

HENRI BERGSON

VLADIMIR JANKÉLÉVITCH

ALEXANDRE LEFEBVRE & NILS F. SCHOTT, EDITORS

TRANSLATED BY NILS F. SCHOTT



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INTRODUCTION BY ALEXANDRE LEFEBVRE

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CONTENTS

EDITORS' PREFACE vii

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS ix

INTRODUCTION. Jankélévitch on Bergson: Living in Time xi
Alexandre Lefebvre

INTRODUCTION I

CHAPTER ONE. Organic Totalities 3

- I. *The Whole and Its Elements* 4
- II. *The Retrospective View and the Illusion of the Future Perfect* II

CHAPTER TWO. Freedom 23

- I. *Actor and Spectator* 24
- II. *Becoming* 30
- III. *The Free Act* 49

CHAPTER THREE. Soul and Body 66

- I. *Thought and Brain* 66
- II. *Recollection and Perception* 79
- III. *Intellection* 89
- IV. *Memory and Matter* 94

CHAPTER FOUR. Life 109

- I. *Finality* 109
- II. *Instinct and Intellect* 119
- III. *Matter and Life* 137

CHAPTER FIVE. Heroism and Saintliness 151

- I. *Suddenness* 152
- II. *The Open and the Closed* 156
- III. *Bergson's Maximalism* 159

CHAPTER SIX. The Nothingness of Concepts and
the Plenitude of Spirit 167

- I. *Fabrication and Organization: The Demiurgic Prejudice* 167
- II. *On the Possible* 179

CHAPTER SEVEN. Simplicity... and Joy 191

- I. *On Simplicity* 191
- II. *Bergson's Optimism* 203

APPENDICES 211

SUPPLEMENTARY PIECES 247

- Preface to the First Edition of Henri Bergson (1930)* 247
- Letters to Vladimir Jankélévitch by Henri Bergson* 248
- Letter to Louis Beauduc on First Meeting Bergson (1923)* 250
- What Is the Value of Bergson's Thought? Interview with*
Françoise Reiss (1959) 251
- Solemn Homage to Henri Bergson (1959)* 253

NOTES 261

BIBLIOGRAPHY 299

INDEX 315

EDITORS' PREFACE

"Jankélévitch's works," Arnold Davidson writes, are characterized "by his inimitable style of writing, his invention of a vocabulary, and a rhythm of prose whose texture is a perpetual challenge for any translator to try to capture."¹ This is true of *Henri Bergson* in more ways than one. Its re-composition for the second edition of 1959—on which this translation is based—combines a very early treatise with a text in which Jankélévitch has found his voice. It brings together a reenactment of Bergson's philosophy in an often breathless current with a melodic interweaving of motifs. Yet it also implies the occasional disparity. This is a stylistic matter, but concerns documentation, for example, as well. Our goal in editing and translating the texts included in this volume, which comprises nearly all of Jankélévitch's writings on Bergson,² has thus been twofold: on the one hand, to remain close to the text with its idiosyncrasies and, on the other, to make it as accessible as possible to a wider audience without intimate knowledge of Ancient Greek, Latin, Russian, and German (languages in which Jankélévitch not only quotes but in which he even writes on occasion) and who may not have the wide-ranging philosophical knowledge (to mention but one field) Jankélévitch seems to presuppose in his readers but in fact may have been one of the few to possess.

We have, therefore, retained Jankélévitch's capitalization, punctuation, and so forth, wherever doing so does not contravene American usage outright. That said, we have adapted the use of tenses, for example, and changed what would appear in English as incomplete sentences by supplementing subjects and verbs, by dropping prepositions (where warranted), or by combining sentences. More often, however, we have broken up sentences, as Jankélévitch uses semicolons the way others use periods. Further, suspension points (...) are a central rhetorical device for him, and distinct from ellipses (...). To reveal the structure of Jankélévitch's

argument and to make the text more manageable, we have broken down paragraphs, which in the original can run to several pages.

There are relatively few direct quotations in the book. Jankélévitch instead weaves references into his text, frequently without marking them. Very often, these seem less to refer to any specific passage of a text than to possible connections to be established with the discussion he is currently engaged in. Quotations from texts written in Greek, Latin, and German have been replaced by translations, and the number of terms and phrases in other languages has been greatly reduced. Where they are available, we have used existing translations but modified them, when needed, to conform to Jankélévitch's reading of a text. This applies in particular to Greek texts but, of course, to Bergson's books as well. We have also kept parenthetical mentions of French terms to a minimum.

All references have been checked. In the 1959 edition of *Henri Bergson*, Jankélévitch refers to the original Alcan editions for some of Bergson's books and the newer Presses Universitaires de France (PUF) editions for others, but does not do so consistently. Although we have taken on what Jankélévitch calls the "long and tedious labor" of aligning these references,³ this means that occasionally, it is not entirely clear what passage exactly Jankélévitch meant to point to. In such cases, references are to entire paragraphs (which can span several pages) or longer discussions. Missing references have been supplied, evidently incorrect ones silently corrected. All references are found in the notes.

References to other authors have been specified where possible, although some—like the reference to Lermontov's poetry—are too general to be pinpointed, others simply too obscure. Where possible, Jankélévitch's references have been updated to refer to newer translations or more accessible editions. Given the richness of the text, which would require a critical apparatus of immense proportions, we have opted to provide only a minimum of explanatory notes.

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In the process of editing and translating the book, we have been greatly helped by the staff of a large number of libraries, including, in Paris, the various branches of the Bibliothèque nationale de France, the Bibliothèque Sainte Geneviève, the libraries of the Sorbonne and the American University of Paris, the American Library in Paris, and the Bibliothèque publique d'information; in the United States, the Library of Congress, the New York Public Library, and the Sheridan Libraries of the Johns Hopkins University; in Berlin, the University and Philological Libraries at the Free University and the Staatsbibliothek; and the University of Sydney Library.

This project has brought us together many years after our graduate studies in the Humanities Center at The Johns Hopkins University. We dedicate this volume to our teachers there, Paola Marrati and Hent de Vries.

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INTRODUCTION

JANKÉLÉVITCH ON BERGSON: LIVING IN TIME

Alexandre Lefebvre

Just twenty-one years old and a doctoral student of the École Normale Supérieure, Vladimir Jankélévitch met Henri Bergson at his Paris home. This was a big moment for the young student. France's greatest living philosopher was not only a hero to him but, on top of that, also the subject of his very first article, which only weeks previously had been accepted for publication.¹ Keen to speak with the master himself, the two met for an hour and a half. These are the first impressions he noted down for a friend:

Speaking of Bergson: last Sunday, I finally saw the great man at his home; we chatted for a good hour and a half. His is a charming simplicity, and I beg you to believe that one feels much more at ease with him—great man that he is—than with that fussy B[réhier]. Picture a little bony fellow (and I imagined him to be tall) whose 65 years show, with very round blue eyes that seem to latch onto something in the distance when he speaks. His speech is slow (an academic's deformation!) but very simple and without affectation, despite some surprising images that, bursting into the conversation with abrupt impertinence, remind the listener that it is Bergson he's listening to.²

