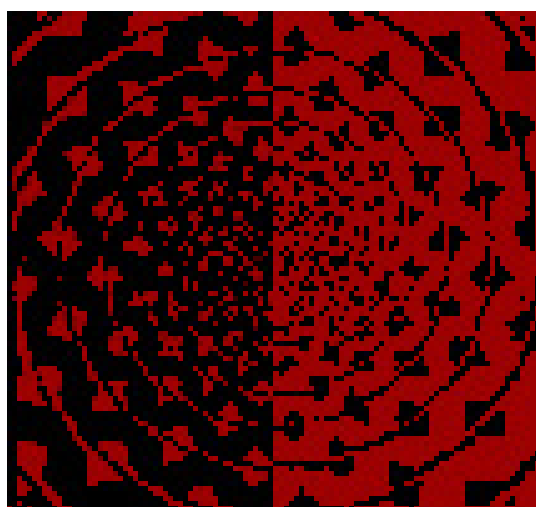


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The paradox of the intellectual or the ambiguity of his discourse*

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Henri Bergson and the political commitment: The paradox of the intellectual or the ambiguity of his discourse*

The intellectual: a bi-dimensional being

The *Kriegsphilosophie* is a very particular research field. Unfortunately its relevance and actuality increase more and more these days. Beside the well known texts on the struggle against imperialism for an internationalist strategy such as Mao and Lenin's, nationalist and ultranationalist literatures have been produced by intellectuals of both sides at the time of the two World Wars¹. Thus even before authors such as Althusser begin to speak of a class struggle in terms of concepts, an intellectual war has been already existing. This war, without any doubt, finds its origin in the conflicts engaged across the centuries by the defenders of the different religions. It seems that we cannot get rid of this ideological, "securitary" and militaristic legacy. These thoughts of war are constantly updated. Let's think, for example, of the globalisation of the context of the economics exchange, or of the violent events of these last years. These events, creating a contagious distress, might push us into new intellectual crusades, as the one Michael Walzer² has been leading. These conceptual wars are certainly not without a direct connection with the peculiar and ambiguous

* We would like to thanks Prof. R. Mercier, M. Maeschalck and R. Gély for their kind remarks and corrections during the writing and translation of this paper.

¹ Cf. L. Dumont, *Homo aequalis II. L'idéologie allemande : France – Allemagne et retour*, Paris, Gallimard, 1991.

² Cf. M. Walzer, *Five Questions about Terrorism*, in *Dissent*, New York, 2002, vol. 49, n°1, pp. 5-10. See also among his works, *Arquiry about War*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2004 ; *Liberty and Power : a Dialogue on Religion and U.S. Foreign Policy in an Unjust World*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, 2004 ; *Just and Unjust War : A Moral Argument With Historical Illustrations*, New York, Basic Books, 1979.

statute the intellectual has always had towards the society. Although he has to respect its own rules and defend its integrity, his participation to the particular field of a discipline always extends straightaway beyond a simple analytical relationship to things. This participation sends him back to his “presence in the world” as actor of a society which claims his expertise. His commitment involves him beyond his discipline to social construction.

« L’intellectuel est un être *paradoxal*, que l’on ne peut pas penser comme tel aussi longtemps qu’on l’appréhende au travers de l’alternative classique de l’autonomie et de l’engagement, de la culture pure et de la politique. Cela, parce qu’il s’est constitué, historiquement, *dans et par le dépassement* de cette opposition [...]. L’intellectuel est un personnage bi-dimensionnel : il n’existe et ne subsiste que pour autant que, d’une part, existe et subsiste un monde intellectuel et autonome (c’est-à-dire indépendant des pouvoirs religieux, politiques, économiques, etc.) dont il respecte les lois spécifiques, et que, d’autre part, l’autorité spécifique qui s’élabore dans cet univers à la faveur de l’autonomie est engagée dans les luttes politiques »³.

The question of this paradox is certainly of some importance and goes largely beyond the single case of the intellectual. This paradoxical “nature” reveals also a more general paradox: a social paradox. After all did we not condemn intellectuals for having as well as for not having committed themselves? Just as if we ultimately involve the intellectual, or at least as if he is involved, more than really committed himself. Of course there is Sartre the ambassador, Alain the soldier, Luc Ferry the minister, etc. As far as they are concerned, the political commitment is obvious, deliberate and totally consented, even up to professionalisation. But there are also intellectuals “of the event”: Pierre Bourdieu himself, André Glucksmann, Bernard-Henri Lévy, Michael Walzer, amongst others, whose the commitment is this time rather the consequence of a call, of a mobilizing *fortuity*. On this *fortuity*, so they say, at least, they did not aspire *a priori*. With this call, they are projected nearly in spite of themselves in the political field, with their intellectual weapons but without any professional aspiration. These two intellectual figures⁴, whatever

³ P. Bourdieu, « Pour une internationale des intellectuels », in *Politics*, n°1, 1992, p. 9 (we propose as translation: “The intellectual is a *paradoxical* being one cannot think as such as a long as one apprehends him through the traditional alternative of pure culture and politics. This is, because he constituted himself, historically, *in and by the going beyond* of this opposition [...]. The intellectual is a bi-dimensional person: he exists and remains only as long as, on the one hand, an intellectual and autonomous world exists and remains (i.e. independent of the religious, political, economic, etc. powers) which he respects the specific norms, and, on the other hand, the specific authority worked out in this world in favour of the autonomy is committed in the political struggles”).

⁴ These two figures, which we would be tempted to set up as categories, do not have value of principle. In our opinion, there are as many types of commitments as committed intellectuals. Our objective is certainly not to create taxonomy of commitment. There is no sense to do it. This categorization is purely operational and its utility consists only in the highlighting certain problematic features of these particular commitments in order to question the general problematicity of commitment.

their proactive look at the political question, reproduce the paradox of their condition and are subjected to the social paradox.

