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HENRI BERGSON[1]

Trevor Perri

In 1896, at the tail end of what has been referred to as a "golden age" for the study of memory (e.g., Schacter 2001: 88), Henri Bergson published his groundbreaking *Matter and Memory: An Essay on the Relation of the Body to the Mind*. In this book, Bergson proposes an integrated theory of multiple forms of memory that ultimately entails nothing less than a radical reconception of consciousness, the material world, and the terms of their relation. During Bergson's lifetime, this book was praised by such notable figures as William James (1920: 179), who described it as a work of "exquisite genius" that effects a Copernican revolution in philosophy akin to the critical turn made in Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, and Walter Benjamin (1969: 157), who described it as a "monumental" work that towers above other efforts that can be classified under the heading of the philosophy of life. In more recent years, the originality and significance of Bergson's philosophy of memory in particular has been recognized in fields as diverse as cognitive neuroscience,[2] psychology,[3] literary studies,[4] and the interdisciplinary field of memory studies.[5]

However, when one turns to *Matter and Memory* itself with the aim of becoming acquainted with Bergson's philosophy of memory, one immediately encounters certain difficulties.[6] For one thing, Bergson employs the terms "memory" (*mémoire*) and "recollection" (*souvenir*)—terms that he often uses more or less synonymously—in various, not obviously consistent, ways. For example, unlike authors who stress the need to maintain a terminological distinction between memory as intention and memory as what is intended (e.g., Ricoeur 2004: 22), Bergson sometimes uses the terms "memory" and "recollection" to refer to the act of representing some past event, and sometimes he uses these terms to refer to the past event that is represented. Further, Bergson also sometimes uses the term "memory" in a more colloquial sense to refer to a capacity for remembering the past, like when one says one has a good or a bad memory. And finally, in what Arnaud François (2008: 30) has recently described as "one of the most astounding and important theses in his work," Bergson also sometimes uses the term "memory" to refer to the past that is preserved. That is, rather than conceiving of memory as a way of relating to the past from the perspective of the present, Bergson regularly equates memory with the totality of one's past as it is preserved in itself.

To further complicate matters, Bergson distinguishes multiple forms of memory throughout his writings—often without indicating how these forms of memory relate to one another. For example, in the first chapter of *Matter and Memory*, aiming to highlight the fundamental role of memory in subjective life, Bergson identifies two forms of memory. On the one hand, Bergson

suggests that a *contraction memory* gathers together a plurality of independent moments to constitute our enduring lived present.[7] And, on the other hand, Bergson also suggests that another form of memory, which we might refer to as *perception memory*, informs the sense of and provides the content for every conscious perception (2001: 34).

Then, without referring back to this distinction between contraction memory and perception memory, in the second chapter of *Matter and Memory* Bergson describes *another* distinction between two forms of memory. Deleuze remarks in *Bergsonism* that "this is a completely different principle of distinction" (1991: 125, n1), and he warns that we should avoid conflating the distinction between contraction memory and perception memory with the new distinction introduced in the second chapter between *habit memory* and what we might refer to as *recollection memory* (1991: 127, n35). According to Bergson, whereas habit memory is an implicit, non-representational "motor memory" (1991: 86) of the body that manifests itself as a disposition to react in a more or less fixed way to one's surroundings, recollection memory is the explicit representation of some event or episode from one's past life.

In addition to these four forms of memory, Bergson also describes another form or aspect of memory in *Matter and Memory* that he terms *pure memory*. Pure memory is conceived as the totality of one's past experience preserved as an integral whole in an unconscious, virtual state. And while this pure, virtual memory is precisely what is actualized in perception memory and in the explicit recollection of memory-images, Bergson stresses that pure memory must not be confused with these forms of memory since "memory that has been actualized in an image differs profoundly from pure memory" (1991: 140).

Finally, in his subsequent works, Bergson discusses still other forms or aspects of memory that are not obviously equivalent to any of the aforementioned forms of memory. Specifically, in 1907 in *Creative Evolution*, developing an idea that is implicit in both *Time and Free Will* and *Matter and Memory*, Bergson identifies a non-intellectual *memory of the will* that constitutes one's character and personal style. And in a 1908 article dealing with the phenomena of false recognition and what is commonly referred to as the feeling of *déjà vu*, Bergson directly contradicts Aristotle's claim that all memory is "of the past" by arguing that there is a *memory of the present* formed simultaneously with every present perception.