This meeting took place in 1923 and, over the years, a close intellectual friendship blossomed between them that would last until the end of Bergson's life.³ The pattern of their exchanges was for Jankélévitch to send an article that he had written on Bergson's philosophy for comment, and, in turn, receive a warm and encouraging reply. So, for example, in 1924 Jankélévitch passed along his "Two Philosophies of Life: Bergson, Guyau" and in 1928 sent "Prolegomena to Bergsonism" and "Bergsonism and Biology."⁴ Thanks to the reputation gained from these early writings, not to mention the high esteem Bergson held him in, Jankélévitch

was soon asked by a former student of Bergson's if he would write a short book. He accepted enthusiastically. "Delacroix has asked me for a book on Bergson for the 'Great Philosophers' series (to be published by Alcan)," he told his friend. "I accepted. I can say that the book is almost done. All that's left is to write it. It's a one- or two-year job."⁵

Perhaps this statement was a little brash on Jankélévitch's part. But, then again, it didn't prove untrue. The first edition of *Henri Bergson* was published in 1930 and to acclaim. It received very positive reviews.⁶ And, most impressively, it included a fulsome preface in the form of a letter by Bergson himself.

Dear Sir,

You have done me the honor of dedicating a work to the whole of my writings. I have read it closely, and I want you to know the interest I took in reading it and the delight it has given me. Not only is your account exact and precise; not only is it informed by such a complete and extended textual study that the citations seem to answer, all by themselves, the call of ideas; above all, it also demonstrates a remarkable deepening of the theory and an intellectual sympathy that led you to discover the stages I went through, the paths I followed, and sometimes the terms that I would have used if I had expounded what remained implicit. I add that this work of analysis goes hand in hand with a singularly interesting effort of synthesis: often my point of arrival was for you a point of departure for original speculations of your own.

Allow me to send my compliments and thanks for this penetrating study, and please trust, dear Sir, in my highest regard.

H. BERGSON.⁷

These glowing lines are helpful to introduce the flavor of Jankélévitch's reading of Bergson. First of all, it is clear that Bergson did not see this book as merely an exegesis of his work. Neither did he think of his relationship to Jankélévitch as a one-way street where the master would simply lead his disciple. His preface points instead to a mutual enrichment of young and old philosopher. And this wasn't mere politeness or fine words on Bergson's part. The proof is that several of his own key later essays—most notably, "The Possible and the Real" and the "Introductions" of *Creative Mind*—would be devoted to amplifying themes from his own work that Jankélévitch had originally highlighted in his study, such as the critique of retrospection and the categories of the possible and nothingness.⁸ Truly, what higher praise is there?

Another notable feature of Bergson's preface is his gratitude to Jankélévitch for treating his oeuvre as a living doctrine, as something that was unpredictable in its development and that continues to grow in new directions. This is significant in light of the reception of Bergson at the time, which was undergoing a major shift. Prior to the First World War, Bergson had been the philosopher of the avant-garde par excellence. True, he was world famous. And yes, the educated public and high society flocked to his lectures. But he was also the vital point of reference for leading artistic and political movements of the day, no matter how diverse. Cubism, symbolism, literary modernism, anarchism, and many others, all took their cue from him.⁹ Yet despite this tremendous success and effect—or likely, because of it—Bergson remained a relative outsider in academic philosophy.¹⁰

After the Great War, however, all that changes. On the one hand, the onetime patron saint of youth, art, and culture is dismissed as a dated establishment figure. And, on the other hand, the onetime renegade philosopher is elevated to the position of a historical “great,” one perfectly at home on a shelf with Descartes, Pascal, and Kant.¹¹ Raymond Aron, a classmate of Jankélévitch's, sums up Bergson's reversal of status particularly well: “Bergson is someone everyone knows, to whom some people listen, and who nobody regards as contemporary.”¹² A great merit of Jankélévitch's book for Bergson, then, is to resist this rather unhappy experience of being embalmed alive, of being canonized and shelved all at once. By plumbing the undiscovered depths of his works, and by glimpsing the paths by which it could be renewed and extended, Jankélévitch reinvigorates the élan of a doctrine that was at great risk of becoming a classic.¹³

Bergson thus praises Jankélévitch for representing a vital doctrine still in the making. This, however, is itself a tricky point; and, after Bergson's death in 1941, things get more complicated. The reason is that Jankélévitch will write not just one but two versions of *Henri Bergson*. There is the first 1930 edition, and then another in 1959. It is this second edition that we have prepared for the present volume. What is the difference between the two? The 1959 edition has three more chapters.¹⁴ By and large, these extra chapters treat Bergson's final work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, which had not yet appeared when the first volume was published in 1930. Thus, Jankélévitch adds one chapter on heroism and sainthood, another on simplicity and joy, and an appendix on Bergson's thought and Judaism. He also writes a new introduction and conclusion.

Stated in these terms, however, the difference between the two editions appears to be merely quantitative: the 1930 edition has five chapters, the 1959 edition has eight. But, in truth, there is a more basic and yet less tangible difference. It relates to the lavish praise given by Bergson in his preface to the first edition. What he admires in Jankélévitch is his ability to place the reader within a process of philosophical creation, one in which the doctrine is in the midst of working itself out and with all the risks and unpredictability that this involves. But the situation is different, of course, in 1959. Then, nearly twenty years after Bergson's death, the object of Jankélévitch's commentary effectively changes. No longer working on a philosophy that is flying and running, he is, instead, writing on one that has flown its course and run its race. He is, in other words, addressing a completed doctrine. The result is a fascinating overlay. By necessity, Jankélévitch's second edition (1959) combines the original commentary of the first edition (1930)—which, as Bergson said, does its utmost to honor a living and breathing philosophy—together with a later perspective that now has the whole and complete philosophy before it.

The marvelous texture of Jankélévitch's book can be put in other, more Bergsonian terms. At its most basic level, Bergson's philosophy boils down to an awareness (or perhaps better, a perception) that the past and the present are very different from one another. The past is time that is done and gone, and, because of that, can be analyzed, broken down, and reconstructed in a great many ways. But that's not the case for the present. Because it is in the making, the present is open-ended, unpredictable, and resistant to analysis. Seen from the perspective of this difference, then, Jankélévitch's *Henri Bergson* is something more than a substantively rich commentary on Bergson. Thanks to its creation in two different editions, it is also a work that uniquely presents—or rather, that uniquely *is*—the temporalities that Bergson had labored his whole life to present and distinguish: a living present, thick and unforeseeable; and an accomplished past, available to analysis and retrospection.

Why Read Jankélévitch's Henri Bergson?

Here, then, is one tempting reason to read Jankélévitch's *Henri Bergson*: its composition exhibits the very temporalities that Bergson sought to represent. But there are, of course, other reasons. Some, we might say, concern Jankélévitch's own philosophical development; others concern

his interpretation of Bergson and the features that distinguish it from existing commentaries.

