

WAYS LEADING TO BERGSON'S NOTION OF "PERPETUAL PRESENT"

In his philosophy of life, Bergson's aim is very clear: to determine, beyond mechanism and finalism, the essence of change and of evolution according to the order of duration in opposition to the order of space or juxtaposition. His intention is to penetrate the specificity of the order of duration. Regarding time, the analyses of the previous philosophers are proved to be deceiving, since all of them, according to him, ended up in reducing time to a succession of simultaneities. Founded on the order of magnitude, mechanism lines up succession as a series of numbers, finalism adds to succession the law of the better: in both cases all is already given and time is reduced to a mere appearance. Nowhere do we find a process in depth; as time is conceived as the realization of a programme previously arranged, everything is simply spread out in space.

THE ALREADY-MADE AND THE BEING-MADE

Bergson's general statement on his predecessors seems, however, to be at variance with the known facts, especially with the accomplishments of the philosophy of Hegel. By openly assuming the obligation of thinking-being in its depth and in its intrinsic mobility, has not Hegel undertaken at the same time the task of unraveling the mystery of time? He has specifically termed his attempt dialectics. His *The Phenomenology of Mind* concludes by stating that the goal of succession is "the revelation of the depth of spiritual life, and this is the Absolute notion".¹ Time, at first an empty intuition of the self, deepens and grows into memory and culture. It thus becomes the womb in which the knowledge of spirit by itself is elaborated. The empty intuition is that nothingness which, by passing through being and thereby arousing contradiction, collects its knowledge.

The task that Hegel has assumed gives us, therefore, the responsibility of seriously evaluating Bergson's judgement on his predecessors as regards the question of time. Even if a general evaluation proves to be difficult, we must at least try to explain why in an apparent allusion to the original meaning of dialectics Bergson thought it justified to remark that "conversation greatly resembles conservation",² thus suggesting the idea that dialectics too "can express the new only as a rearrangement of the old".²

By reviving the link which attaches Hegel to the first thinker of contradiction, namely Heraclitus, we can point out the apparent failure of Bergson in his appreciation of the originality of dialectics. Indeed, for Heraclitus nature is neither blind nor intelligent; it is rather a contradiction. This is a viewpoint which clearly rejects both mechanism and finalism. A thing does not come into being through a mechanical or a final cause. Generation operates by contradiction, by opposite coupling. Hot is not a quality that cold produces in a mechanical or teleological fashion. It is in so far as it contradicts cold. This contradiction is its reason for being; it is also providing its determination. "War is the father

¹ G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, p. 808. New York, The Macmillan Company.

² Henry Bergson, *The Creative mind*, p. 96. New York, Philosophical Library.

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of all and king of all",³ says Heraclitus. We have here a vision which interprets the world as a permanent tension resulting in temporary harmony of opposites.

True, the link between Hegel and Heraclitus is also studded with so many dissonances. In Heraclitus the tension, which is the inner soul of the universe, is never resolved. In other words, movement is not dialectical and being has no history. Accordingly Heraclitus has no place for the coming of the better, for the dissolution and the overcoming of evil. It is not that, as the mechanist philosopher, he is referring to a blind process, but because the very law of being is to remain in that unsolved contradiction. The struggle is thus maintained as an ever-recurring phenomenon. Life and death, beauty and ugliness, the strong and the weak, joy and suffering, etc., do exist together. They draw their determinations from their unity. The ugly is not progressively evolving in the direction of the beautiful, nor is the beautiful the ugly negated for the better. Opposites can interchange, but they never evolve towards either betterment or cessation. They are sealed by their contradiction.

The world understood as a tension which is never resolved actually dismisses time and ends up in an oscillating immobility. The world-order is an "everlasting fire, kindling in measures, and going out in measures",⁴ says Heraclitus. The internal tear of being, in so far as it is neither diminishing nor overcome, immobilizes the world. Hegel has perfectly understood this: in order to inject into the world the possibility of a forward movement, he decided to think tension with the inherent tendency to resolution. Such is dialectics, which is not only contradiction, but also overcoming of contradiction.

