



Universiteit  
Leiden  
The Netherlands

## **Bergson and the Aristotelian model of immanent teleology**

Cortina, A.

### **Citation**

Cortina, A. (2019, April 11). *Bergson and the Aristotelian model of immanent teleology*. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71195>

Version: Not Applicable (or Unknown)

License: [Leiden University Non-exclusive license](#)

Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/71195>

**Note:** To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The following handle holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation:

<http://hdl.handle.net/1887/71195>

**Author:** Cortina, A.

**Title:** Bergson and the Aristotelian model of immanent teleology

**Issue Date:** 2019-04-11

#### **4. Two domains of immanent teleology in Bergson**

This section casts the phenomena that Bergson explains in teleological terms, according to the previously seen ideas. One of the clearest ideas regarding the topic of teleology is Bergson's acute dualism. It is however a general feature of his philosophy: all his approaches are deeply marked by dualism. On teleology, we have seen, that is clear. There are two teleologies, two domains of teleology. If I am not wrong, Bergson refers to this dualistic vision of what Life and individual human life are only in one passage. The biological realm counts with two peculiar directions or teleological strivings, impossible to find in physics. To my knowledge, CV is the only place in which he addresses this question directly. It could be said that in a way the text sums up the varied contents of EC in an elegant synthesis. It is definitely what the following passage does around immanent teleology, although it has not been noted for any commentator until now, as far as I'm concerned. The text is so important for us that I quote it in the original language and in English, just as I did with the few central passages on reforming teleology in the first chapter.

The context is not far from Aristotle indeed. The text starts by establishing a sharp distinction between the artificial and the natural. Bergson asks how man could artificially imitate natural living entities. Like Aristotle at the beginning of *Phys.II*, Bergson thinks that there is one immanent principle in the living beings. This principle has to be understood in two ways, two main tendencies. Two main tendencies that can be found in human consciousness:

“[a] On imitera certains caractères de la matière vivante; on ne lui imprimera pas l'élan en vertu duquel elle [a.1] se *reproduit* et, au sens transformiste du mot, [a.2] *évolue*. Or cette reproduction et cette évolution sont la vie même. L'une et l'autre manifestent une poussée intérieure, le double besoin de [a.1] *croître en nombre et* [a.2] *en richesse* [a.1] *par multiplication dans l'espace* et [a.2] *par complication dans le temps*, [b] enfin les deux instincts qui apparaissent avec la vie et qui seront les deux grands moteurs de l'activité humaine: [b.1] *l'amour* et [b.2] *l'ambition*. [c] Visiblement une force travaille devant nous, qui cherche à se libérer de ses entraves et aussi à se dépasser elle-même, à *donner d'abord tout ce qu'elle a et ensuite plus qu'elle n'a*: comment définir autrement l'esprit?”<sup>506</sup>

“[a] We shall reproduce, that is to say, some characters of living matter; we shall not obtain the push in virtue of which it [a.1] *reproduces itself* and, in the meaning of transformism, [a.2] *evolves*. Now, reproduction and evolution are life itself. Both are the manifestation of an inward impulse, of the twofold need of [a.1] *increasing in number* [a.2] and *wealth* by [a.1] *multiplication in space* and [a.2] *complication in time*, [b] of two instincts which make their appearance with life and later become the two great motives in human activity, [b.1] *love* and [b.2] *ambition*. [c] Visibly there is a force working, seeking to free itself from trammels and also to surpass itself, to give first all it has and then something more than it has. What else is mind?”<sup>507</sup>

The passage shows again that Bergson's conception of Life and living beings can also be found in human consciousness. That is certain, since from [a], biology, we leap to [b] psychology. Namely, on the one hand, Bergson is proposing a link between [a.1] “reproduction”, that is, “increasing in number by multiplication in space” and [b.1] “love”. On the other hand, Bergson defends the analogy between [a.2] “evolution”, that is, “increasing in wealth by complication in time”, and [b.2] “ambition”.

---

<sup>506</sup> “La conscience et la vie”, in ES, p. 22, italics are mine.

<sup>507</sup> CV, in ES, p. 27 .

According to our analysis of teleology in the sense of *hou héneka + tini* (dative) in Aristotle, there has to be a beneficiary of a certain substance. The defenders of the individual biological teleology hold that, for instance, reproduction is something “good” for the individual. Conservation of the being (understood as individual conservation or specific conservation) and well-being are the basic models for the understanding of “perfection” or *télos*. This has to do with [a.1] and [b.1], that is, with “reproduction” and “love”. Teleology of *hou heneka + tinos* (genitive) is better understood regarding the relation between the individual and the universe, or the imperishable parts of the universe. The goal of the action or development or reproduction is not the conservation of any individual nor species, but the contribution to or participation in the whole. It has to do with [a.2] and [b.2], that is, with “evolution” and “ambition”.

[a.1] and [b.1] represent two tendencies toward preservation of what exists, one in biological terms and the other in psychological terms. [a.2] and [b.2] represent two tendencies, one in biological terms and the other in psychological terms, of transgression. The conservation of what exists means necessarily a concrete goal: it implies repetition. The transgression of one species to another does not have a clear beneficiary, but it is rather Life itself or ultimately the cosmos. Transgression implies a general goal, which does not refer to any sort of limited being. There is no repetition, but change. Thus, in the repetition of the conservative tendency, the goal is the existence or persistence of what already exists; and in change understood as evolutionary progress, the goal could not be that persistence, since persistence is at issue, but the enrichment of the wholeness. The *tendency to persist at the limit and the tendency beyond limits* is, for Bergson, the simplest understanding of Life and also, of human life.

Notice that in the passage, *repetition is not seen in negative terms*. Repetition or reproduction and transformation and evolution are seen both next to each other. They seem to be equally considered by Bergson. In EC reproduction or repetition could be reasonably considered one type of stagnation, a certain type of decay imposed to everything that exists. Always after newness comes adaptation, fixation and repetition. If one praises above all newness and creation with such an emphasis, automatically, the rest of the tendencies might be diminished. In EC the author talks about an “effort” which is different from that defended by the neo-Lamarckians, the “effort” of individual adaptation. Bergson believes in an idea of biological effort “far more independent of circumstances”.<sup>508</sup>

Although in MM Bergson’s scope is the “effort towards circumstances”, in EC he has found a second one much more important for him, the “independent effort”. Adaptation seems to be a secondary degree force, derived from the vital impetus. “But, if the evolution of life is something other than a series of adaptations to accidental circumstances, so also it is not the realization of a plan”.<sup>509</sup> He devotes in EC one passage to the question:

*“The truth is that adaptation explains the sinuosities of the movement of evolution, but not its general directions, still less the movement itself.* The road that leads to the town is obliged to follow the ups and downs of the hills; it *adapts itself* to the accidents of the ground; but the accidents of the ground are not the cause of the road, nor have they given it its direction. At every moment they furnish it with what is indispensable, namely, the soil on which it lies; but if we consider the whole of the road, instead of each of its parts, the accidents of the ground appear only as impediments or causes of delay, for the road aims simply at the town and would fain be a straight line. Just so as regards the evolution of life and the circumstances through which it passes - with this difference, that evolution does not

---

<sup>508</sup> EC, p. 87.

<sup>509</sup> EC, p. 103.

mark out a solitary route, that it takes directions without aiming at ends, and that *it remains inventive even in its adaptations*".<sup>510</sup>

At least two things need to be said. First, inventiveness can be found, according to the last line, in EC. It is, anyway, secondary in comparison to the "movement itself". Second, something more general can raise (again) problems for any reader. In the passage Bergson says that evolution "takes directions without aiming at ends". As I said, Life does not pre-design anything, it creates unconsciously. But it does not mean that there is no teleology involved. In the previous paragraph we talk about the vital impulse ("movement itself") as "an internal push that has carried life, by more and more complex forms, to higher and higher destinies".<sup>511</sup>

Once Bergson tries to link adaptation and change in EC, he stresses the value of change. It is also so in DS, since the open society is placed beyond and higher one more than the closed one. In CV he just refers to both, in a lyrical way, talking about love and ambition, as equally important. Equally unique to living beings and Life itself.

Repetition plays the role of adaptation, like attention to life. It is something that appears exclusively in biology. It is a power of Life. In the passage from CV, four years after EC, we see then that even the repetition, as every kind of adaptation or "attention to life" is *unique* to living beings. Conservation or, in his poetical language, "Love", is in its own right spontaneous biological driving force. In a higher degree we find transgression or freedom.

In the next two sections I will address this twofold vision of Life and living beings.

## **4.1. First domain of immanent teleology: conservative teleology**

### **4.1.a. Destination, function and adaptation**

The term "adaptation" is a genuine Darwinian concept. At least *The origin of species* emphasized its importance in a new way, regarding the previous transformist biological framework: namely, Lamarck's. The historian of biology Gustavo Caponi has criticized the adaptive or Darwinian reading of Lamarck.<sup>512</sup> Only neo-Lamarckism has included the notion of adaptation in his framework, after the publication of Darwin's masterpiece in 1859. In rough terms, for Lamarck (as for Buffon) the organic form of the beings is, in different ways, an effect of the circumstances, and not cause of adaptation.

Needless to say, the concept is absent in Aristotle, although there are references in the corpus in which he alludes to the link between the living being and the environment. In Darwin the struggle for life found in the fourth chapter of *The origin of species* implies a dramatic vision of adaptation, while in Aristotle every living being is by nature adapted to a fixed niche, in a certain environment. In Aristotle adaptation is not a problem for the species, as it were, while in Darwin it is the ultimate need for the sake of short and long-term survival. Given that, in Darwin the drive towards adaptation—that is, survival, reproduction and well-being—is still teleological. The *télos* in Darwin has some different features and also the entire framework

---

<sup>510</sup> EC, pp.101-103, my emphasis.

<sup>511</sup> EC, p. 101.

<sup>512</sup> Caponi, Gustavo "Cap. 1. Contra la lectura adaptacionista de Lamarck" in *Filosofía, darwinismo y evolución*. Universidad Nacional de Colombia, Bogotá, 2007, pp. 8-19.

around, but it means perfection and good. Being alive is for the living being an absolute good both in the Aristotelian world and in the Darwin era.<sup>513</sup>

Consequently, I apply to Bergson the teleological assumption of adaptiveness in living beings. Although Bergson talks sometimes about function, more emphatically he also uses the word “destination”. Undoubtedly, Bergson’s perspective may be understood in the Darwinian era, and adaptation is at stake in his works.

From my view, destination or adaptation play exactly the same role as every other teleological term, such as goal, task or function. In the following pages I deal with Bergson’s idea of goal, task or function regarding environment. Hence, again, I defend that the concept of adaptation has an unavoidable teleological meaning. It includes survival, reproduction and living-well, which in a lyrical and anthropomorphic way is called “Love”, in CV.

#### - Destination of the body and habits: attention to life

The activity of the body and its habits is one of the main concerns of Bergson in MM and, later, in ES.<sup>514</sup> So, action is the “fundamental law of life”,<sup>515</sup> and living corporeal beings are “centers of action”,<sup>516</sup> namely, “useful”<sup>517</sup> and “effective action”<sup>518</sup>. This kind of action aims “to adapt ourselves to a present situation”.<sup>519</sup> That is the “purpose and function of our nervous system”: adaptation.<sup>520</sup> The destination of the body and habits<sup>521</sup> that guide its actions, is the scope of MM, and that scope is adaptation. The key notion in MM is “attention to life”, which comes up in MM.III as the “cohesion in the normal work of the mind, as in a pyramid which should stand upon its apex”,<sup>522</sup> and will be used a number of times in his posterior works on body, soul and individual consciousness.<sup>523</sup> Regarding the close relation between adaptiveness and attention to life, in the text of ES “False recognition” Bergson puts both ideas aside. He refers to “attention to life and adaptation to reality”.<sup>524</sup>

Along with adaptation we should include the nature of it: attention to life consists in spontaneous and unforeseen movements.<sup>525</sup> As I mentioned, in “Dreams” he talks in a similar way about being awake. He notes another feature of attention to life: “its main function is to reply to you, for waking and willing are one and the same”. There is thus this voluntarist feature, related to spontaneity. He also relates attention to life with one of his most used terms, “effort”. Being awake or attentive is an “effort of concentration”<sup>526</sup> and being alive is an “intellectual effort” in the “direction of effort”.<sup>527</sup>

---

<sup>513</sup> I have already addressed this subject in “The goal of the living being”, in 2.2.a.

<sup>514</sup> For MM as a “treatise of the body” see Worms, Frédéric. *Introduction à Matière et mémoire*. Op. cit.

<sup>515</sup> MM, p. 150.

<sup>516</sup> MM, pp. 228 and 242.

<sup>517</sup> I mean “vital utility”, for the sake of life itself.

<sup>518</sup> MM, p. 154.

<sup>519</sup> MM, p. 151.

<sup>520</sup> MM, p. 160.

<sup>521</sup> In Bergson, habits “are fixed in the organism”. MM, p. 151.

<sup>522</sup> MM, p. 173.

<sup>523</sup> ES, pp. 59, 60, 147, 153, 178.

<sup>524</sup> “False recognition”, in ES, pp. 147-148.

<sup>525</sup> MM, p. 248.

<sup>526</sup> Dreams, ES, p. 127.

<sup>527</sup> Effl, in ES, p. 200.

Attention to life is something not related to our personal psychology, but with our organic constitution. Attention to life is part of biology, as Bergson understands it. Only the case of human attention to life is at stake there, but it could be in other animals. He says: “I do not mean voluntary attention, which is momentary and individual, but that continuous attention common to us all, *imposed by nature*, which we may call ‘racial attention’”.<sup>528</sup> Since the original text in French says “attention de l’espèce”,<sup>529</sup> it should be better to translate it for ‘attention of the species’. Here the teleological element is implicitly posed. The attention of the species is deeply anchored in one specific form of life and flourishing, and not in mind or intelligence. It is an ontological feature and structure of living beings *per se*.

Adaptiveness to reality and, more concretely, to already made environments and spontaneity or willingness, are basic features of “attention to life”. It is much deeper than the individual human mind. Function and habit, on the one hand, and organs, on the other, are linked. The brain is “the organ of attention to life”,<sup>530</sup> and it is “the point of insertion of mind in matter”,<sup>531</sup> it “secures at every moment the adaptation of the mind to circumstances”.<sup>532</sup>

In MM Bergson talks about it in these terms, which maybe can give a useful general account for this panoramic view: according to Bergson, attention to life “enables us to adapt ourselves to the present situation; through it the actions, to which we are subject, prolong themselves into reactions that are sometimes accomplished, sometimes merely nascent, but always more or less appropriate. Habit (rather than memory) it acts our past experience but does not call up its image”.<sup>533</sup>

In this context, habit refers to the tendency of the body, while memory refers to our spirit. That is, attention to life *is for the sake of adaptation*. Adaptation is its goal.

Attention to life is also the key for understanding the “utilitarian origin of our perception of things”,<sup>534</sup> from which all the epistemological problems and ontological problems in MM are derived. Although useful, attention to life also produces philosophical problems:<sup>535</sup> we forget our past and we do not give to this dimension of time the ontological category we should, Bergson says.<sup>536</sup> The past “is inhibited by the necessities of present action”.<sup>537</sup> Hence attention to life can mislead philosophical enquiries.

---

<sup>528</sup>“Phantasms”, in ES, pp. 94-95, italics are mine.

<sup>529</sup> ES, 1964, p. 77.

<sup>530</sup> AC, in ES, p. 59; in “Phantasms of the living” Bergson calls attention to life “the function of the brain”, ES, p. 91.

<sup>531</sup> AC, in ES, p. 59.

<sup>532</sup> AC, in ES, p. 59.

<sup>533</sup> MM, p. 151.

<sup>534</sup> MM, p. 158.

<sup>535</sup>It has been the “we are so much accustomed to reverse, for the sake of action, the real order of things, we are so strongly by images drawn from space, that we cannot hinder ourselves from asking where memories are stored up”. MM, p. 148.

<sup>536</sup> “Materiality begets oblivion”, quotes Bergson from Ravaisson in MM, p. 177.

<sup>537</sup> In alternative terms to the “plane of action”, in which attention to life performs its task, there is a “plane of dreams” (MM, p. 172), a plane of “disinterestedness” (Phantasms, ES, 94-95) or “inattention to life” (ES, p. False recognition: p. 150). Dreams, *déjà vues* or mental diseases are placed by Bergson in this “plane” (“Dreams”, in ES, p. 154; Dreams, 154: “recollections limited to the necessities of action”).

Although, according to one astonishing statement of Bergson the past “preserves itself”,<sup>538</sup> this scheme implies that the past needs or seeks to be efficient. Efficiency, action and, specially, attention to life are the very key of his structural vision of the living beings. In the case of the human beings, attention to life organizes the scheme of body and soul life, since both are “united inseparably to one another”.<sup>539</sup>

Regarding the general structure of attention to life, as Hude has said, the philosophical approach behind MM (and its so to say doctrinal “appendices” in ES) is that of “hylemorphism”. A new version of the position attributed to Aristotle that invokes the unity of the soul and the body by appealing to teleology. The “attention-to-life-framework” is in my view absolutely teleological.

The term emphasizes the *goal of adaptation* in the Darwinian philosophical context after 1859. Also, Bergson’s attention to life plays a significant role regarding the philosophy of time that is at stake in MM. In the case of the human beings, attention to life is the aim of being fixed to the present and calculating the future. In Bergson, the brain and in general the body and its activities are our participation in the present, while the unconscious past, dreams, etc., are considered starting from the present. Thus, Bergson’s originality resides in the fact that he adds a philosophy of time to the framework of adaptation, a Darwinian and neo-Lamarckian topic.

- Destination of the cells and instincts: cytology, reproduction, ethology

As I said, all the varieties of conservative teleology are versions or expressions of attention to life. “Attention to life” pertains better to the human context of MM and ES, but we have seen in 3.1 that Bergson makes an analogy between animals (the amoeba, the herbivore) and human beings. In DI and LR there are also brief analogies suggested between animals’ hypothetical knowledge of the world and human knowledge.<sup>540</sup> The attention to life is a general structure of Bergson’s conception of individual life, regarding the environment. It is a part (not the whole) of human consciousness. It is to be understood regarding the body and habits. We have seen one of these versions or expressions, language. This new subsection will be another appendix to the attention to life, but in the context of the philosophy of the organism, in EC.II. Now we are focused on non-human development and activities. Namely, Bergson talks about cells and instincts. Also, in the context of MM and ES the difference between body and habit wasn’t clear. As far as I’m concerned, Bergson does not deal with the difference between the organ and the function of the organ, since he considers both as parts of the teleological structure of attention to life.

The first passages that I show here are on cytology or cellular biology, and ethology or animal behavior. The author himself defends the similarity of both grounds of biological inquiry:

“When we see in a living body thousands of cells working together to a common end, dividing the *task* between them, *living each for itself at the same time as for the others, preserving itself, feeding itself, reproducing itself, responding* to the menace of danger by appropriate defensive reactions, how can we help thinking of so many instincts? And yet these are the natural functions of the cell, the *constitutive elements of its vitality*. On the other hand, when we see the bees of a hive forming a

---

<sup>538</sup> MM, p. 149.

<sup>539</sup> AC, in ES, p. 71.

<sup>540</sup> On animals and the space: DI, pp. 96-97. On animals and the intuition of individuals: LR, 47a.

system so strictly organized that no individual can live apart from the others beyond a certain time, even though furnished with food and shelter, how can we help recognizing that the hive is really, and not metaphorically, a single organism, of which each bee is a cell united to the others by invisible bonds? *The instinct that animates the bee is indistinguishable, then, from the force that animates the cell*, or is only a prolongation of that force. In extreme cases like this, instinct coincides with the work of organization”.<sup>541</sup>

Following the analogy, the bee is the cell of the hive and the hive is an organism. The idea of community as organism for Bergson has been noted, also in the human realm, and we will come back to it soon. For the moment, we can focus on the cell and the bee. Both live for themselves and for others, their activities are defined by an interest in self-preservation, nutrition, reproduction and self-defense. Those are the “constitutive elements” of their vitality and vitality in general. As I have said several times throughout this work, Bergson has a hierarchical vision of nature. Just as attention to life among humans is different among bees or cells, they are all expressions of the same impulse for the sake of preservation.<sup>542</sup>

As we saw in 1.2.4 Bergson rejects individual teleology. His own conception of reproduction leads him to reject Driesch’s exclusively individual teleology. I didn’t include this part, since the passage was long enough. I will recall it now. The context, basically, is how to delineate between individuals in biology. First, there is the problem of the compound: every living being is a compound of other living beings. Second, reproduction means that every individual comes from a cell from another body. He writes:

“An organism such as a higher vertebrate is the most individuated of all organisms; yet, if we take into account that it is only the development of an ovum forming part of the body of its mother and of a spermatozoon belonging to the body of its father, that the egg (*i.e.* the ovum fertilized) is a connecting link between the two progenitors since it is common to their two substances, we shall realize that every individual organism, even that of a man, is merely a bud that has sprouted on the combined body of both its parents. Where, then, does the vital principle of the individual begin or end?”<sup>543</sup>

The principle of living entities comes from other entities and the vital impetus must be global then. At the beginning of Chapter 4 we have seen that Bergson interprets the global tendency in two ways. One of them involves only members of the same species, reproduction, the other one covers the whole history of Life, from one species to another. Now it is time to focus on reproduction, since it is a conservative power, and defines it as a tendency of Life to “surpass itself”.<sup>544</sup> It means the tendency to conservation not by one individual, but by one species. Like the previous one, reproduction tries to “give first all it has and then something more than it has”. For Bergson reproduction means “*increasing in number multiplication in space*”, and he calls it instinct. As we saw in 2.2.a survival of the species is for Aristotle one of the most basic and general levels of life, also applied to plants. For Bergson reproduction may have an additional evolutionary value: the dominion on earth is also made by the radiation of the same species all over the world.<sup>545</sup> As in the classic model, reproduction can be understood from the point of view of the individual faculty, but also from the point of view of the species, that covers multiple individuals. In any case, survival of the species, in Bergson, as in Aristotle, has an immanent value. The goal at stake is clearly conservative, and covers one beneficiary or multiple ones.

---

<sup>541</sup>EC, p. 166, my italics.

<sup>542</sup>“Of course there are degrees of perfection in the same instinct (...)” EC, pp. 166-167.

<sup>543</sup> EC, p. 43.

<sup>544</sup> CV, in ES, p. 27 .

<sup>545</sup> See 3.2.b. “Difference in history”.

In EC.II the author is more focused on ethology than on cellular theory and reproduction. In DI.II and LR.III Bergson talks, respectively, about insects and dogs' experience of the space, and about wolves grasping their prey. In EC.II this approach to animal behavior is limited to entomology. As we have seen in the previous passage on bees, the insects of the order of Hymenoptera (like bees, wasps and ants) are the focus of EC. In Chapter 2.2 we showed that he considers them the perfection of instinct. After having talked about bees, and based now on Jean-Henri Fabre's then famous entomological reports,<sup>546</sup> Bergson devotes a number of pages to the perfect expression of this type of attention to life called instinct in the wasps.

