

Henry Bergson's Theory of Duration: A Critical Review

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Abstract

Henry Bergson (1859-1914) sees Duration as a theory of time and consciousness. It is time that characterizes the subjective experience of our conscious moments, which for Bergson, is in constant mobility and interpenetrates as a unity and multiplicity. Duration, according to Bergson, can only be seized from within through first person intuition. He used it first, as an attack against Immanuel Kant, who according to Bergson, holds the idea of a space based or mathematical time. Secondly Bergson uses it also as a defence for free will. This study is therefore an attempt to critically review Henry Bergson's theory of Duration. In his attack against Kant, Henry Bergson misconstrued Kant's position on free will, and seem to have erroneously classified Kant as a Hard determinist. Using the analytic method, the study concludes that: first, Bergson's philosophy should be commended for; calling the attention of man back to his root; showing that life eludes science, technology and logic; secondly, that Kant's position with regards to argument about free will and determinism can rightly be classified as free will agnosticism, not hard determinism.

Keywords: Agnosticism, Determinism, Duration, Free will, Time.

Introduction

The polemic about free will and determinism in the history of philosophy has to do with the questions of: first, whether free will exists or not in relation to determinism; secondly, whether determinism is true, and whether it is compatible with free will. On the question of the existence of free will, the compatibilist sees free will as, doing what we want to do without any coercion. The in-compatibilist on the other hand,

holds that free will requires a genuine choice, that is if and only if given a choice to make again, we would have chosen otherwise. On weather determinism is true, the hard determinists affirm it, while the libertarians deny it. On weather determinism is compatible with free will, the compatibilists affirm it, while the in-compatibilists deny it.

However, from the in-compatibilist libertarian standpoint, Henry Bergson (1859-1914) argues that determinism is impossible, and free will is pure mobility. Immanuel Kant, according to Bergson, erred by seeing free will as something beyond time and space, and therefore a matter of faith. Bergson sees Kant's view as an act of confusing space and time; meaning that human actions are determined by natural factors. The immediate data of our consciousness, according to Bergson, are temporal, or time separated from space, namely, duration. There is no juxtaposition of events in duration, but experience of freedom. Space is an immobile medium, but duration is not a clock time. It is a lived time or experience. Bergson claims further that there is no space in pure duration, for reality is not extended but interpenetrates as a unit; its phases melt into one another and form an organic whole. Duration cannot be understood through immobile analysis but only through experiential first person intuition. What this means is that when we move into our duration through a conscious effort of intuition, we would seize our individual duration in its free, temporal, mobile and interpenetrating whole.

This study is therefore an attempt to carry out a critical review of Henry Bergson's theory of duration as an attack against Kant's epistemology and a defence of free will. We want to show that Bergson misconstrued Kant's position with regard to free will, and therefore was not fair enough in judging Kant on this issue; namely, that Kant did not actually deny the existence of free will as Bergson's criticism indicates. To therefore, clearly understand Henry Bergson's point of departure on his theory of duration, it would be necessary for us to give a brief highlight of Immanuel Kant's view on free will.

Immanuel Kant on Free Will

Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) sees free will as a phenomenon beyond space and time. According to Kant, it can neither be perceived within space and time nor conceptualized through the categories of understanding. Free will for Kant is “indeed, the only non-determined aspect of our private existence in the universe, separate from water cycles, mathematics and morality. However, we could therefore not know whether or not it exists, and that is nothing but a pragmatic faith.”¹ In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant (1724 – 1804) claims that human mind is not capable of acquiring theoretical knowledge of realities that lie beyond the boundaries of human experience or noumenal world. Instead, human minds can only acquire the knowledge of phenomena, or those things that can be perceived within space and time, and known through the categories of understanding. This limitation, for Kant, results from human finitude. The noumenal world is intelligible, since it transcends the phenomenal world.

Sensation and forms of intuition alone do not explain how the knowledge of objects of ordinary experience is possible. There is then need for a set of organizing principles found in the faculty of understanding. Sensibility and understanding have to work together for knowledge to occur. For “without sensibility, no object would be given to us, and without understanding, no object would be thought. Thoughts without content are empty, intuitions without concept are blind...; only through their union can knowledge arise.”² Sense data take the form of judgments, followed by the understanding which actively organizes experience by means of categories of understanding or pure concepts. These categories refer to the way the mind structures experience. Categories are apriori, and are not derived from experience. The twelve categories are broken down into groups of three each: (a) Quality – unity, plurality, and totality. (b) Quantity – reality, negation, limitation. (c) Relation –

1. <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki.> retrieved on 05-12-2023

2. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith (New York: New St. Martin's Press, 1965), A51/B75.

substance, causality, reciprocity. (d) Modality–possibility/impossibility, existence/non-existence, necessity/contingency. These categories govern the way human beings necessarily experience reality.

