

## II.—THOUGHT AND INTUITION.

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It has been suggested that Bergson's philosophy is so popular because it offers an easy road to knowledge. Bergson's attacks upon thought are particularly welcomed, we are told, by the lazy and muddle-headed who shrink from the effort which thought demands, and are only too glad to be absolved, in the name of philosophy itself, from taking trouble, and ready enough to believe the philosopher who tells them that they will get on all the better if they give up any attempt to think things out and just let themselves go. If this be so, then Bergson's philosophy owes its popularity to a misunderstanding.

Bergson does, indeed, consider that intuition is the right method for philosophy, and he urges us to adopt it in place of our usual intellectual methods. But it is not fair to object to intuition on the ground that it is too easy; the question is, rather, whether it is not altogether too difficult an act for us to perform. In his *Introduction to Metaphysics*, Bergson refers to "the essentially active, I might almost say violent, character of metaphysical intuition." For him intuition is the supreme effort, thought the *pis aller* with which we have to manage as best we can when the strain of intuition becomes too great for us to endure.

Bergson's theory of knowledge is rather different from those of other philosophers, in that it undertakes to show not so much how we do in fact get knowledge, as how we ought to set about getting it. Before discussing this question, we must first see what the problem is, by examining briefly what ways of obtaining knowledge are open to us, what ways we usually choose, and what motives determine our choice.

Whenever we pay attention we find ourselves in possession of some sort of knowledge. This way of getting knowledge simply by attending without thinking about what we know we will call "acquaintance," and what is known in this way we will call "our experience." We are in the habit of supposing, in so far as we think about the matter at all, that our experience, what we are acquainted with, is things having common qualities such as solid tables, sweet sugar, blue sky, loud noises, together with states of mind and feeling such as anger, hope, ambition, and so on, with which we can be acquainted if we pay attention, and which may be attended to over and over again. In the course of this paper we shall have to examine our experience carefully; and, as we go on, we shall see that this description of it is at least very much oversimplified, if it is not positively erroneous. There is one thing, at any rate, about experience which must strike anyone who begins to look into what actually happens and which appears to conflict with this simple view of what experience is.

If we examine what actually goes on in our consciousness, our experience seems to be in a perpetual state of change, so that we really never seem to be acquainted with quite the same direct experience even for two moments together. It would, of course, never occur to anyone to deny that our experiences do change very often; most people, however, would hesitate to say that there is no such thing as an experience which is not in process of changing. We all realize that the possibilities of our experience are limited and governed by the presence or absence of conditions outside the experience itself—we should all agree that no one could see the blue sky if he were either blind or were shut up in a cellar, and that he could not hear a song if he were either quite deaf or if no one were singing. We are quite ready to admit that changes in these outside conditions will produce changes in our experience. What is often not clearly realized, however, is the extent to which, even though there is no reason to suppose that there has been any

change in the conditions, our experience is, nevertheless, in fact always changing owing to variations in the intensity and direction of our attention. If, for example, you try to fix your attention on, say, a sheet of foolscap, and notice what happens, you will soon find out that it is a complete mistake to imagine that, during the time your attention is supposed to be fixed upon it, you are continually aware of the same direct experience of, say, whiteness, parallel lines, oblong shape, and so on. Try as you may to steady your attention, it is perpetually shifting, now concentrating on a tiny part of the whole field presented to sight, now expanding to include much more of it; and if, by a great effort, you manage to check this straying of attention, your object seems to elude you altogether, and you find that you are no longer even succeeding in confining your attention to what is presented to sight, but that now you are listening, perhaps, or attending to your breathing or the sensations of your clothes, and not to the sheet of foolscap at all.

If this be a correct account of what actually happens, continual ebbing and flowing of attention would almost seem to be an invariable condition of there being any experience at all. It would be a mistake, however, to think of these ebbings and flowings of attention as if there were any clear-cut distinction between them: they shade off into each other so that it is often very hard to say, in the case of any given experience, just where acquaintance ends. If I am hard at work in a room with a clock, who can say whether or not the ticking forms part of my experience? I might not have been aware of it, and yet if the clock stopped I might notice it; or, again, under special circumstances, it might turn out that I could remember it perfectly well. The clearest way of describing normal consciousness seems to be by distinguishing between the focus of attention and the vaguer experience which always surrounds it. We shall in future call whatever is clearly held before attention "the focussed experience" and the vague surrounding experience towards which attention is not at the

moment directed "the unfocussed experience"; when we mean to refer to them both together we shall speak of "the whole field of experience known by acquaintance." In the case of the foolscap the focussed experience would be the whiteness, the lines, or whatever part of it you succeed, for the moment, in concentrating your attention upon; the unfocussed experience would be the shape, perhaps, sounds within earshot, bodily sensations, your emotional state, and so on. The whole field of acquaintance will include the focussed experience along with all the rest of the sensations and feelings which make up the unfocussed experience.

It is very important to the understanding of what Bergson has to say to realize that our acquaintance is not confined to focussed experience but that, on the contrary, a close examination of what goes on in consciousness seems to show that this focussed experience is really only a small part of a much wider field of experience with the whole of which we are, to some extent, acquainted. The continual change, always taking place in our focussed experience, which we notice when we watch it closely for a while, is simply the continual shifting, relaxing and concentrating of our attention over this wider field of acquaintance.

So far our attempt to discover what ways there are of obtaining knowledge has not got beyond acquaintance, and we have seen that, even in the case of this most direct way of knowing, it is quite possible to make mistakes as to what it is that we know. Acquaintance, however, is not our only way of knowing: we are able further to supplement the knowledge with which acquaintance supplies us by thought. If all our wants were satisfied by the experience which we get in the ordinary course simply by paying attention, we should not trouble about getting any further knowledge. But experience alone is unsatisfactory, very limited, very uncertain, and hard to retain for long at a time, and, above all, very dangerous unless we can foresee what is coming. We shall not

rest satisfied until we can foresee and control what happens and recall and communicate it. These are our practical needs with regard to our knowledge, and I put them first because they are the most pressing. Moreover, we have also what we call our speculative curiosity: we want the fullest possible knowledge for its own sake, regardless of whether it may be of use or not. In order to satisfy these various wants we are driven to try and supplement the very limited knowledge which we get by acquaintance, and the way in which we usually do this is called thought. Thought, then, is, as compared with acquaintance, a *pis aller*. As Bergson says in *La Perception du Changement*, p. 5, we shall all be prepared to admit that "si nos sens et notre conscience avaient une portée illimitée, si notre faculté de percevoir, extérieure et intérieure, était indéfinie, nous n'aurions jamais recours à la faculté de concevoir ni à celle de raisonner. Concevoir est un *pis aller* dans les cas où l'on ne peut pas percevoir, et raisonner ne s'impose que dans la mesure où l'on doit combler les vides de la perception externe ou interne, et en étendre la portée." [If our senses and acquaintance were unlimited in their range, if our faculty of external and internal perception were unrestricted, we should never have recourse to the faculty of conception nor to that of reasoning. Conception is a *pis aller* in cases where perception is impossible, and reasoning is only introduced in so far as we need to fill in the blanks in external or internal perception and extend its range.]

