

Bergson(-ism) Remembered: A Roundtable

Mark William Westmoreland and Brien Karas, eds.

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Bergson(-ism) Remembered

A Roundtable

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Villanova University

Roundtable discussion facilitated by Mark William Westmoreland and Brien Karas, including Frédéric Worms, Michael Foley, Jimena Canales, Hisashi Fujita, Melissa McMahon, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, Suzanne Guerlac, Charlotte de Mille, and Stephen Crocker.

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MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: I'm joined by Brien Karas, and it is our hope that we will have a productive set of reflections in commemoration of 75 years since the death of Henri Bergson. With us are Jimena Canales, Stephen Crocker, Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Michael Foley, Hisashi Fujita, Suzanne Guerlac, Melissa McMahon, Charlotte de Mille, Paulina Ochoa Espejo, and Frédéric Worms. Our plan is to consider a constellation of Bergsonian ideas and some extensions of those ideas. In our time together, we'll discuss Bergson's role in the League of Nations, his relationship with Einstein, and his views on science more generally. We'll consider Bergson as a political thinker and what he said or might say about democracy, immigration, and political theology. We'll explore Bergson's influence on artists and those working in media studies. And, we'll also reflect on translation issues and how to sort through the development of Bergson's thought throughout his body of work. Welcome and thank you all for participating in this roundtable.

BRIEN KARAS: Could you tell us how you became interested in Bergson? Were there certain ideas or themes that you were already working on that you sympathized with? How has his work influenced your own philosophical thinking?

FRÉDÉRIC WORMS: I have the weird feeling of having had an intuition—something that clarifies itself only in retrospect and could not have been explained as such in the beginning except as an impulsion. Now I could say: yes, of course, Bergson is by all means a critical vitalist, which I also claim to be and advocate. But, at the same time, I would avoid his *élan vital* for being too substantial and metaphysical. In my opinion, his critical vitalism is obviously at its best in ethics and politics, with the critical distinction between the closed and the open, both stemming from life in its two sides. Unfortunately, very few scholars have even dared to mention the *The Two Sources on Morality and Religion*, which is where we get the most robust Bergsonian politics? Right, even Deleuze failed to go there. Now of course Bergson has a recognized obvious central place in all the philosophical formation of the century. But I began my own study of Bergson by giving him back his very philosophical legitimacy, let alone a historical role. Put differently, I felt that he was at a good historical distance from me, enabling me to understand the century philosophically as well as politically (in France and elsewhere). This is still true. When I return to Bergson, I sense the passage of time and the fecundity of thought within his own writing instead of pretending to view or perceive time as such. And, if I can say more about that, it is the posturing of both science or the phenomenology “of time,” which are no doubt useful in their own right, to quantify time is, and this, I think, is a mistake and an illusion, a deception and a loss. Bergson saw this early at a time when physics was supplanting biology as the dominant science. But of course it is only now that I can connect it with the two sides of our empirical life and the vital relationships that allow us this vital feeling of time, which is not a metaphysical substratum, but a vital and fragile experience of living beings in their environment and relationships. Without Bergson how could one get to all this? But did I “know”? Only now, in retrospect, but now for sure, and for good.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Frédéric here has gestured toward Bergson’s political thought. I want to ask you all about that. But, first, I’d like to hear if anyone has thoughts about Bergson’s involvement with the League of Nations and the International Committee on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC). Bergson helped found the League and chaired the ICIC (precursor to UNESCO). What do you think Bergson’s assessment of the United Nations/UNESCO would be if he were alive today? Success? Failure?

MICHAEL FOLEY: To be brief, I would just say that, as an energetic worker for the League of Nations and bitterly disappointed by its collapse, Bergson would be pleased by the European Union, though concerned at the threat

from the resurgence of nationalism, which he defined as group narcissism based on a need to feel superior.

JIMENA CANALES: It is difficult to speculate about what Bergson would think about United Nations/UNESCO today, especially since he is one of the most important philosophers to stress the unforeseeable aspects of our future history. But what struck me the most while I was studying Bergson's role as president of the ICIC within the League of Nations was how much he worked to include Albert Einstein. In *The Physicist and the Philosopher: Einstein, Bergson and the Debate that Changed Our Understanding of Time*, I explore how a debate between them on the nature of time that took place in Paris on April 6, 1922 was followed by a disagreement about the fate and role of the League. At first, I was surprised to learn that Einstein was such a negative critic of the League. Most scholars stress his pacifism and internationalism, so to see him take such a firm stance against the League at first came to me as a shock. But his behavior becomes less surprising if considered in relation to what he was trying to accomplish as a scientist. His assessment of the League was colored by his opinion of Bergson, who had just published a highly critical book, *Duration and Simultaneity*, confronting relativity theory. When Bergson resigned from the ICIC, he was succeeded by the physicist Hendrik Lorentz. Einstein also had a complicated relationship with Lorentz, who had worked on relativity theory years before Einstein and who was the author of the famous relativity equations Einstein used. Both Lorentz and Bergson did not accept all of the conclusions that Einstein was drawing from relativity theory. Key players in the League's upper management were not buying Einstein's work whole cloth. How do you think he felt about that?

This historical episode is an ideal case to study the relation between science and politics. Time is just not one of those things that tends to stay in one of the two compartments. Time undergirds our basic structures of governmentality and sociability (necessary for the organization of events, from pragmatic meetings to symbolic rituals). The institutions in charge of the determination and distribution of time are political corporations as much as they are scientific ones. Bergson's ICIC faced competition from the International Research Council (IRC) that eventually fulfilled many of its functions, including the formation of International Time Commission and the International Time Bureau. The IRC, through the International Astronomical Union (ICU), voted to start defining time in the same way that Einstein defined it in his own work, by reference to lightwaves, and eventually became the dominant way of defining time. So it is as much of a mistake to think of Bergson's time at the ICIC as of exclusively political interest as it is to think of Einstein's view of the ICIC and the League in those terms as well. One might think that how we define time here on Earth has a secondary relation to the nature of time itself. That one is social, practical,

and, to some extent, conventional while what physicists and cosmologists get at is transcendental and universal. But the two are intimately related.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: I want to push this further. In what sense is Bergson a political thinker? Bergson is not explicitly a political thinker, but his thought has important political implications. In *The Two Sources*, Bergson writes, "Mankind lies groaning, half crushed beneath the weight of its own progress. Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. Theirs is the task of determining first of all whether they want to go on living or not? Theirs the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want merely to live, or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods." In *Time and Free Will* his argument against determinism grounds the possibility of free action and feeling, implicitly presupposing that a deterministic framework of thought is a foil for the concentration of power. His critical analysis of abstract thinking has political value today in that it resists the hegemony of a data based epistemology. Bergson's emphasis on the concrete, the singular, and the qualitative resists the authority of data in a world that tends more and more toward an informational ontology—an ontology of bits and codes. In *The Two Sources* he associates logics of environmentally unsustainable economic practices with political conflict and injustice.

HISASHI FUJITA: In an extra-ordinary sense of a political philosophy of life: "Let us then give to the word biology the very wide meaning [*le sens très compréhensif*] it should have, and will perhaps have one day, and let us say in conclusion that all morality, be it pressure or aspiration, is in essence biological." Otherwise, in an ecological sense, we could give to this word a sufficient precision of living together. "Living together" does not mean any communitarian implication, but rather a radical reconsideration of being-with. We must take his formula very seriously, that is, literally: "[The great moral leaders] ask nothing, and yet they receive. They have no need to exhort; their mere existence suffices." Literally he says "leur existence est un appel." From his insistent metaphors of Echo, we must develop some political philosophy of "echo-sistence," some politics of emotion based less on the individuality than the personality of "per-sono," of sounding-through. "Thus do pioneers in morality proceed. Life holds for them unsuspected tones of feeling like those of some new symphony, and they draw us after them into this music that we may express it in action." Perhaps too unrealistic or idealistic, this "echo-sistence" or "per-sonality," however, will be contemporary (that is, untimely in the sense of Nietzsche) and critical for our time. Furthermore, we could think about, for example, the validity, in this globalization, of a political concept of "dividual," which

Deleuze in his famous essay on the society of control suggested in contrast with “individual.”

MELISSA MCMAHON: I think that Mark’s quote from *The Two Sources* is more indicative of the ways Bergson is not a political thinker rather than the reverse. It concludes a meditation on the possibility that “psychical research” could open the doors of our perception to a life beyond death and spread supernatural joy throughout the world. It’s a religious or mystical vision rather than a political one, a dream of a heaven on earth that by definition transcends politics. It’s an extreme example of the way Bergson tends to focus on humanity as a species and transformations on an evolutionary level rather than in terms of political reform. That said, it doesn’t mean others don’t find political inspiration in Bergson’s work. I translated Bachir’s book on Muhammad Iqbal, a major political and philosophical figure known as the “spiritual father of Pakistan.” Iqbal studied in Europe and was immensely influenced by Bergson, which is what the book examines, as indicated by its title: *Islam and Open Society: Fidelity and Movement in the Thought of Muhammad Iqbal*. It would be interesting to know whether Iqbal’s approach still has any currency in the Islamic world today.

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE: I’m glad Melissa mentioned this. I have devoted some work to the convergence between Iqbal, the Muslim reformer, and Bergson. It is generally assumed that Bergson is not a thinker of the political. Well, it could be said that our times constitute the best response to such a view and manifest the political import of the oppositions he made between the open or dynamic religion on the one hand and the closed religion on the other hand, the closed society and the open society.

That a human religion, that is a religion which sustains the human being in her becoming fully who she has to be, must continuously remain an open, dynamic religion is indeed a philosophical and political message for our times. Iqbal who insisted on the need for a “reconstruction of the religious thought of Islam” (that is the title of his major work in prose) found in Bergson the only contemporary philosopher who has made “a keen study” of time as duration. Such a philosophy of time was particularly important for the Indian Muslim reformer as he insisted that, only by reconnecting with its own dynamic, continuously emerging cosmology, will Islam be again one with its own principle of movement and develop as a living reality in step with the continuous newness that defines life. Iqbal, whose message needs today more than ever to be heard by Muslims, certainly understood the political import of a dynamic religion.

