

## AFFECT AND LIFE IN SPINOZA, NIETZSCHE, AND BERGSON

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DRAFT of December 21, 2017  
For Alex Houen, ed. *Affect* (Cambridge Critical Concepts)

Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Bergson make an odd gathering, a 17<sup>th</sup> century arch-rationalist and two irrationalists from the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. But affect looms large in all their work, so that will be the lens through which we view them in this essay.

Each of our three philosophers has a characteristic method: for Spinoza, the geometrical method; for Nietzsche, genealogy; and for Bergson, intuition. Each of these methods takes those rare ones able to follow it beyond the human condition of concern with useful manipulation of material objects to the point of an affect-soaked contact with reality. For Spinoza, some who follow the life of reason can reach the intellectual love felt in an intuitive knowledge of "God or Nature"; for Nietzsche, some who practice his "gay science" come to joyously affirm life as will-to-power; and for Bergson some can follow sympathetic intuition to the point of a joyous love in touching life's creativity.

Thus, all three seek conditions for joy, rare though those capable of fully feeling it might be: for Spinoza, joy is felt when adequate ideas lead to increased power to be the cause of actions and thoughts, including even the joy of understanding the way our singular body makeup constitutes reasons for our sadness; for Nietzsche, joy is possible from the practice of "gay science" leading to an affirmation of life; and for Bergson, joy is felt in immersion in life's creativity.

### SPINOZA

To understand affect in Spinoza we must first understand his metaphysics. In *Ethics* 1 he shows that "God or Nature" is a single, self-caused, necessarily existing substance. Every finite thing is an expression of God / nature, a modification or mode or way that God / nature is. There are two attributes of God / nature to which we have access – that compose our being – extension and thought: our body is a finite mode, and so is our mind. Each state of our body has a parallel state of our mind, and each state is produced by chains of efficient causes such that there are laws of physics and psychology that in principle explain our physical and mental states: "there is no affection of the body of which we cannot form a clear and distinct conception."<sup>1</sup>

Things could not have been otherwise; there is no contingency in nature, just necessity. Hence there is no free will. However, the act of recognizing that we don't have free will, because nature is a causal web, such that psychological states are

caused just as physical states are, is one of the key conditions for our freedom. Spinoza says that our affects are fully expressions of nature's power, so they can be analyzed and understood, rather than condemned and mocked. "I shall consider human actions and appetites just as if it were an investigation into lines, planes, and bodies."<sup>2</sup>

In *Ethics 2*, we learn that the mind is the active conceptual grasp of the processes and patterns of processes of the body. When we encounter another body, our body is changed, and so our mind grasps that change. Emotions or "affects" are the changes in bodily composition from singular encounters with other bodies (our "affections" or "being affected") by which our power of acting is increased or decreased (our ability to affect or change other bodies), together with the idea or active conceptual grasp of those changes. As Spinozist ideas are inherently emotive the idea of increase in power is joy or uplift and the idea of decrease in power is sadness or downfall.

*Ethics 3* teaches that affects can be active or passive. We are active when we are the adequate cause of an event. "Adequate cause" here means that we cause an event through our nature or power; in such a state of activity we have an adequate idea of our action, meaning that we understand our causal power in an action. Passivity means that something happens in us of which we are only the partial cause. So, a passive affect occurs when things happen to us that change our bodies as we undergo encounters in the causal web and an active affect occurs when we do something from our own nature, from our own power of acting.

There is a basic trio of affects: desire, joy, and sadness.<sup>3</sup> To understand desire, we have to understand "conatus." *Conatus* is the endeavor to continue in existence that each thing has as its essence.<sup>4</sup> Now this may look like mere self-preservation, but it is an expression of God / nature's power to be *and to act*, and that last bit is our key: each thing expresses God / nature's acting, so it endeavors to act from its own finite nature. So, a rock doesn't just sit there; it is an active exercise of its power as an expression of the power of God / nature (the molecular structure of the rock keeps it together – the energy of which it is composed is caught in that repeating pattern that is the characteristic ratio of motion and rest that individuates that rock). Now the rock has a limited range of affects – there's only so much it can do, though it can withstand a certain range of encounters. Now think of human beings and everything that our body (including our brain) can do and undergo: what a huge exercise of power that can be in the right circumstances.