However, even to remain only on the intellectual's level, if the latter must in himself and for himself be regarded as such a paradox, the consequence or the cause – and probably a little of both – of a social paradox, we will have to pay particular attention to his discourse, and it is virtually certain that this discourse will also be paradoxical. In the intellectual discourse, there are very likely some traces of this paradox which funds his relations to his own field and to the political field. The symptoms of these traces might be a part of ambiguity, ambivalence revealing the contingency of those relations. The paradox might well project the intellectual into a “discourse of certainty”⁵ on the reality. Obstructing any reflexive extension, such a discourse would confine him to a “ready made science”⁶ and would occult the “science in the making”⁷ as said by Bruno Latour. In other words, this paradox might put the intellectual in the status of an expert spokesperson where he would be expected to produce a “dogmatized science of the qualified knowledge which closes the way to the reflexivity on the conditions of its training in a mode of uncertainty”⁸. From the point of view of a social commitment, this results in the creation of a peculiar figure. For Pierre Bourdieu, this figure is personified by Sartre as the one of the *intellectuel total*⁹ and concentrates “in his single person a whole of intellectual and social capacities divided until there”¹⁰. The intellectual becomes “the heroic figure [...], the bench mark, the wise man the council should be heard”¹¹.

It seems crucial, especially today, to examine and understand the ambiguity in which the insertion of a field into another, this *fortuity* as we called it, put the intellectual's discourse. By putting the intellectual in the front line, by hoisting him – literally as well as figuratively – up the barricades, this paradox represents not only a risk of a loss of sense for his intellectual project, but also a distortion of the rationalities which convey and are conveyed by his intellectual as well as his political discourse. We have indeed the right to ask ourselves what still allows the intellectual to guarantee, to ensure the relevance of rationalities which funds his discourses when he moves from one field to the other. All things considered, while moving from his discipline's field to the political field, how can he be sure that these rationalities are not diluted, do not merge into words without any legitimacy, from the intellectual as well as the political point

⁵ Cf. M. Maesschalck, « Philosophie, apprentissage et globalisation », in *Les Carnets du Centre de Philosophie du Droit*, n°90, 2001, pp. 10-11 (we translate).

⁶ B. Latour, *Science in Action, How to Follow Scientists and Engineers through Society*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1987, p. 13.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ M. Maesschalck, *op. cit.*, p. 11 (we translate).

⁹ P. Bourdieu, *Les règles de l'art, Genèse et structure du champ littéraire*, Paris, Seuil, 1992, p. 293.

¹⁰ *Ibid* (we translate).

¹¹ M. Maesschalck, *op. cit.*, p. 8 (we translate).

of view? In this paradoxical situation, how can he still guarantee his own autonomy and the autonomy of his discourse? And is it possible for him to correctly evaluate the risks incurred by the reason when this very reason commits itself against sometimes-violent bias of imposed causes?

Compared with intellectuals involved in politics some of whom have just been evoked, whether "true" professionals or funambulists of the event, Henri Bergson seems to have a particular status, almost constituting a caricature of the "problematicity" of the intellectual's political commitment. Indeed, he shares with the "professionals" letters of accreditation – although his official mission precisely consisted in remaining semi-official – and with the "funambulists" the contingency of the action – although one cannot regard him as a philosopher of the event –, undoubtedly the most unwanted traits of character for the committed intellectual. Beside the fact that the intellectual is projected in a space of play which is not his own, no matter what people say, the political culture, in general, accepts very reluctantly the **crossing** of the spheres of competences. There are laymen on one hand, and professionals on the other, the latter only is truly entitled to put forth a political judgement and especially to exert the political power¹². Of course, the inscription of the intellectual in politics departs from this firmly rooted tradition when he criticizes the political game in force, and *a fortiori* when he presents himself as endowed with the same professional political competences. But once again, while this political culture excludes from politics whoever is not recognised as such, it calls the non-political, using for example the symbolical capital of the intellectual. Both aspects testify not only to the simple problematicity of the commitment itself but also to the fact that this commitment is a priori involuntary, the consequence of a *fortuity*.

Moreover, from the foreword of his *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, Bergson exposes his method in these terms:

“[...] it may be asked whether the insurmountable difficulties presented by certain philosophical problems do not arise from our placing side by side in space phenomena which do not occupy space, and whether, by merely getting rid of the clumsy symbols round which we are fighting, we might not bring the fight to an end. When an illegitimate translation of the unextended into the extended, of quality into quantity, has introduced contradiction into

¹² Talking of which, we refer also to the Bourdieu's criticism on the distinction between the professional and the layman in politics. Cf. for example P. Bourdieu, « Questions de politique », in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1977, n°16, p. 55-89 ; ID., « Le droit à la parole », Entretien avec Pierre Viannson-Ponté, in *Le Monde*, 11 octobre 1977 ; ID., « La délégation et le fétichisme politique », in *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 1984, n°52-53, p. 49-55.

the very heart of, the question, contradiction must, of course, recur in the question”¹³.

Thus Bergson enjoins the philosopher to conform and unceasingly confront his work with the reality to test the sense of his philosophical commitment. If one transposes his method to the only relation between philosophy and the political world, there would be already in Bergson’s view of the philosopher what Bourdieu says about the intellectual in general: a funding bi-dimensionality. It is, then, not more surprising for the philosopher Bergson to commit himself in politic, than for us to ask him the question he inaugurates himself in the first text (1889) of his philosophical work: the question of the relevance of this combat. The more so as if one puts the question of this bi-dimensionality in terms of paradox, like Bourdieu does, i.e. in some way in terms of contradiction, the bergsonian commitment also asks us question, referring to his method, of knowing how this method, applied to the political field, still makes it possible for the philosopher to remain in a horizon of sense, whereas his position of the problem seems to conceal fundamentally a contradiction.

In order to have a better view of this Bergsonian figure of the commitment, we have to refer to his war discourses¹⁴, and above all on his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. The latter seems to synthesize his reflection, including his remarks on war, about the society and the commitment of the intellectual towards it. We should then be able to ask once again his philosophy the question of the relevance of his political and philosophical discourses, and of the risk for rationality.