PAULINA OCHOA ESPEJO: Of course, Bergson does not devote many pages explicitly to politics, but he is a political thinker according to most definitions. In *The Two Sources* he deals with issues closely related to government, administration, and power. He also discusses how and why people establish legal obligations, and how we make groups that often war with each other. Yet, unlike those theorists who see the realm of politics as exclusively about those issues, Bergson also reflects on ideals of political morality that transcends legal obligations. He also considers why and how we espouse ideals of universal morality that occasionally create solidarity beyond groups.

There is one more sense in which Bergson is a political thinker: he gives an account of how politics is connected to other facets of human life and thought. By connecting politics to his theory of the relation between nature and culture (a parallel we find in *Creative Evolution*) and also to a complete metaphysical system (in *Matter and Memory* and *Time and Free Will*), he underscores the importance of metaphysics to morality, religion, and politics. Reading Bergson forces us to re-think liberal commitments and the views of contemporary “post-metaphysical” thinkers.

SUZANNE GUERLAC: On a different level than *Time and Free Will*, it is politically significant that in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson does not place the human being as the final aim of evolution as Herbert Spencer had done in a gesture of extreme humanism. Here consciousness is not limited to humans: “The humblest organism is conscious to the extent that it moves freely.” This invites a consideration of the post human and requires us to make a distinction between different ways of understanding it. We can take it in the direction of the cyborg, that is of the hybridization of the human and the machine (or of the “natural” and the “artificial,” or technological) and construe this as an “evolutionary” adaptation to effects of human progress. Or we can take it to invite a shift away from the project of relentless instrumentalization of the planet for human use and financialization in favor of prioritizing the sustainability of livingness. This is a political choice because what I would call the “Spencerian” alternative (the cyborg version of the post-human) supports the neoliberal subjectivation of what Foucault calls *Homo economicus* and the dynamics of global capitalism which increasingly include, among other forms of injustice, the ravages of environmental injustice. The Anthropocene, characterized by mass extinctions and tipping points with respect to the sustainable operation of the biosphere, is itself a political matter. It implies an instrumentalization of the planet that operates according to a neoliberal fiction of infinite economic growth that in actuality advances the accumulation of wealth on the part of the very few. Bergson’s lucidity with respect to all of this in *The Two Sources* is striking.

Bergson's thought has political implications today as a contribution to (or framework for) ecological thought. In his early work Bergson posits a radical distinction between living beings, in which time penetrates matter, and things. In *Creative Evolution*, however, he both ontologizes the force of time as duration (figured as the *élan vital*) and extends its reach throughout the biosphere. Duration, he writes, extends to "the totality of the material universe." He repeatedly insists on the relation between local sites (or rhythms) of duration and the dynamic relational totality of the biosphere. When, in the *Two Sources*, he implicitly challenges Durkheim's emphasis on the national frame of collective solidarity, and addresses the question of an ethics of humanity as a whole, he invites us to imagine an "open" society. His analysis doubles his earlier theory of the *élan vital* with a creative affective force (he calls it love) that would pass through subjects to all living beings. This too is compatible with an ecological politics—perhaps the only sustainable politics today—that invites a respect and care for livingness. I think this is what is at stake when Bergson declares, at the end of *The Two Sources*, that humanity must decide whether it wants to continue to live.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Politics is often thought of in relation to a second aspect of human experience: politics and economics, politics and religion, politics and technology. There is also work on politics and aesthetics, for instance, done by Adorno, Brecht, Deleuze, and Rancière. Charlotte, can you speak more generally about Bergson and art? Does Bergson offer a philosophy of art? If you had to pick one of Bergson's texts that lends itself to a philosophy art, which would it be? Why? Does art offer a better, or simply different, way of reasoning than science?

CHARLOTTE DE MILLE: Bergson never completed a separate philosophy of art, although his contemporary Matthew Stewart Prichard was misled to believe that he might, and relayed it with excitement to his great friend Isabella Gardner. In fact, any idea of a separate philosophy of art would of course have been contrary to Bergson's thinking. For Bergson art is a way of life that cannot be thought of disconnected from our experience.

All of Bergson's major texts hold nuggets of an aesthetic theory, starting with *Time and Free Will*, where Bergson discussed aesthetic emotion and the artist's method for its realization.

In *Creative Evolution*, he made a claim for philosophy to approach its subject in the same manner as the artist. Rather than choose a text however, I would rather choose Bergson's method of intuition. For me this was what distinguished him particularly from other contemporary philosophers, and is where an artistic vision and a philosophical one meet. According to British

critic T.E. Hulme it was also this that signaled a change in philosophy to being grounded in art rather than science.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Can you give a few examples of how Bergson directly influenced artists, for example, Wyndham Lewis and, in this particular case, how Lewis changed his position regarding Bergson?

CHARLOTTE DE MILLE: There are so many, so I'll restrict myself to British examples. For the Rhythmist group of Scots artist J. D. Fergusson, English critic John Middleton Murry, and others, Bergson's notorious concept of vital impetus, the *élan vital*, was transformed into a regeneration of spiritual, and broadly Christian, values. Lewis, representing (and dominating) Vorticism, subverted both Bergson's experiential time, or duration, and his theory of open evolution to present the counter effects of psychological and evolutionary degradation. He's a complex figure though and regarding his change in detail, it's best to look at my article in *Understanding Bergson Understanding Modernism*. Lewis's anxiety about those who most influenced him most went beyond Bergson however, and Lisa Siraganian has shown Lewis using very similar tactics at work in relation to Gertrude Stein. In contrast to these distortions, Roger Fry arguably offers a direct transposition of Bergson's analysis of perception as physical sensation from *Matter and Memory* into his work on aesthetics.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Hisashi, in "Anarchy and Analogy: The Violence of Language in Bergson and Sorel," you described how Jean Paulhan viewed "Bergson as the person who gave philosophical expression to this terrorism," that is, the work of misology by those, "wary of language as, in their opinion, inherently dangerous to thought." Does Bergson have a philosophy of language? If so, how does it lend itself to political purposes?

HISASHI FUJITA: Yes, he has in fact, but a paradoxical one. On one hand, as a great writer elaborating his elegant style and weaving subtle convincing metaphors or analogies, Bergson received the Nobel Prize in 1927. Without recalling a famous example of "if I want to mix a glass of sugar and water," it is no doubt that his theory got its vital force partly but certainly from his *writing*. But on the other hand, Bergson severely criticized *Homo loquax*, "the only one to which I am antipathique": "My initiation into the true philosophical method began the moment I threw overboard verbal solutions, having found in the inner life an important field of experiment." This is why I would be tempted to say that his philosophy of language is a kind of "vanishing mediator" only by being thrown below or beyond

language. “We call intuition,” Bergson says, “here the *sympathy* by which one is *transported* into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.” This transport of intuition-sympathy must not be an ordinary language nor a simple verbal communication but, almost in the sense of a French expression “*transports amoureux*,” something to express the inexpressible. Mobilizing metaphors, analogies, images, and rhythms in a process of incarnation from ideas to language, from language into a lecturer’s thought, Bergsonian tropes vanish their expression infinitely [*évanouissement*], but by flourishing thought [*épanouissement*]: “But what we shall manage to recapture and to hold is a certain intermediary image between the simplicity of the concrete intuition and the complexity of the abstractions which translate it, a receding and vanishing image, which haunts, unperceived perhaps, the mind of the philosopher, which follows him like his shadow through the ins and outs of his thought and which, if it is not the intuition itself, approaches it much more closely than the conceptual expression, of necessity symbolical, to which the intuition must have recourse in order to furnish ‘explanation.’ Let us look closely at this shadow: by doing so we shall guess the attitude of the body which projects it.” If Bergson employs often the terms of “shadow” or “suggestion,” it is perhaps for a singular mode of existence, *évanouissement* of metaphors. Therefore, stressing the essential moment of metaphors, analogies, and images, it is Bergson himself who points out their own limits.

In fact, we could not understand the exact reason of his wide, positive or negative, reception from various political thinkers (say, from Georges Sorel to Carl Schmitt, from Horkheimer to Arendt), if we did not take into account the linguistic dimension of Bergson’s philosophy, his thought and performance on/by language—“*transports amoureux*” are attractive and dangerous, vital and mortal, productive and destructive—, what we call “violence of language” (symbolic abstraction/metaphoric attraction) in his writings. Actually, they feel there something effectively and politically performative.

BRIEN KARAS: Does Bergson have something to offer, to challenge, our contemporary intellectual field? What extensions of Bergson’s thought are worth pursuing today? Michael, you wrote *Life Lessons from Bergson*. Do you want to go first?

MICHAEL FOLEY: What would Bergson make of the present scene? He would be disappointed to see that many of the tendencies he deplored have persisted and intensified—but heartened also to see that these tendencies have provoked many of the reactions he himself advocated, especially in science. It could be argued that science has come round to a completely

Bergsonian view of matter, life, and the cosmos, not from a study of Bergson but possibly from the diffusion of his ideas into the culture.

As a critic of instrumentalism, convinced that wellbeing is qualitative rather than quantitative, he would be grimly amused by the rise of a movement known as *The Quantified Self*, which believes that the key to wellbeing is monitoring and measuring as many bodily functions as possible, but probably surprised that the bookshops of the Western world are full of books advocating mindfulness as a technique for escaping the limitations imposed by instrumentalism and utilitarianism.

As to which aspect of Bergson's thought would be most useful nowadays, I think that his original approach to religion would be a refreshing counter to the rise of fundamentalism and the split between militant believers and equally militant atheists. Religion is generally understood to be static, a set of doctrines and practices that must be accepted as absolute and eternal, but Bergson argued that this is yet another example of the yearning for fixity and stability. There is no eternal truth and therefore no basis for the righteousness of those who believe themselves to be the sole possessors of it. Morality and religion are dynamic, created rather than revealed—and created not by institutions but by exceptional individuals making it up as they go along. So the inconsistencies of the New Testament, which appear to be a weakness, are actually its strength, and the crucial quality of Christ was not virtue but vitality. Preaching virtue is a waste of time. It is the vitality of the teacher that makes the teaching heard and followed.

