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Charles University

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

(BA Module + Erasmus students)

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**Introduction to Metaphysics (1903)**

• **Two Modes of Knowledge**

🡪 The first implies that we move around the object

🡪 The second requires us to enter into the object

🡪 The first depends on the point of view from which we look at the object

🡪 The second depends on no points of view

🡪 The first employs symbols

🡪 The second relies on no symbols

🡪 The first stop at the relative

🡪 The second attaints the absolute

“Consider, for example, the movement of an object in space. My perception of the motion will vary with the point of view, moving or stationary, from which I observe it. My expression of it will vary with the systems of axes, or the points of reference, to which I relate it; that is, with the symbols by which I translate it. For this double reason I call such motion relative: in the one case, as in the other, I am placed I am placed outside the object itself. Rut when I speak of an absolute movement, I am attributing to the moving object an interior and, so to speak, states of mind; I also imply that I am in sympathy with those states, and that I insert myself in them by an effort of imagination” (2)

- *Metaphysics is the science which claims to dispense with symbols* (9)

“It follows from this that an absolute could only be given in an *intuition*, whilst everything else falls within the province of *analysis*. By intuition is meant a kind of *sympathy* by which one places oneself within an object in order to coincide with what is unique in it and consequently inexpressible. Analysis, on the contrary, is the operation that reduces the object to elements already known, that is, to elements common both to it and other objects. To analyze, therefore, is to express a thing as a function of something other than itself. All analysis is thus a translation, a development into symbols (…)”

“But intuition, if intuition is possible, is a simple act” (7-8)

• **Metaphysics and Duration** = **A Paradigmatic Example**

🡪 There is at least “one reality” which we can grasp from within, by intuition and not by means of analysis: “It is our own person in its following through time. (…) we certainly sympathize with ourselves” (9)

“But if I draw myself in from the periphery towards the center, if I search in the depth of my being that which is most uniformly, most constantly, and most enduringly myself, I find an altogether different thing” (11)

“There is, beneath these sharply cut crystals and this frozen surface, a continuous flux which is not comparable to any flux I have ever seen. There is a succession of states, each of which announces that which follows and contains that which precedes it. They can, properly speaking, only be said to form multiple states when I have already passed them and turn back to observe their track. Whilst I was experiencing them they were so solidly organized, so profoundly animated with a common life, that I could not have said where any one of them finished or where another commenced. In reality no one of them begins or ends, but all extend into each other” (11)

“Lived duration” (*la durée vécue*)

**Intuition** ≠ **Image** ≠ **Concept**

Intuition of the constitutive Though it cannot replace Abstract, general or simple

duration of its own being the intuition, it still has

 the advantage of keeping

 us in the “concrete”

 “but many diverse images, borrowed

“Concepts on the contrary, especially if they are simple, have the disadvantage of being in reality symbols

substituted for the object they symbolize,

and demand no effort on our part” (16)

 from very different orders of things, may,

 by the convergence of their action, direct

 consciousness to the precise point where

 there is a certain intuition to be seized” (16)

“By choosing images as dissimilar as possible,

we shall prevent any one of them

from usurping the place of the intuition it

 is intended to call up, since it would then

“For the concept generalizes

at the same time as it abstracts. The concept can only symbolize a particular

property by making it common to an infinity

of things” (19)

be driven away at once by its rivals”

• **Depending upon what concept we use to approach the object, we will end up reconstructing it in such and such a way**

🡪 Hence, there arises a multiplicity of *philosophical systems*, each of which claims to be able to understand reality from such and such a perspective (20):

“Simple concepts have, then, not only the inconvenience of dividing the concrete unity of the object into so many symbolical expressions; they also divide philosophy into distinct schools, each of which takes its seat, chooses its counters, and carries on with the others a game that will never end” (21).

🡪 Either metaphysics is only this play of ideas, or it must go beyond and transcend the use of concepts in order to reach intuition

🡪 The issue is not the distinction between **intuition** and **analysis**, rather, the confusion between them

 🡪 The mistake consists in doing metaphysics by means of analysis

• **Concepts and Reality**

**(I)** Bergson seems to have a “relational” understanding of “concepts” in general. Each concept represents two contraries, or, better: “concepts (…) go together in couples and represent two contraries” (39)

🡪 As consequence, to *think conceptually* reality means to approach it always from two opposite standpoints, which cannot be reconciled:

“Concepts, as we shall show elsewhere, generally go together in couples and represent two contraries. There is hardly any concrete reality which cannot be observed from two opposing standpoints, which cannot consequently be subsumed under two antagonistic concepts. Hence a thesis and an antithesis which we endeavor in vain to reconcile logically, for the very simple reason that it is impossible, with concepts and observations taken from outside points of view, to make a thing. But from the object, seized by intuition,\_ we pass easily in many cases to the two contrary concepts; and as in that way thesis and antithesis can be seen to spring from reality, we grasp at the same time how it is that the two are opposed and how they are reconciled” (39-40)

**(II)** The work of the intellect is not “dis-interested” (Knowledge is always of practical nature)

🡪 We do not aim at knowing for the sake of it, but in order “to draw profit”. Based on our interest, a “conceptual direction” of thought is determined, hence a conceptual grasp or understanding of the object in question

• **The Role of Metaphysics**

“if metaphysic is possible, it can only be a laborious, and even painful, effort to remount the natural slope of the work of thought, in order to place oneself directly, by a kind of intellectual expansion (*dilatation de l’esprit*), within the thing studied: in short, a passage from reality to concepts and no longer from concepts to reality” (55)

🡪 If metaphysics is possible based upon intuition as a philosophical method;

🡪 If the object of intuition is “duration”

🡪 And if duration is “psychological nature”,

 🡪 Then how are we not saying that metaphysics is, in the end, psychology, and that the philosopher should confine herself/himself to self-contemplation?

“It would be to misconceive the singular nature of duration, and at the same time the essentially active, I might almost say violent, character of metaphysical intuition. It would be failing to see that the method we speak of alone permits us to go beyond idealism, as well as realism, to affirm the existence of objects inferior and superior (though in a certain sense interior) to us, to make them co-exist together without difficulty, and to dissipate gradually the obscurities that analysis accumulates round these great problems. Without entering here upon the study of these different points, let us confine ourselves to showing how the intuition we speak of is not a single act, but an indefinite series of acts, all doubtless of the same kind, but each of a very particular species, and how this diversity of acts corresponds to all the degrees of being” (56-57)

Philosopher

“It is our own person in its following through time.

(…) we certainly sympathize with ourselves”

Lived duration

Different degrees of being

(conception of reality *sub specie durationis*)