Intellectual mobility and social mobility

Four principal topics are present in the Bergsonian war discourses: might, unity, unpredictability of history and intellectual responsibility. The object of the analysis of these topics is mainly to give sense to what does not have any, namely the war, and thereby to convince the American opinion of the “good” reasons why France and its Allies fight against Germany, and also to show the need for America and the democratic people of Europe to go to war.

¹³ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by F. L. Pogson, London, George Allen and Unwin, 1910, xxiii (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, in *Œuvres*, Paris, PUF, 2001, p. 3: « [...] on pourrait se demander si les difficultés insurmontables que certains problèmes philosophiques soulèvent ne viendraient pas de ce qu’on s’obstine à juxtaposer dans l’espace les phénomènes qui n’occupent point d’espace, et si, en faisant abstraction des grossières images autour desquelles le combat se livre, on n’y mettait pas parfois un terme. Quand une traduction illégitime de l’inétendu en étendu, de la qualité en quantité, a installé la contradiction au cœur même de la question posée, est-il étonnant que la contradiction se retrouve dans les solutions qu’on se donne ? »).

¹⁴ We refer for a details study of those texts to P. Soulez, *Bergson politique*, Paris, PUF, 1989, pp. 127-173 ; and for the chronology of the Bergsonian political commitment to R.-M. Mossé-Bastide, *Bergson éducateur*, Paris, PUF, 1955.

At first, the war seems to be seen only as a confrontation of powers of which the conclusion will decide the winner who will assume the direction of the history. However, it is within this uncertain relation that an analysis of the composition of the forces involved makes it possible to anticipate/forestall the consequences to come. The might of a nation is a composite whole where, in particular, an **individual of combat**, economic means and a moral motivation intermingle. We will be able to evaluate the nation's resistance to attrition in the confrontation only by taking into account the whole formed by these forces. Therefore Bergson quickly moves the analysis of the power from the individual to the universal, in other words from France to all the democracies. His aim is to show that the armed action against Germany will have a sense in so far as it places itself at the side of the right and **sees the triumph of it**. The term "right" has to be understood here as the democratic values being mobilized to rise up against the expression of a blind force as the simple assertion of a power. According to Bergson, the use of the force can thus be legitimate if the circumstances make that, without it, the social mobility, indispensable condition with any democracy, would be lost. In 1916, Bergson explains:

« [...] les grandes erreurs politiques viennent presque toujours du fait que le point de départ n'est pas le suivant : la réalité bouge et est en mouvement continu »¹⁵.

However, to impose its power by force is to deny this social reality, to freeze in the name of a particular right what is only mobility. And, for Bergson, it is only in the name of this mobility, also described like the constant opening of "possibilities", that the sense of a war could be found and defended.

Moreover, ether national or international, every thought of war will have to develop at the heart of a reflection on the nature of the unity that is thought necessary for the realization of its socio-political ideal. Under the historical conditions of 1914-18, it is thereby not surprising that the question also arose for Bergson as making truly sense only if applied to the world context. On the basis of the observation of two possible types of organizations at the local level, centralism – as artificial and external imposition – and the network – as development consequent to and in accordance with the natural effort of the life –¹⁶, he extends their consequences to the whole humanity. From this point of view, it is possible to recognize inalienable rights to the society as well as to any person:

¹⁵ H. Bergson, « Conférence de Madrid sur la personnalité », in *Mélanges*, Paris, PUF, 1972, p. 1224 (we propose as translation: "[...] the great political errors almost always come from the fact that the starting point is not the following: the reality moves and is continually moving").

¹⁶ H. Bergson, « Discours en séance publique de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1109.

« [...] la société est une personne et elle a, comme toute personne, des droits inviolables »¹⁷.

Only then, a mutual consensus, a global unity can be born which lets each Nation recognize the same rights it recognizes to the others. But one can also, *a contrario*, refuse the society the rights consented to a person:

« [...] les sociétés ne sont pas des personnes [...] ; on ne peut assimiler les Nations à des personnes aux droits inviolables »¹⁸.

It amounts to erecting as principle for the relationship between Nations the right of the strongest. In this case, every unity will only be “abstraite, pauvre, vide, l’unité d’une machine et non l’unité harmonieuse et féconde de la vie”¹⁹. Therefore, for Bergson, if Nations, especially democratic ones, want to provide the foundations of a lasting world peace, they will have to position themselves in comparison with the others like the components of a network in constant communication.

However, it is only, as it seems to us, in the light of his interpretation of history as basically unpredictable that Bergson manages best to explain himself on the sense he gives to this war. He says in 1914 that the history of Germany is “l’histoire de la sorcière qui avait obtenu de son manche à balai, par une incantation magique, qu’il allât lui remplir des seaux à la rivière, et qui, n’ayant pas de formule pour l’arrêter dans son travail, vit son antre se remplir si bien d’eau qu’elle se noya”²⁰. Which means that any force, any unity, can escape its creator and turn itself against itself. And by thinking the history as an exact and rigorous science, one comes to forget that this history depends on

« [...] chiquenaudes imprévues, imprévisibles, que viendront donner quand il leur plaira, où il leur plaira, dans la direction choisie par elles, des volontés libres, créatrices de leur propre destinée et de celle de leur pays »²¹.

These flicks are what makes history. Unless being somnambulatory dreams, the predictions of the man will have consequently to take into account these unforeseen events that the will of the ones and others inserts in reality.

¹⁷ H. Bergson, « Conférence de Madrid sur la personnalité », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1232 (we propose as translation: “[...] the society is a person and has, like any person, inviolable rights”).

¹⁸ *Ibid.* (we propose as translation: “[...] the societies are not persons [...] ; one cannot compare the Nations to persons with inviolable rights”).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1234 (we propose as translation: “abstract, poor, empty, the unity of a machine and not the harmonious and fertile unity of the life”).