To launch being into time, Hegel had to correct the old metaphysics on an essential point. He had, so to speak, to dig into the full and fixed world of metaphysics so as to introduce into it nothingness, that is a lack of determination. Being is no more that substance to which predicates are attached, but a subject in pursuit of determinations and able to determine itself by its own movement. One must recognize Hegel's merit of having

³ Heraclitus, *The Cosmic Fragments*, p. 245. Cambridge University Press, 1962.

⁴ Heraclitus, *op. cit.*, p. 307.

conceived, as Bergson says, “becoming” as “a subject”.⁵

On the basis of this similarity, some⁶ have thought that Bergsonism is in reality a variety of Hegelianism. However, the dissimilarity between the two is considerable. Bergsonism is absolutely refractory to dialectics, for the latter presupposes what Bergson strongly rejects: the progressive course of time.

In this respect, regarding for instance the history of philosophy, Hegel writes:

“The different stages of the logical idea assume the shape of successive systems, each based on a particular definition of the Absolute. As the logical idea is seen to unfold itself in a process from the abstract to the concrete, so in the history of philosophy the earliest systems are the most abstract, and thus at the same time the poorest. The relation too of the earlier to the later systems of philosophy is much like the relation of the corresponding stages of the logical Idea: in other words, the earlier are preserved in the later; but subordinated and submerged.”⁷

Concerning creative evolution Bergson says:

“The evolution movement would be a simple one, and we should soon have been able to determine its direction, if life had described a single course, like that of a solid ball shot from a cannon. But it proceeds rather like a shell, which suddenly bursts into fragments, which fragments, being themselves shells, burst in their turn into fragments destined to burst again, and so on for a time incommensurably long. We perceive only what is nearest to us, namely, the scattered movements of the pulverized explosions.”⁸

The above quotations convey two different meanings of time and evolution. For Hegel, time is like a circle that grows in a progressive and concentric fashion. Bergson breaks up the circle, leaving time in indetermination. Such is the difference be-

⁵ Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p. 340. New York, Greenwood Press.

⁶ See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *L'union de l'âme et du corps chez Malebranche, Biran et Bergson*, p. 85. Vrin, 1968.

⁷ G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, Being Part 1 of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, translated by William Wallace, pp. 125-126. Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1975.

⁸ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 109.

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tween dialectics and creation. While dialectics, through mediation, develops and reinstates the universal, creative evolution, on the contrary, aims at the individual and not at the universal. The evolution is called creative because precisely it is directed towards the original. For Bergson, since dialectics always returns to the universal which it only made concrete, it merely reflects an apparent movement. As it simply reveals the universal as concrete, it is not endowed with real indetermination and accordingly does not invent.

Because dialectics is at the exclusive service of the universal, it is exposed to the danger of leaving reality aside. Its knowledge is acquired by the historical method which projects time as a succession of particularities through which universality is synthesized. That which is original, different, unique, that which we call reality (as it is the being-made) is viewed as a moment, an aspect of the universal. Its originality is submerged and absorbed by the universal which relegates it to the position of being only a moment with no intrinsic reality, and independence. Every time that duration is grasped as a synthesis of unity and multiplicity, "how this mysterious operation can admit of shades or degrees, I repeat, is not quite clear",⁹ says Bergson.

Bergson is thus asking us to attempt a different conception of time. The trouble comes from the fact that between the past and the future we usually tend to see a mere logical continuity. The future is the past which has become. We thus remain with the same, past and future being its progressive unfolding. We shall grasp the essence of creation only if we understand succession, not as a logical continuity, but as a difference. In this case the future ceases to be a past which has become; not being contained in the past, it is no more something deducible. It is what it is, not because it continues the past, but because it alters it. Through it the past is not completing or achieving itself, it is prolonged by its otherness, replaced by its own alterity. It is not therefore as in dialectics where past, present and future are linked by a historical continuity. The latter demands not only that the original unity be maintained in its integrity, but also that it enrich itself by appropriating its products in a cumulative fashion. With

⁹ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 218.

