A Tale of Two Memories: 
Bergson and the Creation of Memory Science

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Abstract

This essay is an effort to show how Henri Bergson’s distinction between two dramatically different sorts of memory led, after a lapse of three quarters of a century, to the reintroduction of his distinction into mainstream psychology and, strikingly, into successful studies in memory structure and brain localization. Other of his ideas connected with this initial distinction have also come into play in psychology recently, among them theories of cue-dependent forgetting (Tulving 1977), selectionism (MacNamara 1996), and analysis-through-synthesis accounts of perception (Holland 1978, Neisser 1967, Halle and Stevens 1962). These notions might be interesting to pursue. The emphasis in this essay, however, will be on Bergson’s notions of memory in their relations to memory science.

1. Introduction

Bergson’s thought has been typecast as “anti-scientific” and “irrationalist”. That his concept of memory should have led, along with others of his ideas, to successful scientific research programs is a strong indication that this textbook caricature needs to be rethought. Bergson believed that intuition, the center of his theory of knowledge, should lead to insights usefully applicable to the sciences and elsewhere. Were this so, it would certainly exclude him from the ranks of the antiscientific.

The essay is organized as follows. Section 2 sketches Bergson’s concepts of memory, placing them in the context of his philosophical system. Memory as Bergson describes it is fundamental to perception, ordinary practical behavior, and the free act. The goal is to provide a general outline of Bergson’s intentions and their development. Section 3 will examine the creation of contemporary memory science, focusing on the five-level hierarchy at its center, on its terminology, and on the role Bergson’s ideas played in its initial phase. Section 4 will deal with the parallels between Bergson’s memory theory and the basic notions of the new science of memory. The essay will end with brief suggestions as to how Bergson’s ideas might influence research in the future.
2. Bergson’s Concepts of Memory

In his first major work of 1890, *Time and Free Will* (TFW) Bergson (1950) distinguishes two sorts of temporality: inner duration and clock time. Inner duration is continuous, creative, and surprising. Clock or “specialized” time is discontinuous, repetitive, and predictable. He says (TFW, p. 128):

Beneath homogeneous duration, a close psychological analysis distinguishes a duration whose heterogeneous moments permeate one another; below the numerical multiplicity of conscious states, a qualitative multiplicity; below the self with well-defined states, a self in which succeeding each other means melting into one another and forming an organic whole.

We misconstrue our inner nature if (as, for example, in Lockean or Humean psychology) we replace its fluid states either with fragments of ourselves abstracted at any one time, or with instantaneous “snapshots” of ourselves at successive moments.

Inner duration, Bergson argues, is a fact of our experience. But it is a fact with strong implications for our ethical lives and for our sense of self. Through exhibiting periods of relative sameness or stability, it is never twice the same. Though existing in a context of habit and relative repetition, it can give rise to free, spontaneous acts. The free act is exceptional, he states, occurring only when we are called on to make difficult, defining choices (TFW, p. 167). Given that the effort to reach and to express our real or inner selves is strenuous, we prefer to live outside ourselves, “acted” instead of acting. It is easier to live on automatic pilot than it is to be authentic.

If Bergson’s treatment of duration, spontaneity and the free act are open to criticism, still more open to critique are two fundamental problems which arise in *Time and Free Will* but which are not resolved there. The first is the limitation of inner duration to the present, without significant examination of either the contribution of the past or the function of the future. The second is the isolation, which he effects between the inner self, outside of space, and the outer world, which he (at this point like Descartes) construes as geometrical. These problems are serious. How can there be a free act independent of the body, which surely must express it? What is thought without a central nervous system? Hence, it is not surprising that his next study contains strenuous efforts to resolve these and related problems. In resolving them, he significantly restates the “mind-body problem” and reformulates his concept of duration.

*Matter and Memory* (MM), Bergson’s second major work of 1896 (Bergson 1988), continues the stress on temporality central to his prior study. To his previous focus, however, he adds a new insight: the role of memory. Both ordinary perception and the free act, he had insisted,
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take place in the present. Now it becomes clear that both have roots in
the past, in memory, often reaching far back into our personal histories.
In insisting on the role of memory, he distinguishes between memories of
two radically different kinds.

