

Beyond the Human State:  
Bergson, Education, and the Art of Life

Keith Ansell-Pearson

Let us have done with great systems embracing all the possible, and sometimes even the impossible! Let us be content with the real...(Bergson)

Education is the guidance of the individual towards a comprehension of the art of life...Each individual embodies an adventure of existence. The art of life is the guidance of this adventure (Whitehead).

Introduction

In his corpus Bergson is deeply engaged with the question of philosophy's relation to the art of living, as well as with the reformation of education. Bergson insists he has no wish to elaborate a program of education; rather, he restricts himself to indicating certain habits of mind that he considers unfortunate and that schooling all too often encourages in fact whilst repudiating in principle. In this essay I aim to show the relevance of Bergson's thinking on intelligence and intuition for a philosophy of education and here there are two key insights: (a) first, that education needs to resist the substitution of concepts for things; and (b) second, that it needs to advance the idea that there is not only the *socialization of the truth* (CM 87). His education of philosophy consists in showing that philosophy should be an empiricism in as much as it is focused on realities and here it has an intimate connection with a schooling in the art of living. He is inspired, for example, by the ambition of taking philosophy out of the school, as he puts it, including the disputes between the different schools of philosophy, and bringing into more intimate contact with life (CM 126). Indeed, if we follow the contours of 'intuitive life' with its

special kind of knowledge, then the promise is opened up of bringing an end to ‘inert states’ and ‘dead things’: ‘nothing but the mobility of which the stability of life is made’ (CM 127). Such knowledge will do two things: it will enrich philosophical speculation – we see for the sake of seeing and the enrichment an enlarged perception offers us - and it will nourish and illuminate everyday life (it will enhance our power to act and live, for example). In order to restore our contact with life it is necessary to conquer the deadening world of habit: ‘For the world into which our senses and consciousness habitually introduce us is no more than the shadow of itself: and it is as cold as death’ (CM 128). In his essay on ‘Good Sense and Classical Studies’ Bergson contends that the stubborn clinging to habits (raised to the status of laws of life) is to repudiate change and allow one’s vision to be distracted away from the movement that is the condition of life (BKW 424).

Bergson forges a crucial distinction between the provinces of science and philosophy with the former concerned with well being, and at most pleasure, and the latter holding out the promise of delivering us over to joy. Bergson does not wish to denigrate the importance of the convenient life, the life of well-being, but it is clear he sees a superior reality in the joyful existence since it is here that we encounter creative life, including the creation of self by self. It is this set of concerns, centred around Bergson’s attempt to revitalise philosophy’s investment in the art of life, that I wish to explore in this essay. The task is to galvanize perception, to extend perception, and to effect a conversion of attention. The method for doing this is intuition, and the overriding aim is to become accustomed to seeing all things *sub specie durationis*: in this way what is dead comes back to life, life acquires depth, and we come into account with

the original impetus of life that serves to encourage us to create new things. In short, a Bergsonian-inspired philosophy of education restores to the human the vital impetus that lies at the origins of things. The task of education is to become a master in the art of living, and this is something perhaps unique to philosophy.

In what follows I first outline Bergson's fundamental conception of philosophy as the discipline that takes us beyond the human state or condition. I then turn to his specific method, namely intuition, and seek to illuminate this in two sections. In my fourth and final section I explicitly address Bergson on education. In my conclusion I suggest that Bergsonian thinking on education promotes a style of living beyond the logic of capital.

### Philosophy

Bergson conceives philosophy as the discipline that 'raises us above the human condition' (*la philosophie nous aura élevés au-dessus de la condition humaine*) (O 1292; CM 50) and makes the effort to 'surpass' (*dépasser*) the human condition (O 1425; CM 193). In *Creative Evolution* Bergson conceives philosophy as 'an effort to dissolve again into the whole'. Moreover: 'Intelligence reabsorbed into its principle, may thus live back again in its genesis' (CE 123). Such a method of thinking has to work against the most inveterate habits of the mind and consists in an interchange of insights that correct and add to each other. For Bergson, such an enterprise ends by expanding the humanity within us and even allowing humanity to surpass itself by reinserting itself in the whole (CE 124). This is accomplished through philosophy for it is philosophy that provides us with the means (methods) for reversing the normal directions of the mind (instrumental,

utilitarian), so upsetting its habits. In spite of what one might think for Bergson this makes philosophy's task a modest one (CE 123).<sup>1</sup> The key insight is the following one: if we suppose that philosophy is an affair of perception,<sup>2</sup> then it cannot simply be a matter of correcting perception but only of extending it. There is nothing at fault with the human condition, and its fundamental errors and habits do not require correction. Rather, the task is to extend the human present, which is the aspect of time in which the human necessarily dwells, a necessity to be explained through the dictates of evolution such as adaptation. Deleuze writes on this: 'The human condition is the maximum of duration concentrated in the present, but there is no co-exclusivity to being, that is to say that there is not only the present' (Deleuze, lecture 21 March 1960).