Let's begin with the first point: *Henri Bergson* is not only a great book *on* Bergson; it is also a great book *by* Jankélévitch in his own right and a key point of reference for his oeuvre. Here a remark of Bergson's is particularly apt. In "Philosophical Intuition," he claims that any great philosopher has, in all honesty, only one or two "infinitely simple" ideas that are elaborated over the course of his or her life.¹⁵ Taking up the suggestion, what would we say is Jankélévitch's "big idea"? What single idea could possibly span a most prolific and diverse oeuvre, one that includes over forty books in philosophy and musicology?¹⁶ The answer is given in his letters: irreversibility. "Irreversibility," he says, is "the primitive fact of spiritual life . . . [it is] the very center of moral life."¹⁷ What does he mean by irreversibility? Nothing other than the fact that we live in time and that we cannot, in a literal sense, undo what has already been done:

It strikes me that irreversibility represents *objectivity* par excellence. Objectivity, experientially speaking, is that on which we can't do anything. . . . The will can do anything—except one thing: undo that which it has done. The power of undoing is of another order: of the order of grace, if you will. It is a miracle. Orpheus could have not looked back. But the moment he did, Eurydice is lost forever. God alone could do it, if he wanted. The mind [*l'esprit*] thus carries in itself the supreme objectivity, and yet it is true, as idealism tells us, that this objectivity depends on us. It would take too long to tell you how this can be confirmed in all the domains of spiritual life.¹⁸

When we scan the titles of Jankélévitch's oeuvre we see that they revolve around the problem of irreversibility. His works on forgiveness, bad conscience, the instant, nostalgia, evil and harm, and above all, on death, are all meditations of how moral, aesthetic, and religious life responds to and accommodates, for better or worse, the basic fact of irreversibility.¹⁹ It is for this reason that Jankélévitch's writings on Bergson have a very special place in his corpus.

Put it this way: if we were to turn the tables on Bergson and ask him to identify his own big idea, an excellent candidate would be irreversibility. Underlying Bergson's conception of lived and effective time (what he calls "duration") is an awareness that it cannot be broken down, reordered, and reconstructed without distortion, without betraying its nature

as time and turning into something else (that which he calls “space”). As one commentator puts it, “Bergson will affirm a dynamic ontology of irreversible time.”²⁰ In this respect, we might say that Jankélévitch is a Bergsonian moralist (and, in another register, a Bergsonian musicologist). His writings recast a range of moral problems and topics through Bergson’s appreciation of the irreversibility of time. His book on Bergson, then, could rightfully be called the ground zero of his own philosophical project. Not just because it is his first work, but more importantly, because it is his original (and with the second edition following later, a renewed) attempt to formulate what will become the defining theme of his philosophy.

Let’s turn now to his reading of Bergson. What makes it special? To my mind, its great virtue is to present Bergson as a philosopher of existence. By this, I mean that the defining feature of Jankélévitch’s exposition is to consistently couple Bergson’s insights on the nature of time, memory, evolution, and morality, together with Bergson’s (and also his own) reflections on a concrete way of life that would be in harmony with these realities. Understood in this way, the great end of Bergson’s philosophy is to present a mode of living that would be more intensely present, receptive, loving, and ultimately joyful. That is Jankélévitch’s accomplishment. He convincingly portrays Bergson as a philosopher who strives to effect a personal or “existential” transformation in his readers just as much as he seeks to furnish a theoretical discourse to explain reality.

My introduction to this volume will flesh out this line of interpretation. Right away, though, I should say that Jankélévitch is not alone in reading Bergson this way. Just recently, for example, I was happy to discover a volume on Bergson in the popular “Life Lessons” book series.²¹ Moreover, two of Bergson’s greatest readers—William James and Frédéric Worms—place a philosophy of existence at the center of their respective interpretations of Bergson. James, for his part, affirms that Bergson exacts a “certain inner catastrophe”—that is, a reorientation of perception and attitude—in each of his readers.²² Likewise, Worms argues, “It is as if Bergson’s philosophy rediscovered from the outset the most ancient task of philosophy, which is not to distinguish between concepts, but between ways of conducting oneself, not only to think, but also to intervene in life, to reform or transform it.”²³ Other readers have also been drawn to Bergson for this reason. Pierre Hadot, the contemporary thinker who more than anyone has revived an appreciation of philosophy “as a way of life,” describes his

attraction to Bergson and Bergsonism precisely in these terms. “For me,” he says in an interview, “the essential of Bergsonism will always be the idea of philosophy as transformation of perception.”²⁴ For Hadot as well, the basic aim of Bergsonism is to transform our everyday orientation or way of life.

Although such interpretations of Bergson abound, Jankélévitch’s book is the most determined and comprehensive effort in that direction. This makes it an especially important text for an English-speaking audience. Why? Because the English-language reception of Bergson’s philosophy has been dominated by another great work of interpretation that sidelines the philosophy of existence: Gilles Deleuze’s *Bergsonism* (1966). This book almost single-handedly revived interest in Bergson in the English-speaking world. But it is interesting in light of Jankélévitch’s efforts that it deliberately underplays the psychological, spiritual, and existential aspects of Bergson’s thought. I would like here to briefly turn to Deleuze’s interpretation and mark out its basic differences from that of Jankélévitch’s.

Deleuze’s Bergsonism

It is not at all controversial to claim that Deleuze effectively revived interest in Bergson for English speakers. Indeed, the “Henri Bergson” entry for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* begins on just this note: “While such French thinkers as Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, and Lévinas explicitly acknowledged his influence on their thought, it is generally agreed that it was Gilles Deleuze’s 1966 *Bergsonism* that marked the reawakening of interest in Bergson’s work.”²⁵ Consider too that most of the recent major works on Bergson in English are guided by Deleuze’s interpretation, such as John Mullarkey’s *Bergson and Philosophy* (1999), Keith Ansell-Pearson’s *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual* (2002), and Leonard Lawlor’s *The Challenge of Bergsonism* (2003).

Why is Deleuze’s interpretation so prominent? Certainly Deleuze’s status and the key role that Bergson plays in his own thought is a significant reason, along with the fact that *Bergsonism* is a short book and that it was translated into English relatively early in relation to his other works. But most importantly, *Bergsonism* is an indisputably powerful work of interpretation. It is tremendously systematic, tightly presented, and speaks in a commanding no-nonsense tone. For all its strengths, though, balance

is not one of them. Deleuze is highly selective in terms of the concepts he chooses to exposit. And he is determined to demonstrate a clear-cut progression in Bergson's thought.

It's helpful here to draw out these two features in order to contrast Deleuze's and Jankélévitch's respective interpretations. First, Deleuze interprets Bergson's philosophy in terms of a progression, wherein the insights of his early writings are fully realized only in his later work. And it's not as if Deleuze is coy about this feature of his interpretation. To the contrary, he couldn't be more up front about it! Just look at the famous first lines of *Bergsonism*: "Duration, Memory, *Élan Vital* mark the major stages of Bergson's philosophy. This book sets out to determine, first, the relationship between these three notions and, second, the progress they involve."²⁶ With his talk of stages and progress, this is a bold opening move. Indeed, it is a highly—an incredibly!—anti-Bergsonian gambit. No doubt, it buys Deleuze a sharp and systematic presentation; but it comes at the price of faithfulness to precisely what Jankélévitch labored hard to capture: the real duration and lived development of Bergson's philosophy. Or, to put the point in more technical terms, at the outset of his interpretation of Bergson, Deleuze avowedly (I am tempted to say, brazenly) occupies the very standpoint that Bergson had spent a lifetime problematizing: a retrospective vision that sees movement only in terms of the destination it reaches.