Kant argues that any effort to discern the features of realities that lie beyond the realm of phenomena is effort in futility, and any of such arguments are “transcendental paralogism” which he referred to as “a syllogism in which one is constrained, by a transcendental ground to draw a formally invalid conclusion.”³ Kant states further that the unity of our 'manifold experience' is a product of the synthesizing activities of the mind. Otherwise, we would only have fragmented intelligible flow of sensations. The synthesis of the products of the understanding is done by the reason as a third faculty of the mind. For reason to claim the knowledge of the noumena means to apply the categories of understanding beyond the sphere of their legitimate employment within experience. Such pretention of pure reason to draw conclusion about the noumena, for Kant, leads to illusion. Hence, the transcendental ideas of pure reason or traditional metaphysics results in “transcendental illusion.”⁴ The human mind is therefore the originator of experience not passive receptor of perception. Things that we don't know may be real in themselves, but not real for us. We are in a phenomenal world, and our minds according to Kant are limited to grasping only phenomena.

Henry Bergson's Theory of Duration: A Case against Kant

Henry Bergson argues that Kant and philosophers of his like confuse time with its spatial representation, meaning that human actions are to be seen as determined by natural factors. Duration as real time is un-extended, but heterogeneous, and so its parts cannot be juxtaposed as a succession of distinct parts, with one causing the other. Bergson holds that reality can only be understood in terms of duration which for him, is a seamless flow of time; an indivisible movement

3. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A341/B399.

4. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A259/B352

of our consciousness between the past present and future. He writes that duration must be understood as “real time regarded as flux.”⁵

In his Book, *Time and Free Will*, Bergson presents duration as a theory of time and consciousness. The time held by Kant, Bergson argues, is not a real time, but a scientific or mathematical time that characterizes external objects. Such abstract time for Bergson is thought of in terms of space. In language, for instance, we talk about “a point in time”, “long time”, “short time” etc. But duration as real time, free from its spatial representation, is a time that characterizes our subjective experiences, which we seize internally. It is a lived time which is the immediate data of our consciousness. We seize duration in intuition, for intuition, according to Bergson, begins when we place ourselves within duration. Duration is not a spatial time which is a succession of discreet moments; it is rather a seamlessly flowing continuum, whose phases form an organic whole by melting into one another: “The past cannot be separated from the present due to indivisibility of change and time.”⁶ The present cannot also be separated from the immediate future. Charles R. Schmidt rightly points out that, in duration, “Past-present-future are not three separate points or areas on a line; rather, for Bergson, the past is really memory flowing through consciousness, the present is continuous perception with its characteristic *durée*, and the future is the creation, newness and enforceability of experience.”⁷ The past is accumulated in duration, survives as memory and constitutes reality.

Bergson, thus, understands reality in terms of time; and time, is, in turn, understood in terms of memory. The future does not exist, for it is enforceable and in continuous

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5. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, trans. Arthur Mitchell (London: Macmillan & Co. L. t d, 1964), 355.
 6. Henri Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, trans. Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel Press, 1974), 152.
 7. Charles R. Schmidtke, “Bergson and Gerontology,” in Andrew C. Papanilaou and P.A.Y. Gunter, eds., *Bergson and Modern Science* (New York: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1987), 232.

state of becoming; the present activates the past, adds new content to the new past and the past that already existed becomes rich in content. Our consciousness which is dynamic and changing is not only manifesting in time, but also as time. Duration as our changing and mobile awareness, is unpredictable and always new. It is interpenetrating movement of our awareness, manifesting as the known as well as the knower, the dynamic essence of who we are. Bergson believes that no two conscious moments are the same, for my conscious moments multiply as time passes, and the passage of time is, therefore, the changes in our conscious moments. The passage from one conscious moment to another is nothing but a prolongation of a unified state, a continuous swelling up of memory.

