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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to excavate and analyse Henri Bergson's "problematic" thinking. This task will be prosecuted through a close reading of his two-part introduction to *The Creative Mind* – the text in which Bergson most concisely and conclusively articulates the "problematic" character of his work. As I will attempt to show in this paper, Bergson's work is "problematic" in two respects, one to do with methodology and the other metaphysics. These two, furthermore, are intimately entwined: on the one hand, Bergson's method of problematisation *emerges from* the findings of his metaphysical inquiries, while on the other, it is *through the application* of his problematising method that the findings of his metaphysical inquiries can be deemed as reliably accurate. In exploring this "problematic" intersection of Bergson's methodology and metaphysics, I will first discuss what Bergson takes to be one of the biggest problems for philosophy: the lack of adequate "precision." As we will see, many of the major themes and concepts of Bergson's work, such as duration and intuition, both spring from and converge on his efforts to address this problem. The pursuit of precision also calls for a "problematic approach" that is appropriate for the metaphysical reality it seeks to handle – an approach I will outline in the second part of this paper. This will be followed by a discussion of how Bergson's problematic method/metaphysics involves a critique of what he refers to as "fictitious," "phantom" or "pseudo-problems." This "negative" aspect of Bergsonian problematisation will then be reconsidered in the final part of the paper alongside its "positive" dimension – posing problems in terms of time.

Keywords Bergson; problem; methodology; metaphysics

Introduction

The notion of the "problem" is an important feature of twentieth-century French philosophy. This is especially the case for those figures associated with the epistemological tradition in twentieth-century French thought, including Cavaillès, Bachelard, Canguilhem, Althusser and Foucault. Indeed, in the opinion of Thomas Osborne, the "greatest lesson" of this tradition is "the fact that humans are problematizing beings" (2). It is with Henry Bergson, however, that this century of French fascination with the "problem" commences; and it is with Gilles Deleuze, the most Bergsonian of scholars amongst his contemporaries, that it arguably reaches its apogee.[1] In some respects, affiliating Bergson with the subsequent lineage of "problematic" French thinkers is incongruous, for many of these latter philosophers were quite explicit in their criticism of Bergson and/or were at pains to distance their work from Bergsonism. But as Élie During has argued convincingly, detaching their problematic programmes from Bergson's work is easier said than done. In fact, During suggests that Bergson's problematic philosophy provides the grounds for the "non-positivist conception of problems" developed by proponents of the "French epistemological tradition" (4).[2] During arrives at this position by focusing on the problem-based manner in which Bergson explores the history of philosophy and the

history of science, with special emphasis on Bergson's pedagogical practice. By way of contrast, the aim of this paper will not be to compare Bergson's problematic philosophy with that of his various successors. Instead, the more modest objective here is simply to explicate and analyse the "what is" of Bergson's problematic philosophy – a task to which During's paper does not give full attention, nor Osborne's, due to their comparative agendas. And in pursuing this objective, the present paper will be guided not by the "history of problems" that Bergson explores but rather his introduction to *The Creative Mind*, which provides us with the most concise and conclusive account of how Bergson himself saw his problematic philosophy.[3]

In During's insightful paper he mentions a number of key "problems" that animate Bergson's work at various stages of his career, such as the problem of **[end of p. 31]** causality, the problem of change, and the problem of creation. To this one could add the basic point that each of Bergson's major books revolves around or is driven by the effort to articulate a particular problem. Because of this, Bergson's philosophy is not "systematic" *à la* Kant or Hegel (Bergson, *Creative Evolution* xiv). One will certainly find many of the same themes and concepts throughout his texts, but even in these instances the attentive reader will discover that there are often discrepancies and inconsistencies across his books (for example with his notions of the virtual/actual) due in large part to the differing demands of the distinct problematics to which the concepts are directed. It is due to this "problematic" way of working that the introduction to *The Creative Mind* takes on such immense importance, for it is in this two-part introduction, written at the end of his career, that Bergson provides us with a sort of intellectual biography that sums up what he has been doing all these years. As he remarks in the short preface to the book, the essays "bear mainly upon the method I believe should be recommended to the philosopher" (*Creative Mind* iii). In this two-part introduction, which takes up a third of the whole book, Bergson distinguishes between his various projects and problems, but in doing so he also reflects on the threads between them. As a result, these two essays at once separate out and bring together Bergson's major books and philosophical achievements. This retrospective summation is pursued simultaneously in two registers, or along two threads, one methodological and the other metaphysical, which together comprise Bergson's problematic philosophy. Bergson's philosophy is thus "problematic" in both nature and method, and these two facets are inextricably linked. This paper will show how, first by discussing Bergson's demand for "precision" in philosophy and the equivalence he draws between properly stating and solving problems, before going on to explore what Bergson refers to as "fictitious," "phantom" or "pseudo-problems" – false problems, in his view, that have plagued the history of philosophy. In the final major section of this paper I will return to the interrelation of Bergson's "problematic" metaphysics and methodology, providing further detail and illustrations of its negative and positive aspects.

Precision in Philosophy

The two introductions to *The Creative Mind* form somewhat of an odd couple. To begin with, they are two parts of a whole, rather than two independent introductions. The second part is also three times longer than the first. The most likely reason for this is because they are formulated problematically, by which I mean that for each one Bergson poses himself a problem which he then addresses. To be more precise, in the

first part he poses and then pursues a particular problem to its natural end, which takes him to a second problem that he then addresses in the second part to its natural end.

