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ABSTRACT

By the end of the 19th-century, Nietzsche's life works had collectively represented an existential philosophy that strictly categorizes all of life into a sort of power relations he called the will to power. In all his significant works, such as *Beyond Good and Evil*, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, and *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, Nietzsche spent much time investigating the genealogy of humanity, criticizing nihilism and anti-semitism, and of course, conceptualizing the Übermensch/Overman. Referring to the same timeline, Henri Bergson rose into highly honorably positions in France academia while crafting some of the most genius literary works that would forever change 20th-century science and philosophy. *The Creative Mind*, *Creative Evolution*, and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* stand as Bergson's masterpieces, yet also exemplify a philosophy structured around three major concepts: Intuition, duration and the élan vital. The following essays not only review Nietzsche's and Bergson's complex philosophies but also investigated the similarities in both their moral philosophy as a means of better understanding the ultimate goal of justifying an argument which states that both the élan vital and the will to power is nearly one of the same.

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Henri Bergson: A Man of Academia

The incredibly impressive and thought-provoking work of Henri Bergson stands as a final chapter of the late 19th to early 20th philosophy in Europe prior to the great social-political changes brought about during and after the Second World War. Bergson's life and philosophy are not as popularized as his post-war predecessors, such as Micheal Foucault or Jean-Paul Sartre, but for what he lacks in post-war fame he gains in his spectacular contribution to the world of philosophy. Bergson's work exists as a philosophy of life and reality, of science and morality, along with an outstanding influence of early 20th-century continental philosophy. The *élan vital*, duration, and intuition are the three greatest concepts of Bergson's philosophy, with the *élan vital* being his most important and controversial concept. Certainly, it is a concept that will be investigated thoroughly in the following essays. From the early period to the late, Bergson's life is marked by interesting events along with the work he produced. To better understand his philosophy, it is imperative to understand his life just as much as it is to understand his sophisticated philosophy.

Born in Paris in October of 1859, Henri Bergson was born into a Jewish, Anglo-Polish family: His father was a very talented pianist while his mother was from Yorkshire, England, gifting Bergson from an early age the ability to become quite familiarized with the English language. Moving between France and England nine years after his birth, Bergson's family eventually settled in Paris. Bergson attended high school at Lycée¹ Condorcet from 1868 to 1878. It is during this time that Bergson showed great skill in mathematics and the sciences, winning

¹ Lycée is a 3-year secondary school, like high school, that is part of the French educational system.

the “Concours Général,” for discovering the solution to a significant problem in mathematics, which in 1877 would be published in the *Nouvelles Annales de Mathématiques*.² Disappointing his teachers at Lycée Condorcet, a 19-year-old Bergson shockingly opted to further his education in the humanities rather than sciences, and in 1878 was accepted into the incredibly prestigious École Normale Supérieure.

It is during this time that Bergson would become well acquainted with the philosophy of Herbert Spencer, whose work focused on sociology, anthropology, biology, and ultimately evolution. In 1881, Bergson would finish his studies at École Normale Supérieure, achieving second best in the Agrégation de Philosophie, an incredibly selective examination process that requires a considerable amount of preparation and skill. Just after graduation, Bergson would begin teaching at the lycée in Angers, a city in western France. In 1883, he would settle at the Lycée Blaise-Pascal in Clermont-Ferrand, the capital of Puy-de-Dôme. During the following years, Bergson would show his grand abilities in the humanities, writing in 1884 a critical study on the excerpts of Lucretius, a late-period Roman writer, and philosopher. Bergson would then start drafting his dissertation, *Time and Free Will*, which would be published in 1889, the same year he achieved his doctorate from the University of Paris.

Bergson had settled back in Paris and began an 8-year appointment at the Lycée Henri-Quatre. It is during this time that Bergson focused his studies on Charles Darwin and Jean-Baptiste Lamarck (the founder of Lamarckism). By 1896 Bergson had published his second work titled *Matter and Memory*, an interesting piece that investigates the dualism of, as Bergson stated

² “Nouvelles Annales de Mathématiques” 2 (17). Paris. 1878: 268. Retrieved 15 October 2019.

in the introduction, “the reality of spirit and the reality of matter.”³ This complex book led to Bergson becoming a lecturer at the École Normale Supérieure, and by 1900, Bergson was accepted as a Professor and Chair of Greek and Roman Philosophy at the Collège de France.

