

An encounter between Gramsci, Marx, Foucault, and Bergson

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Abstract

Cultural Political Economy (CPE) as readily acknowledges the debt of Gramscianism to Marx as Gramsci did himself. Contrastingly, the debt owed by much of 20th century French philosophy – not least Foucault himself – to Bergson, is little acknowledged – including by Foucault - or studied, and this debt, and Bergson's ideas, seem yet to appear in the CPE literature. The focus upon multiplicity Foucault drew most markedly from Bergson's work, however, stemmed from the latter's broader metaphysical stance on reality, which, because continuously in the process of creation, exists in permanent creative, emergent novelty beyond any causal closure. These foundational – and radical - ideas had a profound effect upon the next century of French philosophical thought. This paper will argue that they indeed also promise a metaphysical grounding which CPE arguably currently lacks, and could benefit from. In an encounter, then, between Gramsci, Marx, Foucault and Bergson, both Marx and Gramsci become set in a temporal frame that at once discards historical inevitability and opens up new vistas of possibility – bringing the 'when' and the 'who' to join the 'how' and the 'why' questions.

Introduction

In this paper I try to set out (i) who Henri Bergson was and what his ideas were, (ii) what impact he had upon French philosophy – and in particular Michel Foucault, and (iii) how his ideas and influence might impact upon Cultural Political Economy. Inevitably in a short conference paper I will concentrate more on Bergson than on Marx, Gramsci, or even Foucault.

At a high-level of abstraction, the loose conglomeration of approaches that can be characterised as ‘poststructuralism’ includes the work not only of Michel Foucault but also of Gilles Deleuze (and his frequent co-author Guattari), Derrida, and many others. Publishing from the late 1950s onwards, these philosophers – and their philosophy tutors - shared an education in French philosophy within which the work of Henri Bergson (1859-1941) figured far more prominently than most of them, or their commentators, have openly acknowledged.

Bergson was the most famous and decorated French philosopher of the early 20th century, awarded, in 1930, with France’s highest honour, the prestigious Grand-Croix de la Legion d'honneur. In 1900 he was awarded the Chair of Greek and Latin Philosophy, and in 1904 the Chair of Modern Philosophy, at the Collège de France, “one of the highest academic posts in the nation” (Goudge 1949:9), where Michel Foucault was to follow in 1970. Bergson was elected a Foreign Honorary Member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and awarded the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters by the University of Cambridge, and toured the world packing lecture theatres with scholars and lay people alike. In 1917 he was sent by the French Government to the US Administration of President Woodrow Wilson, charged with persuading the Americans to enter the First World War (Lefebvre and White 2012). Following the War he continued working with Wilson to help establish the League of Nations, and became, in 1922, the first President of the League’s International Commission on Intellectual Cooperation (ICIC – the forerunner of today’s UNESCO), an attempt to show that intellectuals could work together at an international level, which included Einstein, Marie Curie, and many others. A brilliant and engaging speaker and writer, his work won the admiration and applause of artists and especially of the literary community, and his most famous book, *Creative Evolution*, was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1927, “in recognition of his rich and vitalizing ideas and the brilliant skill with which they have been presented.”ⁱ

What happened to him, then? There is no easy answer, and this paper is not the place for one, at that (for a fuller treatment see Kreps, (2015a)). In brief, amongst the many factors that were at play in the demise of his fame were three that will concern us here, which caused him to become something of a hate figure amongst those philosophers from the late 1920s onwards enamoured of a Marxist approach: firstly, his work with the governments of the day made him an establishment figure - to be attacked; secondly, his popularity with literary and artistic figures made him appear merely bourgeois – to be dismissed; and thirdly, his critique of scientific rationalism in the face of the logical positivism of his era made him appear romantic, even mystical – to be denounced. The philosophers who turned from him for one or more of these reasons included, in the

Anglophone world, Bertrand Russell, inspiration for the Vienna circle of logical positivists, and in France such figures as Louis Althusser, who would teach philosophy to Foucault at L'École Normale Supérieure, and Georges Canguilhem, who would be Foucault's dissertation tutor at the Sorbonne. Both Frenchmen were vehement in their criticisms of Bergson, and had a profound affect upon the education of the young Foucault, who, in his introduction to a reprint of Canguilhem's most famous work, *The Normal and the Pathological*, made it clear how important Canguilhem's influence had been not just upon himself, but upon French Marxists in general, including Althusser, and upon Foucault's contemporaries Derrida, Bourdieu, Lacan, Deleuze and others. Canguilhem, for his part, had made it perhaps his special task to dispute with the work of Henri Bergson – his *Normal and the Pathological* in many ways a direct refutation of Bergson's *Creative Evolution*. Canguilhem “devoted several conferences and classes at the University of Strasbourg and, later on, at the Sorbonne” to criticisms and refutations of Bergson's work (Bianco 2011:865). Yet, without doubt, Canguilhem's work put forward “a perspective much influenced by Henri Bergson's *Creative Evolution*” and although he rejected what he saw as Bergson's ‘vitalism’ he, too, “refused any reduction of life to a sum of mere mechanistic physico-chemical principles” (Geroulanos 2009:291). Canguilhem, in other words, was as much a rejecter of positivism as Bergson, and it was *his* rejection, *not* Bergson's, that turned out to be the main influence upon French thought of the 1960s.