One need look no further than the first sentence of Part I to find its guiding problem: "What philosophy has lacked most of all is precision" (*Creative Mind* 1) By "philosophy" Bergson effectively means "metaphysics," and by the problem of "precision" he means the lack of a method that can reliably deliver precision in metaphysics, which is to say precise knowledge about metaphysical reality. In Part I of the introduction there will be no direct discussion of "problematisation" and the problematic nature/method of philosophy – that will be the subject of Part II, which poses as its guiding problem "the stating of problems" in philosophy. But as Bergson makes clear at the start of Part II, it is none other than his pursuit of precision in philosophy that leads to the development of problematic philosophy. Let us then look briefly at what Bergson means by "precision" in philosophy before turning to address the characteristics of his problematic philosophy more explicitly.

Bergson begins with a fairly simplistic claim: there is reality on the one hand, and on the other there are various explanations of reality. Philosophy, or metaphysics more exactly, by and large involves the construction of philosophical concepts and systems that aim to explain reality – or more specifically, the fundamental nature of **[end of p. 32]** being and the world. But in almost all cases, Bergson thinks, the metaphysics advanced is "too wide for reality" (*Creative Mind* 1), which is to say that it can hold as true for a world or universe that is radically different from the one *we do* occupy. For instance, many metaphysical accounts

> could apply equally well to a world in which neither plants nor animals have existence, only men, and in which men would quite possibly do without eating and drinking, where they would neither sleep nor dream nor let their minds wander […], and where everything might just as easily go backwards and be upside down. (Ibid.)

If your metaphysics can do something like this then it is questionable how much it really tells us about reality, for a metaphysical explanation should correspond to reality but not a *possible* reality or a state of affairs that admits the impossible just as readily as the real. "Let us have done," Bergson implores us, "with great systems embracing all the possible, and sometimes even the impossible!" (50) And in their place, "let us demand of our theory that it embrace the real so closely that between the two no other interpretation can find room" (ibid.). Or as he puts it more fully near the beginning of the introduction:

> The only explanation we should accept as satisfactory is one which fits tightly to its object, with no space between them, no crevice in which any other explanation might equally well be lodged; one which fits the object only and to which alone the object lends itself. (1)

Bergson is of the opinion that science, or more specifically mathematics, does this especially well when applied to objects of a certain kind – static objects. But when it comes to time, Bergson argues that its proper conception "eludes mathematical treatment" (2). It is in this realm of "real time," or time as flow, that metaphysics should come into its own. According to Bergson, metaphysics dates from Zeno of Elea and his various paradoxes to do with movement and change (6, 117). The unfortunate effect of these paradoxes, however, is that they have prompted philosophers from Plato onwards

"to seek the true and coherent reality in what does not change" (117). The nature of time, in other words, has been sought by many metaphysicians *outside* of time. Aside from precluding its object from the outset, such an approach, Bergson points out, circumvents "what our senses and consciousness perceive," substituting in its place "a more or less artificial arrangement of concepts, a hypothetical construction" (7). And as Bergson goes on to say:

> One might as well discourse on the subject of the cocoon from which the butterfly is to emerge, and claim that the fluttering, changing, living butterfly finds its *raison d'être* and fulfillment in the immutability of its shell. On the contrary, let us unfasten the cocoon, awaken the chrysalis; let us restore to movement its mobility, to change its fluidity, to time its duration. Who knows but what the "great insoluble problems" will remain attached to the outer shell? They were not concerned with either movement or change or time, but solely with the conceptual cocoon which we mistakenly took for them or for their equivalent. Metaphysics will then become experience itself; and duration will be revealed as it really is, – unceasing creation, the uninterrupted up-surge of novelty. (Ibid.)

As we can see from this passage, many metaphysical analyses fall foul of Bergson's demand for "precision" because they study the wrong object. It may be that a cocoon is easy to analyse, due to its immobility, but such knowledge is of limited value if the aim is to understand the nature of butterflies. It follows that if one wishes to understand the nature of time, movement or change, the application of a method that freezes time and/or operates outside of time in order to extract "a system of abstract general ideas" will not suffice (7). A more precise explanation is required, one that remains wedded to the object under analysis – in this case time – which in turn calls for an appropriate method that itself remains within time. **[end of p. 33]**

From this short overview we can see how for Bergson the problem of precision in philosophy is a problem that centres on the nature of real time, or duration. The problem of precision then arises in the disjuncture between metaphysical reality and epistemological efforts to gain accurate knowledge of this reality, due to our tendency to study the wrong object. The problem at play here is thus both metaphysical and methodological – our problem, in other words, is that we lack an appropriate method for delivering metaphysical precision. It follows that the problem of precision explored in Part I of the introduction to *The Creative Mind* beckons to another: the *method* by which we examine metaphysical problems. Explicating his methodological approach to metaphysics, *as a problematic approach*, is thus the task of Part II of the introduction – a problematic approach that he titles "the stating of problems" (sometimes translated alternatively as "stating of the problems").