²⁰ H. Bergson, « Discours en séance publique de l’Académie des sciences morales et politiques », *op. cit.*, p. 1110 (we propose as translation: “the history of the witch who had obtained from her brush-handle, by a magical incantation, that it was going to fill her buckets to the river, and, not having a formula to stop it in its work, who saw her cave filling so well of water that she drowned”).

²¹ H. Bergson, « La guerre et la littérature de demain », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1152 (we propose as translation: “[...] unforeseen, unforeseeable flicks that free wills, creative of their own destiny and of their country, will come to give when they like it, where they will like it, in the direction chosen by them”).

Moreover, if the unpredictability does not mathematically guarantee the outcome of the events, it invites us to think history beyond the traditional distinctions. History, as well as the men and societies who are making it, is *elastic*²². Each event does not freeze in it, is not determined in it in the sole light of a first and final intention. One cannot decide in its stead once and for all that such type of action will lead to such type of consequence. All things considered, the message of Bergson is very simple: the worst is only one step away from the best.

Finally, from the point of view of the intellectual responsibility, Bergson knows extremely well, and states it in his texts of war, that, heiress of ideologies in perpetual campaign, any war necessarily involves the personal intellectual projects of those who wage it. This is why, when he describes his mission in the United States²³, he makes immediately the connection between intellectual and political institutions, connecting thereby intellectual credit with political credit. To this end, he presents the French Academy as a pluralist institution inviting in its bosom personalities coming from circles as various as literature, philosophy, sciences, politics, the military world, etc. This diversity, this “chiasm of competences”²⁴, constitutes for it mainly a symbolic force representing the real force of the French Nation.

« Si la France voulait résumer sur ce point sa philosophie et l’enfermer dans une maxime, elle dirait, je crois, qu’il faut agir en homme de pensée et penser en homme d’action »²⁵.

The Academy, as an institution, is the window of the material and intellectual richness of France, in France and abroad.

From this comparison and this metaphor, the mission, or the responsibility, of the intellectual seems obvious to Bergson: he must work, by his intellectual mobility, to the realization of the social mobility, of which all the aspects will be perceptible on the level of the Nation as well as on the level of the whole humanity:

« S’il s’attaque à des questions de politique [...] c’est avec l’idée de proposer ce qui devrait être, au moins autant que de décrire

²² Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 1153-1154.

²³ He describes his mission in two discourses: one said before the *American Academy* in avril 1917 (cf. H. Bergson, *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1249), the other said before the *French Academy* in December 1935 (*ibid.*, pp. 1529-1539).

²⁴ We are taking the expression from P. Soulez, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

²⁵ H. Bergson, « L’Académie française vue de New York par un de ses membres », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1537 (we propose as translation: “If France wanted to summarize on this point its philosophy and to lock it up in a maxim, it would say, I believe, that it is necessary to act as man of thought and to think as a man of action”).

ce qui est : à ses yeux la morale importe d'abord ; l'homme de lettres a une mission ; il doit travailler au bonheur de l'humanité »²⁶.

In the intellectual must resound the philosophical maxim of the French Nation. There is even in Bergson a feeling, very Platonic, of guilty debt towards the city. Looking back on his own commitment, he explains:

« Au fond, ceux qui ne pouvaient pas combattre au front se reprochaient de vivre en parfaite sécurité, alors que nos soldats étaient exposés à des dangers mortels. A courir enfin un risque, on se sentait rentrer dans des conditions normales et pouvoir être un peu moins mécontent de soi-même »²⁷.

Let us note also Bergson's interest for those he calls the “charismatic personalities” and whose role would be precisely to create the social mobility, progress, by the example they give to see.

The leaving in abeyance of the reason

If we refer now to the philosophical work of Bergson, the main problem his political engagement poses to him certainly remains, well beyond the obviousness, the problem of the war, or rather of its sense. How to understand indeed that he manages to think the war in a horizon of sense while at the same time he teaches “morality progress”, the “love of humanity”, the “creative evolution” of the society, i.e. their opening? Certain tracks are already offered to us in the analysis of the concepts mobilized when, confronted with the historical context of the First World War, he develops a whole series of key-concepts especially aiming at concluding his mission. But once this mission completed, what remains of it? What happens to this chiasm of competences? And what happens of the sense given to the might, the unity of the Nations and humanity, their history, and the commitment of the intellectual?

The concept of power, in particular, is treated as early as the *Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness* together with the concept of “deep-seated inner cause”²⁸ and amplified in *Creative Evolution* with the definition of the *vital impetus* as *vis a tergo*²⁹. The *vital impetus* is represented there as the single

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 1534 (we propose as translation: “If he attacks questions of politics [...] it is with the idea to propose what should be, at least as much as to describe what it is: in his eyes morality imports initially; the man of letters has a mission; he must work to the happiness of humanity”).

²⁷ H. Bergson, « Mes missions », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1565 (we propose as translation: “At bottom, those who could not fight reproached themselves to live in perfect safety, whereas our soldiers were exposed to mortal perils. By finally running a risk, we felt to return to normal conditions and to be able to be a little less dissatisfied with ourselves”).

²⁸ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, *op. cit.*, p. 200 (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, p. 132 : « cause interne profonde »).

²⁹ Cf. H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by A. Mitchell, New York, Henry Holt and Cie, 1911, p. 103 (*L'Évolution créatrice*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, pp. 582-583).

effort at the origin of the unfolding of the life. As an origin, it constitutes the unity of any activity. As an effort, i.e. as a force, it accounts for the creation expressed by the evolution of the life in the matter. And as a single and limited effort, it stigmatizes the limitations of this evolution - or creation - in contact with the obstacle that is the matter. We also find in these two texts, inter alia, the question of the unification. Bergson initially conceives it in term of “unity into the diversity”³⁰ in connection with the harmony between the vegetable kingdom and the animal kingdom, but extends its meaning to the human groups to express their difficulty to found and preserve the complex balance between their tendency to differentiation and the memory of their common origin³¹. The *Laughter* still looks further into this prospect by showing the coercive power of the social sanction. Bergson explains there the aversion of nature towards any behaviour, individual or collective, which does not meet the objectives prescribed by the social obligation, as well as the mechanisms designed to fight them³². Let us not forget the question of a philosophy of history which is also treated several times in his philosophical work. Thus, in *The Creative Mind*, Bergson insists lengthily on the essential distinction between the history *reality* and the history *science*³³.

