

**THE PHILOSOPHY OF CHANGE:
A STUDY OF THE
FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF
THE PHILOSOPHY OF BERGSON**

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The philosophy of change: a study of the fundamental principle of the philosophy of Bergson by
H. Wildon Carr

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BY

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PREFACE

THIS book is the outcome of a course of lectures on "The Philosophy of Bergson" delivered in the University of London. The title "The Philosophy of Change" was suggested to me by M. Bergson himself as a sub-title for the little volume on his philosophy in *The People's Books*.¹ It emphasises the fundamental principle of the new philosophy, the principle that change is original.

It seems to me that our present generation is witnessing a wide extension of science in directions unimagined by, and inconceivable to, the last generation. In two directions especially experiment is opening up realms of reality the existence of which has until now been unsuspected, and the discovery of which is probably destined to widen immeasurably the horizon of human knowledge and thereby increase indefinitely human power. One of these new realms of reality may be fitly described as the world beyond the atom, the other is the spiritual (or mental, if that word is preferred) reality revealed in the new method and science of psychoanalysis. The Philosophy of Change is in

¹ *Henri Bergson: The Philosophy of Change.* (T. C. and E. C. Jack.)

striking agreement and complete harmony with the extension of science in both these experimental fields. The simultaneous formulation of a new principle in philosophy with its confirmation in scientific discovery must be something more than coincidence. There is no apparent connection, and it is certainly not due to direct influence. But is it not just as if a greater mind, of which our individual minds are the present activity, had brought to consciousness a new idea? It is this idea, the idea of original change, that I have tried to expound in this book.

From this standpoint I have endeavoured to present a clear and concise account of what seem to me the definite doctrines worked out in Bergson's philosophy. In this task I have been privileged to have the advantage of friendship and personal communication with M. Bergson himself. He is in no way responsible for the order or the manner in which I have set forth the doctrines nor for the arguments with which I have supported them, but he has encouraged me by the deep interest he has shown in the work, and has discussed with me many of the more difficult problems.

The reason I have devoted so much attention to the problem of the relation of mind and body is that I feel it to be the point of departure for a philosophy of action. What impresses me is the quite evident initial determination of M. Bergson to reach a definite conclusion as to the exact nature of that relation, and not, as so many have done, to rest satisfied with a cautious acceptance of some provisional hypothesis.

Matière et Mémoire convinces me that this problem was among the earliest to attract Bergson's attention, and that his conclusion from his studies of the physiology of cerebral processes, that those processes cannot of themselves by any possibility give rise to a perception or a memory, is the real starting-point of the development of his philosophical theory.

On this portion of my book I have had the advantage of the criticism of my friend Mr. William McDougall, to whom I am deeply indebted for his kindness in reading the manuscript, and who, besides pointing to defects in my argument and suggesting many improvements in my treatment of the problem, expressed his strong dissent from me on two most important doctrines. I mention them here because I think it is possible that in each case M. Bergson would himself incline much more than I do to Mr. McDougall's view. In the first place, Mr. McDougall objects that what I have called solidarity in action is nothing else but interaction, that it is meaningless unless there is interaction, and that it cannot therefore be described as a third alternative to the two alternatives of parallelism and interaction. To this my reply is that I by no means deny interaction, but I say that the theory I have put forward would stand even though all experiments designed to prove interaction should continue to be negative. On the question of the possibility of experiment to prove interaction I am able to quote from a letter written to me by M. Bergson: "En ce qui concerne la possibilité d'une création

d'énergie physique, j'inclinerais à considérer la question comme susceptible d'être traitée un jour expérimentalement. Il ne me paraît pas impossible qu'une énergie purement psychique puisse accroître (quoique, sans doute, dans une mesure excessivement restreinte) la somme d'énergie physique existant dans un système donné ; et il n'est pas non plus impossible que des mesures convenablement prises viennent confirmer cette hypothèse, quand la science sera plus avancée." If such a test experiment can be contrived I hope it will be (like the well-known experiment of Michelson and Morley to show the effect of the movement of the source of light on the observed velocity of its propagation) equally capable of demonstrating a negation or an affirmation. For it seems to me that the negation of interaction, if there be none, is quite as important as would be its affirmation. What I claim for the solidarity of mind and body in action is that it is a fact which does not depend on the proof or disproof of an hypothesis.

In the second place, Mr. McDougall, conformably with the view he has developed in his book on *Body and Mind*, thinks that I, following M. Bergson, shirk the problem of individuality and fail to draw what he regards as the plain conclusion from the doctrine of memory, and of the vital impulse, that each human being has a psychical nature which is individual, which is the product of racial evolution and individual development,—a soul. In his presidential address to the Society for Psychical Research, M. Bergson has expressed his view that the

survival of individual personality after death is so probable as to compel belief in the absence of any positive disproof. I should not myself rank the probability so high. But, in any case, one thing is clear,—that, so far as action is concerned, we not only have no evidence of, but we have no way of conceiving, action except as a function of the union of mind and body. And this is plain when we consider the alleged evidences of survival. These are in every case certain actions of living bodies alleged to be the expression of a mind which is not the mind of the person who performs the actions. The important thing to me is that whether or not there be the highly complex psychical structures called souls, capable of maintaining some sort of existence when the organism they acted through is disintegrated, such existence would not, even were it capable of the clearest experimental proof, solve the tremendous problem of individuality and personality. Indeed in many respects it would multiply the difficulties of the problem, which is to understand how the whole can be, as it seems to be, present in the part. It seems to me that however successful we may be in distinguishing the spiritual reality from the material reality, we must recognise that in living action they are inseparable, and that the solidarity of mind and body in action means that only in their union do we know their existence.

It will be seen, therefore, that in making it my aim to present the fundamental principle and definite doctrines of Bergson's philosophy I have sought like-