The Stating of Problems

Part II of the introduction to *The Creative Mind* commences with the comment that it was his conclusions on the subject of duration that prompted Bergson to develop a method capable to delivering precise knowledge of it. The controversial name that Bergson gives to this method is "intuition." This name is controversial, and in some respects regrettable, because of the conceptual baggage that the term has attracted throughout the history of philosophy. Bergson was, of course, well aware that his use of the word intuition could lead to some confusion, but he ultimately concludes that it

remains the most appropriate word, since it designates "a mode of knowing" distinct from intelligence (*Creative Mind* 18). Bergson, as such, relies upon his readers to take note of how *his* notion of intuition (and intelligence for that matter) differs from conventional uses of the term. As Bergson makes clear, intuition for him is *not* an instinct or feeling: "Not one line of what I have written could lend itself to such an interpretation" (69). Nor does Bergsonian intuition involve a "search for the eternal" (18). Here, Bergson is contrasting his meaning of intuition with other great thinkers associated with the term, such as Schelling and Schopenhauer. According to Bergson, his treatment of intuition and intelligence is if anything the converse of these other great thinkers: whereas the intellect is a mechanism that fixates elements in time (or removes them from time) for the purposes of analysing their relations, intuition takes the movement of time – duration – as primary: "to think intuitively is to think in duration" (22). Intelligence, for Bergson, thus starts with the immobile and then "reconstructs" mobility, like a flip-book illustration or a reel of film. Intuition, on the other hand, starts from movement and considers immobility to be an abstraction from reality. Put differently, intelligence "concerns itself with things," which is to say the static, whereas intuition is concerned essentially with change and growth (ibid.). The great advantage of the intellect is that it is well suited to abstract manipulation and the rearrangement of existing elements within an ideal realm – an aspect of human existence that is fundamental and most certainly useful. Intuition, by contrast, involves an effort that "is arduous and cannot last," which is why the effort must be constantly renewed or begun again as time continues to flow (ibid.).

Bergson thus reverses the received positioning of intelligence and intuition. For Bergson, it is the intellect that dallies with the eternal, in so far as intellectual analysis *abstracts away* from reality and presumes an atemporal realm in which to do so, whereas intuition involves going *back into* duration and is thus the effort to get back *in touch* with real time and reality. So put, intuition aims at concrete knowledge or knowledge of the concrete, as opposed to the abstract; moreover, it seeks to reach this knowledge not *by way* of the abstract, as is customary in many metaphysics, but through sustained engagement and connection *with* the concrete, since this latter route enables a tighter fit between object and explanation (i.e., metaphysical precision).

To demonstrate this, Bergson briefly reflects on some of the great concepts in philosophy – **[end of p. 34]** such as Substance, Ego, Idea and Will. Such uber-concepts are notable for their tendency and ability to *totalise* reality. But as Bergson argues, if these concepts are capable of "explaining everything deductively," it is because with such concepts all has "been given beforehand, in a principle which is the concept of concepts, all the real and all the possible" (*Creative Mind* 19).[4] Unity is thus produced by such concepts, but it is an artificial unity that is posited hypothetically from the outset before being (unsurprisingly) rediscovered and overlayed onto reality. In contrast to this tradition in metaphysics, Bergson advocates a more "intuitive" alternative:

> How much more instructive would be a truly intuitive metaphysics, which would follow the undulations of the real! True, it would not embrace in a single sweep the totality of things; but for each thing it would give an explanation which would fit it exactly, and it alone. It would not begin by defining or describing the systematic unity of the world: who knows if the world is actually? Experience alone can say, and unity, if it exists, will appear at the end of the search as a result; it is impossible to posit it at the start as a principle. Furthermore, it will be a rich, full unity, the unity of a continuity, the unity of our reality, and not that abstract and empty unity, which has come from

> one supreme generalization, and which could just as well be that of any possible world whatsoever. It is true that philosophy then will demand a new effort for each new problem. No solution will be geometrically deduced from another. No important truth will be achieved by the prolongation of an already acquired truth. We shall have to give up crowding universal science potentially into one principle. (19–20; see also 71–72)

In this passage we can begin to see how the relation of intuition with movement and time calls for a problem-based method in philosophy that requires "a new effort for each new problem."[5] By associating this problematic method with "precision" in philosophy, Bergson is also attempting to counteract the recurring accusations that his notion/method of intuition is "fuzzy" or lacks "rigour." Intuition is indeed obscure, Bergson is willing to admit, but that description depends on what one means by "clarity" and "obscurity." When an idea is said to be "clear" or "clearly presented," it is often because the idea and/or its presentation draws on elements that are *already* "known." Ideas of this kind may involve a new arrangement of pre-existing elements, but in such instances "Our intelligence, finding only the old in the new, feels itself on familiar ground; it is at ease; it 'understands'" (23). There is, however, an alternative kind or sense of clarity when it comes to new ideas – that of the "radically new and absolutely simple idea, which catches as it were an intuition" (ibid.). In one respect, such ideas are the opposite of clear – they are obscure and incomprehensible, inasmuch as they are properly new rather than rearrangements of the old. But while such an idea may itself be obscure, its *effect* is to dissipate obscurities, which is why it is correct to align them with clarity. Unlike the first kind of clear ideas, which are clear because they rely upon already established understandings, this second kind produces *new* understandings, which in turn shed light on their surrounds.