The most personal application was Bergson's point that the personality tends to harden over time into something fixed, often crankily, even laughably, eccentric, and almost always angry. Any system, either a society or an individual, that shuts itself off to "ferment in a closed vessel" becomes defensive, suspicious, and eventually angry.

But Bergson's relevance goes beyond any specific application to encourage a general change of attitude, a desire to live more intensely, not by dramatic adventures, but by getting more out of everyday experience through paying proper attention to it. He advocates, and demonstrates in his work, enthusiasm, vitality, energy, joy, and even optimism—qualities not easy to find and especially not in serious philosophy. Enthusiasm is generally regarded as naïve, joy as embarrassing, and optimism as the sign of a half-wit.

STEPHEN CROCKER: For me, Bergson's ideas alert us to the affective nature of new media environments and the kind of perception they require. We now live in an endless current of images, sounds, and information. A century ago, Paul Valéry's vision of images directly transferred into the

home was dazzlingly futuristic. Now our homes, offices, and life worlds have been transformed into devices for coordinating and synthesizing multiple sources of information from widely dispersed environments. Even the car, once the symbol of our atomized isolation from each other, is now a central network access point to complex global systems. The over-saturated informational context is not just an aspect of globalization, but its very precondition. All the familiar kinds of globalization—economic, social, technological—require that we be present in one situation and, at the same time, attune to a number of other background ones that originate elsewhere. Bergson's theory of multiplicity informs some of the most influential ideas of global connectedness, such as rhizomatic formations, global flows, and the multitude celebrated by Negri and Hardt.

Bergson's theory of subtractive perception, however, has received less attention, but is equally illuminating for understanding the media rich environments in which we now live.

In *Matter and Memory* Bergson contests the common "associationist" notion that perception consists of discrete sensations, plus the attention we bring to them. Descartes, for instance, had insisted that perception begins with clear and distinct simple ideas, from which we build up to more complex forms. Bergson, on the other hand, argues that perception is a subtractive operation. When we set out to know, we are already adrift in a mass of sensations. We always find ourselves already thrown into a multiplicity (a virtual totality) of affects that lack clear outlines and divisions. To perceive in this environment, we do not add together bits of information. Just the opposite is true. We subtract from this mass of sensation what does not interest us or what is not useful for life. From out of the mass we divide sensations into groups, categories, distinct things, or actualities.

What we experience as a discrete sensation (a sound for example) is the result of our dividing up a multiplicity of sensations. What presents itself to us as a clear signal is produced by our act of cutting up a dense, unclear signal. Perception moves from a virtual, over-determined mass to a clear and distinct signal that is subtracted from it. The selection of a signal, however, in turn changes the wider ecology of sensations and makes it possible to link it up with others in another, different configuration.

Bergson's model of subtractive perception offers a paradigm for understanding what we might loosely call the phenomenology of complex perceptions and, more generally for approaching the social and sensual world as active milieus, transformative agents, capacitors, and resonating intervals.

HISASHI FUJITA: First of all, and generally speaking, Bergson's challenge consists in his position between metaphysics and sciences, what Henri Gouhier called "*nouvelle alliance de la métaphysique et des sciences.*" In our day, there are many philosophers trying to verify the theoretical validity of a philosophical doctrine with a scientific theory, but not so many discuss and collaborate with scientists from their own philosophical point of view. Bergson's contrast with Deleuze could be a good example. Using often a second literature of science, Deleuze's aim is to develop his own metaphysics and neither to show his critique of any scientific theory nor to propose a scientific alternative (except in his collaboration with Guattari). On the contrary, going directly to the primary scientific literature of his time, Bergson's critique of any scientific theory is inseparable from his metaphysical development. Enough would be two examples of a "mechanics of transformation" in *Creative Evolution* and of a "vitalist biology quite different from ours" in *Mind-Energy*. Let us not forget, it is through this collaboration/confrontation with sciences, it is from this attitude, in fact, quite unique and rare, that one derives what Gouhier called "*une nouvelle intelligibilité,*" I would like to add, a new sensibility of time, of memory, of life, of humanity. Since 2007, the members of Project Bergson in Japan have tried precisely to inherit from Bergson this kind of challenge. (See our three previous proceedings, namely *Disséminations de l'Évolution créatrice*, "Bergson et le désastre: Lire Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion au Japon aujourd'hui" in the 6th volume of *Annales bergsoniennes*, and *Tout ouvert: L'Évolution créatrice en tous sens*). And the proceedings we published this year under the direction of Yasushi Hirai, who led our team, would be a good example. This publication handles the relation between Bergson and contemporary theories of perception, mind, and time, especially featuring analytic traditions.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Several of you have mentioned science. Explain Bergson's relation to science, particularly at the time when physics was supplanting biology as the premier science. Jimena, perhaps you could say a few words describing the exchange between Bergson and Einstein for those who may not be familiar.

JIMENA CANALES: It is a mistake to characterize Bergson as anti-science or anti-relativity. What was interesting for me while writing my book was to track how that reputation came to be gospel. His debate with Einstein is again key here. Bergson was in conversation with top-relativity scientists of his time (Poincaré who worked on it well before Einstein, Lorentz who was the author of the relativity equations, and Albert Michelson of the famous Michelson-Morley experiment that became central to relativity). He repeatedly claimed that he accepted all of the physical results of relativity

theory. In a footnote to the main text, he explained that he fully accepted “the invariance of the electromagnetic equations.” None of his claims in *Duration and Simultaneity* were meant to bear on physics: “The theory was studied with the aim of responding to a question posed by a philosopher, and no longer by a physicist,” he said. “Physics,” he added, “was not responsible for answering that question.” Bergson simply did not want to accept that Einstein’s interpretation of relativity theory provided all answers about the nature of time. In this respect, his assessment of the physicist’s work was in fact quite mainstream and shared by many scientists.

Einstein responded by claiming that Bergson had made a mistake in terms of physics. He wrote various letters expressing that point that sealed Bergson’s reputation. But what is most interesting is that there is some evidence to suggest that Einstein did not fully believe that Bergson got his facts all wrong. In his journal, he wrote that Bergson had “grasped the substance of relativity theory and doesn’t set himself in opposition to it.”

MICHAEL FOLEY: Bergson’s ideas are everywhere in contemporary science but almost never acknowledged by scientists. In fact, the only acknowledgement I know is by the geneticist Mae-Wan Ho in her book, *The Rainbow and the Worm: The Physics of Organisms*. Bergson had nothing but respect for science and all his scientific speculations have been vindicated by subsequent research.

His most daring assertion was that not even the atom is solid—this was well before the splitting of the atom—and physics has now come to accept his view of matter as not so much substance as a shimmying skein of force fields where the elementary particles are not solid but only perturbations, moving disturbances in the fields, whose motion alters the fields which in turn alter the particles, in configurations that never repeat. Bergson often sounds just like a contemporary physicist, and contemporary physicists sound just like Bergson. Consider the following two quotes: “So matter resolves itself into countless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all influencing each other.” And, “Every entity in the universe evolves dynamically in interaction with everything else.” The second sounds more like Bergson and the first more like a physicist but it’s the other way round—the second is from the contemporary physicist Lee Smolin. So physics now promotes Bergson’s theory of matter and has also endorsed his rejection of determinism with the revelation that, at the quantum level, behavior is random and unpredictable.

In biochemistry the discovery of non-equilibrium systems, which preserve the illusion of stable structure by means of flow, like a vortex of water over a plughole, matches exactly Bergson’s view of life: “Like eddies of dust raised by the wind in its passing, the living turn upon themselves, borne up by the great blast of life. Therefore, they are relatively stable, and

fake immutability so well that we treat each as a thing rather than a process, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement.”

And biology, identified by Bergson as a key discipline at a time when physics was dominant and biology had little prestige, has moved away from seeing organisms as static assemblies of relatively autonomous parts, like machines, to understanding them as dynamic systems in which everything depends on everything else. Here is Bergson sounding just like a contemporary biologist: “The study of one of these organisms therefore takes us round in a circle, as if everything was a means to everything else.” But biology has not entirely escaped what Bergson described as “the logic of solids.” In a recent book on the origins of life, *The Vital Question*, the biochemist Nick Lane claims that recent biology has been obsessed with the gene because the gene can be seen as concrete, static, and deterministic, whereas the essence of life is energy flow. In other words, life is not substance but process—pure Bergson. Here is Bergson sounding like Lane: “So all life, animal and vegetable, seems to be in essence an effort to accumulate energy and let it flow into flexible channels, changeable in nature, to accomplish infinitely varied kinds of work.”

And as well as these correspondences with specific disciplines, two of the most influential recent general scientific paradigms—chaos theory and emergence—are entirely Bergsonian. Chaotic systems are driven by complex feedback loops where overlapping influences go in circles, and are sensitive to tiny changes in input (examples include weather, the stock market, and marriage). In emergent systems complex order emerges from simple components obeying simple rules (examples include ant colonies, cities, and, possibly, consciousness).

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: What is mechanical thought? Mechanism is defined not by any telos, but rather by a certain logic of organization. These logics of mechanism, in all its various forms, whether technical, philosophical, or aesthetic, are about the relation of means and ends. Marshall McLuhan provided a concise definition of mechanism as “a model of aggregation [which is] achieved by fragmentation of any process and by putting the fragmented pieces in a series.” Does Bergson’s criticism of mechanical thought imply that Bergson is a techno-pessimist? On the one hand, Bergson did rant against industrialism and mechanization frequently, and very much so in *The Two Sources*. On the other hand, he was no different from many intellectuals of that time, such as Freud, who quickly saw an undeniable connection between technology and militarization. But we need to read these more superficial and moralistic criticisms in terms of previous and subtler comments about technology. Already in *Matter and Memory* it is clear that we cannot think of technology, or of anything else for

that matter, as standing on a different ontologically plane from our most intimate selves.