This was an audacious move, dividing in two what was traditionally
conceived as one. The deepening of his phenomenology of inner time
consciousness and a survey of contemporary memory studies – particularly
of the aphasias, the maladies of word memory – convinced him that in
spite of appearances memory is not one. Rather, there are two sorts of
memory: habit memory and spontaneous memory (MM, p. 80).

Habit memory is established by focused, usually repetitive effort. It
consists of both physical and conceptual skills (riding a bike or typing in
the first case, quoting the multiplication table or the Greek alphabet in
the second). Habit memory has no inherent reference to the past. This
is not so with spontaneous memory which (like the recollection of one’s
twelfth birthday or one’s first day on a college campus) involves reference
to one’s personal past per se. Spontaneous memory (MM, p. 81)

... records, in the form of memory images, all the events of our
daily life as they occur in time; it neglects no detail; it leaves to
each fact, to each gesture, its place and fate. Regardless of utility or
of practical application, it stores up the past by the mere necessity
of it own nature.

This is a remarkable claim. On its terms, not merely some but all
memories are retained. Out of the plethora of our experience each as-
pect is preserved, making it possible that we might recover even the
most insignificant details. Bergson’s thesis recalls Marcel Proust’s pas-
sonate explorations of personal reminiscence in *In Search of Lost Time.*
If Proust’s 1,500,000-word novel does not conclusively establish Bergson’s
contentions concerning the all-preserving character of memory, it certainly
makes them understandable (Gunter 2013). In any case, Bergson’s dis-
tinction between two different sorts of memory finds itself mirrored in two
different sorts of memory savants: the prodigies of habit memory, who can
reel off batting averages of major league players from 1946 through 1958,
and the prodigies of spontaneous memory, who can spin off the details of
their past lives in unbelievable detail.

It might seem that spontaneous memories are preserved simply for
their own sake, for no reason. In fact, they have a clear pragmatic func-
tion. Without them, recognition of our physical and social context would
be impossible, not to speak of the working out of our personal lives. If
one did not have (a pertinent example for someone like myself, who still
writes essays by hand) memories of pens and pen-like things, it would not
be possible that we could recognize the object before us as a pen, much
less that its function is to write. Without our fund of personal memories
we would be unable to navigate the changing, many-sided world around us. But memory does not operate in a vacuum. Without our sense organs and their capacity to isolate and stabilize the things around us, memories would, so to speak, have nothing to relate to. They would remain locked up in our memory bank, in what Bergson terms “the unconscious” (MM, p. 145).

The close cooperation of memory and perception, memory and behavior, has implications that reach beyond memory theory as such. It constitutes a denial of the “isolated mind” theory of René Descartes, known as Cartesian dualism. Fatefully, Descartes had defined mind (res cogitans) as entirely unextended and thus outside of the world in space (res extensa) that he conceived as geometry plus geometrized motion. As pointed out above, Bergson in his first work had followed Descartes by contending that within us there is an “organic evolution” with no likeness to number (TFW, p. 226), while outside of us, in the external world, there are “mere simultaneities” (TFW, p. 227), i.e. mere mathematical instantaneous. Matter and Memory cancels this bifurcation of nature. If mind and matter cooperate in perception and behavior, it is because mind is not perfectly extended but reaches out towards space. To use Jean-Paul Sartre’s apt term, it is ek-static: literally, outside itself (Sartre 1956).

Explaining Bergson’s account of the ek-static nature of our awareness would involve a detailed and complex analysis of factors in his philosophy that often have not been understood. If consciousness is not confined to or imprisoned in the brain but reaches into and participates in the rhythms of matter, coinciding with them, this would involve the recasting of our concepts of space, as well as of temporality and mind.

Rather than deal with these issues, it will be much simpler to deal with aspects of his concept of perception which are more readily comprehensible: that is, his theory of filtering operations through which the brain and senses simplify the welter of our perception and localize it in distinct, stable images. If one’s mind were crowded with irrelevant images (clouds, coffee cups, trees) we could not recognize a cylindrical pointed object in front of us. But as a rule, such useless images are filtered out and only useful memories brought into play. Bergson does not attempt to give an account of just how the brain excludes unusable memories. His point is that while we have a lot of remembering to explain, we have equally to explain a prodigious amount of forgetting.