Intuition, as such, may be obscure, but this is to be expected given that intuition aims to produce genuinely new knowledge about new and specific problems. And when it does so, "the problems we considered insoluble will resolve themselves, or rather, be dissolved, either to disappear definitively, or to present themselves in some other way" (ibid.). The effect of this so-called obscurity is thus clarity. By contrast, intellectual ideas or ideas of the intellect invariably begin life as "clear," since they garner their intelligibility from the pre-existent and "ready-made," but for this very reason we might also say that they contribute to confusion and obscurity when attempting to comprehend new problems and the "problem of the new": "One must therefore distinguish between the ideas which keep their light for themselves, making it penetrate immediately into their slightest recesses, and those whose **[end of p. 35]** radiation is exterior, illuminating a whole region of thought" (ibid.).[6]

Philosophers who analyse and explain reality through the use of "ready-made" ideas thus have a natural advantage when it comes to fabricating the initial impression of clarity, for their ideas are couched in the pre-existing and shared conventions of thought and language. But to the extent that one problem *differs* from the next and each is singular in at least one respect, Bergson contends that a "new effort" is required for each that does not merely rely upon "ready-made" abstractions. This shift in focus from the rearrangement of the given to the articulation of the new *on its own terms*, one could say, constitutes the essence of Bergson's problematic methodology:

> But the truth is that in philosophy and even elsewhere it is a question of *finding* the problem and consequently of *positing* it, even more than of solving it. For a speculative problem is solved as soon as it is properly stated. By that I mean that its solution exists

> then, although it may remain hidden and, so to speak, covered up: the only thing left to do is to *un*cover it. But stating the problem is not simply uncovering, it is inventing. Discovery, or uncovering, has to do with what already exists actually or virtually; it was therefore certain to happen sooner or later. Invention gives being to what did not exist; it might never have happened. Already in mathematics and still more in metaphysics, the effort of invention consists most often in raising the problem, in creating the terms in which it will be stated. The stating and solving of the problem are here very close to being equivalent; the truly great problems are set forth only when they are solved. (36–37)

Thus we arrive at what Bergson means by the title of Part II of the introduction, "the stating of problems." Bergson strongly advocates a problematic and problem-based approach to philosophy, but this does not mean that he is concerned with trying to "solve" the remaining inherited problems of philosophy. His ambition is rather to posit problems that have been hitherto poorly stated. Moreover, the stating of problems for Bergson is not akin to a "stock-take" exercise, such as that performed by Bertrand Russell in his *The Problems of Philosophy* (1912). More controversially, for Bergson the stating of a problem is the invention of a problem. To properly state a problem is thus to invent it and dissolve it all at once.

Fictitious, Phantom and Pseudo-problems

In his book on Bergson, Gilles Deleuze brings this discussion of problems and problematic philosophy to the fore of his reading. Indeed, the first chapter of *Bergsonism* is dedicated to developing a highly analytic interpretation of Bergson's problematic philosophy, going so far as to articulate "rules" for Bergson's problem-based methodology (something which Bergson never explicitly did himself). It is perhaps unsurprising that the first of these "rules" commences by reciting at length the climactic passage quoted directly above about "truly great problems." But as Deleuze notes astutely in the "first rule" of Bergson's problem-based methodology, the "great virtue" of Bergson's problematic approach is that it facilitates "an intrinsic determination of the false in the expression 'false problem'" (*Bergsonism* 17). While it is common to say that there are true or false solutions to a given problem, we know that this standard set-up will not hold for Bergson, as his concern is to posit/invent/dissolve problems rather than "find" true solutions to ready-made problems. This does not mean, however, that Bergson has no regard for truth and falsity. For Bergson, though, it is *at the level of problems*, not solutions, that one must ascertain truth and falsity, for if a problem can be shown to be false then it will be not so much solved as dissolved. As Deleuze puts it in an earlier essay on Bergson, "there are false problems more than there are false solutions, more than there are false solutions for true problems" (*Desert Islands* 22). For this section of the paper I will therefore examine how Bergson tackles the issue of false problems, or what he otherwise calls "fictitious," "phantom" and "pseudo-" problems. **[end of p. 36]**

In his seminal lecture "The Possible and the Real," Bergson says the following:

> I say that there are pseudo-problems, and that they are the agonizing problems of metaphysics. I reduce them to two. One gave rise to theories of being, the other to theories of knowledge. (*Creative Mind* 78)

The first thing to note about this quote is that when Bergson speaks of "pseudo-problems" he is referring specifically to the field of metaphysics – or, perhaps more accurately, metaphysics and epistemology. It is therefore important to acknowledge that he does not mean to suggest that *all* problems in the entirety of thought can be classified under these two types. Even within the confines of metaphysics and epistemology it is doubtful that Bergson would insist upon reducing all problems to these two (which is to say that the existence of a third sort of problem would not necessarily negate his argument). Bergson's more restrained aim is rather to "exorcise certain phantom problems which obsess the metaphysician, that is to say, each one of us" (46).[7]

There are three fictitious/phantom/pseudo-problems that Bergson discusses in particular. To begin with, he questions the validity of the enduring metaphysical question: "why is there being, why is there something rather than nothing?" This problem, Bergson accepts, will never be solved, but in saying that, "it should have never been raised" (78). As the passage proceeds: "[This problem] arises only if one posits a nothingness which supposedly precedes being" (ibid.). In Bergson's view, the idea of "nothing" is paradoxical, for at the very least it "designates the absence of what we are seeking, we desire, expect" (ibid.), and such delimitations make nothing "something." The situation is the same when it comes to the problem of order/disorder: "why is the universe well-ordered?" For Bergson, this is the "problem of knowledge," or more exactly, a problem that the mind fabricates, for "disorder is simply the order we are not looking for" (80). So as with the issue of nothing/something, the term "disorder" is predicated on "order," posited by/in the mind, and the suggestion that order is "superadded to an 'absence of order' implies an absurdity" (ibid.).

