

BERGSON AND CHRISTIAN THOUGHT.

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There is a well-known type of apologetic fervour which eagerly hastens to derive religious capital from each new system of scientific or philosophic thought, as though Christianity, owing to unstable equilibrium, had to be bolstered up by every available device, if the impending crash is even to be postponed. The latest utterance of some physicist or biologist in favour of prayer is cited with a trembling gratitude and testimonies to the social value of religion are collected earnestly. It is not in this interest that I propose now to discuss Bergsonianism. By this time, after Platonism, Cartesianism, Hegelianism and the rest, it ought to be tolerably clear that Christianity in no way depends for life or vigour upon any particular philosophy but can quite well get its characteristic ideas expressed otherwise than in the principles or categories licensed by the dominating speculations of the day. The question before us is not whether Christianity needs Bergson, but what elements in the philosophy of that distinguished thinker exhibit a true affinity with fundamental Christian convictions, and, on the other hand, what are the chief difficulties which his general argument offers to the reflective Christian mind.

It is impossible I think to overestimate the debt due to Mr. Bergson by many thoughtful contemporaries—so quickening, so refreshing has been the influence breathed by his work over various fields. To some readers it has actually seemed as if he tore away a veil of illusion interposed between reality and the human mind, and opened to them, as by revelation, new insights into the life of things. They find it difficult to forget the first impression left by the perusal of any of his major treatises. The direct intimacy of his thought comes with surprise and de-

light. To quote one sympathetic writer: "Everything that one believed one already understood is made new, rejuvenated, as by the brightness of morning; on all sides, too, in this light of dawn, new intuitions germinate and expand—intuitions felt to be rich in infinite consequences, laden and as it were drenched with life, each of which, freshly open, appears eternally fruitful."¹ People feel, what is often felt in the best music, the inevitability of his successive movements. The significance of the point must not be pressed too far, but no one can miss the rapidity with which the literature devoted to Bergson, and to the themes he has made his own, is growing. A bibliography covering the last decade would of itself make a considerable pamphlet. In his recent volume, "Modern Philosophers," the Danish thinker Höffding assigns twelve pages to Eucken but over seventy to Bergson, which is perhaps a fairly just measure of the relative importance of the two; and in a technical review like *Mind*, during the last ten years, the special prominence of subjects arising out of the thought of Bergson, as compared with any other single contemporary except possibly Mr. Bertrand Russell, has been equally remarkable. These facts have no direct bearing on the intrinsic value of his contribution to philosophy, but at least they indicate roughly with what commanding power he has seized the attention of our time.

One quality, I think, in Bergson possesses an unusual interest for us as theologians and preachers—I mean his really exquisite gift of illustration. Like the lilies in damask, these figurative parts of his exposition are no mere external ornaments, laid down upon the fabric; they are continuous with the thought, mediating luminously the finest shades of sense. Indeed, Bergson definitely holds that illustration *per se* may be a vital element of true philosophic method, as serving to awaken in us intuitions—the highest form of insight—and to transcend the rigid and ready-made concepts characteristic

¹Le Roy, *Une Nouvelle Philosophie*. p. 5.

of science, by suggesting to us more supple, mobile, and almost fluid representations which mould themselves on the fleeting forms of life. Images get nearer the truth of things than any conceptual fixtures of the understanding. Whatever we may say to this, Bergson's power of illustration, artistic and lucid as crystal, is unrivalled in modern philosophic writing. Here is a good example. "If scientific knowledge is indeed what Kant supposed," he writes in his **Introduction to Metaphysics**, "then there is one simple science, performed and even preformulated in nature, as Aristotle believed; great discoveries, then, serve only to illuminate, point by point, the already drawn line of this logic, immanent in things, just as on the night of a fete we light up one by one the rows of gas jets which already outline the shape of some building."² Could anything be more striking or more felicitous? Or take the famous sentence: "Consciousness or supra-consciousness is the name for the rocket whose extinguished fragments fall back as matter."³ Or again, arguing that our thought in its purely logical form is incapable of presenting the true nature of life, or the full meaning of the evolutionary movement out of which it has itself grown, he proceeds, "As well contend that the pebble on the beach displays the form of the wave that brought it there."⁴ Once more, in a passage where he is insisting on the static quality of intelligence, he declares that "our perception and thought begin by substituting for the continuity of evolutionary change a series of unchangeable forms which are, turn by turn, caught 'on the wing', like the rings at a merry-go-round, which the children unhook with their little sticks as they are passing."⁵ As I have said, Bergson insists on the importance of metaphor for the highest kind of philosophic interpretation. "Many diverse images", he says, "borrowed from very different orders of things, may, by

²P. 73.

³*Creative Evolution*, p. 275.

⁴*Ibid.* p. X.

⁵*Ibid.* p. 244.

the convergence of their action, direct consciousness to the precise point where there is a certain intuition to be seized."⁶ It has been made a reproach to religion that by a fatal necessity it thinks in symbols, but, on Bergsonian principles, this might rather be reckoned at least in essentials, an excellence of didactic method.