In saying this Bergson is, of course, ignoring the whole field of pure thought, pure science, mathematics and logic, which could never be arrived at by mere perception, no matter how "unlimited" and "unrestricted." His pre-occupation is, throughout, with existence and with the ways in which we may hope to increase our knowledge of it. This fundamental pre-occupation, which leads Bergson to assume that the whole concern of speculative curiosity, and so of philosophy, is simply existence—an assumption nowhere clearly stated just because he takes it

so completely for granted, but always clearly discernible through all his writings—may go a long way towards explaining why it is that philosophers whose main pre-occupation is with logic and abstract thought often seem to fail altogether to make out what Bergson is talking about. Bergson is inclined to look upon abstract thought as, at best, a plaything on which it may amuse us to exercise our intellectual powers, but he warns us against over-indulgence in this pastime lest we be tempted to lose our sense of the distinction between the abstract and the concrete and to suppose that by studying abstractions we shall somehow be able to increase our knowledge of existence itself. It is not necessary to discuss here whether Bergson makes a mistake in thus confining his theory of knowledge to the problems raised by the knowledge of what exists. He believes that this is the problem with which philosophy ought to concern itself, and he never discusses thought except from the point of view of how it may increase or stand in the way of our knowledge of existence.

Thought supplements the knowledge of existence secured by acquaintance by discovering the general laws of form and behaviour which apply to different kinds of experiences. It should be noticed that thought, in so far as it is concerned with experience at all, only gives us knowledge about experience, while acquaintance gives actual experience itself. The gulf between these two kinds of knowledge is obvious; no amount of knowledge about light or colour can ever give a blind man the experience of sight. Some philosophers, regarding experience as necessarily fragmentary, think that our speculative curiosity must, perforce, be content to supplement such fragments of experience as come our way with knowledge *about* the rest of existence. Some of them, disappointed with, or not attracted by, such knowledge about existence, turn their backs upon existence altogether, and become absorbed in abstract ideas. Bergson's curiosity is, as we have said, directed towards existence; abstractions do not interest him. For him mere

knowledge about, even though it be about existence, is a wholly unsatisfactory substitute for that actual acquaintance at which he aims. He condemns our common habit of concentrating so much of our mental energies on thought, which can never give more than knowledge about, because he believes that, if only we were not in such a hurry to secure this knowledge about, we might obtain a much greater measure than we usually enjoy of actual acquaintance itself.

Normally we use experience simply as material for thought, and we are always trying to pass from the particular experience to the general law. Bergson's first criticism of this habit of thought is that it diverts an undue proportion of our attention and energy from the business of acquaintance. Whether we agreed with this criticism would depend on the relative importance which we attached to acquaintance with experience as compared with knowledge about it, and this again would probably depend, largely, on the extent to which we thought it possible to enlarge and improve upon the sort of experience with which acquaintance usually at present furnishes us. We might well admit that the experiment of trying to widen and intensify our experience was at least worth making, since, after all, the wider our acquaintance was, the better material it would make for the further task of supplementing our actual experience by knowledge about it. Such concessions, however, would not meet the difficulty which underlies Bergson's criticism.

Bergson believes that there is a fundamental incompatibility between actual acquaintance with experience and knowledge about it. He considers that the fact of attending to experience as so much material for thought leads, not merely to a reduction in the amount of experience attended to, but actually to *the mutilation of such experience as we do still allow ourselves the opportunity to be acquainted with*. This is the essential point in Bergson's criticism of the intellectual method of thought. We shall see better what reasons Bergson has for making this criticism if we examine what it is that actually happens when

we use the experience given in acquaintance as material for that further intellectual operation, called thought, by which we get our knowledge about experience.

There are four stages in this business of deriving knowledge about experience from the actual experiences with which we are acquainted. The first thing we have to do is to learn to *recognise* the common qualities shared by different experiences; the next thing is to *classify* our various experiences by arranging them in groups by reference to the qualities which we are able to recognise in them. Once we have thus classified our experiences, we need no longer trouble to pay attention to the actual experiences themselves which make up any group. Henceforth we shall be concerned with the laws which apply to the group and with the relations of one group to another. This is the third step in getting knowledge about experience: it is called *induction*. We now no longer burden our attention with our actual experiences themselves in their entirety; we pay attention only to the qualities which distinguish one group from another. What we have now to do is to observe those qualities in order to discover the order of their occurrence with reference to each other. Once having discovered this, we need no longer trouble to attend to experience at all. Instead of the actual qualities we now take symbols, words, for example, or letters, or other signs, and with these symbols we make for ourselves diagrams of the relations in which we have observed that the qualities which they are to represent stand to one another. Thus we might use the words "lightning before thunder," or first an L and then a T, to express the fact that in a storm we usually observe the quality of flashing before the quality of rumbling. This arrangement of symbols is called *abstract thought*, and is the fourth stage in the business of getting knowledge about experience.

It will be noticed that, as thought proceeds, we are able more and more to dispense with acquaintance with actual experience, and to replace it better and better by symbols. Thus,



when we have recognised a given quality in any experience, it becomes no longer necessary, for the purposes of thought, to attend to all of it, since the quality recognised in it can be taken to represent the whole experience. Similarly, when we have arranged the experiences which share any given quality into one group, the quality can be taken to represent all the experiences in that group, and finally, in the diagrams by which we illustrate the relations of groups of experiences to one another, we can substitute symbols for the qualities which represent the actual experiences in the groups. At this last stage, therefore, we have freed ourselves entirely from the need of attending to actual experiences. We can, if we like, now proceed to arrange symbols representing imaginary groups, which do not and even could not exist, according to laws never yet observed, and even contrary to the laws which have been found to apply to actual experience. Such activities belong to the field of pure science, and do not come into our present argument; here we need only consider such of the constructions of abstract thought as may apply to experience, since it is with the relation of thought to experience that we are concerned.

The general laws discovered by induction will apply to our experiences just in so far as any of them can be fitted into one or other of the groups whose laws we have formulated, and thus abstract thought renews contact again with actual experience, and the whole method of thought is amply vindicated from the point of view of practical utility. The practical utility of knowledge about experience is so obvious that it is hardly necessary to labour the point. Bergson, indeed, does not attempt to deny the utility of this method of treating our experience; what he suggests, however, is that *the sort of experience which it produces,—a world, that is to say, consisting of solid tables, green grass, anger, fear, and so on—is but a fragment, and a distorted fragment, of the experience with which we have it in our power to be acquainted.*

In order to understand what leads Bergson to entertain this paradoxical notion we must see what actually is the effect upon experience of our anxiety to discover general laws, which is the principal motive of thought. We need not complicate the question by taking any further notice, at present, of that part of our knowledge which consists of the general laws themselves. Bergson's criticism is directed against the actual experiences from which these laws are derived, and upon which they are based, the solidity which we actually touch, the green which we actually see, the anger which we actually feel. He goes so far as to say that these experiences are distorted, that they are arrived at by a process of falsification which we could avoid if we chose.

