

DURÉE AND TEMPORALITY: A DEFENSE OF BERGSON'S CONCEPTION OF TIME

DURACIÓN Y TEMPORALIDAD: UNA DEFENSA DE LA CONCEPCIÓN
DEL TIEMPO DE BERGSON

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RESUMEN ABSTRACT

Este artículo es una defensa del concepto de tiempo en Bergson, en contra de las acusaciones de Heidegger en *Ser y tiempo*. Allí, Heidegger acusó el concepto de tiempo bergsoniano de incurrir en el mismo error de la tradición filosófica al tomar el tiempo como una sucesión espacial de "ahoras". Esta es una acusación injusta porque los conceptos de tiempo en Bergson, *duración* y *Élan vital*, son precisamente opuestos a la concepción tradicional. De hecho, el concepto de tiempo según Bergson coincide con la concepción heideggeriana de temporalidad, la cual es esencial para su analítica existencial y ontología fundamental.

This paper is a defense of Bergson's conception of time against Heidegger's accusation on *Being and Time*. There, Heidegger accused Bergson's conception of committing the same mistake of the traditional conception of time as a spatialized succession of "nows." This is an unfair accusation, for Bergson's main concepts of *Duration* and *Élan Vital* are precisely opposite to that. In fact, Bergson's concept of time coincides with Heidegger's conception of Temporalidad which is essential in his existential analytical and fundamental ontology.

PALABRAS CLAVE KEY WORDS

Bergson, Heidegger, tiempo, duración, Élan Vital, temporalidad.

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Bergson's conception of time is perhaps one of his most valuable contributions to philosophy, since he discovered the failure of the traditional philosophical conception of time and solves the paradoxes that such conception produced. However, it is perplexing that in *Being and Time* Heidegger accuses him to possess the same traditional concept of time since Aristotle. Herbert Spiegelberg declares that that accusation to be made "with surprising violence." (336)¹

In *Being and Time* Heidegger mentions several times that the philosophical tradition since Aristotle possess the same concept of time as a succession of 'nows;' besides, he mentions Bergson as a followers of this same tradition (Cf. Heidegger 18 (39) 421 (473)). He says explicitly: "Aristotle's essay on time is the first detailed Interpretation of this phenomenon which has come down to us. Every subsequent account of time, including Bergson's, has been essentially determined by it." (Ibid. 26 (48-49))

Nevertheless, a closer revision of Heidegger quarrel against Bergson shows that the German philosopher has neither a deep insight of Bergson's works and philosophy nor dedicates the enough effort to rebut it in detail. First of all, Heidegger is not very clear in his accusation on Bergson, since he just says that Bergson's conception of time is a psychological spacialization, which is exactly what Bergson surpasses. Heidegger says: "It is not an externalization of a 'qualitative time' into space as Bergson's Interpretation of time—which is ontologically quite indefinite and inadequate— would have us believe." (Heidegger 333 (382)) Probably, the accusation of ontological indefiniteness and inadaequation could be fairer, but only if we accept that metaphysics must be ground in an analytical existential. Secondly, the only substantial reference to Bergson in *Being and Time* is a footnote at the very end of the book (Cf. 432 note xxx. (484 note 500-501)); there Heidegger indicates again the accusation against him, and he mentions the two earliest works of Bergson, namely, *Quid Aristoteles de loco senserit* and *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, which are written about 1889. My doubt is whether Heidegger read the following Bergson's works; did Heidegger know *Matter and Memory* or *Creative Evolution* that were written on 1896 and 1907 respectively, much more before *Being and Time*?

P. A. Y. Gunter declares that Heidegger corrected this posture in a lecture in 1927, that is, immediately after *Being and Time* was published.

¹ Quoted by Gunter in *Henri Bergson: A Bibliography*.

However, the lecture just was published in 1975, under the title of *The Fundamental Problem of Phenomenology*. Gunter claims that "on pp. 320- 321 he changes his interpretation of Bergson's *durée*, asserting that Bergson opposes Aristotle's concept of time, and attempts 'to surpass the traditional concept of time'." (Gunter 500) However, this vindication makes not the enough justice to Bergson. For, *Being and Time* is more known that this late published lecture and it does not acknowledge many other similarities that there between both conceptions.