Namely, he focuses on the digger wasp.<sup>547</sup> In EC Bergson comments on the astonishing capacity of these insects to follow their instinct in such sophisticated ways, as Fabre relates. Bergson refers to every type of digger wasp as following a musical theme. That is how he considers "the paralyzing instinct of certain wasps".<sup>548</sup> In this context, the caterpillar is the prey of the wasp. Bergson asks how the wasp knows about the caterpillar. Then Bergson proposes the notion of "sympathy", taken in its etymological sense. The wasp must *feel* the caterpillar's nature. "This feeling of vulnerability might owe nothing to outward perception, but result from the mere presence together of the *Ammophila* and the caterpillar, considered no longer as two organisms, but as two activities".<sup>549</sup> The wasp's activities are at stake here and are to be understood in the teleological sense, which is not intellectual, just like the spider in Aristotle. The wasp's activity is for the sake of something good, that is to be understood as perfective. Natural perfection is behind this idea of sympathy. Sympathy is an instinctual power for the sake of survival, reproduction and well-being.

Bergson's conception of cells and Hymenoptera organs and functions is thoroughly teleological. The being is for the sake of some specific activity and this activity is its perfectiveness. Living beings are for the sake of their functions. Bergson even considers that a being is an activity, more than a thing (namely, organism). This activity could be summed up by the expression perfectivism. According to the model of immanent teleology being or being in the fullest form of being are the goals of any living being.

#### - Destination of the human being (I): attention and language

As I have shown in 3.1.d and 3.2.b individual creativity is the paradigm of the activity of the human soul in Bergson. However, there are also adaptive human faculties to take in consideration: namely, the *attention to life*. My point now is that attention to life has its own form regarding *uniquely* human activities. That is: human spontaneous activities should refer to conservation and adaptation. He focuses on human behavior, and the human expression of the attention to life.

Some passages of MM.III put the example of the "man of action", which is interesting for us. It shows in a way the ethical aspect of this adaptive teleology, since it points to a middle-ground conduct for men. Between artistic creativity and animal adaptation there is an unique human activity that is a mixture of both. This hybrid form can be found only in MM.III, and refers to the virtuous middle term of the "well-balanced mind"<sup>550</sup> by understanding mere

---

<sup>546</sup> Fabre, Jean-Henri, *Souvenirs entomologiques*, 3<sup>e</sup> série, Paris, 1890, see EC.II, footnotes 70-72.

<sup>547</sup> Family: Sphecidae. Type genus: *Ammophila*.

<sup>548</sup> EC, p. 272.

<sup>549</sup> EC, p. 174.

<sup>550</sup> MM, p. 153.

animal impulse or inattentive dream of the dreamer (and the mentally insane) as extreme middle terms. Although in general Bergson talks about human nature in heroic Romantic terms by stressing creation and breaking habits, here the philosopher holds a quite classic conception of the *vita activa* or prudent practical life.

At one vicious extreme, there is the “man of impulse”, who, like the “lower animals”, lives “only in the present” and responds to a “stimulus by the immediate reaction which prolongs it”.<sup>551</sup> Living in this way is like being led by “motor memory”, it is like being a “conscious automaton”, according to Bergson, like children and the so-called savages.<sup>552</sup> On the opposite side we have the dreamer, who “dreams his life instead of living it”, led by a “contemplative memory”.<sup>553</sup> The dreamer is the one “who lives in the past for the mere pleasure of living there” and is “hardly better fitted for action” than other people.<sup>554</sup> He or she is maladjusted. The awake dreamers in Bergson are exemplified by the mentally ill persons he refers to in MM.II or the “men drowned and hanged” who finally saved their lives: close to the end and disinhibited by their attention to life, these people saw their entire past existence.<sup>555</sup>

Bergson proposes that “between these two extremes lives the happy disposition of memory, docile enough to follow with precision all the outlines of the present situation, but energetic enough to resist all other appeal”.<sup>556</sup> Between the extreme of the impulsive human and the maladjusted dreamer, there is the *man of action*: “The characteristic of the man of action is the promptitude with which he summons to the help of a given situation all the memories which have reference to it”.<sup>557</sup>

That is, the man of action is in a virtuous midterm between the automatic instinctive spontaneity and the dreamer’s creativeness. Attention to life, and so the man of action, faces its present regarding its open future, and uses the past for the sake of its actions.

The spontaneous effort or willing of the organic beings towards the performance of a certain activity or function upon circumstances imposed by nature is called by Bergson attention to life. It is his major concept in conservative teleology, and it is clearly related to the individual teleology of function. In the case of human beings, Bergson complexifies the human type of attention to life by claiming that there exists a virtuous middle term between two vicious extremes. It can lead to happiness, for human beings.<sup>558</sup> This may be the fulfillment of the being.<sup>559</sup>

Society and the brain are for Bergson just expressions of human superiority, as we saw. Like in Aristotle, language is automatically linked with our social dimension in Bergson: we are

---

<sup>551</sup>MM, p. 153.

<sup>552</sup>MM, p. 154.

<sup>553</sup>MM, p. 155.

<sup>554</sup>MM, p.153.

<sup>555</sup>MM, p. 155.

<sup>556</sup>MM, p. 153.

<sup>557</sup>MM, p. 153.

<sup>558</sup>MM, p. 153.

<sup>559</sup>The idea of the practical middle term can be linked to the Aristotelian *mesótes* (NE.II.2.1104a25). And possibly Bergson’s *man of action* could have some resemblance with the prudent (*ho phrónimos*) ethical man in Aristotle, but the important differences dissuade me from emphasizing the similarities too much. I do not find a theory of virtue in Bergson.

political animals and linguistic animals at the very same time.<sup>560</sup> The problem of language is part of Bergson's philosophical discourse from the first line of his first published work. These are the first lines of DI: "We necessarily express ourselves by means of words and we usually think in terms of space. That is to say, language requires us to establish between our ideas the same sharp and precise distinctions, the same discontinuity, as between material objects. This assimilation of thought to things is useful in practical life and necessary in most of the sciences".<sup>561</sup> In the "Conclusion" of that same work, Bergson states that "there are finally two different selves, one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social representation".<sup>562</sup>

Leaving aside the concept of *spatialization*, we can see that this necessity of practical life is closely linked to social representation. Thanks to language we can "externalize our concepts in relation to one another, reveal to ourselves the objectivity of things. We do this in two ways: by getting everything ready for language and by showing ourselves an external world, quite distinct from ourselves, in the perception of which all minds have a common share, which foreshadows and prepares that way for social life".<sup>563</sup> We all share words in society, and these words are for the sake of adaptation. As far as I'm concerned, this idea doesn't change in Bergson: our verbal dimension is a) useful and b) social.

Language generates problems, for Bergson. Like society it has an important goal: adaptation and conservation. Language permits us to distinguish things and to communicate these distinctions in society. This means that, in the end, we can work in groups like no animal on earth. This group work of language becomes a quite complex but practical compound of symbols. Human domination of the environment and nature is due to society and language, and vice versa, since they can't be distinguished. In DI, modern science is the ultimate step of this scale of dominion. As I say, this is seen by Bergson in a critical way, since positivism is trying to apply the successful scientific quantitative model to consciousness. He considers that this is wrong. But this exhaustive teleological reading of Bergson has to include also the destination of words, for the sake of survival and well-being. Language can be perfectly understood as part of our biological background, unable to grasp the self and duration, for instance, but necessary for practical and social life. Language is then part of the "attention to life", a concept that he created seven years after DI.

#### - Destination of the community: laughter, myths, animism

As we know, Bergson devoted two books to human social life, LR and DS. The entire LR and one half of DS (especially its second chapter) can be read in terms of conservative teleology: they talk about corrections of dysfunctional cases of attention to life. This may mean that society is an entity that has to survive, or reproduce itself and even fulfill the tendency of living-well. It is certainly an entity that has to survive and to fulfill the best of its potency, and with society, all the members of it. As I said in the previous section on analogies, Bergson's lectures of 1916 known as "La personnalité" or "On personality", deal briefly with this conception of national communities and peoples. LR is from 1900 and DS from 1932, but that so-called vitalist conception of society is implied there. Both are focused on the defensive tendencies of society, conceived as a whole living entity composed by human

---

<sup>560</sup> For Aristotle, speech (*ho logos*) is for making clear what is beneficial or harmful, and also what is just or unjust. *Pol.I.2.1253<sup>a</sup>5-20*.

<sup>561</sup> DI, p.xix.

<sup>562</sup> DI, p. 231.

<sup>563</sup> DI, 236.

individuals, and both are social reactions. Although in DS Bergson does not neither recall and nor even mention LR, in my view there is a clear continuity. Jokes in LR and myths in DS are collective creations of some living being called society.

There is a leading analogy in both texts. In LR he states: “Let us go on to society. As we are both in and of it, we cannot help treating it as a living being”,<sup>564</sup> and “we should see that vanity, though it is a natural product of social life, is an inconvenience to society, just as certain slight poisons, continually secreted by the human organism, would destroy it in the long run, if they were not neutralized by other secretions. Laughter is unceasingly doing work of this kind”.<sup>565</sup> Laughter has to be considered from this vitalistic perspective: as we will see, it enacts a particular faculty of a whole called society. In DS we have a similar organic analogy: “... human society with its members linked together like the cells of an organism, or, what amounts almost to the same thing, like ants in an ant-hill, has never existed but the groupings of primitive humanity were certainly nearer the ants than ours are today”.<sup>566</sup>

Following Aristotle, Bergson thinks that the philosopher has to search for function of any given organism, living being, or a part thereof. LR understands the laughter, the comedy and humor, as part of a society, the organism. LR is a book about the function or the *special cause* of laughter in the community. In the book, Bergson himself prefers to talk about function than about cause. He writes: “To understand laughter, we must put it back into its natural environment, which is society, and above all must we determine the *utility of its function*, which is a social one. Such, let us say at once, will be the leading idea of all our investigations. Laughter must answer to certain requirements of life in common. It must have a social signification”.<sup>567</sup> And he adds: “Laughter must be (...) a sort of social gesture. (...) Laughter, then, does not belong to the province of aesthetics alone, since unconsciously (and even immorally in many particular instances) it *pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement*”.<sup>568</sup> The function and the signification have to be understood by means of general improvement or perfectionism. Laughter, ultimately, is read in teleological terms: that is, laughter improves society. Or, in other words, thanks to laughter society can fulfill its natural goal better. “What life and society require of each of us is a constant attention, an alert, that discerns the outlines of the present situation, together with a certain elasticity of mind and body to enable us *to adapt ourselves in consequence*”.<sup>569</sup>

We will come back to DS, on religion and morality, but I want to say in advance that the Aristotelian search for function can also be found. Bergson wants to explain the existence of myths and the social pressure within them: “we have the right to proceed like a biologist, who speaks of nature’s intentions every time he assigns a function to an organ: he merely expresses thus the adequateness of the organ to the function. In spite of humanity’s having become civilized, in spite of the transformation of society, we maintain that the tendencies which are, as it were, organic in social life have remained what they were in the beginning”.<sup>570</sup>

---

<sup>564</sup> LR, p. 16a.

<sup>565</sup> LR, p. 53b.

<sup>566</sup> DS, p. 82.

<sup>567</sup> LR, p. 5a-5b.

<sup>568</sup> LR, p. 9a, italics are mine.

<sup>569</sup> LR, p. 8b, italics are mine.

<sup>570</sup> DS, p. 56.

LR is a book on the phenomenon of laughter, composed of three articles. In the appendix for the twenty-third edition Bergson quotes himself, from a recent article of 1919 about his own book, and says that the essay talks about the “procedure of the comic-making” or of “laughable” and about the “special cause” of that “defensive reaction, by a gesture that makes a light fear”.<sup>571</sup>

The main scope of laughter is to fight the “distraction of life”,<sup>572</sup> which is the opposite of “attention to life”. Thus, laughter is subordinated to attention to life. With Sibertin-Blanc,<sup>573</sup> I believe that the basic thesis of the whole work is the *special cause* of laughter. Secondly, LR talks about the procedures or methods of laughter, which occupy most of the text. In fact, the *perfective power* of laughter is not explained in detail. In general terms we know the essential idea for us: that it *strengthens attention to life*.

Bumping into something, eccentricities, or vanity are subtle distractions that are corrected by laughter. The man who is *attentive* to life is part of a group and he and the group laugh at those cases.<sup>574</sup> My point now is to show that laughter’s function is *correction* of excessive liberties,<sup>575</sup> repression of separatist tendencies,<sup>576</sup> punishment,<sup>577</sup> and humiliation,<sup>578</sup> although in an indirect and subtle way. Near the end of the text, Bergson considers that “laughter doubtless exercises a useful function”.<sup>579</sup> Laughter is understood by Bergson in a teleological way, since this psychological and social phenomenon is “made by” nature for the best of the individual. In this context, the individual is both the human individual and society itself, since it enhances the cohesive tendencies. “Here, like elsewhere, nature has disposed with evil and cruelty for the sake of the good. It is more especially the good that has engaged our attention throughout this work. We have seen that the *more society improves*, the more plastic is the *adaptability* it obtains from its members; while the greater the tendency *towards increasing stability* below, the more it forces to the surface the disturbing elements inseparable from so vast a bulk; and thus laughter performs a *useful function* by emphasizing the form of these significant undulations”.<sup>580</sup> In the end the *télos* is again adaptation.

In DS conservative teleology is called in general terms compulsion, obedience or impulsion. We saw it in 3.1.e. Since this book is the best articulation of the twofold vision of teleology in Bergson, each tendency has its own chapter. Bergson focuses on conservative teleology in DS.II. There we see how this organic society uses dysfunctional faculties of humans *for the sake of the best*.

---

<sup>571</sup> “Appendice de la vingt-troisième édition”. LR, PUF, 2007, p. 156-157.

<sup>572</sup> The original text says “distraction de la vie” which, I think, is closer to the translation in English (authorized by Bergson): “*absent-mindedness* on the part of life”.

<sup>573</sup> Note in LR, ed. Guillaume Sibertin-Blanc, PUF, Paris, 2007, p. 207.

<sup>574</sup> LR, p. 28b.

<sup>575</sup> LR.III.V, p. 59b. Also: “Laughter is, above all, a corrective. Being intended to humiliate, it must make a painful impression on the person against whom it is directed. By laughter, society avenges itself for the liberties taken with it”. LR, p. 60b.

<sup>576</sup> “...it is the business of laughter to repress any separatist tendency. Its function is to convert rigidity into plasticity, to readapt the individual to the whole”. LR, p. 54a.

<sup>577</sup> “Laughter punishes certain failings somewhat as disease punishes certain forms of excess, striking down some who are innocent and sparing some who are guilty”. LR, p. 60b.

<sup>578</sup> “Its function is to intimidate by humiliating. Now, it would not succeed in doing this, had not nature implanted for that very purpose, even in the best of men, a spark of spitefulness or, at all events, of mischief”. LR, pp. 60b-61a.

<sup>579</sup> LR, 60, b.

<sup>580</sup> LR, p. 61a. This idea of nature using wrong outcomes for the best reminds me Aristotle’s nature: it also uses surpluses of matter for the better defense of animals, in *PA*.III.2 663b30-35.

DS.II leads to the search for “the first function of religion”.<sup>581</sup> It is none other than “social preservation”.<sup>582</sup> The myth-making function and static religion, closely linked, generate in societies eschatological myths, taboos, animism and magic against the “anxieties and temptations”,<sup>583</sup> produced by the intelligence (the depressing idea of death, selfish preoccupations, uncertain future, sexual policy, etc.). “The function that nature has assigned to religion”<sup>584</sup> is thus defensive of the group or cohesive. In DS.II there are three similar definitions of the same idea of natural defense: “religion is then a defensive reaction of nature against the dissolvent power of intelligence”.<sup>585</sup> Also: “It is a defensive reaction of nature against what might be depressing for the individual, and dissolvent for society, in the exercise of intelligence”.<sup>586</sup> Regarding the practical life and animism and magic Bergson adds: “defensive reactions of nature against the representation, by the intelligence, of a depressing margin of the unexpected between the initiative taken and the effect desired”.<sup>587</sup>

As I said, society is conceived in DS as in LR like an organism. In both sociological accounts the author shows different ways of defending society against dissolvent elements. In LR these elements are less hostile, so the defense is soft, related to aesthetics: that is laughter. In the end, LR answers the question of the goal of laughter. It attacks distraction and vanity for the sake of a better cohesion and adaptation of the human beings, and, ultimately, for the sake of the conservation of a singular entity called society. In DS.II myth-making faculties cause eschatological myths, animism, magic and taboos. They attack some kind of social illnesses made by the faculty of intelligence among humans. The goal is, thus, similar to laughter: conservation, that is, being and, furthermore, living well, since communitary perfection should involve a certain kind of happiness (not the highest, though, as we will see soon).

#### **4.1.b. Embryologie: continuity and maturity**

In the epigraph above called “destination of the cells and instincts: cytology and ethology” I talked about the activities of different types of living beings, namely cells and bees. Just before, I talked about the human body, and, by analogy, about amoebas and herbivorous animals. This subsection just adds material to Bergson’s philosophy of organisms. It introduces a new concept. The previous sections on language, body, habit, instinct and cellular theory and communitarian behavior stress the notion of function or efficient activity. In this section I recall one passage we saw in Chapter 3.1.b on analogies between consciousness and the embryo, the most conservative cases of conservative teleology.

Now Bergson refers to maturity. In my reading, it is not an expression of the attention to life. It is not a function or an activity. Maturity is certainly a type of perfection, it is a goal of the living being, but it is not an external action that the organism should perform. It has to do with Bergson’s philosophy of time, and namely with duration, as it is seen in DI.II, but transformed into philosophy of the organisms. The temporal perspective introduces this idea of maturity, which has nothing to do with attention to life.

---

<sup>581</sup> DS, p. 129.

<sup>582</sup> DS, p. 129.

<sup>583</sup> DS, p. 208.

<sup>584</sup> DS, p. 204.

<sup>585</sup> DS, p. 123.

<sup>586</sup> DS, p. 205.

<sup>587</sup> DS, p. 140.

“The cause of growing old must lie deeper. We hold that there is unbroken continuity between the evolution of the embryo and that of the complete organism. The impetus which causes a living being to grow larger, to develop and to age, is the same that has caused it to pass through the phases of the embryonic life. The development of the embryo is a perpetual change of form. Any one who attempts to note all its successive aspects becomes lost in an infinity, as is inevitable in dealing with a continuum. Life does but prolong this prenatal evolution. The proof of this is that it is often impossible for us to say whether we are dealing with an organism growing old or with an embryo continuing to evolve; such is the case, for example, with the larvae of insects and crustacea. On the other hand, in an organism such as our own, crises like puberty or the menopause, in which the individual is completely transformed, are quite comparable to changes in the course of larval or embryonic life—yet they are part and parcel of the process of our ageing. Although they occur at a definite age and within a time that may be quite short, no one would maintain that they appear then *ex abrupto*, from without, simply because a certain age is reached, just as a legal right is granted to us on our one-and-twentieth birthday”.<sup>588</sup>

As I said in 3.1.b the feature here is no more activity than maturation and growth. The “perpetual change of form” which, as Bergson seems to think, has more to do with duration, appears as a pure flux. Like time in ourselves: it is a continuum. In this context, Bergson even says that “it is often impossible for us to say whether we are dealing with an organism growing old or with an embryo continuing to evolve”. Growing old seems to be here a non-teleological expression, since “old” is not necessarily something good. Old can mean decay. In this passage the expression stresses “pure becoming” more than directedness. On the one hand, growth is, in the classical scheme of Aristotle, a teleological activity. First, it is linked to nutrition. Nutrition is for the sake of survival, and survival is good.<sup>589</sup> As we saw, in a teleological framework the term “growth” means *growth towards something*, and “something” is fulfillment of the specific nature to be developed, that is maturity. As Bergson says, “[it] is often impossible for us to say whether we are dealing with an organism growing old or with an embryo continuing to evolve” seems to erase the line between becoming and fulfillment, between development and maturity. In this case maturation and growth in age become sort of what Bergson tried to explain about duration in DI.II: continuum and change at the same time. Nutrition is not here the cause of growth and change. There is not matureness on the horizon. Puberty and menopause are the events selected by him, and not, again, matureness.

As I stated in 3.1.b the continuum flux and pure becoming are certainly features of duration, in Bergson. I add maturity, which is maybe less stressed in the first of Bergson’s essays. But even there, he highlights the importance of some moments of life in comparison to others. Bergson stresses in fact rare moments in life. He talks about the decisive moments of free choice and deliberation. As we saw, in DI his depiction of consciousness implies is a constantly changing and irreversible continuum of heterogeneous interpenetrated qualities. In short, this is pure progress. It is called duration. But in the last chapter of DI.III we see that also duration is directed to something: unforeseeable free choices, “the great and solemn crisis, decisive to our reputation with others, and yet more with ourselves...”<sup>590</sup> He calls it “the deep-seated self rushing up to the surface”, which expresses the “whole personality”.<sup>591</sup> In Bergson’s view the case of free-will in DI.III completes the account of duration in DI.II.

---

<sup>588</sup> EC, pp. 18-19.

<sup>589</sup>“Although this potency does not belong to all living things, alteration and growth also exist by way of soul” (DA.II.4.415b25-416a).

<sup>590</sup>DI, p. 170.

<sup>591</sup> DI, p. 169.

Given that we are “rarely free”,<sup>592</sup> it seems that we complete our selves sometimes. I believe the teleological concept of maturity is implied in the young Bergson’s account in DI. Irreversibility points to maturity and maturity is associated with the moments of big decisions. Free-will in DI gives a hint of the notion of creation, in the next works. Free-will is the peak of every duration, since it is a moment of self-creation and, at the same time, a continuation of the whole personality. However, it is not part of natural philosophy and neither of the model of immanent teleology. I defend an implicit perfective element there, but it is sure that there are no analogies at use.

In EC, teleological elements fall under the model of embryology. In the text examined in 3.1.b, Bergson discusses the idea of continuum, change and also maturity. By talking equally about embryonic life, puberty and menopause he is clearly stressing the idea of continuum. But growing old is not more than change and continuum, it is reaching towards something: a more perfect state. *Perfection here includes past time*. Maturity is then a sort of perfection here, for Bergson. It is situated apart from the other conceptions of conservative teleology because, although it does not imply transgression or evolution and it is certainly conservative, it has nothing to do with the fulfillment of attention to life. It means mere conservation in time, accumulation and duration.

## 4.2. Second domain of immanent teleology: transgressive teleology

As we saw at the beginning of 4, in CV there is a second “manifestation of an inward impulse” that can be understood “in the meaning of transformism”. It is evolution. It is not “increasing in number and wealth by multiplication in space” but “*complication in time*”. This can be found in human psychology too. Besides “Love”, he says, there is “Ambition”. Ambition is the analogical psychological item, it is the work of the genius and the spiritual hero. The passage ends with an analogy between life and human psychology: “Visibly there is a force working, seeking to free itself from trammels and also to surpass itself, to give first all it has and then something more than it has. What else is mind?”<sup>593</sup> Now we will see transgressive teleology, which implies “complication” in evolution, and “ambition” in psychology. This is the second domain of teleology. It includes all kinds of global teleology. Approximately, the place occupied by global teleology in Bergson’s philosophical works is proportional to the one devoted to individual teleology in Aristotle. In this sense, EC is to global teleology in Bergson what *Physics* is to individual teleology in Aristotle. In Bergson the teleological paradigm is the cosmic impetus of the *élan* and in Aristotle it is the individual substance. We have seen that the model of immanent teleology explains a great variety of phenomena, pertaining to different domains and areas of knowledge.