What, then, are these experiences, this solidity, green, anger, and so on, and how is it possible to say that they are distortions? Distortions of what? What alternative experience is open to us? What Bergson objects to in this everyday experience of ours is its form—the division of experience into qualities shared in common by more than one experience.

At first sight it may well look as if there were, indeed, no alternative to this experience composed of things sharing common qualities—the form which Bergson condemns, as if, whenever experience is given, common qualities are also given—perceiving an orange consisting, as it does, in perceiving its colour, shape, etc. As a matter of fact, however, by the time we are able to distinguish common qualities, the original stage of mere acquaintance has been left behind, and the preliminary operations of thought have already begun. Common qualities are only perceived as the result of an intellectual operation; we do not, as a matter of fact, distinguish qualities in perfectly unfamiliar experiences, we only learn to distinguish them after having been acquainted with a number of experiences more or less resembling one another. The perception of qualities involves recognition, and so includes memory, in addition to mere present acquaintance.

From the repetition of a number of resembling experiences, there gradually emerges something further, which we believe to be shared in common by all the experiences, and which we call "their common quality," with which we were not till then acquainted. How this comes about we are not concerned, just now, to explain; all that we need, for the moment, is to see what actually happens in ordinary recognition. Once we have found the common quality, we perceive it again whenever an experience occurs which can be fitted into the same group. That is why our ordinary experience does, in fact, come to us in the form of things and events consisting of qualities shared in common with other things and events. But this is not the only form of experience with which it is possible for us to be acquainted; it is only, in fact, familiar experience, experience which we can at once recognise, which has this form.

It is a little difficult to illustrate what is meant here from our ordinary experience, just because, long even before we have grown up, the process of familiarization is over, and we have arrived at most of the qualities which we need to be able to recognise for ordinary purposes, and so it is these qualities which we usually perceive. In this way it comes about that the ordinary experience of grown-up people consists of complex things and events all composed of qualities shared in common.

The best example to show that this form of experience is merely the result of familiarity, would, perhaps, be to take some form of modern art, best of all, perhaps, music composed according to a wholly foreign tradition, or orchestral music heard for the first time. In such cases the experience of the hearer will, in all likelihood, at first be no more than a confused noise. Gradually, however, if the experience is repeated, there will be a change, first one and then another sound will be recognised, until, finally, the earlier experience will have been completely transformed, and, in place of the original confused noise, the hearer will now distinguish instruments, notes, and motifs. This illustration of how we

gradually come to distinguish sounds in unfamiliar music will serve to show what is meant by saying that common qualities are not what we originally became acquainted with, the experience, when we have completed the work of recognition, being of quite a different form from that of the experience with which we were originally acquainted.

Now, of these two forms of experience the form of familiar experience, which consists of distinct things having recognisable qualities, is obviously the best for enabling us to discover the general laws which govern whole groups of experiences. In order to discover these laws it is essential that we should be able to classify our experiences, and the division of experience into things showing recognisable qualities is a necessary preliminary to classification. If Bergson is right (as I am assuming him to be throughout this paper) in believing that the key to our ordinary intellectual habits is to be found in our need for discovering general laws about experience, it would follow quite naturally that, whenever we, became acquainted with any experience, our first object should always be at once to recognise in it as many common qualities as possible, thereby classifying it as belonging to the various groups of experiences distinguished by the fact of sharing one or other of these qualities. If in the end there is any part of the experience left over which will not fit in any group we commonly ignore it. The experience thus sacrificed would in any case be useless for the purpose of enabling us to discover general laws: for this purpose it is only qualities shared by more than one experience that are any good to us; that, in fact, according to Bergson, is why we ignore all the rest of our experience except the common qualities, his idea being that our habit of attending to experience in order to classify it originated simply in order to satisfy this practical need for securing the knowledge about experience with which general laws furnish us.

The more we classify an experience the clearer it becomes, and the clearer it becomes the better we think we know it. Such

clear classified experience is the ideal of science, and the intellectual method of thought is, par excellence, the appropriate method for science. As to which form of experience is best, the distinct form of classified experience or the undivided form of experience in which we have not recognised qualities, the question is, as a rule, simply not raised; we suppose, as a matter of course, that the distinct form of classified experience must always be best. Now, this is just what Bergson denies. He maintains that *classified experience is only best for the practical purpose of obtaining knowledge about experience*, but that, if we want the fullest possible acquaintance, it is better not to classify.

It would be a mistake, however, to imagine that Bergson recommends us simply to return to our original unfamiliar experience itself. There are two ways in which classified experience differs from our original unfamiliar experience: there is, as we have already seen, a difference in form, classified experience being divided up into distinct things and qualities and unfamiliar experience not being so divided; but there is also a difference in content, classified experience including memory in addition to the mere present with which we are acquainted in unfamiliar experience. Now, in so far as the solid tables, green grass, and so on, are recognised experiences containing memory, they have a richer content than mere unrecognised experience and are an improvement upon it. It is to the way in which recognised experience differs in form from unrecognised experience that Bergson objects. The difference in content, which is made by the inclusion of memory, is a difference in the whole field of acquaintance, while the difference in form depends upon the focus of attention within that whole field. What Bergson would like would be to get an experience having its focus more like that of unrecognised experience, distributed over a whole field of acquaintance which, like that of recognised experience, included memory as well as mere present experience. His

objection to the method ordinarily employed in recognition is that it narrows down our experience by concentrating the focus of attention only upon the repetitions, at the expense of whatever else the whole field of acquaintance may contain, the motive for so doing being, as we have already seen, our need of discovering general laws about experience.

The explanation of the greater part of Bergson's philosophy is to be found in this idea of his of *the limiting effect which our practical need for knowledge about experience exercises upon the actual experience with which we are acquainted*. The greater part of his writing is devoted to the exposition and defence of this idea and the consequences which follow from it. His theories of sensible perception, memory, and the functions of the brain, all follow from this same assumption that our mental life is a struggle for economy in which we are perpetually thrusting away experience which we cannot use in favour of that which is of practical value for the discovery of the general laws on which our knowledge about experience rests. He sums up this idea in *La Perception du Changement* (p. 12), where he says: ". . . les faits . . . nous montrent, dans la vie psychologique normale, un effort constant de l'esprit pour limiter son horizon, pour se détourner de ce qu'il a un intérêt matériel à ne pas voir. Avant de philosopher, il faut vivre; et la vie exige que nous nous mettions des ceillières . . ." [In normal psychological life the facts . . . point to there being a continual effort on the part of the mind to limit its horizon, to turn away from whatever it is to its material interest not to see. Before we can philosophise we must live, and life forces us to put on blinkers.]