I do believe that such an accusation is unfair because Bergson's conception of time is as different to the traditional one as Heidegger's one; moreover, I consider that, even though their systems are evidently different, Bergson's conception of time has more similarities to Heidegger's one than what the latter wants to admit. Consequently, the main aim of this paper is to show that, in spite of the difference on Bergon's and Heidegger's philosophies, both have a very similar conception of time as a continuous non-spatialized flux in which the present is neither the only nor the primordial manifestation of it. In a first section, I will show in detail Bergon's time conception. Next, I will show Heidegger's conception stressing in it the similarities and differences between both conceptions.

Before that, let me note that Ernst Cassirer attempted to write an essay comparing both conceptions of time as can be seen in the fourth volume of his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* (SPF). However, he just could make a general sketch of that essay, copy some quotes and foresee a possible similar point between both philosophers that I will point out below. In the third volume of his *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* he treated widely the conception of time in Bergson, whereas he pointed in a footnote that Heidegger's *Being and Time* was published later and therefore its considerations on time could not be included in that chapter (Cf. Cassirer 163 note 2). I think that Cassirer's critique to Bergson's emphasis on past changes from SPF3 to SPF4. Cassirer claims that Bergson has not only a consideration for the past but also for the future (Ibid. Vol. 4 209). Such a change on interpretation will make that Bergson gets closer to Heidegger.

Bergson

Bergson's conception of time changes from that first works, as Deleuze indicated, from a psychological experience to a general condition of

the whole nature (Cf. Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 34). Nonetheless, his concept of time was always a direct critique to the Aristotelic conception as succession of 'nows' and, later, will be also a critique to the psychological and spazialized conception that the moderns have.

According to Deleuze's account of Bergson's philosophy, his method consists in problematizing, differentiating and lastly temporalizing. This last step of the intuitive method urges for a new conception of time, which traditionally has been seen joined to movement (Aristotle) and, therefore, directly related to space covered on a movement (Zenon, modern mechanicism and Einstein).

The third rule of his intuitive method says: "state problems and solve them in terms of time rather than space." (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 31). The philosophical tradition has thought all problems on terms of quantitative and homogeneity; on Bergson's point of view, the reality posses qualitative and heterogeneous differences, because everything posses a duration in time.

Movement is one of the most common phenomena related to time, because it has duration; it is indivisible, heterogeneous and irreducible to moments. Hence, it is different to the space it covers (against Zenon); in short, real movement is concrete duration. Bergson's concept of movement overcomes the atomistic vision of ancient thinkers, and also the mechanistic insight of moderns. Movement and time can not be any longer the sum or succession the individual elements (Cf. Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 1-11). However, even though movement and time share this similarity and have been traditionally related, they are two different phenomena. Movement needs time to be explained because it needs duration to happen; but time does not need movement to be explained.

Although long, the next quote summarized masterly Bergson's conception of time and his precise characterization as duration:

The essence of time is that it goes by; time already gone by it the past, and we call the present the instant in which it goes by. But there can be no question here of a mathematical instant. No doubt there is an ideal present-a pure conception, the indivisible limit which separates past from future. But the real, concrete, live present-that of which I speak when I speak of my present perception-that present necessarily occupies a duration. When is the duration placed? Is it on

the hither or on the further side of the mathematical point which I determine ideally when I think of the present instant? Quite evidently, it is both on this side and on that; and what I call 'my present' has one foot in my past and another in my future. In my past, first, because 'the moment in which I am speaking is already far from me'; in my future, next, because this moment is impending over the future: it is to future that I am tending, and could I fix this indivisible present, this infinitesimal element of the curve of time, it is the direction of the future that it would indicate. The psychical state, then, that I call 'my present' must be both a perception of the immediate past and a determination of the immediate future. (Bergson 177)

In *Matter and Memory*, duration is essentially memory. This is due to conservation and preservation of the past in the present; a moment always contains over and above the preceding one. Present and past are two aspects differentiated in kind as well; but they converge in the recognition of the memories on the present. Even though, the memories are not present or actualized, they all exist virtually. Memories are in an unconscious, virtual and inactive existence, until they act in the present because of their usefulness. However, it is noteworthy that in the duration, past and present are not successive, but coexistent; both are present during the action. Thus, memories are not past and far experience, but active and useful actions at the present.

Deleuze pointed out that what has said until now about experience can be seen as paradoxical if we continue analyzing those aspects from an illusory essence of time. Thus from a traditional point of view the bergsonian system implies four paradoxes.

