Asceticism and Sexuality” is a strange, perhaps even jarring title if you know anything about Bergson’s works. Yet I think that Bergson’s 1932 *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* his last and only work entirely devoted to ethics, revolves around this duality or this doubling: asceticism and sexuality. Obviously, such a title makes us think not of Bergson but of Foucault, and indeed my reflections on *The Two Sources* are partly inspired by Foucault. In the Introduction to his second volume of *The History of Sexuality* called *The Use of Pleasure* Foucault says, “it is philosophical discourse’s right to explore what might be changed in its own thought through the practice [l’exercice] of a knowledge that is foreign to it. The ‘essay’ [in the sense of une épreuve, a test] . . . is the living body of philosophy, at least if we assume that philosophy is still what it was in times past, i.e., an askesis an exercise of oneself in thought.” 2 At a minimum, this comment means that Foucault is defining thought as a kind of exercise. But there is more. As the title to the series indicates, Foucault is implying that exercises concerning sensing—pleasure—generate thought, that is, these exercises in sense generate new forms of thought or new forms of subjectivities. If Foucault is right that thought itself consists in a kind of asceticism of pleasure, then it seems necessary to investigate the discourses on asceticism. Like Foucault—and especially if our most general project consists in the renewal of thinking—we can ask: what kinds of practices are still available that can be used to generate new forms of thinking? Obviously, with Foucault in mind, one thinks of Nietzsche. 3 But one can also go to a less well-known source and that is Bergson, as I said, his 1932 *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.

In the scholarship on Bergson much has been written on the well-known themes of *The Two Sources*: the distinction between the open morality and the closed morality; the distinction between static religion and dynamic religion; dynamic religion being defined by mysticism; the “return to simplicity” of “The Final Remarks.” Yet, I am going to present a thesis that is not found in the scholarship, at least with the scholarship with which I am acquainted. 5 Repeatedly, Bergson qualifies his investigation of the two sources of morality and religion with the word “today” (TSMR 1219/286, for example). Therefore, I am going to claim that *The Two Sources* is a book about “today,” about the then contemporary political and moral problems. As I said, this book first appeared in 1932, and that means it appeared between the two world wars of the Twentieth Century. Thus what Bergson was concerned with, so to speak, “yesterday,” is the problem of war. But war never seems to be a thing of the past; it is always, as we know all too painfully, a problem of today. For Bergson, war, that is, what he calls “essential war,” is generated out of need, the most obvious of which is the need for food. The need for food, but this is true of all material needs, increases with population. Thus for Bergson war is generated by over-population. But, as we can see already, if war is ultimately caused by over-population, and if the contemporary problem with *The Two Sources* is concerned is war, then *The Two Sources* really concerns sexuality. Asceticism, therefore, comes on the scene for Bergson as a kind of “counter-weight” for what he calls the “aphrodisical”
nature of our entire civilization. As we are going to see, the aphrodisical nature of any culture does not consist in what we commonly call perverse sexual practices, but rather in a practice of repetition. But, more importantly, as we shall also see, the very counter-weight of asceticism also consists in the exact same repetition. This role of repetition means that the two sources of morality and religion, the two practices of asceticism and sexuality, are really one. As always with Bergson, the dualism is a monism and vice versa. So, what is at stake here is what we are going to call the “paradox of the double.” In Bergson’s own words what is at stake here is a “trumpery of nature.” In any case, if it is correct to say that The Two Sources concerns the relation of asceticism and sexuality, a relation that we can understand only on the basis of the paradox of the double, then we must identify clearly the problem with which the book is concerned. To identify this problem is the purpose of the present text. I have already mentioned that I think the problem is war. But, to identify this problem is not as easy as one might think. Unlike his 1896 Matter and Memory, which Bergson provided a preface fifteen years after its first publication, The Two Sources possesses, unfortunately, no such guide. So, we shall begin our investigation with identifying the purpose of this long and rather unwieldy book. Then I am briefly going to turn to this “trumpery of nature.”