Homogeneous time, according to Bergson, is nothing but space; it is a medium in which our conscious states are arranged to form discreet multiplicity. Consciousness can only become itself by isolating itself from the external world through a vigorous effort of abstraction. The reason why our intellect arranges our conscious state to form discreet multiplicity is that “we are simply confronted with a confusion between concrete duration and abstract time, two very different things”⁸ Intellect, according to Bergson, turns away from vision of time when it concentrates on that which repeats, solely preoccupied in welding the same to the same. Duration as real time is for Bergson, not thought but lived. Time belongs to inner temporal reality as its integral part. While real time understood as duration is part of things, mathematical time is a framework for everything that exists which Bergson sees as a false spatial view of time. External relation is a spatial relation, but there is no space in the durational temporality.

Bergson understands space as “an empty homogeneous medium...; space is what enables us to distinguish a number of identical and simultaneous sensations from one another; it is thus a principle of differentiation other than that of qualitative

8. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, trans. F. L. Pogson (New York: Donver Publications, INC.,2001), 155

differentiation, and consequently, it is reality with no quality.”⁹ What the intellect presents to us as time, for Bergson, is nothing more than numerically spatialized mathematical time. This is not the real time but mere space: for “if time as reflective consciousness represents, it is a medium in which our conscious states form discrete services so as to admit of being counted, and if, on the other hand, our conception of number is spreading out in space everything which can be directly counted, it is to be presumed that time understood in the sense of a medium in which we make distinctions and count, is nothing but space.”¹⁰

Space is understood as a principle of quantitative differentiation through which we make distinction between identical simultaneous sensations from one another. The mind, according to Bergson, perceives the absolute as a quantitative homogeneity instead of perceiving it as real duration, which is qualitatively un-extensive heterogeneity, the homogeneous reality which enables us to distinguish, count, speak and abstract is space. For the fact that homogeneity is quantitative, there is no qualitative differentiation among the units. Things that occupy space are characterized by our externality, where relation of position is a reversible relation of succession in time. But when our consciousness refrains from separating its former state from its present state, the successive conscious state assumes what Bergson calls pure duration. Our consciousness forms our past and present states into an organic whole. To buttress this point, Bergson uses the analogy of notes of a tune. He writes that these notes melt into one another in succession, but we still perceive them in one another, just like parts of a living organism which permeate one another. Bergson argues further that there is no duration and succession in space, for “each of the so-called successive states of the external world exist alone.”¹¹ He believes that if reality is broken up into time and space, forming a unity, the uniformity and coherence of the whole universe becomes a fiction. The relation between events,

9. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 95.

10. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 91.

11. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 120.

such as “earlier” and “latter” is a spatialized view of time, where events are wrongly taken out of the genuine temporal sequence, mentally juxtaposed as they were simultaneous, and their positions compared, very much like the spatial positions, “nearer” and “further”.

Bergson believes that Kant made a mistake by taking time to mean a homogeneous medium. Kant, for him, expresses time in space whereas real duration interpenetrates one another. The measurement of external process gives rise to clock time, but duration, which Bergson sees as real time, is not segmented into seconds, minutes and hours. Duration is not homogeneous or uniform; but as our internal conscious state, it is fluid and heterogeneous. Clock time is countable spatial time, which is fixed, static and repetitive: “So understood, space is indeed the symbol of fixity and of infinite divisibility. Concrete extensity, that is to say, the diversity of sensible qualities, is not within space; rather, it is space that we must thrust into extensity.”¹²

Bergson understands space as an empty unbounded homogeneous medium. “This empty and immobile space which is merely conceived not perceived has the value of a symbol only. How could we ever manufacture reality by manipulating symbols?”¹³ Our conscious states are counted in mathematical time as objects in space; units distinct from one another by an interval of space. Each conscious state becomes distinguishable from one another, disconnected from the rest and follows each other in sequence in identical space. Luce also observes that the real time of duration is “not so many ticks of clock or swings of pendulum.”¹⁴ Mathematical time, at the other hand, is fixed, static and repetitive. It cannot represent the living flux of duration. Mathematical objects are separated by an interval of space, and

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12. Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scot Palma (New York: Zone Books, 2005), 217.
 13. Henri Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. T.E..Hulme, (New York and London: The Knickerbockers Press, 1912), 52.
 14. Leonard Lawler, *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (New York: Contunum, 2003), 80.

understood as empty, unbounded homogeneous medium. It is therefore most appropriate in dealing with material objects in space.