(1) we place ourselves at once, in a leap, in the ontological element of the past (paradoxe of the leap); (2) there is a difference in kind between the present and the past (paradox of being); (3) the past does not follow the present that it has been, but coexist with it (paradox of coexistence); (4) what coexist with each present is the whole of the past, integrally, on various levels of contraction and relaxation (paradox of psychic repetition). (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 61)

However, to understand them as paradoxical is a consequence of a badly analyzed composed between past and present. Deleuze indicates the misrepresentations of time that correspond to each one of the paradoxes:

(1) we can reconstitute the past with the present; (2) we pass gradually from one to the other; (3) that they are distinguished by a before and an after; and (4) that the work of the mind is carried out by the addition of elements (rather than by changes of level, genuine jumps, the reworking of systems). (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 61-2)

Furthermore, duration is not only in experience, but also of everything else in nature. Indeed, duration is the condition *sine qua non* of experience because duration is a more general state. Thus, the intuitive method discloses the duration, but duration makes possible intuition. Intuition and duration need each other; duration without intuition is only a psychological experience; intuition without duration can neither state problems nor make differentiation in kind correctly.

Duration as a possibility of experience implies a multiplicity of rhythms, a generalized pluralism of different experiences. In spite of this plurality of duration, Bergson seeks for a convergent point, and establishes, in *Creative Evolution*, that duration in a general sense belongs to a single time, it is impersonal and universal. All other particular durations with their dualism are unified in a unique time.

There is a real concrete time, part of things themselves, the duration—felt by the living, unfelt by the inanimate—which belongs to their changes. But intelligence substitutes for this an abstract time, an homogeneous measurable médium, a conception fraught with endless self contradiction. (Solomon 20)

Since all dualisms are dissolved in this universal duration, there is a regression to the differences on degree; however, there is not a contradiction on Bergson's philosophy, for the differences on degree are not the beginning of the method, which has been demonstrated to produce false problems. Instead of that, the differences on degree emerged from a monism rightly reached by the intuitive method.

The unification of dualisms in a convergent whole and in a single time (monism) does not close the totality in an already-made process. In spite of that, Bergson states that from this monism, or general duration, should be generated again the dualism. In other words, the totality is an open process that continues generating differences. This last step is *Élan vital*. It consists in a movement of differentiation that emerges from the unity.

Deleuze concludes his book *Bergsonism* saying: "The *Élan vital* designates the actualization of this virtual according to the lines of differentiation that correspond to the degrees-up to this precise line of man where the *Élan vital* gains self-consciousness." (Deleuze, *Bergsonism* 113)

By means of this conception of *Élan vital*, Cassirer seems to dismiss his critique (which is also Heidegger's critique) according to which Bergson's conception of time is basically focused in past. As we have seen, the study on memory allows Bergson to say that past coexist with present in every action of a body. Now, *Élan vital* allows him to say that not only past and present coexist, but also this potentiality to create new differentiations in future. Cassirer comments it in the following way:

For in terms of its metaphysical essence, Bergson's time appears indeed to relate to the future and to be directed to it. It is none other than *élan vital*, which strives forward and lives wholly in the future — the life will, which constantly aims and strives to get beyond itself. (Vol. 4 209)

Based on Deleuze analysis on cinema, it is possible to offer a conclusive insight of Bergson's conception of time, which, indeed, is compared to a modern cinema in which the flowing is not broken by a succession of photographs (Cf. Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 8 57-8). The cinema is composed for frames, shots and the whole montage. Similarly, duration can be seen as a multiplicity of diverse durations, or as a whole duration. But duration is never a closed system, even though it is a whole. A virtual whole duration is open to new actualizations due to *Élan vital*. The multiplicities of durations belong to a unique duration.

The frames would be instantaneous images, closed and independent, unless it was not related to the shot and the whole film. These frames also communicate and contribute to the whole film. On the other hand, the shots are the movement-images (Ibid. 23); they express the duration of objects and events. The shot is continuity and movement in itself. Finally, it is the montage. The frames and shot are recomposed in it. The montage expresses the whole; whereas shot represents movement, montage represents time. However in *Cinema 2*, Deleuze determine precisely this assumption because time is not reduced to movement, and because time as montage can create some paradoxes that destroys the real time that it attempts to represent.