Thus, although such stories are always far more complex, one can summarize that a generation of French philosophers turned from Bergson, and their view of his work coloured the education given to the next generation of French philosophers, but at the same time much of the gist of what Bergson believed was nonetheless passed on. As Derrida put it, discussing Levi-Strauss' harsh criticisms of philosophers such as Bergson, “only their ghosts, which sometimes haunt school manuals, selected extracts, or popular opinion, are evoked here” (Derrida 1967:117), and not the philosophers themselves, or the detail and significance of their work. It is arguable, then, that even as Foucault turned away from the historical materialism and scientific rationalism of his tutors' Marxism, enamored rather with their distrust of positivism, Foucault may nonetheless have brought with him ideas picked up, even in the critiquing of them, from Bergson's work. Burwick and Douglass, indeed, have stated that Bergson's work can be seen as “a repressed content of modern thought” (Burwick and Douglas 1992:9).

Now, Cultural Political Economy (CPE) as readily acknowledges the debt of Gramscianism to Marx as Gramsci did himself. The clear line of continuity from Marx to Gramsci is unmistakable, indeed unremarkable. Contrastingly, the debt owed by much of 20th century French philosophy – including Foucault himself – to Bergson, is little acknowledged. But Foucault's work not only did not arise in a vacuum, but indeed, I would argue, emerged from a line of continuity from Bergson's work: that this line was submerged beneath critique made its continuity no less forceful.

In this paper, then, I wish firstly to introduce to CPE scholars some of the ideas of Henri Bergson, and secondly to how they reappear in the core insights of Michel Foucault. Lastly, with Foucault contextualized with Bergson behind him, I wish to suggest that in an encounter between Gramsci, Marx, Foucault *and* Bergson, both Marx and Gramsci become set in a temporal frame that at once discards historical inevitability and opens up new vistas of possibility – bringing the ‘when’ and the ‘who’ to join the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ questions of the encounter.

Bergson’s philosophy

Intuition and Time

The key characteristics of mobility and multiplicity that are the signature of poststructuralist thought derive directly from Bergson’s work. In this paper there is not the space to explore fully the ideas and contribution of this great philosopher, nor indeed all that Foucault owed to him, and I must concentrate upon the ideas Foucault gained from Bergson that are of direct relevance to CPE. Fortunately, these are the core philosophical insights at the heart of Bergson’s contribution to Western philosophy: his notion of the *intuition philosophique*, and his unique understanding of *time* – the *durée réelle* as he described it - and the *mobility, multiplicity* and *creativity* implied by it.

The first three key propositions Bergson makes in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* capture well some of the fundamental elements of what he means by the *intuition philosophique* and the *durée réelle*:

1. ‘There is an external reality which is given immediately to our mind. Common sense is right on this point against the idealism and realism of the philosophers.
2. This reality is mobility. There do not exist things made, but only things in the making, not states that remain fixed, but only states in process of change. Rest is never anything but apparent, or rather, relative. The consciousness that we have of our own person in its continual flowing, introduces us to the interior of a reality on whose model we must imagine the others. All reality is, therefore, tendency, if we agree to call tendency a nascent change of direction.
3. Our mind, which seeks solid bases of operation has as its principal function, in the ordinary course of life, to imagine states and things. Now and then it takes quasi-instantaneous views of the undivided mobility of the real. It thus obtains sensations and ideas. By that means it substitutes for the continuous the discontinuous, for mobility stability, for the tendency in process of change it substitutes fixed points which mark a direction of change and tendency. This substitution is necessary to common sense, to language, to practical life, and even, to a certain extent ... to positive science. (Bergson 1946:222)

Thus, the relative knowledge of the intellect, the world of symbols, presents to us states and things that are in truth snapshot moments of an undivided and unceasing mobility, which we can only apprehend *intuitively*, with all our senses and our consciousness heightened and alert. We might summarise, then, in Bergson’s own words, that *intuition*, “signifies first of all consciousness, but immediate consciousness, ... vision which is scarcely distinguishable from the

object seen, and knowledge which is contact and even coincidence.” (Bergson 1946:35) In this sense then, Bergson is not just an empiricist rather than a rationalist, he is also more of a realist than the realists and the scientific realists. Bergson’s realism acknowledges that our perceptions - because they are biological - of reality, are far from being ontologically independent of reality, but in fact far better able to grasp and understand reality than whatever we can come up with in our thinking to explain the world.