The Practical and Theoretical Objectives of The Two Sources of Morality and Religion

In the “Final Remarks” of The Two Sources Bergson states explicitly that “the objective of the present work was to investigate the origins of morality and religion” (TSMR 1220/288). What is important here is that Bergson does not rest with the theoretical conclusions about these origins. He asks, “can [the origins of morality and religion] help us practically?” (TSMR 1206/271, my emphasis). As is well-known, Bergson was involved actively in world politics during and after World War I, with practical matters such as the formation of The League of Nations. And just as the League of Nations was intended to prevent war, here in The Two Sources Bergson’s practical aide consists showing how what he calls the “war-instinct” “will be able to be repressed or turned aside” (TSMR 1220/288). Bergson’s explanation of the war instinct depends on the idea of a “frenzy,” a frenzy for luxury, in particular, which means that the frenzy is based on the artificial extension of the vital need for food (TSMR 1229/298). But, for Bergson, the frenzy is double (TSMR 1227/296). And just as there is now—today,” he says—a frenzy for luxury, there was in the Middle Ages a frenzy for asceticism. According to Bergson, this double frenzy works like a “pendulum” (see TSMR 1123-24/292). The frenzy for luxury will eventually (but not necessarily) swing back towards asceticism. We are going to return to this double frenzy a little later. But what we should notice now is that Bergson describes the two positions of the pendulum as “frenzies.” The word “frenzy”—Bergson uses the word “frénésie”—derives from the Greek “phrenesia,” which means “inflammation of the brain,” in a word, madness.

With this double frenzy in mind, we can now determine three inter-related theoretical objectives that Bergson is pursuing, each one corresponding to the three chapters in which The Two Sources consists. In “The Final Remarks,” Bergson says that the frenzy of “asceticism evokes mysticism” (TSMR 1238/308). So, to understand the frenzy of asceticism, we must understand mysticism. And indeed, Chapter Three, “Dynamic Religion,” concerns precisely Bergson’s definition of mysticism. But in order to define mysticism, Bergson must distinguish it from the normal view of it; normally what we see in mysticism is only “pathological [mental] states” (TSMR 1183/245); in other words, Bergson distinguishes what he is calling

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mysticism from mental illness, from unbalanced states, states of “disequilibrium” (déséquilibres) (TSMR 1183/245). The reason we associate mysticism with unbalanced states consists in the fact, which Bergson admits, that the mystical states are “abnormal” (TMSR 1169/228). The “morbid states” of “a lunatic” (un fou) resemble mystic raptures and ecstasies (TMSR 1169/228-29). Bergson distinguishes between mystic abnormality and morbid abnormality by trying to show that the great mystics themselves (such as Joan of Arc) do not define themselves by the mystical visions and emotional disturbances they undergo. The visions and emotion are only a “systematic rearrangement aiming at a superior equilibrium.” Most importantly, this systematic equilibrium results in action. Action, for Bergson, defines mysticism. If we define mysticism as action, then we can distinguish the frenzy of mysticism from what Bergson calls “charlantanism” (charlantanisme) (TSMR 1184/246; cf. 1169/229). The word “charlantanism” literally means to prattle, to engage in idle talk, and therefore not to act. Now this charlantanism brings us to Bergson’s second theoretical objective in The Two Sources. This theoretical objective is located in Chapter Two, “Static Religion.”