With the aim of providing an overview of Bergson's philosophy of memory that can also serve as a point of entry to his philosophy as a whole, this chapter explores the different senses and forms of memory that Bergson describes, paying special attention to how they are distinct from one another and how they are unified. It is my intention to show that, although these various senses and forms of memory are different from one another (sometimes essentially so), they are also continuous and unified insofar as they are equivalent to different tones of one mental life and to different tensions of one duration.

1. From a metaphysics of memory to forgetting

As a first step towards explicating how these different senses and forms of memory relate to one another, note that throughout his writings Bergson considers the mind from the divergent but complementary perspectives of psychology and metaphysics. According to Bergson's idiosyncratic conception of these disciplines, psychology considers the mind just insofar as it facilitates practical action, and metaphysics strives to achieve an intuition of this mind that is immediate, which is to say as it is in itself and not as it is mediated by action and interest.[8]

Proceeding in these two ways at different points in his work, Bergson arrives at two distinct but ultimately complementary conceptions of memory. On the one hand, investigating what he describes as "the practical and thus ordinary operation of memory" (1991: 78), Bergson

develops what we can refer to as a *psychological* account of the various ways that the past that is preserved is manifested in the present to guide and inform one's practical action. And on the other hand, Bergson also consistently strives to consider memory as it is in itself and not just insofar as it functions in the service of practical human action. Proceeding in this way, Bergson develops what we can refer to as a *metaphysical* conception of memory that he refers to at one point as memory "in the special sense that we give this word" (1991: 222).[9] Unlike the ordinary, common-sense conception of memory as the preservation and reproduction of some past experience in everyday life, memory in this *special sense* is the ongoing, automatic synthesis of the past and the ever-changing present into an undivided whole.

Although he does not explicitly refer to it there in this way, Bergson already develops such a metaphysical conception of memory when describing the form and structure of a consciousness that endures in his early work *Time and Free Will*. In this book, aiming to establish that there is a difference in kind between the time or duration (*durée*) of consciousness and space, Bergson argues that, as it is most immediately given in itself, and not as it is commonly conceived by the practically directed human mind, consciousness does not comprise a collection of discrete states or independent moments that can be counted as things spread out in space can be counted. Rather, according to Bergson, duration and consciousness itself are given in immediate intuition as a whole of continuous and interdependent but heterogeneous and successively given qualities; they are given as a multiplicity, but a continuous multiplicity that is different in kind from the more familiar multiplicity of number. While more could be said about this duration and multiplicity, the crucial point for the purpose of this chapter is that the continuity of the multiplicity of duration depends on an ongoing synthesis that is effected by what I have referred to as contraction memory. Specifically, according to Bergson, duration and consciousness itself are constituted as independent instants which are continuously and automatically contracted together in memory and synthesized with the ever-changing present to form an undivided whole. In the absence of this effort of contraction memory, Bergson suggests that there would only be instantaneity and an "eternal present" (2001: 153).

To be clear, this duration constituted by contraction memory is not just a continually passing present. Rather, according to Bergson, in principle, contraction memory synthesizes the *totality* of one's past with every new present. Hence, instead of appealing to the more traditional image of a flowing river to illustrate duration, Bergson writes that the entire past continuously gathers in the ever-growing present as snow accumulates on a snowball as it rolls down a hill (1998: 2). What this image of the snowball is meant to suggest is that one's past in principle does not pass away; rather, according to Bergson, the totality of one's past and one's memory accumulates in the present such that, in principle at least, consciousness includes "in an undivided present the entire past history of the conscious person" (1946: 152).

Thus, according to Bergson's metaphysical consideration of memory, a contraction memory synthesizes independent moments to constitute a continuous multiplicity of successively given parts, which suggests for Bergson that the entirety of the continually accumulating past is in principle present at every moment.[10] However, as Bergson is well aware, this metaphysical account of memory as it is in itself cannot be the whole story. For one thing, the idea that memory continually and automatically contracts together or synthesizes a plurality of moments to constitute a continuous, extended present that includes the entire past seems to leave no room for a crucial fact of experience—namely, discontinuity and forgetting.

However, as Jean Hyppolite explains in his masterful 1949 essay "Various Aspects of Memory in Bergson," despite the charge made by a later generation of philosophers that Bergson overemphasizes the continuity and cohesion of consciousness and duration while neglecting

discontinuity and forgetting, Bergson confronts these issues head on in *Matter and Memory*.[11] Specifically, Bergson argues that ordinarily we are conscious and live through the continuity of our duration and the totality of our memory just to the extent that it is useful for action and practical life. So, while consciousness might in principle encompass the totality of memory, and while the entire past might in principle inhere within the present, in fact one's consciousness and the totality of one's actual memory is ordinarily "narrowed down by action" (1991: 14), and in fact the entirety of the preserved past only becomes present insofar as it can "make itself useful" (1991: 140). This is to say that while it may be the case that in principle "our whole personality, with the totality of our memories, is included, undivided in our present perception" (1991: 165), this whole is never actually given as such.