Bergson, the unity has exploded, and its fragments are not destined to be collected and appropriated by the same. They are creations, having their own life and always moving divergently.

This is not to say that we must not look for causes and conditionings. These do exist, but what comes out of them, the original, the different, that by which this now is different from the one that produces it, is not accountable dialectically. There is time for us, that is we wait and expect, not because some other thing is realizing itself at our expense, but because our own reality is perpetually being made, its present representing the extreme point of its indetermination. The real is not development in the sense of a totalizing history, but of a continuous pulverizing explosion, creative evolution. The causes that we can enumerate are not as such determinations, but repetitions on the basis of which creation or divergence prosper by the continual generation of difference.

Let us take specific cases. Hegel understands, for instance, Stoicism, as a philosophy that negates force and defends abstract freedom in a world of domination and servitude, that is a freedom “on the throne as well as in fetters”.¹⁰ For him, Stoicism will always remain a negation, an antithesis; from the outset it is refused as an original creation. By following his general method, he is accordingly trying to range Stoicism in a preconceived logical or historical scheme. Hence he believes that Stoicism will be exhaustively explained once it is placed in the historical movement. Yet, even common sense could retort by saying that the content of Stoicism is not determined by the place it occupies in historical development, but by its very originality or uniqueness. It is not a moment in the history of spirit, but a divergence in the already diversified realm of culture. It bears witness to the bursting of spirit, not to its unity.

The other example that we can cite to show the striking incompatibility between dialectics and creative evolution lies in the peculiar manner that Bergson has devised to explain the division between animal life and vegetative life. He relates the separation of the two modes of life with the tendency to develop certain features at the expense of others. Thus, whereas vegetative life tends

¹⁰ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 244.

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towards immobility by fostering the faculty to accumulate energy directly from the sun, animality develops mobility and sensation. This divergence is precisely what dialectics is unable to think. Indeed, for dialectics animal life represents a certain stage in the becoming of the original substance. In this becoming vegetative life, owing to its poverty in determinations, necessarily occupies a lower place. Vegetative life is therefore not a different sort of life, but a lower stage in the development of the same life. In a general statement, perfectly applicable to Hegel, even if he is not mentioned, Bergson says:

“The cardinal error which, from Aristotle onwards, has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature, is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life, three successive degrees of the development of one and the same tendency, whereas they are divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew.”¹¹

Besides, Hegel himself is constantly struggling to resolve the contradiction generated by the successive movements and the totalizing process, without ever being successful. For instance, in his conception of the history of philosophy, he is torn between two opposing views. On the one hand, he would very much like to show that the past philosophical systems are not to be rejected just because they occupy lower stages; on the other, he cannot prevent the totalizing process from refuting the past philosophies and turning them into dead moments. He thought he could reconcile these conflicting views by asserting that

“the history of philosophy, in its true meaning, deals not with a past, but with an eternal and veritable present: and, in its results, resembles not a museum of the aberrations of the human intellect, but a Pantheon of godlike figures.”¹²

This additional remark, far from removing the contradiction, only strengthens Bergson's assessment. If, in the final analysis, succession merely unfolds eternity and again sinks into it, the proof is given that time has no real meaning and efficacy. It

¹¹ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

¹² Hegel, *Hegel's Logic*, *op. cit.*, p. 126.

is simply an apparent movement with no veritable output.

It is with a similar obstacle that a thinker like Sartre is confronted, despite the care he took in criticizing and rearranging dialectics. In his *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Sartre, with great conviction, shows how Marxist dialectics, concealed in an abstract knowledge of the historical movement, has turned into a dogmatic and idealist vision of the world. But, by a peculiar movement of oscillation, he reinstates the mistakes he is denouncing as he maintains dialectics as “a totalising activity”.¹³ Sartre’s attempt to reconcile totality and particularity is never convincing. We do not see how totalization could still leave a certain autonomy to the particular, to the something lived. The reading of his work, on the contrary, arouses the conviction that the something lived is precisely recognized by its resistance to all totalizing processes.