Spinoza says he will derive all the other emotions from this basic trio of desire, joy, and sadness. For instance, "love" is joy plus the idea of an external cause: we love *that which we imagine* causes us to increase our power. And "hatred" is sadness plus the idea of an external cause.<sup>5</sup> But we can be mistaken in our loves and hates as, in "imagination" or the "first form of knowledge," we understand external things through the changes they cause in our body. If we do not clearly understand our own body's nature – its characteristic ratio of motion and rest – we don't recognize

how much it contributes to the image of the external thing we experience and attribute causation to in, e.g., love and hate.

So, while you can be mistaken in your imaginary guesswork as to what external thing is causing an emotion – in some cases, you might simply be imitating the affects of others – you can also come to make a true judgment as to what is good by understanding the adequate cause of an emotion as it comes from our own nature. That is, in “reason” or the “second form of knowledge,” we can, from a systematic investigation of patterns of encounters forming “common notions,” move to an understanding of God / nature. Such knowledge of the scientific laws of nature, including those of human physiology / psychology, enables us to disentangle the causal web and isolate the way our nature produces an emotion out of an encounter; that is, we come to understand our power and its contribution to our being affected.

Spinoza doesn't simply mean by “power” the ability to boss other people around because you have all the guns. He's not a “might makes right” philosopher as that phrase is usually understood. The best, most human and rational, kind of “power” means “constructing a social order that fosters mutual increases in understanding” – basically, a republic in which scientific understanding is supported and used as the basis for public policy.

Spinoza presents a sketch of what reason demands as to the ordering of humans as social beings. We should all love ourselves and seek our advantage, that is, seek to reinforce our conatus; this self-interested seeking is our virtue. However, this is not an egoist doctrine. Truly understanding yourself means understanding yourself as social. This passage is among the greatest ever written in philosophy:

Nothing is more advantageous to man than man. Men, I repeat, can wish for nothing more excellent for preserving their own being than that they should all be in such harmony in all respects that their minds and bodies should compose, as it were, one mind and one body, and that all together should endeavor as best they can to preserve their own being, and that all together they should aim at the common advantage of all. From this it follows that men who are governed by reason, that is, men who aim at their advantage under the guidance of reason, seek nothing for themselves that they would not desire for the rest of mankind; and so are just, faithful, and honorable. <sup>6</sup>

In *Ethics* 5 Spinoza writes movingly about freedom and the power of the human mind to control and check the emotions (note that Spinoza denies we can have an absolute command of the emotions). We can convert passive emotions to active emotions by gaining adequate ideas of them. The key to such conversion is that understanding our emotional reaction pattern is not a reaction; it's an action.

That is, if we can untangle the causal web of any one passive emotion – which is the idea or active conceptual grasp of a changing body under the influence of an encounter – we can disentangle what comes from our nature from what comes from

the encountered thing. Thus, through socially organized investigation (science) we can come to understand our body and its physical / emotional reaction patterns. And when we understand that the emotion resulting from an encounter comes from our nature, and that this emotion was necessary due to our nature's encounter with the nature of the thing, then we have increased our mind's power.

"Our nature" is the causal history that has produced the current state of our body; our reaction patterns are dependent upon that state. The more we understand this nature from analyzing our reactions in a wide range of situations, the more our mind is powerful and able to control the emotions. Such control comes through understanding psychology "men, like everything else, act from the necessity of their nature, then the wrong or the hatred that is wont to arise from it, will occupy just a small part of our imagination and will easily be overcome."<sup>7</sup> "Necessity of their nature" means the causal history that has produced their emotional reactions.

So, freedom for Spinoza is not freedom *from* causation; it is coming to understand how our actions come from our causal history as that is an expression of God / nature. This understanding is like a doubling affirmation of God / nature: we are an expression of God / nature as it unrolls in its causal web, even as that unrolling is expressed as our understanding.

Through reason, we can learn how to relate events and patterns of events to natural laws or God / nature as it unrolls. So, as you come to understand and control your emotions you are coming to understand and to love God / nature. You are coming to affirm your status as an expression of God / nature. Not that "God made you this way" – God doesn't have a plan; God / nature is the unrolling of the world, not something outside the world pulling strings and planning events.<sup>8</sup>

Discursive reason, however, is not our highest expression of power / virtue. Our highest power is intuition, the "third form of knowledge."<sup>9</sup> Here we move from an understanding of God / nature to an understanding of the essence of things: why does this thing have its characteristic ratio of motion and rest? Because it is a specific way of expressing God / nature. When we have these flashes of intuition, we feel the most powerful joy we can, the intellectual love of God / nature.<sup>10</sup> Why is this the most powerful joy? Recall that the feeling of the increase of the mind's power is joy. So, when we understand, we exercise our power of thinking, and we are active. Thus, understanding why you felt sad in an encounter can be converted into the joy of exercising our power of thinking. In other words, the rush of the "Eureka" whereby you understand how that person was provoking your sadness converts that sadness into joy. That doesn't mean you have to keep seeking out that person; in fact, it means you understand why you should avoid them.