Bergson's final example of "nonexistent problems" concerns the notions of the possible and the real. It is common to presume that a possibility precedes its appearance in reality. Bergson contentiously asserts, however, that the reverse is true: "For the possible is only the real with the addition of an act of mind which throws its image back into the past, once it has been enacted" (81).[8] The suggestion that the possibility of a thing appears after the thing has been realised might seem to be manifestly mistaken, but the argument here again turns on the connection between metaphysics and epistemology – which is to say, the way in which some metaphysical problems are the product of epistemological practices. When someone says that something was possible before it was realised, the term "possible" can refer to two things. If what is meant is "that there was no insurmountable obstacle to its realisation," then Bergson has no qualms with this "negative" sense of possibility (83). But when the term is used in a more "positive" sense, where a possibility or several possibilities are sketched out in thought and as such pre-exist their realisation "under the form of an idea" (ibid.), then this leads to the pseudo-problem of "nonexistence" described above. Thus when Bergson says that the real precedes the possible he is not arguing for backwards causation. Nor does he mean to deny that the future can be gleaned from the present in a closed abstract system devoid of duration, such as we find in mathematics. His point is rather that the "positive" sense of possibility, as it is commonly employed in metaphysics and everyday life, involves a trick of the mind, since its formulation presupposes rather than precedes reality: "If you close the gate you know no one will cross the road; it does not follow that you can predict who will cross when you open it" (ibid.).[9]

In each of these examples, Bergson says, the false problem of nonexistence arises out of a confusion of the "more" with the "less": it would appear to be obvious that there is *less* in nothing than something, *less* in disorder **[end of p. 37]** than order, and *less* in the possible than the real. But Bergson argues that the converse is the case:

> there is more intellectual content in the ideas of disorder and nothingness when they represent something than in those of order and existence, because they imply several orders, several existences and, in addition, a play of wit which unconsciously juggles with them. (81)[10]

If it is often assumed that there is more in something than nothing etc., it is because we have a tendency to start in the wrong place – with nothing, despite the fact that pure nothingness can only exist as an idea in the mind and is thus predicated on something, a fact of reality confirmed by experience. If one starts with nothing, or with nonbeing, then it would be obvious that a "thing" or being is more than nothing or nonbeing. A simple glance at these words written down on paper, however, alerts us to Bergson's point: the word "nonbeing" is based on the word "being"; it is "being" with three letters tacked on the front, just as "nothing" is "thing" + "no." There is thus more in nonbeing than being, for the former relies on the latter, along with the idea of negation and the mind that abstractly posits it. In Deleuze's words:

> In the idea of nonbeing there is in fact the idea of being, plus a logical operation of generalized negation, plus the particular psychological motive for that operation (such as when a being does not correspond to our expectation and we grasp it purely as the lack, the absence of what interests us). (*Bergsonism* 17)

According to Deleuze's rulebook, the false problems we have been discussing just now, which concern a confusion of the "more" and the "less" when considering matters of existence, can be referred to collectively as "nonexistent problems." These false problems, in turn, can be distinguished from those that are the result of "badly stated" questions. While this way of framing things is not entirely consistent with Bergson's own explanation (which fails to make the same sharp distinction), it does serve as a useful reminder of the importance that the manner of "stating" or "positing" plays in the perpetuation, or alternatively dissolution, of false problems. In fact, Bergson commences his discussion of pseudo-problems in "The Possible and the Real" by stating:

> I believe that the great metaphysical problems are in general badly stated, that they frequently resolve themselves of their own accord when correctly stated, or else are problems formulated in terms of illusion which disappear as soon as the terms of the formula are more closely examined. (*Creative Mind* 77)

From this quote it may seem that Bergson is making a linguistic point, as if metaphysical problems were the product of anomalies in language and could be solved through linguistic analysis, perhaps with the addendum that "whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" (Wittgenstein 189). But as the passage continues it is made clear that for Bergson the issue of "badly stated" problems has primarily to do with the metaphysical nature of movement and change. The great "badly stated" problems of metaphysics "arise in fact from our habit of transposing into fabrication what is creation. Reality is global and undivided growth, progressive invention, duration: it resembles a gradually expanding rubber balloon assuming at each moment unexpected

forms" (*Creative Mind* 77). But because of the way in which the intellect works, as discussed above, human intelligence segments and freezes this expanding whole when trying to understand it. When reality is manipulated and refashioned in this manner, devoid of duration, it is then no surprise that the intellect is "able to foresee any one state of the whole: by positing a definite number of stable elements one has, predetermined, all their possible combinations" (ibid.). As Bergson thus concludes, "the failure to recognize radical novelty is the original cause of those badly stated metaphysical questions" (78).

We can now see how Bergson's fictitious/phantom/pseudo-problems not only have to do with a confusion of the "more" and the "less" **[end of p. 38]** and the manner in which they are "badly stated"; these two facets are *also* entwined with the category of duration – a situation that was perhaps to be expected, given that for Bergson metaphysics as a discipline fundamentally has to do with movement and change. Making this point in his two-part introduction to *The Creative Mind*, Bergson notes two formative examples from his early work on these connections: "the problem of liberty," he says, is "a pseudo-problem born of a confusion of duration and extension" (15–16). The same confusion, Bergson then claims, is also responsible for the mistaken belief that moods can be isolated and separated, as if they were "an intensity which is measurable" (16). In each case a confusion is taking place between the butterfly and its cocoon. More to the point, there is a failure to properly distinguish between the two in the first place. And this is why Bergson says that "the habit of proceeding from emptiness to fullness" (i.e., "nonexistent problems") is already implied in "the failure to recognize radical novelty" (i.e., "badly stated questions") (78). Both can be traced to the activity of the intellect, and both can be dissolved through a more appropriate appreciation of movement and change through the faculty of intuition.