Bergson begins Chapter Two with an obvious fact. He says, “The spectacle of what religions were and of what certain religions still are is humiliating for human intelligence. What a tissue of aberrations,” “errors,” and “absurdities” (TSMR 1061/102). What Bergson is calling here “static religion” refers not only to all the polytheisms such as the religion of ancient Greece, not only to all the forms of paganism, but also to all superstitions including the belief in evil spirits and magic. Here, for Bergson, in these non-mystical religions we really have madness. So, Bergson’s second theoretical objective consists in showing why rational beings, “Homo sapiens,” are the only beings who believe in “irrational things” (des choses déraisonable) (TSMR 1062/102). He will explain these aberrant beliefs by means of the fact that human beings, unlike animals, possess intelligence. In other words, intelligent being like human beings are the only creatures to believe in superstitions (TSMR 1067/109). For Bergson, intelligence consists in the ability to manufacture tools, but this ability to manufacture tools requires reflection (TSMR 1153/210). Reflection then produces two kinds of dangers (TSMR 1153-54/210). On the one hand, reflection gives humans a kind of “foresight” (prévision) that allows them to be aware of future dangers, in particular, death. The result of this vision of death is that humans become depressed; they then lose “confidence” (TSMR1085/130) in their ability to act and finally detach themselves from life. Because of intelligence, beings like us become unbalanced. But we become unbalanced in a second way. So, on the other hand, reflection allows humans to reflect on themselves. And, according to Bergson, as soon as we begin to think of ourselves, we become egoistical. Nature, however, has generated humanity to live in societies and societal life demands disinterestedness. Thus in two ways things need to be set right again. To do this, according to Bergson, nature uses one of intelligence’s functions, a specific form of the imagination, the “fabulation function” (TSMR 1066-67/107-09). The fabulation function invents images, “voluntary hallucinations” (TSMR 1141/195), out of the feeling that there exists an invisible but efficacious presence who has “its eyes always turned towards us” (TSMR 1124/176). Eventually, the images of this efficacious presence become individual gods. The gods, on the one hand, intervene in human affairs to ward off the future dangers that we cannot control. On the other hand, the gods intervene in human affairs in order to forbid egoism and thereby ensure social cohesion. The gods therefore restore the balance lost through intelligence.
Now Bergson thinks this restoration of balance occurs naturally and that there is no madness here. This is not where the madness is. The madness occurs when an individual is afraid or feels a need (TSMR 1090/136). For example, an enemy in a distant city threatens the individual or disease has destroyed his crops; the individual can neither reach the distant enemy in order to strike back nor obliterate the disease. Confidence is lost. Then the fabulation function takes over and starts to produce images of evil spirits to attack the enemy or to explain the ruined crops. We are now in the domain of magic. Strictly, for Bergson, before its indefinite extension, magic is rational and not madness (cf. TM 1090/136). At the beginning, magic apparently worked (TSMR 1116/166), and this efficacy is why magic contributed at times to the progress of science. Magic becomes irrational when it extends itself in the direction of evil spirits and the mechanical repetition of incantations (TSMR 1117-18/168-69). These first images of evil spirits, according to Bergson, are extended in the direction of the magical “recipes” or “formulas” that are used to conjure the spirits up. Here we return to the idea of charlatanism. The magician is a charlatan, that is, he is not just an imposter but also someone who merely talks, who merely utters “incantations.” The magician does not engage in scientific research to cure the disease; he does not go to the distant city and attack his enemy. In short, he does not act. But even this idle chatter is not quite madness, for Bergson. At first, we had the images of the evil spirit; these images were extended in the direction of formulas. But then, the images continue to extend themselves. As if under the influence of the magic incantation “like is equivalent to like” (cf. TSMR 1118/169), the first images attract more, similar one. Eventually, for this individual, the entire world ends up being “peopled” with evil spirits. This unstoppable “proliferation” (TSMR 1118/169) of images is “monstrosity” (TSMR 1091/137); Bergson also calls it “decadence” (TSMR 1094/140).

On the basis of this consideration of the first two theoretical objectives, we can see already why Bergson called his book “The Two Sources of Morality and Religion.” We have seen two sources or origins of religion. On the one hand, nature is the source of static religion. That is, the evolution of nature has produced intelligence, but intelligence unbalances the individual. This unbalance produces a natural need that in turn develops the fabulation function in order to restore the balance. On the other hand, a certain kind of psychological state, which is abnormal, is the source of dynamic religion; that is, a mystical rapture unbalances the normal balance of the individual resulting in a different kind of balance. Superior equilibrium results in action. Obviously since both sources—nature and mysticism—concern different kinds of balances and equilibriums, we are again speaking of the image of the pendulum. But just as obviously, if we think only of the title of this book, we can see that one of its theoretical objectives is to differentiate between these two sources. But why do they need to be differentiated? This question brings us to the third theoretical objective.