Spinoza claims that the joy of intuition is greater than that of science.<sup>11</sup> The joy of the third kind of knowledge is more powerful than that of the second because in the third kind we understand that our nature is an expression of God / nature, so that we are God / nature loving itself through us. Remember that God / nature is the

power of acting; we most powerfully act when we exercise that power of thought that is our essence. Joy is the feeling of powerful action; when we intuit, we most powerfully exercise our essence / virtue / power; the intellectual love of God / nature then is the most powerful joy we can attain.

Living in this state of intellectual love of God / nature is "blessedness."<sup>12</sup> As much as we can attain it, we are free from passive emotions, as we quickly convert any passive emotion into an active joy by understanding its genesis as necessary. That is, by understanding our own body, we can understand its patterns of reaction. And understanding a reaction is an action. So we are not blessed because we can control our emotions; rather, we can control our emotions to the extent that we are blessed. In great understatement, the *Ethics* concludes by saying that attaining and staying in this state of blessedness is difficult and rare.<sup>13</sup>

## NIETZSCHE

We will concentrate here on one of Nietzsche's masterpieces, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. It asks under what cognitive-affective conditions is life worth living. More concretely, what will allow us to avoid the despair that comes with meaningless suffering?

Nietzsche begins with confronting Schopenhauer: might not valuing pity be a sign of exhaustion and illness, of will turning against life, of risking nihilism? So, one of the motivations of the *Genealogy* is to ask: what if morality was a danger so that the type man might never reach its heights?<sup>14</sup>

In the *Genealogy*, "will-to-power" is the basic ontological category for life forms. Will-to-power is not mere "striving," but is striving to exercise power in overcoming resistance to appropriating and organization of other beings into subordinate parts of a life form. The will-to-power ups the ante on Spinoza's *conatus*, which in Nietzsche's reading aims only at persistence in being, as does Darwinian adaptation, which thereby misunderstands "the essence of life, its *will-to-power* ... [we miss] the prime importance that the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, re-interpreting, re-directing, and formative forces" by which organism's shape themselves.<sup>15</sup> Instead of mere survival, for Nietzsche, "every animal ... instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions in which to fully release its power and achieve its maximum of power-sensation [*Machtgefühl*]." <sup>16</sup> So, the overall question of the *Genealogy* is the effect of moralities on life qua expression of will-to-power.

The three essays of the *Genealogy* produce genealogies of resentment, bad conscience, and the ascetic ideal. The principle of functional indeterminacy is the key to genealogy: current function is no clue to origin, since the history of anything is the history of its being seized by greater forces and put to a new task, a new function, which obliterates the previous function. Purposes and functions are only

signs of being used by a will to power; the history of a thing is arbitrary and contingent. Nietzsche illustrates the genealogical method with a brief treatment of punishment, in which the custom must be distinguished from the many meanings or purposes which have been applied to it, among them, one that will be of interest to us, torturous punishment as payment of a debt.

As with Spinoza, affects for Nietzsche arise from encounters of beings. But complex beings are a system of “drives,” each one of which with its own will-to-power. The inner struggle of drives sometimes allows one to subordinate all others, sublimating them to its expression; hence the highest form of will-to-power is self-overcoming, not mere external command of other humans’ physical labor.

Although the essays hop about in history, we can attempt the following narrative, bringing us from the “pre-historic” work of the first band societies to the parlous state of contemporary European society. The first task is rendering the pre-human animal regular and predictable. The next is the taming of masterly predators by state society. The next task is allowing the weak to keep living in the conditions of servitude to which they have been subjected. Finally, the task of the future is to create a space for the healthy few to live affirmatively.