HISASHI FUJITA: More than that! As initiator of a hidden tradition of “non-organic vitalism,” with Canguilhem, Simondon, and Deleuze, Bergson developed his “organology”: “Thus, all the elementary forces of the intellect tend to transform matter into an instrument of action, that is, in the etymological sense of the word, into an *organ*. Life, not content with producing organisms, would fain give them as an appendage inorganic matter itself, converted into an immense organ by the industry of the living being.” His famous theory of *Homo faber* would lose its meaning, if we did not take into consideration this connection of life and industry. If I may read one more passage: “But the revolution it has effected in industry has nevertheless upset human relations altogether. New ideas are arising, new feelings are on the way to flower. In thousands of years, when, seen from the distance, only the broad lines of the present age will still be visible, our wars and our revolutions will count for little [...]; but the steam-engine, and the procession of inventions of every kind that accompanied it, will perhaps be spoken of as we speak of the bronze or of the chipped stone of prehistoric times [...]. Above all, [an instrument] reacts on the nature of the being that constructs it; for in calling on him to exercise a new function, it confers on him, so to speak, a richer organization, being an artificial organ by which the natural organism is extended.” Re-reading the second chapter of *Creative Evolution* would be the key for this topic.

STEPHEN CROCKER: Whether it takes the form of the factory production of commodities or the organization of shots in a film, mechanism is a medium in which any given whole—Greek or Christian ideas of unity, peasant life worlds, or the human body itself—is disassembled and rendered into a set of discrete, atomic units that can be reorganized over and again to serve some new purpose. This is true whether the mechanism we are speaking of is the complex body of a farm animal that is broken down into a set of routine, predictable functions, or a worker who becomes a quantity of labor time. It is present in the modern image of the mind as a machine that links together the clear and distinct ideas of Descartes or the separate sense impressions of Hume. We find this logic of decomposition and reconstruction in the fifteenth-century aesthetic revolution of perspective, which builds a painting of distinct planes, and the later, more modern development of filmic montage that reconstructs actions from discrete photographic cells. The “mechanical” dimension of each of these developments is defined not by the particular kind of device that it employs, but by this operation of dissolving wholes into atomic units and reassembling them into new aggregate forms.

At the turn of the twentieth century, many people were complaining about the inhuman, alienating quality of modern mechanical thought, whether this meant the indifference of capitalism to the life of the worker whose time it divides into quantified units, the spiritless dissection of nature into a productive machine that serves our purposes, or the bland image of the mind as a machine that processes distinct ideas. For some, this led to a rejection of modernity and a desire to return to the world we had lost. For others, the problem was knowing toward what end all the frenetic movement of industrial life might be heading.

Bergson's relation to mechanical modernity is refreshingly different. He shows us how the "mechanical thought" that reorganizes modern life emerges out of a long historical struggle to break up older Greek and Christian ideas of unity. Mechanism accomplished only a limited, incomplete revolution because it did not develop an adequate understanding of time and intervals. When science set out to explain movement without reference to any external, otherworldly cause, it presupposed a concept of time as not only a measure of a pre-given motion, but also as a generative force of invention and differentiation. Science breaks down unities into sets of sterile elements of T1, T2, and so on. Every element, or moment counts, and no one of them is more important than any other. Any given unity—material or ideal—can be dissected into a series of "any-moments-whatever." "Any" moment because the instant itself has no special telos or specific way of dividing up the whole. A moment is a function of the set in which it participates. In order that change be initiated and pass along a line of these instants, however, the first instant, T1, must possess the capacity both to exhaust itself and to generate the conditions for the second instant, T2. This supposes some milieu, or medium in which the two elements participate together. What science did not provide was an analysis of this medium or "whole" in which "any moments whatever" work together to produce a cumulative effect. And because it did not develop its own concept of change, it could not help but to carry along the ancient image of time as a static and accomplished fact. Because it does not bear on the interval, but only on its extremities (T1, T2), scientific knowledge must appeal to another knowledge of intervals to complete it.

Bergson's critique of mechanism is not the work of a reactionary thinker, or techno-pessimist as you put it. In fact, the opposite is true: with the concepts of duration and creative evolution, he wants to carry forward the revolution in thought and experience that science and mechanism began, but did not complete. In short, his project is to develop the metaphysics that mechanical thought presupposes but does not think.

JIMENA CANALES: We have some stellar work done on Bergson and evolution, and I am hoping that someone will soon write an entire volume

on Bergson and Darwin (with Spencer as an intermediary, of course). That book, to be any good, would approach the question of mechanism in a way that shows its deep imbrication with that of humanism, and that does not assume a clear and undisputed boundary between machine and human. It would have to be written from what we now would call a post-human perspective, but the purpose of such approach would not be to follow a recent academic trend, but because only in that way would it do full justice to their work.

SUZANNE GUERLAC: I think what he would say is just what he says at the conclusion of *The Two Sources* when he declares, "*Une décision s'impose. L'humanité gémit, à demi écrasée sous le poids des progrès qu'elle a faits. Elle ne sait pas assez que son avenir dépend d'elle. A elle de voir d'abord si elle veut continuer à vivre.*" A decision is before us. It is up to us to decide if we want to continue to live. Our own technocratic world is the fruit of the spirit of intelligence and rationality whose prerogative Bergson challenges in all his work. He does not challenge its value as such but he insists on setting boundaries with respect to it. It does not give us knowledge of the living real. It simply imposes instrumentally useful frameworks upon the real that lead us into a fabulous dream of mastery of the world. We have seen where that dream has led us. The dream of technical mastery fits well with dreams of global capitalism. Except that capitalism needs to be able to bet on the future.

And I think for us to decide to do so requires the kind of shift in perspective that Bergson introduces through what he calls *mysticité*. This is perhaps not so mysterious. It comes down to an affective experience (an experience of love) that passes through us to embrace all living beings. This is the decision that faces us in the Anthropocene Age. We can call it by another name—ecological thinking, perhaps. But it will require shifting away from the absolute privilege given to human reason and to human interests. It will require the gesture Bergson repeatedly makes, which is to shift the reach of our thinking to the living biosphere.

MELISSA MCMAHON: I think Bergson sees the human species itself as fundamentally mechanistic and technocratic. A lot of his argument is that our intellect is a tool, just like physical tools, rather than a transparent window onto the world. In that sense, the world has always been technocratic, but obviously the sophistication and impact of that technology has increased exponentially since Bergson's death. That said, our concerns about human progress are very similar now to those in Bergson's time: concerns that we will exhaust our natural resources, concerns that, despite technology's power to improve our lives, it can also become tyrannical and aggravate social divisions.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Melissa, I have a question specifically for you as a translator. Often translators are hidden by the name of the author and, consequently, don't receive the credit they are due. In other words, translation work remains underappreciated. Is there anything you wish scholars would be more aware of with regard to translation?

MELISSA MCMAHON: Ironically, the more prominent the name of a translator is on a work—as is customary in literary and scholarly translation—the less likely it is that they were paid very much. Literary and scholarly translation largely draws on a pool of volunteer or semi-volunteer translators in the student and academic body, who do the work because it is connected to their interests and a good point of entry into the academic community—this was my situation in any case. Many excellent translations emerge from this system, but some will inevitably be amateurish because the translator is an amateur. So I suppose I would like there to be more awareness of the positive difference a professional can make to the finished work and hence the benefit of allocating resources to that—but then I would say that, wouldn't I. The academics I have worked with have always been aware of this issue and have been very concerned to be as generous as possible, but they are limited by the system.

BRIEN KARAS: As a translator, what concerns do you have about making Bergsonism accessible? To what extent do you strive to make it speak to twenty-first century dispositions?

MELISSA MCMAHON: I always strive to produce a translation that is as natural and readable as possible while recognizing the fact that there are French sensibilities and stylistic peculiarities that simply can't and shouldn't be erased. Sometimes amateur or inexperienced translators can tend towards transliteration, whether because they are overly deferential to the author, or not confident or familiar enough with the source language outside of the academic sphere. This can have an impact on the accessibility and appeal of a work. An interesting question regarding older texts is whether you should be mindful of English language norms of the time the text was written, or whether you should be able to draw on more contemporary language in the name of naturalness. I think perhaps that as long as you are aware of the effect the period has on the meaning of the words for the author, it is okay to use the language of your own time in the translation, but it's not a situation I have a lot of experience with.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: How has the secondary literature on Bergson impacted your understanding of Bergson?

MELISSA MCMAHON: This is my Deleuzianism kicking in, but I think secondly literature mostly provides an insight into the author of the secondary literature rather than the primary text. Secondary literature is more about what you can do with a thinker than the thinker themselves. Translating Jankélévitch on Bergson gave me insights into Jankélévitch, rather than Bergson, which is no criticism of Jankélévitch. The exception would be works like Philippe Soulez's *Bergson politique*, which examines the political and historical context of Bergson's writing (I translated a section of the book for the Lefebvre and White collection), and that kind of insight into the polemics around at the time an author is writing, whether historical or philosophical, is often very illuminating, because they are often not explicitly mentioned in the work.

BRIEN KARAS: Often we come to one theorist through reading another. Melissa just mentioned the tension that can arise between, for example, reading Bergson *avec* Deleuze and coming to Bergson from, say, his nineteenth century predecessors. How do you understand the relation between Bergson and post-structuralism? Positivism? Phenomenology? Analytic philosophy?

MELISSA MCMAHON: I think the relationship between Bergson and post-structuralism in concrete terms is Deleuze. My view might be skewed by my own experience, but I get the impression that it was Deleuze's interest in Bergson that brought him to the general attention of poststructuralists, whether the latter were Deleuzean or not. Maybe it spread because Bergson's philosophy seemed to tie in with contemporary phenomenological interests in time, consciousness and criticism of the natural sciences. I don't see Bergson however as belonging to the same lineage as phenomenology, either philosophically or historically. Bergson's work was contemporary with the twin birth of phenomenology and analytic philosophy or logical positivism, but he seems to exist to one side of them. Analytic philosophers at the time such as Russell grouped him with Anglo-American "anti-intellectualist" movements such as pragmatism. That categorization still seems true to me.