Why should we feel motivated by this endeavour to think beyond our human state? Deleuze provides the essential insight that is required here: we find ourselves born or thrown into a world that is ready-made and that we have not made our own. This world always goes in the direction of the 'relaxed aspect' of duration, Deleuze argues (May 2 1960). It is on account of the fact that the human condition is one of relaxation that we have such difficulty in understanding the meaning of creation - precisely the notion that proves essential for artistic invention, for new modes of ethical being, and for philosophical reflection, and that lies, of course, at the heart of Bergson's project.

In his writings Bergson advances several conceptions of philosophy, of what it is and its chief tasks. Sometimes he will stress its capacity to enable us to see: philosophy exists to extend our perception of the universe. At other times he will also express anxiety over philosophy's lapse into contemplation and stress its ability to enhance our power to act and to live. Philosophy for Bergson is not a rarefied, aristocratic activity,

something reserved for the best or the most wise, but a popular activity that all can potentially participate in and as a way of being creative. On the one hand, the paradoxical theoretical task of philosophy is, above all, to find some 'absolute' in the moving world of phenomena. On the other hand, it is more dynamic than this and, through this restoration of the absolute we will gain in a feeling of greater joy and power. Like Whitehead, then, Bergson links philosophy and education with the task of becoming masters in the art of living. Bergson writes:

Greater joy because the reality invented before our eyes will give each one of us, unceasingly, certain of the satisfactions which art at rare intervals procures for the privileged; it will reveal to us, beyond the fixity and monotony which our senses, hypnotized by our constant needs, at first perceived in it, ever-recurring novelty, the moving originality of things. But above all we shall have greater strength, for we shall feel we are participating, creators of ourselves, in the great work of creation which is the origin of all things and which goes on before our eyes (CM 105).

Typically we exist – both in terms of our species history and our individual development – as slaves of certain natural necessities. Philosophy is a practice and a discipline that can enable us to go beyond the level of necessities and enable us to become 'masters associated with a greater Master' (CM 105-6).

We exist as masters in two main forms: through science and the mastery of matter and through philosophy and the mastery of life. One is more free than the other for Bergson: the mastery of matter is part of the human condition and is a necessity for us, but the mastery of life takes us beyond the human condition and represents a free activity. Moreover, whilst the former activity serves to provide us with security and is bound up with securing a life of convenience (s), the latter is something different. Philosophy can

become complementary to science with respect to both speculation and practice. More than this, it supplements science since science offers us only the promise of well-being and the pleasure of it – philosophy can give us *joy*, and this joy is bound up with the move beyond the limited character of the human condition. This supplementary aspect of philosophy provides us with an insight into the role Bergson accords to intuition. Let me now focus on this in the next two sections.

### Towards Intuition

Bergson calls intuition the attention that the mind gives to itself ‘over and above, while it is fixed upon matter, its object’ (CM 78). It is a ‘supplementary attention’ that can be methodically cultivated and developed. We need to begin by noting the distinction between life and matter that characterizes Bergson’s thinking. For the most part he writes of ‘inert matter’, though he also refers to ‘organized matter’ and also of matter as made up of vibrations and to which slight durations can be attributed (CE 201). However, marking a distinction between matter and life is a central feature of Bergson’s thinking, whether he is attempting to explain the character of evolution or exploring the meaning of the comic.<sup>3</sup> Roughly speaking, it works as a distinction between inertia and vitality, between rigidity and suppleness, between automatism and creative effort, between necessity and freedom, and so on. However, matter and life/‘consciousness’ (delay, hesitation, a latitude of choice) are not to be explained apart from one another, and the two have a common source (ME 17, 20). If the determinism of matter were absolute, to the point of admitting no relaxation and showing no elasticity (which Bergson thinks it

does), then life would be an impossibility. Life is an insinuating energy, an impetus, that draws matter away from pure mechanism but only by first adopting this mechanism; life installs ‘itself in matter which had already acquired some of the characters of life without the work of life’ (ME 20). However, if matter were all that there is then it would have stopped at this point. This is akin, Bergson thinks, to the work of our scientific laboratories where we are seeking to manufacture matter that resembles living matter and is an enterprise that one day, he says, may well be successful. However, he adds, ‘we shall reproduce, that is to say, some characters of living matter; we shall not obtain the push in virtue of which it reproduces itself and, in the meaning of transformism, evolves’ (ibid.).