We begin with the “morality of custom,” the “pre-historic” labor, undertaken first by pre-state tribal life, of transforming an essentially forgetful animal into human beings capable of promises. The morality of custom is never fully superseded; it continues on, presumably, in the training to obedience of children. Such training is hence “pre-historic,” in being presupposed in the positive content of the morality of any society appearing in history. The morality of custom, one might say, is the “anthropological” labor of transforming instinctual animals into conscious humans. Such labor is necessary, because forgetting is an active faculty allowing for the protection of consciousness from unconscious processes of experience and absorption, thus making room for new experiences and for happiness in the present. Hence, in order for something to stick in consciousness, like the fact one has made a promise, it must be “undigested” by active forgetting.<sup>17</sup>

How does the morality of custom produce “sovereign individuals” who know they have made promises? Through affective training, through a “fearful *mnemotechnics*” that teaches that only pain can overcome forgetfulness.<sup>18</sup> In explaining the uses of pain to breed memory, Nietzsche pushes the creditor / debtor relation to pre-state days. Here we see that the moral term guilt (*Schuld*) comes from the political economy term debts (*Schulden*).<sup>19</sup> Punishment was for the most part of history only the venting of anger at an offense; it was not directed at a “guilty” person, but at one who had not paid his debt. But the venting of anger at a hapless debtor is held in check by the notion of equivalence: that pain caused by an offense can be paid back by pain dealt out in punishment. The origin of this equivalence is the contract between creditor and debtor.<sup>20</sup>

Over time, the community becomes to its members as creditor to debtor. Punishment of law-breakers is then a reminder of what credit the community has extended the citizen in terms of protection and peace. A law-breaker is then thrown outside the community so that now hostility can be vented upon him as upon an enemy defeated in war.<sup>21</sup>

Next in our narrative comes the formation of the state: a master group of warriors falls upon a tribal people without form. The masters make them subordinate, make them organs of a greater whole in an expression of will-to-power in the political register.<sup>22</sup> The ruling class of this state now claims the right to make moral valuations; here we see “master morality,” in which the nobles call themselves “good.” This self-naming is part of the overflowing fullness of their life and power: they seize the right to create values from the “pathos of distance” they felt separating themselves from the common herd. Nietzsche stresses that the feeling of superiority is much too intense, much too hot, to have anything to do with the cool calculation of utility.<sup>23</sup>

In a split of the ruling class, the strong and active masters are opposed by priests. The priests tend to be “unhealthy,” which keeps them from action, forcing them into brooding and emotional explosions, which leads to “intestinal morbidity and neurasthenia.” The priestly remedy for this unhealthy condition (the ascetic ideal) has been terribly dangerous to mankind. But we can’t forget that only the priests make man an interesting animal: only with them does the soul acquire depth.<sup>24</sup>

The priests foment a “slave revolt in morality.”<sup>25</sup> Although reactive to the masters, the slave revolt has its own creativity. Noble valuation is active and self-affirmative – “I am good, therefore (an afterthought) those others are bad” – while slave valuation is reactive and other-negating – “The powerful others are evil, therefore I am good.” Even though priests are creative and subtly powerful, they base themselves on the reactivity of the slaves.

*Ressentiment* is the basic affect of the slave revolt in morality; it is a matter of physiology: the active are those whose happiness is found when strength is manifested in action, while the reactive are the weak who need rest. That is to say, the will-to-power is direct in masterly action, and indirect in slavish *ressentiment*. As with priestly impotence, however, *ressentiment* breeds cleverness in the weak, while it is immediately consummated and extinguished in the strong. The nobles do not have to “forgive and forget”: rather they forget so quickly and thoroughly that they have no need to forgive. Thus, the nobles can revere their enemies rather than hate them: they love a good opponent as the occasion to manifest their strength.<sup>26</sup>

The creation of the bad conscience is the same creative force of meaning-making, but on the small scale of the internal soul. The will-to-power vents itself not on an external population, but on the internalized ancient animal instincts of man now trapped in society. The active bad conscience, the joy of making one’s own self suffer, is the womb of all ideal and imaginative phenomena.<sup>27</sup>

The final episode in our narrative is the advent and spread of the “ascetic ideal.” After a long preamble, Nietzsche tackles the main problem of the meaning of the ascetic ideal once he has introduced the ascetic priest.<sup>28</sup> What is the valuation of earthly, sensual, power-striving life by the ascetic priests? They degrade it as only a bridge to another existence, as a wrong path, or a mistake. But “life itself must have an interest in preserving such a self-contradictory type” as the life-hating form of life that is the ascetic priest. An ascetic life is self-contradictory: it is a life in which *ressentiment* rules, in which will-to-power pushes for a mastery over life, rather than over something.<sup>29</sup> In the ascetic ideal, paradoxically, power seeks to block the biological, physiological sources of power; power targets the manifestation of physiological power in growth, beauty, joy, and finds satisfaction in failure, decay, and pain. The paradox is that ascetic power grows as the condition, life, decreases; in other words, you have to be alive in order to hate life.

