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objects of our knowledge come to be represented under the categories by being represented in the *a priori* image of space and time to Kant's early conception of an 'exposition of appearances', where appearances are set out as instances of a general rule. Laywine explains, 'Once the categories have been schematized and stated as the universal laws of nature […] they can relate to objects of knowledge in just the way that the enunciation of a proposition in classical geometry […] will relate to an object of knowledge' (p. 262).

This completes Laywine's argument for the thesis of her book: the B-Deduction provides a cosmology of experience – by representing the objects of our knowledge as belonging to a whole of nature in space and time – and it does so by something like an exposition of appearances, where each particular object of our knowledge is set out in the *a priori* image of space and time as an instance of a general rule of the understanding.

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Bergson by Mark Sinclair (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020).
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In the first quarter of the twentieth century, Henri Bergson was French philosophy's brightest star. 'Old-fashioned professors,' wrote William James, 'whom his ideas quite fail to satisfy, nevertheless speak of his talent almost with bated breath, while the youngsters flock to him as to a master'.[1] He published a string of influential books, including *Matter and Memory* (1896) and *Creative Evolution* (1907), and filled lecture halls in Paris, Oxford, London and New York. He was awarded the 1927 Nobel Prize in Literature 'in recognition of his rich and vitalizing ideas and the brilliant skill with which they have been presented'. Today, however, he is a marginal figure in the history of philosophy, at least when that history is written in English. A.C. Grayling devotes sections of his recent *History of Philosophy* to Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur, Deleuze and Derrida, but spares a mere paragraph for Bergson, remarking

[1] *A Pluralistic Universe* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1909) p. 227.

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that 'the enormous celebrity he enjoyed in his own day seems to have drained his reservoir of reputation, leaving none to be enjoyed posthumously'.[2] The index of Sir Anthony Kenny's four-volume *New History of Western Philosophy* goes straight from 'Bentham' to 'Berkeley'.[3] *The Journal of Philosophy* hasn't published an article with 'Bergson' in the title since 1955; *The Philosophical Review* hasn't done so since 1933.

In light of the continuing neglect of Bergson within the Anglophone philosophical community, the publication of Mark Sinclair's *Bergson*, an instalment in the Routledge Philosophers series, is a cause for celebration. It is easily the best introduction to Bergson – and one of the very best books on Bergson – in English. Sinclair brings to his task a deep knowledge both of Bergson's philosophy and of the broader history of French philosophy. While stressing the continuities between Bergson's ideas and those of earlier French philosophers, Sinclair helps the reader to understand, and even to share, the sense of novelty and excitement that these ideas provoked in Bergson's contemporaries.

Sinclair's emphasis on the continuities between Bergson's ideas and those of earlier French philosophers deserves particular attention for two reasons: first, it distinguishes his interpretation from previous Anglophone commentary, with the honourable exception of Susan Stebbing,[4] and second, it provides the context for his sharpest criticisms of Bergson. Sinclair argues that Bergson's philosophy was profoundly influenced by the French 'spiritualist' tradition running from Pierre Maine de Biran and Félix Ravaisson in the first half of the nineteenth century through to Émile Boutroux and Jules Lachelier in the early years of the Third Republic. For Ravaisson, spiritualism took as its starting point 'the consciousness, which the mind has in itself, of an existence from which all other existence derives, and which is nothing other than its action'[5] and Sinclair finds echoes of this consciousness throughout Bergson's philosophy. He writes that 'Bergson's philosophy of life as creation is a philosophy of the will as a self-propelling and self-constituting power' (p. 246). He describes Bergson as developing 'the

[2] *The History of Philosophy* (London: Viking, 2019) p. 508.

[3] *A New History of Western Philosophy, Volume IV: Philosophy in the Modern World* (Oxford: Clarendon, 2007).

[4] *Pragmatism and French Voluntarism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1914) pp. 35-36, quoted by Sinclair (p. 3).

[5] *Rapport sur la philosophie en France au XIXème siècle* (Paris: Hachette, 1867), p. 275, quoted by Sinclair (p. 9).

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nineteenth-century Romantic idea that instead of pure mechanism or pure finalism there is genius at the heart of the creative advance of nature' (p. 223). He suggests that Bergson's theory of perception, '[i]f it is a realism, …is a panpsychic, spiritualist realism: the world that pre-exists my perception of it is a tensed, minimally conscious world of duration' (p. 126), and he regards Bergson's theory of freedom as a development of the spiritualist attack on determinism (p. 70).