The impulse for the sake of complication and ambition doesn’t fit perfectly with the global model, taken from Aristotle. This is not surprising, since we knew that Bergson is an original reformer. The second domain includes the cosmos, Life or the *élan* but also individual human free beings. In the passage above from CV we see that the transgressive teleology is to be found also in individual human beings. Only human beings are analogous to the macrocosmos. As I have said, Aristotle believes that man, to some extent, expresses the general order of the cosmos (2.1.c). However, he doesn’t use that analogy for teleology. Furthermore, Bergson’s reform of teleology reaches its most original and its most interesting

---

<sup>592</sup> DI, p. 231.

<sup>593</sup> CV, in ES, p. 27.

philosophical problems and paradoxes points in this domain. In Bergson, global teleology becomes a combination of primary teleology and secondary teleology, and is grounded in freedom. *Teleology of freedom* is at stake now. Although at this point we should use the Bergsonian term: creativity.

We have seen that creativity is one of the main topics in Bergson and it is extremely close to the question of freedom. Freedom is a creative power, and vice versa. According to different contexts, it has different terms. This idea can be found at the very beginning of his dissertation. One can understand DI, his first original book, as a response to his book on Lucretious, published earlier in 1883. Hence Lucretious is the first one of a list composed of the materialist physicians of DI, Leibniz, Laplace or Huxley in EC, as we saw in 1: Lucretious is the first of the *deniers of the spirit*. In Bergson's account, for the Roman poet "everything consists and has always consisted solely of atoms, masses of atoms, and changes in the arrangement of atoms; atoms move on, eternally and inexorably; definite, changeless laws must govern the birth, growth and decay of things caught up and squeezed from every direction by the tight bond of necessity".<sup>594</sup>

Part of Bergson's commentary on Lucretius deals with his philosophy and, as we know, he compares him with Darwin.<sup>595</sup> Bergson describes the origin and philosophical sources of this conception of the world, inspired "by what he assumes to be the basic idea of Epicureanism".<sup>596</sup> This worldview is again determinism. According to Bergson, it holds "the eternal rigidity of the laws of nature" and the "inexorable natural laws".<sup>597</sup> But especially, Bergson depicts Lucretius' character and, namely, Lucretius' philosophical anthropology, in the light of that natural philosophy. Determinism and the "inexorability of natural laws"<sup>598</sup> or "inexorable laws of matter",<sup>599</sup> produces "compassion for mankind"<sup>600</sup> and "melancholy".<sup>601</sup> Unlike contemporary scientists, according to Bergson, Lucretius was a sensible enough to suffer coherently his own intuition of the world.

As Bergson says: "The concept of the rigidity of natural laws reappears under various guises. This notion obsesses and saddens the poet; it explains his peculiar variety of melancholy that, in a manner of speaking, contains its own consolation. Unable to see anything in the universe except cumulative or compensatory forces and convinced that whatever is results naturally and inevitably from whatever has been, Lucretius takes pity on the human race".<sup>602</sup> Lucretius' compassion, pity, dread, obsession, sadness, consolation and melancholy are due to the inexorability and rigidity of his vision of the place of human beings in the cosmos. Bergson seems to say: if I would have Lucretius ideas I would feel the same. But in Bergson there is neither sadness nor dread since there is creativeness. Creative, meaning freedom, is, for Bergson, the "sign of joy".

In Lucretius creativity is impossible. All is done and humans are just puppets of an inexorable destiny. In the end, Lucretius' conception of the place of man in the cosmos was the source of

---

<sup>594</sup> EL, p. 56.

<sup>595</sup> EL, p. 46.

<sup>596</sup> EL, p. 56.

<sup>597</sup> EL, p. 58.

<sup>598</sup> EL, p. 59.

<sup>599</sup> EL, p. 39.

<sup>600</sup> EL, p. 59.

<sup>601</sup> EL, p. 39.

<sup>602</sup> EL, p. 38.

his own melancholy. Equally, one can think that maybe Bergson's view of humans as creative and unforeseeable was the source of the euphoric buoyancy of some of his writings.

Again, creativity is a major issue in Bergson, from the beginning until the end, and it comes into play in DI.III, where it faces the "principle of conservation of energy".<sup>603</sup> Freedom is a fact "if it is agreed to call every act free which springs from the self and from the self alone, the act which bears the mark of our personality is truly free, for our self alone will lay claim to its paternity. It would thus be recognized that free will is a fact",<sup>604</sup> is made by an effort.<sup>605</sup> It is a fact, and there is "none clearer."<sup>606</sup> It is defined as "the relation of the concrete self to the act which it performs".<sup>607</sup> Spontaneity *versus* inertia:<sup>608</sup> "All determinism will thus be refuted by experience, but every attempt to define freedom will open the way to determinism".<sup>609</sup> Bergson relates freedom with causality.<sup>610</sup> According to the conservative understanding of the world, "the same causes produce the same effects".<sup>611</sup> But according to duration there is a cause produced by effort, which is unforeseeable. Both causalities, the inertial and the spontaneous, the physical and the psychic, can't be reduced one to another since he is not trying to elaborate a philosophy of nature. But the work of Lucretius and DI don't link openly the question of creativity and the question of immanent teleology. As I have shown in two occasions, there are reasonable hints of it to be found in DI.

There is only one passage on general causality in EC that must be addressed now.<sup>612</sup> It is an obscure text for me, and doesn't clarify much. Like Aristotle in *Phys*.II.3 and 7, surprisingly Bergson's account of causality in his treatise on nature is illustrated only with human and artificial examples. We see here again that, according to the model of immanent teleology, Bergson considered human beings an expression of nature. As I said, EC is as focused on global teleology as *Phys* is focused on individual teleology, and this passage shows, I believe, precisely that.

In EC Bergson tries to place human creative freedom in nature. As we have seen, he establishes an analogy between personal freedom and Life. In the first chapter of EC the causal model is not twofold, but threefold. Bergson himself talks about causality:

"[1] A cause may act by [a] *impelling (impulsion)*, [b] *releasing (déclenchement)*, or [c] *unwinding (déroulement)*. [a] The billiard-ball, that strikes another, determines its movement by *impelling*. [b] The spark that explodes the powder acts by *releasing*. [c] The gradual relaxing of the spring, that makes the phonograph turn, *unwinds* the melody inscribed on the cylinder: if the melody which is played be the effect, and the relaxing of the spring the cause, we must say that the cause acts by *unwinding*. What distinguishes these three cases from each other is the greater or less solidarity between the cause and the effect. [a] In the first, the quantity and quality of the effect vary with the quantity and quality of the cause. [b] In the second, neither quality nor quantity of the effect varies with quality and quantity of the cause: the effect is invariable. [c] In the third, the quantity of the

---

<sup>603</sup> DI, p. 151.

<sup>604</sup> DI, p. 173.

<sup>605</sup> DI, pp. 214-215.

<sup>606</sup> DI, p. 221.

<sup>607</sup> DI, p. 219.

<sup>608</sup> DI, p. 230.

<sup>609</sup> DI, p. 230.

<sup>610</sup> DI, pp. 201-209.

<sup>611</sup> DI, p. 201.

<sup>612</sup> As Arnaud François points out, in EC, p. 73. there are other texts, like DI.III in which Bergson talks about causality, to be sure. But this is the only general account and typology of the topic.

effect depends on the quantity of the cause, but the cause does not influence the quality of the effect: the longer the cylinder turns by the action of the spring, the more of the melody I shall hear, but the nature of the melody, or of the part heard, does not depend on the action of the spring. [2] Only in the first case, really, does cause *explain* effect; in the others the effect is more or less given in advance, and the antecedent invoked is—in different degrees, of course—its occasion rather than its cause”.<sup>613</sup>

Following Troitignon, I would say that the threefold vision of causality could be completed by the fourth type: teleological “attraction”. It appears in EC.IV, actually addressing Aristotle’s theology. I have mentioned this passage in 3.1.d and we will come back to it in 4.2.d. Bergson thinks that in Aristotle, but also in major Greek and Alexandrian philosophers, there are two types of movement in the world, movement by mechanical impulsion and movement by aspiration or attraction to God. Attraction would be exerted then by something external and eternally fixed. In fact, impulsion has in EC.I and IV a similar sense. Impulsion, releasing, unwinding and attraction are the four types of causality that can be found and pondered in the whole EC. As I said in 3.1.d, after EC, in DS he incorporates “attraction” in his own terminology, for expressing the immanent power of the *élan* in our consciousness. As I will say in 4.2.d Bergson himself was not far from the two fluxes (impulsion/attraction) in some passages from EC. But attraction, as we have it in EC.IV, is part of theological causality. And the threefold passage in EC.I only deals with natural causality. We may focus on it now.

In EC.I, the threefold passage, [a] impulsion is the efficient cause that explains [2], since the quantity and quality of the effect vary with the quantity and quality of the cause. Regarding [b] *releasing* and [c] *unwinding* there is a certain disproportion.

In my view, with Troitignon and against Marietti,<sup>614</sup> for Bergson is “*unwinding*” or “*dérroulement*” is the one which represents the “*true finalism*”, while “*releasing*” or “*déclenchement*” seems to be placed somewhere in the middle.<sup>615</sup> Is the key term is unwinding. EC is not focused on impulsion. Releasing fits with the metaphor of explosion that Bergson uses at the beginning of EC.II, but in the end, only unwinding contains the full scope of his work on global teleology. Following Troitignon, releasing represents a low degree of indetermination, such as spontaneity; attention to the life of the living beings and unwinding are better than genuine freedom or creation. It is more vital, so to speak, than mechanic impulsion, but is less than free unwinding. Releasing is *midterm* causality.<sup>616</sup>

Unwinding means that although the quantity of the effect depends on the quantity of the cause, the cause does not influence the *quality* of the effect. The cylinder/spring and the “*nature of the melody*” compose an analogy of matter and Life or, in individual terms, of body and soul. This dualistic perspective is harder than the one we could find in the classic teleological perspective. But there is still a cylinder engine that exists for the sake of the melody, just as Bergson finds body for the sake of free choice or the material universe for the sake of indetermination. There is a difference in nature, between the matter and the spirit, but in the end, there is a coordination between the two. In the example of the cylinder engine there is subordination.

---

<sup>613</sup> EC, p. 73.

<sup>614</sup> For “impulsion” as the vital cause, Marietti, Angèle. *Les formes du mouvement chez Bergson*. Le Puy, Paris, 1953.

<sup>615</sup> Following Troitignon, Pierre. *L’idée de vie chez Bergson*, PUF, Paris, 1968.

<sup>616</sup> Troitignon, Pierre. *L’idée de vie chez Bergson*, PUF, Paris, 1968, p. 571.

The passage from EC.IV is, again, obscure and open to different interpretations. I believe that genuine freedom or creation is to be understood only according to unwinding. As usual when Bergson addresses the topic in EC, this causal typology sheds maybe light only on creative teleology and does not include forms of conservative teleology that we saw in 4.1. Anyway, Bergson does not use this terminology later on, neither in the discourse within the book nor in any other text. It is just one possible typology, in the context of EC.I, of global evolutionary teleology. According to Troitignon, Life in Bergson is in between impulsion (mechanism) and attraction (theology). In particular, unwinding addresses better than any other type his emergentist conception of global immanent teleology.

Section 4.2 is twofold, and, to this extent, shows two different kinds of unwinding causality or creativity. The first kind is anchored in individual free activities that *exclusively* involve human beings. *The melody of the cylinder can be heard regarding free will and human culture*. From my perspective, there is an immanent teleological model at stake, since it implies the coordination of different parts and means in accordance with one goal. The goal is creation. The *télos* of what I call transgressive teleology.

The first kind of creation in Bergson is individual: personal creativeness and personal freedom. I will develop another view of human action different from 4.1.a. As we will see, there are three possible ways of understanding individual creative teleology in Bergson's works. Keeping with the already mentioned metaphor, the cylinder is the human body and the melody is the human soul, created by free choices.

The second kind of creativity involved in this view of creative teleology is much more ambitious and also philosophically problematic. Global immanent teleology is at stake here. It talks about nature as a whole and not about individuals. Namely, it addresses general drives in Life: following the musical analogy the cylinder is the material world, and the melody is biology; or the cylinder is the world, including matter and Life, and the melody is human freedom.

In Bergson global teleology is teleology beyond individual living beings, but it only covers the progress of Life, in evolution, and human history. Mutations in biology, according to Bergson, can be understood teleologically. Biological lineages express direction and the essential drives of Life. They are not all, to be sure, progressive. On the contrary, in general terms, we have failure in Life, Bergson says, but there is room for global teleology. There are few but huge successes in nature. Namely, those that lead toward mankind. Note that Bergson doesn't openly extend global teleology to elements, as we found in Aristotle in 2.2.b. The *élan vital* in biology and human progress are the two grounds for global creative teleology, although in fact they compose for Bergson different parts of the same picture: the emergence of consciousness in the world.

I have divided global creative immanent teleology in three subsections. I ponder firstly global teleology within Life, regarding the different realms of biology. Plants, fungi, animals and humans take part of the one whole: history of spiritual progress. After I address the continuation of the doctrine of the *élan*: human history or progress. In DS, among other things, Bergson applies his approach of EC to history (although in EC he also talks about history): he repeats the main features of his biological global teleology, but makes one addition, the notion of mimesis.

I finish the set with cosmology, as we find it in EC, namely, in its third chapter. There I reach the widest scope around the topic of Bergson's global teleology. In 4.2.d I tackle the notion of Life, apart from evolution. In EC and CV there are passages in which Life is understood as opposed to matter. The world is depicted as the tension between two fluxes: I claim that this view comes, again, from Aristotle. It is Bergson's view of Aristotle's theodicy, heavily influenced, as is well known, by Neoplatonism and the 19th century Hellenist Ravaisson. After this, we will see that in other places in Bergson it seems that there is a coordination between the two, and then matter could be understood teleologically, as the cylinder is teleologically directed to its function: the melody. In other places, Life seems to be autonomous.

Creative immanent teleology involves one (human) entity or many (all the living), but its goal is always unpredictable indetermination. In all of its versions, creative immanent teleology faces the same paradox: the natural tendency toward overcoming.

#### **4.2.a. Individual creative immanent teleology: destination of the human being (II)**

The term "destination" appears in CV,<sup>617</sup> but the meaning was implied in his previous work EC, which develops in a teleological and natural ground the conclusions of DI. As we saw in 3.2 the creative freedom (which involves invention and also intuition) are exclusive faculties of the human being. Again, there is a certain dualism in Bergson. On the one hand, humans are the sum of natural conservative strivings and also add attention to life, which in my reading of 4.1.c implies a certain kind of midterm prudence for the sake of adaptation. The scope of man in EC has more to do with DI: the goal is not adaptation any more, but creation. We have reached the other dimension of human teleology: the ultimate transgressive goal of being is to create himself or herself, surely inspired by one spiritual inspiring model. Attention to life and creative freedom are not more opposed than active prudent living and contemplation in Aristotle. They are compatible.<sup>618</sup>

If human nature in Bergson has to be understood in teleological terms, as I defend, human realization has to be made regarding the use and ultimate fulfillment of these faculties. Bergson's framework is clearly eudaimonistic: the goal, within humans, entails happiness.

As we saw, creative freedom is thus the basis of man's superiority, and that implies that man's goal is his or her own realization through this activity. Creative freedom and invention are outcomes of history, the history of the *homo faber*. Bergson defends intuition as an undeveloped faculty that, again, is linked not to instinct or feelings.<sup>619</sup>

"Nature warns us by a clear sign that our destination is attained. That sign is joy",<sup>620</sup> Bergson says. The mother, the merchant, the artist and the spiritual hero exemplify different kinds of joy. The quality of that joy depends on the quality of the creation. As the author says in the same place, "wherever there is joy, there is creation; the richer the creation, the deeper the joy". In a way, for Bergson, that joy is supernatural, since is "the joy of a god".<sup>621</sup> Neither the

---

<sup>617</sup> ES, p. 29.

<sup>618</sup> Maybe one can think here about the Aristotelian controversy between the inclusivist and the exclusivist readings of *NE*.

<sup>619</sup> "(...) my intuition is reflection". "Introd.II", PM, p. 102.

<sup>620</sup> ES, p. 29.

<sup>621</sup> ES, p. 30.

pleasure obtained from admiration nor vanity nor the pleasure from bodily satisfaction could be compared.

Bergson's ethical teleology is grounded in this idea of *joy as destination*. He gave hints of that in DI and in EC he doctrinally grounds this eudaimonic approach. But he only develops that in his last book DS, focused on ethics and heavily influenced by Christian religion. It seems that in the third chapter of DS the destination of the human being should be considered love and creation. First, love should be understood "not [as] love for any particular person".<sup>622</sup> Second, creation is a central issue in Bergson at least from EC. It has more Christian echoes in DS. Bergson says: "Creation will appear to him [to the intellectual who study the deepness of mysticism] as God undertaking to create creators, that He may have, besides Himself, beings worthy of His love".<sup>623</sup> I believe it is precisely from this point of view from which we should read the last sentence of DS.IV, according to which the universe is a "machine for the making of gods".<sup>624</sup>

In the end of DS Bergson returns to the notion of joy. To be sure, he had already mentioned it in the book, previously, when he talks about it as an unmixed joy, lying "beyond pleasure and pain".<sup>625</sup> The context of DS.IV is the context of an ideological promotion of asceticism. Joy means here self-sufficiency, creativity and is necessarily different from pleasure, vanity, and luxury. In DS.IV Bergson defends a return to a more sober life. There he says that "joy indeed would be this simplicity".<sup>626</sup>

As we already know, for Bergson "the creative effort progressed successfully *only* along that line of evolution which ended in man".<sup>627</sup> This exclusive being has for Bergson a concrete nature and only by developing its own nature humans can attain their goals. Words such as function appear in his speech. Bergson's approach is deeply teleological.

Although the idea of free creation as the main goal of human life appears in DI, it is an implicit eudaimonological and teleological perspective. The reader can interpret that from the whole text, although it is not openly stated. In MM the model is that of the virtuous middle term between two vicious extremes, but he does not develop this perspective. In EC, CV and DS Bergson develops his teleological anthropology that, by force, includes a doctrine of happiness. Freedom understood as creativity, invention and intuition are mankind's characteristics. Bergson's approach in EC relied on a notion of human nature. The only way in which nature could be completed should be through one of these activities. To sum up, the fulfillment of human life could only be considered regarding those faculties:

"Even so with regard to the moments of our life, of which we are the artisans. Each of them is a kind of creation. And just as the talent of the painter is formed or deformed—in any case, is modified—under the very influence of the works he produces, so each of our states, at the moment of its issue, modifies our personality, being indeed the new form that we are just assuming. It is then right to say that what we do depends on what we are; but it is necessary to add also that we are, to a certain extent, what we do, and that we are creating ourselves continually".<sup>628</sup>

---

<sup>622</sup> DS, p. 254.

<sup>623</sup> DS, p. 255.

<sup>624</sup> DS, p. 317.

<sup>625</sup> DS, p. 261.

<sup>626</sup> DS, p. 317.

<sup>627</sup> DS, p. 209.

<sup>628</sup> EC, pp. 6-7.

Like Aristotle, in CV and DS, Bergson calls the major faculties unique to humans “divine”. But, more important for us, he erects a philosophy of happiness. Natural or material teleology points out what the nature is and, so, what the specific goal is, but also adds the concept of happiness. Happiness is the expression of metaphysical fulfillment. Although, in Bergson there is not a theory of virtue, there is a teleological framework regarding human life. Bergson uses the term “joy”, that is still linked to creativity. In his new religious and political context, he links joy with Christian love and communitarian austerity.

In this level, there is one hard paradox at stake. This paradox is of real importance for us at this point. It can be formulated as follows: the goal of the human individual is to create his or her own goals. Human beings are teleologically oriented towards their own self-creation: that is ethical maturity. Can we be directed towards something that does not already exist? This problem re-appears in the next subsection in a wider context. In short, all the anthropological aporia of creative finality are translated into the cosmic domain.

As I see it, the overarching term Life or *élan* can be found in tension with individual autonomy. The limits of global teleology are difficult to distinguish here. In the case of Aristotle, the tension was less hard to avoid: the individual and global are two dimensions of the same picture. Now, regarding freedom, the question becomes more problematic, since a strong theory of freedom like Bergson’s requires a great deal of autonomy. This autonomy fits badly sometimes in his view, since the boundaries between Life and individual man are blurred. In fact, Life is still emerging in culture. According to his account, Socrates and Christ express the nature of Life. Given that there is freedom in the world, it is unclear to me *to whom this freedom belongs*.

There is one more thing to add now. Although, as I just said, DS sharpens the problem of freedom, Bergson also nuances his conception of free creation in human beings. In DS he distinguishes between the powerful unforeseen work of the genius, in morals or arts, and the derived creative power by average human beings. Bergson’s global teleology, as we will see, also leaves space for mimesis. In this framework, regular human beings are inspired by the great personalities. This tendency is perfective, since it moves regular people to contribute to and participate in progress. In DS he proposes the model of attraction, imitation or aspiration that is, mainly, a midterm between pure genius, creativity and passivity. This complexifies and nuances his theory of creation.

#### **4.2.b. Global creative immanent teleology: destination of evolution**

Now we have to deal with the notorious idea of the *élan vital*. It appears in EC, the first of Bergson’s books that gives a philosophical account of biological transformism. One can find that as a sort of delay, insofar as Bergson was such an early reader of Herbert Spencer, for whom evolution was so central.<sup>629</sup> For whatever reason, evolution is absent in DI, MM, LR or IM: but in EC he shows a considerable knowledge of the subject.<sup>630</sup> Bergson was a lifelong reader of Darwin too and knew his work quite well.<sup>631</sup> Furthermore, the book shows very well

---

<sup>629</sup> “Intro.I” in PM, p. 12.

<sup>630</sup> The best study on this is François, Arnaud. “Les sources biologiques de *L’Évolution créatrice*.” *Anales bergsoniennes*. PUF, Paris, 2008.

<sup>631</sup> For Bergson and Darwin: “Bergson and Darwin: for an immanentist to an emergentist approach to evolution”, Paul-Antoine Miquel, *Substance*, vol. 36, number, 3, 2007. For the historical relation between Bergson and Darwin (Bergson’s early readings) see Magda Costa Carvalho and M. Patrão Neves. “Building the

the philosophical debate around 1907, called by one historian “the eclipse of Darwinism”.<sup>632</sup> The natural selection theory was hardly revised and criticized by different biological trends: French and American Neo-Lamarckians, Spencerians, monists, mutationists, the defenders of orthogenesis, Weissman genetics and vitalists. EC echoes all of these trends and many others.

