter referred to a TT.
- 12. Bergson associates language with the spatializing powers of intellect, with sociality, and with a unique form of human mobility. His philosophy is pervaded with an interest in the emancipatory and binding powers of language. See, for example, TWF, pp. 128–39 and CE, pp. 102–6.
- 13. See Judith Shklar, 'Bergson and the Politics of Intuition', *The Review of Politics* 20, no. 4, Twentieth Anniversary Issue: I (October 1958): 634–56. p. 635.
- 14. G. Stanley Hall, quoted in Ralph Barton Perry, *The Thought and Character of William James* (Boston: Little, Brown, & Company, 1935) ,Vol. 1, pp. 108–109.
- 15. This is particularly the case with James. See Charlene Haddock Seigfried Chaos and Context: A Study in William James (Ohio University Press, 1978) and Feminist Interpretations of James, ed. Erin C. Tarver and Shannon Sullivan (Pennsylvania State University Press, 2015). On Bergson, Lee Dorothea O. Owlkowski, 'The End of Phenomenology: Bergson's Interval in Irigaray', Hypatia 15 no. 3 (Summer 2000): 73–91.
- William James, Essays in Radical Empiricism (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996) pp. 203–204. Hereafter referred to as ERE.
- 17. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. N.M. Paul and W.S. Palmer (New York: Zone Books, 1991) p. 17. Hereafter referred to as MM.
- 18. See MM pp. 23, 25, 30, 197.
- 19. See, MM, pp. 93, 97, 109, 159.
- 20. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M. Anscombe (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1968) p. 48e, ¶115.

- 21. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Mabelle L. Adison (Mineola: Dover Publications) p. 97. Hereafter referred to as CM.
- 22. See Hans Georg Gadamer, Truth and Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 2000) pp. 389–395. Derrida writes: '[T]he philosophical text, although it is in fact always written, includes, precisely as its philosophical specificity, the project of effacing itself in the face of the signified content which it transports and in general teaches. Reading should be aware of this project.' Jacques Derrida, Of Grammatology, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1997) p. 160.
- 23. Bachelard, for example, seizes on the image of a chest of drawers. See Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, Trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994) p. 74.

24. See Alia Al-Saji, 'Life as Vision: Bergson and the Future of Seeing Differently', in *Bergson and Phenomenology*, pp. 148–73.

- 25. 'Peri-phenomology' is how Edward S. Casey describes 'a phenomenology of the around, a willingness to pursue the capillaries that animate the surface of things, places, and persons'. He describes periphenomena as 'appearances whose paradigm is neither perception (with its emphasis on the directly given and robustly materialized object) nor thought (a cognitive operation with tenuous ties to bodily expression)'. Edward S. Casey's term in The World at a Glance (Indiana University Press, 2007), p. 86 and p. 438.
- 26. Deleuze writes: 'Bergson saw intuition not as an appeal to the ineffable, a participation in a feeling or a lived identification, but as a true method' (Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), p. 115.
- 27. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) p. 153. Hereafter referred to as CE.
- 28. Bertrand Russell, 'The Philosophy of Bergson', *The Monist* 22, no. 3 (July, 1912): 321–47, p. 346. Russell mistakenly equates instinct and intuition in Bergson, adding the quip 'Intuition is at its best in bats, bees, and Bergson' (p. 323).
- 29. George Santayana, Winds of Doctrine: Studies in Contemporary Opinion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1914) pp. 58–109.
- 30. Claire Colebrook, 'The Art of the Future', in *Bergson, Politics, and Religion*, pp. 75–95, p. 81.
- 31. Leonard Lawlor also stresses the immanence central to Bergson's thinking and writes: 'It seems to me if you prioritize language over intuition, you

become a philosopher of transcendence, while if you prioritize intuition over language, you become a philosopher of immanence' (The Challenger Bergsonism (New York: Continuum, 2003), p. 62).

32. Henri Bergson, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, trans. R. Ashland Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame

Press, 1977) p. 58. Hereafter referred to as TS.

33. Bergson writes: '[I]t is the mystic souls who draw and will continue to dise civilized societies in their wake. The remembrance of what they have done is enshrined in the memory of humanity. Each one of us can revive II, supercially if he brings it in touch with the image, which abides ever living with him, of a particular person who shared in that mystic state and radiated around him some of its light' (TS, p. 84).

34. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, In Praise of Philosophy, trans. John Wilde, James Edie, and John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1964)

p. 9 ff.

35. Merleau-Ponty, 'Eye and Mind', in The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader, of Galen A. Johnson and Michael B. Smith (Northwestern University Pro-1993), p. 140.

36. For an account of the radical empiricism of Levinas's philosophy see Megan Craig, Levinas and James: Towards a Pragmatic Phenomenology (Indland University Press, 2009).

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37. Simone de Beauvoir, The Ethics of Ambiguity, trans. Bernard Frechtman (New York: Citadel Press, 1976) p. 13.

38. Eva Kittay, Love's Labors: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency (New York: Routledge, 1998).

39. Pierre Hadot, Philosophy as a Way of Life, ed. Arnold Davidson (Willey Blackwell, 1995).

40. Deleuze and Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus, trans. Brian Mussami (Non York: Continuum, 2004) p. 25. See also p. 323.