What is that destination according to Deleuze? It is Bergson's eventual realization of the ontological, and not merely psychological, nature of duration. Bergson's trajectory, in other words, is said by Deleuze to trace a progressive realization that the notion of duration he uncovers in his early work cannot be confined to merely psychological or subjective experience. Duration, instead, comes to be recognized as the very substance of life and being. As Suzanne Guerlac states, for Deleuze it is as if Bergson's thought "self-corrects" as it moves away from "the phenomenological cast of the early work, toward the purely ontological character of *Creative Evolution*."²⁷ At every point in his interpretation Deleuze is keen to push past Bergson's analysis of subjective experience toward an ontological—or, as he puts it, an "inhuman" or "superhuman"²⁸—register of duration.

This brings us to the second feature of *Bergsonism*: Deleuze's select concentration on themes and concepts from Bergson's philosophy. Because Deleuze is keen to demonstrate that psychological duration is only a particular case of ontological duration, he systematically underplays

the subjectivist, spiritualist, and phenomenological dimensions of Bergson's thought. Here again, Guerlac is helpful to characterize this bent of Deleuze's interpretation: "It is as if, in *Le bergsonisme* (1966), Deleuze had carefully edited out all those features of Bergson's thought that might appear 'metaphysical' (the soul, life, value, memory, choice), all those features that distinguish the human being from the machine, that suggest an appeal to experience and a phenomenological perspective. It is perhaps this gesture that most clearly delineates the contours of the New Bergson."²⁹ In Deleuze's interpretation, then, there is a studied avoidance of precisely those psychological and existential features of duration that Jankélévitch foregrounds.

This tendency to avoid the psychological and subjective has consequences for which texts Deleuze decides to focus on. In a nutshell, the more ontological works (especially *Matter and Memory* and *Creative Evolution*) are in; the more psychological (or "phenomenological" or "existential") texts are out. Deleuze, for example, largely restricts his discussion of Bergson's first work, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* (1889), to its mathematical theory of multiplicities. He also makes no reference to Bergson's essay on laughter and the comic. Yet by far the most significant omission of Deleuze's text concerns Bergson's final great work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932). In *Bergsonism*, Deleuze devotes a scant seven pages to it. And it's not difficult to see why given that *Two Sources* is, in large measure, a book on the emotions and has as its centerpiece an account of the pressure and pull of obligation and the aspiration to love.³⁰ Clearly, for Deleuze, this feature of *Two Sources* does not sit well within a narrative that recounts Bergson's career as progressively moving away from a theory of subjective experience toward an ontological account of duration.³¹

Did Deleuze read Jankélévitch's book on Bergson? It is hard to believe he didn't. The second edition of *Henri Bergson* was published well before Deleuze would have begun writing *Bergsonism*. Yet there is not a single mention of Jankélévitch's book.³² In light of their basic differences of approach, this is perhaps not so surprising. In terms of style and composition, and also with respect to their substantive and textual focal points, the two books are at opposite ends of the spectrum. First, Jankélévitch writes out Bergson's philosophy from the perspective of the lived present, whereas Deleuze explicitly adopts a retrospective position. Second, Jankélévitch privileges the psychological dimensions of Bergson's work that Deleuze eschews. And third, Jankélévitch gives special attention to

those texts that Deleuze downplays (namely, *Time and Free Will* and *Two Sources*). But while these differences may once have marked a contest over Bergson's philosophy, today they are a genuine boon. For as Nietzsche said with respect to the ancients, "we will not hesitate to adopt a Stoic recipe just because we have profited in the past from Epicurean recipes."³³ So too with us. English readers of Bergson have long enjoyed Deleuze's interpretation. Jankélévitch's book will hopefully provide just as rewarding fare. To continue Nietzsche's metaphor, we could say that by holding the divergent but not incompatible perspectives of *Henri Bergson* and *Bergsonism* in mind, we have the unique chance to have our Bergsonian cake and eat it too.

Jankélévitch on Bergson

Jankélévitch's *Henri Bergson* is a comprehensive commentary on Bergson's philosophy, with chapters devoted to all four of his major books. But, as is the nature of Jankélévitch's writing, it also includes a series of what one might call improvisations on Bergsonian themes, such as life, embodiment, and joy. At times this interweaving of interpretation and improvisation makes it difficult to keep the principal lines of the book in sight. To conclude this introduction I would like to briefly sketch its structure and a few of its animating problematics.

The structure is relatively straightforward. Jankélévitch lays it out early in chapter 1:

The experience of duration determines [the] true and internal style [of Bergson's philosophy]. Duration is what we find in the "infinitely simple" image at issue in the lecture "Philosophical Intuition," and it is really the lively source of Bergson's meditations. Before we follow its successive incarnations by way of four problem-types—the *effort of intellection*, *freedom*, *finality*, *heroism*—we have to go back to the "primitive fact" that, in matters of the soul, governs all of Bergson's ascetic approach. (4)

Duration and the experience of duration is the core (or "primitive fact") of Bergson's philosophy according to Jankélévitch. As such, chapter 1 is dedicated to an exposition of its three modalities: past (which he calls "succession"), present (which he calls "coexistence"), and future (which he calls "becoming"). From there, as Jankélévitch says, he takes up the theme of duration within the context of four "problem-types" that map,

with some degree of overlap, onto each of Bergson's major works. Thus, chapters 2 and 3 treat duration in relation to intellection and freedom in *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*; chapter 4 addresses duration with respect to finalism and teleology in *Creative Evolution*; and chapter 5 addresses the temporality of heroism and love in *Two Sources*. The final two chapters work a bit differently. Here Jankélévitch's aim is to make explicit certain understated motifs that traverse Bergson's philosophy. In this vein, chapter 6 (which, in the 1930 edition, was the final chapter) extracts Bergson's tacit critique of the categories of "nothingness" and "possibility."³⁴ Chapter 7 does the same but this time with positive concepts: the presence of joy and the imperative of simplicity that imbue all of Bergson's writing. Finally, as a kind of coda, the book compares conceptions of time in Judaism and Bergson.

As I've suggested, Jankélévitch interprets Bergson in terms of a philosophy of existence: namely, as a doctrine that sets out a way of life attuned to the nature of duration. But why is a life lived in sync with time, so to speak, so important for Bergson? What are the stakes? Jankélévitch identifies them straightaway in chapter 1: human beings, and us moderns in particular, have an inveterate tendency to deny and repress time and movement, such that we both misapprehend the world and also close off pathways of self-understanding and experience. He calls this tendency the "illusion" or "idol" of retrospectivity (16).