Severer critics will doubtless urge that what Bergson gives us, at some crucial points, is not reasoning, but a series of brilliant metaphors. Hegel, it may be presumed, would say that he wilfully prefers the level of **Vorstellung**, and either will not or cannot rise to the more exacting level of **Begriff**. Well, something might be said for the view that in his great moments even Hegel ought to be read as a poet, who at various turning-points in his argument helps himself through by metaphor rather than by strict ratiocination. Still, I freely own that, in reading Bergson, we have constantly to ask ourselves whether what he is offering us is new ideas or only new pictures.

At the outset of an inquiry, however brief, into the relations of Bergsonianism and Christian thought, we are bound to recollect that, quite possibly, that relation has not as yet revealed itself fully. In this connection, it is noteworthy that the one point on which Bergson has explicitly declared himself is Theism. In 1912 a letter from his pen was published containing an unequivocal reply to people who had charged him with teaching an atheistic Monism. He rejected, he there said, what he did right to reject, namely, doctrines which merely hypostatise the unity of nature or the unity of knowledge, substantiating either in God as an immobile principle that really would **be** nothing because it would **do** nothing. But he proceeds, in the most direct and important theological statement he has yet made: "The considerations set forth in my 'Time and Free Will' result in making clear the fact of liberty; those of 'Matter and Memory' make palpable, I hope, the reality of spirit; those of 'Creative Evolution' present creation as a fact. All this clearly yields the idea of

⁶Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 14.

a free and creating maker at once of matter and life, whose creative effort is continued in a vital direction by the evolution of species and the construction of human personalities."⁷ In terms, there could not be a more express repudiation of monism and pantheism generally.

It is besides of importance to recollect that Bergson does not profess to have excogitated a complete philosophic theory, embracing all aspects of experience. With unusual self-restraint he has laboured at quite special problems. He approached philosophy by way of mathematics and natural science. It is evident that his theological conclusions are unlikely to take shape before he has thoroughly explored the realm of moral experience. On such questions, observes Le Roy, the author of "Creative Evolution" has thus far said nothing, and, he adds, "he will say nothing as long as his method shall not have brought him in this domain to results as positive in their way as those of his other works; for in his judgment there is no place in philosophy for mere personal opinions. Without denying anything, therefore, he waits and he inquires—always in the same intellectual temper. What more could any one ask?"⁸ It is still too early to speculate as to whether his Gifford Lectures at Edinburgh, the delivery of which to crowded audiences was interrupted by the war, will carry us more deeply into the specific problems of religion. The first course was occupied mainly with a delicate and searching analysis of personality.

In M. Bergson's philosophical work, one or two salient characteristics seize our attention at the very outset. In the first place, its optimism. Optimism, indeed, is the natural sign and outgrowth of his triumphant insistence on the freshness and forward impulse of life itself. He paints the future as the home of achievement and success on a scale "unforeseeable on the basis of any analysis of the past or the present." He combats at every point the

⁷Quoted by Le Roy, p. 202.

⁸*Ibid*, p. 203.

notion of a mortgaged future depressed by a past which hangs about its neck like a fate, in a miserably rigid predestination. As Wildon Carr puts it in more general terms: He "fastens upon the great fact of the evolution of higher forms, the fact that while the energy of our system is running down yet there has entered it a principle which has evolved ever higher and higher forms, and yet lower and simpler forms. * * * The main trend of evolution is upwards, from a primitive simplicity to complex and higher types. We see in life therefore an ascending movement."⁹ To live, as Bergson reads the universe, is to create what is new—new, be it remembered, in the sense that it marks an increase and enrichment of being and is an ascent in the path of growing spiritualization. What the Christian intelligence will have to ask itself, at certain points, is, I think, whether this progressive journey is not often described in terms only too reminiscent of old Pelagian error, as though progress could be defrayed by the finite out of its own resources, and, in particular, as if man were cast upon himself for victory. At the close of a chapter entitled "The Meaning of Evolution," in a passage of thrilling metaphor, we read: "All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push. The animal takes its stand on the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death."¹⁰ It is an inspiring vision, though it leaves conscience curiously unmoved.

Again, a large part of M. Bergson's attraction lies in his anti-intellectualism. He exhibits a radical distrust of logic as a calculus of the inner nature of living reality. The experience to which he appeals is a larger and richer thing—yielding an interpretative method more

⁹*The Philosophy of Change*, p. 183.