Nevertheless, the duration and memory that are forgotten in this way are also never completely lost. Rather, the totality of one's past is preserved in and by itself in an unconscious state that Bergson refers to as "pure memory" (1991: 156).[12] Although he most often emphasizes the "powerlessness" (1991: 141) of this unconscious, pure memory, Bergson also suggests that "the totality of our memories pushes from the depth of the unconscious" to become conscious and has an at least implicit effect on our present experience.[13] As he writes in *Matter and Memory*: "Our whole past mental life conditions our present state, without determining it in a necessary way; whole also it reveals itself in our character, although none of its past states are manifested in character explicitly" (1991: 148). Bergson comes to characterize this implicit effect of the whole of one's past on the present as a non-intellectual "memory of the will" (1998: 6), and he reiterates that this memory of the will manifests itself in the "push" or "tendency" of one's character (1998: 5).

In addition to manifesting itself implicitly in character, this ever-changing, unconscious, virtual whole of the past is also what comes to be actualized in practically directed life in the form of independent memories and recollections. In turning from considering memory as it is in itself to considering how the unconscious, pure memory is actualized in the service of action, we turn from what Bergson conceives of as a metaphysics to a psychology of memory.

2. A psychology of multiple manifestations of memory

Accounting for how the entire past that is preserved in memory manifests itself in one's practically directed present is a central preoccupation of *Matter and Memory*. As Bergson indicates in both the 1898 and 1910 introductions, the guiding idea of the book is that one's consciousness or mental life always comprises the integral totality of one's memory or one's "whole personality" (1991: 14), but this totality is given in different ways. Sometimes, tending more toward present action, one's memory is given only insofar as it most generally resembles and can help one navigate some present circumstances. And, at other times, in a way that tends more towards contemplating or dreaming the past, one's memory is manifested in its particularity and with all the nuances that make one specific past experience differ from another. As Bergson describes it, there are "different planes of consciousness" or "different tones of mental life," and "our psychological life can be played (*se jouer*) at different heights, sometimes closer to and sometimes further from action, according to the degree of our attention to life" (1991: 14).

Bergson introduces this idea of different planes of consciousness or tones of mental life in the second chapter of *Matter and Memory* by pointing to a radical difference between two ways that past experience can be utilized for present action—that is, between two forms of memory in the ordinary, psychological sense of the term. Anticipating contemporary discussions of procedural memory and episodic memory, Bergson describes how, on the one hand, past experience can be actualized in the present in the form of "motor apparatuses" (*dispositifs moteurs*) or

"motor mechanisms" that have been set up in our bodies subsequent to some repeated action or experience (1991: 77–8). And, on the other hand, he describes how one's past can also be actualized in the present in the form of independent recollections or representations of some specific past event. In contradistinction to the first form of memory, which he claims is, in fact, just "habit interpreted by memory" or "habit more than memory," Bergson characterizes the explicit recollection or representation of specific past events as "memory *par excellence*" and as the "true memory" (1991: 84, 151).

Bergson explains the difference between these two ways that the action of the past can be said to be manifested in the present—between what I have referred to as habit memory and recollection memory—by considering the example of studying a lesson in order to learn it "by heart" (1991: 79). Specifically, reflecting on two different experiences of memorizing a series of words, Bergson distinguishes two essentially different ways that one can be said to remember the words. On the one hand, I can say that I remember the words of a poem or a song that I have memorized when, after repeating them a number of times, I am eventually able to recite or repeat the words accurately without reading them. In this case, the lesson has been committed to habit memory. And, on the other hand, I can also say that I remember, but this time in a very different sense, when I think back to the experience of studying the lesson and recollect a specific instance of reading the words that I wanted to memorize. That is, after I have committed the lines of a poem or a song to memory in the sense that I am able to recite this poem or song easily and accurately without reading it, I can also call to mind a particular episode in which I read these lines. In this latter case, rather than remembering how to recite the lines, I remember that I have read the lines at some specific, individual time in my personal life history.

After considering how these memories are acquired and how they are manifested, Bergson argues that these two forms of memory differ in nature rather than in a degree of more or less. As he writes, "consciousness reveals to us a profound difference, a difference of nature, between the two sorts of recollection" (1991: 80). And further, Bergson argues that, although they overlap and cooperate, the two forms of memory are "theoretically independent" from one another (1991: 81). Specifically, Bergson argues that habit memory can "do without" (*se passer de*) the recollection or representation of the history of one's past life and that one's representations of past events are "independent of" the habit memory of the body (1991: 81).