Now intuition, in common understanding, is the ability to understand something without the need for conscious reasoning. The implication that one can ‘know’ anything somehow by instinct, or gut feeling, or some kind of mysterious inner perception, is clearly anathema for the rationalist, for whom only the intellectual faculty of reason can bring knowledge. For Bergson, indeed, ‘intuition’ is a word he chose with some hesitation: “Because a Schelling, a Schopenhauer and others have already called upon intuition, because they have more or less set up intuition in opposition to intelligence, one might think that I was using the same method” (Bergson 1946:33). Clearly, however, he is not. On the contrary, Bergson’s understanding of the nature of his *intuition philosophique* is very different. It is more what one might call ‘apprehension,’ even a ‘gestalt’ presence in the moment and in the world, that in fact implies or presupposes one of Bergson’s most famous core ideas: the *durée réelle*. In this sense, for Bergson, intuition is “neither a feeling, an inspiration, nor a disorderly sympathy, but a fully developed method” (Deleuze 1996:13) or philosophical approach. As such, it is of course a means of exploration. Bergson never suggested that the fruits of intuition should not be tested. If not empirically proven such intuition is, after all, mere fancy. But without the freedom to intuit, and the method by which to undertake such exploration, how can great ideas be found? Nor did he suggest that intuition or perception gave us access to the ‘truth of the world’: on the contrary, his understanding of perception was that it was inflected and conditioned by pragmatism: we see what is good to eat or that we should avoid bumping into. In a universe that is constantly moving and indivisibly intermingled, to perceive anything more than this would be to perceive the entire universe at once!

Creativity

Now, the means by which the unfolding of the *durée réelle* are generally measured, in the terms used by Bergson, are either mechanistic, or finalistic. Bergson rejected both.

In the mechanistic universe according to physics, the world is ‘superveniently’ determined, all the way up, by its lowest level laws: those of physics. At the root of this view, is Laplace’s famous demon. Laplace imagined a demon sitting on the scientist’s shoulder, (although it was others, later, who called it that) who could (unlike us) see the actual initial conditions of any process, and would therefore be “capable at any given instant of observing the position and velocity of each mass that forms part of the universe and of inferring its evolution, both toward the past and toward the future” (Prigogine and Stengers 1984:75). The entire universe, and everything in it, in this view, was completely determined by simple, clear, scientific laws, deep into the past and far into the future. The

fiction of the demon was Laplace's reasoning for the need, in many situations, nonetheless to use statistics and probabilities – on which he wrote many of the most important texts of the early 19th century - to describe and understand the processes involved. It was a fiction that asserted that deterministic laws govern all things, and that our ignorance of initial states sometimes makes such deterministic predictions impossible. But this ignorance must be distinguished from “the ‘objective truth’ of the system as it would be seen by Laplace's demon” (Prigogine and Stengers 1984:75). Thus, for Laplace, probability and chance relates to our (necessarily limited) knowledge of things and not to things in themselves.

For Bergson such an approach suggests that the future is already contained in the past, that everything is already determined, and that the key element of human free will: *choice*, is a fiction. This would suggest that there can be no *creativity*, no *novelty*. Such a mechanistic world-view, therefore, must be wrong.

By the same token, however, Bergson also criticizes – in the same terms, and for the same reasons - the teleological approach of traditional finalism. The notion most popular among such ‘finalist’ theories derives ultimately from the patriarchal religions, whose Creator God made the world and made Man to put in it. Only barely modified from a seven-day fiat, the Creator God, in the humanist revision, sets evolution running in a grand progress from origins up to a pinnacle in the human being, who then absorbs all into himself. Such humanist teleological progress equally makes genuine creation of the new impossible, since, just like mechanism, it rests upon an assumption that the ‘whole is given,’ from the start. As Foucault would later characterise it, the Age of Man presented the human as both subject and object of all knowledge, classical pinnacle of the universal *fixed* order (Foucault 1997).

Neither mechanism nor such humanist finalism, therefore, can be a satisfactory explanation – for Bergson – of the phenomenon of *change*, and its inherent properties of indetermination, which for Bergson is the most essential aspect of life. For Bergson, by contrast, the universe is in fact making itself up as it goes along, impossible to predict; far from an ‘order’ it is unfinished and never finishing; it is a *creative evolution*, in which there is no inevitability, in which there is always choice.