We also need to note that Bergson is puzzling on action and we can only resolve the difficulties generated by the puzzle by recognising that he is putting forward different types of action and activity. This is best seen in the way he seeks to demarcate the difference between metaphysics (and intuition) and science (and intelligence). Both are related to action but the action is different in the two cases. So, Bergson writes:

To metaphysics, then, we assign, a limited object, principally spirit, and a special method, mainly intuition. In doing this we make a clear distinction between metaphysics and science. But at the same time we attribute an equal value to both. I believe they can both touch the bottom of reality. I reject the arguments advanced by philosophers, and accepted by scholars, on the relativity of knowledge and the impossibility of attaining the absolute. (CM 37)

It is important to appreciate that Bergson is positing between science and metaphysics a difference of method and not a difference in value (CM 43-4). The task of metaphysics, as he conceives it, is to concern itself with the actual world in which we live and not with

all possible worlds, so philosophy embraces realities (CM 44). Science for Bergson is attached to a specific task, one that he does not wish to negate the importance of, namely, the mastery of matter. Positive science relies on sensible observations as way of securing materials and it does this by elaborating, through methods and faculties, abstraction and generalization, in short it establishes the order of intelligence through judgement and reasoning. Its 'original domain' and its 'preferred domain' is the domain of inert matter, or of matter stripped of the vitality of life: 'it clings to the physico-chemical in vital phenomena rather than to what is really vital in the living' (CM 38). If our intelligence can be construed as the prolongation of our senses, then we can see the force of science and its aid to life, at least life in its aspect of calculability and manipulation. Prior to pure speculation – seeing for the sake of seeing – there is the imperative to live, and so life demands that matter be made use of, and this takes place through our organs (conceived as natural tools) and with tools, properly so-called, as artificial organs. Although science has pushed far the labour of intelligence it has not changed its essential direction, which is to make us masters of matter. Bergson argues that even when it speculates science continues to devote itself to acting, and here it is evident that he has a specific kind of action in mind, namely, action of a utilitarian and instrumental character. Bergson further holds that between intellect and matter there is 'symmetry, concord and agreement': 'On one hand, matter resolves itself more and more, in the eyes of the scholar, into mathematical relations, and on the other hand, the essential faculties of our intellect function with an absolute precision only when they are applied to geometry' (CM 39).

To break out of the social circle it will become necessary to appeal to experience. Experience is of two main kinds: if it is an affair of knowing material objects then we are



dealing with exterior perception; if it is question of encountering the mind we refer to the name of 'intuition' and raising ourselves above our human state (CM 50). What of 'metaphysics'? Here Bergson holds that the task is 'to develop new functions of thought' (CM 41). The focus of metaphysics is with 'mind' and 'spirit', especially with ourselves and our internal lives. He acknowledges the difficulty: is it not, he asks, much more difficult to develop knowledge of oneself than it is knowledge of the external world? He adds:

Outside oneself, the effort to learn is natural; one makes it with increasing facility; one applies rules. Within, attention must remain tense and progress becomes more and more painful; it is as though one were going against the natural bent. Is there not something surprising in this? We are internal to ourselves, and our personality is what we should know best (CM 41).

Bergson notes, then, a point that is crucial to his own attempt to contribute to how philosophy can aid the art of living, namely, that within the field of instrumental action, a certain *ignorance* of self is what is found to be most useful and answers to a necessity of life since here we encounter a being, ourselves, that must exteriorize itself in order to act. Hence his claim that mind finds itself in a strange place when it encounters life, in contrast to its habitual feeling at home in the realm of matter (it knows what it must do when it comes to acting in the world). He is not denying, of course, that when it comes to such effective action that we are distinguished from animals, for example, in having capacities that enable us to reflect on our actions. But, he notes, nature requires that we only take a quick glance at our inner selves: 'we then perceive the mind, but the mind preparing to shape matter, already adapting itself to it, assuming something of the spatial,

the geometric, the intellectual' (CM 42). It is in this context of problems that he appeals to intuition as a mode of mental attentiveness: 'This direct vision of the mind by the mind is the chief function of intuition, as I understand it' (CM 42). But we still do not know what this intuition is and how it can amount to a new function of thinking. Part of the difficulty is our reliance on metaphor and ready-made concepts as a way of thinking reality and reflecting on our experience of the real. This is why Bergson stresses that in order to gain access to intuition – since there is nothing immediate about it as a method – an entire labour of clearing away is required and as a way of opening up the way to 'inner experience': 'True, the faculty of intuition exists in each one of us, but covered over by functions more useful to life' (CM 47).

In order to gain access to the practice of intuition it is necessary to break with society, in particular with the subdivision and distribution of the real into concepts that society has deposited into language and for the sake of the convenience of existence. Society or the social organism cuts out reality according to its needs, and Bergson asks why philosophy ought to accept a division that in all probability does not correspond to the articulations of the real – except, of course, in terms of our mastery of matter. The challenge here for thinking about the art of living is a serious one: it means not accepting the claim, 'that all truth is already virtually known, that its model is patented in the administrative offices of the state, and that philosophy is a jig-saw puzzle where the problem is to construct with pieces society gives us the design it is unwilling to show us' (CM 50). Contra this position, Bergson maintains that in philosophy – and not only in philosophy – it is question of *finding* the problem and of positing it, rather than of solving it: '...stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing' (51). The difference

between the two is paramount since in the one case we are uncovering what already exists actually or virtually and in the other case with what does not exist and might never have happened: 'Already in mathematics and still more in metaphysics, the effort of invention consists more in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated' (51).