¹⁰*Creative Evolution*, pp. 285-6.

finely differentiated, more flexibly fitted, like elastic silk, to the varying outlines of successive problems; it is experience as living, productive, fertilized by the onward movement of being and fertilizing it in turn. Thought must be free to change with changing data; it must display a vigilant activity, a suppleness of inner attitude that adjusts itself without fatigue to the ever-new and imprevisible forms of the real. Life is a moving continuum and the movement cannot be dismissed as an awkward inconvenience to be huddled up or suppressed by theoretic diplomacies; for that it is too essential, too constitutive. Less intellect and more intuition is our deepest need. Till we have learned that genuine knowledge is (in M. Rageot's phrase) "to understand in the fashion in which one loves," reality will be for us a sealed book. There is no way of bathing in the stream of creative fact but that of intuitive sympathy. Something there is here, surely, which theologians no less than philosophers may gladly accept. It is much to acquire an ingrained suspicion of closed systems—theories of God and man, that is, which have been finished at a stroke and have been stationary ever since. How much we have suffered in theology from sheer mental inertia I need not stay to prove. Orthodoxy in the bad sense may be defined as the view that once upon a time—whether in the fourth century or the sixteenth matters little—such a formulation of Christian faith was attained to as never again required, or indeed admitted of, improvement. But thus to canonise past systems, Bergson reminds us, is to forget how all interpretation is the creature of time. It is not in the nature of life to hand on anything unchanged. Truth is no intemporal essence which some genius sufficiently powerful might actually envisage in a single view, handing it down subsequently in stereotyped form. To reflect the great whole many minds are needed. Truth, as it has been expressed, is analysable in systems as light in varied colours, but the systems one and all, have their day and cease to be. No

finer passage could be extracted from M. Bergson's writings, or one more expressive of his profound intellectual modesty than the page of his Preface to "Creative Evolution", where, after repudiating the false evolutionism of Spencer, which elaborately assumes everything that calls for explanation, he sketches a programme for true evolutionism, "in which reality would be followed in its generation and its growth". "But", he proceeds, "a philosophy of this kind will not be made in a day. Unlike the philosophical systems properly so called, each of which was the individual work of a man of genius and sprang up as a whole, to be taken or left, it will only be built up by the collective and progressive effort of many thinkers, of many observers also, completing, correcting and improving one another." Again I say, it is good to be reminded that dogmatic systems, nay ecclesiastical dogmas themselves, are but as it were "snap-shots" of reality, and that theology is a movement as truly as an edifice.

After these more general and preliminary observations we may proceed to consider in the first place, those elements in Bergson's philosophic outlook as a whole which Christian thought may well receive with grateful appreciation, as enabling us, or at least as aiding us, either to express our fundamental convictions more worthily or to repel some of the more threatened modern assaults upon the Faith. Next we shall study those aspects of his work which seem less easily reconcilable with our deepest beliefs, or at least have not as yet been sufficiently expounded to determine their helpfulness or the reverse. It will of course be understood that the judgments I express can have nothing unconditional about them. Bergsonianism as a whole is entitled to the benefit of its own central principle; it too, like the world it interprets, is a growing fact, bursting with vitality; and we must not too hastily conclude that it has yet developed its complete meaning. Let us turn, then, first to the more positive side of the account.

I have already mentioned the unhesitatingly theistic position taken by Bergson, not so much in his published works, which rightly confine themselves to strictly technical matters, as in occasional utterances of a less argumentative type. He believes, to use his own phrase, in a free and creating God. In the never-ceasing conflict between Theism and Pantheism, he ranges himself decisively on the theistic side. He feels no sympathy whatever with the attempt to refund all mental life, human and divine, into the abstract unity of Spirits as such, in an hypostatized form of Kant's **Bewusstsein ueberhaupt**. "How", he asks, "could this 'form', which is in truth formless, serve to characterize a living, active, concrete personality, or to distinguish Peter from Paul? Is it astonishing that the philosophers who have isolated this 'form' of personality should, then, find it insufficient to characterize a definite person, and that they should be gradually led to make their empty ego a kind of bottomless receptacle, which belongs no more to Peter than to Paul, and in which there is room, according to our preference, for all humanity, for God, or for existence in general?"¹¹ The history of speculation proves to the hilt that the ideas of God and man have constantly varied together. If, as we believe, religion is a fellowship, a communion of Spirit with spirit, on each side of the relation there must exist self-conscious and self-determining mind; and whether, with empiricism, we dissolve personality into a multiplicity of psychical states detached from an ego that binds them together, or, with transcendental rationalism, substantiate the unity of experience as an independent entity unrelated to the concrete filling of individual souls, in both cases alike the presuppositions of faith and worship vanish, because God and man equally are evaporated in abstractions. To this form of dialectic Bergson is unreservedly opposed. Beginning at the human end, he insists that personality shall be allowed to tell its own story, revealing itself to the eye of intuition.

¹¹Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 30.

What we thus discover about the essential movement of its life will prove our best guide to conceiving God.