Articulating the Two Advantages of Bergsonian Problematisation

In his 1960 lecture course on Bergson, Deleuze states that there are "two advantages," or aspects, to the method we have been discussing. The "negative" aspect pertains to the way in which the method affords a separation of true and false problems, whereas the "positive" aspect concerns the way in which the method "makes it possible for problems to be posed in terms of time" (Deleuze, "Lecture Course" 84). In most cases it is necessary to undertake the "negative" aspect first, due to the existing status quo in metaphysical analyses of commencing with general abstract ideas – a state of affairs naturally engendered by the activity of the intellect. As we have seen, Bergson seeks to avoid those approaches that begin by positing vague notions such as "something" and "nothing." In contrast to such "dialectical" methods,[11] the "Bergsonian question," as Deleuze puts it, is "why this rather than something else" (*Desert Islands* 24).[12] By attending to the detail of "this" thing and "that" thing, Bergson's metaphysics is a kind of empiricism, "But an empiricism worthy of the name, an empiricism which works only according to measure, sees itself obliged to make an absolutely new effort for each new object it studies" (*Creative Mind* 147).[13] The driving rationale for this, however, is not merely because various things differ from one another in actuality; rather, it is because "being is difference and not the immovable or the undifferentiated" (*Desert Islands* 25). The specific problem with treating being as a generality is thus that it makes

of being "something immovable or undifferentiated that, in the immobile ensemble in which it is set, can only be distinguished from nothingness, from non-being" (24). In other words, the problem with general ideas and problematics is that they are detached or abstracted away from time as duration. Hence the imbrication of the negative and positive aspects of the method.

The positive aspect of the method, we should be sure to note, does not consist in simply making up problems or ideas willy-nilly. On the contrary, it requires close attention to the nature of a thing in time; and this in turn demands close attention to the *nature and experience of duration*, as befits an empirical method "worthy of the name."[14] But *how*, one might still be wondering, does this all work in practice? How are we to state and solve problems in terms of time rather than space? To gain precise knowledge of the real, according to Bergson, we must rediscover true differences in kind and track their articulation. When we do this, we engage in a process of division – the dividing of a composite into its pure differences in kind, one kind from another. If duration is significant in this process, it is not merely because it guides intuition when navigating problems; more profoundly, *duration is what gives the rule of division itself*. Why? Because it is **[end of p. 39]** that which, by definition, *differs from itself* – indeed, according to Deleuze, "Everything Bergson has to say about [duration] comes down to this" (37).

Recall that for Bergson the aim of metaphysical inquiry should be to pair as tightly as possible an object with a concept, so that for each thing there is only one adequate explanation, and vice versa. Another way of putting this would be to say that metaphysical analysis should aim to isolate a thing by explaining how it is different from everything else. In Deleuzian parlance this means articulating the *internal difference* of a thing:

> If philosophy has a positive and direct relation to things, it is only insofar as philosophy claims to grasp the thing itself, according to what it is, in its difference from everything it is not, in other words, in its *internal difference* […]. This unity of the thing and the concept is internal difference, which one reaches through differences of nature. (32–33)

Deleuze's use of the term "internal" here is interesting because one might have presumed that when a thing is distinguished from other things then what has been established is the nature of its *external* difference – the difference *between* two things. There is no question that intuition, at the outset, involves the separation of things according to their differences in kind, but as Deleuze says, "the difference of nature between two things is still not the internal difference of the thing itself" (33). How, then, do we move from the difference of nature between two things to the internal difference of the thing itself, the latter being that which defines the nature of a thing?

Deleuze responds to this conundrum by examining the principal example in Bergsonian philosophy that addresses the issue: the division of duration and space. According to Bergson, the notion of abstract time in modern metaphysics is a composite of space and duration, each with its respective tendencies that differ in nature (relaxation for space and contraction for duration). However, Bergson also defines duration as that which differs from itself, for the essence of time is to continually change and become other to what it was. In this respect, duration is not merely a difference of nature in contrast to other natures; more profoundly, the *nature of duration is to differ in nature*. The upshot

of this is that the division at play here is not so much between two differences of nature – this nature from that nature – but rather the separation of differences of nature from differences in degree.

We can now see how what began as a separation of differences of nature, one nature from another, culminates in a separation of that which differs in nature from that which does not. Put differently, it is no longer accurate to say that the division is between two kinds of difference, this kind and that kind; rather, on one side of the ledger resides differences in kind, while on the other is differences in degree. In this division, we have moved from an articulation of external differences to a distinction between that which differs internally and that which differs externally. Of these two differences, external and internal, it is the latter that is primary. Why? Because external difference relies upon an identification of two natures to discern their difference, thereby subordinating difference to identity, whereas internal difference relies upon nothing other than itself – or more exactly, the othering of itself – to produce differences of nature (since its nature is to differ in nature). And it is for this reason that duration is so important to the intuitive method of problematisation: duration, as internal difference, is what gives the rule of differentiation, facilitating as a consequence the further articulation of difference into kind/degree and one kind from another. Thinking in time is thus not merely a requirement for the separation of differences in kind; it is the means by which we access internal difference, opening out in turn onto difference in the world.