Bergson's career in philosophy was entering a golden age. In 1903 he contributed one of his most important essays titled, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, to the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, a French journal of philosophy. *Introduction to Metaphysics* stands not just as an important mark in Bergson's philosophy, but also the essential beginning of what would become part of *The Creative Mind*. Here, Bergson further develops and conceptualizes his philosophical ideas of duration and intuition. Intuition, as Bergson defines, is “the symphony by which one is transported into the interior of an object in order to coincide with what there is unique and consequently inexpressible in it.” Bluntly, intuition is Bergson's method of establishing absolute truth, something his post-war predecessors would have generally opposed. Duration is much more complicated to understand, hence why Bergson constructed it through three examples: the spool of film, the color spectrum, and the elastic band. All three, in some way, fail to perfectly exemplifying duration yet together represent the mobility, the multiplicity, and homogeneity of duration. It is, Just as Bergson stated, “a continuity of flow comparable to no other flowing I have ever seen.”⁴

In 1904, Bergson continued to climb the ladder of academia, becoming Chair of Modern Philosophy at Collège de France while also giving lectures at the Second International Congress

³ Bergson, Henri, Nancy Margaret. Paul, and William Scott Palmer. “Introduction.” Essay. In *Matter and Memory*. Authorized Tr. by Nancy Margaret Paul & w. Scott Palmer, xi-xxi. Humanities pr., 1970.

⁴ Bergson, Henri. “Introduction to Metaphysics .” Essay. In *The Creative Mind*, Westpoint Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1976, p. 192.

of Philosophy in Geneva, Switzerland. However, it is in 1907 that Bergson's true genius was shown, with the publication of *Creative Evolution*. Laying the groundwork for his third concept, Bergson effectively debated the leading theories of evolution, such as Darwinism and Lamarckism, while proclaiming evolution as a process of pre-determined transformations through a force or impetus known as the *élan vital*. *Creative Evolution* became incredibly successful, further proliferating Bergson's popularity. He was invited to give lectures at numerous universities, including Oxford and the University of Birmingham. In 1913, Bergson made his first visit to the United States, lecturing at Columbia University. His relationship with the United States would only grow, and by 1917, Bergson would aid in the negotiation of persuading the United States to enter World War 1.

Bergson's rising stardom treated him quite well. He earned honorable titles, such as President of the Académie des Sciences morales et politiques and Officier de la Légion d'honneur.⁵ Bergson saw his writings translated into eight different languages, including English and Russian. Already having retired from teaching, in 1922 Bergson publishes, arguably his worst book, *Duration and Simultaneity*, as well as participating in a somewhat infamous debate with Albert Einstein on the subject of relativity. Thanks to the success of *Creative Evolution*, In 1928 Bergson is awarded The Nobel Prize for Literature, an honor that very few philosophers would ever earn. He ultimately did not travel to the ceremony in Stockholm, Sweden due to his increasing difficulties with severe arthritis.

⁵ The Legion of Honour, the highest award for military or civil merits.

Seemingly retired from the public sphere due to his declining health (leaving him half-paralyzed), Bergson painstakingly publishes his final masterpiece, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* in 1932. Furthering the ideas brought about in *Creative Evolution*, Bergson outlines the concept of open and closed morality while critiquing Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy. Though an amazing achievement considering Bergson's health and age, the following years would be marked by waves of antisemitism mirrored by the rise of the Nazis. The Vichy government was instituted in France in July of 1940, forcing many Jews to become registered through the state. Bergson was offered omission from such requirements but refused. At 81 years old, still suffering from his poor health, Bergson went and registered as a Jew. On the registration form, he wrote, "Academic. Philosopher. Nobel Prize winner. Jew."⁶

There are many theories as to why Bergson's philosophy faded into obscurity. Though frustrating, according to reports it was Bergson's dying wish that all his papers be destroyed after his death. His wife fulfilled such wishes, incinerating his papers in a fireplace. It has been rumored that a half-written manuscript was willfully destroyed along the rest of his papers.⁷ It is the ultimate question as to what great writings could have been made public had they not been destroyed. Certainly, the new wave of philosophy that exploded in France after the second world war also played a major role in Bergson's philosophy become a mere footnote in history. Thanks in-part to the work of philosophers like Gilles Deleuze, Bergson's writing has been reborn and reestablished into the world of academia.

⁶ Gilbert, Martin. *The Second World War: A Complete History* (p. 129). Rosetta Books. Kindle Edition.