Bergson also encourages us to fight off that tendency to "psychologise" in our ultimate conceptions of the Self, to find the only reality of spiritual life, as Hume did, in the transient flux of inward states, which attained such unfortunate predominance in the analytically-minded second half of the nineteenth century. He curtly declines to melt the Self down in a diversity of feelings and impressions. The psychologist cannot answer questions regarding ultimate reality, and to turn psychology forthwith into a metaphysic, as though the final meaning of personality could be elicited by external analysis, is philosophically one of the unpardonable sins. His severe comment upon the school of J. S. Mill is that "however much they place the (mental) states side by side, multiplying points of contact, and exploring the intervals, the ego always escapes them, so that they finish by seeing in it nothing but a vain phantom." He ends, in one of his characteristically memorable figures: "we might as well deny that the *Iliad* had no meaning, on the ground that we had looked in vain for that meaning in the intervals between the letters of which it is composed."¹²

Probably, were Christian thinkers questioned as to what, in their judgment, is M. Bergson's highest service of faith, the majority would reply promptly: His destructive critique of materialism and mechanism as all-comprehensive points of view. His work in this reference is specially valuable for its disinterested and scientific character. It is a criticism of these philosophies from within—in the light, as it may be put, of their own ideal. Bergson disarms materialism by explaining it. He points out that it so much falls in with the natural bent of intelligence that "even when we convince ourselves of its absurdity, we are drawn to it as the needle to the magnet." The reason is that, being creatures made for action, our minds comprehend reality most easily in

¹²Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 27.

that form, namely matter, in which we can with least trouble measure and manage it. The intellect petrifies the real, lest the continual change actually going on in living fact should baffle apprehension, and our work be thus robbed of all purpose and achievement. Everything like explanation of thought by cerebral events; all suggestions that "the brain can produce the mind in any way that is analogous to the secretion of a gland or the functioning of an organ," Bergson abhors. He argues convincingly that if this were true, or anything like it, knowledge as a whole would become illusory. The limited series of events in the cells and fibres of the cerebral cortex cannot produce the cognition of a reality unconfined in space and boundless in time. In point of fact, the brain is an organ subservient to the directing agency of intelligence. It resembles a telephone exchange, in which different connections have to be made in accordance with different calls from the outer world. When the stimuli reach the brain, some go through automatically; others are checked and sifted before passing into action; perception means hesitation, choice, the making of distinctions. Thus the brain, Bergson holds, is to be regarded as a motor mechanism, fitted for the reception and transmission of movement; it is the mind's tool, not its creator or sustainer. Nor has biology any use for a theory which, like materialism, would make biological science an impossibility. For materialism is openly at war with the fact that a living creature represents far more than the immediate effect of an immediate past; "we see in it the preservation and activity and continuity of an illimitable past." If there were nothing but matter, the accumulated storage of organic memory, so to call it, would be unintelligible.

Still more impressive, perhaps, is Bergson's handling of pure mechanism, which he exhibits as impotent to explain even physical events, not to speak of definitely vital phenomena. The true view of things, he protests,

cannot be "a vast mathematic, a single and closed-in-system of relations, imprisoning the whole of reality in a network prepared in advance."¹³ The universe is a scene not of being simply, but of true becoming. The whole is shot through with original and originitive change. Things, when made, are not stereotyped for ever; they are a-making and to be made. Life presents itself as a continuous generation, in and through which is ever being born the new, the unrepeatable, the infinitely full of promise. Progress depends on a sort of inner spring, urging all things towards life, and towards a more fully developed life. Just for this reason, what is forthcoming can never be calculated or budgeted for in advance. The delusion that it can arises simply because intellect, which people usually apply to the problem, is adapted solely for the cognition of matter and of necessity fails to apprehend movement; it knows reality in the static form we call matter and not in the flowing form we call life. Intellect, indeed, is thought arrested and standardized at a certain stage of its development; it has been evolved not for the purpose of insight but for action—to canalize, as Bergson puts it, the directions of our activity. Inevitably, then, it transposes everything into mechanism, which is hopeless when the phenomena are vital. If the keynote alike of thought and of reality is spontaneousness, originality, creative change, then no form of apprehension which is orientated towards the repeatable, and must on principle neglect what is unique, can be just to the fact of the world as biology and self-consciousness reveal them. Without pronouncing on this specific view of intellect, we certainly may take Bergson's argument as proof that higher categories than those of mechanical equivalence are required to interpret the events of organic, and still more of conscious, life.

These considerations, I think, cast light upon two great and ancient problems. If the modern mind could be delivered from the haunting obsession of a world pre-

¹³Introduction to *Metaphysics*, p. 71.

determined in all its parts by a purely mechanical scheme of forces, we might be able to look with new understanding at the familiar questions of "miracle" and "freedom." On mechanistic presuppositions, obviously enough, the very conception of miracle is meaningless: nothing new really ever happens, and history itself is nothing more than the gradual self-exhaustion of a pre-arranged mechanical system charged with potential energy. Novelty is ruled out *ab initio*, therefore also the specific kind of novelty to describe which religious men have chosen the word "miracle." But according to Bergson, who claims to have observation and reflection on his side, the world is all novelties together. Does this make Divine preferential action more credible or less? To me it seems to make it distinctly more credible. It permits us, that is to say, to regard the universe as open to the Divine activity. The future is not given in the present, it is unwritten, waiting to be written; it is not a scroll slowly unfolding itself, but, for religious faith, all things are in the hand of God who creates by bringing continually to new birth what is not merely unforeseen but, for us, unforeseeable. In that case, one question well worth asking will be whether, at a particular point in history, the new fact vouchsafed to the world may not have been a transcendent Personality, charged with Divine redeeming life and love. It is a question which Bergsonianism of course cannot answer in the affirmative, any more than could its speculative predecessors: but at least it fortifies the mind to realize an end that the negative objections of the past, which in the main rested on mechanistic assumptions, have thus from a fresh point of view been proved untenable, and that to concede their truth would be fatal to a very great deal more than to the supernatural against which they have usually been directed. It would be fatal above all, to the moral interpretation of history.