For his part, Bergson has detected in this obstinate recourse to totalization the presence of a congenital bent. Owing to this bent, the endeavour of the human intelligence to make the bursting of unity (instead of totalization) the object of human thinking is extremely difficult. Our intelligence is haunted by the fear that unity, by bursting into multiplicity, might end up in a juxtaposition without dynamism and significance. The continuity of the process seems unthinkable without totalization.

But this need for totalization emanates, in the eyes of Bergson, from that original mistake of our intelligence which accords more reality to immobility than to mobility. Our intelligence requires explanation for movement. Accumulation, attraction, repulsion, totalization, etc., are all expressions meant to explain the continuity of movement. But had we first considered movement as given, immobility would have appeared as a stopping due to resistance, and movement as the most natural thing.

This is to say that the unity is given as original impetus. The indefinitely divided movement continues by virtue of the same impetus. The impetus is behind, it is never aimed at for itself. The aim is the new, the creation. This impetus is interiorly differentiated by the resistance (matter) it meets, thus yielding multiplicity, not as enriched in itself, but as the other of itself.

¹³ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, p. 47. NLB.

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Such is the essence of duration for Bergson: it is that continuity by which the one becomes the other. The impetus is neither contradiction nor causal impulse; it always results in otherness. Whether one deals with qualitative, or extensive, or evolutionary change, the principle is always the same: a universe that endures because it is giving birth to its own alterity. Otherness is duration; it cannot be instantaneous for it is neither given in advance nor simply deducible. It consists in that effort, in that interval between the given and the unpredictable.

The seriousness and passion of life lie in this effort, in this transition to otherness. We must admit that, when compared to the Platonic tradition, what Hegel has accomplished is undeniable. By introducing into the world the negative he has corrected the tradition which saw existence as the fall of the eternal. This correction has undoubtedly played a great part in the awareness of the importance of becoming. Besides, conscious of his discovery, he himself wrote:

"The life of God and divine intelligence, then, can, if we like, be spoken of as love disporting with itself; but this idea falls into edification, and even sinks into insipidity, if it lacks the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative."¹⁴

But no sooner had he warned us of the danger than he himself rushed into it. "Of the Absolute", he wrote, "it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only at the end is it what it is in very truth."¹⁵ All that suffering, all that struggle just to reinstate that which was already given and pre-existing! Hegel's artifice is all here: he makes us believe in becoming, he arouses in us the passion of the unfinished, but it is by setting its meaning and content in advance. Becoming is altogether logical and phenomenological, eternal and temporal.

Because of this premise, for Bergson, Hegelianism does not differ, in the final analysis, from the other philosophies. Still time has no real significance. How comes it then that it had such an impact? Maybe because in opposition to Plato who spoke of the fall of eternity, and to Kant who limited us to phenomena, Hegel

¹⁴ Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

¹⁵ Hegel, *op. cit.*, pp. 81-82.

brandished the negative which, even if it does not bring any new thing, offers nevertheless the advantage of being thought in terms of contradiction and struggle. Life becomes dramatic, thus conveying the feeling of seriousness. We are invited to witness a tragedy, and says Bergson,

“man loves the dramatic; he is strongly inclined to pick out from a whole more or less extended period of history those characteristics which make of it a struggle between two parties, two societies, or two principles, each of them in turn coming off victorious.”¹⁶

To prove that the world is neither a reflection nor an appearance, it is not necessary to appeal to the negative. Simply one must cease to posit being in advance; then, the being which is in the making, the being which creates and is created by us becomes the very meaning of life. Our passion for life does not come from the fact that we struggle, but from the fact that we are constantly being installed within the indetermination of being. Indetermination incites our creativity. This meaning of duration constitutes the very meaning of life.

According to Hegel, the rational grows out from the contradiction which has the tendency to transcend itself. This conception, he assures us, keeps us out of Kant's antinomies in that it shows that the rational is reconciliation,¹⁷ synthesis of contradiction. Granted that he is right, what do we get in exchange? To reconcile the infinite with the finite, the external with the internal, the subject with the object, Greek thought with Christian thought,

¹⁶ Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, p. 286. New York, Henry Holt and Company.