⁷ Lawlor, Leonard, and Valentine Moulard Leonard. "Henri Bergson." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, March 21, 2016. <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/bergson/>.

The Élan Vital

Bergson's work in philosophy in the early decades of the 20th-century exemplifies the incredible changes in the sciences during the late 19th and 20th centuries, where theories on evolution brought about by thinkers such as Charles Darwinian and Jean Lamarck, birthed entirely new schools of thought. Bergson's written works and lectures effectively critiqued 19th-century evolutionary thinking, and in doing so introduced an extremely well thought out philosophy. *Creative Evolution* is by far Bergson's most famous work and in the following pages it will be dissected, evaluated, and properly understood so that the we can attune ourselves to that of Bergson's views on evolutionary philosophy.

Creative Evolution, written in 1907, contains a very pure form of Bergsonian philosophy. It would be challenging to bring out, so to speak, the many ideas within the text in such a rapid and dense essay. It would be like consuming too much alcohol in one sitting: it would not be recommended. The task at hand is finding a perfect mixture of dilution, that is why we will only be focusing on mainly chapter 1. Here, the introduction to one of the most important theories of Bergson's philosophy resides: The élan vital. In reviewing this, we will also be investigating Bergson's views of mechanism and finalism, which will be properly explained just as the élan vital. We will also be making use of the other works by Bergson and introducing outside sources to better understand the text.

The entire purpose of the first chapter of *Creative Evolution* was to critique the two predominate theories of evolution and in doing so bring forth an introduction to an “original common impulse,” one that can “offer a philosophy capable of accounting both for the continuity of all living beings—as creatures—and for the discontinuity implied in the evolutionary quality of this creation.”⁸ To Bergson, duration is going to be the most common philosophical idea that emerges in all his works, and one should not be surprised to see its occurrence in *Creative Evolution*. Gary Gutting explained it quite well while quoting Bergson, “Existence is a matter of temporal development, seen as a process of self-creation. “we find that, for a conscious being, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.”⁹

We see early on in *Creative Evolution* that Bergson is reintroducing duration as a means of introducing the reading into mechanistic and finalist evolutionary philosophies. The courageous question being asked early on is whether or not that duration, in intelligent beings such as ourselves, is the same to that of all life? Bergson suggests this with the sugar water example. According to Bergson, when we mix some sugar into a glass of water, we have to “willy nilly wait until the sugar melts...It coincides with my impatience, that is to say, with a certain portion of my own duration, which I cannot protract or contract as I like. It is no longer

⁸ Lawlor, Leonard and Moulard Leonard, Valentine, "Henri Bergson", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2016 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2016/entries/bergson>.

⁹ Gutting, Gary. *French Philosophy in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, page 66.

something *thought*, it is something lived.”¹⁰ Skipping ahead in the text, he writes, “Continuity of change, preservation of the past in the present, real duration—the living being seems, then, to share these attributes with consciousness. Can we go further and say that life, like conscious activity, is invention, is unceasing creation?”¹¹

Certainly, after that voluptuous amount of quotes, one can clearly see that Bergson theorized a philosophy in which all of life is engendered with duration, but before we can completely understand this as Bergson intended, his original life constituting impulse, known as the *élan vital* must be introduced. However, before we can even start on the *élan vital* an understanding of the mechanist and finalist theories of evolution must be made. In the beginning of chapter one in *Creative Evolution*, much time and effort is spent by Bergson in focusing on critiquing mechanism, and is therefore a great starting point towards the *élan vital*. To simplify, mechanism is a theory of evolution, mainly in terms of Darwinism and Lamarckism, in which the multitude of different randomized traits, or variations, within an organism is determined to hold certain levels of adaptive value. The random variations which serve the organism better, in terms of survival and reproduction, are then selected naturally to be preserved and transmitted to the next generation of that organism. Weaker or useless variations are naturally disposed of via the failure of an organism to survive. Essentially, animals with certain traits who are better at surviving than others spread their traits to the next generation.

¹⁰ Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. “Chapter 1.” Essay. In *Creative Evolution*. Authorized Translation by Arthur Mitchell, Holt, 1928, p. 9-10.

¹¹ Ibid p. 23.