Bergson's attitude to freedom is peculiarly his own, though in certain ways, I feel, it recalls the distinction of

noumenal and phenomenal in Kant. Life, for Bergson, as we have seen, is unceasing creation, and consciousness is life at its highest point. We need not therefore be surprised to find that no one has ever asserted more emphatically the reality of freedom as a fact. "Consciousness", he writes, "is synonymous with invention and with freedom. Now, in the animal, invention is never anything but a variation on the terms of routine. * * * With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in man alone, it sets itself free. While at the end of the vast spring-board from which it has taken its leap, all the others have stepped downwards, finding the chord stretched too high, man alone has cleared the obstacle."¹⁴ Action, as we know it, as we launch ourselves into it, is liberty. "We are free," he says, falling into a more familiar groove, "when our actions issue from our entire personality, when they are its expression, when they have to it that indefinable resemblance that one finds often between the artist and his work."¹⁵ Elsewhere, however, he explains that by this he by no means intends simply that freedom is to be dependent on oneself just as the effect is dependent upon a cause which determines it necessarily, and that while he rejects the idea of a free act being preceded by the equal possibility of two contrary manifestations of the Self, he holds strongly that the free act is original and under pressure, would not entirely disown the conception of the *liberum arbitrium*. In a sense, it is true, Bergson would say that we share our freedom with all that lives; yet in our form of life is registered the greatest amount of free creative power that the life impulse has yet evolved. For this philosophy of change Wildon Carr pleads that it is the "final refutation of the Calvinism which has weighed heavily on the human spirit."¹⁶

But while Bergson withstands the determinist to the face, and affirms liberty as the constitutive fact of life,

¹⁴*Creative Evolution*, pp. 278-9.

¹⁵Quoted by Le Roy, p. 74.

¹⁶*Philosophy of Change*, p. 196.

he warns us with no less emphasis that to theorize freedom is to extinguish it. We are free, for we are alive; we assert our freedom by acting freely, but to explain it is impossible. Strictly it is indefinable. The necessitarian is an intellectualist; and the intellect, he points out, "will always perceive freedom in the form of necessity, it will always neglect the element of novelty or of creation inherent in the free act."¹⁷ Try to argue the question with the necessitarian, nay, try even to **state** the problem of freedom, and you have fatally prejudged the solution in a deterministic sense; you are done for, because you have not rested content with asserting the bare fact. This is surely unfair to Bergson's own argument, which, after all, is addressed to our intelligence, and seems to me to contain a thoroughly convincing refutation of necessitarianism; but it is interestingly similar to the intuitive conviction of the religious man that grace and freedom are both operative in the experience of salvation, and need not each be pared down in accommodation to the other, while yet we possess no rationalizing insight into the mode of their coalescence. Their oneness we can experience, but to explain it is beyond us.

I should venture to urge something like the same objection with reference to another feature of M. Bergson's general argument. Not merely, as we have already seen, does he repudiate mechanism; he tries Finalism also and condemns it, and thereby, as might appear, the whole teleological view of things. His ruling is based on the ground that to conceive the universe as the working out of a preconceived plan or purpose, drawn in detail beforehand, is no better than inverted mechanism. But whether we can or cannot divine exactly how Divine purpose is fulfilled—the apparatus or mediation of fulfilment, I mean—the **fact** of purpose is surely as impossible to deny as the fact of freedom. In such matters, we can only use the principle of analogy, moulded on our own highest experience; and nothing is more certain than that

¹⁷*Creative Evolution*, p. 285.

the facts of life and mind cannot be truly described except teleologically, that is to say, as activity directed towards some end. So that Bergson cannot really reject Finalism in the same sense as he rejects mechanism, or in the same unconditional way. Even from his own standpoint, it must be incomparably nearer the truth than the other. For one thing pure mechanism has no place in human experience: we therefore rightly reject it as an interpretation of the world. On the other hand, Purpose is native, central and organic in our experience at its best and highest; accordingly it is a conception we are bound to take with us in our efforts to interpret the ultimate relationship of God and the world. Further, if this world be, in Kant's phrase, "a vale of soul-making," no kind of mechanism, inverted or other, can be supposed equal to so high a task. And that the End of the Absolute, or God, is the creation of finite personalities, fundamentally kindred to Himself, remains the last outcome and conclusion of every spiritual interpretation of the universe. Let us by all means banish from the Divine purposive action all ideas of contrivance—of a search for, and skilful or laborious adjustment of, means to end—for this, as it has been expressed, "evidently implies a pre-existing or independently existing material whose capabilities limit and condition the realizing activity."¹⁸ But the thought of End or Purpose is not indissolubly bound up with this feature of finite action, nor does it necessarily imply the mechanical realization of a programme arranged beforehand. As Professor Pringle-Pattison has said, in our application of this, for us, supreme category to the Divine guidance of all things, "certain features of finite purpose it is to be presumed, must fall away; but when these are dropped, there may still remain a fundamental attitude of will (perhaps even of desire) which cannot be more fitly designated in mortal speech than by the time-honoured category of End or Purpose."¹⁹

¹⁸Pringle-Pattison, *The Idea of God*.