Bergson finishes EC.I by addressing the nature of the global tendency he calls Life and in EC.II Bergson considers the natural history of Life on earth by splitting into divergent branches or lineages. Conry, Kanamori and François have linked Bergson’s view with other thinkers of Life, in a number of cases, with teleological evolutionary biologists like Edward D. Cope.<sup>633</sup> As Barthélémy Madaule has said: “In the Lamarckian concept of effort, capable of creating an organ through the exercise of a function, Bergson found an analogue to the creative power of his ‘vital impulse’. To the mechanistic Lamarck, whom he knew and quoted, Bergson preferred the Lamarck of the will favored by Cope”.<sup>634</sup>

Teleology is a flexible philosophical model, as Bergson himself said: his view of global evolutionary teleology has certainly important traits in common with Cope’s view. However, my aim will be to analyze Bergson’s approach with regard to our already gained conceptual background. This section is quite long, and I have structured it in the following way, partially following EC’s discourse. First, we will see the main elements of the *élan*: it is one tendency, and its features are simplicity and unpredictability. Afterwards I will highlight one problem criticized by Bergson in the philosophy of biology: uni-linearity. Then I will discuss pluri-linearity, which implies more features: namely, divergence, which reinforces unpredictability in my reading. As a result, I will claim that Bergson combines the Aristotelian natural scale and the Darwinian tree of life. He also combines primary teleology of regularity and secondary teleology of contingency. In the next three subsections I address Bergson’s history of Life. We will end this subsection with the paradigmatic global teleologic image of the cosmic army.

#### - Life is a tendency: unity, simplicity, unpredictability

With regard to the idea of tendency we can recall that in EC.I Bergson quotes Paul Janet and his book *Les causes finales* on the case of the evolutionary formation of the eye in biology. The “destination of the eye” is Bergson’s last example of Life in EC.I. The defenders of teleology recalled the case of the progressive formation of the eye: it was at that time a controversial case. The accidental and slow progressive formation of something so sophisticated and apparently coordinated as an eye seems like a weak response for the teleologist.<sup>635</sup> In this context, Bergson starts by discussing a finalist perspective.

“Two points are equally striking in an organ like the eye: the complexity of its structure and the simplicity of its function. The eye is composed of distinct parts, such as the sclerotic, the cornea, the

---

‘True Evolutionism’: Darwin's Impact on Henri Bergson's Thought”. *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia*. T. 66, Fasc. 3, Evolução, Ética e Cultura / Evolution, Ethics and Culture, 2010.

<sup>632</sup> Bowler, Peter. *The eclipse of Darwinism*: Op. cit.

<sup>633</sup> For Bergson and Cope: Conry, Yvette. *L'évolution créatrice. Investigations critiques*. L'Harmattan, 2005 and Kanamori, Osamu. Also “L'évolution créatrice et le néo-Lamarckisme” in *L'évolution créatrice. Études & Commentaires*. Ed. A. François. Vrin, Paris, 2010. Also François in VVAA. “Commentaire”, *L'évolution créatrice. Études & Commentaires*. Ed. A. François. Vrin, Paris, 2010.

<sup>634</sup> Barthélemy-Madaule, Madaleine. *Lamarck, the mythical precursor..* Trad. M. H. Shank. MIT, 1982, p. 137.

<sup>635</sup> Janet, Paul. *Les causes finales*. Germer Bailliere, Paris, 1876. For the eye and evolution see Darwin, Charles *The origin of species*. Chapter VI. „Difficulties on theory“. For one echo in the late XIX century philosophy see Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Morgenröte* §122. KSA, 3, Walter de Gruyter, München, 2016.

retina, the crystalline lens, etc. In each of these parts the detail is infinite. The retina alone comprises three layers of nervous elements—multipolar cells, bipolar cells, visual cells—each of which has its individuality and is undoubtedly a very complicated organism: so complicated, indeed, is the retinal membrane in its intimate structure, that no simple description can give an adequate idea of it. The mechanism of the eye is, in short, composed of an infinity of mechanisms, all of extreme complexity. Yet vision is one simple fact. As soon as the eye opens, the visual act is effected. Just because the act is simple, the slightest negligence on the part of nature in the building of the infinitely complex machine would have made vision impossible. This contrast between the complexity of the organ and the unity of the function is what gives us pause”.<sup>636</sup>

According to Bergson, the accidental and progressive formation of the eye is highly improbable. But here comes the moment for Bergson distance himself from the finalist thinkers:

”Just so with the relation of the eye to vision. There is in vision *more* than the component cells of the eye and their mutual coordination: in this sense, neither mechanism nor finalism go far enough. But, in another sense, mechanism and finalism both go too far, for they attribute to Nature the most formidable of the labors of Hercules in holding that she has exalted to the simple act of vision an infinity of infinitely complex elements, whereas Nature has had no more trouble in making an eye than I have in lifting my hand. Nature's simple act has divided itself automatically into an infinity of elements which are then found to be coordinated to one idea, just as the movement of my hand has dropped an infinity of points which are then found to satisfy one equation”.<sup>637</sup>

As I interpret it, Bergson does not deny the finalistic element, that is, the natural global tendency *toward the best*. He states that for nature there is no rational coordination behind the eye's structure: nature neither thinks nor deliberates. Bergson defends an immanent understanding of Life and there are neither demiurges nor divine plans at stake. Some anthropomorphic features for establishing analogies are just discarded. As we know, the model of immanent teleology can be rigorous regarding the analogies. Not any analogy is accepted. Hence, nature is neither a plan nor a plan maker. I think that when Bergson says that vision is “more” than the compounds and the coordination of them, he is referring to the immanent spontaneity towards perfection. Sometimes Bergson features the tendency towards vision in Life as a simple force. Notice that simplicity in Bergson is opposed to matter (since matter is always composed). It is by no means opposed to teleology. The simple wholeness that articulates the parts and pushes it spontaneously is the *élan*.

Concerning the question of the eye, we can see that Bergson gives a lot of importance to the similarities between different lineages of Life. He says that the idea that such distant lineages such as mollusks (scallops, namely) and vertebrates have developed the eye is illustrative. This similarity between mollusks and vertebrates is for Bergson a sort of proof. They are, as he will say in EC further on, different variations of the same theme: “progress toward vision”.<sup>638</sup> He writes: “For this reason, no matter how distant two animal species may be from each other, if the progress toward vision has gone equally far in both, there is the same visual organ in each case, for the form of the organ only expresses the degree in which the exercise of the function has been obtained”.<sup>639</sup>

---

<sup>636</sup> EC, p. 88.

<sup>637</sup> EC, p. 91.

<sup>638</sup> The idea of the “variation” appears in EC.II with regard to instincts and entomology. We have seen the case of the wasp above in 4.1.

<sup>639</sup> EC, p. 96.

After this approach, Bergson seems to be aware of his ambiguous position.

“But, in speaking of a progress toward vision, are we not coming back to the old notion of finality? It would be so, undoubtedly, if this progress required the conscious or unconscious idea of *an end to be attained*”.<sup>640</sup>

Divergence, progress and simplicity are features of a new kind of finalism and immanence and perfectivism are definitely part of the old finalism. Bergson claims to overcome finalism by his own doctrine, but progress-toward-vision still sounds pretty finalist.

So, since there are neither forms in nature nor god as general aspiration, there is no “old notion of finality”. Bergson holds that the progress is “effected in virtue of the original impetus of life; it is implied in this movement itself, and that is just why it is found in independent lines of evolution”. Bergson is referring to the “old notion of finality” with something transcendental. But we know that the old notion of finality, if Aristotelian and not Platonic, is to be understood as immanent. However, Bergson thinks that progress toward vision is not old finality. In a way, that is reasonable. As we know well, the context of the evolutionary progress of the eye is just alien to ancient world-view.

The next passage to quote is, to be sure, problematic and unclear. But it is important for us now, for the philosopher seems to seek to clarify his position regarding the problem of the “progress toward vision”.

“[a] If now we are asked why and how it is implied therein, we reply that life is, more than anything else, *a tendency to act on inert matter*. [b] The direction of this action *is not predetermined*; hence the *unforeseeable variety of forms which life*, in evolving, sows along its path. [c] But this action always presents, to some extent, the character of contingency; it implies at least a rudiment of choice. [d] Now a choice involves the anticipatory idea of several possible actions. Possibilities of action must therefore be marked out for the living being before the action itself. *Visual perception is nothing else: the visible outlines of bodies are the design of our eventual action on them. Vision will be found, therefore, in different degrees in the most diverse animals*, and it will appear in the same complexity of structure wherever it has reached the same degree of intensity”.<sup>641</sup>

Section [a] is clear for me, and is in fact the basis of my claim. Saying that Life is “a tendency to act on inert matter” is, to some extent teleology. That is to say that the essential fulfillment of Life is a certain function. In our context, it means that the more indetermination Life introduces in the material world, the more this goal is fulfilled. Section [b] is more or less easy to understand, from my perspective. The natural tendency of Life remains but its outcomes are unforeseeable. Shortly before, regarding human goals, we faced the same paradox. Being a complete, joyful human being for Bergson implies fulfilling a natural goal, but a human natural goal is not concrete because the goal just can be formulated as follows: the *télos* is to create a *télos*. This implies a certain degree of unpredictability, but not a complete one. Given human form, human culture, and the past, newness is needed for the sake of attaining personal perfection. Unlike the previous one, section [c] is a bit unclear to me. On the one hand, Bergson talks about contingency. The contingent events are by force unforeseeable, so to this extent it completes [b]. But it is the idea of “rudiment of choice” which causes uncertainty in my vision. It connects the sentence with [d]. In [d] a number of statements remain obscure, but at least I can identify the perfective element: action. Vision is a way of acting. Vision is action upon the world. To this extent, it introduces indetermination in the world. That is, the *eye fulfills the original tendency of acting on inert matter*.

---

<sup>640</sup> EC, p. 96.

<sup>641</sup> EC, p. 96, italics are mine.

It is an evolutionary immanent global teleology. This tendency is simple, unpredictable and contingent. Intellectual models are useless for thinking about it, since unpredictability leaves room for a high variability of the outcomes. This evolutionary immanent global teleology implies one clear idea of *télos*: indetermination. Ultimately, the different degrees of complexity and intensity refer to degrees of indetermination. The more indetermination an organic structure can produce, the more complex it is. Spontaneity guides the animal's use of vision. The more complex is the central nervous system of a being, the *more spontaneous* it becomes. The apex of this scale is to be found in humans, where spontaneity opens the stage for freedom. That is, the human brain is to human freedom what the eye is for mollusks and vertebrates.

Bergson asks rhetorically “are we not coming back to the old notion of finality?” I think so, but only partially. Bergson's modern notion of finality adds new elements. Namely, Bergson introduces unpredictability. When he ends the chapter by writing that he has defined his “attitude toward mechanism on the one hand and finalism on the other”, this affinity with finalism, clear in the case of the progress toward vision, remains vague. I'm sure that this sort of ambiguity in Bergson has misled many commentators.

#### - Uni-linearity of the tendency: the natural scale

EC.II, entitled “The divergent directions of the evolution of life. Torpor, intelligence, instinct” makes my philosophical point even clearer, even though, Bergson seems to put distance between his view and finalism. Furthermore, in this chapter of EC Bergson finds in Aristotle the founder of the scheme of understanding Life, even for the evolutionary philosophers. I will start with that.

As we saw, when Bergson was developing these theories for EC, he taught a number of courses on Aristotle or Aristotelism at the Collège de France, and furthermore we already know too that he was deeply familiarized with the philosopher. Aristotle also occupied an important role in his non-monographic but historical courses at the Collège, such as the recently published *Histoire de l'idée du temps* and *L'évolution de l'idée de liberté*. In EC he is the more quoted author with Darwin, something quite outstanding in a book that is supposed to be on the theory of evolution in 1907. The centrality of Aristotle comes up in EC.II. The Greek philosopher is the founder of the concept of “natural scale” which is the basis, according to Bergson, of the conventional view of Life and Biology.

*“The cardinal error which, from Aristotle onwards, has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature, is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life, three successive degrees of the development of one and the same tendency, whereas they are three divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew. The difference between them is not a difference of intensity, nor, more generally, of degree, but of kind”*.<sup>642</sup>

The second text just completes the same idea:

*“If our biology [Bergsonian biology] was still that of Aristotle, if it regarded the series of living beings as unilinear, if it showed us the whole of life evolving towards intelligence and passing, to that end, through sensibility and instinct (...) But one of the clearest results of biology has been to show that evolution has taken place along divergent lines”*.<sup>643</sup>

---

<sup>642</sup> EC, p.135, the italics aren't mine.

<sup>643</sup> EC, p. 174.

As we will see, the context of the first reference to Aristotle is the relationship between the three kingdoms, and in the second it is focused on the relation of instinct, the animal kingdom, and intelligence to which only humans belong. The main thing for us now is that the idea of “different degrees of life” is, according to Bergson, the mental *vice* of most “philosophies of nature”. As usual, I am afraid, the author does not specify which philosophical currents he is actually talking about. Arnaud suggests that Bergson is referring to Spencer, which is perfectly possible, but nonetheless uncertain.<sup>644</sup> The crucial point for us is that within Bergson’s historical perspective Aristotle is the founder. I cited the two passages in the Aristotelian corpus in 2.1.c and, then, on Bergson, in 3.2.a I talked about the idea of making that vertical scale of nature a horizontal process. Now is time to nuance that claim.

Although in EC.I the role of Aristotle is non-existent, in EC.II his name appears in the spotlight. Biological thought is extremely close to what Bergson considers the “Aristotelian theory of nature”.<sup>645</sup> Bergson needs to confront not orthogenesis, Darwinians, Hugo De Vries, French or American neo-Lamarckians, as he did in EC.I, but rather old Aristotle. However, he does not quote his sources. In fact, he is not talking about Aristotle, but about evolutionary biology, without quoting anyone in concrete. It is difficult to attribute to Aristotle the idea of difference in degree/kind, since they are absent in his work, to my knowledge.

Hence plants, animals and humans are the three realms, the three “successive degrees” in the same unilinear “tendency”. They compose the conceptual scale, the “cardinal error which has vitiated most of the philosophies of nature”, in Bergson’s opinion. Up to this point, we have seen that while Aristotle is the founder of biological thought, he is also the *founder of a vice*.

Before we check what Bergson’s response consists in, I want to say something about his historical remark. As we have seen, according to EC.II, evolutionary philosophers use Aristotle’s model. It shows the importance that Bergson gives to ancient thought in general and, more concretely, to Aristotle. It is important to notice that Bergson used to refer to the metaphysical sources of contemporary science in modern philosophy (Descartes, Spinoza or Laplace), but ancient ascendancy is much rarer in Bergson. By stating so, if I am not wrong, here Bergson constitutes a precedent of the theory explained by Arthur Lovejoy in the previous chapters of *The great chain of being*, published in 1936.<sup>646</sup> That is, according to Bergson, the natural scale held by Aristotle in three basic stages (the nutritive or plant one; the instinctive or animal one; which involves desire, imagination and locomotion in Aristotle; and, finally, the rational or human one) is apparently, still alive among scientists in 1907. Now I explain why this is so.

Bergson holds that, in general terms, the philosophers of Life took this vertical scale, which shows three successive degrees of perfection and interpreted it in a horizontal or historical way. In Aristotle, for sure, there is an a-historical perspective. In this way, he is opposed to evolutionary positions. But Aristotle held, as we have seen, a principle of continuity, which means that, in the sublunary realm, there is a progressive ascension from the lowest beings to human beings. According to this vision, intelligence is the apex of sublunary nature.

---

<sup>644</sup> EC.II, footnote 116: “Il s’agit de s’opposer à la philosophie spencerienne de la nature”. EC, PUF, 2009, p. 457.

<sup>645</sup> EC, p. 175.

<sup>646</sup> Note that 20 years before the publication of this important historical work, Lovejoy read EC and commented it in 1914 in *Bergson and romantic evolutionism*. UCP, California, 1914. Some of the ideas of this early essay appeared again in 1936. Therefore, in EC there are substantial elements of the so called “great chain of being”.

As I said, Bergson thought that this scale can be expressed in evolutionary terms as a trend or, as Bergson himself says, as a *unilinear tendency*. For certain authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the history of Life is the material succession from the non-living to plants, from plants to animals, and from animals to humans. Hence, the degrees in the scale become epochs, and the epochs, degrees. We have then the epoch of plants (nutrition), the epoch of animals (instinct) and the epoch of humans (intelligence) that make up the whole history of Life.

Bergson affirms that this conception of “the series of living beings as unilinear” is wrong. Bergson is positive. We can figure out why. It seems that Bergson interprets Aristotle in the following way: since there is a *scale of perfection*, instinct is considered an impoverished intelligence. Just as plant nutrition is considered an imperfect instinct. In historical terms, this general progress towards intelligence is close to the type of finalism he is, actually, trying to avoid in chapter two. The Aristotelian scale leads to unilinear vision of Life, a unilinear vision of Life leads, in evolutionary terms, to a non pluralistic view of nature. Maybe it is Spenser’s. Furthermore, that would involve *intellect-centrism*. And he, Bergson, thinks that human intuition (at stake in EC.II) has something of the animal branch too (what he calls sympathy).

Bergson seems to prefer a pluralistic way of thinking of evolution. There are two Bergsonian concepts to note at this point. One is divergence and the other is the idea of difference in kind. I will show how he combines the Aristotelian model and the Darwinian one. *He does not avoid the Aristotelian scale, but, once again, he reforms it.*

#### - Pluri-linear tendency: the tree of life

Bergson states that “one of the clearest results of biology has been to show that evolution has taken place along divergent lines”.<sup>647</sup> He uses the term “divergence”, which is, apparently supported by empirical discoveries. It will have an important role in his philosophy of history. The concept will become “dichotomy” in his later work on history DS.IV, as we will see further on. Apparently, the main philosophers of Life were at that time defenders of the scale in time, as we saw, but not of this “result” of biology.

Divergence means that, over a long span of time, in a biological realm, Life splits into divergent branches. The concept contains, for his defender at least, two positive ideas that may reinforce contingency in nature. First of all, behind divergence is the branching pattern. This is the paradigm of the tree of life, part of the Darwinian world-view from the beginning. This image of a “tree of life” is referred to by Darwin himself in the first edition of *The Origin of Species*.<sup>648</sup> In fact, Bergson mentions it in EC.I.<sup>649</sup> To this, Bergson adds an element

---

<sup>647</sup> EC, p. 174, also p. 117.

<sup>648</sup> Darwin himself says that previous biologists have used the very same image in the ending paragraph of Chapter IV of his famous book: “*The affinities of all the beings of the same class have sometimes been represented by a great tree.* I believe this simile largely speaks the truth. The green and budding twigs may represent existing species; and those produced during former years may represent the long succession of extinct species. At each period of growth all the growing twigs have tried to branch out on all sides, and to overtop and kill the surrounding twigs and branches, in the same manner as species and groups of species have at all times overmastered other species in the great battle for life. The limbs divided into great branches, and these into lesser and lesser branches, were themselves once, when the tree was young, budding twigs; and this connexion of the former and present buds by ramifying branches may well represent the classification of all extinct and living species in groups subordinate to groups. Of the many twigs which flourished when the tree was a mere bush, only two or three, now grown into great branches, yet survive and bear the other branches (...) As buds

that was certainly not in the gradualist evolutionary framework of Darwin: suddenness. Bergson thinks that this splitting is not necessarily slow and progressive, but sudden. He takes this idea from Hugo De Vries and the contemporary mutationists.<sup>650</sup> Bergson defends the tree but challenges one of Darwin's mantras: *Natura non facit saltus* ("Nature does not make jumps").

Divergence expresses the idea of *unpredictability*, one idea that he raised in talking about the unique simple tendency. Now it gains a clearer form, since divergence reveals the concept of contingency better and more intuitively than unilinearity.

Along with divergence there is a second concept that I mentioned as "difference in kind". This difference has to be noted in the evolutionary tendency that guides each branch:

"Attempts to define the two kingdoms strictly have always come to naught. There is not a single property of vegetable life that is not found, in some degree, in certain animals; not a single characteristic feature of the animal that has not been seen in certain species or at certain moments in the vegetable world. (...) There is no manifestation of life which does not contain, in a rudimentary state (either latent or potential), the essential characters of most other manifestations. The difference is in the proportions. (...) In a word, *the group must not be defined by the possession of certain characters, but by its tendency to emphasize them*. From this point of view, taking tendencies rather than states into account, we find that Plants and animals may be precisely defined and distinguished, and that they correspond to two divergent developments of life".<sup>651</sup>

And this can be extrapolated regarding animals and humans.<sup>652</sup> The same happens with the difference between instinct and intelligence. Bergson says:

"We have seen in the case of vegetable and animal life how they are at once mutually complementary and mutually antagonistic. Now we must show that intelligence and instinct are also opposite and complementary. But let us first explain why we are generally led to regard them as activities of *which one is superior to the other* and based upon it, whereas in reality they are not things of the same order: they have not succeeded one another, *nor can we assign to them different grades*".<sup>653</sup>

According to Bergson, the difference between the three kingdoms is not of degrees, but of kind. Thus, there is no superior faculty. The three kingdoms are parts of Life, and that is because they are in different proportions, in every organism. They take part of the common origin of Life. They come to be by its sudden splitting.

We can go back to the statement that makes Aristotle the founder of a centuries-old misinterpretation.

"Vegetative torpor, instinct, and intelligence—these, then, are the elements that coincided in the vital impulsion common to plants and animals, and which, in the course of a development in which they were made manifest in the most unforeseen forms, have been dissociated by the very fact of their growth. *The cardinal error which, from Aristotle onwards, has vitiated most of the philosophies of*

---

give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with *the great Tree of Life*, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever-branching and beautiful ramifications". *The origin of species*. Chapter IV. Darwin, Charles. *The origin of species*. Chapter IV. Darwin. Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago-London, 1952, p. 64.

<sup>649</sup> EC, p. 43.

<sup>650</sup> EC, p. 63.

<sup>651</sup> EC, p. 106.

<sup>652</sup> EC, p. 136.

<sup>653</sup> EC, pp. 135-136, italics are mine.

*nature, is to see in vegetative, instinctive and rational life, three successive degrees of the development of one and the same tendency, whereas they are three divergent directions of an activity that has split up as it grew. The difference between them is not a difference of intensity, nor, more generally, of degree, but of kind*".<sup>654</sup>

Divergence splits Life into two tendencies first (plants and animals), and subsequently, the animal branch is divided into two, instinct and intelligence. In conclusion, they are just different. If so, that can be interpreted as a pluralistic account. Hence, plants have a chlorophyllin function,<sup>655</sup> animals are mobility and humans express intelligence.

But, if in "the root of life there is an effort to engraft on to the necessity of physical forces the largest possible amount of *indetermination*",<sup>656</sup> then indetermination is a perfective concept, just as the Aristotelian intelligence. This must lead to superiority, necessarily: and only the human beings attain the step further in terms of perfection, or indetermination. That is, *only* humans are free.