This theory, that it is the function of thought not to extend but to limit our knowledge, is so vital to the understanding of all that is new and original in Bergson's philosophy, that it will be worth while for us to set it clearly before ourselves once again by contrasting it with the commonly accepted view of the effect of thought upon our experience.

The ordinary theory of the origin of our experience starts from the idea of external objects, or outside conditions of experience, soliciting our attention, on the one hand, and, on the other, our minds in a state, at first, of complete ignorance. Experience, on this view, begins at the moment when some external object or outside condition of experience first secures our attention. Before we recognise qualities in it, however, that is, until we can classify it, this original experience is supposed to be very limited, and it is imagined that the purpose of recognition and classification is to add to this original fragment fresh discoveries, thus gradually building up and completing our experience. Bergson, on the other hand, begins just the other way. Instead of setting out from the idea of a mind in a state of complete ignorance, he regards us as including potentially, in the whole field of our acquaintance, all the experience which the external objects or outside conditions which solicit our attention are capable of producing. He calls this our "*connaissance virtuelle*" [virtual knowledge], and he thinks of all the various intellectual operations by which we finally arrive at the experience which we ordinarily enjoy as so many ways of limiting our horizon, narrowing down our acquaintance, and confining it within such bounds as best suit our practical convenience. This limitation of the field of our potential acquaintance was begun, according to Bergson, by the act of attention, which first made us acquainted with an experience in its original unclassified form, and it continues *pari passu* with the operations of thought, which tend more and more to focus attention upon the repetitions in experience at the expense of whatever else the whole field of acquaintance may contain. It is this limited experience that Bergson means when he speaks of our "*connaissance actuelle*" [actual knowledge]. The brain he regards as an instrument, not, as is commonly supposed, for procuring us experience, but, on the contrary, for protecting us from the whole of experience with the exception of just so much of it as is of fairly immediate

practical interest to us. As he puts it in *La Perception du Changement* (p. 12):—"Notre connaissance, bien loin de se constituer par une association graduelle d'éléments simples, est l'effet d'une dissociation brusque; dans le champ infiniment vaste de notre connaissance virtuelle nous avons cueilli, pour en faire une connaissance actuelle, tout ce qui intéresse notre action sur les choses; nous avons négligé le reste. Le cerveau paraît avoir été construit en vue de ce travail de sélection." [Our knowledge, far from being built up by the gradual association of simple elements, results from a sharp dissociation; we make our actual knowledge by selecting out of the infinitely vast field of our virtual knowledge whatever concerns our action upon things; we neglect all the rest. The brain appears to have been constructed on purpose for this work of selection.]

Practical utility—the necessity which we are under of discovering general laws about experience, in order that we may be able rapidly to pass by inference from present experiences to others which are not actually before us at the moment, and so to anticipate what is coming—is, according to this theory, the principle upon which the selection is made, the object being to retain out of the whole field of acquaintance only so much as lends itself to that classification upon which is based all our power of framing general laws, and so of passing from the known to the unknown.

It would follow that classification, together with induction and abstract thought, which are only further stages in the same process of selection, are methods appropriate to science, whose object is the practical one of discovering as many general laws as possible about experience. Bergson, however, insists that the methods which are appropriate for the satisfaction of these practical needs will be found useless, and worse than useless, if we try to use them to satisfy speculative curiosity, which is the motive underlying philosophy.

It may, indeed, be argued that these two motives, practical necessity and speculative curiosity, do not really conflict, since,



admitting that it was practical necessity which drove us to attempt the discovery of general laws, the discovery of general laws happens also to be the best way, the only way, in fact, of increasing true knowledge beyond the narrow limits of such fragments of experience as each of us is able to pick up for himself. The plausibility of this view rests on the assumption that the only way of adding to the fragments of experience with which we are ordinarily acquainted is by getting more and more knowledge *about* experience: the notion that it might be possible to add to our store of knowledge by actually increasing our experience itself is not contemplated. According to this view the philosopher is thought of as seeking, like the scientist, for formulæ or hypotheses which shall explain and supplement the particular set of experiences in which he happens to be interested. The aims and methods of the two are not looked upon as being really distinct at all, the chief difference between them being supposed to lie in the subject matter which each cares to investigate. Philosophy, on this view, is regarded as a branch of science. Bergson, on the other hand believes that it is really possible to satisfy our speculative curiosity, not simply by increasing our knowledge *about* existence, but actually by improving and enlarging our acquaintance *with* it. His point is that we have before us two alternative ways of adding to the very fragmentary acquaintance with existence which we ordinarily get—either we can devote ourselves to obtaining more and more knowledge about it (this is the line followed by science), or we can concentrate our efforts on increasing our actual experience itself by improving our powers of acquaintance. This, according to him, is the method of philosophy. We cannot, however, pursue both methods at once owing to the distortion of our experience which occurs as soon as we begin to use it as material for the intellectual operation of thought. He puts this view in *L'Evolution Créatrice*, p. 259, where he says: "A vrai dire, les deux démarches sont de sens contraire: le

même effort, par lequel on lie des idées à des idées, fait évanouir l'intuition que les idées se proposaient d'emmagasiner." [To tell the truth, the two activities go opposite ways: the same effort by which we string ideas together dissolves the very intuition which the ideas were intended to capture.]

Bergson does not, indeed, deny that many of those who have devoted their lives to philosophy have, in fact, adopted the methods of science in the pursuit of their speculative aims, but, he insists (*La Perception du Changement*, p. 8) that by adopting these methods they have simply defeated their own ends. "Nous disions que c'est l'insuffisance de notre perception naturelle qui a poussé les philosophes à compléter la perception par la conception, laquelle devra combler les intervalles entre les données des sens ou de la conscience [et, par là, unifier et systématiser notre connaissance des choses. Mais l'examen des doctrines nous montre que la faculté de concevoir, au fur et à mesure qu'elle avance dans ce travail d'intégration, est obligée d'éliminer de la réalité une multitude de différences qualitatives, d'éteindre en partie nos perceptions, d'appauvrir notre vision concrète de l'univers; c'est même parce que chaque philosophie est amenée, bon gré mal gré, à procéder ainsi, qu'elle suscite des philosophies antagonistes, dont chacune relève quelque chose de ce que celle-là a laissé tomber. La méthode va donc contre le but qu'elle se propose; elle devait, en théorie, étendre et compléter la perception; elle est obligée, en fait, de demander à une foule de perceptions de s'effacer afin que telle ou telle d'entre elles puisse devenir representative des autres." [We have said that it is the insufficiency of our natural perception which has driven philosophers to complete perception by conception, which is supposed to fill in the gaps in what is given by sense and in consciousness, and thus unify and systematise our knowledge of things. But an examination of their doctrines shows that, as the faculty of conception advances further and further in this task of integration, it is obliged to cut

numbers of qualitative differences out of reality, partially to extinguish our perceptions, and to impoverish our concrete vision of the universe; it is, in fact, just because every philosophy, whether it will or not, is driven to proceed thus, that it evokes rival philosophies, each of which picks up something of what the first one let fall. The method, therefore, defeats its own end; in theory it is supposed to extend and complete perception; in practice, it is forced to relegate a whole mass of perceptions to the background, so that this one or that may represent the rest.]