Thus, Deleuze clarifies firstly that time is not movement exactly, even though they are related. The sensory-motor process that expresses movement in its more directed mode must be reevaluated. In other word, the action-images that commonly represented movements and were confused with time must be replaced for optical and sound situations, which can express time in a most direct way. Second, the initial assumption that time would be represented by montage is modified, because it creates the same paradoxes that the traditional conception of time. If time is the sum of many movements, the continuity and fluidity of real time is broken. Whether it is assumed that the shot is a present moment or a temporal movement, the fluidity of time is broken in parts, even though they would give the appearance of time. Both visions conceive time as succession or simultaneity of different elements. On Bergson's point of view, time must be neither a succession nor simultaneity of before and after, but a coexistence. Time must be an open whole in which virtual and actual coexist. "Image has to be present and past, still present and already past, at once and at the same time." (Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 76) As it can be deduced, non all kinds of cinema reached a direct way to represent time; most of them made the montage with "aberrant movements and false continuity shots;" just the modern cinema has expressed the time in a direct way. That is why Deleuze says: "The direct time-image is the phantom, which has always haunted the cinema, but it took modern cinema to give a body to this phantom." (Ibid. 40)

Heidegger

In Heidegger's philosophy time has a central role, for the fundamental ontology, which is his main philosophical concern, requires it as the horizon of understanding being (Cf. Heidegger 1 (19) 17 (38)); In the same way that Bergson urges to solve all problems of philosophy from a temporal point of view, Heidegger claims that time is the horizon of understanding of being; such a claim would be not important if it was not pointed out that one of the mistakes of the philosophical tradition was to see being as an timeless or always present being.

Thus, if the main aim of *Being and Time* is to discover a new meaning of being, the mode to achieve it is finding its relation with time. *Being and Time* just exposes the existential constitution of a determined being, Dasein, which is only a preparatory step before pass to the general being. Unfortunately, Heidegger never wrote those conclusive sections,

except for some critiques to the greatest system of metaphysics. In that preparatory ontology that represents the existential analytic, Heidegger underscores some existential relations that Dasein has with time. Temporality, as he names it, is the ground of Dasein's historicity, which is the fundamental form of being of Dasein, and in this temporal way it has the condition of possibility of understand its own being; therefore, Heidegger assumes that Temporality is the most general way of time, which temporalizes itself in Dasein under the form of history. Likewise, Bergson's intuitive method, that must state its problems on temporal mode, is based and conditioned by the duration of man and also the general duration of world. Joachim Seyppel outlines this same similarity between both philosophers as well; he says "For *durée* and *Zeitlichkeit* seem to have certain things in common, and both seem to be very different from any other time concept." (506)

Another evident similarity between both philosophers is their critique to the traditional way to see time and the ordinary conception of time. Heidegger points out that all the common and ordinary consideration on time need to be clarified and justified from an existential point of view. Thus, for instance, he says that differentiations, such as temporal entities and non entities (Cf. Heidegger 18 (39)), and subjective and objective time (Ibid. 24 (45)), are completely naïve and ungrounded.

Perhaps, the consideration that Heidegger attacks the most was the conception of time as an endless, as infinity; as a continuous going on. For such a complex conception has not been demonstrated; rather the existential analytical that serves a starting point of his ontology shows that time manifest itself as a finite. This is, moreover the greatest difference with Bergson's conception of time, as has been clearly indicated by G. S. Herbert: "Bergson future is open, indefinite and infinite. For Heidegger future is limited, definite and finite. This difference arises because Bergson thinks in terms of creative evolution, whereas Heidegger thinks of basis of authentic Dasein." (67)

Another ordinary conception is that which comes since Greek philosophy, according to which 'Present' is a privileged mode of time; Aristotle account of time is a perfect example of this; for him, time is a succession of 'nows' (Cf. Heidegger 47-9), a "continuously enduring sequence of pure 'nows'." (Ibid. 409 (462)) This privileged mode of time makes past to become a simple *no longer present*; and future *no yet present* (Ibid. 373 (425) 421 (473)). It includes also the ordinary conception of history as

something that is no longer available, that it has not more effects on us. "Thus for the ordinary understanding of time, time shows itself as a sequence of 'nows' simultaneously passing away and coming along. Time is understood as a succession, as a 'flowing stream' of 'nows', as the course of time.'" (Heidegger 422 (474))

The ordinary conception of time is, according to Heidegger, not a mistaken philosophical conception, but a consequence of the essential phenomenon of fallen. Thus, he points out that the everyday Dasein takes time in what it encounters within-the-world. The fallen state of everyday Dasein sees time a being ready-to-hand or present-to-hand. That is why it can be measured and calculated, but that is far from get the essence of temporality.