But it is, above all, in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* that we will find answers - on his commitment as such, as well as on the statute of his committed discourse. Often considered as a treaty of moral philosophy, it illustrates better than any other of Bergson’s works the chiasm of the thought and the action, especially in the first part treating of *Moral Obligation* and in the

³⁰ H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, p. 152 (*L’Evolution créatrice*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, p. 624: « unité dans la diversité »).

³¹ Cf. H. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, *op. cit.*, pp. 126ss (*L’Evolution créatrice*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, p. 602sv).

³² Cf. H. Bergson, *Laughter*, translated by G. Meredith, New York, Doubleday Anchor Books, 1956, pp. 72-73: “What life and society require of each of us is a constantly alert attention 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 [...]. But society asks for something more; it is not satisfied with simply living, it insists on living well. What it now has to dread is that each one of us, content with paying attention to what affects the essentials of life, will, so far as the rest is concerned, give way to the easy automatism of acquired habits [...]. Society will therefore be suspicious of all *inelasticity* of character, of mind and even of body, because it is the possible sign of a slumbering activity [...]. And yet, society cannot intervene at this stage by material repression, since it is not affected in a material fashion. It is confronted with something that makes it uneasy, but only as a symptom – scarcely a threat, at the very most a gesture. A gesture, therefore, will be its reply. Laughter must be something of this kind, a sort of *social gesture*” (*Le Rire*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, pp. 395-396 : « Ce que la vie et la société exigent de nous, c’est une attention constamment en éveil, qui discerne les contours de la situation présente, c’est aussi une certaine élasticité du corps et de l’esprit, qui nous mette à même de nous y adapter [...]. Mais la société demande autre chose encore. Il ne lui suffit pas de vivre ; elle tient à vivre bien. Ce qu’elle a maintenant à redouter, c’est que chacun de nous, satisfait de donner son attention à ce qui concerne l’essentiel de la vie, se laisse aller pour tout le reste à l’automatisme facile des habitudes contractées [...]. Toute raideur du caractère, de l’esprit et même du corps, sera donc suspecte à la société, parce qu’elle est le signe possible d’une activité qui s’endort [...]. Et pourtant la société ne peut intervenir ici par une répression matérielle, puisqu’elle n’est pas atteinte matériellement. Elle est en présence de quelque chose qui l’inquiète, mais à titre de symptôme seulement, à peine une menace, tout au plus un geste. C’est donc par un simple geste qu’elle y répondra. Le rire doit être quelque chose de ce genre, une espèce de geste social »).

³³ Cf. H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, translated by Mabelle L. Andison, Westport, Greenwood Press, 1971, pp. 16-28 (*La pensée et le mouvement*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1258-1264).

Final Remarks on mechanics and the mystique. But this work is much more than a treaty of moral philosophy. According to us, it is rather the place chosen by Bergson to try to solve the problems still posed to his philosophical theories. Very early in his work, indeed, the need to prolong/extend the theoretical considerations in a practical philosophy will arise³⁴. Looking more closely at it, none of his preceding works answers anyway truly the questions they ask. They are connected and fitted together, giving the feeling to send back to each other the task of solving the question. Each one of his work presents and contextualises a particular problem only, its consequences and the requirements of the resolution, but never satisfies the expectations of the reader being on the lookout for of final answers. The reason of it is precisely, as it seems to us, the constant tension towards such a practical philosophy, only relevant and legitimate, according to the author, in the dynamics of search for a possible resolution. The *Two Sources* thus seems a central text of the Bergsonian work, not only because it is the place where the social point of view of Bergson is summarized and is truly expressed in his philosophical work, but even more because this place is where everything is cleared up at the end of a waiting, of a philosophical attention of more than forty years.

In the *Two sources of Morality and Religion*, our societies are presented as founding themselves primarily on social habits, so well rooted in ourselves that they have value of natural law.

“What a childhood we should have had if only we had been left to do as we pleased! We should have flitted from pleasure to pleasure. But all of a sudden an obstacle arose, neither visible nor tangible: prohibition. Why did we obey? The question hardly occurred to us. We had formed the habit of deferring to our parents and teachers. All the same we knew very well that it was because they were our parents, because they were our teachers. Therefore, in our eyes, their authority came less from themselves than from their status in relation to us [...]. In other words, parents and teachers seemed to act by proxy. We did not fully realize this, but behind our parents and our teachers we had an inkling of some enormous, or rather some shadowy, thing that exerted pressure on us through them. Later we would say it was society”³⁵.

³⁴ Cf. F. Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie*, Paris, PUF, 2004, pp. 8 sv.

³⁵ H. Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, translated by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton, London, Macmillan, 1935, p. 1 (*Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, in *Œuvres, op. cit.*, p. 980 : « Que n'eût pas été notre enfance si l'on nous avait laissé faire ! Nous aurions volé de plaisirs en plaisirs. Mais voici qu'un obstacle surgissait, ni visible ni tangible : une interdiction. Pourquoi obéissions-nous ? La question ne se posait guère ; nous avions pris l'habitude d'écouter nos parents et nos maîtres. Toutefois, nous sentions bien que c'était parce qu'ils étaient nos parents, parce qu'ils étaient nos maîtres. Donc, à nos yeux, leur autorité venait moins d'eux-mêmes que de leur situation par rapport à nous [...]. En d'autres termes, parents et maîtres semblaient agir par délégation. Nous ne nous en rendions pas nettement compte, mais derrière nos