¹⁹*Ibid.* p. 323.

Two problems remain to be briefly treated of, immortality, and the difficult theoretic question of intuition. I do not know that M. Bergson has anywhere in print dealt fully with the question of immortality; but he is quoted as saying that "we have no repugnance in supposing that consciousness will pursue its path beyond this earthly life," and Mr. Carr reminds us that "in his presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research" M. Bergson expressed his view that "the survival of individual personality after death is so probable as to compel belief in the absence of any positive disproof."²⁰ His philosophy may be read as in harmony with the Christian hope in two points of detail: first, it suggests that beyond death as in this life soul is inconceivable except as united, in active fashion, with that which for lack of a better name we are compelled to call "body." And again, Bergson insists that unless the individual histories apparently broken off at death have their continuity preserved on the further side—just as elsewhere in living reality the whole past is preserved—the universe would be the scene of quite unintelligible waste. It would be very unwise, however, to hail M. Bergson as a preacher of the full Christian message regarding the future life. For one thing, he manifestly considers immortality to be only extremely probable—which is very far from being the same thing as the "full assurance of faith." And also—this is perhaps the objection I have just stated in another form—the basis of his hope, with its probability more or less, is philosophical, not religious; it is not, that is to say, rooted in the known character of God. Survival by itself is scarcely fitted to evoke a "joy unspeakable and full of glory." As is evident from Hebrew and Greek thought, survival may mean persistence in conditions of a kind indescribably gloomy and abhorrent. Not "that" but "what" is here the crucial question; and the content we Christians assign to immortality must be drawn from the revelation of the Father vouchsafed to us in Jesus.

²⁰Philosophy of Change, VIII-IX.

M. Bergson's idea of intuition, as you are aware, has been the subject of very ample debate. Intuition, for him, means penetration by insight into the spontaneous movement of life. It enables us to see into the life of things, to know as it were from the inside that which is given immediately. Above all, through intuition we are able to distinguish between the psychological conception of time (true duration), in which all moments are qualitatively different and cannot be taken for each other, and which forms, as Bergson mysteriously puts it, "the very stuff of reality," and on the other hand the mechanical or mathematical conception of time, in which it consists of identical moments, any one of which can be substituted for any other because they differ only numerically. Intuition we best understand by contrast with intellect. Intellect, or as it may be otherwise named, understanding, is bent on analysis, sorting different aspects of the given under concepts; it is *post mortem* dissection at the best; whereas intuition is to place oneself in the living stream of fact, "to feel", as it has been put, "the palpitating of the heart of reality." We must form, Bergson tells us, "fluid concepts, capable of following reality in all its sinuosities." It would be impertinent in me to enter here upon the multifarious criticisms which have been passed upon this idea from the strictly philosophic point of view—often, as I think rightly. It has been objected, for example, that nothing **can** be immediately given without the incipient action of conceptual thought, that consequently intuition and intelligence cannot form an absolute opposition, that intuition also is vitally related to practical life, that intellect is itself creative, that what intuition is cannot be explained clearly because language is intellectual through and through. But, leaving these technical matters, I should like rather to point out that in one aspect what Bergson calls intuition is simply what, in religion, is known by the more familiar name of "faith." William James had this in view when he said that what Bergson calls us to is "putting off our

proud maturity of mind and becoming again as foolish little children in the eyes of reason. But difficult as such a revolution is (he adds) there is no other way, I believe, to the possession of reality." Faith also is an inward, living knowledge of transcendent things beyond the reach of discursive understanding; it is an apprehension of what cannot be rationalized, into which we enter by sympathy, making ourselves one with it in order that we may know. Hence intuition, as a technical Bergsonian idea, may serve to remind us of the distinction, which religion can never afford to forget, between knowing by theory and knowing by experience, between the external analysis of a faith whose joy one has never tasted and a personal participation in its recreating and inspiring life. It has been defined as "redeemed reason," laying hold of supreme truth by the intuition of love and the penetration of a stricken conscience.²¹ Not that faith need take over the defects we have found in the Bergsonian intuition. It must not be the precise contrary of intelligence, nor, with the New Testament in our hands, can we truthfully represent it as proceeding by a movement at bottom quietistic and Neo-platonic—away from the world into the depths of our own being, to seek and find the actual reality of existence in the contemplations of subjective fact.