FRÉDÉRIC WORMS: Here's a thought about how various trends in philosophy (and psychology) in France changed the reception of his work during this interval. There have been several distinctive moments in French

philosophy, each of which centered around a new philosophical problem. But it is a fact that the very reception of Bergson, during the century, is a living proof for such distinctive moments. Of course there is the parricide of breaking with and from Bergson. Although Husserl, Freud, and even Heidegger were Bergson's contemporaries, they were used by Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, but also Politzer, Lacan, Ricoeur and Bachelard, to depart from Bergson. Bergson would then be seen as committing the unforgivable sin of "realism," that is, thinking of consciousness, according to them, as a "thing" and not as an act, or even a "nothingness," a pure freedom. But Bergson was also accused of being a-historical and a-dialectical in his thinking. Of course, Bergson's concepts of life and time are both polarized, including some negativity (culminating in the two ethics and politics). Bergson's *durée* was thought to be too subjective, and lacking objectivity, as Canguilhem, Jankélévitch, Wahl, and even Levinas well knew. But nothing would do. Then came structuralism, where Bergson led a sort of hidden life; that of the pure Deleuzean difference in the structural sign system and world; or that of the Derridean continually differing un-presentable time; or paradoxically in the vindication against him (as Russell invented analytic philosophy using Bergson's critique of analysis) of space in Foucault, Lacan, or Levi-Strauss. Invisible threads were still persisting. Then the questions of the brain and memory, of life and death, of creation and destruction, came back to us, and Bergson, and all the hidden tradition of critical vitalism, with him. Recently, there's been some focus on Bergson and art, particularly modernist art, which Mullarkey has shed light on.

BRIEN KARAS: Today, we're also starting to see a new turn to Bergson's political thought. I'm thinking here of Lefebvre and White's *Bergson, Politics and Religion* and *Beyond Bergson: Race, Gender, and Colonialism*, edited by Mark and Andrea Pitts.

SUZANNE GUERLAC: Of course the response to this question depends on what one means by post-structuralism. If one defines it in terms of writing – Derridean grammatology or Barthesian textuality – there might not appear to be much common ground. Yet Bergson's thinking is fundamentally deconstructive in that he critiques the whole history of western metaphysics for having suppressed the dynamic force of time. He diagnoses in it an "obsession with space" and affirms the limits of both abstract conceptual thought and quantification, which he characterizes as modes of spatialization. His philosophy of duration includes a critique of presence; "nothing is less than the present," he writes; the only thing that remains constant is change. So both Bergson and Derrida engage in a rigorous critique of the metaphysics of presence.

Bergson also challenges epistemological assumptions. In *Creative Evolution*, he presents human intelligence as an effect, or product, of evolution, rather than positioning it in relation to a transcendental subject, which would know evolution, nature or the real from the outside. In his analysis of the “cinematographic illusion,” the cinematographic becomes a powerful critical figure of false epistemology and false metaphysics that has run throughout the history of western philosophy. He derives the cinematic figure from Jules Marey’s claims that chronophotography captures motion—the motion of life itself—and the fulfillment of the illusion of this capture by the mechanisms of projection invented by the Lumière Brothers. He proposes a second figure to help us understand the critical force of the cinematographic figure: the child’s puzzle. The child puts together pieces of a puzzle with full knowledge of what the resulting image of the whole will be. The cinematic illusion gives only an illusion of dynamism; it is constructed out of a concatenation of fixed or spatialized elements.

We could say that both Bergson and Derrida are philosophers of difference. Whereas Derrida relies on the linguistic figure of grammatical difference (or indefinite chains of mediation and deferral) to challenge metaphysical notions of presence and conceptual representation, Bergson appeals to direct experience to convey the processes of a dynamic heterogeneous real that we limit and arrest through representation. Post-structuralism will of course reject any notion of immediate experience. The issue here is how one understands what Bergson means by “immediate experience”—it may not coincide precisely with what post-structuralism rejects.

As philosophers, both Bergson and Derrida face the problem of trying to say in words precisely what escapes language or cannot be named by it—*différance* in the case of Derrida and real duration in the case of Bergson. Both philosophers must cultivate specific writing strategies to perform a thinking that is incompatible with representation. This is of course an old problem, one that goes back to German Romanticism and that we find in Nietzsche and late Heidegger, as well as in the late work of Merleau-Ponty.

PAULINA OCHOA ESPEJO: We probably owe Bergson’s come-back in the twenty-first century to Deleuze’s *Bergsonism* (and I think Deleuze’s reading of Bergson was much needed, particularly in political theory where, from the 1950s until Deleuze published, most references to Bergson were immediately followed by denunciations of his “vitalism” and strained associations between his philosophy and Nazism.) However, that post-structuralists have gotten a lot out of him now does not mean that thinkers in other schools have not; it is clear that Bergson shared many key commitments with the other traditions that you list, including positivism and analytic philosophy.

In my view, one of the most distinctive traits of Bergson's philosophy is a particular method. Bergson had a particular style of dealing with intellectual problems, which he shares with many phenomenologists and analytical philosophers. Like them, Bergson seeks to solve or "dissolve" problems. He analyzes paradoxes by clarifying their terms, either logically (like analytical philosophers) or by studying the structure of experience (like phenomenologists), and then he shows that these seemingly intractable paradoxes are in fact false problems. He develops this method in *Time and Free Will* and uses it in all his subsequent works. In contrast, most post-structuralist thinkers "press" problems. That is, they examine problems in order to find difficulties and paradoxes, and then show that these paradoxes present a philosophical impasse—that they are problems that we cannot solve or dissolve. (I talk more about this in a piece I wrote with Thomas Donahue: "The Analytical-Continental Divide: Styles of Dealing with Problems in Political Theory.")

STEPHEN CROCKER: Bergsonism gives us a sense of "wholism" and multidimensionality that stands in contrast to the themes of fragmented perception and distracted consciousness that have dominated post-structuralist cultural theory in recent years. In the 1980s and 1990s, it was popular to describe the cultural development of the post-war world as a progressive "flattening of experience." Critiques of the essentialist and totalizing discourses of structuralism and Marxism often led to a whole new valorization of ideas of dispersion and fragmentation. In the absence of any full and whole experience, the world seems to consist of isolated, decontextualized signs.

The flat, depthlessness of late modernity was the central thesis of some of the most influential works of cultural theory in the late twentieth century, most notably Jean Baudrillard's *Simulations*, Jean-Francois Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, and Fredric Jameson's *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Lyotard describes the decline of Enlightenment Grand Narratives as a flattening of knowledge: "The speculative hierarchy of learning gives way to an immanent and, as it were, flat network of areas of inquiry." As daily life is speeded up and plugged into ever wider global circuits of information and exchange, it becomes more difficult to recognize any pattern in the randomness of events. Jameson famously captures this position with his thesis that late capitalism produces a schizophrenic consciousness of disconnected sensations.

Bergson's relation to the science of early modernity was not to reject it, but to carry through the project that its atomism began, but did not complete. Bergson's critique of scientific modernity helps us recognize the dualism of unity and fragmentation, or the one and the many, that underlay these more recent debates. The postmodern thesis that we had moved from a

unified to a fragmented world raises a problem very similar to the one that Bergson recognized in his critique of mechanical science. In the haste to overcome totalizing images of structure, post-structuralism risked falling back on the principle of completion and self-containedness that it hoped to overcome. Its many tiny unities of subject positions and identity fragments still require some kind of “whole” or medium in which to operate. Bergson’s critique of science therefore raises important and interesting questions about the limits of the poststructuralist discourse of fragmentation.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Bachir, in *African Art as Philosophy: Senghor, Bergson, and the Idea of Negritude*, you begin with the claim that “Bergson teaches us how to read philosophers.” What do you mean by this? Are you speaking about the philosophers that Bergson inherited as part of his tradition and/or the philosophers that come after and are influenced by him? Perhaps you could connect this with some of the things about art that Charlotte mentioned earlier.

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE: When I say that Bergson teaches us how to read philosophers and how to read Senghor in particular, I am making a reference to his statement that great philosophical works are born out of one original intuition, which they develop in many different directions. To read them is to get to that point where their thought is condensed and from which it unfolds. This is particularly true, I contend, of Senghor whose fundamental intuition is that African art is the language of African philosophy and is knowledge. Senghor had that intuition from his frequent visits to the museum of Place Trocadéro in Paris when he was a student at Lycée Louis-le Grand. What Senghor had to say afterwards about negritude—negritude as ontology, as epistemology, as aesthetics of course, and even as politics—is to be read as a development of that fundamental notion that art is knowledge, a view he developed in conversation with the philosophy of Nietzsche, with the art of Picasso, but essentially with Bergson’s thought. His friend and accomplice Aimé Césaire has a reflection on “poetry and knowledge” which is deeply Bergsonian. Generally speaking, Senghor and Césaire and those who constituted their thought in conversation with them found in Bergson the formulation of the notion that the truth of art is to manifest that detachment from reality (Bergson speaks of the “distraction” of the artist) makes us see more in it. We see reality better and more and otherwise through art. We *know* better because the work of art teaches us that an expansion of our capacity to perceive is possible so that we can *know* the real.

Senghor expresses Bergson’s distinction between the analytical, scientific, approach of things and the intuitive grasping of reality by coining the expressions “eye-reason” for the knowledge that keeps its object at a

distance, immobilizes it, and “embrace-reason” for the kind of artistic knowledge which means coinciding with the object, being in phase with it, with its rhythm.