On Heidegger's point of view, the essence of temporality can only be disclosed through a phenomenological insight of Dasein. Any traditional or ordinary conception of time is not clear or safe until it has been disclosed from the existential character of Dasein. All the traditional and ordinary conceptions have not been demonstrated and need clarification, which only will be available by means of the analytical existential.

The preparatory analysis concludes that Dasein is a being-in-the-world whose essence is Care. The limits of this analysis bring about two problems, namely the pursuit of a totality and unity in the Dasein and the possibility of an authentic existence. It is here precisely that temporality is evident in Dasein, for the seek of totality and unity of Dasein lead us to the beginning and end of this being, and the possibility of an authentic existence will be possible precisely for its anticipatory resoluteness to its most authentic being.

In the pursuit of a totality for Dasein, it is primordial its being-toward-death, insofar death is revealed to Dasein as its most authentic possibility. The being of Dasein discloses itself as a being-toward-death; moreover, this distinctness of its existence allows him to getting free of the fallen and public mode of being-in-the-world. When Dasein is conscious of its death, it can be free again to its most authentic mode of being. Thus, the anticipatory consciousness of its end liberates it of the dominance of the public "they." Besides it discloses the temporality that leads its existence to an end and gives the potentiality to find its most authentic existence.

The temporality of Dasein is, then, primordially futural insofar as the importance of the anticipatory insight of its end and potentiality. However, neither future has here the same traditional sense of a not yet actual being, nor Heidegger excludes the past or the present of Dasein existence. On the contrary, he will include them all in it; "Dasein "is" its past in the way of *its* own being, which [...] 'historizes' out of its future on each occasion." (Heidegger 20 (41)) Yet, all three (past, present and future) cannot be seen as they have been seen ordinarily, that is, as successive separate stages; rather they must be seen in his new conception of temporality. In this new conception, the futural Dasein that is open to its most authentic possibilities is the same historical being present in the existential analytic. Thus, past, present and future are not three separate and successive events, but the same phenomenon of temporality in Dasein.

With regard to this unity of present, past and future in temporality, Heidegger says:

we call the phenomena of the future, the having been, and the Present, the "ecstases" of temporality. Temporality is not prior to this, an entity which first emerges from itself; its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of ecstases. (Ibid. 329 (377))

Future can be the most primordial of this ecstases and Present can be the last one because temporality is not a sequence of ecstases, but their manifestation.

It has been usually identified that the futural aspect of Dasein is one of the major differences between Heidegger and Bergson; for the latter makes a particular emphasis in the past.² In this way is indicated by Cassirer:

Heidegger's understanding of time differs from Bergson's primarily in that it is not the past, but the "future" which is taken to be the essential aspect of time. Being as "having been" is itself understandable only with regard to the future. The image of death as the "end" of time discloses the authentic "historicality" of dasein. (Vol. 4 209)³

² On the contrary, Joachim Seyppel claims that Bergson's conception is primarily present (506).

³ This is the same interpretation that he has in his third volume (Cf. Cassirer *Philosophy*, Vol. 3 187).

Nonetheless, as was pointed out above, Cassirer himself claims that this interpretation must be revised because *élan vital* is the futural element that complements the essence of duration.

In conclusion, both philosophical systems possess a conception of time that differs of that of tradition. These conceptions are duration and temporality. Both conceptions can be seen in a more general perspective that only in human. However, both are revealed primarily from the human perspective, for it was the psychological duration and Dasein's historicity and being-toward-death those which allow to disclose their general counterpart. It has been characterized that whereas Bergson emphasizes past, Heidegger emphasizes future. However, Bergson's concept of *élan vital* is as important as past. Besides, even though these philosophers privilege an aspect of time, they do not exclude the other aspect; rather their conception of time must be seen as a coexistence of past present and future.

Perhaps, the major difference between both systems is located in their method; Bergson bases his philosophy in a system of images, in which man is seen simply as a center of action, like any other being but with more or less capacity of action; moreover duration is not only human duration, but also take important part in a general evolutionary process. Heidegger's main aim is a fundamental ontology which he grounds in an existential analytic; he distinguishes between an authentic and inauthentic existence. Therefore, Bergson privileges past because it explains thus the capacity of action through habits and recollections; Heidegger privileges future because it gives to Dasein the possibilities to be an authentic being. However, any of them rejects the other modes of time; rather they unify them in duration or temporality respectively. The most evident difference is, as Herbert indicated, that Heidegger just accepts a finite time manifested by the finitude of Dasein, whereas Bergson accepts the infinitude of time.

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