What I have not already shown is that Bergson claims the superiority of animals over plants. In short, although Bergson tries to avoid Aristotle's triadic vision of Life, it is still in his work. In EC there is a triadic classification of realms and furthermore there is a hierarchical subordination.

Bergson is one of those "philosophers of nature" that are influenced by Aristotle regarding the question of the scale. In the end, what I am doing is applying to Bergson himself what he says of the uncertain philosophers of Life. But as we have seen Bergson is an original reformer. The importance of the divergence and his hierarchical understanding of evolution produces a new framework.

There is also another essential question to tackle at this point. The Ancient model of immanent primary teleology would find some problems when addressing the notion of *élan vital* for two reasons. First, it involves contingency and it is unpredictable. Second, it happens only once. Every event in natural history takes part in global teleology, but regularity is not the main feature anymore. The model of secondary teleology can help us at this point. In fact, what we have is a mixture of primary and secondary teleology. On the one hand, the tendency of Life is rooted in nature. There is not one form at stake but one natural function, need or tendency, the "*need for creation*" that "strives to introduce into it the largest possible amount of indetermination and liberty".<sup>657</sup>

There, as in a number of places, Bergson is describing a natural tendency of nature. It is natural and regular. The impetus expresses one dimension of nature for Bergson, as we will see in more depth in 4.2.c. Creativity is part of the cosmos, and is expressed in Life. We are for the moment in the realm of primary philosophy. In terms of its domain, it covers the whole of the living beings. Thus, it is global teleology.

But notions like contingency, divergence, creativeness and uniqueness introduce a big distance between this paradigm and the ancient model of immanent teleology. Although the source and tendency of Life is expressed in regular terms, the outcomes of this tendency

---

<sup>654</sup> EC, p. 174.

<sup>655</sup> EC, p. 114.

<sup>656</sup> EC, p. 114.

<sup>657</sup> EC, p. 251, italics are mine. He repeats the idea of the need in EC, p. 261. See 4.2.d.

could not be considered regular. *History of Life is unrepeatable*. It is made by singular creation in singular moments.

This implies that there is *as if* teleology regarding the events within the history of Life, although not regarding Life itself. The plant form, the animal form and, more important for Bergson and for us, the human form are not necessary. They were not contained in any pre-design. Within this framework anthropocentrism is severely mitigated: the human form as such is contingent.<sup>658</sup> When Bergson displays his little histories of Life and humans, he is applying retrospective teleology or secondary teleology. EC.II, CV, DS.II and III contain a narratology with regard to the great deal of contingency involved. At the same time, all the events are selected for the sake of following one precise non-contingent story line: the fulfillment or decay of one original need or exigency: indetermination.

The tree of life coexists with the natural scale and the natural global tendency with indetermination. Now we will see how this mixed model is applied to the data of science.

#### - The scale, the plants and the animals

I claim that in EC.II plants are part of a global historical teleology. They are described in two ways. There is a positive but subordinate one: they are a reservoir of energy to be partially used by others. There is negative interpretation of what plants are: they represent unconsciousness, sleep and torpor in the world. In the best case, plants are for the sake of animals' activity. In the worst, they are deficient animals.

In nature there is complementariness, and not harmony.<sup>659</sup> It is the Bergsonian version of contribution, since harmony was neither perfect nor scientific enough for Bergson, as we saw in 1.1.b. Bergson's global teleology could never be harmonious. Naturally, this complementariness means coordination towards something. Plants have a positive task or function here. They contribute in a certain way to the evolution or progress of Life. Plants are *for their own sake* and *also* are *for the sake of animals*, but, more importantly, animals *are not* for the sake of plants. Bergson openly talks about the natural scale: "What constitutes animality, we said, is the faculty of utilizing a releasing mechanism for the conversion of as much stored-up potential energy as possible into 'explosive' actions. In the beginning the explosion is haphazard, and does not choose its direction (...) But, as we rise in the animal scale, the form of the body itself is observed to indicate a certain number of very definite directions along which the energy travels".<sup>660</sup>

"Explosive actions" are the *télos* of this complementary action, since they imply more indetermination. The evolution of the sensory-motor system *needs* the chlorophyllin function, that's out of question.<sup>661</sup> No one said that the subordinates are not needed (for instance, the soul needs the body).

Animals, as having a tendency, seem to be directed to what Bergson considers the best. And, thanks to complementariness, plants developed their subordinate capacity: amassing energy. Despite divergence, there is still room for complementarity: "series of characters opposed in

---

<sup>658</sup> As I will show in 4.2.c, it is unclear whether contingency comes from Life, spirit or consciousness alone, whether it comes from the clash between Life and matter, or whether it comes from both.

<sup>659</sup> EC, p. 116. On complementariness. EC, p. 117.

<sup>660</sup> EC, p. 120.

<sup>661</sup> EC, p. 123.

certain points, complementary in others, but, whether opposed or complementary, always preserving an appearance of kinship. While the animal evolved, not without accidents along the way, toward a freer and freer expenditure of discontinuous energy, the plant perfected rather its system of accumulation without moving”.<sup>662</sup>

We can read this other example:

“The evolution of life really continues, as we have shown, an initial impulsion: this impulsion, which has determined the development of the chlorophyllian function in the plant and of the sensori-motor system in the animal, brings life to more and more efficient acts by the fabrication and use of more and more powerful explosives”.<sup>663</sup>

It is true that I have extracted this conclusion from the text, and it is not openly stated as subordination. It is logically implied. The negative definition of plants reinforces my position.

In some passages, the plant kingdom is regarded as “torpor” (in French, “torpeur”). We have seen one sentence above. Bergson compares “vegetative torpor” with intelligence and instinct. To some extent, torpor as such is a negative feature. Torpor means lethargy. It is a lack, while instinct and intelligence are not. “Though the plant is distinguished from the animal by fixity and insensibility”, Bergson says, “movement and consciousness sleep in it as recollections which may waken”.<sup>664</sup> Plants sleep. If one compares this with the heroic march of the animal kingdom towards mankind, one realizes that: “the vegetable falling asleep in immobility, the animal, on the contrary, becoming more and more awake and marching on to the conquest of a nervous system”.<sup>665</sup>

Notice that, as I quoted in 2.1.c “Analogy consciousness/general consciousness”, the “elements of a tendency” are like “psychic states”.<sup>666</sup> In this case, the psychic state is that of decay. Bergson clearly thinks so when he says that “the animal kingdom threatened with torpor, secured that, on some points at least, it should rouse itself up and move forward”.<sup>667</sup> When Bergson applies plant features to animal lineages he talks about parasites.<sup>668</sup>

In conclusion, the plant kingdom is teleologically subordinated to animals. Bergson writes in EC.II that he is “more particularly interested” in animals.<sup>669</sup> The reason is quite obvious: the scope of his inquiry is mankind, and animals are so to say closer to mankind than plants. Plants have their own goal, as any other living being according to immanent teleology. Secondly, there is a complementary goal: that of contribution to progress. Bergson states that plants and their tendency is different in kind. Furthermore, they are also inferior and the plant form, like the other forms of kingdoms, genera and species as such, is also an expression of contingency in nature.

#### - The scale and humans

---

<sup>662</sup> EC, p. 116.

<sup>663</sup> EC, p. 245-246.

<sup>664</sup> EC, p. 119.

<sup>665</sup> EC, p. 130.

<sup>666</sup> See the in DI he said that states of consciousness are like organisms in DI, p. 118.

<sup>667</sup> EC, p. 132.

<sup>668</sup> EC, p. 109. On fungus, the “abortive children of the vegetable world”. EC, p. 107 for the insectivorous plants.

<sup>669</sup> EC, p. 119.

The latest vertebrate, the human being, seems to be *one* of the two culminating points of evolution,<sup>670</sup> but, in the end, it is *the* culminating point. *Despite of the rich plurality of the branching pattern and the room made for contingency, in the end, the scale persists.* Between animal knowledge and human knowledge there is a difference of kind, and not a difference of degree, as we saw in 3.2.b. In this case *kind* means also superiority. He says that “science claims to resolve instinct completely either into *intelligent* actions, or into mechanisms built up piece-by-piece like those combined by our *intelligence*”.<sup>671</sup> There is a difference in kind, and not of degree, and we can find it to be so in our consciousness. The rest of our instinct shows it to be so.

We can ask whether instinct is situated in Bergson in a lower level than intelligence. In EC intelligence is more important than instinct in at least one sense. It means invention, freedom and intuition, and instinct just shares some features in common with intuition. Bergson considers his doctrine “a philosophy that attempts to reabsorb intellect in intuition”,<sup>672</sup> and not instinct. We should not overemphasize the role of instinct in EC, which would be a misguided reading.

Since Bergson’s approach is based on analogy, we find in our mind sleep, instinct, intelligence and intuition. Since Bergson’s view is deeply hierarchical he establishes different degrees, depending on the ontological importance that he gives to each one.

It is time to ask whether Bergson avoids the conception of the natural scale within his own vision. My answer is clearly negative. In Bergson there is a scale of living beings, but developed in time. There is an epoch of plants, and epoch of animals, and an epoch of intelligence and, more important for Bergson, of intuition.

The different realms/faculties are different in kind and they appear by splits, divergences or dichotomies. But there is still a gradation. Each degree implies *better* efficiency, that is, *closer to perfection*. It’s difficult to know what Aristotle would say about the idea of difference in kind and evolution, but in his corpus there are degrees of perfection. The ultimate one is god and in the infralunary world the ultimate one is the human philosopher. In Bergson there are degrees of perfection, and the ultimate one is the creative spiritual hero, and before him the regular human being.

I would say that Bergson does not avoid the “scale model” by just saying that every realm is not more or less perfect, but *different* in nature or kind. First, Bergson’s text implies that plants, represented by two faculties, torpor and the accumulation of energy, are “for the sake of” animals, that is: animal movement and explosion of energy. Animals are *superior* to plants: they are placed by Bergson in an upper level of the scale. He himself mentions that scale, not just here in EC, but before in MM.<sup>673</sup> When a lineage becomes increasingly vegetative, it means that, for instance, it becomes parasitic.<sup>674</sup>

It is not totally clear whether Bergson considers intelligence *better* than instinct in this work, though I believe he tends to dismiss this equality here and, later, openly in EC. However, it is clear that intuition is in an *upper degree, over instinct and intellect*. In a way, it is like a synthesis of both. Part of the epistemological discourse of EC.II is for the sake of this idea.

---

<sup>670</sup> EC, pp. 133-134.

<sup>671</sup> EC, p. 174.

<sup>672</sup> EC, p. 270.

<sup>673</sup> See 2.1.a.

<sup>674</sup> See EC, pp. 112-113.

The important aspect here is that intuition, which involves freedom, is *exclusively possessed by human beings* (I show that in detail in 3.2.b).

Thus, Bergson does not reject the natural scale. The scale is to be found in many passages of his corpus, but he *reforms* it. He reforms the scale. First, he wants to make it a product of an unpredictable power. The divergence does it. The difference in kind stresses the same idea: unilinearity reduces reality. But at the same time, Bergson doesn't avoid the idea of perfection or perfectibility. The energetic reservoir of plants, the energetic explosion of the central nervous system and the faculty of intelligence which leads to intuition can be perfectly understood in terms of perfection. Thus, nutrition or torpor, instinct or sensibility and intelligence and intuition form a new sequence. The main novelty regarding Aristotle is the addition of intuition and, maybe, the closeness between instinct and intelligence.

We have already seen the teleological relation between plants and animals. We saw the difference between animals and humans. These three stages are different in kind, according to Bergson. But this difference is articulated in teleological terms, since every step is for the sake of the next one. And the next one is for the sake of the whole, that is, the general *télos*. This, I insist, *does not reduce the goal of individuals or different branches of Life*. As we know, immanent teleology recognizes the intrinsic value of all kinds of life since it is alive. Every kind of living being tends to some kind of perfection. Like in Aristotle, individual teleology and global teleology are compatible in Bergson. The latter even makes primary teleology and secondary teleology compatible.

#### - Global teleology and the paradigm of the cosmic army

After talking about the simple tendency of the *élan* (EC.I) and its divergences (EC.II), in the last section of EC.III Bergson comes back to address Life. Now he tackles the topic in the most general dimension; there are no biological concrete issues like the eye or the relation between plants and animals.

Now Bergson emphasizes the most important features: the hierarchy and the idea of progress or emergence. Bergson's hierarchical scale has to be interpreted in global teleological and historical or horizontal terms. The three stages form a scale in time, that is, a progress. The ultimate *télos* is, again, indetermination or freedom. That is the "exigence" of the whole universe, and *it is its tendency because it is its natural tendency*.

In the following passage we can see the cosmic approach of EC.III. The natural global tendency that he calls Life is now seen within the solar system:

"As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided movement of descent which is materiality itself, so all organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first origins of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and in itself indivisible. All the living hold together, and all yield to the same tremendous push".<sup>675</sup>

I think it is already clear that progress "from the humblest to the highest" can be understood in at least three stages. Their difference in kind and the splits in Life cannot avoid perfectivism.

---

<sup>675</sup> EC, p. 270.

The next passage that I will quote closes EC.III. In a way, it can be said that it closes the book, since EC.IV is one addition, taken from one course in the history of philosophy. In terms of doctrine, the following text ends Bergson's essay. It reaches the widest and most panoramic scope. In this central moment of the book, the idea of the cosmic hierarchy is illustrated by the image of the army. There are strong Aristotelian echoes here. As we know, the most important example of global teleology in Aristotle is to be found in the last chapter of *Met.*XII, where precisely the whole cosmos and god were understood as one army (*stráteuma*) and its general (*strategós*).<sup>676</sup> This is how Aristotle illustrates the cosmic order or *taxis*.<sup>677</sup> We also know that Bergson taught this passage at the Collège.

The army of Bergson has no god as leader. It seems, better, that mankind is the official in charge of the great parade of nature. There is no divine entity inspiring order and perfection in nature. Bergson's army becomes an emergentist metaphor, taken from the ancient world. It develops the idea of a global teleology, as we saw it in 2.2.b. In fact, he advances the "riding metaphor" in EC.I. There he says that "the essential thing is the *continuous progress* indefinitely pursued, an invisible progress, on which each visible organism rides (*chevauche*) during the short interval of time given it to live".<sup>678</sup>

Miquel says in his commentary of EC that "the "substantialist and spiritualist conception of duration and life" appears "particularly" in the closing paragraphs of EC.III.<sup>679</sup> Surely Miquel wants to be far from the "spiritualist lobby" (Troitignon) among Bergsonists.<sup>680</sup> It seems that Miquel's "aporetic reading" of EC.III does not emphasize this passage because, substantialism and spiritualism in Bergson are not to be emphasized. This conception is not far from Pearson's claims in the two articles quoted in 1. Whatever substantialism and spiritualism is for Miquel, I consider that the last *suspicious* lines of EC.III will complete our enquiry. I do not consider the last paragraphs of EC.III to come from a sort of mystical access point, but to be coherent summary of the essay, although, obviously, expressed in a lyrical form. It shows a clear example of evolutionary global teleology:

"[1] The animal takes its stand on the plant, [2] man bestrides animality, and [3] the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each of us in an overwhelming charge able to beat down every resistance and clear the most formidable obstacles, perhaps even death".<sup>681</sup>

The three stages of Life are clearly present in [1] and [2]. Although it is uncertain for me what Bergson means with beating down "perhaps even death", there is, at least, one thing that is clear enough: the passage talks about three different degrees of evolution and ontology. Bergson notes three roles for three different types of being. They are situated hierarchically,

---

<sup>676</sup>See 2.2.b on *Met.* XII.10.1075a10-25.

<sup>677</sup> The passage from *Met.* XII echoes his earlier dialogue *On philosophy*, Ed. Ross, 12b. Pseudo-Aristotle uses the metaphor it in *On the universe* (*De mundo* 399a35-b10). Also Plotinus echoes Aristotle's army in *En.*III.2.4-11.

<sup>678</sup> EC, p. 27. For the French, EC, 2009, p. 27.

<sup>679</sup> Miquel, Pierre-Antoine. "Chapitre III. De la signification de la vie. L'ordre de la nature et la forme de l'intelligence". *L'évolution créatrice. Études & Commentaires*. Ed. A. François. Vrin, Paris, 2010, p. 179.

<sup>680</sup> Troitignon, Pierre. *L'idée de vie chez Bergson*, PUF, Paris, 1968, p. 5.

<sup>681</sup> EC, pp. 270-271. On animals as useful forces, at this point, he had already given another hint: "The animals, however distant they may be from our species, however hostile to it, have none the less been useful traveling companions, on whom consciousness has unloaded whatever encumbrances it was dragging along, and who have enabled it to rise, in man, to heights from which it sees an unlimited horizon open again before it". EC, p. 267.

from “the humblest to the highest”. This army has no general. But the leader of the army will be one of the topics of DS. I will come back to this matter onwards.

We can see from the passage in EC.III that plants are for the sake of animals [1] and animals are for the sake of humanity [2], since it “gallops” *on* “animality”. However, it is not a teleological reading of the natural scale as we found in the Stoics.<sup>682</sup> I think [1] refers to that by “taking stand”, but also implies a sequence. Here animality splits from the unconsciousness of the plant world. In the same way, [2] I presume that taming and feeding animals is legitimate, but the main aspect there is that the central nervous system has been developed through animality. The human body is in a certain way the outcome of it. This development should be understood as a process towards freedom. It could have been in another way. Unpredictability implies contingency. But although there is room for contingency in Bergson, there is always implied the same global tendency towards freedom. There is progress, although it can be seen retrospectively, since the possible forms of Life were infinite and the success was uncertain.

To some extent Bergson’s approach is anthropocentric and to some extent is not. In Bergson, new more perfect forms could come to earth. Man could lose its centrality. I agree with Troitignon in that “le but de la nature n’était pas l’homme, mais le but essentiel de l’homme est de se comprendre et de se dépasser”. I add another useful remark: “Nous sommes pourtant la fin que la nature s’assigne à elle-même à travers les êtres naturels que nous sommes”.<sup>683</sup>

This is a new variety of what I called in 2.1.c mitigated anthropocentrism. Human beings are the best on earth because they have the most important thing on earth: indetermination. Human beings are more creative than any other being, and this implies that even the analogy between wholeness and personal freedom can be established. They are better than the rest for the sake of indetermination. They contribute by their own actions to progress. And progress is the essence of the cavalry march of Life and culture.

EC, CV and DS coincide in saying the same thing. In the first one, Bergson says: “With man, consciousness breaks the chain. In man, and in *man alone*, it sets itself free. The whole history of life until man has been that of the effort of consciousness to raise matter (...) But, everywhere except in man, consciousness has let itself be caught in the net whose meshes it tried to pass through”.<sup>684</sup>

In the same page of CV Bergson writes: “In *man alone*, especially among the best of mankind, the vital movement pursues its way without hindrance thrusting through that work of art, the human body, which it has created on its way, the creative current of the moral life”,<sup>685</sup> and that “Human societies, *alone*, have kept full in view both the ends to be attained”. This is the essential aspiration of Life. In DS he just repeats the idea: “the creative effort progressed successfully *only* along that line of evolution which ended in man”.<sup>686</sup>

But then, finally, I have to address what Bergson does mean when he says in EC:

---

<sup>682</sup> See 2.1.c.

<sup>683</sup> Troitignon, Pierre. *L’idée de vie chez Bergson*, PUF, Paris, 1968, pp.10-11.

<sup>684</sup> EC, p. 264.

<sup>685</sup> CV, in ES, p. 32

<sup>686</sup> DS, p. 209.

“[a] It is in this quite special sense that man is the “term” and the “end” of evolution. Life, we have said, *transcends finality as it transcends the other categories*. [b] It is essentially a current sent through matter, drawing from it what it can. *There has not, therefore, properly speaking, been any project or plan*. [c] On the other hand, it is abundantly evident that the *rest of nature is not for the sake of man: we struggle like the other species, we have struggled against other species*. [d] Moreover, if the evolution of life had encountered *other accidents in its course, if, thereby, the current of life had been otherwise divided, we should have been, physically and morally, far different from what we are*. [e] For these various reasons it would be wrong to regard humanity, such as we have it before our eyes, as *pre-figured in the evolutionary movement*. It cannot even be said to be the outcome of the whole of evolution, for evolution has been accomplished on several divergent lines, and while the human species is at the end of one of them, other lines have been followed with other species at their end. [f] It is in a quite different sense that we hold *humanity to be the ground of evolution*”.<sup>687</sup>

It is now the moment to face the problem whether there is any contradiction contained in Bergson’s account. In [a] he shows us that teleological terminology is still useful for him, but, again, in a special sense. What Bergson rejects definitely is to “regard humanity as pre-figured in the evolutionary movement”. According to [b] there is no transcendent plan, that is, *evolution is immanent*. According to [d] there is contingency, so we humans “should have been, physically and morally, far different from what we are”. There is more to be said regarding [c] and [e].

Bergson says in [d] that we “struggle like the other species, we have struggled against other species” and then, that is because the “rest of nature is not for the sake of man”. He adds in [e] that “evolution has been accomplished on several divergent lines, and while the human species is at the end of one of them”. But I don’t think that the struggle is necessarily a sign of teleology or not. Furthermore, he holds in other place, as we already know, that human beings have dominated the other species. Domination is the result of the struggle. It is, anyway, [e] the most problematic statement. In the two paragraphs above we have seen that for Bergson in EC, CV and DS man *alone* is the real fulfillment of nature, so in light of those affirmations we can ponder the term “accomplished” and the expression “one of them”, regarding the lineage that leads to human beings. But we have seen that man is not one of the ends of nature and that nature hasn’t attained its perfection through any other line.

I will quote one more statement from EC, really similar to those from EC, CV and DS three paragraphs before, but with some useful insight regarding our current logical problem. It is, in fact, where Bergson wants to address the mentioned “special sense” in which “man is the ‘term’ and the ‘end’ of evolution”.

“From our point of view, life appears in its entirety as an immense wave which, starting from a centre, spreads outwards, and which on almost the whole of its circumference is stopped and converted into oscillation: at *one single point the obstacle has been forced*, the impulsion has passed freely. *It is this freedom that the human form registers*. Everywhere *but in man*, consciousness has had to come to a stand; in man *alone* it has kept on its way. Man, then, *continues the vital movement indefinitely*, although he does not draw along with him all that life carries on itself. On other lines of evolution there have travelled other tendencies which life implied, and of which, since everything interpenetrates, man has, doubtless, kept something, but of which he has kept only very little. *It is as if a vague and formless being, whom we may call, as we will, man or superman, had sought to realize himself, and had succeeded only by abandoning a part of himself on the way*. The losses are

---

<sup>687</sup> EC, p. 265-266, italics are mine.

represented by the rest of the animal world, and even by the vegetable world, at least in what these have that is positive and above the accidents of evolution”.<sup>688</sup>

Again Bergson talks about “man alone”. Thus, human species is at the end of *one of the* lines of evolution, but at the end of the most important one. Although in the previous paragraph, regarding [e], Bergson seems to consider human beings just one part, equal to the others, that is not his idea. What Bergson is trying to emphasize by this, to be sure, through excessive contrast, is that human beings are important not because of their form, but because *of their contribution to history of freedom*. “It is this freedom that the human form registers”, he says. It seems that “human form” in itself is not important, but his or her capacity to imitate or replicate the vital impulse. Man “continues the vital movement indefinitely”.<sup>689</sup> In my view, this claim and the mention of the figure of the “superhuman” mean basically what the mystic genius will be in DS.