The ascetic ideal “springs from the protective and healing instincts of a degenerating life.” The ascetic ideal doesn’t ultimately aim at death, but at the preservation of a form of life: the sickly human. The ascetic priest puts himself at the head of the flock of sick humans and lets them maintain their hold on earthly life by making their suffering meaningful as preparation for rewards in the after-life.<sup>30</sup> The ascetic priest, as a sick physician to sick people, has an historic mission as the defender of the herd. He is in fact a deadlier predator, because of his cleverness, than the merely physically strong warriors. Now in protecting the herd, he must manage the herd’s *ressentiment*; he can’t let them envy the healthy, for he must despise, delicately, all direct expressions of strength such as those displayed by the healthy.

To prevent a dangerous explosion of *ressentiment* that would disintegrate the herd, the ascetic priest changes the direction of *ressentiment*. All sick suffering people seek someone to blame for their suffering, because such blaming, as a powerful emotion, anesthetizes pain; this desire for anesthetizing is the “physiological causation of *ressentiment*.” The amazing trick of the ascetic priest is to convince the sick herd that they themselves are the cause of their suffering, that they are the ones to blame. Guilt and sin are thus attempts to make the sick harmless, to turn their *ressentiment* back on themselves; for the less ill among them, this is “for the purpose of self-discipline, self-surveillance, and self-overcoming.” Now this can’t be a real physiological cure, but it did at least organize the sick (in “churches”) and keep them separate from the healthy for a long time.<sup>31</sup>

The ascetic priest treats only symptoms (pain) rather than causes (weakness, sickness). He uses emotions to combat the depression, fatigue, and melancholy of the sick. He’s a psychologist trying to cure a physiological problem, which might be caused by mixing races or social classes, by unsound emigration, by bad diet, by disease. The ascetic priest must fight lethargy, and his first method is to reduce awareness of life to its lowest point: no more desire, no emotions. This hypnotizes man, like hibernation; this can result in conquering depression, and often in

spiritual visions or hallucinations, and even in “salvation” as “state of total hypnosis and silence.”<sup>32</sup>

More common than the use of “hypnosis” in fighting depression are two other methods. The first is the use of repetitive work, “mechanical activity,” which distracts the sufferer from his pain. Giving meaning to the work they have to do anyway succeeds with slaves, whose discontent was not invented by priests, even though priests take them in hand, organize them, and offer them “cures.” Another method is a small dose of pleasure, frequently the pleasure of giving pleasure to others by helping them; this is an arousal, in small doses, of life-affirming will-to-power by allowing the helper to feel superior to the helped.<sup>33</sup>

The ascetic ideal is thus used to produce an excess of feeling as a means of freeing man from depression. Now this just makes the sick even sicker, but the ascetic priest is not a physiologically adept physician; he’s just trying to keep humanity from a mass suicide. The main tool of the ascetic priest is the feeling of guilt; in Essay 2 Nietzsche showed how bad conscience is cruelty turned on the self when it’s impossible to release outward due to social life; now we realize that’s only the raw material for the ascetic priest as artist, who turned animal bad conscience into guilt over sin. The ascetic priest taught man that he was to blame for his own suffering because he was a guilty sinner; his suffering was punishment for his sin. In this way depression is overcome and life became interesting again: the guilty sufferers cried out for more ways to suffer.<sup>34</sup>

The cost of the ascetic priest’s prescription of the ascetic ideal as antidote to depression has been very high. It has tamed the healthy man, while it has made the sick even sicker. Plus, the sickness of guilt is virulent; it spreads widely and quickly. It provokes “shattered nervous systems,” epidemics of “epilepsy” like St Vitus’s Dance; depressive towns; witch hunts; sleep walking; death worship. It has been a disaster for the health of Europeans.<sup>35</sup> Despite all this, the ascetic ideal has served a great purpose: it has preserved man from suicidal nihilism by giving a meaning to his suffering. Suffering is not a problem; meaningless suffering is the problem. The ascetic priest and the ascetic ideal mean that man would rather will nothingness – the afterlife is nothing compared to this world – than not will.<sup>36</sup>