To Bergson, there are many faults in this theory. The most prevalent fault he sees in the mechanist approach to evolution, which Michael Vaughan explains quite well, is through Bergson's example of the eye. Bergson explains that if mechanism were in fact true, then the complex organ that is the eye would never have evolved at all. As Vaughan explained: "As Bergson reads Darwin, the eye is held to be the result of an accumulation of insensible variations. How could this be the case? If the elements of the eye are not in themselves of any use how would they survive natural selection in order to wait for the other elements to evolve?"¹² With a mechanist reasoning, it would require an extreme number of randomized variations to create sight, and yet the eye itself has so many complex parts: "the cornea, the retina, the crystalline lens, etc... yet sight is one simple fact."¹³ To imagine the statistical changes of the eye coming about through a very lucky strain of natural selection is simply impossible and or extremely unlikely, this is what Bergson is essentially explaining here.

Additionally, mechanistic evolution, in itself, lacks the ability to produce real change or any form of true creativity. He writes, "In considering reality, mechanism regards only the aspect of similarity or repetition. It is therefore dominated by this law, that in nature there is only like reproducing like. The more the geometry in mechanism is emphasized, the less can mechanism admit that anything is ever created."¹⁴ By supposing an organism's development is based entirely on the carrying over of certain variational traits, it assumes that no real change has ever occurred.

¹² Vaughan, Michael. "Introduction: Henri Bergson's "Creative Evolution"." *SubStance* 36, no. 3 (2007): 7-24. <http://www.jstor.org.ezaccess.libraries.psu.edu/stable/25195137>.

¹³ Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. "Chapter One." Essay. In *Creative Evolution*. Authorized Translation by Arthur Mitchell, Holt, 1928. p. 81.

¹⁴ Ibid p. 45.

To Bergson, evolution is not a set of stackable building blocks, but rather a long series of creative events which occur by the virtue of an original impulse.

Ultimately, the fundamental issue with mechanism, according to Bergson, is that it assumes that the entirety of the biological world is composed and constructed by a multitude of diverse components. This sounds quite strange to think as a faulty assumption, as we as human beings construct everything with a complexity of parts. We build and craft engines, buildings, food and drink out of so many differing components. Would it be wrong to assume a similar reasoning with that of nature? For Bergson, yes it would. One need only look at certain creatures to understand this, such as the sea anemone, which to reproduce commits to a process known as splitting; It literally divides itself in two, just like a microscopic ameba. But, unlike the ameba, the anemone is a much larger and more complex creature, and yet it commits to an extremely simple form of reproduction. Bergson illustrates this, although with a different example concluding that, “Life does not proceed by the association and addition of elements, but by dissociation and division.”¹⁵

Mechanism fails in many respects according to Bergson, and finalism fails just the same in this regard. Finalism, to begin, is another evolutionary application that supposes that there is purpose outside of our biological functions believing that it better explains, opposed to mechanism, how certain ends are achieved. That life has the predetermined propensity, through evolution, to become more and more perfect, that a particular end is the goal of the organism. A great non-Bergsonian example is the famous high school science poster which shows a chainlink

¹⁵ Ibid p. 94.

of man evolving from one permeative species to the next, ending with the perfection of glorious man. The thinking behind finalism is ancient, going all the way back to Aristotle. One could also understand it as a theory which all things have an end or purpose; for instance, the purpose of the cow is to be food for humans; this would be an ancient viewpoint, being strongly related to the greek word telos, hence the origin of the word teleological, which often is used in place with finalism.

Bergson also explains the difference between internal and external finality.

External finality is certainly the more traditional understanding, that all things have a purpose or end (the grass is made for the cow, the cow is then for the wolf, etc). Internal finalism is however more modern, supposing that all “living beings are made for themselves, that all its parts conspire for the greatest good of the whole.”¹⁶ Internal finality claims itself opposite of externality through the suggestion that the very structure of an organism is preordained towards a collective end. Bergson finds this incredibly broken, as it ignores the fact that the very elements which compose a living thing is itself made of independent organisms. If each organism is assumed to have just one purpose as part of the whole, then it must automatically assume externality, thus voiding internal finality.

To Bergson, It is just “inverted mechanism” springing from the same “postulate.”