So “the place we occupy in the whole of nature”<sup>690</sup> is by all means exceptional, not ordinary. But it is due not to a pre-ordained plan. We are not the accomplishment of nature. Our *form* is not, so to say, the last step of the movement of nature. Nothing has ended yet. Besides, humans are not good *per se*, but only with regard to their faculty of creating: again, their *contribution*. If we increase this contribution to change (and that would involve, according to Bergson, the use of intuition), then we should attain a “more complete and perfect humanity”.<sup>691</sup>

These texts clearly show that in Bergson there is a global teleology. It gathers every living being and articulates their existence for the sake of one goal. That is, Bergson uses the teleology of contribution, which in his particular case is a transgressive teleology. Particular animals and species do not contribute to eternity like perishable beings in Aristotle, but to progress and change. In my interpretation, Bergson falls into the precise problem that he criticizes: the Aristotelian idea of the three stages/faculties of Life becomes not a vertical scale but a horizontal progress. In Bergson there is a historical version of the three levels of life, but he is a reformer, so he introduces newness. First, there is divergence or contingency. Second, there is difference in kind, and not in degree. Third, he adds a new degree and new notions (torpor, explosion, etc.). For Bergson, there is the plant-torpor level, an animal sensory-motor level and human intelligence. As I said, Bergson adds the faculty of intuition, still to come fully on earth. Furthermore, Bergson has a hierarchical vision of Life, so he understood the different realms, all different in kind, all with irreducible types of *télos* but also unequal in value.

Bergson wants to avoid excessive anthropocentrism and also pre-design, and that’s because he emphasizes the natural origin of man. In this sense, the human is the end of one of the branches of nature. His perspective is, however, that of global teleology. There is tendency in nature and that tendency comes to its fullest form. The final success and, importantly, the forms that appear in the process, are contingent. The human form is not a predesigned apex of any demiurge or god; it is important because of its freedom. That is its perfective power.

---

<sup>688</sup> EC, p. 266.

<sup>689</sup> EC, p. 266.

<sup>690</sup> EC, p. 268.

<sup>691</sup> EC, p. 267.

According to Bergson, and according to the model of immanent teleology in general, every being has its own goal (attention to life is its best expression, in Bergson). But still there's room for hierarchy and even for subordination: they are all goals and souls, but some goals are better than others. Aside from the developmental teleology there is contribution teleology. In his nuanced way, we can say that, partially, plants are for the sake of animals, and likewise animals are for the sake of humans, but also humans are for the sake of consciousness.

The whole material world is *for the sake of* consciousness and consciousness is a work in progress, as I show in section 4.2.d. Now we will turn to Bergson's continuation of this trend in human history.

#### **4.2.c. Global creative teleology: destination of history**

The domain of global teleology continues combining primary teleology and secondary teleology in Bergson's philosophy of history. We focus now on the leaders of that global army. This is found in his last long essay, DS, where the doctrine has some additions. In this section I find it useful to examine, at least roughly, the context of the philosophy of history in Bergson. Then I will address the subject in three different subsections, following the same structure as when I talked about natural history in 4.2.c. That is, first I will talk again about the tendency of the *élan* as one teleological impulse in DS. Then I will talk about dichotomy and other subjects that nuance his view of the teleology of history. Afterwards I will address the concrete account of Western history to be found in DS. In this case, instead of plants, animals and humans, in rough terms we have the primitive epoch, the pagan epoch, Christian medieval epoch and modernity.

Throughout this work I have highlighted the affinity between Aristotle and Bergson; at this point it is necessary to emphasize their differences. As we saw in 2.2.a I do not support the teleological interpretation of Aristotle's philosophy of history. It does not mean, like Bury says, that all the Greeks are simply alien or *opposed* to any idea of cultural or technical progress.<sup>692</sup> This is not the case with Aristotle. If Aristotle had a vision of history *opposed* to progress, we could find in the corpus a philosophy of history in the sense of necessary decay. Maybe this regressive vision of history can be found in Plato, as the historian suggests. Regarding Aristotle, my claim is precisely that he saw history from an empirical perspective and thus had no philosophy of history. In short, although Aristotle created the model of immanent teleology, that is not to be found in the domain of history in his work.

I want to recall one more thing from 2.2. In that section I addressed historical teleology in the 2.2.a, at the end, and not along with the other views of Aristotelian global teleology in 2.2.b. Now regarding Bergson, I consider teleology of history a global teleology. This needs an explanation. In the case of Aristotle, I consider that it is a mixed field, difficult to pin up in this sense. If teleology of history were included in the framework, it would be always related to individual entities. In the case of political teleology, the *télos* is the city, one individual, perishable compound of living substances. In the case of the poetics, a certain type of tragedy would be the goal. It would surely involve a number of substances (people) activity, all subordinated to a general good. However, it would fit with the label of contribution, and not development. This good would always be concrete and also perishable, whereas in all the

---

<sup>692</sup> I think Nisbet is right in this critique of Bury, John. *The idea of progress. An inquiry into its origin and growth*. McMillan & Co. London, 1920. See Nisbet, Robert. *History of the idea of progress*. Heinemann, London, 1980.

cases of genuine global teleology there is a contribution for general stable good or *táxis*. I gave the examples of ecology or cosmology. In Bergson the universal goal to contribute is not stable in any case, but progressing. His view of history as one trend is a continuation of the natural trend in evolution and also in cosmology. The goal to attain in history is universal, and part of nature understood as a whole. In short, history in Bergson is what in Aristotle was cosmology. In Bergson the *élan*, in nature and in history, is always global transgressive teleology. It may be understood as a general contribution to the general good. In this case, the good or *télos* is indetermination or progress, and not *táxis*. That is the need and the exigency of nature. So, in the context of DS the key term is progress.

Cultural or historical progress mean human perfectiveness, by means of intelligence, technology, adaptation, natural dominance, peacefulness, cultural improvement, etc. Furthermore, following classic teleology, modern progressive perfectiveness can also imply happiness (a general eudaimony). If the notion of progress emphasizes above all the latter outcome, happiness, then we could talk about a eudaimonological theory of progress. Regarding the former concept of perfectiveness, we should notice that it could also imply physiological improvement, that is, biological progress. There can be then cultural progress and material progress, eudaimonological progress and physiological progress. All these versions can be gathered together or in different proportions. Anyway, in general, progress is a highly familiar term to us, so common in ordinary language. Among other things DS deals with it and is the main textual source for this section. Material, cultural and eudaimonological progress are at stake. Maybe also the biological one.

#### - Philosophy of History: in the line of Comte and Spencer

In terms of the cultural context of this book of 1932, I find it important to call attention briefly to the classic historical account of the idea of progress by John Bury, written ten years before DS. I want to recall two aspects regarding the notion of progress as it is addressed in that essay. First, Bury considers the concept as primarily French.<sup>693</sup> Throughout modernity, Bossuet, the Abbé Saint Pierre, Turgot, Condorcet, Madame DeStäel, Cousin, Saint-Simon and, finally, Comte built and developed the most important part of the doctrine of progress. Second, he establishes at the end of the essay three stages of the history of the idea of progress: paradoxically, the peak of progressive thinking is not French, but British, and, strangely, his account of it is extremely short. So, the first stage is conceived up to the French Revolution and Condorcet; the second one, after it, when a search for a general law began (it culminates with Comte). And now, the third one, which holds that the general apex of the idea of progress is associated with England (not with France). Bury devotes only one chapter, the last one, “Chapter XIX. Progress and evolution”,<sup>694</sup> to the apotheosis of the idea of progress. Darwin and above all Herbert Spencer mix the idea of progress and the scientific theory of evolution. Bury writes that “in the seventies and eighties of the last century [19<sup>th</sup> century] the idea of Progress was becoming a general article of faith”.<sup>695</sup>

We can turn back to DS. First, DS is to be understood as the prolongation of the French tradition, where the idea of progress was widely accepted, both in the positivist lines that lead to Comte and also in the spiritualist lines, such as Ravaisson or Renouvier.<sup>696</sup> Second, Herbert

---

<sup>693</sup> Bury, John. *The idea of progress. An inquiry into its origin and growth*. Op. cit., pp. x-xi.

<sup>694</sup> Ibid., pp. 334-335.

<sup>695</sup> Ibid., pp. 346-347.

<sup>696</sup> See “Quelques mots sur la philosophie française et sur l’esprit français”, written two years after DS, in 1934. *Écrits philosophiques*, PUF, 2011, p. 675.

Spencer exerted a great influence upon Bergson during the 70s and 80s of the 19th Century, Bergson's formative early years.<sup>697</sup> Maybe DS can be read as a response to Spencer's view of history. DS, the work of a man who many years before was a French Spencerian, still contains a theory of progress, or, in my words, a global historical teleology of human culture. From my perspective, regarding the context, it should also be considered as a *convergence* of the two mentioned traditional lines of modern progressive thought.

To this extent DS is to be understood in the line of modern progressive authors such as Comte or Spencer, for whom universal progress is a central concept. Both Bury and Nisbet consider Spencer the "supreme embodiment in the late nineteenth century of both liberal individualism and the idea of progress".<sup>698</sup> Bergson mentions both, and criticizes Spencer twice in DS.<sup>699</sup>

My approach to Bergson's teleology in 4.2.c is twofold, and follows the same scheme as regarding the natural history in 4.2.b First, I will show the internal dynamism of the *élan* throughout history. I will try to address roughly why and how culture progresses. In Bergson, history and human culture are moved by inner perfectiveness. This is part of the reform of classic finalism, advanced in Chapter 1. Second, I will also roughly discuss the whole picture of Bergson's historical global teleology in three stages. His historical vision challenges the idea of progress as universal law. I claim again that Bergson does it by appealing to secondary teleology.<sup>700</sup>

As we have been seeing throughout these pages, Bergson is not a passive receptor, but an active reformer. While using the same concept, in this case (beyond Aristotlianism) the modern notion of teleological progress, Bergson modifies some of its features. In Bergson, progress is *a fact but not a law*. It is, then, unforeseen and unpredictable. Again, his ascensional model must make room for creative freedom. I think of Bergson like a sort of transitional figure, between the great historical progressive systems of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the more sceptical approaches regarding global perfectiveness from post-WWI era. That is, what Pierre Taguieff calls the "anti-progressive *vulgata*".<sup>701</sup> I find DS between two opposite directions.<sup>702</sup>

As I said above, DS is also the convergence of the two domains of teleology in Bergson. We have already seen conservative teleology in DS, but we already need to tackle the creative one. To this extent, the issue at stake in this section is a continuation of EC and the doctrine of the *élan*. DS prolongs the ascensional conception of nature in EC that we saw in the two previous subsections in 4.2. The book addresses the higher function in Bergson's nature: mystic intuition.<sup>703</sup>

---

<sup>697</sup> PM, p. 12.

<sup>698</sup> Nisbet, Robert. *History of the idea of progress*. Op. cit., pp. 234-235.

<sup>699</sup> Bergson mentions Comte once in DS, in p. 117, regarding his law of "law" and "progress". He also mentions Spencer once in DS, in p. 272-273, regarding the issue of the inheritance of acquired characteristics. Bergson had already rejected this neo-Lamarckian theory in EC.I, but here it has important historical implications. Both references are really important in Bergson's discourse.

<sup>700</sup> See chance and luck in 2.1.d.

<sup>701</sup> Taguieff, Pierre André. *Le sens du progress*. Flammarion, Paris, 2004, p. 265.

<sup>702</sup> Take the example of his influence in Sorel and De Chardin.

<sup>703</sup> DS, p. 264.

Bergson developed in DS something contained in the last statements of CV, written 20 years before. In CV he said that human heroes are the “culminating point of evolution and they are nearest the source” and they “enable us to perceive the impulsion which comes from the deep”.<sup>704</sup> To this extent, DS ascends even more in the scale of living beings: from humans to human genius.<sup>705</sup> DS talks about biology in a “wide meaning”<sup>706</sup> and, ultimately, all kind of law that Bergson would accept is *biological, and not historical*.<sup>707</sup> In this context, biology refers to the teleological tendency to conservation. It is a law that appears equally in the beginning or in the end, for this author. To this extent, primitive societies and Western civilization are essentially the same. With historical laws he means a concrete development. But, again, at this point Bergson recalls contingency. The historical events unfolded from the beginning of the human being could not be pre-determined. Bergson is writing here against historical determinism, in all its forms.

In sum, Bergson considers culture and spirit to be inside the concept of biology, *widely understood*. Cultural and spiritual matters are, so to say, biological outcomes of society, which is an organism, whereas human physiology remains fixed in comparison. Culture, including here religion, politics and the arts, are the most moveable parts of human life. DS tries to show that evolution, that is, the *élan* is at work in culture.<sup>708</sup>

Ultimately, DS is a continuation of EC. Bergson is clear when he states in the former essay that progress’ “direction is exactly that of the vital impetus; it is this impetus itself, communicated in its entirety to exceptional men, who in their turn would fain impart it to all humanity, and by a living contradiction change into creative effort that created thing which is a species, and turn into movement what was, by definition, a stop. Can it succeed? If mysticism is to transform humanity, it can only do so by passing on, from one man to another, slowly, a part of itself”.<sup>709</sup>

Finally, regarding the continuity from EC to DS I want to reiterate one thing. Bergson repeats his critique of the retrospective illusion<sup>710</sup> and the idea of divergence.<sup>711</sup> He also claims two important ideas for establishing global teleology: a global tendency towards perfection in nature and a concrete higher point or culmination of Life.

Also, DS is the best articulation of the twofold vision of teleology in Bergson. Conservative teleology and creative teleology are both part of the same picture. Each perfective tendency occupies its own chapter in that book. While in EC conservation was seen as something clearly less interesting than evolution, here in DS *conservation and evolution share the leadership*. Both are perfective, although obviously, change or progress means a higher degree of perfection, since it implies not mere action for the sake of something good for an individual entity (one organism or one society), but a creation for the sake of contribution to something universal (the vital impulse or progress).

---

<sup>704</sup> CV in ES, p. 32.

<sup>705</sup> See DS, pp. 95-96.

<sup>706</sup>“See DS, pp. 100-101.

<sup>707</sup> DS, p. 293.

<sup>708</sup> DS, p. 27: “... however much human society may progress, grow complicated and spiritualized, the original design, expressing the purpose of nature, will remain”. DS, p. 27. Leaving aside the question of progress and evolution, also in Aristotle the *polis* and human beings are part of nature.

<sup>709</sup> DS, p. 235.

<sup>710</sup> See Chapter 1.

<sup>711</sup> See 4.2.b.

- The essential function of the universe

What in EC has the name of “need” or “exigency” now DS has a much more openly teleological term: “function”. Bergson says in the last sentence of the book that the “the essential function of the universe” is a “machine for the making of gods”.<sup>712</sup> This can recall the third type of causality that we saw at the beginning of 4.2 on the cylinder and the melody. Here the melody is none other than freedom and the universe is called “machine”. In this last statement of DS we see that nature is for the sake of perfection. I see it as a clearly perfective or teleological statement. Again, the destination of the world is freedom. Thus, universal history has for Bergson cosmic echoes, as evolution had.

Regarding the culmination point it is also clear in CV, when Bergson writes that the “original and essential aspiration of life (...) could *only* find full satisfaction only in society”.<sup>713</sup> As we saw, Bergson’s cultural philosophy relies on the exemplary figure of the hero. To this extent, societies should be understood for the sake of genius, since the genius introduces indetermination and freedom in the world. Here the mitigated anthropocentrism of EC is even emphasized. In the following passage Bergson says that man *only* “accounts for the presence of life on our planet”. Also, and especially interesting for us, Bergson says here that teleology is in between predetermination and accidentality:

“It doubtless takes, by reason of the diversity of conditions in which it exists, the most varied forms, some very remote from what we imagine them to be; but its essence is everywhere the same, a slow accumulation of potential energy to be spent suddenly in free action. We might still hesitate to admit this, if we regarded as accidental the appearance amid the plants and animals that people the earth of a living creature such as man, capable of loving and making himself loved. But we have shown that this appearance, *while not predetermined, was not accidental either*. Though there were other lines of evolution running beside the line which led to man, and in spite of all that is incomplete in man himself, we can say, while keeping in close touch with experience, that it *is man who accounts for the presence of life on our planet*”.<sup>714</sup>

The universe has a *function*: indetermination. Human beings, human societies and particularly, human geniuses *partially* fulfill that function. The tendency of Life or nature towards human beings, and particularly, human geniuses is *not accidental*. It is a natural goal: it is regular and perfective. These three features sketch out an unavoidable teleological model. Bergson considers it important to stress again that pre-design is not part of his global teleological framework. DS focused on the role of human societies and, moreover, human progress in this natural vision. There is, thus, a non-accidental tendency to fulfill a certain *télos* and it is unforeseeable. Regarding the natural scope of EC, human progress is at the very peak of nature. But like evolution, history is not pre-determined. We will see this in the next paragraph.

---

<sup>712</sup> DS, p. 317. In a letter to Henri Gouhier, in 9 juin, 1932 he explains this in Christian terms. The universe is a machine “créé par Dieu pour faire des créateurs”. “Lectures” in DS, 2008, p. 622.

<sup>713</sup> CV, in ES, p. 33.

<sup>714</sup> DS, p. 255, italics are mine.

## -Progress against progress: retrospective illusion, sudden leaps, and dichotomy

In the insightful article called “Y a-t-il chez Bergson une philosophie de l'histoire?” Polin proposes two notions of progress.<sup>715</sup> On the one hand, DS is a “rejection of progress like a principle of forecasting and like a real presence of one pre-existent direction and immanent to the historical becoming”. On the other hand, it's a *defense of progress in an original way*. According to Polin, DS holds an “open progress”. It is discontinuous, undefined, undetermined. So, in Bergson, civilizations make progress regarding the second. The accumulation of intellectual inventions and the diffusion of the creations of the mystic love are to be called progress.

Polin notices that the problem is not the word “progress”. The problem is not the concept behind that either. Bergson was in his early days a French Spencerian: he grew up with that concept, and he still supports its philosophical use. In rough terms, Bergson is a progressive author. Just as Bergson reforms global teleology in other areas, he does the same here. Bergson is a reformer of the concept of progress, and not a destructive critique. Polin shows very well that the problem is not general enhancement and perfectivism: for Bergson the problem is how to hold perfectivism and freedom at the same time. The global historical laws of the previous century are not useful for him now.

The progress defended in DS should go beyond already made conceptual destinations and should be *opened*. Progress should escape from the “enclosedness”.<sup>716</sup> Two years after DS, Bergson published the article PR. It is time to recall that there Bergson writes that from his philosophical perspective that “evolution becomes something quite different from the realisation of a program: *the gates of the future open wide*; freedom is offered an unlimited field”. Just afterwards he talks about the doctrines, “rare indeed in the history of philosophy”, that have tried to make “room for indetermination and freedom *in the world*”.<sup>717</sup> His own doctrine is, beyond a doubt, one of those rare speculative proposals. Bergson defends progress, but *open progress*.

As I have said, DS is a development of EC. It is clear why he recalls two major concepts regarding the vital impulse's doctrine. The retrospective illusion or *vis a tergo*,<sup>718</sup> and the idea of divergence:<sup>719</sup> Bergson renames the term as “dichotomy”. It apparently brings about a materialization by a mere splitting up.<sup>720</sup> Besides he also conceives the process towards freedom as non-gradual, but made by sudden leaps. Clearly, Bergson repeats the contents of EC.<sup>721</sup>

Concerning our subject, DS merely continues what he said in EC. If we understand progress, then “ (...) we introduce into the things themselves, under the guise of the pre-existence of

---

<sup>715</sup> Polin, Raymond. “Y a-t-il chez Bergson une philosophie de l'histoire?”. Études bergsoniennes. IV. PUF, 1956, p. 33.

<sup>716</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>717</sup> PR in PM, p. 122, my italics.

<sup>718</sup> For the idea of illusion of progress: DS, pp. 72, 78-79, 267-268.

<sup>719</sup> DS, pp. 293-296. Bergson himself relates dichotomy with divergence in EC: “We could say the same of instinct and intelligence, of animal life and vegetable life, of many other pairs of divergent and complementary tendencies”. DS, p. 294. On dichotomy see Aaron, Raymond. “Note sur Bergson et l'histoire”. Études bergsoniennes, IV, 1956.

<sup>720</sup> DS, p. 296.

<sup>721</sup> “And even then we should have to add that there had been, not gradual progress, but at a certain epoch a sudden leap. It would be interesting to determine the exact point at which this saltus took place.” DS, p. 73.

the possible in the real” and “this retrospective anticipation”. It seems that “each one [personal and contingent creation] has given rise to the one that follows it and if they appear, in retrospect, as continuations of one another”.<sup>722</sup> Recalling EC’s doctrine, Bergson states “that it is always possible to take the latest phase of renovation, to define it and to say that the others contained a greater or lesser quantity of what the definition defines, that therefore they all led up to that renovation. But things only assume this form in retrospect”.<sup>723</sup> This is his theory of the *vis a tergo* in EC. Bergson puts it in this way in DS: “if there were really a pre-existent direction along which man had simply to advance, moral renovation would be foreseeable; there would be no need, on each occasion, for a creative effort”.<sup>724</sup>

“Step forward” is a metaphor that implies a misinterpretation, for Bergson. It shows history in retrospect. But history has “defied all anticipation”,<sup>725</sup> because human effort and creativeness defies anticipation. Bergson proposes another metaphor that I have mentioned: “opening what was closed”.<sup>726</sup> Bergson talks about a succession of creative efforts:

“these successive efforts were not, strictly speaking, the progressive realization of an ideal, since no idea, forged beforehand, could possibly represent a series of accretions, each of which, creating itself, created its own idea; and yet the diversity of these efforts could be summed up into one and the same thing: an impetus, which had ended in closed societies because it could carry matter no further along, but which later on is destined to be sought out and captured, in default of the species, by some privileged individual”.<sup>727</sup>

Again, we are facing creative teleology. *Dichotomy, as divergence and sudden leaps in EC, is the material expression of creation and contingency.* There is no pre-determined goal or plan out of time, waiting for history to reach its plenitude. For Bergson everything in human culture is contingent and human beings are free. “We do not believe in the fatality of history. There is no obstacle which cannot be broken down by wills sufficiently keyed up, if they deal with it in time. There is thus no inescapable historic law”.<sup>728</sup>

Bergson is talking here about history as a mere sum of accidents. We already know that that is not true. There is an “original tendency”,<sup>729</sup> or “primitive tendency”<sup>730</sup> but, as in any activity where freedom is involved, there is also real oscillation between opposites and contingency. Perfectivism and attraction might go hand in hand with contingency and freedom. Bergson proposes “to designate law of twofold frenzy the imperative demand, forthcoming from each of the two tendencies as soon as it is materialized by the splitting, to be pursued to the very end as if there was an end!”.<sup>731</sup>

As evolution “while not predetermined, was not accidental either”, that’s the same that we should say about history. Bergson’s global teleology works at this middle term, full of risks of aporia and paradox. According to Bergson it “*is man who accounts for the presence of life on our planet*” and, moreover, in the cultural ground the Christian mysticism is the

---

<sup>722</sup> DS, p. 72.