Like the devil it is, this idol has many guises. Truth be told, it takes a different form for each facet of human life, whether it is our self-understanding, our conception of freedom, our appreciation of nature, our depiction of morality, or how we envisage the future. As Jankélévitch puts it, "Bergson for his part never relented in denouncing, more or less implicitly, this idol in all problems of life" (16). But underlying all of its manifestations, the core of the illusion of retrospectivity is to reconstruct any event or phenomenon as a modification of already given parts. Its essence, in other words, is to deny novelty in favor of an explanation that represents any process of change either as an increase or decrease of existing elements or else as a rearrangement of them. From the perspective of this illusion, then, a new sensation or feeling is seen as an intensification or diminution of a previous one; freedom is envisaged as a deliberation between alternatives; an organism is comprehended as the product of its combined parts; all-embracing love is grasped as the expansion of exclusive attachments; and the future is seized as the predicted outcome of a reshuffled present. Jankélévitch will track down all of these

permutations. But again, if we can set aside the details of his reading, the overarching point is that for Bergson the illusion of retrospection isn't just an error of understanding. Its failing is not simply that it gets the world, or ourselves, or the nature of change "wrong." Its effects, rather, are practical. The distortion we suffer is not merely cognitive but also existential.

Here we can speak concretely. One way to approach Jankélévitch's *Henri Bergson* is as a treatise on the different dispositions or moods that are vitiated by the retrospective illusion. He highlights three in particular: naivety, wonder, and simplicity. Indeed, the threatened loss of one of these dispositions is at the heart of each of his readings of Bergson's major works: naivety in *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, wonder in *Creative Evolution*, and simplicity in *Two Sources and Creative Mind*. In each case, Jankélévitch demonstrates that for Bergson the retrospective illusion confounds our knowledge of the world and of ourselves, that it undermines particular experiences, and most disastrously, that it blocks joyful and intense modes of life. I will briefly summarize each in turn.

NAIVETY

"Naivety" is a keyword in *Henri Bergson*, especially in the early chapters on *Time and Free Will* (chapter 2, "Freedom") and *Matter and Memory* (chapter 3, "Soul and Body"). With it, Jankélévitch marks Bergson's goal to "place us, once again, in the presence of *immediately perceived qualities*" (29). But for Jankélévitch this term is also an exegetical device. He uses it, on the one hand, to mark the fundamental continuity between Bergson's first two books in that both seek to recover a capacity for unprejudiced and immediate perception. But he also uses it, on the other hand, as a foil to contrast these same works and show genuine evolution—in the sense of an unplanned and innovative development—in Bergson's oeuvre.

Let us consider the contrast. Jankélévitch says that Bergson seeks "immediately perceived qualities." But perceived qualities of what? What is the "object," for lack of a better word, that Bergson seeks a naive perception of? Jankélévitch observes that it changes over the course of the two books. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson seeks an unmediated perception of spiritual life and consciousness. The problem in this text, according to Jankélévitch, is how to regain a naive (or pure, or exact) perception of ourselves in light of the abstract and distancing nature of intellection. *Matter and Memory*, by contrast, has a slightly but significantly different

goal. Certainly, the desire for naive perception remains; but, at the same time, Jankélévitch notices that its object changes. Whereas before in *Time and Free Will* it was a question of perceiving ourselves, now, in *Matter and Memory*, it becomes a question of how to perceive things in the world (“images,” as Bergson would say) outside the associations, opinions, and prejudices we foist on them. As Jankélévitch puts it, Bergson’s thrust in *Matter and Memory* is “to dissociate the immediate given from the ‘suggestions’ of habit and association” (88). The conclusion Jankélévitch draws from this comparison is brilliant. He demonstrates that the very reality Bergson uncovers in his first book (i.e., the rich thickness of spiritual life and the deep self) becomes a key obstacle to confront in his second book: namely, how the wholeness of the person obtrudes his or her past (i.e., his or her memory) on the world, such that, in the end, true knowledge and experience of things fall into mere recognition and familiarity.

In one sense, then, Jankélévitch’s analysis of naivety shows variation in Bergson’s work. Yet to fixate on this variation is to miss the forest for the trees. We must not forget that Jankélévitch is equally keen to prove just how steadfast Bergson is in his search for lost naivety and unprejudiced perception. This is, indeed, the ambition that links *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*. Driving the critique of intellection and retrospection in *Time and Free Will*, Jankélévitch returns time and again to Bergson’s concrete ambition: to show the possibility of a pure perception of the self so that we may become fully present to our own experience. His aim, in Jankélévitch’s words, is to release us from the state of living as a “posthumous consciousness [that] lets the miraculous occasions of contemporaneity pass by forever” (17). The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for *Matter and Memory*. While Bergson’s critical apparatus may take aim at a different target, Jankélévitch is clear that his goal remains constant: to regain an immediate perception of the world—a “learned naivety”—that is nothing short of a mode of life, a way of being that is more receptive, sensitive, and present. “No other theory has ever shown more forcefully and more lucidly to what extent learned simplicity, which separates us from our dear and old superstitions, in reality brings us closer to the center of the mind. Those who recollect too much will always remain ignorant of the innocence of life. But those who know how to renounce memory will find themselves, and in themselves, reality” (105). “That,” he concludes, “is what Bergson’s philosophy asks of us.”

WONDER

Jankélévitch's commentary on Bergson's most famous book, *Creative Evolution*, begins with an examination of a particularly entrenched idol of retrospection: finalism or teleology. Finalism is the doctrine that natural processes and evolution are directed toward a goal. Or, in Jankélévitch's more pointed definition, its essence is to "subject life to the execution of a transcendent program." Its principal sin, he elaborates, is "to exhaust the unforeseeable movement of life in advance, in a fictitious future that is not 'to come' (except on paper) and that, mentally is already past" (110). In chapter 4 ("Life") Jankélévitch enumerates the manifold errors of understanding that finalism commits. These include misrepresenting immanent or vital causality, not acknowledging discontinuity in evolution, and failing to grasp the pluri-dimensional character of evolution.

But along with these errors of understanding, Jankélévitch also diagnoses a moral (or rather, an existential) failing that stems from finalism and retrospection. He calls it, borrowing from Schopenhauer, "teleological astonishment" (114). Such astonishment happens, according to Jankélévitch, when finalism is combined—as it almost always is—with a conception of nature as created by a demiurge or creator. The result is the discourse of creationism: a view that evolution is purposive and that biological life is made the same way that an artisan produces his work, namely by crafting parts into a whole. Creationism is thus, for Jankélévitch, a striking case of the retrospective idol. Or more exactly, it is a species of that idol: it is the form retrospection takes when confronted with the plurality and movement of life. Creationism both eliminates the creativity of time by turning evolution into design and also portrays vital creation in terms of an unfathomably complicated combination of parts. For these reasons, Jankélévitch charges it with the errors of retrospection. Fair enough. But why, then, does he see in it a moral failing as well? Because it is narcissistic. "In thus reducing the operation of nature to a procedure of the mechanical type," writes Jankélévitch, "our intellect in a way admires itself. It is in fact one of the intellect's most absurd manias to thus create within things a certain complicated order in order to enjoy the spectacle. It is perpetually lunatic and loses itself in the ridiculous contemplation of its own image" (114).