Bergson's well-known description of the dissolving lump of sugar is perhaps the best way of illustrating this point. Chapter 1 of Bergson's *Creative Evolution* begins with the assertion that "The existence of which we are most **[end of p. 40]** assured and which we know best is unquestionably our own" (1). Referring back to his previous books, Bergson then claims that when we reflect on this existence the first thing we find is change: "I find, first of all, that I pass from state to state" (ibid.). These "states," however, are by no means discrete homogeneities. On the contrary, every state itself undergoes continual change: "states thus defined cannot be regarded as distinct elements. They continue each other in an endless flow" (3). As this endless flow suggests, states do not repeat themselves, for even when a state is said to occur again it is distinct from the first instance by virtue of its being the second iteration, and furthermore it is informed by the memory of the first. Novelty is thus guaranteed, as is unforeseeability:

> For to foresee consists of projecting into the future what has been perceived in the past, or of imagining for a later time a new grouping, in a new order, of elements already perceived. But that which has never been perceived, and which is at the same time simple, is necessarily unforeseeable. (6)

The critical question then arises: if this assessment holds for conscious beings, can we extend the findings to existence in general? At first it would appear not, for material objects seem to present opposite characteristics: "Either [a material object] remains as it is, or else, if it changes under the influence of an external force, our idea of this change is that of a displacement of parts which themselves do not change" (7–8). Material objects would also seem to lend themselves to foreseeability:

> A superhuman intellect could calculate, for any moment of time, the position of any point of the system in space. And as there is nothing more in the form of the whole than

> the arrangement of its parts, the future forms of the system are theoretically visible in its present configuration. (8)

Bergson's ultimate conclusion, however, is that such initial impressions are only made possible by a disregard for duration – a disregard that results from our *intellectualisation* of matter, which removes/abstracts matter from real time. The key passage reads as follows:

> Yet succession is an undeniable fact, even in the material world. Though our reasoning on isolated systems may imply that their history, past, present, and future, might be instantaneously unfurled like a fan, this history, in point of fact, unfolds itself gradually, as if it occupied a duration like our own. If I want to mix a glass of sugar and water, I must, willy nilly, wait until the sugar melts [*sic*]. This little fact is big with meaning. For here the time I have to wait is not that mathematical time which would apply equally well to the entire history of the material world, even if that history were spread out instantaneously in space. It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer something *thought*, it is something *lived*. (7–8)

The purpose of this anecdote is to demonstrate the fundamental importance of time for assessing reality. Imagine a scenario in which we assess the nature of a sugar lump using purely spatial means. In such an exercise, as Deleuze points out, "all we will ever grasp are differences in degree between that sugar and any other thing" (*Bergsonism* 31). The dimension of time is therefore needed in order to properly see how the sugar lump differs in kind from other things. Duration, moreover, does not only reveal a difference in kind between the sugar lump and other things; as the spectacle of dissolving the sugar lump in water capably shows, over time and *in* time the sugar lump itself undergoes change – it differs from itself. Also take note of the means by which the dimension of time reveals itself in this example: *by my having to wait, my impatience*. From this "little fact" it becomes apparent that it is *through* the fact of my own duration, of which I have a privileged and reliable knowledge, that the duration of the sugar lump is made evident, allowing me in turn to assess how it differs in kind. In Deleuze's words, "my own **[end of p. 41]** duration, such as I live it in the impatience of waiting, for example, serves to reveal other durations that beat to other rhythms, that differ in kind from mine" (32). This is why duration "gives the rule" of division, and why thinking in terms of duration provides the "fundamental meaning" of Bergson's problematic method/metaphysics (31).

Conclusion

The major stages/concepts of Bergson's work are well known: duration, memory, the *élan vital*. The key problems that animate Bergson's work can similarly be identified without too much trouble: causality and free will, the relation of memory to matter, and the problems of change and creativity. Discussion of Bergson's method of problematisation as a central plank of his work, however, is somewhat less commonplace. It is also far more fraught, since a not insignificant amount of this problematising method remains implicit in Bergson's work. As we have seen, far from preceding his metaphysical inquiries, Bergson's philosophical method gradually *emerges from* his conclusions on the subject of duration. This may seem strange to some, but as his remarks on "precision in philosophy" demonstrate, it could be no other

way for Bergson. The manner in which one thinks cannot be detached from the explanations that thought forms for reality. But while such a straightforward comment could be endorsed from a range of philosophical positions, Bergson's significant contribution is to insist that the method of thought does not precede the metaphysical reality under consideration, and nor can it be artificially abstracted and detached from metaphysical reality without adverse consequences for the precision and usefulness of the findings. Bergson's "problematic" thinking is thus at once methodological and metaphysical, and in the most intimate of ways. It is then little wonder that Deleuze, arguably the most important and influential successor of Bergson, asserts that this metaphysical-method or methodological-metaphysics is in fact responsible for *determining the progress* of Bergson's work as a whole (*Bergsonism* 14) – a bold statement, but one that is supported by Bergson's own retrospective view of his work, as this paper has attempted to detail.[15]