At the end of the journey of European culture we face the greatest challenge. Insofar as the mark of the higher nature today is the struggle of noble and slave systems of morality is an internal, spiritual struggle,<sup>37</sup> can such struggle produce a new type of man, one capable of affirming life?<sup>38</sup>

## BERGSON

Sympathy, joy, and love are the affects we will trace through Bergson’s four major works. In *Time and Free Will*,<sup>39</sup> sympathetic intuition requires us to free ourselves

from intelligence and its spatializing habits of thought (which are, to be fair, necessary for us to deal pragmatically with matter, but which distort our reports of inner life). Suitably awoken, intuition allows us to truly access our inner life, which is marked by “duration” (temporal interpenetration) and “qualitative multiplicity” (processual heterogeneity without juxtaposition of mental states). In *Matter and Memory*,<sup>40</sup> we overcome the dualism of inner duration and exterior space when we learn to sympathetically intuit the whole of the universe as consisting of multiple durations of different rhythm. In *Creative Evolution*,<sup>41</sup> joy marks our intuitive touch with life’s creativity, as opposed to the mere pleasure felt at the intelligent satisfaction of organic needs. Finally, in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*,<sup>42</sup> love is the “creative emotion” at the root of open morality and dynamic religion, a universal love that pours through mystics due to their contact with life’s creativity. Mystic love, symbolized in the actions of moral heroes, allows us to hope that by imitating them we can, perhaps, leap from the obligations and duty imposed on us by closed society and static religion, dedicated as they are to the organic needs of necessarily social creatures such as humans.

### *Time and Free Will*

The fundamental distinction of this work is between consciousness, whose immediacy is given to us as duration or qualitative multiplicity, and external space or quantitative multiplicity. Qualitative multiplicity is a process with heterogeneity of quality but no juxtaposition or quantitative comparison of objects, while quantitative multiplicity consists of the numerical distinction of juxtaposed objects.

Inner life and exterior space are accessed by mental attitudes with distinctive affective stances: sympathetic intuition and reflective consciousness. Sympathetic intuition allows an awareness of the temporal change of quality of inter-related and inter-permeating mental states, as in Bergson’s metaphor of listening to a melody. Reflective consciousness, on the other hand, transfers onto inner life a mode of thought which is pragmatically justified when it is aimed at its proper object, the world of external objects distributed in space, but which drastically misses the essence of inner life, duration.

Immediate consciousness of duration can however be subject to an “overwhelming” (*écrasement*) by naming and analysis, as is shown most clearly, Bergson says, with “feeling” (*sentiment*): “A violent love or deep passion takes possession of our soul. Here we feel a thousand different elements which dissolve into and permeate one another ... We distort them as soon as we distinguish a numerical multiplicity in their confused mass.”<sup>43</sup> Although in the depths of our inner life we have intermingled ideas, nonetheless some ideas float separated from one another on the surface, like “dead leaves on a pond.”<sup>44</sup> These dead ideas are those capable of being expressed in language; externalized one from the other, they are can be connected after the fact in the mistaken psychological doctrine of associationism. In this case of a linguistic crushing of duration, “we need not be surprised if only those ideas which least belong to us can be adequately expressed in words.”<sup>45</sup>

### *Matter and Memory*

Properly applied, sympathetic intuition allows us to say that all things are durational, not just human consciousness. In *Matter and Memory* intuition is no longer only the way we delve into our inner life; it is the way we delve into the “life” of anything. Hence Bergson can now say that all things, not just the human mind, are qualitative multiplicities: all things are unrolling, qualitatively differing, processes.