<sup>723</sup> DS, p. 267.

<sup>724</sup> DS, p. 267.

<sup>725</sup> DS, p. 268.

<sup>726</sup> DS, p. 268.

<sup>727</sup> DS, p. 268.

<sup>728</sup> DS, p. 293.

<sup>729</sup> DS, p. 294.

<sup>730</sup> DS, p. 296.

<sup>731</sup> DS, p. 296.

culmination of human history, in DS.III, and at the same time we should talk “as if there was an end”<sup>732</sup>.

The global natural function, on the one hand, and divergence and contingency of one singular event called history of mankind (or rooted in history of Life), on the other, compose a mixed model with regard to the temporal dimension of 2.1.d. It is primary teleology, since this vision of the cosmos presupposes a certain regularity: regularly the cosmos tends to fulfill its requirement. The global natural function is to be interpreted in terms of primary teleology. At the same time, the actual outcome of this tendency, split into divergent branches is different. It is different not only for its form, marked by contingency, but also for its singularity. The history of man is unique. Contingency and singularity imply that the outcomes of the process are not to be deduced from any law. That is because Bergson says that progress is not a law, since his global teleology has to be understood from secondary teleology too. In the end, however, it is not like an Aristotelian secondary teleology since this one is based on cases of fortune, and they do not constitute any sort of fulfillment at any natural degree. As we saw, only humans can have good or bad fortune. What I take from secondary teleology in Aristotle is the idea of *as if* teleology or making sense of unique and unrepeatable events. That is what I called narratology.

Like in the case of Life in 4.2.b human history is unique and unrepeatable. It has something of the events of fortune of secondary teleology (2.1.d), but at the same time, it is led by the original tendency, which implies real fulfillment in the natural ground. In this sense, it is a mixture of two types of teleology regarding time. Bergson’s global teleology implies a primary natural teleology and a narratology regarding the outcomes. That is why he can say that, inasmuch as there is a tendency in culture, there is a genuine fulfillment. At the same time, every stage of the concrete historical becoming is contingent.

#### - Three degrees of culture: on heroes

History is not only non-accidental, but also not pre-designed. This means that there is a natural direction or impulse, but not a concrete end, already finished as a “possible” waiting to be “actualized”. In Bergson, history is neither chance nor plan. Bergson defends an idea of open progress. “Openness” is his metaphorical proposal. Opening means creation. Spiritual heroes move by attraction because their capacity of creating. They make everybody creator, in a way. This implies growth, ascension and perfectiveness.

This is coherent with Bergson’s personal account of history of humanity. The same as his vision of history of philosophy in EC.IV which is quite systematic, and in DS there is a clear succession of efforts that lead to higher momentum. In my view, just as in EC.II regarding biology and in EC.IV regarding philosophy, one finds a general movement.

My account will be undeniably rough at this moment, but still I think that a rapid overlook is useful for us, since it is illustrative. First of all, DS.II and DS.III talk about the past (primitive societies, pagan societies and early Christianity). The form that it draws is clearly ascensional. DS.IV talks about both the past and above all about the future of man in technological societies. The last chapter is extremely important for understanding Bergson’s view of history and freedom, but first we can start with the previous historical chapters.

---

<sup>732</sup> DS, p. 255, italics are mine.

Bergson's historical account in DS.II and DS.III can be considered a threefold historical model, and in this sense remains related to the 19<sup>th</sup> century models where the universal history schemes were ultimately considered in a triadic sequence. In my view, the primitive-pagan-Christian cultures model is to be found in DS.

In DS.II we see how primitive cultures fit with the conservative teleology or attention to life (the only "law of biology" that he admitted). Primitive cultures are the paradigm of the closed society. Closed society is not a thing (a society), but a social tendency. This tendency finds its goal in conservation, or in the defense of conservation.<sup>733</sup>

Just after primitive cultures we tend beyond the "hands of nature" as he says. It means that progress starts and human culture starts growing. From now on, Bergson understands each cultural step in history as a contribution to progress. Every culture and, especially, every cultural or spiritual hero contribute to progress *for the sake of* indetermination, freedom or transgression.

In the end of this chapter and during the first half of DS.III Bergson talks about paganism. It is a step further, in terms of perfection. The pagan society constitutes a progress, especially regarding philosophy. Contemplation is the goal of human beings for them. Pagans, and also Oriental societies, and even the briefly mentioned the Hebraic societies contributed to progress in a way.<sup>734</sup> But they all take part of that intermediate step, around paganism. The pagan spiritual hero proposed by Bergson is clearly Socrates, a figure with whom Bergson is deeply familiar. Socrates appears in the first courses he taught. Socrates is a culmination of the pagan epoch and he opens new ways of feeling, thinking and moral living.

Just afterwards comes the third lapse that goes from Christianity to Modernity. Bergson compares Socrates and Christ. As it appears in DS, I think that just as Socrates is a culmination of Ancient times, the Gospels are the beginning of a new era. Certainly, one of the most important and maybe striking historical statements of DS is that there is an "evangelic spirit" which goes throughout history and culminates in democracy and the rights of man. That's why I think that the lapse between the Gospels and French Republics composes one sole step.<sup>735</sup>

The Christian human model is not so focused on contemplation. It is, however, not opposed to contemplation. As in biological matters, each step further includes the previous. Intuition was, in biological terms, the highest faculty. Intuition includes or better presupposes (from higher to lower degrees) intelligence, instinct and locomotion, nutrition and torpor or unconsciousness. Now, in historical terms, we see that Christianity is a progressive tendency that leads to democracy, cosmopolitanism and pacifism, but would not reach them entirely. There will also be a conservative tendency which is deeply anchored in our biology and part of the closed or primitive society. Closed society is not a useless tendency, since it promotes the conservation of each community. Anyway, there is a transgressive teleology that explains the tendency of going always beyond the fixed habits, institutions, ideas or sentiments. This means for Bergson real progress.

---

<sup>733</sup> I addressed this in 4.1.a "Destination of the community".

<sup>734</sup> On Oriental mysticism, DS, pp. 222-226. On the Jewish prophets, DS, p. 240.

<sup>735</sup> For this statement DS, pp. 78 and 283.

Socrates, who talks about spirit and incarnates mysticism in an exemplary way, incarnates the first step of this progress.<sup>736</sup> Christ defends a new mysticism. What Christian mysticism is for Bergson is a complicated issue, and many scholars have studied it, so I will not enter into that. What is interesting for us now is that mysticism produces progress and transgression. *Mysticism reproduces the élan vital*. The outcome of it is the growth of freedom or indetermination, which is the function of all of nature. It is then *superior* to the pagan contemplative mysticism, that is why Bergson himself calls Christian mysticism “complete mysticism”, identified with “action”:<sup>737</sup>

“For the *complete* mysticism is that of the great Christian mystics. Let us leave aside, for the moment, their Christianity, and study in them the form apart from the matter. There is no doubt that most of them passed through states resembling the various culminating phases of the mysticism of the ancients. But they merely passed through them: bracing themselves up for an entirely new effort, they burst a dam; they were then swept back into a vast current of life; from their increased vitality there radiated an extraordinary energy, daring power of conception and realization”.<sup>738</sup>

By stressing the importance of the notion of charity, for instance, Bergson is giving importance to the “superabundant activity”<sup>739</sup> and creativity of the Christian human model.

Now one can say that Bergson adds on new aspects to his theory of the *élan vital* in EC. Unlike Spencer, Bergson’s history is led by heroes and saints. Bergson philosophy of history is a doctrine of heroes, and not laws. Strong individuals incarnate the power of the *élan*. They are analogue to mutations, in the biological realm. They emerge suddenly and produce divergent branches in culture.

The heroes move regular people by attraction and aspiration. They introduce in average people the unforeseen aim of perfection. The unknown primitive epochs progressed by unknown heroes up to the pagan world. The pagan world reaches its apex thanks to Socrates. The mysticism around the idea of contemplation or *theorein* is an outcome of progress, indeed, but is a static spiritualism. It does not promote or prolong the force that led to that success. Socrates produces aspiration in uncountable generations after him, but it is an aspiration of *ataraxia*, according to Bergson.

Christ and Christian heroes attract average people in a different way. They move people to action. Strictly speaking, the Christian framework introduces history as such into human culture. And history, for Bergson, is above all progress. Christianity both discovers and promotes progress. Christianity’s “mysticism agissant”, active mysticism, is “capable of marching on to the conquest of the world”<sup>740</sup>.

As I said earlier, in DS he adds a mimetical model to his global teleology. The great artists in EC imitate the vital impetus that goes through Life and so do the heroes and saints in DS. In addition, Bergson finds out how regular people can contribute to the general good. They do it through imitation. This second-degree imitation is still a development of his theory of the *élan*, regarding only humans.

---

<sup>736</sup> It is curious that Bergson does not think of Plato as an active promotor of primitive myth-making functions, regarding his eschatological myths in DS. Bergson only considers his rationalism and mysticism.

<sup>737</sup> DS, p. 226.

<sup>738</sup> DS, p. 227-228, my italics.

<sup>739</sup> DS, p. 228.

<sup>740</sup> DS, p. 240.

- Unpredictable future: open progress

Until now, in this subsection we have seen the account of Western history in Bergson. Finally we can turn to DS.IV. As Ghislain and Keck say, that conclusive chapter IV, entitled “Final remarks: mechanism and mysticism” is a certain “caesura” with regard to the rest of the book.<sup>741</sup> Its style and subject are different, as I said earlier. It is focused partially on the past too, but above all on the future. That is something different from the rest of the book. In general terms the author demands a moral reform and also the apparition of spiritual leaders.<sup>742</sup> Regarding the past time, the chapter is his contribution to genealogy and the philosophy of technology.<sup>743</sup> Leaving these interesting topics aside, our current concern is that this chapter addresses one of our major issues: unpredictability.

*Progress in Bergson is not a law but a fact.* DS.I, II, III, especially II and III offer some examples of narratology or secondary teleology. They compose human history, including the history of philosophy. There is a natural tendency in nature and the human being is a fulfillment, and, among human beings, the heroes, and, among heroes, the mystic heroes, and among mystic heroes, Christian mystic heroes. These individuals attract the rest of the people and make cultures move suddenly forward. Chapters II and III show that this is precisely what happened. Chapters II and III are a philosophical description of what is history: a progress towards freedom.

DS.IV adds new features of this past (especially regarding philosophy of technology) but also applies to what he said about the illusion of progress. It is important to emphasize that Bergson does not consider progress an illusion *per se*. That would render DS absolutely incomprehensible. What he is saying is that although progress is a fact, it is a singular event. *Progress is ascension, but also openness.* This is the second progress Polin was talking about. Bergson identifies progress as an “original tendency”. It is original because, again, Bergson is deeply rooted in nature. Ultimately the universe is expressed by progress. But he seeks to provide a much more sophisticated account of humans and history by making room for freedom and, then, for unpredictability.

When Gilson says that “Bergson is a continuation of Spencer” he is right; when he states that “like Spencer’s, it [Bergsonism] is an optimistic evolutionism”<sup>744</sup> I do not think he is entirely correct. Since *open progress* means not only room for freedom, but room for risk and, ultimately, risk of decay, morally or biologically speaking. It is true that Bergson’s view of human beings was more optimistic before the First World War. Coherently, this change of vision of mankind changed his vision of the future. Human beings are responsible, in his view. This is not necessarily an optimistic vision. It seems that, in his view in 1932, technology had developed much better than morals. Bergson says that material progress became a sort of menace for mankind, for the threat of industrial war and the decline of virtues and good habits:

---

<sup>741</sup> DS, 2008, p. 484.

<sup>742</sup> For „war conferences“ see Soulez, Philippe. *Bergson politique*. PUF, Paris, 1989.

<sup>743</sup> The spiritual origin of technology is one of the topics addressed in DS.IV, usually eclipsed by other issues such as mysticism. See Sérís, Jean-Pierre. *La technique*. Cap. IV. “Techniques et machines”. PUF, Paris, 1994 and Zanfi, Caterina. *Bergson, la tecnica, la guerra*. Bononia, Bolonia University Press, 2009.

<sup>744</sup> DS, p. 94, my italics.

“Mankind lies groaning, half-crushed beneath the weight of its own progress. Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. Theirs is the task of determining first of all whether they want to go on living or not. Theirs the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want merely to live, or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods”.<sup>745</sup>

Following Polin, we can say that there are two visions of global transgressive teleology or progress. There is *closed progress*, which is, in fact, a historical application of what Bergson called “radical finalism”.<sup>746</sup> There is an *open progress*, a translation into history of the *élan vital*'s global transgressive teleology, where natural perfectivism and human responsibility are compatible. Open progress is nothing like a law, it is made by effort of powerful individuals and their inspired imitators.

#### 4.2.d. Global creative teleology: the destination of cosmos

We have reached now the widest domain in Bergson: cosmology. I will tackle the idea of *élan* as such, without its history in evolution and progress. It is the most abstract step in Bergson's worldview, to be found in EC. For Janicaud EC is an ambiguous theodicy.<sup>747</sup> It is true that Bergson rejected in his famous letters to Tonquédec,<sup>748</sup> any charge of pantheism, but he did not detail the ontological status of Life and avoided natural theology. Reasonably, Gouhier calls Life a “species of soul of the world”.<sup>749</sup> Bergson himself defends in EC and also in his book on Einstein's Relativity, DuSi, a cosmic global duration.<sup>750</sup> It is difficult to disentangle these remarks. For the moment it is necessary to affirm that we will remain in the realm of cosmology: it covers only two items, Life and matter. Here I tackle the relation between them, to be found in EC, especially in its third chapter (there are hints of his cosmic approach in MM and IM).

From my point of view there are two ways of seeing this relation: it is conflict or cooperation. Sometimes, it seems that Life itself is the only tendency to perfection (“ascension”, in this context) and matter is its obstacle. This ontological conflict, along with that of *anima mundi*, is the ground for the abundant studies of Bergson from Neoplatonism, and vice versa, from Bréhier onwards.<sup>751</sup> There is a second relativist understanding of this relation between the two basic cosmic items. I think Miquel is a good example of it.<sup>752</sup> Above all my aim is only to explain both perspectives in terms of global teleology, but I think that these two views are compatible. That is, Life and matter are two opposed tendencies, but the world is made of the two. Miquel is right suggesting the necessary relation of the two.

---

<sup>745</sup> DS, p. 317.

<sup>746</sup> See 1.1.b.

<sup>747</sup> According to Janicaud, EC that is “une théodicée qui n'ose pas dire son nomme” in Janicaud, Dominique. *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, Vrin, Paris, 1997, p. 205.

<sup>748</sup> The definitive textual basis for this can be found in his famous response to Tonquédec, Joseph. “Comment interpréter l'ordre du monde?” in *Sur la philosophie bergsonienne*. Beauchesne, 1936. It is included as Appendix in EC, 2009.

<sup>749</sup> Gouhier, Henri. *Bergson et le Christ des évangiles*. Vrin, Paris, 1999, p. 101.

<sup>750</sup> DuSi., pp. 45-48.

<sup>751</sup> The most important work on Plotinus and Bergson is still: Mossé-Bastide, Rose Marie. *Bergson et Plotin*. PUF, Paris, 1959.

<sup>752</sup> For this division: François in EC, 2007, p. 499, footnote p. 304. For the relative interpretation of Life, for instance Miquel, Pierre-Antoine. “Chapitre III. De la signification de la vie. L'ordre de la nature et la forme de l'intelligence”. *L'évolution créatrice. Études & Commentaires*. Ed. A. François. Vrin, Paris, 2010, P. 179.

Secondly, I will address the source of this dual conception of the universe with regards to Aristotle. Bergson himself offers the textual basis in one passage in EC.IV, that we have already seen in 3.1.d on historical analogy (on attraction/impulsion) and also at the beginning of this chapter (on attraction). I defend that out of this specific theological framework they both fit with Bergson's cosmology. I also tackle Bergson's interpretation. As we saw in the section on evolution, Bergson considered Aristotle the founder of philosophy of biology, also at work in evolutionary biology. Now Aristotle is seen as the founder of philosophical theology. Although, his interpretation of the two Aristotelian books on theology, *Phys.VIII* and, above all, *Met.XII*, is peculiar. It comes from his course at the Collège, but I think it comes from Ravaisson's Neoplatonic view of Aristotle as a system. Although Bergson's reading of Aristotle in the course is really nuanced and based on abundant quotations, his synthetic account in EC.IV is quite violent. It is easier to find here more clearly the mark of both Ravaisson's interpretation of Aristotle and also Plotinus. These two influence Bergson's synthetic account of Aristotelian theodicy heavily.

Like with regard to the case of the army, the cosmology of EC.III is suggested in advance in EC.I. Although EC.I seems totally focused on biology, there are some scattered remarks that show Bergson's ultimate scope. In the first pages of EC.I the author compares our psychology (duration) with the Universe. This is a passage that shows relatively clearly an opposition between the two fluxes. He does not explain much about the nature of these two movements:

“The universe *endures*. The more we study the nature of time, the more we shall comprehend that duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new. The systems marked off by science *endure* only because they are bound up inseparably with the rest of the universe. It is true that in the universe itself two opposite movements are to be distinguished, as we shall see later on, ‘descent’ and ‘ascent’. The first only unwinds a roll ready prepared. In principle, it might be accomplished almost instantaneously, like releasing a spring. But the ascending movement, which corresponds to an inner work of ripening or creating, *endures* essentially, and imposes its rhythm on the first, which is inseparable from it”.<sup>753</sup>

While ascent is, genuinely, a teleological metaphor, descent cannot be a teleological tendency. It is obvious that Bergson is not talking about ascending in space, up in the air, but about ascension in value. Furthermore, he adds creation to ascension, the main *télos* in Bergson. He promises that “later on” the explanation of such an ambitious statement will come, but it does not. On the other hand, although it becomes much clearer, in EC the movement of ascent is, so to say, the leading characteristic: creative evolution itself incarnates that ascent. As we will see, matter incarnates the descent.

The idea of descent is changed for that of fall later on in EC: “The whole history of life until man”, he says, “has been that of the effort of consciousness to raise matter, and of the more or less complete overwhelming of consciousness by the matter which has fallen back on it”.<sup>754</sup> Matter is related to “the fall”. In this cosmological level, it seems that matter is the counterforce of Life, it is opposed to Life.<sup>755</sup>

---

<sup>753</sup>EC, p. 11.

<sup>754</sup>EC, p. 264.

<sup>755</sup>“It does, however, behave absolutely as a force would behave which, left to itself, would work in the inverse direction. Incapable of *stopping* the course of material changes downwards, it succeeds in *retarding* it”. EC, p. 246.

Life, or Supraconsciousness is in conflict with something that is the opposite of creation. While Life ascends and remounts, matter “falls”, metaphorically speaking. In five pages of EC.III,<sup>756</sup> Bergson addresses this opposition. Regarding the “whole of our solar system”, he says “the two most general laws of our science” are “the principle of conservation of energy and that of its degradation”. The latter is the second principle of thermodynamics. Regarding the descent movement, thermodynamics plays the role as evolution regarding ascension. In this way, they are symmetrical.<sup>757</sup>

For Bergson the physicians Sadi Carnot, Rudolf Clausius and Ludwig Boltzmann add different aspects to the same “the law of the degradation of energy” which “does not bear essentially on magnitudes”. In sum, the tendency towards degradation or, at least in this discourse, entropy, incarnates the movement opposed to Life. It is not necessary for us to analyze Bergson’s interpretation of thermodynamics, I will quote just one passage where I believe Bergson shows, in general terms, what he thinks about this law and, more importantly for us here, the role that matter plays in his framework.

“Essentially, it [the law of degradation of energy] expresses the fact that all physical changes have a tendency to be degraded into heat, and that heat tends to be distributed among bodies in a uniform manner. In this less precise form, it becomes independent of any convention; it is *the most metaphysical of the laws of physics* since it points out without interposed symbols, without artificial devices of measurements, *the direction in which the world is going*. It tells us that changes that are visible and heterogeneous will be more and more diluted into changes that are invisible and homogeneous, and that the instability to which we owe the richness and variety of the changes taking place in our solar system *will gradually give way to the relative stability of elementary vibrations continually and perpetually repeated*. Just so with a man who keeps up his strength as he grows old, but spends it less and less in actions, and comes, in the end, to employ it entirely in making his lungs breathe and his heart beat. From this point of view, a world like our solar system is seen to be *ever exhausting something of the mutability it contains*. In the beginning, it had the maximum of possible utilization of energy: *this mutability has gone on diminishing unceasingly*”.<sup>758</sup>

This law is the most metaphysical law in physics because it expresses the irreversible direction or movement of the world. It is a tendency towards stability and repetition, and it means the diminishing and exhausting of mutability. As I said, EC.III defines Life in relation to this tendency, as a sort of counter-force.

Sometimes, on the one hand, it seems that contingency is an effect of Life itself, and sometimes, on the other, it seems that it comes from the collision of evolution and entropy. To this extent, Life is “an effort to remount the incline that matter descends. In that, they reveal to us the possibility, the necessity even, of a process the inverse of materiality, creative of matter by its interruption alone. The life that evolves on the surface of our planet is indeed attached to matter. If it were pure consciousness, *a fortiori* if it were supra-consciousness, it would be pure creative activity. In fact, it is riveted to an organism that subjects it to the general laws of inert matter. But everything happens as if it were doing its utmost to set itself free from these laws. It has not the *power to reverse* the direction of physical changes, such as the principle of Carnot determines it. It does, however, behave absolutely as a force would behave which, left to itself would work in the inverse direction. Incapable of *stopping* the course of material changes downwards, it succeeds in *retarding* it”.<sup>759</sup>

---

<sup>756</sup> EC, pp. 241-245.

<sup>757</sup> EC, p. 241.

<sup>758</sup> EC, p. 243.

<sup>759</sup> EC, p. 242.

The degrading tendency suggests the idea of a thing *unmaking itself* and evolution would be the opposite. Now, we can come back to the special metaphor of EC.I, ascent and descent, in EC.III: “The vision we have of the material world is that of a weight which falls: no image drawn from matter, properly so called, will ever give us the idea of the weight rising. But this conclusion will come home to us with still greater force if we press nearer to the concrete reality, and if we consider, no longer only matter in general, but, within this matter, living bodies”<sup>760</sup>.

There is also a more relativist view of the relation between matter and Life. In EC.II he refers to the harsh collision, again with regard to the inversion, but we see how Life, in the end, works upon matter. Matter is disposable to Life, it seems. We have seen the first sentence of the following passage throughout this work:

“The impetus of life, of which we are speaking, consists in a *need for creation*. It cannot create absolutely, because it is confronted with matter, that is to say with the movement that is the inverse of its own. But it seizes upon this matter, which is necessity itself, and strives to introduce into it the largest possible amount of indetermination and liberty”<sup>761</sup>.