This thesis has been taken up by current “selectionist” theories of perception. McNamara (1999, pp. 33–62), agreeing with Bergson, draws a helpful parallel between Bergson’s theory of perception and the function of the immune system. Out of its immense store of antibodies (each dealing with a particular pathology), the immune system brings forward only those that deal with a particular illness. From an immense surplus, most agents are excluded, while the useful are marshaled. As with antibodies,
so with memories. Many might be volunteered; only a few are allowed in
to do their work.¹

3. Contemporary Memory Science

The history of ideas does not always proceed in a straight line. Ortho-
odoxies believed impregnable succumb or are outflanked. Ideas long dead
arise from their ashes and traverse the landscapes of thought. Both of
these fates have awaited Bergson. Hailed in the early 20th century as a
milestone in Western thought, his philosophy suffered nearly total “era-
sure”, partially after the First World War, conclusively after the Second.
Today Bergson’s thought is enjoying a rebirth, largely among literary and
film theorists and largely through the writings of Deleuze (1986); see also
Pearson (2002). The notion of a literary or aesthetic Bergson is thus with
us again. The notion of a Bergson closely familiar with the sciences and
responding to them – a pragmatic and scientific Bergson – remains in
limbo.

Initially, Bergson’s explorations of duration and memory, though of
interest to some philosophers and phenomenological psychologists, found
few applications in scientific psychology. This changed in the 1970s when
Tulving picked up on Bergson’s distinction between two sorts of mem-
ory. Tulving later involved his younger colleague (initially his student)
Schacter in the development of Bergson’s duality. Together they and
their colleagues were able, significantly, to rewrite the map of memory
research.

It will be helpful to set the work of Tulving, Schacter and their asso-
ciates in context. The scientific study of memory begins with Ebbinghaus’
rigorously argued Über das Gedächtnis (Ebbinghaus 1885). This work, an
extension of prevailing associationist psychology, initiated an extended pe-
riod of laboratory experiments focused on word memory. Tulving (1995,
p. 839) recounts:

This was the long period of verbal learning. Its emphasis was on
experimental design and precise measurement of basic phenomena
and forgetting in normal adults of serial and paired-associate lists
of verbal items.

This approach was quantitative, and it produced a body of work in terms
of which memory science could be extended and applied. But it suffered
from a kind of laboratory abstractness.

¹Bergson provides no account of how the brain excludes unhelpful memories. In his
Mind Time, Libet (2004, p. 115) gives a neurophysiological account of how this can
happen.
Not until the 1960s was this approach effectively challenged. The new standpoint, the information-processing paradigm, was based on a computer model, with its notions of encoding, storage, and retrieval. Earlier concepts of paired associates in serial learning were replaced with “free” and “cued” recall and by studies of recognition. Concepts of storage and retrieval were distinguished and intense debates over long- and short-term memory initiated.

The dominance of the information-processing paradigm was to be brief. By the 1980s, it was edged out by a new viewpoint, the cognitive neuroscience of memory. This approach, a component of the cognitive science revolution, remains dominant today. It was new in several ways, uniting psychology and neurophysiology (which, surprisingly, had previously been studied separately) and dealing with factors which prior memory science had not studied, for example, memory over the human life span, pharmacological factors, and the vitally important notion of human memory systems. To take memory systems seriously is to insist that there is more than one sort of memory and to develop new techniques to study them.

Memory science thus moved away from concentration on word tests to embrace a far wider domain (Bower 2000, Baddeley 1990, Schacter and Tulving 1994). A philosopher would be tempted to say that it began to converge more closely to a life-world phenomenology. Neisser (1967, 1982), one of its strongest proponents, recommended it as an “ecological” approach that could bring psychology closer to reality.

The concept of memory systems did not always receive a warm welcome. Debates over the nature of long- and short-term memory had helped pave the way for the fundamental notion of memory systems. But, as Schacter (1996, pp. 169–170) points out,

... when Tulving introduced the distinction between episodic and semantic memory in 1972 some psychologists resisted this division of memory into two further systems.

It seems simpler and more parsimonious to assume a single memory, Schacter continues, unless and until the evidence forces us to postulate multiple memory systems.