Having shown, as he believes, that thought, the method of science, far from adding any further experience to that with which we become acquainted in the ordinary course of things, actually narrows down the focus of attention so as to suppress a good part of the whole field with which we were already, in fact, acquainted, he proceeds to ask (*La Perception du Changement*, p. 8), "Devons-nous rester sur ce terrain, ou bien ne vaudrait-il pas mieux (sans renoncer, cela va sans dire, à l'exercice de nos facultés de conception et de raisonnement) revenir à la perception elle-même, obtenir d'elle qu'elle se dilate et s'étende?" [Must we remain on this ground, or would it not rather be better (without, of course, giving up the exercise of our powers of conception and reasoning) to return to actual perception and enlarge and extend that perception itself?] This is the secret of the new method which Bergson urges us to adopt for philosophy—de revenir à la perception elle-même, obtenir d'elle qu'elle se dilate et s'étende [to return to actual perception, and enlarge and extend that perception itself],—and the effort by which he proposes that we should widen the horizon of an actual acquaintance is what he calls the act of intuition.

It is sometimes fancied that this intuition is some new and mysterious faculty which Bergson has either discovered or pretended to discover, but which ordinary people know nothing about. To suppose this would be a great mistake.

The act of attention which Bergson would have the philosopher make, and which he calls "intuition," is by no means an absolutely unfamiliar mental operation. The intellectual operations of recognition, classification and induction, with which we usually occupy our minds, all, in fact, depend upon a preliminary act of intuition. Before we can begin to recognise and classify any experience we have first to attend to it in a very special way; we have to try, while holding the experience in question before us, also to link it up with our past experience—to place it. This effort to link up the present with the past is what Bergson calls intuition. It will be seen from the above definition that intuition is really nothing more than the act of attention which secures for us that whole field of acquaintance within which the focus of attention is constantly shifting and out of which we make our selection whenever we recognise anything. We saw, when we were considering the respects in which clear classified experience was superior to experience which was unfamiliar, that it was just this reference to the past, this placing a given experience by recalling other past experiences throwing light upon it, which gives present experience significance. Without memory experience would be devoid of meaning; reinforced by memory an experience, slight in itself, a faint whisper or a light touch, may open up a whole world to us. What we call "present experience," then, is usually largely composed of memories. This is true even of the ordinary everyday objects of sense—colours, sounds, smells, and so on—which we recognise as soon as they are presented to us. It seems, as we have seen, really to be only owing to the help of memory that we are able to distinguish such qualities at all; for we cannot do so until they have grown familiar to some extent, that is, until there are a certain amount of experiences of that kind in our memories to be recalled when a fresh experience occurs. Blue, for example, becomes a definite quality only when we have had other experiences like it which our present experience calls up. When we look at the sky our ability to

distinguish its colour depends quite as much upon past skies as upon the sky at which we are actually looking.

It seems, indeed, as if, whenever we have any acquaintance at all, we do always make some effort to place it—as if some effort of memory always accompanies every act of attention to present experience. If this be the case, it comes to saying that so long as we are conscious at all we are always making more or less of an effort of intuition. Intuition gives us a whole field of acquaintance, including memory as well as present experience, but within this field it is possible to focus our attention in many different ways. We noticed in our illustration of the sheet of foolscap how perpetually the focus of our attention to present experience appears to shift and change according to our particular interest at each moment. It may be argued, however, that, in the case of memory, our attention is not equally free to choose its object. It is not easy to lay down any exact rules as to just what the connexion between present experience and memory is. Dreams, curious cases in which events long forgotten, and perhaps never attended to even at the time when they occurred, are suddenly recalled, or cases in which enormous stretches of the past, apparently unconnected with what is being experienced at the moment, are remembered in a flash, appear to conflict with the accepted theories about the kind of association which enables present experience to call up memories. It looks sometimes almost as if the mere fact of having any present experience at all was of itself enough to call up almost anything that we have ever experienced, regardless of any discernible connexion between the present experience and that which is recalled. Nevertheless, it is true that, when we attend to any present experience, all the past experiences related to it in particular ways, such as similarity, either of quality or often, even, merely of name, association of time or place, causal connexion, and perhaps one or two others, tend to be recalled in preference to other memories not so related. From these facts it is usual to infer some general law

to the effect that relations of similarity, and so on, have a particularly binding effect between experiences, such that, when one experience having these relations to others attracts our attention, the others tend also to be recalled. This explanation of why experiences associated in these particular ways tend to appear before our attention together is not, however, the only possible one. Bergson puts forward an alternative explanation. The truth may really be, he thinks, that the same cause which governs our choice of what present experience we will focus our attention upon in the whole field of our acquaintance may also govern our choice of what we will remember. This fits in with his whole theory of perception, and it is the explanation of memory which he adopts. According to his theory, our pre-occupation with repetitions limits our memory just as much as it limits our present experience, and the suggestion is that by thus focussing our attention on repetitions we often pass by what is most interesting in the whole field of our acquaintance, setting a check upon memory which shuts out all that is most worth recalling.

It may be objected that all this is nonsense, since, as a matter of fact, the laws which connect memory with present experience are such that we can, in truth, only remember past experiences which are repeated in the present. Such an objection is not convincing. We have already referred to the curious mass of cases which appear to conflict with any such hard and fast rules as to what it is or is not possible for any given present experience to recall. But further, even if it be established as an undoubted fact that in the majority of cases we do only succeed in remembering experiences which are repeated in the present, that would in no way refute Bergson. For Bergson's point is that the whole focus of our attention, whether it be directed towards the present or towards the past, is governed by two principles,—our pre-occupation with repetitions which are needed for securing knowledge about experience, and our desire for economy of effort. Just as, in the case of present

experience, we focus our attention upon the repetitions contained in the whole field of our acquaintance, so in remembering we keep our attention under equally strict control, only allowing such past experiences as resemble our present experience to be recalled. Until we have begun to practise the distribution of attention which Bergson recommends, we cannot make any positive statements as to what it may or may not be possible to remember.