¹⁷ In this study we deal exclusively with Hegelian dialectics. The dialectics of Marx obviously present a different texture. We only need to observe that this critique against Hegel was already made by Marx to measure the distance separating him from Hegel. Indeed, Marx, following Feuerbach, has criticized the manner peculiar to Hegel of “positing, negating and re-establishing” (*Early Writings*, p. 393. The Pelican Marx Library). The method preserves what it meant to negate. Thus, concerning the Hegelian negation of religion, Marx writes: “If I know religion as alienated human self-consciousness, then what I know in it as religion is not my self-consciousness but my alienated self-consciousness confirmed in it. Thus I know that the self-consciousness which belongs to the essence of my own self is confirmed not in religion but in the destruction and supersession of religion.” (*Early Writings*, p. 393).

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etc., is it not to contrive a form of thought which has no place for the typical, as it indulges in a conception which knows only to mix or mingle things?

THE CONNIVANCE BETWEEN BERGSONIAN DURATION AND NIETZSCHE ETERNAL RECURRENCE

The orientation of our critique of Hegel strongly reminds one of Nietzsche who, precisely, diagnosed the attempt to reconcile differences as a symptom of decadence. To see movement, not as leading to the individual, but as reconstructing the universal, is to expect from it a product which is no more than a mixture, an amalgam of different tendencies. In that case, spirit is nothing but lie and escape, as it is deprived of all intrinsic character, of all inherent particularity. "The historical sense", writes Nietzsche, "means virtually the sense and instinct for everything, the taste and tongue for everything: which at once proves it to be an ignoble sense".¹⁸ Because Bergson also opposes to the movement towards universality a divergent movement, a parallel between him and Nietzsche becomes irresistible.

If, by different alleys, Nietzsche and Bergson arrive at a similar appreciation, it is because both of them have the same suspicion *vis-à-vis* contradiction. We know that Nietzsche, an admirer of Heraclitus, was tempted to accept as his own the Heraclitean type of thinking, which indefinitely feeds on tragedy. At that moment he wanted to overcome the pessimism of Schopenhauer by a leap into the tragic from which he would draw a line of tension supplied by the opposition Apollo-Dionysus. But very soon he saw the danger: the temptation of reconciliation, of Hegelianism. For the tendency of the epoch is that "the tension, the range between the extremes is growing less and less—the extremes themselves are finally obliterated to the point of similarity",¹⁹ remarks Nietzsche.

A strong or ascending life is one which places itself beyond opposition, beyond good and bad, beyond truth and error. With

¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond good and evil*, p. 134. London, Penguin Classics.

¹⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols. The Anti-Christ*, p. 91. London, Penguin Classics.

a sharp insight, Nietzsche understood that to go beyond opposition is nothing else but to install oneself in the realm of power. Being is no more contradiction and overcoming of contradiction, but will to power, tendency to expansion and domination. The world does not resolve contradictions: it simply wants to have more and to be more. The affinity between Bergson and Nietzsche is so obvious that a rapprochement between will to power and Bergson's vital impetus, far from being arbitrary, is the selected road for anyone who is harbouring the desire to enter into the intimacy of their respective thoughts.

To encircle the problem of time, Nietzsche first reflected on the relationship between identity and change, between the one and the multiple. This reflection brings him back to the old problem of the mutability or immutability of being. If one says that being is immutable, then what would be the fate of becoming, of the visible world? Nietzsche simply rejects the immutability of being, for it is through immutability that life is discredited to the advantage of the eternal and reduced to the status of mere appearance. "Philosophers have never hesitated to affirm a world provided it contradicted this world and furnished them with a pretext for speaking ill of this world",²⁰ says Nietzsche.