Finalism, just as mechanism, suffers from one major issue: they both assume that “all is given,” meaning that it once again fails to suppose any form of creativity in life. If there is no creativity in the universe and everything is eventually to be, then what is the point of time? “Life endures

¹⁶ Ibid p. 41.

time” it cannot predict it.¹⁷ It presupposes that the future can be known and thus fails to properly explain the phenomena of life. It also assumes a harmonious whole, that everything is perfect. This is further from the truth for Bergson, as there is no perfection in finalist harmony; human beings are all for themselves, and thus will find discord in one another: same goes with animals and other forms of life. There is simply too much discourse in life for there to ever be a so called harmonious whole as the finalist imagine it to be. Ultimately, finalism therefore makes time pointless, for what is the purpose of time when all things are strictly predetermined?

Though mechanism and finalism are not sufficient in properly explaining the creativity of life, finalism is closer to Bergson’s original common impulse than mechanism. Finalism, in the tradition sense, implies that living things have a short of impulse to direct evolutionary process to a particular and predestined end. For Bergson, an original vital impulse is what best explains the phenomena of life. However, he feels that traditional finalism is adequate insofar that it expresses an impulse, albeit still falling short. The only possible way to understand the phenomena of life, in its creative glory, is through the *élan vital*: The original impulse that can explain all the creative phenomena in life, such as the complex organs like the eye; in all its organized yet dissociative glory. This is the vital impulse that Bergson has been leading up to, and by tearing down mechanism and finalist we see a silhouette of how evolution in life should be understood.

We may now begin to answer the question of this essay: What is the *élan vital*, and how does it succeed in explaining evolution when compared to mechanism and finalism? To simplify,

¹⁷ Ibid p. 39.

the *élan vital* is an original impetus that penetrated matter, gave rise to life, and determined the course of evolution of life. According to Bergson, it can explain all the situations that which give fault to the mechanist and finalist theories of evolution. It expresses creation in evolution rather than the supposition of predetermined change and or a natural selection of variations. Let us go back to the example of the eye, being complex in structure yet simple in function. There is simply no feasible way for mechanism to properly explain the creation of the eye, and finalism simply assumed the eye was predetermined. But, through an original impulse, the *élan vital*, life was driven by this impulse to seek creative evolution through many facets, such as in fish vs insects. Though many species differ, many have in one way or another the complex organ know as the eye.

However, the most significant example used to properly understand the creation of the eye is the iron filings example, which he uses to show how life created the eye. Bergson first asked for to imagine we raise our hand, when doing so, there is a multiplicity of points where our hand will be in that instance, and yet we perceive this as one simple act, he calls this “reality.” Furthermore, he goes further by explain the iron filings “Let us imagine now that, instead of moving in air, the hand has to pass through iron filings which are compressed and offer resistance to it in proportion as it goes forward.”¹⁸ Now imaging that your hand is invisible. How are we to interpret this analogy? A mechanist would look at the filings as that push and compress with one another to form the image of resistance from the hand, while a finalist would imply that there was an intention of an end goal in this movement. But the simple fact is, according to Bergson, that it was a movement of cause and effect; the hand is the cause and the filings

¹⁸ Ibid p. 94.

compressing to a certain position within the set container is the effect. At any point in this movement, no matter the amount of force or depth of the hand into the filings, an equilibrium is always achieved. The eye is found in humans, birds, insects, and fish, and though they are all complex in different ways, such as the different color pigments that we as humans can see that birds cannot, there exists an equal coordination.

The further in life we investigate, the more divergence we will see. The *élan vital* shows that life is the tendency to act upon inert matter. We see now through Bergson's reasoning, that life was able to evolve in a multitude of ways via an original impulse known as the *élan vital*. Through this, life diverged into a multitude of directions, a great example he gives is the wind current going through a town, "Thus the wind at a street corner divides into diverging currents which are all one and the same gust."¹⁹ Life diverged via this impulse, and forked out into different directions. Life went a route of immobility and lack of conciseness in plants, and another focused on mobility and intellect. Bergson explains this very well in chapter two, and as he continues, he goes more in depth with what the *élan vital* truly is, even in the later chapters making an assertion that it may be a God.

At any rate, we can look towards his other works to discover more interesting assertions about the *élan vital*. One such great work is in the *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, where Bergson points out a number of different points about the *élan vital*. He again explains the Iron filings analogy, stating that life "operates in the manner of a special cause added onto what we ordinarily call matter, matter in this case being both an instrument and an obstacle. It divides

¹⁹ Ibid p. 51.

what it defines.”²⁰ This essentially builds up on the idea of the hand being the cause and the filings being the effect; the filings only compress and become defined only by the initial force being committed by the hand. The Élan Vital is the impulse that pushes the hand into the filings, so to speak. It converged life into many different directions. We see that in each mobile species, a leap in evolution occurred that gave us the eye.