The casualty of this kind of astonishment is wonder. For when we gape at the so-called complexity of this kind of artisanal creation, or when we reel at the so-called greatness of the craftsman behind it, what

we really opt for is admiration of feats drawn from our own likeness. This is why, according to Jankélévitch, Bergson's efforts in *Creative Evolution* seek to regain a disposition of wonder: "For the one who adopts an entirely different scale from the beginning, who from the outset conceives an entirely different metempirical and supernatural order, stupid *amazement* would no doubt make way for *wonder* and veneration of the sublime thing" (116). No doubt, inculcating a disposition of wonder is difficult. It requires us to swim against a very strong current. For to do so we must resign ourselves to remain contemporary with the history of vitality and not subject it to a transcendent plan. Or positively speaking—and in a line that might as well have come from the pen of Deleuze—we must reorient ourselves according to a "nominalism of the virtual," in which open-ended tendencies are acknowledged as the genuine realities of life (181). But the upshot of an attunement to duration is to attain an adequate comprehension of life as process and movement and, in so doing, rescue wonder—that existential attitude at the heart of philosophical inquiry—from its degradation into a merely astonished contemplation of ourselves.

SIMPLICITY

In French as in English, the word "simplicity" has several meanings. It can designate something that is undivided and unalloyed. And it can also refer to a way of being that is plain, unpretentious, and uncomplicated. For Jankélévitch, the virtue of Bergson's work—the "beautiful aridity" of his philosophy (203)—is that it combines these different meanings. And in the three concluding chapters of *Henri Bergson*, he sets out to show how Bergsonian simplicity can infuse all the different dimensions of our life: moral (chapter 5, "Heroism and Saintliness"), intellectual (chapter 6, "The Nothingness of Concepts and the Plenitude of Spirit"), and affective and aesthetic (chapter 7, "Simplicity... and Joy").

Consider intellectual simplicity. Like so many other major philosophers of the twentieth century—such as the later Wittgenstein, J. L. Austin, Stanley Cavell, John Dewey, Jacques Derrida, and Richard Rorty—Bergson advances a method (he calls it "intuition") to release us from long-standing but ultimately fruitless problems of philosophy. These problems include, for example, Zeno's paradoxes on movement, the Kantian relativity of knowledge, as well as vexing concepts of possibility and nothingness. But while there are innumerable pseudo-problems and

idle concepts according to Bergson, for him they all stem from one and the same fault: our inveterate tendency to confuse time with space and quality with quantity. What is the solution? A critical method able to distinguish these categories and analyze each on its own terms, pure and unalloyed. That, as Jankélévitch explains at length, is precisely what Bergson's philosophy provides: a means to think "quantity quantitatively" and "quality qualitatively" (152). Or, to revert to the language of simplicity, Bergson's achievement is to furnish a way of thinking of time, space, quality and quantity "simply" (i.e., as unalloyed with one another) in order to attain a tranquil or "simple" mind.

Readers steeped in interpretations of Bergson will know that this aspect of Jankélévitch's analysis is not unique. Other commentators stress the link between Bergson's method of intuition and simplicity of mind. It is, for example, a staple of Deleuze's first chapter in *Bergsonism* ("Intuition as Method"). However, Jankélévitch goes a step further in positing that for Bergson intellectual simplicity cannot be isolated from simplicity in other walks of life. He recognizes, in other words, the internal connection between intellectual simplicity on the one hand, and moral, affective, and aesthetic simplicity on the other.

These latter kinds of simplicity go by different names in Jankélévitch's interpretation: love, grace, and charm. And his passages on these distinct virtues are among the most moving in the book. But if we view them together, it becomes clear why Jankélévitch represents Bergson's philosophy as renewing *l'esprit de finesse* and culminating in a great "thawing of the soul" (201). For the simplicity sought by his philosophical method aims, in the final analysis, at the simplicity of what ancient philosophers would have called a "philosophical" way of life: a mode of being that upends not just our mental habits but also our moral and affective constitution. "Perhaps," Jankélévitch proposes, "there is even only one Simplicity, or rather one single spirit of simplicity... There is thus no difference whatsoever between the pure movement that swallows up all Zeno's aporias and the ascetic who leaps over [merely material] well-being in a single jump. For intuition is the asceticism of the mind; and asceticism, in turn, is nothing but intuition become the diet, catastasis, and permanent exercise of our soul" (165). Put this way, the simplicity that Bergson urges is comprehensive. Indeed, it is more than that. In touching the different areas of our life, and in urging a change in all of them, it might be called maximalist.

BERGSON'S MAXIMALISM

If we were to boil down Jankélévitch's reading of Bergson to its essence, we could say that for him Bergson's philosophy rests on the affirmation—and not just the recognition—that we live in time. As he states in the appendix, "There is no other way of being for man than becoming. Becoming, namely being while not being, or not being while being, both being and not being (is this not the way it is conceived in Aristotle's *Physics*?)—this is the only way man has of being a being! Man, turning his gaze away from the mirage of the timeless, put down roots in the joyful plenitude" (223–24). Now, when we hear a line like this today our first reaction may be to think we already know the lesson. Yes, yes: movement and flux is our own reality. We've heard it before and since Bergson! But to read Jankélévitch's interpretation of Bergson may raise a nagging sense that our assent to this proposition is only notional or theoretical. Because what Jankélévitch is talking about is something different. It is real assent. It is an awareness that assenting to this proposition—that is, that our mode of being is becoming—involves our entire being and that to adhere to it will change our entire life, right down to our habits and ethos. It involves, to use a term Jankélévitch raises time and again, a conversion.

Speaking at a gathering to commemorate the hundred-year anniversary of Bergson's birth, Jankélévitch begins his address by adapting Kierkegaard's observation that the least Christian person in the world is, in fact, not the atheist or pagan but instead the satisfied soul who goes to church once a week on Sunday and forgets about Christ the rest of the time. The same goes, Jankélévitch says, for Bergson and Bergsonism.

We know that at the end of his life, Bergson preached the return to simplicity. One may wonder whether what we're doing here tonight is very Bergsonian. One may wonder whether it is very Bergsonian, generally, to commemorate Bergson. There are two ways not to be Bergsonian. The first is to be Bergsonian only on anniversaries, as if that exempted us from being Bergsonian all the other days, as if we had to square accounts once and for all. On that account, we may say, we might be better off being anti-Bergsonian. This anniversary must not resemble the all soul's days that the living invented in order to think of their dead only once a year and then to think of them no more. I hope, therefore, that it is about a renewal of Bergson's thought and that we won't wait for the second centenary to talk about it again.

The second way not to be Bergsonian is to treat Bergson like a historical sample, to repeat what he said instead of acting the way he did, or to “situate” Bergson’s philosophy instead of rethinking Bergson the way Bergson wanted to be rethought. These two pseudo-Bergsonisms, that of the anniversary Bergsonians and that of the historians, bring me to the two main points of this speech.³⁵

Henri Bergson takes aim at these kinds of “holiday” Bergsonians. In this category are those who think of Bergson only now and again, but it also includes professional philosophers and philosopher tourists for whom Bergson’s work would be just another doctrine or method among others—as if his insights could be hived off to a specialist set of questions on time, memory, or life. It is to this casual reader—whether lay or professional—that Jankélévitch opposes his maximalist interpretation. For what drives his book is the attempt to interpret each line Bergson wrote as if it could invite or initiate, as he puts it, “a conversion that implies a reversal of all our habits, of all our associations, of all our reflexes” (239). Or, in the more laconic phrase of his 1930 preface, Jankélévitch seeks “less to give an exposition of Bergson’s philosophy than to make it understandable.”³⁶ Those are, for him, related but distinct tasks.