Tulving’s two memory systems precisely paralleled Bergson’s distinction between spontaneous and habit memory, and were made with an awareness of Bergson’s contributions. It was exciting, Schacter notes, to contemplate using scientific techniques to study what Bergson and others had theorized about or had observed in the clinic. Tulving, Schacter and their colleagues were to take Bergson’s distinction between conscious remembering of the past and learned habits (including conceptual habits), and place them in a new psychological and experimental context (Tulving 1985).
Tulving (1995, p. 386) reserves the term “semanti” for the use of language. Recalling a chemical formula, a city map, or a statistical equation, provides examples of semantic memory (Bergson’s habit memory), which deals with information about general concepts, their interrelations, and their relations to the world (p. 397). It is object-centered (hence the term semantic). By contrast, episodic memory (Bergson’s spontaneous memory) presents a record of personal experiences: particular events and their temporal-spatial relations (p. 385). The semantic system requires encoding; the episodic system far less so (p. 390). Finally, though, when Tulving introduced his distinction little was known about how they are related: it was clear to him that the two sorts of memory are interdependent (pp. 390–392).

Tulving’s initial dualism was soon to be augmented (“fractionated”) by the addition of a new memory system. This system, working memory, was a recasting of short-term memory in terms of function. Working memory acts in the short run, but its behavior is thoroughly pragmatic. One dials a phone number, writes a check, and pushes papers out of the way. Here, memory acts only in the present and (a reigning assumption) is quickly and effectively forgotten. Working memory is divided into three parts: the “phonological loop”, the “visual-spatial sketchpad”, and the “executive assistant”.

The phrase “executive assistant” is extremely apt. Working memory acts exactly like an executive assistant to a CEO, getting short-term affairs out of the way to serve long-term interests. To these three memory systems two more were to be added: representational memory and procedural memory, whose characteristics and interrelations will be discussed below. This system, worked out through a combination of both psychological and neurophysiological investigations, completes a five-tiered hierarchy or “monohierarchy”:

1. episodic memory
2. working memory
3. semantic memory
4. representational memory
5. procedural memory

As in most hierarchies (that of general systems theory, for example, or of Aristotle), the higher levels have capacities that the lower levels lack, while the lower levels are necessary to the activities of the higher. To quote Tulving (1985):

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2 Other memory systems were, like working memory, to develop subsystems. Though these are interesting and important in their own right, space forbids their discussion in this essay.

3 It is arguable that there is a sixth memory system, the emotional memory system, involving the amygdala (Schooler and Eich 2000, pp. 379–392).
In this scheme each higher system depends on and is supported by
the lower system or systems, but it possesses unique capabilities
not possessed by the lower systems.

Not one of these systems functions in isolation from the others. They
operate as one (Anderson 1983, 1995).

Neither representational nor procedural memory involves the making
of judgments – they are unconscious. Representational memory (often
termed the perceptual representation system) deals with both words and
images. Only the structure of words and physical objects is accessed by
this memory, however, which “... does not know what words mean or
what objects are used for” (Schacter 1996, p. 184). As such it can provide
raw materials on which the next tier of the hierarchy, semantic memory,
depends.

The fifth level, procedural memory, functions exclusively in behav-
ior and consists of simple conditioning, associative learning, motor and
conceptual skills. Its productions have no truth-values, do not store rep-
resentations of external states of the world, and operate at an automatic
rather than consciously controlled level. If consciousness can access the
perceptual representational system (i.e. can be aware of recognizing word
or image structures), procedural memory lurks beneath the thresholds of
awareness. We act in terms of it without knowing that we do.

Viewed as a whole, this theory is plausible. It is not difficult to conceive
of a first-level system that responds to causal factors without representing
them, and a higher system, supported by the first, which represents things
without any notion of what is being represented. The relations of these
two systems (procedural and representational) to semantic memory are
in turn comprehensible enough. Together they make it possible to supply
the semantic memory system with the word and image structures through
which concepts can be formed, concepts through which the organism can
cope, practically, with its environment. This in turn makes it possible
for the episodic system to provide the retrospect and prospect in terms
of which goals can be formed. If the five-tier memory system is a ladder,

To the description of this system some distinctions must be added –
distinctions which make the structure of memory science clearer. The
two higher levels, episodic and working memory, are coupled together as
“explicit” memory while the lower three are grouped as “implicit” or non-
conscious memory. Explicit memory involves knowledge of the situation
in which a memory was acquired, while implicit memory does not. To
this 2:3 classification is added another in which the first four tiers are
grouped together as “declarative” while procedural memory is termed
“non-declarative”. This 4:1 grouping is sometimes depicted in terms of cognition, with the first four tiers termed cognitive representation systems and the fifth an action system. It can be a tricky business in all this to discern what is “conscious” or “conceptual” or “unconscious”, and in what sense. The multiplication of synonyms for the different memory systems provides yet another obstacle.