Taken separately, these habits would be nothing else than simple usual constraints. But they form a whole, a “block”, intended to sweep out away our smaller hesitations and giving any action departing from it a monstrous character, an “anti-natural character”³⁶. This social obligation would then be “to necessity what habit is to nature”³⁷. It is a force mobilizing us from the inside, i.e. present in us in the form of a *social ego* adding itself on our *individual ego*. Society thus penetrates in us by the means of this *social ego* of which it sowed the germ more than to impose itself upon us. We find ourselves in state of complementarity between the *social ego* and our *individual ego*. This complementarity makes that we are stripped without society as much as society does not have any sense without us. What society imposes to us is mainly to conform to these habits forged throughout its evolution, to cultivate our *social ego*, i.e. the idea that “each of us belongs as much to society as to himself”³⁸. The example of Robinson Crusoe and Kipling’s forster³⁹ are not only literary figures. The man, as far as he could be from society to which he belongs, is as much in society as society is in him. Therefore the construction of this *social ego* from our *individual ego* does not seem/appear to Bergson as particularly difficult. It is enough for us to look what society deposited into us to know how we are expected to act in its bosom. It is from society that we draw the principle of our vital force, by society that our memory and our imagination are structured.

“To cultivate this social ego is the essence of our obligation to society. Were there not some part of it in us, it would have no hold on us [...]. Its presence is more or less marked in different men; but no one could cut himself off from it completely. Nor would he wish to do so, for he is perfectly aware that the greater part of his strength comes from this source [...]. But he could not do so, even if he wished to, because his memory and his imagination live on what society has implanted in them, because the soul of the society is inherent in the language he speaks”⁴⁰.

parents et nos maîtres nous devinions quelque chose d’énorme ou plutôt d’indéfini, qui pesait sur nous de toute sa masse par leur intermédiaire. Nous dirions plus tard que c’est la société »).

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4 (trad. citée, p. 984).

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 6 (trad. citée, p. 986: « à la nécessité ce que l’habitude est à la nature »).

³⁸ *Ibid.* (trad. citée: « chacun de nous appartient à la société autant qu’à lui-même »).

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 7 (trad. citée, pp. 987-988).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7 (trad. citée, pp. 986-987 : « Cultiver ce ‘moi social’ est l’essentiel de notre obligation vis-à-vis de la société. Sans quelque chose d’elle en nous, elle n’aurait sur nous aucune prise [...]. Sa présence est plus ou moins marquée selon les hommes ; mais aucun de nous ne saurait s’isoler d’elle absolument. Il ne le voudrait pas, parce qu’il sent bien que la plus grande partie de sa force vient d’elle [...]. Mais il ne le pourrait pas, même s’il le voulait, parce que sa mémoire et son imagination vivent de ce que la société a mis en elles, parce que l’âme de la société est immanente au langage qu’il parle »).

But such “an absolutely categorical imperative, explains also Bergson, is instinctive or somnambulistic”⁴¹, it remains an habit which repeats us that “you must because you must”⁴², and of which the nature is not always sufficient to direct our action. In certain cases, habits are not enough. These situations require from us a particular treatment, because precisely they go beyond the usual framework of our decision-making. War is an extreme example of it. Moreover, some of these “difficult” or simply unusual situations lead us, as it the case of war, beyond society, beyond even the decisional schema to which this society accustomed us, forcing us to re-examine not only the degree of our judgement, but its nature. Certain situations oblige to the opening, i.e. to recognize that the event with which we are confronted does not accept, in its management, the norms allowed until then, invites other ones that society alone cannot produce, unless falling into the intellectualist aporia which wants that one passes gradually, by capillarity from the enclosed to the open. The First World War, for example, confronts us with a problem which goes beyond national competences and affects humanity. However, for Bergson, there is, by nature, as much difference between nation and humanity as between the finite and the infinite. We have to find other references, to go beyond habits.

This **leaving from the habits** is to be found on the side of the morality. Bergson identifies two types of moral: a moral of the obligation, impersonal by nature and direct heiress of the social habits, and an *absolute morality*, which will be not only social but also human. It is the business of men for whom life has “unsuspected tones of feeling like these of some new symphony”⁴³ and who “draw us after them into this music that we may express it in action”⁴⁴. The *absolute morality* is all the more human since it must, according to Bergson, “in order to be fully itself, must be incarnate in a privileged person who becomes an example”⁴⁵, personality whose existence itself will constitute a “call”. Let us note that this call has well the obligatory feature/character of moral, but is distinct from the traditional obligation since it operates this time from the inside and not outside. It is inspired in us more than it is imposed to us by the rule. This distinction leads Bergson to think the moral in term of emotion – this does not mean that Bergson would wants to think a moral of the feeling. Thus, one will be able to say about the moral of obligation that it is “infra-intellectual”⁴⁶, as its emotion is “the consequence of an idea, or of a mental picture”⁴⁷, while absolute

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16 (trad. citée, p. 996 : « un impératif absolument catégorique est de nature instinctive ou somnambulique »).

⁴² *Ibid.* (trad. citée: « il faut parce qu’il faut »).

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 29 (trad. citée, p. 1008 : « des résonances de sentiments insoupçonnés, comme on pourrait donner une symphonie nouvelle »).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.* (trad. citée : « font rentrer avec eux dans cette musique, pour que nous la traduisions en mouvement »).

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23 (trad. citée, p. 1003 : « pour être pleinement elle-même, [...] s’incarner dans une personnalité privilégiée qui devient un exemple »).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 32 (trad. citée, p. 1012 : « infra-intellectuelle »).

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32 (trad. citée, p. 1011 : « consécutive à une idée ou à une image représentée »).

morality could be characterized of “supra-intellectual”⁴⁸, insofar as its emotion would rather be “in relation to the intellectual states which are to supervene, a cause and not an effect”⁴⁹; and to add that it is “it is pregnant with representations”⁵⁰. The chiasm is again well present here. What makes the force of the *absolute morality* is that it translates the emotion that is at its source into representations to guide its action, by assuming the requirement of the social matter. The *absolute morality* manages to mix at the same time the need for order of societies which is call a moral of the obligation and the “possibilisation” of an opening, while authorizing, by reversal, the emotion felt towards a situation to be efficient. It allows thereby this emotion to be translated into action, and not only simply to conform the action to a necessarily primary reason. It is thus here intentionally that the reason is put in danger by the commitment of Bergson the philosopher. One could fear that with the discourse of war the reason has been left in abeyance; it turns out that it is relatively the case, but in a movement of assumption and not of neglect or loss. This leaving aside, or rather this weakening of the reason is, according to Bergson, necessary to the progress.