So Bergson’s philosophy of intuition and of *élan vital* have been incorporated in the language of Senghor and Césaire. And the rapprochement was also made with certain thoughts about time expressed in certain African narratives, manifesting other dimensions of time than serial, quantifiable time. Senghor has often declared that the twentieth century, putting an end to the age of positivism, had truly started with the “1889 revolution,” meaning with the publication of Bergson’s *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Stephen, earlier you mentioned media. Explain how you understand Bergson’s influence in Media Studies, particularly in relation to some interlocutors, for example, Benjamin, Deleuze, McLuhan, and Serres. For instance, their many differences aside, Deleuze and McLuhan share the view that mechanical thought does not (or does not only) alienate us from what is real, but raises important problems about the nature of relations and intervals. Both develop a very unusual sort of media studies that is not interested in the semiotic meaning of the message conveyed, or the political economy of its production, but rather in the nature of mediation as such.

STEPHEN CROCKER: Agamben suggests that the philosophical element of a work is its capacity for elaboration. Our interest in the ideas of another concern are not only their truth content, or how well they reflect the reality they describe, but what can be done with them. In what new direction can an idea be pushed? With what can it be mixed? What new realities can it help illuminate? In my book, *Bergson and the Metaphysics of Media*, I pick up on some central elements of Bergson’s “science” of intervals, and show how they have been mixed in with various degrees of Catholicism, Marxism, phenomenology, and structuralism to elaborate a metaphysically oriented media studies. Bergson’s philosophy of discrete and continuous multiplicities, for example, informs the intervallic studies of Deleuze, McLuhan, and Serres.

Using Bergsonian ideas, Deleuze and McLuhan see the emergence of film, in particular, as a pivotal point or “break boundary” between the mechanical, discrete structures of early modernity, and the continuous organic forms of organization that now become thinkable as the mechanical world breaks up. In their very different kinds of media studies, we can trace the elaboration of Bergson’s opposition of discrete and continuous organization into a theory of media and relations.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson shows how a medium is a necessary means to convey change, but because it can be speeded up and made more efficient, we also experience it as obstacle in the way of a more effective delivery of a message. This contradiction—where the medium of change is both a means and an obstacle—leads to important metaphysical questions about the nature of middles and media. What must mediation be if it does not go away? Why is there always a middle? Can the means be considered independently of the content that passes through them?

Serres' work on "noise" takes this seemingly contradictory quality of the medium (as means and obstacle) in new and interesting directions. Noise, as Serres informs us, is not itself a medium but always indicates the presence of one. Communication requires, at the very least, the presence of two different stations and a means of moving between them. The message has to move thorough a middle, and each middle, it turns out, has its own distinct properties that affect the message in precise ways. The medium is not only a conduit but also a "space of transformation" where something happens to the message. The point here is not to make Serres a Bergsonian, though he himself has made that claim, but to show how his work contributes to, or elaborates the complimentary science of intervals and clarifies the relations among mechanism, medium and multiplicity.

JIMENA CANALES: Just how important Bergson is for media studies has not yet been fully fleshed out. Like Stephen said, media is still usually considered in terms of communication theory (transmission, noise, distortion) or in terms of a McLuhanesque "everything is media" slogan. But for me, the realization that Bergson had a better alternative for understanding media came during my research for *A Tenth of a Second: A History*. It was then that I realized how useful his work could be for Science and Technology Studies (STS). Bergson inspires us to ask how it is that media *becomes* and to see that its *becoming* is tied to our experience of temporality. He offers a new way of understanding technology by reference to time. In his assessment of time dilation in relativity theory he explained it clearly: "It is not because clocks go more slowly that time has lengthened; it is because time has lengthened that clocks, remaining as they are, are found to run more slowly."

Two points about his comments on the cinematographic method are key to understand this aspect of his work. First of all, what he says about the cinematographical method applies simultaneously to a new technology and to our intellects. Bergson criticized the instrument as much as the proclivity of the human mind for arranging temporal images spatially, he criticized its restrictiveness and urged scientists to "set the cinematographical method aside" and search instead for a "second kind of knowledge." So with him we already have the challenge of thinking about

technology, minds, and selves in intertwined ways. Usually we trace this lesson to Heidegger (“The Question Concerning Technology”), Simondon (*Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*), or Haraway (*Cyborg Manifesto*), but this point was already eloquently made by Bergson much earlier.

Second, media *becomes* because of how it is attached to a certain conception of movement, change and therefore time. When he wrote about cinematography, he was not only careful to point out its illusions, he also explained why the illusions worked so well: “In order that the pictures may be animated, there must be movement somewhere. The movement does indeed exist here; it is in the apparatus.” The cinematographic spectacle only worked because viewers were not looking at the apparatus that hid real movement. I’ve taken this insight of Bergson as an invitation to pay careful attention and understand what it is that makes technology work more broadly. Often, it is something that is kept from sight. In the case of cinema, it is all that is hidden in the dark area behind the spectators, and in the case of other technologies it can include hidden networks and people (a car needs a road, a mechanic, and a motor and chassis with steel that comes from mining, etc.). All of these additional elements (human and non-human) have particular relations to time. In the case of cinema, it appears most obviously in the clockwork mechanism that drives it, but other elements involve activities of “waiting” and “servicing” that make technology work.

It is no surprise that Heidegger expands this aspect of Bergson’s work in his assessment of scientific instruments and scientific measurement. For scientists, the power of measurement is often traced back to a famous quote by William Thomson (later Lord Kelvin): “When you can measure what you are speaking about, and express it in numbers, you know something about it; but when you cannot measure it, when you cannot express it in numbers, your knowledge is of a meagre and unsatisfactory kind.” But an excessive focus on measurement results comes at the expense of exploring the conditions of possibility of measurability. What is even more interesting (and this is what we learn from Heidegger) is that the very possibility of measurement presupposes a notion of fixity that arises from a severance or separation from the rest of time. “Measuring time is essentially such that it is necessary to say ‘now,’” explained Heidegger, “but in obtaining the measurement, we, as it were, forget what has been measured as such, so that nothing is to be found except a number and a stretch.” While in Bergson’s account it is the working cinematographic apparatus that hides time, in Heidegger it is *every scientific measurement* that already does that to some extent.

BRIEN KARAS: In what sense can Bergson be seen as part of the tradition of rationalism? There are those that refuse such an interpretation and assert that, in fact, Bergson’s thought should be considered a form of irrationalism.

In contrast, there are those that assert that Bergson is most certainly to be placed in the Cartesian tradition of first philosophy, albeit with a radically different starting point. Is either view adequate?

FREDÉRIC WORMS: As Péguy said when writing on Bergson: every philosophy is a kind of rationalism because philosophy as such is an effort to enlarge reason not only to what is adapted but also to what offers resistance to it. Bergson is by all means a conceptual thinker: he distinguishes, he defines, he argues. You can disagree, but you cannot discard him just because he developed a concept of intuition and a definition of what cannot be defined. People have been deceived by the content of his rationalism, forgetting the acts of reason that are behind it and beyond it. There are some irrationalist defenses of reason (such is the case of Benda's according to Péguy), but there are some rationalist thoughts of what resists reason, and of course such is the case of Bergson, as Canguilhem well knew, who himself was rightly called a "vital rationalist."

BRIEN KARAS: Perhaps for the remainder of our time, we can briefly talk about some of Bergson's major concepts, or perhaps some of the implications of those concepts. For instance, the concept of intuition has come up a few times in our conversation.

FREDÉRIC WORMS: I am actually working on an article on Bergson and Lucretius right now! There is nothing that Bergson takes from Lucretius, except one idea, perhaps one intuition, namely, the very idea that a philosophy is always based on an intuition. His commentary is founded on the idea that the entirety of Lucretius' poem is grounded on a single intuition. Even emotion is a great pity for humankind arising from its unknowing the true substance of atomic reality, and of the fixed laws of nature. Of course, Bergson does not believe in the same conception of nature. His metaphysics will be opposed to every tenet of Lucretius's, but he will always hold, as in his youth, that one and only *l'intuition philosophique*. Is there an emotion full of knowledge? Is this more fundamental than a pure, abstract statement? Bergson had been accused by Russell of being a poet; but his remarkable study of Lucretius shows that a creative intuition can and must create both ideas and style. Perhaps these poets—Lucretius and Bergson—are closer to first philosophy than Russell ever knew.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Senghor's oft-misunderstood dictum that emotion is negro as reason is Greek seems to map on to Bergson's distinction between intuition and intellect. In what sense should emotion

and intuition be privileged over reason and intellect? Or, is this an unfair way of framing what's at stake?

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE: Senghor allowed himself to be misunderstood when he wrote in one of his early writings in prose that emotion is negro as reason is Greek: he obviously let his will to coin a flashing formula (in French it is an alexandrine) carry him into writing a statement that was understood more as a validation of Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's characterization of primitive pre-logical mentality than the Bergsonian distinction between intuition and intellect that it deeply was.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: African intuition ought to be valorized since intuition, not intellect, is the means for grasping the heterogeneous continuity of reality. Clevis Headley has recently explored this dictum in "Bergson, Senghor, and the Philosophical Foundations of Négritude: Intellect, Intuition, and Knowledge" in *Beyond Bergson*. Headley suggests that your thesis is correct, namely, that the primary emphasis is on the analogy and less about epistemology or cognitive ability.

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE: The context of the article in which the dictum is to be found and the reflections on African aesthetics developed in it show that the formula should be understood as an analogy: the works of Greco-Roman statuary are to eye-reason what the works of African sculpture are to embrace-reason. Afterwards Senghor spent much ink and energy explaining that all humans share the same cognitive capacities of course.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Many would choose *durée* as Bergson's most noteworthy concept. Can this concept be captured in visual art? How can we think temporality within a painting? Does something like Duchamp's "Nude Descending a Staircase (No.2)" accomplish this?

CHARLOTTE DE MILLE: Absolutely. It is a mistake to think of static art objects existing in a solely spatial realm, not least as we perceive them in time. At the start of the twentieth century many avant-garde artists experimented with depictions of temporality, as Mark Antliff in particular has demonstrated so clearly. However, this was also one of the most contested areas between different factions: Wyndham Lewis for example accused the Futurists of fixing a series of instants rather than representing *durée* in process, presumably thinking of works such as Giacomo Balla's *The*

Hand of the Violinist—and he'd probably have said much the same about *Nude Descending a Staircase*. Looking at a work such as Umberto Boccioni's *Unique Forms of Continuity in Space* or his series *States of Mind: The Farewells; Those who Go; Those Who Stay*, we see a far more engaged and complex response to Bergsonian thought, not only the dynamism and movement of temporal experience, but also its intangible traces in memory.