The third theoretical objective is located in the first chapter of The Two Sources: “Moral Obligation.” Unlike the titles to Chapters Two and Three—“Static Religion” and “Dynamic Religion”—which together indicate a difference, the title for Chapter One indicates a unity, within which, nevertheless, Bergson is going to make a difference. This difference is that of closed morality and open morality. Closed morality is the morality of a group, the morality of the city, and here we should keep in mind the old walled cities of Europe. The closed morality aims only at self-preservation of the group and thus social cohesion. It consists in customs. Society therefore trains the individual in these customs to the point where the individual is habituated. The closed morality is entirely about habituation, even automatism.

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In contrast, the open morality is entirely about creation. For Bergson, the open morality refers to the great moral initiators, the mystics, and in particular, Jesus. Jesus gives us the image, according to Bergson, of an individual who loved all humanity, not just one’s friends, not just the group. In fact, the openness of this love is such that it has no object and thus extends to infinity, to every single thing. Here we do not have customs but an example (the image of Jesus given in the Gospels) to follow or, more precisely, to which one aspires. Here, in the open morality, we do not have habits, but emotion and therefore for Bergson effort. As I said, the title of the first chapter, “Moral Obligation,” implies a kind of unity. The two kinds of morality, the open and the closed, can come to be mixed together and therefore be indistinguishable.

But also, the title of the first chapter quickly makes one think of duty and thus of Kant’s moral philosophy. According to Bergson, Kant has made a “psychological error” that has, as Bergson puts it, “violated many theories of ethics” (TSMR 991/20). The psychological error is this. In any given society, there are many different, particular obligations. The individual in society may at some time desire to deviate from one particular obligation. When this illicit desire arises, there will be resistance from society but also from his habits (TSMR 992/21). If the individual resists this resistance, a psychological state of tension or contraction occurs. The individual, in other words, experiences “the rigidity” (la raideur) of the obligation. Now, according to Bergson, when philosophers such as Kant attribute a severe aspect to duty, they have “externalized” this experience of the inflexibility of the obligation. In fact, for Bergson, if we ignore the multiplicity of particular obligations in any given society, and if instead we look at what he calls “the whole of obligation” (TSMR 995/25), then we would see that obedience to obligation is almost natural. According to Bergson, obligations, that is, customs, arise because of the natural need an individual has for the stability that a society can give (TSMR 986-87/15). As a result of this natural need, society “inculcates” habits of obedience in the individual (TSMR 1057/97). And, habituation means that obedience to the whole of obligation is, in fact, for the individual, effortless (TSMR 990/19).

The psychological error then consists in externalizing an exceptional experience—which Bergson calls “resistance to the resistance”—into a moral theory. Duty becomes severe and inflexible. But there is more to this error. Philosophers—and again Bergson has Kant in mind—“believe that they can resolve obligation into rational elements” (TSMR 992/22). In the experience of resistance to the resistance, the individual has an illicit desire. And, since the individual is intelligent, the individual will use intelligence, a “rational method,” to act on itself. According to Bergson, what is happening here is that the rational method is merely restoring the force of the original tendency to obey the whole of obligation that society has inculcated into the individual. But as Bergson says, the tendency is one thing, the rational method is another (TSMR 993/22). The success of the rational method however gives us the illusion that the force with which an individual obeys any particular obligation comes from reason, that is, from the idea or representation, or better still, from the formula of the obligation.