The chiasm is also well present in the most original topic of the *charismatic person*, and of the *hero*, that we already mentioned.

“The truth is that heroism may be the only way to love. Now, heroism cannot be preached, it has only to show itself, and its mere presence may stir others to action”⁵¹.

The putting between brackets, the creative abeyance of our reason is not so easy and nor is it given to all. It requires a particular frame of mind which makes it possible to understand, and in consequence to make understood, that, between the closed and the open, between the static and the dynamic is the movement itself of opening. This movement constitutes for moral and politics the interval for possible progress, the moment when the individual man lends himself to the mobilization. This mobilization, which will take the form of a call, consists then of an attitude making it possible for the human kind to foresee a new social type,

“[...] a new social atmosphere, an environment in which life would be more worth living, [...] a society such that, if men once tried it, they would refuse to go back to the old state of things”⁵²

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 32 (trad. citée, p. 1012 : « supra-intellectuelle »).

⁴⁹ *Ibid.* (trad. citée, pp. 1011-12 : « par rapport aux états intellectuels qui surviendront, une cause et non plus un effet »).

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* (trad. citée, p. 1012 : « elle est grosse de représentations »).

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40 (trad. citée, p. 1019 : « La vérité est qu’il faut passer ici par l’héroïsme pour arriver à l’amour. L’héroïsme d’ailleurs ne se prêche pas ; il n’a qu’à se montrer, et sa seule présence pourra mettre d’autres hommes en mouvement »).

The *moral creators*, as Bergson calls them, are such examples because, succeeding in extending the frontiers of the intelligence, they extend those of the group in order to go and to call to go towards the whole humanity. Enthusiastic by nature, they also mobilise, almost in spite of themselves, with a force that takes along with them the crowds towards this goal without frontier. According to Bergson, such is also the sense of democracy: “an ideal, or rather a signpost indicating the way in which humanity should progress”⁵³, an ideal of freedom and equality for which it can be necessary to fight.

Habituality and social creation

Thus, what Bergson seems to tell us, it is that, whatever is the extent of the problem one is confronted to, any rationality lending itself to the play of the resolution of this problem will necessarily have to be able to move beyond categories in which it tends naturally to settle. This means to get rid of the habituality which prevents it from opening to a broader prospect which a new problem represents and inevitably calls. It is in this awakening of a constant attention to the opening that the intellectual has a role to play, and particularly the philosopher who, by his method which unceasingly pushes him to stick to reality – what is far from meaning here to be riveted to a certain given reality –, can manage to leave habits while letting himself be mobilized by the requirement of a passage, of a creation. It is even only at the price of this abandon that the method of the philosopher will be able to lead him to be as near as possible to this moving, mobile and elastic reality, and at the price of this abandon also that any commitment, philosophical or political, will be authentically assumed. Beyond the paradox into which Bourdieu inserts the intellectual, Bergson pushes us to think reality, in particular the social one, in a horizon of sense taking truly account of the contradictions, of the *fortuity*. Far **from levelling/smoothing away** reality to model it on his method, he invites us, on the contrary, by this method, to think our history as the cradle of all the “possibles” ones, as the opening, without any condition, to an intellectual, social and political history which is still to make.

“I believe that it is of man’s essence to create materially and morally, to fabricate things and to fabricate himself. *Homo faber* is the definition I propose. *Homo sapiens*, born of the reflection *Homo faber* makes on the subject of his fabrication, seems to me to be just a worthy of esteem as long as he resolves by pure intelligence those problems which depend upon it alone. One philosopher may be mistaken in the choice of these problems, but another philosopher

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 64 (trad. citée, p. 1042 : « [...] une nouvelle atmosphère sociale, un milieu dans lequel il ferait meilleur vivre, [...] une société telle que, si les hommes en faisaient l’expérience, ils ne voudraient pas revenir à leur ancien état »).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 244 (trad. citée, p. 1215 : « un idéal, ou plutôt une direction où acheminer l’humanité »).

will correct him [...]. *Homo faber*, *Homo sapiens*, I pay my respects to both, for they tend to merge. The only one to which I am antipathetic is *Homo loquax* whose thought, when he does think, is only a reflection upon his talk”⁵⁴.

The language, the discourse, is for Bergson a reality that the social life imposes to the man to *converse* on it. But this reality is a chance to better understand it, and thus to better live it and to better make it, as much as to withdraw from it by the dialectical play. The first of the habits Bergson invites us to pay attention to could well be that one. He enjoins us to think the social reality as *Homo faber* and *Homo sapiens*, i.e. to make possible a real training/learning on social reality rather than to reproduce a dogma or to create a new one.

« Il faut agir en homme de pensée et penser en homme d'action »⁵⁵.

He also invites us to get rid of this comfortable habituality to which the sophisms of *Homo loquax* would almost manage to reduce us, i.e. of our tendency of intellectual expert installing us too often in a simple role of “consignator” or “pedagogue”.

« [...] la parole est méprisable quand elle n'est pas au service de l'action »⁵⁶.

But if one sees well how the philosopher theoretically catches a glimpse, by this moment of putting the reason brackets of, of creative leaving of the habits, the problem of the concrete execution of this moment in the historical fields of social matters and politics remains unsolved. How can the philosophical commitment of the philosopher, whose line of action is expressed since the *Essay on Immediate Data of Consciousness*, create an era of opening in the concrete experience of a practical commitment, as the *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* wishes it? In other words, what is to be done in order that the creative evolution of the intellectual's theoretical values – understood as an opening – encourages to the evolutionary continuation of the normative creative *impetus* in relation to the concrete social realities?