4. Relations to Bergson’s Theory

Today and in the Future

It will be helpful here to return briefly to Bergson’s thought for clarification. First, his approach to memory and that of memory science, though they may appear to be in conflict, are really not at odds. The mnemonic hierarchy of contemporary scientists and the dualism of Bergson are parallel both in their descriptions of the different sorts of memory and in the sharp difference they find between the “higher” and the “lower” memory types. Second, the standpoint developed in Matter and Memory was not to be the philosopher’s final “take” on memory. In his next major work, Creative Evolution, the concept of memory was to be expanded, making it a source and even the embodiment of creativity.

Hierarchies are certainly not dualisms. But Bergson, in Matter and Memory, manages to combine both. To see this, one need only follow contemporary scientists, stressing the distinction these scientists make between explicit and implicit memory. Explicit memory (to repeat) involves awareness of the occasion in which it was gained – implicit memory does not. Bergson’s distinction has two sorts of memory: one involving this awareness, the other not.

A major field in contemporary memory science is the study of “priming”, e.g., the manner in which implicit memories are instilled by repetition. In making his distinction between the two major forms of memory, Bergson also made it clear that the second form of memory involves repetition for its “encoding” and does not need awareness of the past for its use. If he deserves credit for the distinction between the two major forms of memory, he also deserves credit for his depiction of the primed and atemporal nature of the second.

There appears to be a further discrepancy between Bergson’s views and those of memory science. Bergson seems to describe only one form of habit memory. But memory science describes three: semantic, representational and procedural. This discrepancy, however, is only apparent. Bergson does treat habit memory as, in one sense, one (MM, p. 225):

There is only a difference of degree, not of kind, between the so-called perceptive faculties of the brain and the reflex functions of the spinal cord.
But in speaking in this way, he is only insisting on the mechanical or quasi-mechanical nature of habit memory, a fact that underlines his agreement with contemporary memory theorists. Equally important, in describing a continuity of functions from reflex behavior to brain activity, he is clearly demarcating a series of distinguishable functions which must be studied independently and cannot be confused with each other. He singles out some of these, without attempting to fill in the intermediaries (which, then as now, could be found in any elementary physiology textbook): knowing perception (MM, pp. 78–80), learning how to draw (MM, pp. 98–99), bodily exercise (MM, pp. 88, 110–111) and, again, reflexes (MM, pp. 86–87). This is the same general progression described by contemporary theories. The essential difference is that Bergson outlines a general viewpoint while scholars of memory science, accepting the viewpoint, went on to flesh out the details.

A similar claim can be made for episodic and working memory as forms of explicit memory. The two are similar not only as “explicit”, but in other ways. The focus of attention in a phonological loop or the acts of an executive assistant, in working memory, combine past and present in a single (if brief) duration. The same is true of episodic memory, but in greater breadth. It is thus not surprising that at least one psychologist has argued that the former is only a contraction and application of the latter (Anderson 1983, 1995). But it is not necessary to conflate them to see them as functioning together. Unified action is enough to constitute a single pole of a duality.

Put inversely: if memory science asserts a hierarchy, it contains an implicit duality, with implicit memory as its “lower” and “explicit” memory as its “higher” pole. The latter tends towards greater awareness and the former, strongly, towards unconsciousness. (This duality will become clearer when the nature of episodic memory and autonoetic awareness are examined below.) To complete the comparison, Bergson’s psychology, through involving polarity, also contains a hierarchy of habit memories inscribed in human physiology, including neurophysiology.