Bergson gives an example to illustrate his point, and it serves as a good way of indicating how a Bergsonian philosophy of education can be developed from the insights I am staging. He imagines the question being set: 'Is pleasure happiness or not?' To answer the question we could examine the conventional meaning of the words involved and take it as a question of vocabulary; alternatively, we could grasp 'realities' and not simply re-examine conventions, and so endeavour to *transform* the problem being posed. Bergson elaborates as follows:

Suppose that in examining the states grouped under the name of pleasure they are found to have nothing in common except that they are states which man is seeking; humanity will have classified these very different things in one genus because it found them of the same practical interest and reacted toward all of them in the same way. Suppose, on the other hand, that one arrives at an analogous result in analysing the idea of happiness. Immediately the problem disappears or rather is dissolved in entirely new problems of which we can know nothing, and in whose terms we do not even possess, before having studied in itself the human activity of which society had formed from the outside, in order to arrive at the general ideas of *pleasure* and *happiness*, views that were perhaps artificial. Even then one must be assured that the concept of 'human activity' itself is in accordance with a natural division. In this disarticulation of the real according to its own tendencies lies the principal difficulty, as soon as one leaves the domain of matter for that of mind (CM 52).

## Intuition and Sympathy

Let me now look in some more detail at Bergson on intuition and in particular seek to illuminate its connection with the mode of perception he calls ‘sympathy’.

Intuition is said to be a mode of sympathy ‘by which one is transported into the interior of an object’ (CM 135). The contrast is with the mode of ‘analysis’, which is an operation that reduces an object to elements already known and that are common to it and other objects. Intuition involves a special kind of attention or attentiveness to life (Bergson speaks of performing an ‘auscultation’ and in accordance with a ‘true empiricism’, CM 147). Bergson contends that even the most concrete of the sciences of nature, namely, the sciences of life, ‘confine themselves to the visible form of living beings, their organs, their anatomical elements’ (136). The task at hand is to understand precisely what Bergson means when he says that intuition leads us to ‘very inwardness of life’. Intuition is important to Bergson since he holds that, taken as a mode of sympathy, it will enable us to resolve – indeed, to *dissolve* – many of the problems that are often taken to be the genuine puzzles of metaphysics, such as, ‘what is the first cause of existence?’ and ‘why is there something rather than nothing?’ So, he writes: ‘To the extent that we distend our will, tend to reabsorb our thought in it and get into greater sympathy with the effort that engenders things, these formidable problem will recede, diminish, disappear’ (CM 62).

As Deleuze notes, intuition is the method peculiar to Bergson’s philosophy. He stresses that it denotes neither a vague feeling or incommunicable experience nor a

disordered sympathy. Rather, it is a fully developed method that aims at precision in philosophy. Where duration and memory denote lived realities and concrete experiences, intuition is the only means we have at our disposal for crafting knowledge of experience and reality. 'We may say, strangely enough', Deleuze notes, 'that duration would remain purely intuitive, in the ordinary sense of the word, if intuition - in the properly Bergsonian sense - were not there as method' (Deleuze 1988: 14). However, intuition is a complex method that cannot be contained in single act. Instead, it has to be seen as involving a plurality of determinations. The first task is to stage and create problems; the second is to locate differences in kind; and the third is to comprehend 'real time', that is, duration as a heterogeneous and continuous multiplicity. Let me now note some salient aspects of Bergson on intuition and then draw on Deleuze to indicate how intuition aspires to operate as a method of precision in philosophy.

Bergson acknowledges that other philosophers before him, such as Schelling, tried to escape relativism by appealing to intuition. He argues, however, that this was a non-temporal intuition that was being appealed to, and, as such, was largely a return to Spinozism, that is, a deduction of existence from one complete Being. Bergson locates a failure of empiricism in Spinoza. For a system like Spinoza's, Bergson notes, true or genuine being is endowed with a logical existence more than a psychological or even physical one: 'For the nature of a purely logical existence is such that it seems to be self-sufficient and to posit itself by the effect alone of the force immanent in truth' (CE 276). Spinozism is an attempt to make 'the mystery of existence', such as why minds and bodies exist, vanish and instead of making actual observations of nature the philosopher advances a logical system in which at the base of everything that exists is a self-positing