Criticism

The principal criticism levelled at Bergson by his detractors was that this philosophy – because of its critique of scientific rationalism and its use of ‘intuition’ - was mystical. This criticism was levelled, in the first place, by Bertrand Russell, and by the Vienna School of ‘logical positivists,’ who, in the 1920s, held to a strict verificationism that insisted that any proposition has no factual meaning if no evidence of observation can count for or against it. Many clung to this even after Gödel had shown, in 1931, that the (Russell's) project of reducing all things to logic could not be achieved (Kleene 1967:250). That all ethics, aesthetics and romance, that all (by definition unobservable) subjective experiences, are merely meaningless pseudostatements, continues to be the assumption of some in positive scientific circles whose philosophy stems from

this bleak period, and the American logical empiricism that followed when these central European thinkers fled across the Atlantic to escape the ravages of war (e.g. Carnap, Reichenbach, Hempel).

In fact, Bergson had no issue with scientific advance, and indeed used the science of his day liberally throughout his work. In *Time and Free Will*, for example, discussing the nature of attention, focus, and the experience of muscular effort, Bergson refers to Helmholtz's work on the physiology of the eye, Ribot's work on the mechanics of facial expressions, and Darwin's description of the symptoms of rage (Bergson 2005 pp23-29). In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson makes reference to the ongoing work in the journals, *Brain*, the *British Medical Journal*, *Revue de Medicin*, *Berliner Klinische Wochenschrift*, and books by Freud, Kussmaul, Bernard, and many other scientists of his day, concerning the then current understanding of aphasia (problems with comprehension and expression of language caused by brain dysfunction,) and other neuroscientific concerns (Bergson 2004:156-7). In his deconstruction of the realism/idealism debate, in *Matter and Memory*, Bergson is explicit in supporting not just the "success" of science, but the importance of scientific knowledge, which he uses in his arguments (Bergson 2004:17). The list of biological and environmental journals and treatises he uses in *Creative Evolution* is extensive, and, when refusing to take sides in the debate around the heritability of acquired characteristics, he is emphatic that "Nowhere is it clearer that philosophers cannot today content themselves with vague generalities, but must follow the scientists in experimental detail and discuss the results with them" (Bergson 1944:87).

Nonetheless, science presents us with a great number of theories, each of which, in its own partial view of the totality, supported by its relevant facts, presents us with but a partial understanding. This, Bergson asserts, is where philosophy steps in. But the personal experience of duration, of the unfolding of time, which, uniquely, can only be experienced internally by subjective consciousness – what Bergson describes as the *durée réelle* – is that part of reality most specifically discounted by positive science. As neuroscientist Benjamin Libet puts it: "Studies that require data from introspective reports of subjective experiences have tended to be taboo in the academic community. That negative attitude was influenced in large part by the dominance, during the first seventy-five years of the twentieth century, of behaviourism in psychology and of logical positivism in philosophy" (Libet 2004:9). But that subjective experience – the common sense knowledge of time as it unfolds – is perhaps the most immediate and *real* aspect of reality we can apprehend. That it should be discounted seems, when viewed this way, quite ridiculous. Contemporary American philosopher Thomas Nagel puts it thus: "The subjectivity of consciousness is an irreducible feature of reality – without which we couldn't do physics or anything else – and it must occupy as fundamental a place in any credible world view as matter, energy, space, time and numbers" (Nagel 1986:7-8).

In contemporary philosophy of science, the voice of Nancy Cartwright in her book, *The Dappled World*, takes the same stance: "The laws that describe this world are a patchwork, not a pyramid" and our understanding is "apportioned into disciplines...governing sets of properties at different levels of abstraction;

pockets of great precision; large parcels of qualitative maxims resisting precise formulation; erratic overlaps; here and there, once in a while, corners that line up, but mostly ragged edges” (Cartwright 1999:1). The desire of science, therefore, for definitive knowledge of all of reality, is, for Bergson, as for many philosophers of science, hubristic.

The other principal criticism of Bergson came from the Left, in the form of Politzer’s 1928 Pamphlet *La Fin d’une Parade Philosophique: Le Bergsonisme*, (1928) and his follow-up critique, *After the Death of M. Bergson* (1941). Both make passionate defenses of the Enlightenment project. Most critiques amongst French philosophers and Marxists of Bergson’s work thereafter refer either directly or indirectly to one or both of these polemics. The argument boils down to a vehement defense of Marxist dialectical materialism as a scientific doctrine, in the face of Bergson’s critique of positivism, attempting to distance materialism from positivism: “The identification of Positivism with materialism is a disorder set off by the Church and the idealistic philosophers, who sought to discredit materialism through Positivism and Positivism through materialism” (Poltizer, 1941). Both passionate polemics lack the finesse and reasoned argument provided by Bergson, and the nuance with the great philosopher both defended the achievements of science and the Enlightenment, whilst enjoining us to see beyond what such objectivity could encompass, to that which it discounted from its outset, but which we – all of us – know intimately, every day: our own inner subjective voice. Politizer’s impact upon such thinkers as Althusser and Canguilhem was such that it became impossible to be a radical *and* a Bergsonian.