But it is this rationalization of the force of closed morality into formulas that really leads to the need to differentiate between the closed and the open morality. The open morality, for Bergson, is identical with the dynamic religion, with mysticism. Here too we have a force. This second force is what Bergson calls “the impetus of love” (élan d’amour) (TSMR 1057/96). Here too we must speak of an experience, but one that is different from the experience of resistance to...
the resistance. When a mystic has the experience of the impetus of love, this mystic, according to Bergson, undergoes a specific emotion and specific images (TSMR 1170/229). Both the emotions and images can be, indeed, must, be explicited into actions and representations. But this process of explicitation can be extended. The representations that the mystic explicates can be further explicited into formulas, for example, the formula of each person being deserving of respect and dignity. These formulas, which are the expression of creation and love, are now able to be mixed with the formulas which aim solely to insure the stability of any given society. Since we are now speaking only of formulas, this mixture of creation and cohesion is found on, as Bergson says, “the plane of intelligence”; the two forces now are mixed together, in other words, in reason. As before, where the rational method used in the experience of resistance to the resistance comes to explain force of obedience, here in the mystical experience of the impetus of love the formulas come to explain the force of creation. A reversal has taken place. The very forces, which, Bergson says, “are not strictly and exclusively moral” (TSMR 1056/96), that have generated the formulas are instead now being explained by the formulas. We can see the difficulty that rational moral theories encounter. How could “some representation of intelligence have the power to train the will”? How could “an idea demand categorically its own realization”? As Bergson says, “Re-establish the duality [of forces], the difficulties vanish” (TSMR 1057/96).

All I have been trying to do so far is determine the objectives of Bergson’s *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. There are four objectives, each one corresponding to one of the book’s four chapters. So, first, we saw that Bergson has a practical objective, which consists in finding a method to repress the “war-instinct.” Then there are three theoretical objectives. Corresponding to Chapter Three, there is the theoretical objective of differentiating between two unbalanced psychological states, between mystical states and morbid states. The difference is that mystical states result in action, while the morbid ones do not. Then corresponding to Chapter Two, there is the theoretical objective of explaining why the only beings with intelligence believe in irrational things. It is intelligence itself that brings about this belief since intelligence unbalances the individual. Finally, corresponding to Chapter 1, there is the theoretical objective of righting the relation between intelligence or reason and the forces of morality. Again, as Bergson says, “Re-establish the duality [of forces], the difficulties vanish” (TSMR 1057/96).

Now, immediately after this passage that I just quoted again, Bergson says, “Reinstate the original duality [of forces] and the difficulties vanish. And the duality itself will be absorbed into the unity, since ‘social pressure’ and the ‘impetus of love’ are but two complementary manifestations of life.” For Bergson, there is a unity of life that always manifests itself in duality. Bergson at times calls this unity “sens” (cf. TSMR 1157/214); indeed, it seems to me that we will never be done with this word “sens” or “Sinn” or “sense,” with all its ambiguities. In any case, Bergson compares this unity of sense to a “point” (TSMR 1191/253) and to a star or a “planet” (*un astre*) (TSMR 1238/308). We know what is implied with this image. A “planet,” a shiny point up in the nighttime sky, is during the day, occluded by the bright light of the sun; yet the planet is still there. But the image of the planet suggests something else. Like our moon, a planet revolves, showing us at one time one side and at another time the other side. For Bergson, this revolving moon is an image of what he calls the “Christian ideal,” and indeed he even uses Nietzsche’s phrase and speaks of “the ascetic ideal.” What Bergson is implying in *The Two Sources* is that the ascetic ideal itself at one moment shows the side of the frenzy of asceticism and at other times the frenzy of industrialism. The connection is

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that asceticism, for Bergson, is about mysticism and therefore the love of all things and industrialism is too about improving the life of all things, that is, humans, so that industrialism too is an extension of love. As we have seen, this frenzy of industrialism can go in the direction of luxuries and thus towards sexual pleasure. We return again to the aphrodisical nature of contemporary culture. And the aphrodisical nature of contemporary culture brings us to “the trumpery of nature.”