Sympathetic intuition occurs when we become aware of how the rhythm of our consciousness – the frequency of our duration – meshes with that of another process so that we can experience it as, like us, a process, not as a thing. Such intuition entails a convergence of quality and quantity; whether we perceive one or the other is just a matter of the meshing of rhythms of duration. Sometimes we can even feel the shift from quality to quantity – and feeling that shift means we can understand the way perceived quality is just the contraction of fast frequencies. That is to say, quality is based in quantity, but a quantity that is in itself durational: “In cases where the rhythm of the movement is slow enough to tally with the habits of our consciousness ... do we not feel the quality perceived analyzes itself into repeated and successive vibrations, bound together by an inner continuity?”<sup>46</sup>

We are kept from this realization by our intelligence, that is, our biologically justified habits of thought aimed at manipulation of matter. To remedy this, we have to realize two things. First, that we only perceive what is of survival interest to us, but secondly, that reality is wider than that. Hence, we can learn to grasp our sensation “as if this sensation itself were pregnant with details suspected yet unperceived.”<sup>47</sup> The ability to “suspect” what lies beyond utilitarian reification is sympathetic intuition; through it, we realize that “there is no one rhythm of duration; it is possible to imagine many different rhythms which, slower or faster, measure the degree of tension or relaxation of different kinds of consciousness and thereby fix their respective places in the scale of being.”<sup>48</sup>

This is an amazing breakthrough for Bergson; he decenters the humanism of *Time and Free Will* at one stroke. Intuition is now sympathy with multiple durations such that we put ourselves at the heart of the material universe and feel its movements the way we feel our own. This allows a “vision of matter, fatiguing perhaps for your imagination, but pure, freed from all that the exigencies of life compel you to add to it in external perception.”<sup>49</sup> That is Bergson’s challenge to us in *Matter and Memory*: can we call upon our sympathetic intuition to overcome the spatial and utilitarian tendencies of our mind? Can we feel ourselves part of a universe of multi-rhythmic durations?

### *Creative Evolution*

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson distinguishes instinct, intelligence, and intuition. Instinct is that by which non-human lifeforms meet their organic needs, and so is in touch with life's creativity, even when, as in plants, consciousness is slumbering. Intelligence, by which humans meet their organic and societal needs, is oriented to control of matter. Intuition is "instinct that has become disinterested, self-conscious, capable of reflecting on its object and enlarging it indefinitely"; it is the human way of contacting life's creativity.<sup>50</sup>

The "true evolutionism" we are tasked with finding in *Creative Evolution* takes as its object life as a whole confronting matter. Matter is determined, but there must have been a slight indeterminism into which life could insert itself. Life tends to consciousness and freedom, but only in and through matter.

Bergson's is an odd sort of vitalism, as *élan vital*, the impetus life gives to matter, setting it on its evolutionary divergences, is not a principle, but only an image: "In reality, life is of the psychological order, and it is of the essence of the psychical to enfold a confused plurality of interpenetrating terms." It is only in space that we have exteriority such that divergent lines of evolution appear as numerically separate. Mind and life are inter-penetration or duration; when rigidly opposed, unity and multiplicity are categories of the understanding which falsify reality, though "both, united, may give a fair imitation of the mutual interpenetration and continuity" that is "my inner life ... and life in general." It is only in contact with matter that life appears as *élan vital* or impetus; in itself, life is "an immensity of potentiality" that only dissociates in contact with matter.<sup>51</sup>

Echoing the fourth chapter of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson concludes *Creative Evolution* by claiming modern physics is tending to his view of reality; if philosophers can take up the relay, we "will see the material world melt back into a simple flux, a continuity of flowing, a becoming."<sup>52</sup>

### *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*

The basic distinction in *The Two Sources* is between closed and open society, and their accompaniments, static and dynamic religion. Each pair has a characteristic affect: obligation and love, respectively. Each also lines up with survival and creation, respectively, and thus, ultimately, with matter (quantitative multiplicity, allowing a distinction of "us and them") and life (qualitative multiplicity, continuity and heterogeneity of love ever opening outward without ever reaching a border of "us and them").

The distinction of closed and open society is that of tendencies whose essence can be distinguished even though in any one concrete society they will exist in a mixed state. Thus, despite Bergson's use of "primitive" to characterize it, the closed society is a tendency whose effects are felt today, rather than being a point in our past from

which we have moved on. Those effects are hidden only for those credulous enough to believe the West's hypocritical self-congratulations on the universality of its moralistic discourse, a universality that crumbles at the merest hint of the war drums.

One of Bergson's fundamental convictions is that the tendency of closed society to favor individuals in your group cannot be overcome by expanding the circle of identification and altruism; this would be to conceive open morality as a simple quantitative modification of the closed. But open and closed differ in kind, not degree. The closed tendency can only be overcome by a leap into the qualitatively different emotion of universal love. Such leaps happen with privileged souls, mystics and heroes. Their universal love is not simple group feeling pushed outward; rather it is the content of mystic experience in its immediacy.