But if one says that being is mobile, then the serious problem of conceiving a perpetually increasing force is raised. For how will becoming not only be prevented from falling into equilibrium and stability, but also be always new unless it is sustained by an indefinitely growing force? But an indefinitely growing force is unthinkable. What will its source be? What will be the force which will maintain it as indefinitely growing? The world does not live simply by accumulating force, but also by losing force. As Nietzsche says,

"the world, as force, may not be thought of as unlimited, for it cannot be so thought of; we forbid ourselves the concept of an infinite force as incompatible with the concept of force."²¹

Nietzsche has no other choice: he must conceive being as mobile and immobile at one and the same time, as both in time and

²⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "*The Will to Power*", p. 253. New York, Vintage Books.

²¹ Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 547.

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in eternity. He thus reaches the vision of the eternal recurrence. The world does not have a goal that it intends to realize. True, it is not static, immutable; but its mutability is not continuous, cumulative. It breaks down in the very act of self-making. "It lives on itself: its excrement is its food."²² It has not any given direction or successive state; this can only mean that between one moment and the next it is always the same world but otherwise repeated. It is because the world eternally repeats itself that it is always new. It is not changing owing to the fact that it is pursuing a goal or its force is increasing, but because it always terminates itself, thus creating at the same time the condition of being always new or other. Nietzsche says:

"This notion that the world intentionally avoids a goal and even knows artifices for keeping itself from entering into a circular course must occur to all those who would like to force on the world the ability for eternal novelty, *i.e.*, on a finite, definite, unchangeable force of constant size, such as the world is, the miraculous power of infinite novelty in its forms and states."²³

Complete recurrence becomes selection, power of novelty, more exactly will to power, expansion of force. Expansion is not the result of an increase or decrease. If the world is the same but always as other, as the other of itself, this otherness within sameness, this instability can only be the expression of inherent dissatisfaction, the absence of satiety, the longing for power. The recurrence precisely insures the play of forces. By the very fact that recurrence makes the world by unmaking it, it always brings about new possibilities for the play of forces, for force is "increasing here and the same time decreasing there."²⁴

The concordance of view between Bergson and Nietzsche on this issue is undeniable. For, despite a received idea, there is not in Bergson something like a becoming of being. He is stating it unequivocally when he defines the impetus of life as a "need of creation", as always making the effort to give more than it possesses. This more indicates that the meaning of becoming is not

²² Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 548.

²³ Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 546.

²⁴ Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 550.

as such the becoming of the same. We have already said that evolution is not aiming at the same but at the other. For Bergson and Nietzsche, the issue is to conceive change by positing a limited force, an impetus which is "finite",²⁵ and a change such that the force gives birth to otherness and not to its own development. Only that which is finite can overcome itself and create something other than and superior to itself. Not being in a position to evolve for itself, its creative capacity must lie in its own repetition. Repetition is the manner it avoids having a goal or taking itself as a goal. Such seems to be the intimate conviction of Nietzsche and Bergson.

Yet it is also undeniable that our two thinkers cannot be treated as identical. Where does the difference between the two lie? To say that Nietzsche is an atheist while Bergson is not cannot be a relevant approach to the specificity of the topic. Not only Nietzsche never gave his atheism an explicitly elaborated form, but Bergson himself, more than anyone else, understood that it is impossible to imagine the world simply as something created by the will of a superior Being. Something superior could not have created an inferior being. That is why he thinks of the impetus as finite. If need be, one can say that the superior Being has lent something of himself to the world, but He cannot have created it directly without falling into the mere act of fabrication. The impetus is of God, but it is not God.

Let us see then whether the concept of creation, as it exists in Bergson, is comparable with the concept of will to power. That change is conceived, not as an unrolling process, but as a set of differences, requires that Bergson too think of time as repetition, or to use his expression, as "a present which endures".²⁶ Bergson's insistence on the artificiality of the splitting of time into past, present and future, no doubt stresses the affinity between eternal recurrence and his notion of duration. The "presence" of the past generates in both thinkers the problem of knowing what the conscious present means. Bergson understands it as a limitation rendering choice, indetermination, novelty possible. With Nietzsche too, eternal recurrence generates at the surface

²⁵ Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 277.

²⁶ Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

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the possibility of choice, of the "great dice game of existence".²⁷ It is the same dice, and each game brings with it a new possibility. We can say that what is creation for Bergson appears to Nietzsche as a game of dice generating chance. But as chance itself is for Nietzsche "only the clash of creative impulses",²⁸ the difference between the two thinkers is not yet clearly emerging.