Foucault’s debt to Bergson

Attacked by the logical positivists, and deemed bourgeois by the communists, Bergson’s fame faded during the 1930s and by the time of his death in 1941 he was almost forgotten. Yet it is clear that his work continued to be influential. Foucault’s own project of understanding the networks of power relations that define disciplines of discourse is clearly at the very least in a Bergsonian vein – as much a critique of positivism and materialism as Bergson’s was.

Part of the eclipse of Bergson’s fame was also the rise of phenomenology. While Bergson toured the world giving lectures to all and sundry, Husserl – Bergson’s contemporary in Germany – focussed upon PhD students and the establishment of a school of scholars developing a movement that would outlive him. Heidegger, for all the shifts and changes of his own work from that of his mentor, Husserl, nonetheless ensured that such a movement continued. With no one to continue his work in this way, Bergson’s ideas were not so much refuted as forgotten. Yet one could argue, for all the shifts and changes of his own work from that of his hidden, unacknowledged forebear, that Foucault, in many respects, (and in others, Deleuze) could be seen as Bergson’s Heidegger. (Or, for that matter, Bergson’s Gramsci.) Indeed, not only were the poststructuralists influenced by Bergson, but the phenomenologists were themselves. As Bianco asserts in his essay on this period, “young phenomenologists like Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were at first influenced by Bergson and later interiorized a series of ‘Bergsonian’ intellectual *habiti*” (Bianco 2011:867-8).

Foucault's contemporary, Gilles Deleuze, was perhaps the only one of the French poststructuralists of the era to openly acknowledge his debt to Bergson – and in so doing resurrected Bergson's ideas and began the path of his return to fame. Deleuze turned from monographs on Nietzsche, Kant and then Proust, to Bergson: *Le Bergsonisme*, published in 1966, as Mullarkey suggests, "is partly responsible for [the] resurgence" (Mullarkey 1999:2) of Bergson's ideas. Key to this revitalisation, for Deleuze, was Bergson's concept of multiplicity, and all that it implied. Heidegger and the phenomenologists' notion of being as a unity was the target, Bergson was the weapon. For Deleuze, Bergson forms part of a counter history of philosophy. He was a writer like Lucretius (whose *De Rerum Natura* Bergson translated), Spinoza, Hume or Nietzsche, "who seemed to be part of the history of philosophy, but who escaped from it in one respect or altogether" (Deleuze 1996:7).

In Deleuze's study of Bergson, the crucial point is that he has re-imagined Bergson as a precursor of the 'poststructural turn': philosophy turning its own powers back upon itself, reflecting upon its own flaws, gaps, and limitations – philosophy as an act of self-consciousness. "He sees Bergson's *intuition philosophique* as the first clear statement of the poststructuralist turn as method" (Burwick and Douglass 1992:379).

Foucault, to my knowledge, only references Bergson twice – in his very first, and very last work. The first – predating Deleuze's revitalization of Bergson's legacy – in *Birth of the Clinic* (1963) seems much in the mold of the young critics' disdain for the great philosopher: "Bergson," Foucault writes, "is strictly in error when he seeks in time and against space, in a silent grasp of the internal, in a mad ride towards immortality, the conditions with which it is possible to conceive of the living individuality" (2003[1963]:209-10). The error, apparently, is Aristotelian, which "prohibited the application of scientific discourse to the individual" (2003[1963]:210). Foucault here has absorbed his tutors' criticisms of Bergson, one surmises, and neglected the original texts, which, as I have pointed out above, are replete with scientific discourse and show – beyond any simple 'prohibition' – quite why the reality of subjectivity must be considered unique. Perhaps following Deleuze's explorations of those original texts, Foucault then decides to remain silent on Bergson until 1984, in what was perhaps one of his very last writings, *Life, Experience and Science* (1985) - an essay on his doctoral supervisor, Georges Canguilhem. Here he speaks of a dividing line through French thought that "separates a philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject, and a philosophy of knowledge, of rationality, and of the concept. On one side, a filiation which is that of Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty; and then another, which is that of Jean Cavailles, Gaston Bachelard, Alexandre Koyré, and Canguilhem. Doubtless this cleavage comes from afar, and one could trace it back through the nineteenth century: Henri Bergson and Henri Poincare" (Foucault 1985:6). On the rationalist side of the divide, Canguilhem ultimately, in addressing the life sciences, comes up against the philosophical problem that in evolutionary terms, biology and evolution are about error, that "life - and this is its radical feature - is that which is capable of error" (Foucault 1985:476). In other words, the biologist, "has to grasp what makes life a specific object of knowledge and, thus, what accounts for the fact

that among the living, and because they are living, there are beings capable of knowing, and of knowing, finally, life itself" (Foucault 1985:475). This leads him – although not explicitly – in my reading of this late essay, ultimately to see something of a rapprochement, a healing, of that divide with which he begins it: "Should not the whole theory of the subject", he asks, in fact "be reformulated, seeing that knowledge, rather than opening onto the truth of the world, is deeply rooted in the 'errors' of life?" (Foucault 1985:477). The rationalist approach, in other words, through biology and evolutionary theory, must ultimately return to the "philosophy of experience, of meaning, of the subject," because – as with phenomenology, "the *cogito*" remains central to it, and the 'truth of the world' is neither rational, nor, indeed, apparent (Foucault 1985:477).