Bergson's theory of memory is very like his theory of present perception, and contrasts similarly with the theory currently accepted. Just as, in his theory of present perception, Bergson, instead of starting from the notion of complete ignorance, sets out from the idea of an act of acquaintance embracing a field of experience much wider than that which, in fact, constitutes our actual experience, constantly soliciting our attention, and only prevented from turning into actual experience by our indifference, so, in the same way, instead of starting from the idea of memory as a complete blank, which we are able to fill in bit by bit, now with one idea of past experience and now with another, Bergson starts with the idea of memory as preserving and perpetually trying to press upon our attention every experience which we have ever had, so that we only save ourselves from being acquainted all the time with everything with which we have ever been acquainted by keeping vigilant watch over our attention, bestowing it only upon just so much of the past as may be of fairly immediate practical use in guiding our behaviour with regard to our present circumstances. What Bergson proposes is that we should relax our vigilance and allow ourselves to be acquainted with the whole of our memory along with the whole of our present experience.

One curious result which he thinks would follow from this widening of the focus of our attention would be that the everyday divisions of experience into things having distinct qualities would disappear. These divisions, according to Bergson, result

from the selective focus of our attention—whenever we stop attending to any part of the whole field of our acquaintance a gap occurs, and so things and qualities begin to be divided off from each other. Divisions, according to him, are the signs of failures of attention, and the fact that our everyday world of experience is so divided is one reason why he condemns it.

The ideal experience, for him, would be one in which there were no divisions either between quality and quality or between past and present, because the ever-widening act of intuition which embraced it would be so extended as to include past and present in one single continuous experience, and so focussed as to cover everything, not concentrating attention upon one point at the expense of any other. Bergson believes that we do, in a sense, already possess this experience, which is nothing more than the whole field of acquaintance supplied by the preliminary act of intuition that must always precede those further intellectual operations whereby we reduce experience to its usual form. He thinks that it is, in fact, just these intellectual operations which prevent us from enjoying the whole of our field of acquaintance.

Intuition secures for us the whole field of acquaintance ; our intellectual operations consist in focussing our attention upon a part of this whole field and shutting off the rest of it. Intuition extends our acquaintance by recalling the past and adding it to our present experience ; thought narrows down our experience, it is selective, experience only interests it in certain aspects, in so far as it contains repetitions on which general laws about experience may be based. Intuition supplies an ample material, but we, intent, as a rule, upon recognition and classification, which are the necessary preliminaries to the discovery of general laws, select from it only so much as lends itself to that purpose. It is as though we were always casting our net into the past and bringing it up full, and then only cared to keep a very small fraction of our haul, letting the rest slip back so that it is lost. It is of this that Bergson complains,



that we are so much pre-occupied with picking out the repetitions in every experience the moment it occurs, that we overlook a great part, perhaps the most interesting part, of the whole field of acquaintance with which our preliminary act of intuition supplied us.

Our attempts to see what Bergson means by saying that the ordinary view of experience as consisting of solid tables, green grass, and so on, is a distortion, have led us to examine further and further into our experience. We have seen that the experience to which we ordinarily confine our attention is really only a small part of the whole field of past and present with which we are acquainted, and we have seen also that Bergson believes that our ordinary intellectual habits all tend towards a further and further narrowing of the focus of attention to experience. We have said that what Bergson wants us to do is to reverse these intellectual habits of ours and devote our energies, not to narrowing the focus of our attention, but to widening it so as to include the whole field of our acquaintance, and even to extend that field. In order to do this we need have recourse to no mysterious new faculties. Bergson believes that we do already habitually perform acts of intuition sufficient to acquaint us with a field of experience, past and present, much wider than that to which we usually attend, and that it is only our intellectual habits of mind which stand between us and full acquaintance with a vast field of experience. As he says in *L'Intuition Philosophique*, "... il ne peut être question de se placer hors du temps ni de percevoir autre chose que du changement. Mais le temps où nous restons naturellement placés, le changement dont nous nous donnons ordinairement le spectacle, sont un temps et un changement que nos sens et notre conscience ont réduits en poussière pour faciliter notre action sur les choses. Défaisons ce qu'ils ont fait, ramenons notre perception à ses origines, et nous aurons une connaissance d'un nouveau genre sans avoir besoin de recourir à des facultés nouvelles." [... there can be no question of

getting outside time or of perceiving anything but change. But the time in which we naturally remain and the change at which we usually assist, are a time and change which our senses and our consciousness have reduced to powder in order to facilitate our action upon things. Let us undo what they have done, let us take perception back to the beginning again, and we shall have knowledge of a new kind without needing to call in any new faculties.]

If this were the whole of Bergson's criticism of thought, it would certainly be damaging, but it would hardly justify him in saying that such experience as our bias in favour of repetitions does allow us to get is positively a falsification of experience. We might admit that our experience is perhaps more limited than it need be, but why call it falsified? Bergson maintains that our everyday experience of solid tables, green grass, and so on, is falsified, not only because it is divided, which means, according to him, that the whole experience contains gaps due to failure of attention to the whole field of acquaintance, but also in so far as the qualities are supposed to be repetitions recurring over and over again.

We have spoken, all along, for convenience, as if the common qualities which we recognise were really repetitions of past experiences. According to Bergson, however, experience does not admit of repetitions. Every experience which we pick out of the whole field of acquaintance really has its own place in that whole field, and Bergson maintains that to isolate it is to falsify it. To take an illustration. You may see the blue of the sky one day when you are warm and happy and the sight of it may delight you, while on another day you may see it when you are shivering and gloomy, and it may only add to your depression. It would not usually occur to us to say that, on account of the difference in the rest of your state of mind on the two occasions, your experience of the sky was different; we should explain matters by treating consciousness as a complex, and saying that the one occasion was a case of your seeing

blue and feeling warm and happy, while the other was a case of your seeing blue and being cold and gloomy. Bergson, however, objects to this explanation. He maintains that, if we are to pick out the experience of seeing blue from its context in consciousness we must say that it is "modified" according as you are happy or gloomy, warm or cold, when you attend to it. According to this theory, the notion that the same experience of blue is repeated on the two occasions is a pure fiction. There is a very great difference between the whole experience blue modified by depression and cold, and blue modified by happiness and warmth,—a difference the extent of which we fail to realise only because we call both experiences by the same name, and, having once named them, take so little further trouble to notice what experience we are actually having. Such a theory, of course, immediately raises the question, why, if our experiences are all so different from one another, we call any of them by the same name; what other reason could we have for doing this except that the experiences, if not exactly similar, are, at any rate, very much alike? The way in which Bergson meets this difficulty will be found in the account of his theory of bodily recognition. We cannot do more here than indicate the outline of the theory, which is, briefly, this.

In a whole field of acquaintance containing past and present there cannot be repetition, because every part of the whole is modified by every other, and no later whole, from the mere fact of being later, can be quite like any earlier one in every respect. Repetitions do, however, occur in matter (*i.e.*, in existence not turned by an act of intuition into a field of acquaintance). The body (which is itself matter) can recognise repetitions in matter by making the same reaction to them. The same bodily reaction acts as a link between past and present states of matter which resemble each other. But when we attend to matter, past and present, we turn it by our act into a field of acquaintance. Past and present

then combine to form a whole experience within which every part is modified by every other. In such an experience there can be no repetition, because, though the present matter may itself be a repetition, the fact that each time it is repeated there is more past for it to combine with, modifies each fresh experience of it.