But can we not say that Nietzsche's notion of will to power is meant to design a process which excludes causal impulse as well as final cause? It is the desire for more power, realized by the free interplay of dominating and dominated forces, which is actually explaining the structure of the world. It seems that Bergson rejected radical finalism but did not go so far as to deny any term or end to life.

Yet here also a categorical affirmation would be misleading. On the one hand, Nietzsche himself, impelled by his notion of will to power, conceives man as "something that should be overcome",²⁹ and the superman as "the meaning of the earth".³⁰ A kind of end is thus recognized to the world, even if it is not conceived in advance. On the other hand, we find a similar suggestion in Bergson. He let us imagine that the original end of life was to create something like a "superman".³¹ Evolution, it is true, has only partially succeeded; instead of the superman, it has given birth to a multitude of scattered individuals who now constitute humanity. At any rate, in both cases we are asked to understand how something finite and indefinite overcomes itself to create something higher and better than itself.

Creation and will to power—these two notions seem to convey equivalent meanings, particularly as life is expressly defined by Bergson as a tendency to dominate matter, as a "current sent through matter, drawing from it what it can".³² Earlier he had said that it is an "effort to re-mount the incline that matter descends".³³ And how does the ascending life, the impetus

²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 549.

²⁸ Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 355.

²⁹ Friedrich Nietzsche, "Thus Spoke Zarathustra", London, Penguin Classics.

³⁰ Nietzsche, *op. cit.*, p. 42.

³¹ Bergson, "Creative Evolution", *op. cit.*, p. 290.

³² Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 289.

³³ Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 268.

counter the descending life or matter? Bergson has a definite answer: organization. "Of those two currents", he says, "the second runs counter to the first, but the first obtains, all the same, something from the second. There results between them a *modus vivendi*, which is organization".³⁴

To account for the organization of the world, Nietzsche is suggesting a similar image. Indeed, he writes:

"In all willing it is absolutely a question of commanding and obeying, on the basis, as I have said already, of a social structure composed of many 'souls': on which account a philosopher should claim the right to include willing as such within the field of morality: that is, of morality understood as the theory of the relations of dominance under which the phenomenon 'life' arises."³⁵

This conception of organization as a hierarchy of "souls" out of which grows the relation of dominance, which is properly the phenomenon of life, greatly resembles the Bergsonian image of the struggle of the two currents. Besides, the two expressions, impetus of life and will to power, resound with the same ascending or "moral" meaning.

It is not surprising then, if their social philosophy is equally conditioned by the struggle between ascending and static or declining life. According to Bergson, the organization inherent in the impetus, because of the burden that it carries with it, is stopped and converted into oscillation, that is into closed societies. These societies do not open up by successive efforts expressing "the progressive realization of an ideal".³⁶ The task of moving these societies one step forward falls on some privileged individuals. Thus there is no progressive history;³⁷ we have rather intermit-

³⁴ Bergson, *op. cit.*, p. 272.

³⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³⁶ Bergson, "*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

³⁷ This conclusion gives us the opportunity to compare the position of Bergson with that of Lévi-Strauss who stated that it is "not only fallacious but contradictory to conceive of the historical process of a continuous development." (*The Savage Mind*, p. 260. Weidenfeld and Nicolson). In many ways the debate we have opened between Hegel and Bergson recalls the confrontation that Lévi-Strauss had with Sartre. When Structuralism refuses the cumulative process of history, which is said to go always in the same direction, and replaces it by the notion of history as a

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tent ruptures by which, as expressed by Merleau-Ponty, these societies are "perforated"³⁸ and the impetus liberated for a while.

For Nietzsche, social and moral life is characterized by the dichotomy between strong or ascending and weak or decadent life. The struggle between these two kinds of life is the inner tension which animates human life. The aim of the decadent life, whose morality is, according to Nietzsche, the prevailing one, is to oppose "the effort of nature to achieve a higher type".³⁹ But here again, as is the case with Bergson, the movement is not a progressive one. The higher type of man is not progressively becoming victorious; nor is the decadent life dominant once and for all. We have rather intermittent irruptions of the higher type through which ascending life celebrates its occurrent triumph.