It seems, to some scholars' eyes, that Bergson was here "presented by Foucault as being the key-figure of the 'philosophy of experience' at the beginning of the twentieth century" (Bianco 2011:856). Now Bianco, in his essay on this fragment, asks, quite rightly, how it might be "possible that several types of philosophical practice, which were completely different one from the other (such as those of Sartre, Canguilhem, Foucault, and Deleuze), could share the same Bergsonian" roots? (Bianco, 2011:856). We have already seen how Canguilhem at once owed much *and* distanced himself from Bergson. As Bianco points out, Foucault's philosophy tutor, Althusser, also "saw the history of French philosophy as following two lines: on the one hand a rationalist and scientific lineage, close to dialectic materialism, and, on the other, an ideological, irrational and anti-scientific lineage. Bergsonism and, then, existentialism were the ultimate result of this second lineage" (Bianco 2011:863). So if "Althusser's harsh hostility towards Bergson" derived directly from the classical Marxist rejection of Bergsonism, conceived as bourgeois mystification, which had begun with Georges Politzer's 1928 pamphlet, and allied itself ultimately with the logical positivism of the era, then Canguilhem's, and Foucault's own rejection of such positivism and dialectical materialism allied them with the anti-scientific lineage with Bergson at its root. Clearly there are no simple answers here.

"Just like Levi-Strauss and Lacan, Canguilhem and Hyppolite, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty [all] began their intellectual careers by criticizing Bergson, by borrowing arguments from Politzer's anthropological and humanist project of a concrete psychology" (Bianco 2011:867). Gilles Deleuze, as we have seen, saw it as his duty, amongst his series of assessments of other philosophers, to undertake a monograph on Bergson, in his case not so much to critique as to rehabilitate him. In short, whether critiquing or rehabilitating, as Bianco asserts, "even though these young, angry people, born at the beginning of the twentieth century, were affirming their own intellectual projects by first negating Bergson's philosophy, they were, willy-nilly, influenced by the author of *Creative Evolution*" (Bianco 2011:867). Bergson's influence on contemporary French philosophy, then, is clearly complex, impossible to trace as a school or lineage, yet nonetheless profound.

The influence of Bergson's ideas upon Foucault, moreover, is clear. Just as Bergson critiqued the intellectualism of scientific rationality for its hubris in attempting to be definitive in its knowledge of the universe, so, we find that

Foucault's critique of the disciplines of Enlightenment discourse does the same – and goes further! In his *Foucault*, Deleuze describes Michel Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), as "the most decisive step yet taken in the theory-practice of multiplicities" – the theory-practice whose origin Deleuze ascribes to Bergson (Deleuze 1986:14). Foucault's work represents, indeed, an extraordinary step forward from the critique of scientific rationalism and mechanism undertaken by Bergson – but he owes them a debt.

In his final work, in the third volume of *History of Sexuality* (1988) and in late writings gathered in the volume *Technologies of the Self* (1988), Foucault accentuates, moreover, the processual flow of 'taking care of the self,' as an ethical project on its own terms undertaken over time. The late Foucauldian poststructuralism, then, is a uniquely human 'turning' – for all its anti-humanist decentring - which keeps us open, keeps open all that, otherwise, would remain forever closed. In taking care of the self, the *cogito*, and the possibility of choice are reinserted into Foucault's previously disciplined world, making the latter part of his oeuvre more distinctly poststructuralist, where the earlier was more structuralist - in the vein of his tutor Althusser's ideologies: inescapable. The processual flow, moreover, of 'taking care of the self,' can only occur in a *durée réelle* where subjective consciousness – for all its decentred, contingent, and disciplined context – nonetheless apprehends the real *intuitively*, and makes choices. It can only occur in a world where *novelty* and *creativity* are possible.

An encounter between Gramsci, Marc, Foucault and Bergson

We are now ready to consider how Bergson, standing behind Foucault in the manner that Marx stands behind Gramsci, might be 'welcomed to the party' in the exploration of cultural political economy.