Notes

1 Patrice Maniglier claims that Gaston Bachelard, and to be more specific his text *Le Rationalisme appliqué* (1949), is the origin for twentieth-century and contemporary interest in France for problematisation (21). While there is no denying that Bachelard plays an important part in the history of the problematic in French thought, I am of the view that this reading of the situation overlooks the contribution of Bergson. At the very least, I cannot follow Maniglier in his tracing of Deleuze's problematic philosophy back to Bachelard (21–22), since Bergson is quite clearly the more accurate source. As an examination of Deleuze's early work on Bergson reveals, it is *through* his engagement with Bergson that Deleuze *first* starts to develop his own problematic philosophy. One might also note that in a letter written by Deleuze to Althusser in February 1966 – the same year *Bergsonism* would be published – Deleuze remarked that he was in the process of reading Althusser's books and wanted to say that he too had been working on "the concept of the 'problem'" (see Dosse 227). As this suggests, the influence of the "French epistemological tradition" on Deleuze's "problematic" thinking is ancillary at best.

2 This paper by During provides an excellent response to Osborne's "What is a Problem?," which seeks to separate the "problematology" of Canguilhem and Foucault from Bergson and Deleuze. For instance, while Osborne's account draws on and reinforces Foucault's infamous delineation of two traditions of French thought – one of experience, meaning and the subject, and another of knowledge, rationality and the concept – placing Bergson on the former line and **[end of p. 42]** Canguilhem on the latter, During attempts to "problematize" this distinction in order to effect a détente of sorts. This debate about traditions of problematisation in French philosophy is tangential to the aims of the present paper, though for my part I would hazard to say in passing that Osborne's description of Bergson as the author of a "normative" and "legislative" problematic philosophy – a description upon which his Bergson *vs*. Canguilhem distinction depends – is in need of further justification to be convincingly maintained.

3 The reader should note that Bergson's discussion of problematics and false problems is progressively developed through the course of his career (see *Matter and Memory*

xvii, 241; *Creative Evolution* 178, 220–36, 274–77, 296–99; *Creative Mind* 147). The focus of this paper will be, however, on Bergson's final position on the matter.

4 See also Bergson, *Creative Mind* 35: "[A] word can have a definite meaning when it designates a thing; it loses that meaning as soon as you apply it to all things."

5 See also Bergson, *Creative Mind* 71–72; idem, *Matter and Memory* 241: "This method [of intuition] presents, in its application, difficulties which are considerable and ever recurrent, because it demands for the solution of each new problem an entirely new effort."

6 As an aside, and in further response to his critics, Bergson argues that this confusion over clarity/obscurity explains why intuition might initially appear as philosophically inferior to intelligence. Describing a scene that will be familiar to most students of philosophy, Bergson says:

> Listen to the discussion between any two philosophers one of whom upholds determinism, and the other liberty: it is always the determinist who seems to be in the right. He may be a beginner and his adversary a seasoned philosopher. He can plead his cause nonchalantly, while the other sweats blood for his. It will always be said of him that he is simple, clear and right. He is easily and naturally so, having only to collect thought ready to hand and phrases ready-made: science, language, common sense, the whole of intelligence is at his disposal. Criticism of an intuitive philosophy is so easy and so certain to be well received that it will always tempt the beginner. Regret may come later […]. (*Creative Mind* 24)

7 See also the closing of Bergson's introduction to *Matter and Memory*, where he states that the second of the book's two guiding principles is "that the habits formed in action find their way up to the sphere of speculation, where they create fictitious problems, and that metaphysics must begin by dispersing this artificial obscurity" (xvii).

8 "Backwards over the course of time a constant remodelling of the past by the present, of the cause by the effect, is being carried out" (*Creative Mind* 84–85).

9 For a more detailed examination of Bergson's "the possible and the real," see Gunter.

10 When applied to the example of the possible and the real, Bergson says:

> The idea immanent in most philosophies and natural to the human mind, of possibles which would be realised by an acquisition of existence, is therefore pure illusion. One might as well claim that the man in flesh and blood comes from the materialization of his image seen in the mirror, because in that real man is everything found in this virtual image with, in addition, the solidity which makes it possible to touch it. But the truth is that more is needed here to obtain the virtual than is necessary for the real, more for the image of the man than for the man himself, for the image of the man will not be portrayed if the man is not first produced, and in addition one has to have the mirror. (*Creative Mind* 83)

11 For more on Bergson's critique of dialectics, see *Creative Mind* 63.

12 See also Deleuze, *Desert Islands* 36:

> It will come as no surprise, then, that a kind of principle of sufficient reason, as well as indiscernibles, can be found in Bergson's work. What he rejects is a distribution that locates cause or reason in the genus and the category and abandons the individual to contingency, stranding him in space. Reason must reach all the way to the individual, the genuine concept all the way to the thing, **[end of p. 43]** and comprehension all the way to "this". Bergson always asks of difference: why "this" rather than "that"?

13 As the quote continues: "It cuts for the object a concept appropriate to the object alone, a concept one can barely say is still a concept, since it applies only to that one thing" (*Creative Mind* 147).

14 In his work on Bergson, Deleuze will refer to this empiricism as a "superior empiricism" (see *Bergsonism* 30; see also *Desert Islands* 36). Subsequently he will lean heavily on this for his own notion of "transcendental empiricism," which at times will be described as "superior" (see *Difference and Repetition* 57, 143).

15 See also Deleuze, *Desert Islands* 22.

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[end of p. 44]