That Bergson provided an entry to the creation of a new science is interesting, partly for the light it casts on his own philosophical intentions, and partly for the insights it could provide into the relations between philosophy and the sciences. Possibly this potential usefulness for memory science is exhausted. But after Matter and Memory he was to reformulate and broaden his concept of memory. I will suggest that Bergson’s broadened notion of memory and duration could have further interesting implications.

The shift in Bergson’s concept of memory occurs before Creative Evolution, in the last paragraph of Matter and Memory, where he returns to the concept of the free act, so painstakingly explored in his first work Time and Free Will. In Matter and Memory, reminiscence is treated as...
not merely recording but also reconfiguring and restructuring the past (MM, pp. 248–249):

Not only, by its memory of former experiences, does this consciousness retain the past better and better, so as to organize it with the present in a newer and richer decision; but living with an intenser life, contracting, by its memory of the immediate experience, a growing number of external moments in its present duration, it becomes more capable of creating acts of which the inner indetermination ... will pass the more easily through the meshes of necessity.

What had changed here? Previously, memory had been treated as a purely conservative faculty: almost like an immense collection of color slides depicting particular past times and places, slides (images) which can be marshaled to deal with particular situations. That these images do not change guarantees both their usefulness and the reliability of our knowledge. But in the passage just quoted, it is claimed that memory is a basis for the free act, which transcends mere retention and adds to, rather than simply replicating what precedes it. To reason in this way is to deny that the present is simply a recombination, (a sort of combinatorial analysis) of past prior units. It is to insist that in constituting the present, memory acts not as a collection of distinct units but as a whole.

This is the fundamental assumption of Creative Evolution: that memory, securely anchored in the past, provides a basis for a future that will transcend it. There are many consequences of this claim. One is that the future does not preexist the present. We persuade ourselves erroneously, Bergson (2007, p. 218) argues

... that duration to come admits the same treatment as past duration, that is that it is, even now, unrollable, that the future is there, rolled up, already painted on the canvas.

But if the future does not preexist, then what it will become is a function of processes taking place in the present. These, Bergson (2007, p. 23) argues, involve a constant creative effort: “...to act is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly”. Put in another way, human beings are creatures of not only intelligence but also of will. Their existence, embodied in the past, embodies a drive towards the future.

The notion that man is impelled by a fundamental drive or drives is scarcely new. It was decisively brought into psychology around the turn of the 19th/20th century by those who Ellenberger (1970) terms the discoverers of the unconscious: the dynamic psychiatrists Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, Pierre Janet, and Alfred Adler (Gunter 1982). Each of these figures had their own conception of the nature of these drives. Freud, using the term libido, defined it as sexual in nature. Jung, influenced by
Bergson, transformed libido into a generalized force, having sexuality as one of its components (Wheeler 2000, p. 598).

I will suggest three possibilities for this newer standpoint: (1) the study of creativity per se, (2) the study of the part played by creativity in the development of normal personality, and (3) the study of neurosis as a failure or blockage of creativity. The basic claim in each case would be that, having accepted autonoetic (episodic) memory as a fundamental fact of human psychology, memory science has reached a boundary that it will find hard not to transgress. Episodic memory is, it will be argued, so closely bound up with both the higher mental functions and the constitution of personality that failure to extend memory science to deal with them must seem inconsistent, illogical: even though the reasons for failing to do so do make sense.

Creativity is a slippery concept, hard to correlate with laboratory experiments or modern imaging techniques. It is easy to see why memory theorists have kept it at arm’s length. I would argue that, nonetheless, it is inescapable. A scientific theory, with its attendant mathematics, observations and experiments can help us predict the future, but it cannot help us predict the next theory: for that, an intervening act of creative imagination is necessary, not only in the sciences, or in the arts where it is supposed to have found a permanent home, but in matters more mundane.

The word “creativity” scarcely appears in the literature of mainstream memory science. In the capacious Oxford Handbook of Memory it appears only twice, once with regard to the way creativity leads to mnemonic error. In Schacter’s (1996) Searching for Memory no mention is made of creativity. Imagination is mentioned only once, in terms of memory distortion (Schacter 1996, p. 116). In his The Seven Sins of Memory (Schacter 2001), neither creativity nor imagination are mentioned. In Baddley’s (1998) Human Memory one finds no references to creativity, imagination, or intuition. In Tulving’s (2001) Memory, Consciousness and the Brain, two paragraphs are devoted to “creative abilities”. But no references to creativity or imagination are found in the index.