This account of Bergson's theory of recognition is so condensed that I am afraid it is hardly intelligible; we have perhaps said enough, however, to show that he puts forward a theory which tries to account for the fact of recognition without assuming repetitions in experience, but only in matter. It would be beside our purpose to go fully into the merits of this theory here. What is more urgent is that we should see how, supposing it be granted that there are no real repetitions in experience, Bergson accounts for the fact that we certainly imagine ourselves to be acquainted with similar qualities which are repeated over and over again. For it may well be asked how it is possible to suggest that we can be mistaken about any experience with which we are actually acquainted.

No doubt it is impossible to have such a thing as a false experience—an experience is what it is—only judgments can be false. But it is quite possible, particularly if one is not paying much attention, to make a false judgment as to what experience one is actually having, and this is the error into which Bergson thinks we are led by our habit of relying so much more upon our knowledge *about* experience, which we get by thought, than upon the experience itself with which we are acquainted. In order to see how it might be possible for us to slip gradually into false judgments as to what our everyday experience actually is, we must follow step by step the process of abstraction by which we ordinarily pass from our actual experience itself to those abstract ideas, or concepts as they are often called, of which the general laws which sum up our knowledge about experience consist.

We begin the work of getting knowledge about experience, as we have seen, by recognising our experiences (whatever that may mean) and classifying them accordingly. This first step need not take us very far from actual experience itself. It may be true that, not being equally interested in all parts of the whole of our field of acquaintance, we begin from the first to discriminate, focussing our attention only upon a part of it and refusing to attend to the rest. In this way there arises some difficulty, even at the outset, in deciding how much experience we may really be said to have, as we saw in our illustration of a person hard at work in a room where there was a clock ticking. At this early stage, however, it appears to be simply a question of the limits of our experience. There is no doubt at least that we are acquainted with as much of the experience as we actually attend to.

The next step towards abstraction raises further difficulties. At first, when we classify experiences and think of them in groups, we attend to the actual experiences themselves of which the groups consist. By and by, however, as the groups get larger, and thought more subtle, it becomes troublesome to think of all the members whenever we want to refer to the group. We select, perhaps, some one member, or two or three, vaguely recalled, to represent all the rest, in our minds, and henceforth, when we concern ourselves with the group, we attend only to these representative experiences, it being understood that we could recall plenty of other members too if we chose to make the effort, and that what we think about the representative members applies to all the others likewise. Here we have the beginning of symbolism. We have begun to attend only, as it were, by proxy to some of the members of the group; we are no longer actually attending to them all. The split between acquaintance and symbolism has begun and, with the introduction of symbolism, truth and error are also introduced. As we proceed the split widens. By and by we find that it is not

convenient always to have to recall a particular member or members of a group whenever we have to refer to it. This stage is reached so soon as we begin to frame general propositions. Actually to have in mind any particular instance of the group concerned now becomes a positive disadvantage, as being likely to introduce irrelevant considerations belonging to it in its private capacity, so to speak, and not *quod* representative of the group. For this reason it becomes not only less trouble, but even better, for the purposes of thought, to represent the groups about which thought gives us knowledge by using words or other signs rather than by recalling any concrete experiences belonging to those groups.

With the adoption of symbols in place of the actual experiences themselves, which make up the groups into which we classify our experiences, we enter a new intellectual world. We need not longer hamper our invention by restricting the arrangement of our symbols so as to correspond with what we observe of the behaviour of concrete experience; we can arrange and rearrange them according to principles wholly different from those observed in experience. We soon discover, indeed, that our symbols have themselves got laws of their own, which govern the ways in which it is possible for us to combine them. Pure logic is the study of these laws. We need not discuss this branch of knowledge further, because we are here concerned mainly with the knowledge of existence, and only with pure thought, in so far as it relates to such knowledge.

One way in which even pure thought may be of use in extending experience itself may, in passing, be mentioned. We find that, by combining one general law, based upon experience and consisting of symbols standing for groups of experiences, with another, we can arrive at new laws, which will actually be found to apply to all experiences which those symbols represent. Such manipulation of general laws, in order to arrive at new laws, is called framing hypotheses, and

is a very fruitful way of extending our knowledge about experience. It may even be of use in enabling us to pick out of the field of acquaintance particular experiences to which we might not otherwise have attended. An astronomer, for example, may discover by intellectual methods that between two stars which he has already distinguished there must, in fact, be another, and, through having his attention directed as to where to look, he may now be able actually to distinguish the new star. A similar experience must have happened to many people in connexion with the little rider star on the tail (or is it the neck?) of the Great Bear. Once it has been pointed out you cannot miss it, but you may easily pass it over till your attention has been directed to it.

So long as we are actually getting the material for framing general laws about experience we have to observe numbers of actual experiences to see what relations there are between all the experiences which can be fitted into one group and all the experiences which can be fitted into another. And this means that our attention is still, in a measure, tied to experience, though we shall not trouble ourselves to attend very closely to it since it is enough for our purpose if we can recognise it as "a so-and-so"—a member of one or the other of the groups in which we are interested. We should only trouble to attend closely to an experience if we were not quite sure whether it might or might not correctly be classed in some group whose general laws we were trying to discover.

Once the law is framed, however, the need for being even to this extent in touch with concrete experience disappears, and it becomes more convenient to represent the groups concerned by symbols than by concrete examples. Henceforth, in so far as we concern ourselves with experience, we shall devote our attention to the symbols which represent groups of experiences, and not to the experiences themselves which make up those groups. It is here that the danger lies; from our habit of attending more to the symbols used in thought than

to the experiences which they represent, we slip insensibly into the mistake of applying to the experience itself what really only applies to the symbols by which we represent it.

If this confusion can be made by people who really have paid sufficient attention to their experience to find out for themselves the general laws which apply to it, it is still more likely to be made by the rest of us. For most people do not give a great deal of their attention to the discovery of general laws. They take what is commonly believed ready made from what they are told or what they read. Such people are peculiarly apt to think in terms of words or signs rather than of actual experience. At most, these words or signs stand in their minds for a vague picture (often second hand at that, borrowed from reading or accepted notions) of some experience isolated, watered down, conventionalised, stripped of the setting in emotion and value which proper attention to the actual experience would inevitably arouse. From this loss of contact with actual experience which results from our inattention and our preconceived ideas there follow the gravest results. It is possible so to impose on us that we can be induced to entertain false beliefs, not merely about the nature of experiences with which we are not ourselves acquainted, but about experiences which we ourselves actually have.