being dwelling in eternity. Bergson's main engagement, however, is with Kant and for obvious reasons. He argues that in order to reach the mode of intuition it is not necessary, as Kant supposed, to transport ourselves outside the domain of the senses: 'After having proved by decisive arguments that no dialectical effort will ever introduce us into the beyond and that an effective metaphysics would necessarily be an intuitive metaphysics, he added that we lack this intuition and that this metaphysics is impossible. It would in fact be so if there were no other time or change than those which Kant perceived...!' (CM 128) By recovering intuition Bergson hopes to save science from the charge of producing a relativity of knowledge (it is rather to be regarded as approximate) and metaphysics from the charge of indulging in empty and idle speculation. Although Kant himself did not pursue thought in the direction he had opened for it - the direction of a 'revivified Cartesianism' Bergson calls it - it is the prospect of an extra-intellectual matter of knowledge by a higher effort of intuition that Bergson seeks to cultivate. Kant has reawakened, if only half-heartedly, a view that was the essential element of Descartes' thinking but which the Cartesians abandoned: knowledge is not completely resolvable into the terms of intelligence. Bergson does not, let it be noted, establish an opposition between sensuous (infra-intellectual) intuition and intellectual (what he calls an 'ultra-intellectual') intuition but instead seeks to show that there is a continuity and reciprocity between the two. Moreover, sensuous intuition can be promoted to a different set of operations, no longer simply being the phantom of an unscrutable thing-in-itself:

The barriers between the matter of sensible knowledge and its form are lowered, as also between the 'pure forms' of sensibility and the categories of the understanding. The matter and form of intellectual knowledge (restricted to its own object) are seen to be engendering each other by a reciprocal adaptation,

intellect modelling itself on corporeity, and corporeity on intellect. But this duality of intuition Kant neither would nor could admit. (CE 230)

For Kant to admit this duality of intuition would entail granting to duration an absolute reality and treating the geometry immanent in space as an ideal limit (the direction in which material things develop but never actually attain).

Deleuze thinks we can learn some valuable philosophical lessons from Bergson on intuition, so let me now turn to his account. He argues that we go wrong when we hold that notions of true and false can only be brought to bear on problems in terms of ready-made solutions. This is a far too pre-emptive strategy that does not take us beyond experience but locks us in it. This negative freedom is the result of manufactured social prejudices where, through social institutions such as education and language, we become enslaved by order-words that identify for us ready-made problems that we are forced to solve. True freedom lies in the power to constitute problems themselves. This might involve the freedom to uncover certain truths for oneself, but often discovery is too much involved in uncovering what already exists, an act of discovery that was bound to happen sooner or later and contingent upon circumstances. Invention, however, gives Being to what did not exist and might never have happened since it was not destined to happen, there was no pre-existing programme by which it could be actualized. In mathematics and in metaphysics the effort of invention consists in raising the problem and in creating the terms through which it might be solved but never as something ready-made. As Merleau-Ponty notes in a reading of Bergson, when it is said that well-posed problems are close to being solved, 'this does not mean that we have already *found* what we are looking for, but that we have already invented it' (Merleau-Ponty 1988: 14). For

Bergson the genuine philosopher, as opposed to the amateur, is one who does not accept the terms of a problem as a common problem that has been definitively posed and which then requires that s/he select from the available solutions to the problem (the example Bergson gives to illustrate his point is that of Samuel Butler rejecting Darwin's solution in favour of Lamarck's) (BKW 370).

A second rule of intuition is to do away with false problems, which are said to be of two kinds: firstly, those which are caught up in terms that contain a confusion of the more and the less; and, secondly, questions which are stated badly in the specific sense that their terms represent only badly analyzed composites. In the first case the error consists in positing an origin of being and of order from which nonbeing and disorder are then made to appear as primordial. On this schema, order can only appear as the negation of disorder and being as the negation of nonbeing (CE 222). Such a way of thinking introduces lack into the heart of Being. The more or less errs in not seeing that there are *kinds* of order and forgetting the fact that Being is not homogeneous but fundamentally heterogeneous. Badly analyzed composites result from an arbitrary grouping of things that are constituted as differences in kind. Bergson wants to know how it is that we deem certain life forms to be superior to others, even though they are not of the same order, and neither can they be posited in terms of a simple unilinear evolutionism with one life form succeeding another in terms of a progress towards perfection in self-consciousness. Life proceeds neither via lack nor the power of the negative but through internal self-differentiation along lines of divergence. Indeed, Bergson goes so far as to claim that the root cause of the difficulties and errors we are confronted with in thinking creative evolution resides in the power we ascribe to negation, to the point where we represent it



as symmetrical with affirmation (CE 287). When Deleuze says that resemblance or identity bears on difference *qua* difference, he is being faithful to Bergson's critical insight into the character of negation, chiefly, that it is implicated in a more global power of affirmation.

It is through a focus on badly analyzed composites that we are led, in fact, to positing things in terms of the more and the less, so that the idea of disorder only arises from a general idea of order as a badly analyzed composite. This amounts to claiming, as Deleuze cognizes, that we are the victims of illusions that have their source in aspects of our intelligence. However, although these illusions refer to Kant's analysis in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where Reason is shown to generate for itself in exceeding the boundaries of the Understanding inevitable illusions and not simple mistakes, they are not of the same order. There is a natural tendency of the intellect to see only differences in degree and to neglect differences in kind. This is because the fundamental motivation of the intellect is to implement and orientate action in the world.