BRIEN KARAS: Jimena and Suzanne, do either of you have reflections on Bergson's theory of temporality, which Stephen mentioned earlier?

JIMENA CANALES: For me the key sentence is again from *Duration and Simultaneity*: "Time is for me that which is most real and necessary; it is the necessary condition of action: What am I saying? It is action itself." It matches with how Bergson spoke about time elsewhere, for example in the quote Mark cited earlier: "Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands." In terms of science, we might say that Bergson's contribution was to consider time as an operator instead of merely as a parameter.

This positive (and science-friendly) aspect of Bergson's temporality frequently gets lost when his contributions are seen as merely "psychological" and as a response to the common (Aristotelian) identification of time with space. Bergson stressed the difference of his notion of temporality so much by contrasting it against the ways in which it was defined objectively via space that his contributions were often seen as merely negative. So Einstein seems to have read him in this way when he wrote in his journal: "The philosophers constantly dance around the dichotomy: the psychologically real and physically real, and differ only in evaluations in this regard. Either the former appears as a 'mere individual experience' or the second as 'mere construct of thought.' Bergson belongs to the latter kind but objectifies in his way without noticing." Heidegger, in *Being and Time*, also considered him as merely inverting a dominant notion of time. He explained quite clearly what his ax against the philosopher was: "Every subsequent account of time, including Bergson's, has been essentially determined by [Aristotle's concept]." The contrast to space was so prevalent that it reinforced a cliché where Bergsonism, in philosophy and French culture more generally (from philosophers to film directors), was seen as excessively fixated on flows, continuity, ripples, and other water and liquid metaphors.

In light of this common way of reading Bergson we may understand—and celebrate—Bachelard for stressing the poetics of space as much as those of time. To do this required breaking away from the common identification

of Bergson with the continuous. “From Bergsonism we accept almost all, except continuity,” he wrote.

For me, the Bergson-to-Bachelard contribution to thinking about time allows us to conceive it in ways that go beyond the sciences-humanities dichotomies or subjective-objective stereotypes. Time can also be considered in decisively post-Augustinian and post-Kantian ways. For example, it can be seen as most akin to sowing or even writing. Drawing lines—making furrows on various surfaces (on page, on a road, or on fertile ground for an agricultural plough)—is not so different from dividing marks and ticks of a clock. In this way, the essential instrument for time-keeping, the clock, can also be seen as a tool for the creation of culture. Rituals of caring, sharing, and giving can thus be reintegrated into our scientific and instrumental understanding of temporality.

BRIEN KARAS: Suzanne, can you shed light on the different notions of temporality operative in Bergson’s oeuvre, particularly between *Time and Free Will* and *Creative Evolution*? Deleuze claims that a radical break occurs between these two texts with regard to Bergson’s treatment of temporality. He reads *Time and Free Will* as a philosophy of consciousness (a phenomenology). He claims that Bergson breaks with this psychological perspective and shifts to an ontological one in *Creative Evolution*. For him these two approaches are radically discontinuous because, in the context of post-structuralism, the philosophy of difference (and the impact of psychoanalysis) radically undermined the status of the subject.

SUZANNE GUERLAC: Bergson is a strategic thinker who enters into specific debates. He challenges Fechner, Taine, and associationist psychologists in *Time and Free Will* and Spencer in *Creative Evolution*. He is a transversal thinker, not a systematic one. He neither systematically continues the theory of time as duration presented in *Time and Free Will* nor abandons it entirely when he shifts to the new project of *Creative Evolution*.

In *Time and Free Will* Bergson distinguishes duration from abstract (Kantian) time as *lived* time, which he characterizes in qualitative, dynamic, nuanced, and heterogeneous terms. What duration means, however, fundamentally, is that the past survives and acts on the future. This is the sense in which consciousness comes into play, for memory lets the past survive in present action (see the analysis of attentive recognition in *Matter and Memory*). In *Creative Evolution* Bergson extends the reach of duration out from the framework of individual experience to “the totality of the material universe” which itself enjoys a kind of agency. “The universe endures,” he writes, “the more we deepen the nature of time, the more we understand

that duration signifies invention, creation of forms, the continuous elaboration of the absolutely new.”

There is no fundamental disparity between Bergson’s early discussion of duration in *Time and Free Will* and the one he presents in *Creative Evolution* in the context of what he calls his “philosophy of life” — “continuity of change, conservation of the past in the present, real duration [*la durée vraie*] the living being seems to share these attributes with consciousness.” And he asks, “Can one go further and say that life is invention like conscious activity, ceaseless creation as it is?” The basis for this analogy is the inscription of time such that the past acts upon the (arriving) present. The “evolution of the living being,” he writes in *Creative Evolution*, “implies a continuous registering [*enregistrement*] of duration, a persistence of the past in the present and therefore at least an appearance of organic memory [*une apparence au moins de mémoire organique*].”

There is no fundamental discontinuity in Bergson’s treatment of temporality when duration becomes, as Deleuze puts it, ontological. There is rather an extension or deepening of duration which becomes *both* “the foundation of our being” and “the very substance of the things with which we are in communication.” The fundamental features of real duration remain coherent: the past (time) presses against the present “and produces [*en fait jaillir*] a new form incommensurable with its antecedents.” What remains constant is the distinction between what Bergson calls “concrete time” (or duration) “along which a real system develops” and abstract time “which intervenes in our speculations about artificial systems.” The critique of mechanistic and teleological versions of evolution in the later work parallels the critique of abstract thought (the work of intelligence) in *Time and Free Will*; in both cases the problem is the eradication of the force of time (or of time as force): “We don’t think real time” he writes in *Creative Evolution* “but we live it, because life exceeds intelligence.”

BRIEN KARAS: What is your view of the narrative expressed by thinkers as diverse as Adorno and Deleuze that *Matter and Memory* represents Bergson at his most radical, with works such as *Creative Evolution* representing a step back from this radicalism?

FRÉDÉRIC WORMS: I used to agree; I do not any more. Let me explain. First, let us not be confused: people are fascinated, in fact, not by *Matter and Memory* as a whole (as is obviously and explicitly the case with Deleuze, but also phenomenologists such as Barbaras, and between them in the great book by Bento Prado Jr.), but by the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*! It is understandable. It presents itself as a “pure description” of “pure perception,” in terms of images and what Deleuze would call (and Prado

and Barbaras after him) a pure “transcendental field.” All very good. Except for one major point, and that is the obvious fact that this “pure” perception is not the “real” perception, but what perception would be in the pure instant of pure space and without the concrete role of time in perception, which memory adds to it (which is what we get in chapters 2 and 3) and which will be described in the fourth and last chapter on matter as duration, and perception as life and creation. What a mistake. And that is also a way to forget that *Matter and Memory* leads to and in a way calls for *Creative evolution*. The latter is much more radical since the spatial perceptions and perspectives are there engendered and derived from pure time and creation, and their reversal is due to their interruption and internal negativity. To be honest, it took me a while to go through this whole process again. In other words, I needed to read Bergson’s oeuvre over and over to see this clearly. But then one could see the result with certainty: every book by Bergson is as radical as the preceding. Each one grabs hold of the roots of even more demanding philosophical questions.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Let’s return to some of the political dimensions of Bergson’s philosophy, say, for example, democracy.

MICHAEL FOLEY: Bergson argued that the beliefs we revere as eternal truths eventually were in fact contingent creations. So democracy is not the natural and inevitable terminus of civilization but an idea that had to be invented and need not have been. It was based on the notion of the equality of all, which was not a discovery of the Enlightenment, as is often claimed, but a radical proposition of Christianity. Philosophers had never formulated any such idea and might never have. We have Christianity to thank for secularism.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Secularism from Christianity. I’m thinking here of Schmitt and later reactions to his thesis that modern political theory is redressed theology. How might Bergson’s philosophy contribute to political theology? There are different ways of thinking of political theology. For example, “political theology” can mean the subordination of religious to political authority: what Max Weber termed “caesaropapism.” The term has also been used to describe the theological reflection on political problems and doctrines such as liberation theology or Islamist thought. I don’t think Bergson is so illuminating when thinking about political theology according to this definition, but he is extremely useful if we think about political theology in the way that many contemporary political theorists use the term.

PAULINA OCHOA ESPEJO: According to this other usage, political theology is the thesis that the liberal democratic state cannot justify state coercion successfully in its own terms, because it must rely on normative standards that cannot be explained scientifically or according to any convention that every single member of society would accept. So, any argument that tries to justify state coercion will eventually appeal to some controversial metaphysical assumption. This assumption need not be explicitly religious, but insofar as it is part of a general account of the nature of reality it will be functionally equivalent to theology in the context of a justification of the state. Thus, according to the thesis of political theology, these metaphysical assumptions perform the same legitimizing function that theology performed in the past, when religious beliefs justified authority. Many people worry about this type of political theology because they think that a justification of politics that appeals to metaphysics must necessarily be dogmatic or violent. But this is not necessarily the case.

Schmitt believed that liberal democracy required a functional substitute for religious justification, because without an authoritative will, anarchism would exploit the weakness of liberal doctrine and eventually destroy the state. But this belief relies on Schmitt's picture of a secularized sovereign will, which in turn comes from a distinctive theology of voluntarism which can be traced back to Hobbes and his contemporaries. Schmitt's view of political theology reduces political order to the dictates of a commanding will. In contrast, Bergson's view of divinity and religion, as propounded in *The Two Sources and Creative Evolution*, also focuses on motivating the will, but this type of motivation couldn't be more different. Where Schmitt sees the commands of a sovereign modeled on the Pantocrator (an Almighty God enthroned as emperor: omniscient, changeless, and all-foreknowing); Bergson sees the divine as love or creative energy, the condition of possibility for novelty and change. Unlike Schmitt's political theology, which seeks established order and stability at any cost, Bergson's view of divinity allows for expansion, and it opens new possibilities for the ideals of liberal democracy to grow, even while acknowledging their limitations.