I present, therefore, a remodelled schematic, developed from the one in Sum and Jessop's book, *Towards A Cultural Political Economy* (2013:206), Figure 5.1 'An encounter between Gramsci, Marx and Foucault'

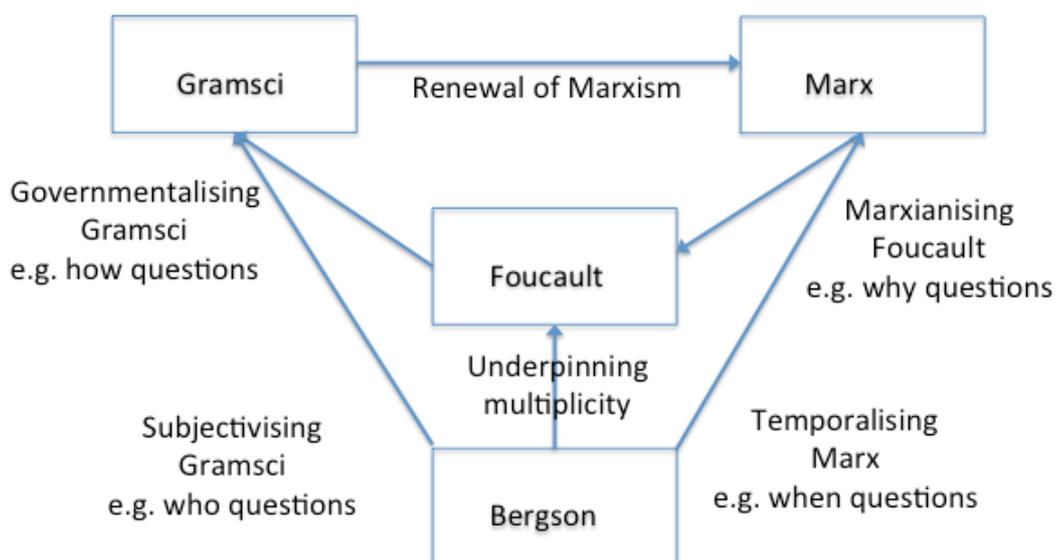


Figure 1 An encounter between Gramsci, Marx, Foucault and Bergson

Perhaps the most immediate impact of inserting Bergson into this encounter is to dismiss once and for all any kind of historical inevitability. The core *creativity* of *Creative Evolution* requires the absolute renunciation of any mechanistic or finalistic belief in a scientific unfolding of history. The universe is making itself up as it goes along, and our ability to choose makes of us centres of action affecting and effecting that unfolding. To Marx, then, the question of “when” is answered, and the answer is, “now”: the creativity of possibility is continually ongoing, and hegemony runs so deep that we are continually choosing to recreate the conditions that contain us. Foucault’s own critique of dialectical materialism is underpinned with Bergson’s deft containment of positivism within the bounds of its rightful competencies.

Secondly, the behaviourism and observed, scientific materialism of both Gramsci’s cultural Marxism and Foucault’s disciplined individual must admit of the thinking, aware self-consciousness of the subject. The ‘philosophy of experience’, and subjectivity, of the internal and unverifiable impression of reality upon the “me” who is the sole actor in history of whom any of us, ultimately, has any immediate knowledge, must be granted her/his place within the greater schema of understanding. The nonphysical nature of subjective consciousness is dependent upon but not determined by the physical nature of the body, and we are actors who exercise choice.

Now, Sum and Jessop, in their book, would seem in their depiction of the Structural-Relational Approach, to support this in principle: “Actors have some freedom of manoeuvre more or less skillfully and reflexively to choose a path of action. Second, actors not only engage in action within a given institutional matrix but, in certain circumstances, can reflexively reconstitute institutions and their resulting matrix. Their capacity to do so depends both on the changing selectivities of given institutions and on their own changing opportunities to engage in strategic action.” (Sum and Jessop 2013:50) In other words, there is sufficient ‘wiggle-room’ within the otherwise disciplined structure of institutions for individual actors to *choose* paths of action. However, in a note at the end of this chapter, Sum and Jessop seem at pains to point out that this does *not* constitute ‘free will.’ “For the SRA, this ‘freedom’ exists only in relation to a given structure. It does not mean that actors have free will – their choices within the range of freedom permitted by a given structure are typically constrained by other factors, which we explore through other types of selectivity” (Sum and Jessop [Note] 2013:70)

With Bergson added to the encounter, my suggestion is that this freedom *is* free will, albeit a contingent and situated free will, and that although one agent alone may not have the power to break from the cultural constraints, many together may indeed have that collective power. Resistance structures *are* possible, and it is free will that seeks to create and enter such structures, and a collective free will that is exercised when such groups seek to act. This opens up Gramscian possibilities for collective organising, and a means to understand the fervour of revolutionary moments when the possibilities of collective agency seem imminent and powerful in ways that solo agents can rarely feel.