To bring into play a different kind of intelligence is to introduce the element into philosophy that will enable us to go beyond the human state and to widen the canvas of its experience. It is intuition that allows this novel tendency to express itself through two procedures: the discovery of differences in kind and the formulation of criteria for differentiating between true and false problems. But at this point things get even more complex. If intuition is to be conceived as a method that proceeds via division - the division of a composite into differences of kind - is this not to deny that reality is, in fact, made up of composites and mixtures of all kinds? For Bergson, Deleuze argues, the crucial factor is to recognize that it is not things which differ in kind but rather

tendencies: 'a thing in itself and in its true nature is the expression of a tendency before being the effect of a cause' (Deleuze 1956: 4). In other words, what differs in nature are not things (their states or traits) but the tendency things possess for change and development. A simple difference of degree would denote the correct status of things if they could be separated from their tendencies. For Bergson the tendency is primary not simply in relation to its product but rather in relation to the causes of productions in time, 'causes always being retroactively obtained starting from the product itself' (ibid.). Any composite, therefore, needs to be divided according to qualitative tendencies. Again, this brings Bergson close to Kant's transcendental analysis, going beyond experience as given and constituting its conditions of possibility. However, these are not conditions of all possible experience but of real experience (for example the experience of different durations).

Bergson thinks that all the great masters of modern philosophy are thinkers who have assimilated the material of the science of their time. He adds that the partial eclipse of metaphysics in recent times can be explained by the fact that today it is a difficult task to make contact with a science that has become scattered. However, the method of intuition, which is to be attained 'by means of material knowledge', is something quite different to a summary or synthesis of scientific knowledge. Although metaphysics has nothing in common with the 'generalization of experience', it is possible to define it 'as the whole of experience' (*l'expérience intégrale*).

Intuition is not duration, but rather the movement by which thought emerges from its own duration and gains insight into the difference of other durations within and outside itself. It both presupposes duration, as the reality in which it dwells, but it also

seeks to think it: '...to think intuitively is to think in duration' (CM 34). Without intuition as a method duration would remain for us a merely psychological experience and we would remain prisoners of what is given to us. Informing Bergson's thinking, therefore, is a philosophical critique of the order of need, action, and society that predetermine us to retain a relationship with things only to the extent that they satisfy our interest, and of the order of general ideas that prevent us from acquiring a superior human nature.

Bergson insists that his method of intuition contains no devaluation of intelligence but only a determination of its specific facility. If intuition transcends intelligence this is only on account of the fact that it is intelligence that gives it the push to rise beyond. Without it intuition would remain wedded to instinct and riveted to the particular objects of its practical interests. The specific task of philosophy is to introduce us 'into life's own domain, which is reciprocal interpenetration, endlessly continued creation' (CE 115). This is different to what science does when it takes up the utilitarian vantage point of external perception and prolongs individual facts into general laws. The reformed metaphysics Bergson wishes to awaken commits itself to an intellectual expansion of reflection and intuition is, in fact, intellectual sympathy.

For Bergson, then, the key move for thought to make lies in the direction of sympathy. By means of science intelligence does its work and delivers to us more and more the secret of life's material or physical operations. But this gives us only a perspectivism that never penetrates the inside, going 'all round life, taking from outside the greatest possible number of views of it...' (CE 176) By contrast, metaphysics can follow the path of intuition, which is to be conceived as 'instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting upon its object and enlarging it

indefinitely' (ibid.). Bergson has recourse to the example of the aesthetic to develop this insight. It is the aesthetic faculty that gives us something other than what is given for us by normal perception. The eye, he notes, perceives the features of the living in terms of an assembling and not as something involving mutual organization and reciprocal interpenetration: 'The intention of life, the simple movement that runs through the lines, that binds them together and gives them significance, escapes it' (177). It is just this intention that the artist, he says, seeks to regain, 'placing himself back within the object by a kind of sympathy...by an effort of intuition'. In his essay on Ravaisson, Bergson alludes to the importance of art for metaphysics: 'The whole philosophy of Ravaisson springs from the idea that art is a figured metaphysics, that metaphysics is a reflection on art, and that it is the same intuition, variously applied, which makes the profound philosopher and the great artist' (CM 231).

It needs to be pointed out, however, that Bergson himself does not subscribe to the identification of art with philosophy. He holds that philosophical intuition goes further than aesthetic intuition since it is capable of capturing the vital before its dispersal into images (BKW 450). Aesthetic intuition has a limited character, which resides in the fact that it gives us only the individual case. He thus invites us to pursue an inquiry that is turned in the same direction as art, but 'which would take life *in general* for its object, just as physical science, in following to the end the direction pointed out by external perception, prolongs the individual facts into general laws' (CE 177). He concedes the obvious point, namely, that such a philosophy of life will never obtain a knowledge comparable to that which science acquires: 'Intelligence remains the luminous nucleus around which instinct, even enlarged and purified into intuition, forms only a vague

nebulosity' (ibid.). In default of knowledge properly so-called, however, intuition provides us with a supplement that enables us to grasp that which intelligence fails to provide. More than this, it is intuition that can disclose to us in a palpable form what the discoveries of modern biology have established.