The Trumpery of Nature

I am not artificially introducing the question of sexuality into Bergson. Since *The Two Sources* is published quite late, it relies on the evolutionary theory that Bergson developed earlier in *Creative Evolution*. Thus all species have an instinct to reproduce and preserve the species. This instinct according to Bergson produces in all the species including us a “procreative sense.” Bergson says, and we all know this, “the demands of the procreative sense are imperious” (MR 1232/302). The demands must be satisfied and when they are, we experience pleasure. But the purpose or end of the sense and its satisfaction and its pleasure is reproduction. Now, Bergson thinks that “we would finish with these demands [of the procreative sense] quickly if we held ourselves to nature” (MR 1232/302); in other words, if we restricted ourselves to the natural function of procreation like other animal species, humans would engage in the sexual act and be done with it. If we restricted ourselves in this way, the sexual act would be a means to an end, the end being the multiplication of individuals in order to conserve the species. But, since, for us, today, everything is about sex, something has happened to this means-end relation. The direction (sens) of sexuality has changed from its natural direction.

How is it possible to go in the opposite direction from nature, to mis-direct nature? In *The Two Sources*’s first chapter, Bergson describes the transition from the closed morality to the open morality in the following way:

there are numerous cases where humanity has deceived [a trompé] nature, which is so knowing and yet so naïve. Surely, nature intended that humans should procreate endlessly, like all the other living beings. Nature has taken the minutest precautions in order to insure the conservation of the species through the multiplication of individuals. It has not therefore foreseen that, by giving us intelligence, intelligence would discover immediately the means of cutting the sexual act off from its consequences, and that humans could abstain from reaping without renouncing the pleasure of sowing. (MR 1022-23/56-57, my emphasis).

The “misdirection” (la tromperie) that intelligence plays on nature allows us to enjoy the pleasure of sex without producing children. In other words, intelligence has found a way of “cutting off” the means—the sexual act and its pleasure—from its natural goal. It has found a way of turning “Venus’s love”—this is how Bergson talks—into an end in itself. Love becomes the love of pleasure in and of itself. Bergson describes the sexual sensation as “impoverished.” We can understand the impoverishment in the following way. Since the “trumpery” that intelligence plays on nature separates the sexual act from its natural goal, the pleasure creates nothing. Pleasure has no goal; pleasure has no direction; pleasure is not used. We could say that this side of the deception is a superficial repetition of the same. Bergson, however, continues the above quote:

It is in a wholly other direction [sens] that humans misdirect [trompe] nature when they extend social solidarity into human fraternity, but humans mislead nature nevertheless. Those societies whose design was pre-formed in the original structure of
the human soul, and of which we can still perceive the plan in the innate and fundamental tendencies of modern humanity, required that the group be closely united, but that between group and group, there should be virtual hostility; we were always to be prepared for attack or defense. Not of course that nature designed war for war’s sake. Those great leaders of humanity drawing humans after them, who have broken down the gates of the city, seemed indeed thereby to have placed themselves again in the current of the vital impetus . . . [and] re-open what was closed. (MR 1023/57, my emphasis).

Nature aims only at the closed. The very same “misdirection” allows humanity to open and go against nature by going either in the direction (sens) of pleasure for its own sake or in the direction (sens) of the love of all beings, of everything. The love that I have for one person can be repeated to everything. This would be a repetition not of the same, not a superficial repetition, but a deep repetition of difference. These two “misdirecting” senses become, for Bergson, the two frenzies of sexuality and asceticism.