But the notions of episodic or autonoetic memory and creative imagination are closely linked. It is not possible to consider the latter apart from the former. Wheeler notes (Gunther 1973):

Individuals with autonoetic awareness are capable of reflecting on their own experiences in the past, present and future. Reflecting back on past happenings is episodic memory. Related behaviors are the ability to introspect on present experiences, and also to anticipate or imagine future experiences, and also to anticipate or imagine future experiences through imagination, daydreams and fantasies.
All of these require the withdrawal of attention from the immediate situation. This in turn makes reflection possible. This reflective character is one of the factors that make episodic memory, as Wheeler (2000, p. 397) stresses, “critically different from all other varieties of memory”. It also relates episodic memory to other higher-order mental achievements.

Here, again, it is necessary to be brief. As noted above, Bergson’s philosophy, with its implications for memory science, has implications for psychotherapy as well. Those interested should look over the work of Eugene Minkowski (1885–1972) who appropriated Bergson’s reflections on time, memory and personality to create a unique approach to mental illness. Most of Minkowski’s work is not translated into English. But the one exception, *Lived Time*, provides a deep enough insight into Minkowski’s ideas to indicate the direction in which he developed Bergson’s thought (Minkowski 1970).

The normal personality, Minkowski holds, is able to handle space, repetition, and stasis without difficulty. The neurotic, by contrast, is trapped by them. Mental illness is marked by both repetitive behavior and the spatialization of consciousness, and by the inability to develop. The normal creativity by which people fashion their lives and their ideas is blocked. The aim of psychopathology must therefore be to bring the patient into time – into duration – and reconnect him or her to their potential lives. In this there is no attempt to avoid the standard ingredients of mental illness (sexual, social, genetic). But behind all efforts to help the patient is the view of their pathology as the blockage and enfeebling of the fundamental process of being human: the reduction of life to dullness, flatness, and the repetition of the same, often self-destructive actions (Gunter 2008).

The strong linkage to autonoetic knowledge and autonoetic memory brings together two disciplines that have, to date, proceeded with total disregard for each other. Memory science and psychotherapy now find themselves, without the slightest intention of doing so, occupying the same autonoetic conceptual territory. So far the recognition of this fact seems not have dawned on either memory science or psychotherapy. It is hard for me to believe that this mutual disregard can continue indefinitely. I am convinced, also, that once the camel of autonoetic (episodic, autobiographical) memory gets its nose under the tent of orthodox psychology, it will carry the tent away. This might require that the tent be recut and restitched. (Under pressure I might be forced to withdraw this metaphor. But the point remains.)

5. Conclusions

There is an ancient saying: “Philosophy bakes no bread”. This is certainly true. But it is possible that philosophy might lead to a rethinking of the ways ovens are designed. This is part of the significance of
Bergson’s philosophy: its fruitfulness, its capacity to anticipate notions that might later prove useful. Such applicable anticipations in this case include, beyond the career of memory science, areas such as cosmology, thermodynamics (Gunter 1991), and chronobiology (Gunter 2005).

It is fascinating to look back on Bergson’s philosophy with this in mind. The distinction which he drew so dramatically between two forms of memory seemed initially, no doubt, to be a mere philosopher’s distinction. But by picking it up and applying it to the concrete, empirical study of memory, it helped engender – was an important factor in creating – a new science, laboratory experiments, neurophysiology and all that.

Types of memory could be distinguished and related, their underpinnings in the central nervous system and their function in behavior explored. It is essential to see that Bergson’s approach and his basic ideas were not imposed as dogmas but proposed as ways of getting in touch with reality. They are regulative ideas, concepts that can help us organize our experiences and make more sense out of it than we otherwise could.

Given this conclusion, two things follow. One is that the reigning notion of Bergson as an irrationalist and antiscientific thinker should be quietly put to the side and his thought understood for what it is: a metaphysics believed to have positive implications for the sciences, and for the entire spectrum of human thought. The other is that philosophy has a right to exist. When we reduce it to one or another form of analysis, or when we simply reject it, we truncate our thought and rule out speculative concepts, some of which, sooner or later, could make a difference.

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