Just what this means is explained well by David Lapoujade in an incisive treatment of intuition and sympathy in Bergson.<sup>4</sup> I will now draw on his inquiry and cover only the essential points. Intuition is a reflection of the mind upon itself and there is no intuition of the material or vital as such. Given this constraint, how can we, with the aid of intuition, open ourselves up to different levels of reality and enlarge our perception of life? This is where sympathy intervenes and assumes an important role. Lapoujade argues that sympathy is not a fusion without distance and so cannot be crudely assimilated to some miraculous intuitive act. Rather, it relies upon reasoning by analogy. The reasoning Bergson has in mind here is not one that appeals to fixed terms but rather to movements. One way to think this is in terms of an analogy between tendencies, in which the 'structure' at work is not one of what is similar but of what is common. So, it does not work through an exterior relation of resemblances, but rather through 'an interior *communication* between tendencies or movements' (Lapoujade 2004: 8). Analogy comes into play for us between the movements of our own interior existence and those of the universe, and we uncover ourselves intuitively as material and as vital through a series of explorations into ourselves. Bergson expresses it in just these terms in his lecture of 1911 on 'Philosophical Intuition':

...the matter and life which fill the world are equally within us; the forces which

work in all things we feel within ourselves; whatever may be the inner essence of what is and what is done, we are of that essence. Let us then go down into our own inner selves: the deeper the point we touch, the stronger will be the thrust which sends us back to the surface (BKW 299).

As Lapoujade pithily expresses it, for Bergson, ‘we are analogous to the universe (intuition), and inversely, the universe is our analogue (sympathy)’ (2004: 9). In making the effort, then, to think ‘beyond the human state’ we come into contact, through intuition, with movements, memories, and non-human consciousnesses deep within us. Deep within the human there is something other than the human. This means that for Bergson the sources of human experience are more obscure and distant than both common sense and science suppose, and these are sources that, Bergson contends, Kant failed to penetrate in his attempt to philosophize about the conditions of the possibility of experience. In essence, this is what Bergson means when he writes of ‘dissolving into the whole’ and experiencing ‘the ocean of life’. Although this dissolving experience may approach the insights of poetry or mysticism Bergson is after philosophical precision and clarity. He never ceases to emphasize the extent to which intuition requires long and stubborn effort.

As Lapoujade further notes, Bergson is according primacy in reality to alterity: ‘it is because the other is within us that we can project it outside us in the form of “consciousness” or “intention”’ (2004: 11). What we ‘project’ onto the world is our own alterity. However, it is clear that for Bergson when we experience sympathy it is not merely sympathy for others we subject ourselves to, but equally sympathy for one’s self and recognition of the alterity that lies concealed within ourselves: ‘...one thing is sure: we sympathize with ourselves’ (CM 136). Such an insight perhaps allows us to

reconfigure the 'in-itself': 'The in-itself no longer designates the way in which things will never be "for us" but the way in which, on the contrary, things will be very much within us' (Lapoujade 2004: 12).

To conclude this treatment of intuition: intuition is the primary method of philosophical thinking for Bergson, and from sympathy it gains an extension that enables it to be deployed as a general method. Intuition puts us into contact with other durations and ensures that we do not exist simply or only as internal duration. This constitutes a fundamental part of what it might mean for us to be able to go beyond the human state.

### Education Beyond Intelligence

Bergson's thinking provides us with a mode of philosophy that enables us to prize an education that is not based solely or simply on the possession and acquisition of intelligence. Although he holds intelligence in high esteem, which is 'the human way of thinking' (CM 78), he discloses that the 'intelligent human being' is to be regarded with a low opinion since this kind of cleverness only consists in taking about all things with a show of truth (CM 83). In short, such a human being has been merely socialized in truth. At work here we can detect a conservative mode of thinking since it is a 'conservative logic which governs thought in common' (CM 82). Moreover, does not conversation greatly resemble conservation? As Bergson notes, '...conversation should bear only upon things of the social life. And the essential object of society is to insert a certain fixity into universal mobility. Societies are just so many islands consolidated here and there in the ocean of becoming' (CM 82). Although he does not explicitly posit

legislation as the true goal of philosophizing, Bergson does follow Nietzsche in exposing the hollowness of mere criticism as the endeavour of intellectual activity. Somewhat sarcastically Bergson writes: ‘Clever in speaking, prompt to criticize’ (CM 83). In teaching someone to be critical the aim is not to get them to work on the thing in question, or on things themselves, but to appraise what others have said. Bergson thus expounds an education in being ‘unreasonable, which is a philosophy of education based on the desire for *searching* that casts aside ready-made ideas. Only in this way can education disturb society and resist the socialization of truth. In addition, the new education needs to aim well beyond the inculcation of encyclopaedic knowledge. Bergson clarifies his position as follows:

...I value scientific knowledge and technical competence as much as intuitive vision. I believe that it is of man’s essence to create materially and morally, to fabricate things and to fabricate himself. *Homo faber* is the definition I propose. *Homo sapiens*, born of the reflection *Homo faber* makes on the subject of his fabrication, seems to me to be just as worthy of esteem as long as he resolves by pure intelligence those problems which depend upon it alone. One philosopher may be mistaken in the choice of these problems, but another philosopher will correct him; both will have worked to the best of their ability; both can merit our gratitude and admiration. *Homo faber*, *homo sapiens*, I pay my respects to both, for they tend to merge. The only one to which I am antipathetic is *Homo loquax* whose thoughts, when he does think, is only a reflection upon his talk (CM 84-5).

If education is to centre on the creative needs of the child then the focus should be on the child as a seeker and an inventor, ‘always on the watch for novelty, impatient of rule, in short, closer to nature than is the grown man’ (CM 86). Bergson locates a tension between the educator, who is essentially a sociable human being, and the child to be educated who is free of social conventions and expectations. The educator seeks to be



encyclopaedic in the sense that they place primary importance on the need to impart to children the entire collection of acquired results that make up the social patrimony.

Bergson does not doubt for a moment that these results fill us with pride and are each one is precious. But it is not these acquisitions that education needs to be focused on if our interest is in the cultivation of the child and its original being:

Rather, let us cultivate a child's knowledge in the child, and avoid smothering under an accumulation of dry leaves and branches, products of former vegetations, the new plant which asks for nothing better than to grow (CM 86).

For Bergson, then, education appears to have two core aspects: socialization and anti-socialization! On the one hand, we are to be educated, but not loquaciously, in the domains of intelligence, which is 'science' broadly conceived and centres on practical truths. On the other hand, we are to be 'educated' in the domain of intuition, which centres on art, literature (including the rhythms of reading), and philosophy, and here there is no pragmatism at work but rather a creative evolution and a style of life or way of life Bergson calls 'sympathy'. The former mode of education provides us with tools of criticism and serves the needs of society; by contrast, the latter mode provides us with superior vision or extended perception and serves only the desires of life for creativity and originality. But in both cases we are dealing with reality, or with different aspects of it, and it is an education in realities that Bergson wants above all. In the case of the 'higher' form of education, it is clear that a Bergsonian philosophy of education seeks to make learning relevant to the tasks of the art of life:

In this speculation on the relation between the possible and the real, let us guard against seeing a simple game. It can be preparation for the art of living (CM p. 106).

### Conclusion

Bergson's thinking is highly relevant to the concerns of the philosophy of education since it takes us beyond the idea of a ready-made world in which the child is simply exposed to ready-made ideas and concepts, and be it through a scientific education or a philosophical one with both modelled on intelligence. As he notes, education is needed simply because nature rarely produces in a spontaneous manner 'an emancipated soul that is master of itself', and here education's task is primarily to remove obstacles, rather than to communicate an élan, to lift a veil rather than to shed light (BKW 427). A Bergsonian-inspired education would take us beyond the realm of the natural and the necessary, in which the ready-made holds us in tutelage. Read-made philosophy and science are to be accepted but only provisionally and as a means of climbing higher: 'Beyond the ideas which are chilled and congealed in language, we must seek the warmth and mobility of life' (BKW 428).

I agree with one commentator who has recently sought to show that Bergson's non-utilitarian thinking about 'the creative mind' and 'creative evolution' works profoundly against the logic of capital. Bergsonian thinking does not want human beings to be passive receivers – or consumers – of truth, but participants in the shaping and reshaping of truth, including the truth of their individual and collective lives (BKW 428-

9). Bergsonian thinking thus works against, then, the ‘reductive and homogenising neoliberal landscape’ (Sullivan, 182).

---

<sup>1</sup> On this modesty see Bergson, *Oeuvres* p. 658; *Creative Evolution* p. 123.

<sup>2</sup> Compare Nietzsche’s definition of philosophy as ‘spiritual/mental vision’ (*geistigen Blicke*), *Beyond Good and Evil*, section 252.

<sup>3</sup> For Bergson the comic does not exist outside what is human and is to be explained in terms of the mechanical being encrusted on the living. He writes: ‘The comic is side of a person which reveals his likeness to a thing, that aspect of human events which, through its peculiar inelasticity, conveys the impression of pure mechanism, automatism, of movement without life’, H. Bergson, Laughter: an essay on the meaning of the comic, trans. Cloudesey Brereton and Fred Rothwell (Kobenhavn & Los Angeles: Green Integer, 1999), p. 82.

<sup>4</sup> David Lapoujade, ‘Intuition and Sympathy in Bergson’, Pli: The Warwick Journal of Philosophy, volume 15, 2004, pp. 1-18.