INTRODUCTION

There is only one way to read a philosopher who evolves and changes over time: to *follow the chronological order of his works and to begin with the beginning*. This order, to be sure, does not always correspond to the order of increasing difficulty; for example, reading *Matter and Memory*, which dates from 1896, is much more arduous a task than reading the 1900 text *Laughter*. But Bergson's philosophy [*le bergsonisme*] is neither a mechanic fabrication nor an architecture built step by step, as some of the great "systems" are. *All* of Bergson's philosophy figures, each time in a new light, in each of his successive books—just as, in Plotinus's doctrine of emanation, all hypostases figure in each hypostasis. In the same way, Leibniz presents his entire philosophy in each of his works: does not each monad express the entire universe from its individual point of view? Is not the entire universe mirrored in the *Monadology's* drop of water? The microcosm is a miniature of the Cosmos. Schelling, another philosopher of becoming, writes, "what I consider is always consider the totality," and this totality he calls potential (*Potenz*).¹ Bergson writes each of his books oblivious of all the others, without even worrying about the inconsistencies that might at times result from their succession. Bergson delves into each problem as if this problem were the only one in the world. He follows each "line of facts" independently of all the other lines, just as the *élan vital* follows divergent lines of evolution. He leaves it to the commentators to resolve possible contradictions and to harmonize these divergences. The conciliation will no doubt work itself out infinitely. It will work itself out, not within the coherence of logic but in the musical affinity of themes and in the continuity of an *élan*. For in Bergson *order* resembles a kind of obsessive digression² more than it resembles the patient work of the system builders' marquetry. Bergsonian intuition, always total and undivided, simple and whole, grows continually in a single

organic thrust. In this sense Bergson's philosophy is as complete in the eighteen pages of the essay on "The Possible and the Real" as it is in the four hundred pages of *Creative Evolution*.

Bergson, this great genius in perpetual becoming, was very impressionable. The essay on "The Possible and the Real," which is of capital importance for understanding Bergson's philosophy, appeared (in Swedish) in November 1930, after Bergson had read my *Bergson*. In this book, which had come to his attention at the beginning of 1930,³ I had shown the importance of the *illusion of retrospectivity*, talked about the possible in the *future perfect*, and signaled the central character of the critique of the Nothing, already anticipated by Bergson himself in his 1920 address to the Oxford meeting. Bergson thus became aware of the brilliant originality, the creative fecundity of his own intuitions only bit by bit. The intuition is born in 1906, in an article in the *Revue philosophique* about the idea of Nothing; then in 1907, in the pages of *Creative Evolution* dedicated to the ideas of Nothing and Disorder; in 1920, it first becomes aware of itself; at the end of 1930 and in 1934, in *The Creative Mind*, Bergson finally, influenced by his interpreters, reconstitutes the movement that has carried him from the originary dawning to the metaphysics of change and creative plenitude. In Bergson's evolution, as in all volition or causation, there is a retroaction of the present on the past and, after the fact, an ideal reconstruction of becoming. The end, as Schelling says, testifies to the beginning.⁴

A melody played backward, going upstream beginning with the last note, will only be an unspeakable cacophony. This is what *Time and Free Will* lets us understand. How could we ever understand a living philosophy that develops irreversibly in the dimension of becoming if we began at the end or in the middle? The temporal order of a sonata is not an accident but its very essence. In Bergson's philosophy, the temporal order and the succession of moments are not details of protocol: they are Bergson's philosophy itself and the Bergsonian ipseity of a philosophy unlike the others. The first requirement for understanding Henri Bergson's Bergsonism is not to think it against the flow of time. Bergson's philosophy wants to be thought in the very sense of futurition, that is to say, *in its place*.

CHAPTER 1

ORGANIC TOTALITIES

Take comfort; you would not seek me
if you had not found me.—Pascal

Bergson's philosophy is one of the rare philosophies in which the investigation's theory blends with the investigation itself. It excludes the kind of reflexive doubling that gives rise to gnoseologies, propaedeutics, and methods. In a sense, we may repeat à propos of Bergson's thought what has been said about Spinoza's philosophy, in which there is no method substantially and consciously distinct from the meditation of its objects.¹ Instead, the method is immanent to this meditation whose general figure, as it were, it traces out. Bergson has carefully insisted on the vanity of the ideological phantoms that perpetually insinuate themselves in-between thought and facts and mediatize knowledge.² The philosophy of life embraces the sinuous curve of the real, and no transcendent method of any kind weakens this strict adherence. Better still, its "method" is the very line of the movement that leads thought into the thick of things. In Friedrich Schlegel's profound words, the thinking of life does without any propaedeutic because life presupposes nothing but life, and a living thought that adopts the rhythm of life goes straight to the real without troubling itself with methodological scruples.³ The difference between timid scholastic abstractions and the generosity of concrete philosophy is that the former are *eternally preliminary* or—which amounts to the same thing—relative to something *absolutely ulterior* that would constitute their application or would derive from them, while the latter is at every moment present to itself. The former refer to some kind of future from which a gaping void separates them; the latter on the contrary is enveloped in what is presently evident and visibly certain: it accepts no transcendent jurisdiction because it carries its law and its sanction within

itself. The method, thus, is already true knowing. Far from preparing a doctrinal deduction of concepts, it comes into being by degrees as spiritual progress unfolds, a progress of which the method, in sum, is nothing but the physiognomy and internal rhythm.

Let us, therefore, not seek the starting point of Bergson's philosophy in a critique of knowledge or (the way Høffding seems to do) in a gnoseology centered on the idea of intuition. Such an exposition retains of Bergson's thought only a certain system of formulas, a certain *ism* (in this case, "intuitionism"). It condemns the interpreter to confront *Bergson's philosophy all said and done* instead of witnessing its generation and penetrating its meaning [*sens*]. Incidentally, in the response he sent to Høffding, Bergson protests quite clearly (and perhaps without giving all of his reasons) against so *retrospective* an exposition, alleging that Duration, much more so than Intuition, is the living center of his doctrine.⁴ As a metaphysics of intuition, Bergson's philosophy is only one system among others. But the experience of duration determines its true and internal style. Duration is what we find in the "infinitely simple" image at issue in the lecture "Philosophical Intuition,"⁵ and it is really the lively source of Bergson's meditations. Before we follow its successive incarnations by way of four problem-types—the *effort of intellection*, *freedom*, *finality*, *heroism*—we have to go back to the "primitive fact" that, in matters of the soul, governs all of Bergson's ascetic approach.