Other points of similarity could be cited, but what has been said up to now is sufficient to render palpable the complex and intimate resemblance existing between Bergsonism and Nietzsche's philosophy. We do not hold the belief that, in the final analysis, the two philosophers are saying the same thing. Beyond resemblances, one can detect far-reaching nuances. Yet these nuances never stick to themselves; they move from the one philosopher to the other, thus creating a puzzling situation dotted none the less with illuminating moments.

discontinuous process, as composed of different slices that do not form a series, it is obvious that it is repeating in different words the description given by Bergson of creative evolution. Bergsonism and Structuralism do not exactly coincide, but it is amazing to observe that the Structuralists, being content with the superficial reading of Bergson as philosopher of continuity, failed to see in him their eminent precursor.

³⁸ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Signs*, p. 188. Ill., Northwestern University Press, 1964. The book contains an article, entitled "Bergson in the making", which exhibits a dilemma. On the one hand Merleau-Ponty states that Bergson "does not seem to have impregnated himself with history as he had with life (p. 188), on the other, Bergson being philosopher of duration, Merleau-Ponty finds it hard to understand why he "did not think about history from within" (p. 187). He tries to explain this apparent contradiction by the emphasis that Bergson is making on the arrested nature of social life. According to Merleau-Ponty, this emphasis resulted in a pessimistic view of social life. However, it must be clear by now that the dilemma springs from a reductionist reading of Bergson. Owing to the nature of Bergsonian duration, there cannot be a simple, continuous, all-embracing historical process. It is not due to a pessimistic inclination but to the very nature of the spirit of his philosophy that Bergson, as pointed out by Merleau-Ponty himself, has refused to follow Peguy on the question of history.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

One thing is however certain: despite their effort to avoid the Hegelian type of thinking, our two philosophers are impregnated with it more than they suspect. As in Hegel's vision, their respective philosophies rest on the conflicts between two principles. With Nietzsche there is the opposition between strong and weak life, between Apollo and Dionysus. In Bergson there are the opposing movements of life and matter from which all the other oppositions (continuity-discontinuity, closed and open societies, etc.) proceed.

But it is equally true that, even if the two philosophers did not avoid thinking in terms of opposing principles, they nevertheless did not succumb to the temptation of making syntheses. On the contrary, they placed themselves beyond opposition, thus thinking of time, not in terms of unrolling, of successive realizations, but of irruptive creation. They took opposition as a melting-pot in which being undergoes that transmutation which turns into types or individualities. The Hegelian concrete universality is a moment in the successive realization of the universal, whereas typification bears witness to the fragmentation of the unity into irreducible individualities.

The way leading one to think that the notion of opposition need not necessarily require reflecting in terms of progressive unfolding, of successive realization is, henceforth, pioneered. We can conceive it as a source of permanent tension leaving us in an eternally enduring present that repeats and renews itself without ever taking the form of a series of successions. We thus radically revolutionize our old notion which conceived time as composed of a dead past, an evanescent present and a yet non-existing future, that is, as instances which are all equally excluded from being.

For Nietzsche and Bergson, the original opposition is never overcome; it becomes the permanent source of unpredictable creations that are projected from the depth of being to its surface. We have thus the image of a volcano which is throwing in all directions its multiple fragments which are so many irreducible creations. Being is not realizing itself as such; it recurs or endures, that is it revives the tension which, because it is repeated, is always forcing being to accomplish its own endless transfiguration. The world does not progress, but recurs or endures, such is Berg-

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son's and Nietzsche's vision of time. It is imperative that we enter into a frank dialogue with this vision if we intend to open a fruitful confrontation between our impatience and utopia and the slow, hesitant, now leaping, now regressing course of the world. Through the vision of the two philosophers a re-thinking of the notion of progress is forced on us. In view of the "surprises" that are constantly assaulting us, this re-thinking is no more something that we can afford to evade.

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