The spatial view of our conscious states results from importation of measurable space into the flux of duration by the intellect, due to the need to measure time. Such an importation breaks into fragments the seamlessly flowing duration. Duration as real time, according to Bergson, is not segmented in space, but interpenetrates as a unit that is constantly in the process of being made. Real time cannot be counted, since each state is not segmented or disconnected from one another. Duration as real time is not simultaneously present, but grows in succession, with each moment seamlessly flowing into the next moment. In duration, the past which is memory flows naturally through the present, which is a continuous perception in cumulative process; and the future is unforeseeable creation of the consciousness. The content of consciousness, according to Bergson, is the same as time.

Thus, instead of conscious states being only in time, they constitute time. Duration as time is not a container in which events take place; rather, it is our experience or our self. Merleau-Ponty notes that duration “is not something that I see from outside. From outside I would have only an outline of it, I would not be in the face of generating thrust. Time, then, is myself; I am duration that grasps; duration that grasps itself is in me.”¹⁵ I continuously move forward, carrying with me memories of my experiences, of which each of them shapes me into a new person. As time, I cannot be the person I was the previous moments, since I am continuously flowing towards unforeseeable future self that I will become. My experiences in life are always unique and personal; they cannot be expressed without distorting it through symbolic representations. It is an inversion of my normal way of looking at time as a point in time, or a space of time; leading me to observe that each of my conscious moments brings new life with it. Those conscious moments are streams of time that

15. Thomas Hanna, ed., *The Bergsonian Heritage* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962), 136.

are each different from past events or future events. While objective time is a mathematical time understood in terms of space; subjective time is duration, free from any space.

Guerlac understands Bergson's demonstration of the power of time, and as a result, affirms that "Time is a form of energy that does not obey the principle of conservation. Nothing remains the same for us in time."¹⁶ Our deepest conscious state exists in duration and as duration. The subjective time is a time of interpenetration. Bergson likens the interpenetration of subjective time to notes of melody; he argues that the notes of melody, in as much as our intellect can attend to each note, thereby separating each one from another; the notes interpenetrate each other, and blends, such that the melody evolves in the same fashion that the tune progresses.

Freedom, for Bergson, is a fact that can neither be denied nor defined in duration; except in a case where time is identified with space. The solidification of reality by science is more convenient for measurement and forecasting; since we can only measure space and not duration. The solidification enables science to distinguish and give fixed names to the flowing reality. Bergson's theory of duration places emphasis on human personality or self as the locus of the primary reality. Our real self, according to Bergson, is made up of our conscious moments, of which each of its constituent moments permeates one another as unity and multiplicity. The problems of freedom, causality and personality, according to Bergson, stem from the displacement of real self with its symbolic substitutes. The reason is that we are accustomed to perceiving ourselves through external forms, instead of seizing ourselves directly.

Nagel admits that he cannot avoid the assumption of freedom in his existence, thus: "I can no more help holding myself and others responsible in ordinary life than I can

16. Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 78.

help feeling that my actions originate with me.”¹⁷ Searle also pointed out that “we don't navigate the earth on assumption of a flat earth, even though the earth looks flat, but we do act on the assumption of freedom. In fact, we can't act otherwise than on the assumption of freedom, no matter how much we learn about how the world works as a determined physical system.”¹⁸ Bergson writes that; “each of us has his own way of loving and hating; and this love or this hatred reflects his whole personality. Language, however, denotes these states by the same words in every case.”¹⁹

Juxtaposition of our conscious states, for Bergson, cannot translate completely what our mind experiences; just as it is impossible to fill two positions transversed by a moving body with points inserted. The whole personality is in each of the single conscious states, which the associationists reduce to aggregate of conscious states, like feelings, ideas and sensations. They understand these by their linguistic symbols, and place them side by side, without getting at the real.

Free act, in Bergson's view, is the external manifestations of conscious states, which expresses the whole self. Bergson argues that “in short, we are free when our act springs from our whole personality, when they express it, when they have that indefinable resemblance to it which one sometimes finds between the artist and his work.”²⁰ While proponents of free will on the one hand, hold that in every action, there are equally possible alternative actions; determinists on the other hand believe that only one action is possible, given certain antecedents. It means, therefore, that in free act, contrary actions are equally possible. Griffin comments that most

17. Thomas Nagel, *The View from Nowhere* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 123.

18. John R. Searl, *Minds, Brains and Science* (London: British Broadcasting Corporation, 1984), 97.

19. Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An essay on immediate data of consciousness*, trans. F.L Pogson, (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1910), 164.

20. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 172

common-sense assumptions in history have been proved false, thus: “common sense said the world was flat; science showed this to be false. Common sense said the earth was the centre of the universe; science showed this to be false. Common sense said matter was solid; science has shown this to be false.”²¹ The deep-seated self perceives itself free through intuition; and such experience cannot be expressed without first freezing the fluid reality. Bergson writes in this regard that “the self, infallible when it affirms its immediate experiences, feels itself free and says so; but, as soon as it tries to explain its freedom to itself, it no longer perceives itself except by a kind of refraction through space, hence, a symbolism of mechanical kind, especially incapable of proving, disproving, or illustrating free will.”²²

The claim of determinists results from numbering and symbolizing concrete reality, thereby confusing time with space. While space can be seen and enumerated indefinitely, time in Bergson's view is lived and does not need to be seen. The self, according to Bergson is not determined, for: “it is only an inaccurate psychology, mislead by language, which will show us the soul determined by sympathy, aversion, or hate as though by so many forces pressing upon it. These feelings, providing that they go deep enough, each make up the whole soul, since the whole content of the soul is reflected in each of them.”²³

Bergson argues that our common claims to prediction of events, just like the astronomical predictions, results from our habit of reducing the interval of future time, and preserving the relations between its parts. Comte believes that the universe was a perfectly ordered, utterly predictable machine, while Sheldrake holds that: “everything, even physicists, became inanimate matter moving in

21. David Ray Griffin, *Unsnarling the World-Knot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 15.

22. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 183.

23. Bulletin, Feb., 1903, 102. Cited in Jacques Chevalier, *Henry Bergson*, trans. Lilian A. Clare (Freeport, New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1970), 138.

accordance with these blind laws.”²⁴ Bergson notes again that the astronomer reduces the interval of time, by tacking in a glance the orbit which planet transverses in several years: “In fact, astronomical predictions should be compared with the recollection of the past states of consciousness, not with the anticipation of the future one.”²⁵ The future conscious state is a dynamic process, which one lives as it is unfolding. It is, therefore, the activities of duration that our intellect claims to see, and even predict; but the deep-seated conscious state is only a progressive action.

Cause and effect relationship, according to Bergson, can be nothing outside two possibilities, namely: (1) that the future action can be foreseen in antecedent, or (2) that no other action is possible, under a given condition, when a particular action is performed. But these positions according to Bergson, are meaningless, since “the principle of universal determination loses every shred of meaning in the inner world of conscious states.”²⁶ As a regular succession, causality, for Bergson, cannot disprove free will, for the principle is all about collection of successions observed in the past: “attributing the necessary determination of physical phenomena to the fact that things do not endure as we do, invites us to regard the self which is subject to duration as a free force.”²⁷ This is, thus, based on the divide between the real and shadows of the real or symbols. Bergson sees external relations as spatial mathematical relation, which is totally different from the relations between psychic moments. Gallagher notes that, in case someone may want to subject consciousness to physical laws, “what we want to know is whether it can still be verified in the cases in which consciousness feels itself in possession of a free activity.”²⁸

Determinism in Bergson's view seems tenable due to positive definition of

24. Rupert Sheldrake, *The Presence of the Past* (Rochester, Vermont: Park Street Press, 1988), 3.

25. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 198.

26. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 201.

27. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 215-216

28. Idella J. Gallagher, *Morality in Evolution* (The Hague, Netharlands: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970), 43.

freedom, but freedom, for, him cannot be analysed without distorting the real. He writes that: freedom is the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs. This relation is indefinable just because we are free. For we can analyse a thing, but not a process; we can break up extensity but not duration. Or if we persist in analysing it, we unconsciously transform the process into a thing and duration into extensity.²⁹ The intellect sets out conscious moments in homogeneous space by breaking up concrete time. The free spontaneous activities of the self in duration are, thus, settled into necessity and inertia; duration is endowed with the same attributes as extensity; succession interpreted by simultaneity, and freedom expressed with linguistic symbols. Immanuel Kant raised freedom to the sphere of noumenal, and made the free self to, not only be outside space, but also outside duration; since it cannot be conceptualized by the categories of understanding. Kant claims that: "It may therefore be admitted that if it were possible to have so profound an insight into a man's mental character... as to know all its motives, even the smallest, and likewise all the external occasions that can influence them, we could calculate a man's conduct for the future with as great certainty as a lunar or solar eclipse."³⁰