But we can see already the point from which these two frenzies are suspended: the repeatability of the form. The form of love can be repeated. Intelligence misdirects or trumps nature, since its function, according to Bergson in The Two Sources but also in Creative Evolution, is to manufacture tools. Because intelligence has this function, it must be able to reflect (MR 1158/210). And as soon as I reflect, as soon as I think, as Bergson says, I think of myself. The point suspending the pendulum of the two frenzies is auto-affection. It is self-imitation (cf. MR 1102/149, MR 1118/168). If self-imitation is fundamental, then the self is always already doubled. Here we have what must be called “the paradox of the double.” The paradox is that, if the self can be imitated, it must be possible to be imitated and that necessary possibility means that the self is always already imitated, memorized, formalized, or “imaged.” We might even say that the self is always already art, artifice, and artificial. Reflection (and not a reflex), this fold—“pli,” as in “im-pli-cation,” “com-pli-cation,” and “sim-pli-fication”—puts an interval between the stimulus and reaction; there is a hesitation (cf. MR 990/19). Thanks to the hesitation, the past returns and the future is already seen. Although the derivation is unclear, the word “trompe” is associated with infidelity, perfidy; there is a loss of confidence (as we have seen) in self-reflection. These is a “deficit” (MR 1159/210), a “lack” (MR 1155/211), de-pression. One is no longer confident that what returns from the past into the present will go in the right direction (sens). There is an “interval” (MR 1005/37) between the present and the future. Or, there is a kind of imbalance or disequilibrium between the past and the future. But this disequilibrium means that the returning form is freed from the present. Thus the form of what returns is iterable or, as Bergson would say, “transformable,” “transfigurable,” or “transferable” from one object to another, even to un-natural or irrational objects. We cannot but think of Nietzsche: “the form is fluid, but the sense [Sinn] is even more so.”

The form and sense can be hooked or unhooked, folded, re-folded, de-folded. Yet, with Nietzsche in mind, we must ask: what does the hooking and unhooking? In Bergson, “we have no choice” (MR 1008/39). There are always and only two forces: the force of nature or instinct or habit—the procreative sense is imperious—or the force of religion or intuition or emotion—what Bergson calls “creative emotion.” But these two forces, like the two frenzies, are reciprocally implicated in the élan vital. Unlike the abstract concept of the will to live, the power of the vital impetus, as Bergson stresses, is empirical, meaning that it can be experienced (MR 1073/115).

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Conclusion: Unjust Charity

Now it would be necessary to go to the concept of mystical experience in Bergson. Obviously, such an investigation goes beyond the scope of this essay. But we have seen already that mystical experience in Bergson is an experience of disequilibrium. Mystical experience in Bergson is the experience of the vital impetus, which means that there is a fundamental disequilibrium within life itself. The doubling, the trumpery, means that life is always out of joint and thus always fundamentally unjust. Thus, to conclude, I would like only to speak of justice in The Two Sources. In the first chapter of The Two Sources Bergson differentiates between relative justice and absolute justice. In a very general way, the difference between relative and absolute justice defines, for Bergson, the difference between the closed morality and the open morality. Relative justice is determined by the idea of compensation, weighing. Sounding very much like Nietzsche, Bergson claims that this relative justice has a mercantile origin. Everything can be measured, everything has its price. But, this principle of relative justice is really a principle of revenge: an eye for an eye. For Bergson, it is only absolute justice, whose other name is charity, that truly overcomes revenge. Absolute justice is determined by the absolute worth of every individual; the value of each is beyond measurement, compensation, and price. But, insofar as each is beyond compensation, the cry for justice is infinite, even relentless. In the discussion of Christian mysticism in The Two Sources Bergson emphasizes that “the Christ of the Gospels” was “the continuator of the prophets of Israel” (MR 1179/240). Bergson says, “when a great injustice has been committed and admitted, it is the voice of the prophets of Israel that we hear” (MR 1038/76). Now I have been drawn to this passage about the prophets of Israel in The Two Sources because of Jankélévitch. Thus you can see that my inspiration in this text not only comes from Foucault but also from Levinas. In the 1959 appendix to his book on Bergson—the appendix by the way is called “Bergson and Judaism”—Jankélévitch says, “the infinity of forgiveness and the supernatural dissymmetry of grace makes the circuit of vindicative expiation explode: [this is] the unjust charity that commands paradoxically to give goodness for evil.” What Jankélévitch seems to be implying here is that only an “unjust charity” can respond to the paradox of the double, to a fundamental disequilibrium, to a fundamental injustice within life itself.

ENDNOTES


3. I will take up Nietzsche as well in a different book project, which is in progress, called Memory and Life: An Archeology of the Experience of Thought.

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