1. *The Whole and Its Elements*

This ascetic approach is necessary because a method that works only on the level of material realities (what, to abbreviate, I will call *mechanisms*) has been extended erroneously to spiritual—mental and vital—realities (what I will call *organisms*). The truly fundamental fact, both in the order of the mind and in the order of life, is the fact of "enduring" [*durer*] or, which amounts to the same, the mnemonic property. This property, when properly considered (as it is by Richard Semon)⁶ is the only guarantee of perpetuating our experiences at each moment of life. Memory is not, as has been claimed, a derivative and belated function.⁷ Before it becomes an independent organ, a methodical faculty for classifying and distributing, memory is nothing but the spiritual face of a duration internal to itself. Some persist in treating it as something like the agenda or the calendar of the soul when it simply expresses the following: our person is a world in which nothing is lost, an infinitely susceptible environment

in which the slightest vibration calls up deep and prolonged resonances. Memory is but my experiences' entirely primitive perseverance in surviving themselves. It is that which *continues* innumerable contents, continues the ones through the others; these contents, together, form at any moment the current state of our interior person. But to say "continuity" is to say "infinity," and the *immanence of everything in everything* thereby becomes the law of the mind...

Not that memory is literally the thesaurization or capitalization of recollections. Philippe Fauré-Fremiet has lucidly shown that memory is the exercise of an ability rather than the augmentation of a possession, that it is the "re-creation" or active actualization of the past rather than a recording of this past. Bergson himself, hostile as he is to spatial metaphors, refuses to consider the brain as a receptacle of images and refuses to consider these images as contents in a container, and he is certainly not going to turn time itself into a receptacle for recollections! Yet (as a reservoir!) conservation is a spatial image...

It remains no less true that the past imperceptibly qualifies our current being and that it can be evoked at any moment, even if such conservation is simply inferred from the immediate givenness of the recall, even if the past neither literally survives *in* us nor lies dormant *in* the unconsciousness of becoming. Is Bergsonian time not this paradoxical latency without either *inesse* or *being-in*, without either virtual conservation or virtual reservation? Is Bergsonian time not this non-representable survival in which there isn't anything that survives or anything in which the surviving past could survive? Is it not creative conservation, conservation without conservatory? This provision granted, we retain the right to compare (as Bergson does in *Creative Evolution*)⁸ duration to a snowball that grows in an avalanche. May the discontinuity of recall not keep us from having the continuity of becoming subtend it!

What we have here, then, is a first opposition between the life of organisms and the existence of mechanisms. A material system *is entirely what it is at any moment one observes it, and it is nothing but that*. Since it does not endure, it is in a way eternally pure because it has no past whatsoever to color and temper its present. And this is why Bergson, on this subject, reminds us of Leibniz's expression, *mens momentanea*.⁹ Is this not the instantaneous consciousness that Plato, in the *Philebus*,¹⁰ attributes to oysters? A rock can change and, apparently, "age"; but in this case, its successive states will remain external one to the other without any transition, no matter how imperceptible, succeeding in soliciting the

old in the new. For we may very well say, in a paraphrase of a well-known verse, that without duration, “things would indeed only be what they are.”¹¹ And that is the case for material things that are always and totally themselves.

A spiritual reality, which serves as a vehicle for impalpable and subtle traditions, on the contrary, perpetually takes on innuendos [*sous-entendus*]. Thanks to all of its supposed implicit allusions and accumulated experiences, each of its contents is so to speak venerable and profound. The most mediocre human emotion is a treasure whose riches we will never be able to enumerate because it testifies to a continuous past in which a person’s innumerable experiences have silently settled like sediment. To be sure, there isn’t any sedimentation in the literal sense because all localization is deceptive. Nor do experiences accumulate the way staples pile up in a pantry. But there is nonetheless an enrichment and a continual modification of the way the mind lights up.

This first opposition gives rise to a second that completes it. To make up the duration of the mind [*esprit*], conservatory memory must in fact have an auxiliary. Temporal “immanence” by itself would not suffice irreducibly to differentiate organisms and mechanisms. For it to be possible to talk about, if not a veritable implication of the past in the present, then at least a certain presence of the past, a kind of immanence of coexistence must immediately accompany the immanence of succession. Because the spiritual is in many respects more “elastic” than it is malleable, that is to say, because it records and perpetuates all the modifications of which it is the theater, it also tends to reconstitute at each moment its own totality: at every moment, we may say, it remains organically complete. But since it has conserved “adventitious” experiences and bears no trace of profound breaking or plurality, we must admit that it has assimilated, digested, totalized them and that they have modified it as it has modified them. All spiritual reality thus by nature possesses a certain totalizing power that makes it engulf all imported modifications and reconstitute at each step its total but continually transformed organism. And as this totalization applies at every moment to all elements of the spiritual organism, we have to say that the contents of life not only survive themselves in time, they so to speak revive themselves—partially in each of the contemporaneous contents and totally in the spiritual person they express.

This mutual immanence horrifies our understanding. The arts, on the contrary, seek to imitate it. None, however, succeeds better than music, no doubt because, thanks to polyphony, it has more means at its disposal

than any other art to express this intimate copenetration of states of mind. Does not polyphony make it possible to conduct several superposed voices in parallel, voices that express themselves simultaneously and harmonize among themselves and all the while remain distinct and even opposed to one another? Recall, for example, the mysterious prelude to *Pelléas et Mélisande* which, starting in the eighteenth bar, sets Golaud's theme against Mélisande's and thereby expresses the tragic union that will tie the two destinies together. And how can one not admire the marvelous subtlety with which Liszt's *Faust Symphony* meshes the most opposite emotions: Faust's love and his speculative unrest in the first movement, Faust's love and Gretchen's love in the second? The themes confront, blend with, contaminate one another, and each of them bears the signature of all the others. This is what the inner life does at every moment: in paradoxical counterpoints, it associates experiences that appear to us as without connection, such that each of them bears witness to the entire person. Is the "total blending" that the Stoics articulated as a paradox not a reality we continually live?¹²

The distinctive and truly inimitable trait of spiritual things—organisms, works of art, or states of mind—is thus to always be *complete*, to perfectly suffice onto themselves... The distinction between partial and total makes sense only in the world of inert bodies. These, subsisting outside of one another, can always be considered to be parts of a larger set and have an entirely external relation with this set—a topographical relation. The universe of life, on the contrary, is a universe of individuals,¹³ of "insular" totalities and, in the proper sense of the word, of masterpieces. Like Plotinus's intelligibles,¹⁴ these masterpieces are total parts, that is to say, each expresses the complete set of the world of which they seem to be the parts. "Thus *all* is Dionysus," Schelling says.¹⁵ And for Plotinus, *panta pasai*, all souls are all things!

This is proven, first, by the study of *instinct*.¹⁶ We cannot imagine instinct to be mutilated or fractional any more than we can conceive of half an emotion or of a piece of sensation. From one species to the next, instinct varies simply in quality, but the theme is entirely present in each of the variations in which it clothes itself. In each, the original theme tends to grow, to set itself up in the center of a private domain. Only raw bodies allow for gradual transitions between the whole and the part. One of the roles of science is to skillfully appropriate insensible transitions and to turn them into pretty genealogies that erase the originality of individuals. The biologist Vialleton, whose acute sense for discontinuity