But Bergson argues that Kant's position results from Kant confusing duration with space. Contrary to Kant, Bergson argues that we can perceive the free self only through a strenuous effort of reflection in which we retire into ourselves. The movements of pure duration are internal and heterogeneous to one another and in it, a cause cannot repeat its effect, for the very reason that it will not ever be repeated, just as past phases in the history of a nation will never come back again. Bergson claims that one thing which Kantians fail to perceive is that "in this so-called phenomenal world, which we are told, is a world cut out for scientific knowledge, all the relations which cannot be translated into simultaneity, i.e. into

30. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason and other works on the Theory of Ethics*, trans. T.K. Abbot (London: Longman's, Green, 1909), 193

31. Bergson, Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 234.

space, are scientifically unknowable.”³¹

Bergson believes that, free action is not capricious, or unreasonable action, for such would mean that the self oscillates mechanically between several readymade alternatives, and finally settles on one of those alternatives. Such cannot be real evolution or maturing of self, for “a conduct that is truly our own, on the contrary, is that of a will which does not try to counterfeit intellect, and which, remaining itself – that is to say evolving – ripens gradually into acts which the intellect will be able to resolve indefinitely into intelligible elements without ever reaching its goal.”³² Free act is, therefore, the character of the evolution of self, which Bergson sees as a becoming.

Intuition, which Bergson claims, is the only means of ceasing duration, is the immediate consciousness or direct awareness of the absolute. For while science works by analysis, metaphysics or philosophy draws its life from intuition. It is only in metaphysics, according to Bergson, that the mind can have direct and immediate awareness of the actual movement of life or the real. Bergson is not however underrating or rejecting experimental science; rather, he is trying to put science as well as philosophy in perspectives- delivering science from the menace of scientism (the claim to applying scientific method in philosophy), as well as freeing philosophy from wrong conception of itself as a super science capable of generalizing from the data of science that which the scientist cannot provide. Modern science, for Bergson, is developing to confirm his intuitional metaphysics which reveals to us the nature of reality underlying the constructed world of science. Bergson's intuitive metaphysics is an attempt to overcome Kant, who denies the possibility of knowledge of realities lying beyond the boundaries of experience, claiming that such realities cannot be perceived in space and time, and known through the categories of understanding.

Intuition, according to Bergson, is sympathy; that is, putting oneself in the

32. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 54.

place of duration. The point of departure of the Metaphysicians is immediate or intuitive awareness of inner life of the spirit as it is lived, which he tries to prolong in his reflection. Intuition thus means placing oneself sympathetically inside the object to be known. It involves seizing objects from within through sympathetic insight, rather than conceptualization or abstraction of others.

Evaluation

Bergson's philosophy represents a revival of speculative metaphysics which has seemingly gone into disrepute in 19th century. Bergson should be commended, for calling the attention of man back to his root, showing that life eludes science, technology and logic. The method of science is, according to Bergson, not useless; but useful for practical purposes to serve man's physical needs. However, Bergson's attack on Kant seems not fair enough, for Bergson misconstrued Kant's position on free will. Bergson argues that Kant and philosophers of his like confuse time with its spatial representation, meaning that human actions are to be seen as determined. Immanuel Kant holds that free will is a phenomenon beyond space and time. According to Kant, it can neither be perceived within space and time nor conceptualized through the categories of understanding. Free will for Kant is "indeed, the only non-determined aspect of our private existence in the universe, separate from water cycles, mathematics and morality. However, we could therefore not know whether or not it exists, and that is nothing but a pragmatic faith."³³ Realities in the noumena world (world outside time and space) cannot according to Kant, be comprehended by human mind. This limitation is as a result of human finitude. The legitimate application of the categories of understanding is within experience, and any attempt to apply such beyond experience leads to illusion.

Classifying free will as one of the realities outside the phenomena world, does not actually imply denial of its existence as Bergson seem to claim. We agree

33. <http://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki>. retrieved on 05-12-2023

with Bergson that Kant confused time with its spatial representation, but the resultant meaning that Bergson inferred, does not correspond with Kant's position on free will. Bergson's problem with Kant is solely epistemological in nature, not ontological as Bergson's criticism implied.

Conclusion

We have so far tried to review Henry Bergson's theory of duration, which he used as an attack against Kant and a defence of free will. We therefore conclude that, Bergson's attempt to revive speculative metaphysics should be commended. However, Bergson was not fair enough in his critique of Kant. He misunderstood Kant's view on free will and misrepresented Kant as a determinist. We therefore feel that Kant's position on free will can rightly be classified as free will agnosticism. Bergson would have limited himself to proving that by means of intuition, human beings can seize realities lying beyond the phenomena world in duration.

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