Looking back, we may perhaps agree to find the most valuable contribution of Bergsonianism to religious thought in its destructive analysis of mechanistic fatalism, in its plea for intuitive knowledge, and in its vindication of spontaneity as an indubitable element in the reality presented in actual experience. It is a large and valuable service. But when we ask whether the Bergsonian philosophy is an adequate exponent of our ultimate convictions, and may legitimately be laid down as the speculative substructure of Christian thought, the answer is much less clear. Certain unquestionable deductions from its utility for that high purpose have to be made. Of these let me treat briefly.

²¹G. E. Hermmann, *Eucken and Bergson*, pp. 211, 207.

An enemy might protest, I think, that Bergsonianism and Buddhism are in essentials closely akin, inasmuch as each proclaims that there is no such thing as Being—only Becoming. Reality is a flux; nothing abides. Time is the very stuff of all existence. I do not feel that on the whole this charge could be sustained; but certainly Bergson has laid stress so exclusively upon the continuity of change as to obscure the companion truth that change is intelligible only by contrast with the permanent, multiplicity by its difference from, and essential relation to, unity. His complete reaction against the idea of the immutable has gone so far that I do not think it would be unfair to say that at times his language actually suggests that the conception of a fluid thing must itself be fluid.

The point at which this difficulty becomes crucial is the Bergsonian idea of the Divine. He seems to teach the doctrine of "a growing God." Not perhaps in explicit terms. "God," he does say in one passage, "God, thus defined, has nothing absolutely finished in his essence. He is unceasing life, action, freedom. Creation is not a mystery: we experience it in ourselves when we act freely."²² But in this there is nothing, so far as I can see, that could not be paralleled from writers of the most orthodox schools as they endeavor to set forth one great aspect of the truth—as they strive, that is, to bring the Divine activity into some real and positive relation to changes within the world. But when we turn from express statements to the implicit logic of Bergson's thought, our conclusion may well be different. His principles, when prolonged into the highest sphere, seem to plunge the Godhead into the stream of change, inevitably making Him the subject and, as it were, the victim of time. God ceases to be in any sense independent of, or transcendent over, the world. In various quarters recently the idea of a finite God has been put forward, usually in connection with the philosophical theory of Plural-

²²*Creative Evolution*, p. 262.

ism; and of course the point at which this touches Christian faith most acutely is that of Providence. From Bergson's works we receive the impression that what falls in best with his general principles is the notion of God as restricted in knowledge and moving forward into the future, as we do, more or less in ignorance of what lies ahead. I observe that Bishop D'Arcy, arguing recently on these lines, has written: "We are included in a single, all-comprehending Life. It may be that, for Him also, the precise form of the future is, as yet, undetermined."²³ This, I am convinced, is bad philosophy; but there is no conceivable gain in philosophical completeness which would not be too dearly purchased by the sacrifice of religious faith in Providence in the fullest sense. The Father of Jesus Christ is One who knows all, and to whom all things are possible; and it ill becomes a philosophy which has unceasingly protested against sacrificing life to logic, thus in the name of theory to deprive religion of its most fundamental conviction. We Christians cannot believe in a God who is nothing more than the ocean-tide of Life forcing its way up the creeks of the future, blindly feeling for the path of least resistance. In saying so we do not forget all that Bergson's victorious polemic against mechanism may suggest as to the powers of self-renewal with which the universe is charged. God, we also believe, is infinitely strong to recreate. To Him the past is no fate; it is the pre-supposition of triumphant advance, carrying forward the accumulated increment of what is bygone into a creative present.

When we demur to the notion of a finite God, it is not I hope with the meticulous dismay of a narrow orthodoxy. Too often, as we read Bergson's entrancing pages, we become conscious that in his anxiety to dethrone the idol of Determinism he goes very near enthroning Chance, or, as he would say, "radical contingency" in its place. If purpose be absent from the action of that universal

²³God and Freedom, p. 219.

Life-impulse which functions as God in Bergson's thought, and if, as apparently must follow, we ascribe to God moods identical in quality with what we know as "suspense," the confusion of baffled plans, and readiness to change His mind under the compulsion of circumstances, it is difficult to see what is meant by describing the universe as under Divine control; and to represent this as a development of Bible religion, and a development true to type, would indeed be fatuous. It seems to me impossible to override the testimony of the religious consciousness on this point. To regard God as an "only half-aware life-force" is to remove the foundation-stone of Christian joy and peace. Far better to accept frankly the antinomy or paradox implicit in the facts: admitting that spontaneity and creative freedom are somehow an irreducible element in the life we live, yet claiming openly, with the faith of every age, that underlying and overarching all is the supreme sovereignty of God. How the two finally are in accord, we cannot tell; but antinomy is not an accident in religious thought: it belongs to its essential and constitutive fibre. As a recent writer has observed, "At our level of thought, the inclusion of an element of contradiction seems to be a sign of reality and of largeness of view rather than of error."