And as we think about it in evolutionary leaps, the idea of duration once again comes about: “From this standpoint, evolution appears as a series of sudden leaps, and the variation constitutes the new species as made up of a multitude of differences completing one another, and emerging all together in the organism formed from the germ.”²¹ Real duration is life, like the unwinding spool as explained in Bergson’s Introduction to Metaphysics, and just as in the iron filings example, it is a multiplicity of points and events. As the hand thrusts in, there are different points where the filings become more and more compressed; each further point of compression is a leap in evolution. It is purely creative, and ultimately endless in its operation.

The élan vital is not an easy philosophical idea to grasp, and I’m quite sure that I have only given it a quarter of its much deserved credit. But what we have been able to ascertain from this investigation is that life is a long line of creative events, seemingly without a well defined beginning and a definite aim or end. We see the mechanism and finalism fail to properly account for the creative tendency of life, but through their faults we are given a negative to which we can begin to understand the original vital impulse known as the élan vital. It is a theory that properly

²⁰ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter Two.” In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 114. Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013.

²¹ Ibid p. 116.

explains the evolution of life. It injects itself into matter and conclusively determined the course of life via a multiplicity of leaps that define evolution through duration.

Nietzsche: Tragedy and Philosophy

Born in the small village of in Prussia (now modern-day Germany) on October 15, 1844, Friedrich Nietzsche lived in time when the world was unwittingly under great pressure, as if ready to explode into a complex and devastating new century: anti-Semitism was mounting; nihilism was growing in the West; the newly defined sciences were developing the ideas of evolution; and the radical social-political theories of communism and fascism were slowly yet consistently taking root as the imperial governments of Europe were unwittingly manufacturing the pretexts of World War I. Nietzsche's philosophy would mirror these points throughout his work, with nihilism, anti-Semitism, and religion being a major staples in his various writings. Throughout his life, Nietzsche would write on differing subjects yet always build upon a few basic ideas: The will to power, self-overcoming, and morality. All these ideas fit like puzzle pieces, projecting a historically groundbreaking philosophy. His life can be easily understood in three periods: early, golden, and late.

From 1844 to 1870, Nietzsche's early life could be best described as challenging yet prosperous. At five years of age, Nietzsche experienced the death of his father Carl Ludwig. Ludwig's death birthed opportunity for the young 14-year old Nietzsche, as his father's influence as a protestant clergymen garnered him admittance into the prestigious Pforta monastery boarding school in 1858. It was there at Pforta that Nietzsche developed his intellectual persona, constituting a strong passion for writing and music. From 1864 to 1868, Nietzsche would study theology at Bonn University, then defecting to Leipzig University to study philology. It is during this time he begins to study Schopenhauer, the artistic compositions

of Richard Wagner, and subjects relating to the evolutionary and natural sciences.²² Eventually, Nietzsche would be appointed as an associate professor of Classical Philology at the well-known University of Basel in 1870. It is around this time that Nietzsche's military service before and during the Franco-Prussian war begins to affect his health. During his voluntary military service in 1868, Nietzsche tore his chest muscles after falling onto his horse's saddle pommel, leaving him injured and unable to ride for the rest of his time in the military. Later, between 1870-1871, as a medical orderly during the Franco-Prussian War, Nietzsche contracted dysentery and diphtheria.

Between 1871 and 1876, Nietzsche would hold a deep relationship with Richard Wagner, heavily admiring Wagner for his brilliant compositions and operas. Spend much time at Wagner's home at Lake Lucerne, Nietzsche shared Wagner's great interest in using music as a method of improving modern culture, all while being inspired by the philosophical ideas of Schopenhauer. Nietzsche shared his 1872 edition of *The Birth of Tragedy* with Wagner, who praised it for its glorification of the German spirit. In a very poetic manner, one can easily see how Wagner would have taken interest in *The Birth of Tragedy*: "The German spirit still rests and dreams, undestroyed, in glorious health, profundity, and Dionysian strength, like a knight in slumber; and from this abyss the Dionysian song rises to our ears to let us know that this German knight is still dreaming his primordial Dionysian myth in blissfully serious visions."²³

²² Pence, Charles H. "Nietzsche's Aesthetic Critique of Darwin." *History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences* 33(2):165-190. Accessed September 25, 2019. https://www.academia.edu/759427/Nietzsche_s_Aesthetic_Critique_of_Darwin.