To the “how” and “why” questions, then, must also be added the “who,” and the answer is, “me,” and, by implication, across the divide to an unknowable Levinasian ‘other,’ “you,” and, in the moments of collective agency by which real change takes place, “us.” The subject, in other words, albeit dead in Enlightenment terms, must be pronounced alive and *experiencing* self and other in the unfolding of the ever changing dispositifs that define, contain, yet cannot, in the end, entirely hold them back. Just as discourse theory must inevitably lift Gramscian analysis free from the essentialist remnant that clung onto a role for fundamental classes in hegemonic struggles (Torfing 1999: 13), so Bergsonian *intuition philosophique* must contribute the power of choice of the experiencing subject to the technologies of the self, empowering individuals in the self-transformation of their identities, situating their ability to “develop ‘appropriate’ competencies and modes of calculation, and reshape their modes of existence” (Sum and Jessop 2013:211) within a metaphysics pregnant with an immense and intense liberty born of the possibilities of openness and multiplicity: and, crucially, at its most powerful when in concert with others.

This is perhaps the most fundamental impact of Bergson’s ideas upon the schematic: the metaphysics of free will by which – for all the assemblages of power relations, the ‘soup’ of hegemonies and governmentalities, for all that the genealogical interpreter must be all too conscious not just of where he/she stands in history, but of the historically contingent nature of the construction of his/her selfhood undertaking the interpretation – yet still there remains the fundamental freedom of possibility: that change is the only inevitability. To this author, such openness is far preferable to the seeming security of historical inevitability and social construction, which smack too nearly of the positivism of causal closure locked in by a supervenient physics. It is also much closer to the historical reality, which has seen capitalism - despite beliefs in the coming of the revolution - reinvent itself over and over.

In his final work, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, in the first part, Bergson – the political philosopher - defined humanity as caught between the notion of societies, and of society; between that which is closed, and that which is open. Prefiguring, in some ways, elements of the later Foucauldian disciplinarity and network of power relations, Bergson offered a description of the social as a system of obligation. A great believer in free choice, a faculty which consciousness grants us, Bergson nonetheless was all too aware that choice is soon overlaid by the necessary co-ordination required of social grouping. “While his consciousness, delving downwards, reveals to him, the deeper he goes, an ever more original personality, incommensurable with the others and indeed undefinable in words, on the surface of life we are in continuous contact with other men whom we resemble, and united to them by a discipline which creates between them and us a relation of interdependence” (Bergson 2006:14). This discipline and interdependence comprise a foundational moral obligation to one another that forms the glue of social grouping.

But these groupings are always, by definition, ultimately, closed. Any individual grouping, be it family, clan, tribe, academic discipline, nation, or even a grouping of nations such as Europe, or ‘the West,’ is “to include at any moment a certain

number of individuals, and exclude others” (Bergson 2006:30). For Bergson this is a ‘natural’ state, akin to the societies created by that other most social of Earth’s creatures, the ant. Yet this is no simple biodeterminism, for Bergson is clear on the essential point that human consciousness not only marks a fundamental distinction between us and the ant, but that consciousness itself is of a radically different nature to anything that science has yet approached: in part because it lies on the other side of a divide at the foundation of modern science itself. Having carved out his belief in human choice in *Time and Free Will*, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* it is in the distinction between the closed and the open that Bergson finds choice at its most powerful, and its most human. “Between the society in which we live and humanity in general there is...the same contrast as between the closed and the open; the difference between the two objects is one of kind and not simply one of degree” (Bergson 2006:32). The spirit of the League of Nations, still alive in the United Nations, is imbued with just this very openness, an expansive inclusivity very different from the closed inclusivity of nationalism. The tradition of internationalism in revolutionary politics, moreover, is underpinned by this ‘openness’ of spirit.

Conclusion

Bergson’s legacy, in sum, in both his philosophical critique of reductionist positive science, and his internationalist political philosophy, offers very contemporary insights for CPE. His influence upon French thought throughout the 20th century, although far from straightforward, is both profound, extensive, and lasting, and he deserves to be seen as a forefather, if not principally of, then certainly in large measure for, Michel Foucault. (The best candidate for Bergson’s Heidegger, as suggested earlier, is probably Gilles Deleuze, although even Canguilhem has been suggested as a likely candidate.)

To the “how, why and what questions about the dispersion and codification of social power” (Sum and Jessop 2013:209) must now be added the “when” and the “who” questions. The “when” questions by which the notion of historical inevitability is not just politically, but *metaphysically* debunked, and the possibilities of the “now” reemerge; and the “who” questions, by which the subjective consciousness of the individual, the experience of the unfolding of duration, is returned to its rightful place alongside the positive sciences, and the power of choice reemphasized – and added to the notion of collective agency. Through durations as personal as the technologies of the self and as impersonal as the openness of internationalism, the immanent power of subjectivity through the *intuition philosophique* to apprehend the real and enact change, offers a tool for understanding mass movements, crowd mentalities, and the possibilities of a revolutionary era or moment, and for their inspiration, education, and, perhaps above all, leadership.

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ⁱ http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1927/