In *Les Données Immédiates de la Conscience*, p. 99, Bergson notices this effect which symbols, particularly words, have upon the experiences for which they stand. Referring to the way in which we are ordinarily acquainted with sensation, he says, "je l'aperçois à travers . . . le mot qui la traduit." [I perceive it through the word which translates it.] He goes on to speak of the influence which this word has on the actual sensation itself. "Cette influence du langage sur la sensation est plus profonde qu'on ne le pense généralement. Non seulement la langage nous fait croire à l'invariabilité de nos sensations, mais il nous trompera parfois sur le caractère de la sensation éprouvée. Ainsi, quand je-



mange d'un mets réputé exquis, le nom qu'il porte, gros de l'approbation qu'on lui donne, s'interpose entre ma sensation et ma conscience; je pourrai croire que la saveur me plaît, alors qu'un léger effort d'attention me prouverait le contraire. Bref, le mot aux contours bien arrêtés . . . écrase ou tout au moins recouvre les impressions délicates et fugitives de notre conscience individuelle." [This influence which language exercises over sensation is more profound than we generally suppose. Not only is it language that makes us believe in the invariability of our sensations, but now and then language deceives us as to the character of the sensations which we experience. Thus, when I eat a delicacy which is said to be delicious, its name, coloured by the praise bestowed upon it, slips in between me and my consciousness; I might believe that I liked the taste, while all the time a slight effort of attention would prove the contrary to me. In short, the word with its clearly traced outlines . . . crushes or, at any rate, colours the delicate fugitive impressions of our individual consciousness.]

This is most obviously true in cases of feeling, which seems to offer terrible possibilities in the way of insincerity, self-deception and sentimentality. But it applies also to other kinds of experience. According to Bergson, we actually deceive ourselves every day and all day as to the experiences with which we are acquainted. He traces back to delusions imposed upon us by the preconceived ideas and loss of contact with concrete experience, which result from our habit of thinking in terms of symbols instead of paying attention to actual acquaintance, our notions of time and change as series of events, matter as consisting of things and qualities arranged in space, and, most misleading of all, our conception of own selves as consisting of states of consciousness, particular emotions, notions, feelings, desires, and so on. All these notions are, according to Bergson, intellectualisations of experience; they are what, on the model of the symbols to which we devote so

much of our attention, we suppose to be the form of that concrete experience which we take so little trouble really to observe. As he says, in *Les Données Immédiates de la Conscience*, "La conscience, tourmentée d'un insatiable désir de distinguer, substitue la symbole à la réalité, ou n'aperçoit la réalité qu'à travers la symbole." [Consciousness, tormented by an insatiable desire to distinguish, substitutes the symbol for the reality, or only perceives the reality through the symbol.] Armed with preconceived notions drawn from our knowledge about it, we hardly ever attend to an experience with really open minds, or examine it without bias.

We have already referred to the fact that we are sometimes able to pick out fresh details in the whole field of our experience by knowing beforehand what to expect and being on the look out for it. It seems, unfortunately, also to be the case, however, that *when we are expecting an experience we find it, or at any rate believe ourselves to have found it, even though there was no such experience in the whole field of our acquaintance to be discovered, and no warrant for it in the outside conditions of our experience upon which the whole field of acquaintance is based.* Whether we may most correctly be said to hypnotise ourselves into having the experiences we expect, or to deceive ourselves into believing that we are having them, I do not know—the line between auto-suggestion and unconscious self-deception is narrow, and is perhaps no more than a question of words. In any case, we can now at last see what Bergson means by saying that our habits of thought falsify our experience. He means by this that they lead us to expect and to look out for experiences which no amount of unprejudiced attention to the field of acquaintance would ever have revealed. Whether this expectation actually leads to our having the experiences, or only to our believing that we have them, and acting upon this belief, may be left an open question. In any case the result is to shut us off from the real experience which unbiassed attention would otherwise have revealed.

The main grounds upon which Bergson's theory of knowledge rests have now been, I do not say established, but at least stated. They are these. (a) All experience is a combination of past and present. Past and present are combined to form experience by a mental act called intuition. (b) All knowledge of existence, not only the experience in which we are acquainted with it but also all our knowledge about it, rests upon an original act of intuition. (c) Knowledge about existence is derived from the field of experience embraced in intuition by a process of abstraction called thought. The object of thought is to formulate the relations between groups of experiences in general laws so that, as soon as we can classify an experience, we may be able to draw inferences about its relations to other experiences which will guide us in our behaviour. Thought formulates these laws by means of symbols representing groups of experiences which it arranges in diagrams representing the groups and their relations. The more we think the more we tend to withdraw our attention from the actual experiences themselves which make up the groups and devote it to the symbols by which thought represents these groups. The two ways of knowing exclude one another, so that the more attention we give to thought the less we have left for experience.

In practice, however, we try to carry on both operations at once, and the result is our ordinary every-day experience of things having common qualities and standing to one another in a variety of relations. This experience is a hybrid product resulting from the attempt to practise thought and intuition together; it has still some of the content of our original experience—a combination of past and present united in a single mental act—but whatever did not lend itself as material for thought has been left out, and it has borrowed the form which properly belongs only to the symbols of thought; what applies to the names or signs used for the purposes of thought to represent the differentiation which experience contains, is,

to some extent, applied also to the actual experiences which those names or signs represent. Thus it is that, whereas in fact every so-called repetition in experience is so modified by its context that no two experiences can really be alike, the fiction is adopted that experiences can be repeated over and over again, and, because this is true of the sign which stands for them in thought, we end by actually being acquainted, or at any rate believing ourselves to be acquainted, with experiences which are alike. Again, because after an interval we may still call an experience by the same name, the fiction arises of the unchanging experience which remains the same over a period of duration, and we end by being acquainted, or believing ourselves to be acquainted, with such experiences. These are two illustrations of what is meant by intellectualised experience, but, according to Bergson, the intellectualisation of experience is not confined to isolated instances here and there. He believes that the whole notion of experience as consisting of distinct qualities united by external relations of time, space, number, similarity, difference, and so on, in fact arises from the intellectualisation of the field of experience given by the act of intuition in which all experience originates,—that is from our imposing the form which belongs to the symbols employed by thought upon the experience itself with which intuition acquaints us.

His new philosophical method comes simply to this: that instead of confining our attention to a small part only of our present experience, and only to just so much of the past as may be of fairly immediate practical use for guiding our conduct in the circumstances at the moment, and instead of intellectualising even such experience as these limitations still allow us to attend to, we should reverse our mental habits and make an effort to widen rather than to limit the whole field of experience, past and present, with which intuition acquaints us, and to attend to it directly, as it really presents itself, without the intermediary of any thought or word or sign.

Philosophy may take us beyond our own individual experience in the end, but, at all events, it is from that experience that philosophy must set out. What Bergson asks is simply that the experience which is to be used as the starting point for philosophy should be as full and as immediate as experience can be.

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