Nevertheless, although Bergson argues that these two forms of memory are theoretically independent, and while Bergson sometimes suggests that habit is not *really* memory, he also suggests that, considered from another perspective, habit is just a highly contracted tension of our duration and a form of memory that still deserves to be classified as such. That is, while Bergson sometimes characterizes the sensorimotor habits of the body as independent from recollection memory, he also characterizes these same habits as a contracted tone of mental life. And while he sometimes claims that motor habits are simply present material mechanisms of the body that are not really memory since they have no obvious relation to the past, Bergson also characterizes habit as a unique and genuine form of memory that he designates a "memory of the body" (1991: 152).

Moreover, even if the two forms of memory might exist independently in principle, we do not encounter habit or recollection in isolation from one another in fact in ordinary life. These two forms of memory are just two *limits* of our experience or just two extreme ways that one's past tends to be manifested rather than two fixed, neatly delineated forms of memory. The implicit, non-representational memory of habit and the explicit, representational memory of recollection are, to use Bergson's own language, just "two extreme limits, at which the psychologist must place himself alternately for convenience of study, and which are never really

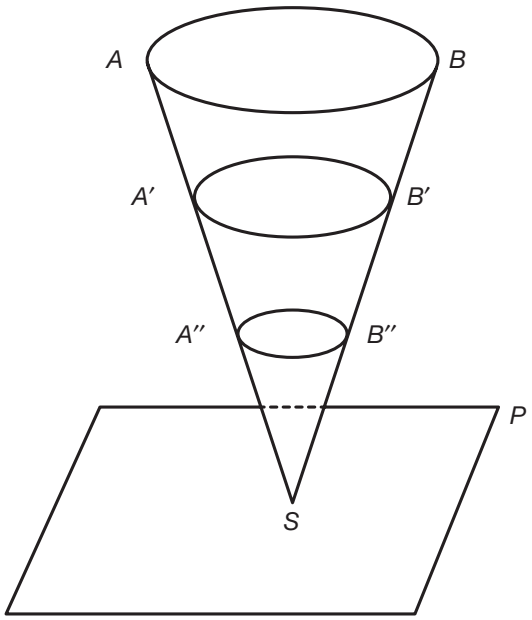

Figure 42.1 Bergson's cone of memory

reached in practice" (1991: 168). And between the two extremes of habit memory and recollection memory, there is a continuity and even a unity insofar as each manifestation of memory is a different tone of one mental life. Thus, although they are perhaps distinct and independent at the limit of our experience, pure habit and pure memory are also joined since, according to Bergson, they are just two extreme tensions of one memory and duration.

This idea that habit memory and recollection memory are simultaneously distinct, continuous, and unified is precisely what is meant to be depicted by the famous image of the inverted cone presented in the third chapter of the book (1991: 162) (shown here in Figure 42.1). Specifically, on the one hand, the base of the cone marked as AB represents the integral totality of memory given in all its particularity and nuance. On the other hand, the apex of the cone marked as point S represents the sum of the present and actual sensorimotor mechanisms that have been acquired in my material body. And the plane P that point S intersects with represents the totality of the parts of the material universe that are in my field of perception. So, disregarding for a moment everything but the apex of the cone S that intersects with plane P, this image depicts a system of habits or motor mechanisms that inhere in the material world and that are independent of all memory—simply stated, the point S is on plane P and not on plane AB. However, although pure habit memory and pure recollection memory are thus represented as different in nature (insofar as one is represented by a point and the other by a plane), and although they are represented as distinct and independent of one another (at least if we only focus on point S on plane P and plane AB), the two forms of memory are also represented as unified and as fundamentally continuous with one another insofar as they are both part of the totality of the memory that is represented by the cone SAB (since the apex of the cone at point S is an integral part of, so to speak, the cone SAB as one of its limits). And these extremes are represented as continuous with one another in the sense that between the plane of the material universe that includes the totality of my sensorimotor habits, on the one hand, and the plane of pure memory, on the other, there are an infinite number of planes that correspond to all different tensions of memory or to all different tones of mental life—two of which are represented in the image by sections AB′ and AB″. Bergson describes the distinction of and

gradual progression between these two united extremes in the following important passage from *Matter and Memory*:

> Between the plane of action—the plane in which our body has contracted its past into motor habits—and the plane of pure memory, in which our mind conserves in all its details the picture of our past life, we believe we can discover thousands and thousands of different planes of consciousness, a thousand integral and yet different repetitions of the whole of our lived experience.
>
> *(Bergson 1991: 241)*

Without further considering here the mode of being of these virtual repetitions of the whole of one's past life, allow me to emphasize that, according to Bergson, each of these thousands of different planes of consciousness or tones of mental life repeats, in a more or less contracted way, the integral totality of one's ever-growing past experience.