For Bergson, saints and moral heroes are those capable of getting close enough to life to feel such love. Such heroes are not satisfied with mere contemplation of a universe of love; rather, they are great actors: "the necessity to spread around them what they have received affects them like an onslaught of love. A love which each of them stamps with his own personality. A love which is in each of them an entirely new emotion, capable of transposing human life into another tone."<sup>53</sup> Let us turn to his "Life and Consciousness" lecture of 1911 for a clear statement of this ability of the moral hero to transform others: "it is the moral man who is a creator in the highest degree – the man whose action, itself intense, is also capable of intensifying the action of other men." Moral men reveal "metaphysical truth," in being close to life. Here again sympathy is the key: "It is in studying these great lives, in striving to experience sympathetically what they experience, that we may penetrate by an act of intuition to the life principle itself."<sup>54</sup>

The move from closed to open morality is thus not an expansion, but a leap, and it is fittingly marked by a qualitatively different affective state. Open morality is not marked by pleasure, but by joy: "Those who regularly practice the morality of the city know this feeling of well-being... But the souls that is opening, and before whose eyes material objects vanish, is lost in sheer joy. Pleasure and well-being are something, joy is more. For it is not contained in these, whereas they are virtually contained in joy. They mean, indeed, a halt or marking time, while joy is a step forward."<sup>55</sup> *The Two Sources* concludes: were we convinced of salvation after death, "pleasure would be eclipsed by joy. Joy indeed would be that simplicity of life diffused throughout the world by an ever-spreading mystic intuition."<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Baruch Spinoza, *Complete Works*. Trans. Samuel Shirley. (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002): E5P4.

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<sup>2</sup> E3Preface.

<sup>3</sup> E3P11s.

<sup>4</sup> E3P7.

<sup>5</sup> E3P13s.

<sup>6</sup> E4P18s.

<sup>7</sup> E5P10s.

<sup>8</sup> E5P14-15.

<sup>9</sup> E5P25.

<sup>10</sup> E5P32.

<sup>11</sup> E5P36.

<sup>12</sup> E5P42.

<sup>13</sup> E5P42s.

<sup>14</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*. Trans. Carol Diethe. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997 [1887]). GM Preface 5-6.

<sup>15</sup> GM 2.12; italics in original.

<sup>16</sup> GM 3.7.

<sup>17</sup> GM 2.1.

<sup>18</sup> GM 2.3.

<sup>19</sup> GM 2.4.

<sup>20</sup> GM 2.4.

<sup>21</sup> GM 2.9.

<sup>22</sup> GM 2.17.

<sup>23</sup> GM 1.2.

<sup>24</sup> GM 1.6.

<sup>25</sup> GM 1.7.

<sup>26</sup> GM 1.10.

<sup>27</sup> GM 2.18.

<sup>28</sup> GM 3.11.

<sup>29</sup> GM 3.11.

<sup>30</sup> GM 3.13.

<sup>31</sup> GM 3.15-16.

<sup>32</sup> GM 3.17.

<sup>33</sup> GM 3.18.

<sup>34</sup> GM 3.19-20.

<sup>35</sup> GM 3.21.

<sup>36</sup> GM 3.28.

<sup>37</sup> GM 1.16.

<sup>38</sup> GM 2.24-25.

<sup>39</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*. Trans. FL Pogson. (New York: Dover, 2001 [1889].)

<sup>40</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*. Trans. NM Paul and WS Palmer. (New York: Zone Books, 1988 [1896]).

<sup>41</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Trans. Arthur Mitchell. (New York: Dover, 1998 [1907]).

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<sup>42</sup> Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Trans. R. Ashley Audra, Cloudsley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1977 [1935]).

<sup>43</sup> TFW 132.

<sup>44</sup> TFW 135.

<sup>45</sup> TFW 136.

<sup>46</sup> MM 203.

<sup>47</sup> MM 204.

<sup>48</sup> MM 207.

<sup>49</sup> MM 208.

<sup>50</sup> CE 176.

<sup>51</sup> CE 257-58.

<sup>52</sup> CE 356.

<sup>53</sup> TS 99.

<sup>54</sup> Henri Bergson, *Mind-Energy*. Trans. H Wildon Carr. (New York: Henry Holt, 1920 [1919].): 19.

<sup>55</sup> TSMR 58-59.

<sup>56</sup> TSMR 317.