⁵⁴ H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100 (*La pensée et le mouvement*, in *Œuvres*, *op. cit.*, p. 1325 : « Nous croyons, dit-il, qu'il est de l'essence de l'homme de créer matériellement et moralement, de fabriquer des choses et de se fabriquer lui-même. *Homo faber*, telle est la définition que nous proposons. L'*Homo sapiens*, né de la réflexion de l'*Homo faber* sur sa fabrication, nous paraît aussi digne d'estime tant qu'il résout par la pure intelligence les problèmes qui ne dépendent que d'elle : dans le choix de ses problèmes un philosophe peut se tromper, un autre philosophe le détrompera [...]. *Homo faber*, *Homo sapiens* devant l'un et l'autre, qui tendent d'ailleurs à se confondre ensemble, nous nous inclinons. Le seul qui nous soit antipathique est l'*Homo loquax*, dont la pensée, quand il pense, n'est qu'une réflexion sur la parole »).

⁵⁵ *Supra*, note 25.

⁵⁶ Cf. H. Bergson, « L'Académie française vue de New York par un de ses membres », in *Mélanges*, *op. cit.*, p. 1534; Bergson cites here Théodore Roosevelt (we propose as translation: “[...] the word is despicable when it is not to the service of the action”).

It should initially be understood that this opening must be an attention to the innovation. We can consider and treat in two different ways a new idea or situation. One can certainly understand it as a simple rearrangement of old and thereby already known elements, or accept as a whole its radically original character and the temporary uncertainty in which it plunges us. Only this second attitude is properly creative. Indeed,

“[...] our first impulse is to say it is incomprehensible. But let us accept it provisionally, let us go with it through the various departments of our knowledge: we shall see that, itself obscure, it dissipates obscurities. By it the problem we considered insoluble will resolve themselves, or rather, be dissolved [...]. From what it has done for these problems, it will in its turn, benefit”⁵⁷.

A totally original idea, in so far as we pay all the attention it requires, can thus appear carrying much more sense than the sense we have the habit to refer. The habit our intelligence contracts in the analysis of concrete problems often imposes to it the limits of its method. In front of a new situation to which it answers only by tested and worn down mechanisms, intelligence has no other choice than to repeat tirelessly the same dead ends that it escape from only illusorily, unless it recognizes purely and simply its ineffectiveness. If on the other hand intelligence agrees to open itself to the unknown – thing that in fact it detests –, while intuitively admitting that perhaps this new idea, in what it has of most incomprehensible, would allow it, if not to elucidate itself immediately, to bring an additional and lighting point of view, to well-known situations but nevertheless problematic, then the idea of opening to the innovation as absolute originality would not convey any more this worrying image of a risk of loss of sense, but would constitute a creative potential.

This opening is what we will call a “possible possibilizing”. It is an sustained attention to reality, imperceptible in its unfolding but nevertheless carrying and generating of sense. Our social and political habits, before being mechanisms of action, are mechanisms of thought close to any true opening. They only agree very rarely, unless to harden their legitimating position, to submit themselves to the exercise questioning, which new social realities however enjoin to. It is that, on two accounts, they are not ready to receive this innovation: not only the innovation means for them the unknown, which would be enough to disqualify it, but also our usual way of thinking, the social matter as well as any other sphere of activity, simply does not have the tools to see the real prospect of this innovation. Here are, we think according to Bergson, what

⁵⁷ H. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, *op. cit.*, p. 40 (*La pensée et le mouvement*, *op. cit.*, p. 1276 : « [...] notre premier mouvement est de la dire incompréhensible. Mais acceptons-la provisoirement, prommenons nous avec elle dans les divers départements de notre connaissance : nous la verrons, elle obscure, dissiper les obscurités. Par elle, des problèmes que nous jugions insolubles vont se résoudre ou plutôt se dissoudre [...]. De ce qu'elle aura fait pour ces problèmes elle bénéficiera alors en retour »).

the philosopher can and must work on. Here is how his theoretical commitment made relevant and funding his practical commitment, can open to the possibility of a new social era. Thus, to stick to reality, and in particular to the concrete social reality, correspond for him to nothing else than to this creative leaving of the habits by the emergence of a continual attention to social “possibilities”. This means that the relation of the philosopher to the social habit cannot simply be a relation of dismissal, but rather of assumption. These social habits indeed must be reformulated, **reframed** to find their original and creative principle, to make “possible the possibility” itself that they inaugurated, especially to be extended in an attitude appropriate for social progress. Again ambiguity reappears in this philosophical as much as political project of the philosopher, the ambiguity of the possibility of a discourse capable of the worst as well as the best. By considering that “[...] habit being to action what generality is to thought”⁵⁸, We can be led to recognize two dimensions to the social habit: one allowing us to seize the sense of the movement by the only means the nature placed in us in order to understand its signs, the other requiring from us to stop and roll up this movement on itself by the equally natural inclination of this means to the inertia of the mobilized concepts.

To open the social field to new possibilities does not refer to a search for a vacuum of habits in which a new dogma must be substituted. Norms built that way do nothing but reproduce the fought aporias. It is rather necessary to find again back the initial movement for which these habits had a sense in relation to a concrete social condition, to put back there our normative procedure and thus to follow the creative flow this network “possibles possibilizing”, old or new, constitutes. It is not the opening that we have to find, it does not exist as such, but the movement by which our normativity opens to these “possibles” and possibilises them. The committed philosopher has all his relevance here when he theoretically studies such mechanisms through by his example. The philosopher who commits his philosophical responsibility on the ground of the social and political fight makes the choice to endorse the role of the *moral creator* Bergson speaks about. It would be thus, with Bergson, as a *moral creator* that the intellectual can authentically concretize his philosophical commitment in the field of the social matter.

⁵⁸ H. Bergson, *Matter and memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer, London/New York, Allen/Macmillan, 1929, p. 201 (*Matière et mémoire, op. cit.*, p. 296 : « [...] l’habitude étant à l’action ce que la généralité est à la pensée »).