Two great omissions in M. Bergson's work, it appears to me, must be filled up, at least in outline, before we shall be able to say how far he is going to help the Christian thinker. In the first place, he has not yet explained to us his conception of that specific kind of reality we call history, and its value for a completed view of the universe. This is perhaps natural in one whose work began from the side of mathematics, later advancing to the problems of biology. His method, we must remember, has been to concentrate upon one specific problem at a time. His day for writing on the meaning of history has not yet arrived. Perhaps we can already discern points in his thought to which it will not be difficult to fasten a positive evaluation of history, as the tissue of past events,

and one which may help serious men in the terribly severe task of discovering a universal and eternal significance in concrete items of the time-and-space series. For one thing, as we learn from his **Introduction to Metaphysics**, Bergson is a radical opponent of the Platonic and Neo-platonic tenet according to which the invariable, the unchanging is the sole reality, while what happens is but "a receptive and shifting image of immobile eternity." "The whole of the philosophy which begins in Plato and culminates in Plotinus," he adds, "is the development of a principle which may be formulated thus: 'There is more in the immutable than in the moving. * * * Now it is the contrary which is true.'"²⁴ Over and over again he insists that we must permit actual life to dilate our thought to its own scale; philosophy is a systematic expansion of our minds, an ever-renewed effort to transcend our ideas up to date. If the surprises of fact should demand it, we may have to create new concepts, perhaps even a new method of thinking. Intellectual inertia—what Professor James used to call philosophical old-fogysm—must not be allowed to stereotype our categories. One can perceive how kindly the relation might prove to be between this sort of thinking and the idea of Divine revelation, or at all events the conviction that human history has a value for God. Revelation is nothing if not a flat denial that what is must be for ever. It means that God can accomplish what is new and put forth ever increasing resources for the world's deliverance, so that man is not condemned eternally to pour all possible experience into pre-existing moulds. In particular, this unfettered and open-eyed recognition of novel fact is an encouragement to all who need it, to claim for Jesus Christ an unshared and unprecedented place, and if necessary, to urge that no familiar humanitarian concept can do justice to His absolute significance. If the past is no standard for present or future, because "each moment brings something new, something that never was

²⁴P. 64.

before," then there is room in the universe for a real Divine self-bestowment in Jesus, who escapes from and passes beyond all that in the light of a pure empirical inspection of humanity might antecedently have seemed possible.

The deepest reason, however, why M. Bergson has left history untouched is that he has not yet chosen to deal with the problems of morality. It might perhaps be well if occasionally he reminded his readers that an interpretation of human life which takes no account of morality can be nothing more than a fragment. Amongst his more unquestioning adherents, certainly, there are those who badly need this reminder. To say, with one of them, that "there is only a difference of degree and not of kind between an atom of hydrogen and a human soul," or again that insects "are in exactly the same relation to the activity of life as we are," is to propound statements containing so small an ingredient of truth as to be virtually indistinguishable from nonsense. Bergsonianism, thus far, is the characteristic philosophy of a biological age, and while in itself this represents a notable advance beyond the dreary and repellent negations of materialism, inasmuch as it teaches the use of perpetually higher categories, and proves the impossibility of reducing vital processes to terms of mechanism, since to describe the behaviour of anything that lives we must pass to another range of conceptions altogether; yet it would be the height of unwisdom to repeat the old mistake by suggesting that biological categories are adequate to the distinctively human experience. No doubt in one sense "history" is a biological conception. The living being has a past, which persists as a vital moment in the present, its nature at any given point resuming, as it were, its whole bygone development, so that its reaction upon environment is largely determined by the experience it has traversed. But this is not enough. It implies indeed a capacity of learning; in some sense it means progress through the integration of past change in the accumulat-

ed present; but so far there is no trace of that *sui generis* element of human life known as the good, the right, the feeling or judgment of obligation. In all likelihood M. Bergson would not deny this; I have not brought it forward by way of refuting him; but rather in order to explain why the conception of history in the deepest sense has as yet no place in his thought. But we should not be much better off if the specifically human values were ultimately to be dissipated in biological, instead of physical, terms; a man dies equally whether he is hanged or shot. Neither biology nor physics can appreciate the meaning of God, or redemption, or faith and hope and love.

In conclusion I can only mention, without dwelling upon it, a subject full of fascination for the philosophical theologian, I mean the resemblances of Hegel and Bergson and their respective bearings upon faith. The resemblance is closer than we might suppose. If we take Bergson's master principle, as stated by Mr. Wildon Carr, the principle, namely that "the fundamental reality is life, that life is an original movement generating an order the inverse of itself,"²⁵ we might just for the moment be listening to Hegel. They agree in offering us the principle of advance through contradiction, or the distinction of inseparables; for both the pulse of thought beats with the pulse of things when we behold life as a development proceeding through division to a truer unity—a development which alone makes intelligible the fullness and richness of the world. It may well happen, should Bergsonianism exhibit the gift of proselytism and create a school, that before long, like Hegelianism eighty years ago, it also will split into two wings, a Right and a Left: one more friendly to Christian faith, the other increasingly negative and hostile.

²⁵*Philosophy of Change*, pp. 183-5.