When Bergson departs from his spiritualist predecessors, Sinclair thinks that he comes off worse. Take the distinction that Bergson draws in *Matter and Memory* between two forms of memory, habit and recollection, which Sinclair explains in terms of the distinction between 'remembering how to do something and remembering that something has happened' (p. 89). Sinclair writes that Bergson's 'mechanistic' analysis of habit compares unfavourably to 'the rich tradition of non-mechanistic, vitalist and animist conceptions of motor habit in the foreground of earlier nineteenth-century French philosophy' (p. 89). He argues that if habit is interpreted mechanistically, then it isn't a form of memory at all. Bergson regards habit and recollection as two forms of memory because they both involve 'the survival of the past' into the present (p. 92). But to this Sinclair objects that habit, on the mechanistic interpretation, is simply an effect of something that happened in the past, and that 'we might just as well say that the past survives in the letter that I have folded and put in the envelope' (p. 92). He adds that 'if Bergson really does want to discover a survival of the past in an acquired habit, he will have to see in habit a power, a disposition, a tendency that is irreducible to material, mechanical changes and that belongs to duration itself' (p. 96). According to Sinclair, not only does Bergson's mechanistic interpretation of habit undermine his attempt to distinguish two forms of memory, it also threatens the whole project of *Matter and Memory*, which is to solve the problem of the relationship between the mind and the body. To the extent that Bergson makes progress in solving this problem in his later book *Laughter* (1900), it is by 'adopting more clearly… the vitalist and anti-mechanistic ideas about nature advanced by Boutroux and Ravaisson before him' (pp. 130–31). In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1932), however, Bergson 'seems to return to the kind of dualist and mechanistic interpretation of social and ethical habit that he had presented of motor habit in *Matter and Memory*' (p. 235), and here once again Sinclair finds his position implausible: 'Is it not absurd to suppose that Berliners customarily wait for… the *Ampelmännchen*… to

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appear before crossing the road… because social pressure has been instantiated in physiological or psychological mechanisms?' (p. 235).

There is another way to understand Bergson's relationship to French spiritualism, according to which he shares this tradition's hostility towards Kant's supposed scepticism about the possibility of metaphysics, but also departs from this tradition in constructing a metaphysics whose methods and results are more sharply distinguished from those of post-Kantian German idealism.[6] While I find this alternative way of thinking about Bergson more appealing, there is no question that it faces a serious challenge from Sinclair's interpretation, which is based on a rigorous analysis of the primary texts. Certainly, no future Anglophone historian will be entitled to wonder whether Bergson 'can be seen as belonging to a philosophical tradition at all'.[7]

One important aspect of Bergson's philosophy is his frequent engagement with late nineteenth and early twentieth century developments in physics, psychology, neurophysiology, and evolutionary biology. While this helps to explain why his contemporaries found his work so exciting, it also opens him up to two objections: first, that his arguments rely on what are now outdated views about the plausibility of particular scientific theories, and second, that his understanding of these theories is defective even by the standards of his own time. The objection that Bergson misunderstood the theory of relativity was made by no less an authority than Albert Einstein following a famous exchange with Bergson in 1922. According to Sinclair, Bergson insisted that his intention was 'not to criticise Einstein's theory of relativity, but only to assess its philosophical significance' (p. 23). He thought that the theory of relativity

[6] This is not to suggest that French spiritualism was simply an offshoot of German idealism. At one point in his essay on Ravaisson's life and work, Bergson compares him to Schelling: 'One finds in the work of M. Ravaisson more than one page which could be compared, for the direction of thought as for the elegance of style, to the best writing of the German philosophy. Yet the influence of Schelling must not be exaggerated. There was perhaps less influence than there was natural affinity, community of inspiration and, if one can speak in this way, preestablished harmony between two minds that both floated high above and met on certain summits' (*La Pensée et le Mouvant* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2013), pp. 262–63). Sinclair has a careful discussion of the relationship between Schelling and Ravaisson in his *Being Inclined: Félix Ravaisson's Philosophy of Habit* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 116ff.

[7] F.C.T. Moore, *Bergson: Thinking Backwards* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), xi, quoted by Sinclair (p. 5).