BRIEN KARAS: Paulina, in "Creative Freedom: Henri Bergson and Democratic Theory," you connect Bergson with democratic theory, which you just mentioned. Bergson wrote about liberal democracy in the few pages that he devoted exclusively to politics in *The Two Sources*. So for those who seek to draw the political implications of Bergson's philosophy, democratic theory is an obvious place to look. Yet current interpreters of Bergson in political theory usually focus on his metaphysics—they seldom discuss democracy—while most contemporary democratic theorists could hardly be less interested in Bergson's insights. Can you explain your thesis?

PAULINA OCHOA ESPEJO: In the essay you mention, I probe the areas of overlap between Bergson's philosophy and current democratic theory. Specifically, I focus on "the problem of the people," a problem that is also known as "the democratic paradox" and "the boundary problem." This is a problem of self-reference that arises because the *demos* seems to be both precondition and product of the democratic process. This problem bedevils debates on cosmopolitanism, the possibility of democracy without a state, the criteria for exclusion from the *demos*, and in general, every time there is a tension between concrete peoples and the universal democratic ideals of freedom and equality. The problem is important because it seems to show that a liberal democratic people is a chimera. The problem of the people is thus taken by many critics of liberal democracy to evince inherent flaws in any political project based simultaneously on a people and on the ideals of universal human freedom and equality. As plausible as this critique may seem, it in fact jumps too hastily to its conclusions.

Bergson's philosophy can help us dissolve the problem of the people, and thus give us new traction on all of these debates. I argue that Bergson's social and political thought can provide a solution to the problem of the people by modifying democratic principles and concepts at the root, that is, at the metaphysical level. Bergson's main insight in *The Two Sources*, (that is, the very distinction between the sources), allows us to see that this is a false problem, and thus avoid the grim conclusions of the critics. I use Bergson's insight to argue that the democratic people is not absurd — provided that we see it as an ongoing process, rather than as a fully formed entity. Seen as a process, the people is always evolving under the aegis of a self-creative drive derived from the lived experience of time and the indeterminacy of nature, a drive I call "creative freedom." This conception of the people can dissolve the problem of self-reference (where the people is both its own cause and its consequence) because it is always partial and incomplete, a part of it creating other parts as the process changes. This processual conception of the people can justify democracy without appeal to a narrow conception of popular sovereignty based on the rational social contract. It can also provide a ground for democratic theory that acknowledges the merits in the views of the critics of liberal democracy, but is yet able to defend that ideology.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: The United States faces a major injustice on its southern border (and also more recently, the failure to accept refugees from Syria) whereby the migrant has become seen as a criminal threat. Do you think that Bergson's discussion of the open and closed societies can help us in our thinking about borders? How might the figure of the migrant be akin to the figure of the mystic in *The Two Sources*?

SOULEYMANE BACHIR DIAGNE: Bergson warned us against the danger of turning the open society into a closed one. We can see in the rise, in many different places, of populisms and nationalisms as well as the return, in the public square, of xenophobic discourses of another time, that the open society is always under the threat of internal forces of closure. Hospitality to difference, ethnic or religious, is not a threat to the open society, it is a test of its openness.

PAULINA OCHOA ESPEJO: It is tempting to use Bergson's ideas of open and closed societies to think about states with open and closed borders. If we were to use the ideas of open and closed societies as a simple model, we could see those who are suspicious of immigrants as promoting a closed society, while those who believe in open borders and human rights could be labeled as representatives of the open society. However, I think this would be a simplistic reading of *The Two Sources*. In practice, any form of government, and any ideal view to which we may aspire, always presupposes a mixture of the two types of morality and religion. For example, exclusionary orders that close their borders to migrants or strangers often incorporate solidarity in their internal politics, as well as the ideals of freedom and equality. Conversely, those who promote the idea of open borders still couch their proposal in terms of legal rights. But these, for Bergson, are an institution of the closed society, because, according to him, all rule-based, legal obligations are characteristic of closed societies. So an open borders regime also bears traces of closure. (This is not difficult to see if we remember that human-rights regimes have troubling dealing with those whose cultural practices are not attune to the idea of legal rights of individuals, like patriarchal orders that put the family over the rights of women, for example.) So, given that political practices are always a mixture of the two sources, we cannot equate Bergson's idea of the open society with a country willing to receive more migrants. No matter how much empathy migrants may inspire, the figure of the migrant is too concrete to fully encompass the emotion channeled by Bergson's mystics.

In my view it would be a mistake to equate any particular moral doctrine to Bergson's second source. The second source always resists concrete content because it is an intuited emotion rather than a rationally constructed discourse. For this reason, the source cannot be reduced to a specific ideal or a movement. The second source, I think, should be seen as the condition of possibility for creative change and the capacity for moral improvement: it is the condition for the emergence of new moral doctrines. A moral intuition from the second source seeks to turn humankind into a "creative effort" such that humans can change and evolve, and "turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop."

I do think, however, that the immigration crisis may be the shock that we need to tune our feelings to the second source, and be more willing to embrace political change. To be sure, feelings towards migrants are not always warm. Vulnerable migrants often trigger strong feelings of fear that re-enforce in-group solidarity. Yet, just as frequently, the migrants' plight and their example moves individuals and societies in the opposite direction. Bergson helps us to understand and explain the origin of political practices that are generous to strangers. These changes take place when some individuals respond to an intuition that thrusts them towards moral universalization, even when it does not seem fully rational to turn in that direction. Their example inspires other individuals to break away from fear and turn towards generosity. Eventually the intuited emotion spreads across a society, which turns the intuition into speech, into doctrine, and eventually into improved practices of rule. In this particular case, the feeling that vulnerable migrants inspire might motivate citizens to make changes to their political orders; even if opening up borders or having an accepting society now seem impossible. Convincing nativists to extend their solidarity to strangers may seem far-fetched now, but this should not keep us from trying to go in that direction.

In conclusion, an open society is not strictly about open borders. It is about forms of political organization that allow for alternatives, and give us space to adapt to unforeseen circumstances. The current migration crisis is one among many opportunities for change. And we need to take advantage of these opportunities because we need political practice to better respond to the challenges that lay ahead. We have put undue pressure on the environment through uncontrolled growth, industrialization, and war. We will face unforeseen difficulties and new hard choices in the future. So, if we want to be prepared for these trials, we need to exercise our creative freedom and cultivate our capacity for change and moral improvement.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: Suzanne, in your book, *Thinking in Time*, you focus on Bergson's *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*. In the first, Bergson displaces intelligence to intuition; in the latter, Bergson deconstructs the opposition between mind and matter. You've been known to claim that *The Two Sources*, Bergson's final book, produces a feeling of estrangement for those immersed in Bergson's earlier texts. How would you describe the relationship between Bergson's earlier and later works? Perhaps you can tie together some of the threads we were just laying out about politics, religion, and ethics.

SUZANNE GUERLAC: Bergson's early work—up through *Creative Evolution*, the work, which sealed his international reputation—has been filtered for us through Deleuze. From this perspective Bergson becomes a

philosopher of immanence, an ontologist of difference. In this respect one can approach the Bergsonian notion of duration from the general horizon of post-structuralism. The issue of mechanism or determinism against which Bergson deployed his philosophy of duration remains pertinent: many contemporary biologists define life as code. With *The Two Sources*, which has not been filtered through Deleuze, and whose territory is not so much ontology as a (pre-Foucauldian) social theory, we are thrust back into the French interwar context.

Whereas *Creative Evolution* concerns biological evolution, the *The Two Sources* concerns the possibility of social (ethical) evolution. Bergson's principal interlocutor here is Durkheim, who held that the ideal of humanity (an ethics of humanity as a whole) serves as a regulative idea in a social teleology based on nineteenth century discourses of civilization (advanced by François Guizot in the 1830s). For Durkheim, the real unit of social solidarity was the nation, which, he hoped, would eventually advance to a more cosmopolitan ethics. Against Durkheim Bergson holds that the progressive realization of a rational ideal of a universally humanitarian ethics is a mystification, which you and Paulina were just discussing. WWI revealed the amorality of state sovereignty in time of war and even Durkheim affirmed the inevitability of war in a world of economic competition among sovereign nations.

Instead of a (Kantian) rational ethics Bergson proposes what he calls dynamic religion, which he characterizes as a mysticism, thereby avoiding all theological specificity or entanglement. Mysticism aligns with what he calls the "open society," an alternative to the Durkheimian model of social cohesion which operates at the level of the nation, and which Bergson calls the "closed" society.

The Two Sources carries Bergson's philosophy of life into the realm of social and ethical concerns. The distinction between the "closed" society and the "open" one plays out the difference between the (scientific) order of intelligence and the vital order (the order of duration that we access through intuition). As he writes already in *Creative Evolution* "If the intuition that accompanies science [...] can be extended it can only be by mystical intuition." Bergson writes that "the mystical experience extends the one that lead us to the doctrine of the *élan vital*," and, in so doing, goes beyond the philosophical conclusions reached in *Creative Evolution*. The opposition between the mechanistic and the vital is rephrased in *The Two Sources* in terms of a distinction between mechanism [*mécanicité*] and mysticism. Mechanism no longer implies only a metaphysical or epistemological attitude. It now includes a socio-political/industrial structure and implies the instrumental exploitation of natural (and, implicitly, human) resources.

MARK WILLIAM WESTMORELAND: I think concluding with a reflection on Bergson's last book is a good place to end. Brien and I want to thank you all for participating. It was good to hear divergent and sometimes opposing interpretations of Bergson. And, perhaps more interesting as we think about the influence of Bergson's thought over the last 75 years is that we consider how his thought might be extended into contemporary problems that we face in the twenty-first century.