This is not to say, however, that the whole of one's memory is always (or ever) given as a plurality of completely distinct memories. Although the whole of memory is always included in our present perception, according to Bergson, the continuous multiplicity of our consciousness, duration, and memory is more or less distinguished into *several* memories that can be considered independently depending on one's circumstances. Bergson characterizes the way that the whole of memory is experienced and more or less contracted as a "translation," and he compares it to the way that "a nebulous mass, seen through more and more powerful telescopes, resolves itself into an ever greater number of stars" (1991: 166). And, in addition to this movement of "translation," by which one's past is more or less contracted and one's memories more or less detailed and distinct, Bergson suggests that by a process of "rotation" the past presents the aspect of the whole of memory that is most useful (1991: 168).[14] That is, just as we can focus on an individual note in a melody while keeping the whole in mind, individual memories can be manifested in perception without thereby being separated from the whole of the past that is preserved.

3. Conclusion: the movement of memory

Bergson's philosophy of memory entails a rejection of traditional associationist theories of mind (most clearly advocated by thinkers such as James Mill, Herbert Spencer, Alexander Bain, and John Stuart Mill) according to which the mind contains a number of more or less independent, atomistic sensations, perceptions, and ideas that are then associated with one another. Against this view, Bergson argues that there is nothing stored "in" the mind (as things are stored in a cabinet) and mental states are not primarily distinguished from one another. Rather, according to Bergson, the entirety of one's present and past experience forms a continuous whole that is manifested differently depending on the demands imposed on us by virtue of the fact that we are alive.

And despite his own occasional suggestions to the contrary, according to Bergson there are not two, three, or even four types of memory. To suggest that this is the case is still to conceive of the different forms of memory and of individual recollections as fixed, static, and something ready-made (*tout fait*). As Bergson suggests with his reference to different *tensions* and *tones* of one duration and one integral memory, memory is a single dynamic process in and through which the past that is preserved in itself can be manifested in an infinite number of different ways.[15] Highlighting this dynamism and movement of the fundamental memory of duration as it differentiates itself, Bergson states in his 1904 course on the history of theories of memory that memory "is not a thing; it is a process; it is a movement" (2004: 108).

Notes

1 This is an abridged and slightly revised version of an article of the same title that was first published in *Philosophy Compass* 9, 12 (2014): 837–47.
2 E.g., Eichenbaum (2011: 16) credits Bergson with being one of the first to recognize the difference between habit and memory.
3 E.g., Schacter (1987: 504–5; 1996: 165) claims that Bergson recognized implicit memory and was an early proponent of multiple memory system theory.
4 Scholars have pointed to the influence of Bergson's philosophy of memory on literature, especially the movement of modernism. See, e.g., Gontarski et al. (2013).
5 See, e.g., Whitehead (2009).
6 For especially illuminating recent discussions concerning Bergson's philosophy of memory in particular, see: Al-Saji (2004); Ansell-Pearson (2010); Bernet (2005); de Warren (2015); François (2008); Lawlor (2003); Riquier (2009); Worms (2004). For his influential treatment of Bergson's philosophy of memory, see especially Deleuze (1991) and (1994).
7 Deleuze refers to this memory as "memory-contraction" (1991: 127), and Worms refers to it as "immediate memory" (2000: 43).
8 See Bergson (1991: 15).
9 Vieillard-Baron (1991: 50–51) and Lawlor (2003: 131) point out that discussions of Bergson's philosophy of memory tend to focus *either* on the psychological *or* on the metaphysical aspects of this account. This chapter aims to present both and to show their relation.
10 Deleuze (1991: 61) has described this in principle coexistence of the whole past with every present as one of the paradoxes of memory. For a discussion of the paradoxes of memory, see Al-Saji (2004).
11 Hyppolite (2003: 113).
12 This pure memory of the totality of one's past is unconscious, as Bernet (2005: 62–3) explains, in the sense that it is conserved in consciousness yet independent of any present awareness.
13 Bergson (1920: 177).
14 For a helpful discussion of this rotation and contraction of memory, see Lawlor (2003: 51).
15 As Worms has elucidated: "Thus, one can say if one wishes: *there are not two memories but three, or ultimately there is only one*" (2004: 164; original emphasis).

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