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was perfectly consistent with his own philosophical views about time, at least if it was shorn of a 'naïve crude ontology' (p. 23). Einstein thought that Bergson had failed to understand what the theory of relativity strictly entailed. Sinclair's general approach to this exchange is to focus on describing its historical context and reception. He does go as far as to describe the perception that Bergson 'lost his argument with Einstein concerning the nature of time' as erroneous (p. 2), and remarks: '[t]he argument was certainly not one that Bergson could claim to have to won, but it was not one that he lost' (p. 24). However, his assessment appears to be based less on the merits of Einstein's and Bergson's respective positions than it is on the extent to which other people at the time were persuaded to accept them.

Sinclair adopts a similar approach when he turns to Bergson's discussion of biological theories in *Creative Evolution*. Here he outlines Bergson's objections to various theories of evolution, including the neo-Darwinian theory of natural selection and the neo-Lamarckian theory of the inheritance of acquired characteristics, before introducing Bergson's idea of the *élan vital*, which is characterized as '[t]he psychological force throughout life as a whole', and as a 'global drive… expressed and carried forward in particular species and individuals' (p. 213). Sinclair goes on to describe Bergson's own biological theory as a '"psychological" account of the motive force of evolution whose impetus transcends individual living beings… and advances as arborescent differentiation' (p. 223). He admits that Bergson's ideas about the science of evolution 'came to appear obsolete and ill-informed' in the decades that followed the publication of *Creative Evolution* (p. 213), but he doesn't appear to regard this as a decisive objection to Bergson's 'philosophy of life', or as robbing the *élan vital* of its philosophical interest. An adequate defence of this position would have required a more detailed engagement with the question to what extent Bergson's metaphysics can be disentangled from his views about the scientific theories of his day.

At this point I should mention a reservation. At the end of the final chapter of *Bergson*, which helpfully describes Bergson's influence on philosophers such as Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, Sinclair writes: '[o]utside of the confines of academic philosophy, Bergson's thinking finds perhaps its most popular prolongation in the work of Rupert Sheldrake' (p. 271).[8] Sheldrake is a biologist known for his

[8] Sheldrake is also cited in support of the claim that 'the limits of gene-centric approaches have increasingly come to light since the underwhelming results of the Human Genome Project' (p. 213).

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hypothesis of 'formative causation', which operates by means of 'morphic resonance', and for his interest in topics such as clairvoyance and telepathy. Steven Rose, another biologist whom Sinclair regards as having 'signalled the importance of Bergson's work' (p. 213), describes formative causation as 'an hypothesis of such astounding generality as to be virtually vacuous', adding that, '[a]long with parapsychology, corn circles, creationism, ley-lines and "deep ecology," "formative causation," or "morphic resonance" has many of the characteristics of such pseudosciences, well-discussed by a number of contemporary sociologists of science'.[9] To the extent that the continuing neglect of Bergson within the Anglophone philosophical community is due to the perception that there are irresolvable tensions between his metaphysics and widely accepted scientific theories, it is unlikely to be improved by association with such ideas.

In the chapter of *Bergson* that deals with the topic of art, Sinclair raises an objection to the ethical dimension of Bergson's 'doctrine of "absolute novelty"' (p. 195), writing: '[t]he idea… that novelty is desirable *per se* is scarcely defensible, and one does not have to be a political reactionary to see that novel things can be bad and that constant novelty leads to distraction' (p. 196). The idea that novelty is desirable *per se* may be indefensible for other reasons, but it is at least consistent with the observation that what is novel is sometimes bad. After all, an object can have other qualities besides novelty, and even if its novelty is desirable *per se*, its other qualities may be sufficiently undesirable that the object turns out to be bad all things considered. Happily, Sinclair's *Bergson* combines novelty with many other desirable qualities. It explains Bergson's key ideas in a clear and accessible way, while at the same time making a powerful argument regarding their place within the broader history of French philosophy. It should be the first port of call for Anglophone philosophers looking to learn more about Bergson, and I hope that it will restore at least some of his lustre.

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[9] S. Rose and R. Sheldrake, 'The Rebirth of Nature', *RSA Journal* 142 (1994), p. 25. See also J. Maddox, 'Resonance Through the Editions', *Nature* 320 (1986), p. 648.

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