And also:

Also: “If our analysis is correct, it is consciousness, or rather supra-consciousness, that is at the origin of life. Consciousness, or Supra-consciousness, is the name for the rocket whose extinguished fragments fall back as matter; consciousness, again, is the name for that which subsists of the rocket itself, passing through the fragments and lighting them up into organisms. But this consciousness, which is a *need for creation*, is made manifest to itself only where creation is possible. It lies dormant when life is condemned to automatism; it awakens as soon as the possibility of a choice is restored”<sup>762</sup>.

This need is relatively fulfilled by biology and, moreover, by human spirit. But humans and evolution are, in the end, material. Matter is here the opposite to duration/Life, and Bergson does not regard them as equal counter-forces. In short: *Life tends to perfection, and matter does not*. Duration and creativity are the basis of the cosmos. The need of the cosmos is life and perfection. This means that they are not mere opposites, *different in kind*, but also subordinated. Thus, Life possesses matter to create. This issue is, however, full of obscurity and it is unclear to me to what extent Life needs matter to create. Also, their union is unclear. For instance, we know that from the development of Life through matter contingency unfolds, but it is uncertain for me whether contingency arises from Life itself only or also from the collision with matter. I am inclined to support a combination of these two.

I follow Miquel on saying that in our world Life is for Bergson relative to matter. It is finite and concrete. Sometimes, it seems that Bergson talks about matter as a lack and limit for something that, by nature, shouldn't be. Also, it seems that Life is contingent in itself. At other times, it seems that matter's opposition is the source of contingency and is necessary to understand Life. They are two complementary perspectives of a general subject, though, in any case, global teleology is at stake. Just as how the soul and the body take part in a teleology of development in individual teleology, survival and well-being, Life and matter are both parts of the same thing: a tendency towards creativity, newness and perfection.

---

<sup>760</sup> EC, p. 245.

<sup>761</sup> EC, p. 251, italics are mine.

<sup>762</sup> EC, p. 261.

We can now ask whether at this cosmic level there is any sort of teleology involved. There is, certainly, a global teleology at stake. Bergson stresses the idea that the Universe, as a whole, endures. That was his mysterious claim at the beginning of EC.I, which he will address again in EC.III and in DuSi. The Universe also ascends and creates. It means progression in time and directedness. As I said in advance, matter can be opposed in nature to Life, but it seems that everything in this world is a mixture of the two. It is reasonable to think that Life possesses matter, since it is hierarchically superior. Although it needs creation, it also needs matter.

As François says in footnote 198 of EC.III with regard to the cosmic opposition between Life and matter, evolution and thermodynamics: “Bergson, ici, est au plus près des cosmologies plotinienne et ravaissienne évoquées à la note 1 de la page 211, à cette différence près (et elle rend les doctrines inconciliables) que le principe qui “se défait”, chez lui, n’est pas l’Un immuable, mais du mouvant”.<sup>763</sup> I agree with this scholar: ancient cosmology is here at stake. It is worth noticing that the next chapter of that book, EC.IV, devotes some interesting pages to ancient cosmology. Following François there may be some link then between EC.III and EC.IV. I claim there is.

Nevertheless, my agreement with François is not total. I believe that his statement lacks one thing. I think that it becomes clear when reading EC.IV, on ancient cosmology. Although, maybe surprisingly, I think he should have included Aristotle along with Plotinus and Ravaisson. He is not in the footnote he mentions, but he certainly is in the cosmological account of EC.IV. In fact, it is a major issue in this account. If I am not wrong, it is not only the most important reference to theology in the book, but also the only one: he seems like the founder of theology.<sup>764</sup> More important for us, I believe the ascension/descent view of the cosmos comes from a peculiar reading of Aristotle’s theology, influenced by Plotinus and Ravaisson. This is not so difficult to demonstrate, since in EC.IV he addresses Aristotle’s theology and cosmology in these terms, as we will see soon. Again, Bergson’s vision of Aristotle is deeply influenced by Plotinus.<sup>765</sup> Also Ravaisson’s interpretation of Aristotle in *Essai sur la Métaphysique d’Aristote* was a major influence regarding the Aristotle’s cosmology. It is surely a peculiar interpretation, but in the end, it is a reading of Aristotle. Moreover, it also comes from a direct, intensive reading of Aristotle.

As the author himself says in a footnote, EC.IV is a summary of the lessons that Bergson gave in the course *L’Histoire de l’idée de temps* at the Collège de France, from the years 1902 to 1903. Bergson devoted four lessons of this course to Aristotle: on the 16th of January, the 30th of January, and on the 6th of February and the 13th of February. The Aristotelian theological contents in EC can be found mainly in the lesson of February the 13th.

According to the philosophical scope in this historical research, Aristotle is conceived as one crucial step in a universal philosophical evolution that starts with Zeno and finishes in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with Fichte and Spencer. To this extent, Aristotle “develops” or, even “evolves” Platonic thought.<sup>766</sup> But the most interesting aspect for us, regarding the cosmic teleology of

---

<sup>763</sup> EC, 2007, p. 491.

<sup>764</sup> That is the case if we don’t include the reference to the Spencerian “Unknown” as theology properly speaking. Besides, Aristotle, as a theologian, precedes Bergson’s account of ancient metaphysics.

<sup>765</sup> EC, 2007, p. 510. Footnote 128 and 130.

<sup>766</sup> See EC, p. 321.<sup>766</sup>

Bergson's interpretation, can be found in the problematic question of the relation between cosmos and god. We already know the text, but it is necessary to quote it again:

"There is, then, immanent in the philosophy of Ideas, a particular conception of causality, (...) Sometimes, indeed, they [Greek philosophers] speak of an *attraction*, sometimes of an *impulsion* exercised by the prime mover on the whole of the world. Both views are found in Aristotle, [a] who shows us in the movement of the universe an aspiration of things *toward the divine perfection, and consequently an ascent toward God*, [b] while he describes it elsewhere as *the effect of a contact of God with the first sphere and as descending, consequently, from God to things* (...) Everything is derived from the first principle, and everything aspires to return to it".<sup>767</sup>

Impulsion and attraction are the two main types of causality in Aristotle, according to Bergson's view. In his opinion, Aristotle's cosmic view can be summarized according to these two tendencies. He is referring to one classic topic: the influence of god upon the world. Bergson is using his own words for addressing two of the four causes at stake in this ground. Impulsion is the efficient cause and attraction the final cause.

In *Histoire de l'idée du temps*, years before EC, he puts it in clearer terms. He also addresses the question by quoting the texts with rigor. There Bergson holds that "Aristotle says to us that the prime mover could be examined as final cause or efficient cause, and it is according to the second point of view he is in touch with the mobile", that is, the cosmos.<sup>768</sup>

"Therefore, we perceive God as efficient cause or as final cause, according to the point of view", Bergson says.<sup>769</sup> "Attraction" is nothing but final cause. As one can read in the passage, in [a], it means perfection, ascension and aspiration. That is: god is the cause of movement by being the most desirable being ("*erómenon*", *Met.XII. 7.1072b2*). Tendencies such as rotation among the heavens and reproduction or even any kind of perfection (development) could be explained by this sort of metaphysical attraction. It is the standard interpretation of this issue among Aristotelians. For Bergson then the prime mover of *Met.XII. 7* and *9* *attracts* all beings. It is certainly a "broad interpretation" of the prime mover's influence.<sup>770</sup>

The role given by Bergson to the second theological tendency, "impulsion", which fits more or less with the notion of efficient cause, is more uncommon. Anyway, it is relevant to notice that important interpreters nowadays defend it as well.<sup>771</sup> This vision implies that the Aristotelian god exerts power *directly only* upon the last heaven. Bergson proposes this interpretation in the course at the Collège, with the basis from texts such as *Phys.VII. 2.* and, especially, *VIII. 5*, where Aristotle also talks about this Prime mover, within the context of demonstrating the everlastingness of movement. The relation between god and the universe in efficient terms, by means of physical contact, is maybe more peculiar, but still based on the text. Moreover, Bergson is completely aware of the singularity of this interpretation at that

---

<sup>767</sup> EC, p. 323.

<sup>768</sup> "Aristote a parlé de cause efficiente et de cause finale (...) si je me place dans ce qui est causé, j'aperçois ce qui est causé comme en mouvement et ce mouvement est un travail pour réaliser la perfection de la Forme: c'est le finalité. Si je me place dans la cause, j'aperçois dans cette cause, comme contenues en elle, tous les diminutions d'elle qui seront son effet. Et alors je dirai que cette cause est efficient". *Histoire de l'idée du temps*, PUF, 2016, p. 180.

<sup>769</sup> EC, p. 325.

<sup>770</sup> See Kahn in 2.2.b.

<sup>771</sup> See Berti, Enrico. "La finalità in Aristotele". *Fondamenti*, Pisa, 1989. See also Laks, André. "Le moteur immobile". *Lire Aristotele*. Ed. Enrico Berti, Michel Crubellier. PUF, 2016.

time.<sup>772</sup> He is, on the other hand, convinced of its validity. Right or wrong, in 1902, Bergson states that this issue of the *double chain of causality* is the “fundamental principle of Aristotle’s philosophy”.<sup>773</sup>

As I said, the text of EC is less rigorous and maybe the traits in common between Aristotle and Plotinus are overemphasized. But notice that in EC.IV Bergson doesn’t confuse Aristotle with Plotinus: he thinks that the latter and, in general, the Neoplatonists, continue some of the genuine Aristotelian traits. He says it openly: “The Alexandrians, we think, do no more than follow this double indication when they speak of *procession* and *conversion*”.<sup>774</sup> To Bergson’s eyes, the double causal chain is Aristotelian.

This reading of Aristotle’s theodicy can be found in Ravaisson, to whom theodicy was central in Aristotle (despite his rejection of Aristotelian scholastics).<sup>775</sup> The cosmic “double chain” or double causality, and the causal “attraction” can be found particularly highlighted in the *Essay on Metaphysics by Aristotle*, published by Ravaisson in 1837. As we know, it is a text with which Bergson was highly familiarized from his early years.<sup>776</sup>

On the “double chain”, check the following passages from *Essai sur la ‘Métaphysique’ d’Aristote*, where he relates aspiration/ascension with final cause and impulsion/descent with efficient cause: “la nature motrice (...) s’agit par impulsion. Dans la sphère des mouvements et des actions libres, c’est l’attrait de la cause finale”<sup>777</sup> Ravaisson talks openly about two chains of movement. The mechanical (downwards) movement and the teleological one (upwards): “double chaîne qui vient de lui [god] et qui retourne à lui [god], qui en descend et qui y remonte. D’un côté, c’est le système du monde dans l’ordre de la succession de ses parties élémentaires, depuis le ciel jusqu’ à la terre ; de l’autre, le système des puissances successives de la nature, depuis la forme imparfaite de l’existence élémentaire jusqu’ à la forme accomplie de l’humanité.”<sup>778</sup>

Furthermore, Ravaisson talks about Aristotle’s scale of being in dynamic terms, definitely closer to Bergson. He talks about the general constitution of Aristotle’s cosmos, the ascending scale as the “progression ascendante”,<sup>779</sup> or even as the “marche de la nature”.<sup>780</sup>

So, I do think that this impulsion/attraction formula is part of the *Ravassonian Aristotle*. As I say, this is related to Bergson’s cosmic view of Life and matter. Bergson has got rid of the

---

<sup>772</sup> Bergson, Henri. *Histoire de l’idée du temps*. Op. cit., pp. 178-179.

<sup>773</sup> Ibid., p. 180.

<sup>774</sup> EC, p. 323.

<sup>775</sup> Hadot, Pierre. “Introduction”, *Le Néoplatonisme*, CNRS, 1971, p. 2.

<sup>776</sup> For the relation between Bergson and Ravaisson, and also between the latter and Plotinus. Janicaud, Dominique. *Ravaisson et la métaphysique*, Vrin, Paris, 1997.

<sup>777</sup> Ravaisson, Félix. *Essai sur la ‘Métaphysique’ d’Aristote*. Cerf, Paris, 2007, p. 344.

<sup>778</sup> Ravaisson, Félix. *Essai sur la ‘Métaphysique’ d’Aristote*. Op. cit. p. 401. Also : “Le premier moteur touche le monde et n’en est pas touché. Le mouvement du monde n’est donc pas le résultat fatal d’une *impulsion* mécanique. Le premier moteur est le bien où il *aspire*. La série descendante des causes motrices se renverse ici en quelque sorte, et se convertit encore en une série ascendante de causes finales. ... Le mouvement circulaire du ciel est la cause motrice de la génération dans le monde sublunaire ; mais c’est que la génération est l’effort de la nature pour atteindre à la continuité du mouvement et de la vie céleste ; à son tour, le mouvement continu de la révolution du ciel n’est que la tendance du monde à réaliser en lui-même l’unité et la simplicité absolue de son principe. Rien n’a de réalité que par sa fin et dans la tendance à sa fin ”. Ibid., p. 373.

<sup>779</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid., p. 339.

mentioned Aristotelian theological aspects, since natural theology is absolutely absent in his works. The model descent/ascension could remain, remodeled, in EC.<sup>781</sup> In this work “attraction” is not unwinding, or creative tendency. But, as I have shown, he uses it in DS.

From the widest perspective, nature can be understood in Bergson from two perspectives: it is Life, and hence an unforeseen *need for* and *tendency toward* creation, perfection or indetermination. Or it is Life versus matter. According to this, matter slows down and concretizes the power of Life. It also could add contingency to the results of Life itself. But still in this last version, the teleological model would be equally teleological: matter is clearly subordinated to the real tendency of the universe, which is on the side of Life.

The influence of god upon the material world is translated into modern language. Evolution and thermodynamics express, in our current context, two types of causality that come from ancient thought, and namely, ancient theodicies. Aristotelian final causality is based on god’s perfection, but as we already know well, it doesn’t imply providence. For Aristotle inspires a perfective tendency among individual supralunary and infralunary beings and there is no providence or *prónoia*. In Aristotle, God neither arranges nor even knows the world.<sup>782</sup> As I have been claiming during this work, there is a deep affinity between this view and the Bergsonian conception of cosmology.

When Riquier says that “d’un côté, la causalité ascendante de *l’élan vital*, renverse la causalité descendante de l’ancienne métaphysique et s’appelle plus proprement création” seems to forget that there is an ascensional causality for the Ancient thinkers. Bergson’s view implies creation, as Riquier says, but he replicates in modern terms the aspirational and perfective causality of the Aristotelian cosmos.

The immanent tendency of nature towards indetermination or perfection, inspired in the broadest context by an *élan vital* is in my view global teleology. The Universe tends toward the best. At this level, there is no subsequent “for the sake of”. Indetermination, creation or freedom are considered the best in itself.

---

<sup>781</sup> Guthrie, G. K. tries to establish an eloquent comparison between Aristotle and evolution, which has something in common with Lovejoy’s “great chain of being”. See my Introduction note 38. *A history of Greek philosophy*. VI. Cambridge, 1981, pp. 117-118.

<sup>782</sup> Riquier, Camille. “Causalité et création: l’élan vital contre Plotin et la cause émanative”. Op. cit., pp. 304-305.

## Conclusion of Chapter 4

[A] While in 3 we saw the structural elements of this worldview, in 4 we have seen what perfectiveness concretely means. There, all the structural elements are more or less at work regarding concrete natural phenomena. As I did in Aristotle, I divide these phenomena in two. Based on one relatively clear passage from CV I have distinguished two basic domains of perfectionism.

[B] Reproduction, attention to life and maturity are examples of what I call conservative teleology. There the beneficiary of the process of change is the substance involved, namely, living substance. It implies the fulfillment of one specific function of one organism, one human being. Like Aristotle, Bergson addresses communities as if they were organisms too.

Bergson's view of teleology in life does not need the term 'form'. Perfection here refers to that ontological fulfillment and being in time, and to maturity. In the case of embryology and maturity, I think that the author is using the model of duration from his early philosophy: still in maturity, like in any other process of growth, there is teleology implied. This section aimed at showing that Bergson's account of the world is pluralistic. There are multiple irreducible perfective trends in the cosmos.

[C] The second domain of immanent teleology is called by me transgressive teleology. It is compatible with the other one. The *télos* or perfective feature here is not fulfillment or maturity, but contributes perfection to the whole of nature. In this case, stability is not the perfective item to contribute to, but rather change. I think that the model of global immanent teleology is here at stake, although this framework is to be understood within evolutionary thought. There is no god that exerts influence upon the heavens or cosmos. Here there is contribution for the sake of transgression. The set of phenomena here are to be found in four groups. They are individual freedom, evolution, history and cosmology. Every ground has its own peculiarity.

[D] The destination of the human soul is in between individual conservative teleology and transgressive teleology. I have noted it in the two subsections: "Creation for the sake of joy", which implies a beneficiary, as in the conservative teleology. The horizon becomes suddenly expanded within a global framework in the next subsection: "Joy for the sake of progress". Individual freedom has this twofold structure between the two domains. In the end, the most important feature is creation, before any other notion, and that is because I included it in the second group. Here I give the first idea of how paradoxical Bergson's view is as part of our modern understanding of human beings: fulfilling our *télos* implies creating our *télos*. The goal is here not specific, but personal.

[E] The section of global teleology regarding the *élan vital* is the longest. It shows all Bergson's problems for reforming the model of immanent teleology. The doctrine contained in EC is a mixture of different teleological issues. In this section I first define the idea of the global impulse to perfection and afterwards I show how it is applied to scientific phenomena. The global impulse is, according to Bergson, a global natural tendency. Bergson includes in it the feature of simplicity. Its nature is referred to by Bergson in terms of exigency or need. In the end, global teleology is at stake.

He includes the concept of divergence, contingency and singularity. These features mean that an account of the development of Life has to deal with great amount of contingency. Life is

not unilinear, but plurilinear. Life is also unpredictable, and any sort of pre-design must be rejected. There are multiple branches or lineages within Life. This fits with the idea of pluralism. Also, the idea of narratology or secondary teleology must be mentioned now. The forms in nature, which are an outcome of the creative evolution through spontaneous mutations, are contingent. This includes plants, animals and also humans. They are to be understood in a singular history full of unpredictable newness. This means that Life is unrepeatably and that it can be narrated, but never deduced from the beginning in all its traits.

At the same time, against certain readings, I find one dominant trend in nature. EC makes clear that the narration according to which plants give energy to animals, and among animals one lineage tends to exploit more and more of this energy, points to one dominant trend. This trend is the development of the central nervous system. This lineage is understood by Bergson as ascension of the spirit, incarnated only by humans. When Bergson says that humans are the only fulfillment of nature, he is not appealing to secondary teleology or narratology, but to the primary one. This fulfillment is not contingency. Thus, in Bergson's global teleology there are two different levels. According to the historical development of Life, there is a great deal of contingency. According to the goal of nature and its fulfillment, the statement is made in terms of primary teleology: the goal of nature is always indetermination, and human beings are a fulfillment of that. The human form is contingent, to some extent, but because of the freedom implied, it is the goal of the universe. To this extent, plants and animals are for the sake of freedom. This composes a new type of mitigated anthropocentrism: everything is for the sake of freedom and humans are the only species that can be called free. Bergson combines the branching pattern of the Darwinian tree of Life with the hierarchical understanding of the cosmos of the Aristotelian natural scale. Finally, in this section I emphasize the importance of the cosmic army passage, a paradigm of ancient global teleology. It also comes out in the reformed Bergsonian framework.

[F] Bergson's teleology of history in DS is as subtle as his doctrine of evolution. I partially reproduce what I do regarding EC, although with little additions. Bergson considers a sole function in the entire world: indetermination. At the same time, he has to nuance this idea of global tendency in order to make room for real spontaneity. Dichotomy, the sudden leaps in history and the idea of the retrospective illusion nuance this global teleology. Three stages of culture, produced ultimately by spiritual geniuses and their imitators, are the material of a narratology. This does not mean, again, that everything in history is contingent. Progress is not an illusion in Bergson, but a reality. It is certainly not a law. I think it is a fact, for him. The fulfillment of freedom in the world and through democracies is nothing contingent in itself, but grounded in nature, for Bergson.

In DS Bergson does not merely focus on history: coherently he addresses the question of the future. Here is where Bergson illustrates his doctrine better, I think. He says that the growth of freedom may imply real progress and a real progress may imply the fulfillment of the function of nature. But progress in the future cannot be deduced, since there is real contingency. There is an open future. It is open to decay and failure.

The main addition in DS is the mimetic model. Bergson's view of history is deeply based on heroes: strong individualities that contribute to progress.

[G] In 4.2.d I deal with the most obscure area in Bergson, the most abstract one: cosmology. Here I only consider two basic items: Life or the *élan*, and matter. At this level, Bergson makes Life confront matter. Life and matter are, respectively, understood as ascent and

descent tendencies. In this context, Bergson thinks that thermodynamics address rightly the nature of matter. It plays a symmetrically opposite role in Bergson's cosmology. Thermodynamics is for matter in Bergson what evolution is for biology. In some passages, Bergson seems to consider the history of Life the outcome of the collision between matter and Life. The scope of this statement is rather unclear, but in the end, it means that, given that Life is ontologically superior to matter, the former possesses matter teleologically. Matter is for the sake of Life. Life in itself may include the feature of contingency, but surely an additional amount of contingency is unfolded from this clash.

Furthermore, in this section I claim that this view is taken from Bergson's peculiar reading of Aristotle's cosmology. This interpretation is based on Bergson's own reading of Aristotle, and hardly influenced by Neoplatonism and, namely, Félix Ravaisson, his master.

[H] In terms of what I called the temporal dimension of teleology there is something more to say. Whereas conservative teleology implies a primary teleology, the teleology of regular events, the transgressive imply partially a secondary teleology. In his vision of Life and history the outcomes or actual forms that compose the whole are only contingent, while the teleological ground (fulfillment of worlds function) is addressed as if it were regular. This implies that whereas in Aristotle secondary teleology did not imply the fulfillment of one substance (since it was chance), in Bergson it is something natural. Contingency is placed by Bergson at the center of natural teleology, and not as an alternative to exceptions.

The pluralistic vision of the world implied in teleology recognizes always the value of non-human forms of perfection, as we saw. Bergson adds to that the recognition of the essential superiority of human freedom. The teleology of human beings is a teleology of creation, in the level of ethics. The paradox here is easy to expose: the attainment of something that someone has to create. Creation here is, however, part of immanent teleology. In bigger levels, such as cosmology, biology and history this paradoxical teleology without a goal in view is the same, but bigger. There is a second problem, which I find more acute. It is the clash between the individual creative teleology and the global one. In biology, the *élan* is an overarching figure. It is difficult to differentiate individual consciousness from nature. Even when Bergson talks about the genius he says that he or she is closer to the main source of creativeness. If the spiritual genius is just an emanation of Life, then personal freedom becomes something difficult to maintain. Contingency and our experience of freedom imply the existence of freedom, this is beyond doubt. What is not totally clear to me is whose freedom that is.