²³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann . "The Birth of Tragedy." Essay. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, NY: Modern Library, 1967, p. 142

Nietzsche would soon meet Paul Rée, a Jewish-Prussian philosopher influenced primarily by Darwinism and Lamarckism. Nietzsche's relationship with Rée would not only further introduce Nietzsche to the scientific and philosophical ideas of evolution, it would also reveal to Nietzsche Wagner's anti-Semitic and German nationalistic beliefs. Wagner promoted his work as a means of furthering a radical German culture. Wagner even warned Nietzsche not to get too close to Paul Rée, deeming him untrustworthy because of his Jewish heritage. Eventually, Wagner's pompous beliefs and egoism would permanently drive Nietzsche to end his connections to Wagner. In addition to Nietzsche's prior medical conditions, new symptoms involving intense migraines, and a "psychiatric illness with depression" (possibly due to a brain tumor) indicated Nietzsche's declining health, forcing him into even greater isolation. As time progressed, Nietzsche went from a full-time professor at Basel, to taking extended periods of absence over the following years.²⁴ His isolation, however, would ultimately allow him to culminate his ambition of writing culturally groundbreaking philosophical literature.

Nietzsche's golden period certainly begins in 1882 when *The Gay Science* is published, reflecting his relationship with Paul Rée via the discussion of Darwinism in the text. Due to his health, Nietzsche would leave Basel and travel from Switzerland to Italy between seasons, spending most of his time writing. By 1889 Nietzsche had completed his masterpieces: *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*, and *On the Genealogy of Morals*. These literary pieces compose Nietzsche's rather complex philosophy. A philosophy which constructs all the

²⁴ Hemelsoet, D, K Hemelsoet, and D Devreese. "The Neurological Illness of Friedrich Nietzsche." *Acta neurologica Belgica*. U.S. National Library of Medicine, March 2008. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/18575181>.

moral and religious suppositions in humanity as an exemplification of will to power. Through self-overcoming, all of mankind can progress and or evolve into the Übermensch (overman/superman). Nietzsche's writing was indeed fruitful, all while his health continued to degrade. He began to experience bouts of mental and physical distress, including depression and the continuation of intense migraines. By January 3, 1889, Nietzsche reaches the late period of his life after suffering a mental breakdown in Turin, Italy. The story goes that Nietzsche famously witnessed the flogging of a horse by its owner, resulting in Nietzsche running to embrace the horse from the blows, eventually collapsing to the ground.

Nietzsche would remain in a state of mental ineptitude, sending incredibly interesting yet irrational letters expressing his extremely harsh opinions of the Pope and the German Emperor Wilhelm, Bismarck. By 1899, Nietzsche would suffer two strokes that would leave him semi-paralyzed, being cared for by his sister Elizabeth. After contracting phenomena in August of 1900, Nietzsche would eventually suffer yet another stroke and finally, pass away August 25. Though tragic, the final years of his life would remain famous for generations in academic literature. It is quite fitting that Nietzsche's philosophical career began and ended in tragedy, starting with the loss of his father at an early age, then ending with an incurable progression into insanity at the age 54. For years to come, Nietzsche's work would be abused and misinterpreted. Elizabeth would use Nietzsche's notes to compile Pseudo-Nietzschean pieces such as *The Will To Power*:

It is the case that the long and challenging effort to isolate himself from, while also heavily critiquing, the essence of German nationalism and antisemitism, would represent the

ultimate tragedy that is Nietzsche's life and work. It wouldn't be till the 1960s that Nietzsche's philosophy would experience a rebirth; where Walter Kaufmann, famous for his translations, would bring Nietzsche into a much more suitable light. It is through Kaufmann's translations that the following investigation has been made. The following essays stand to reconstitute Nietzsche's life work into an academic substance that rationally evaluates a clear and undeniable connection to the philosophy of Henri Bergson, as generally expressed through their shared stance on evolution, morality, and religion. Though they certainly never met (no historical evidence to date likewise suggests they had read each others work), it is incredibly fascinating to see that both Nietzsche and Bergson had contemplated a similar theory suggesting that an objective force drives all of life.

The Will To Power and Self-Overcoming

The writing and rhetoric of Friedrich Nietzsche are almost entirely indistinguishable from any other writer. His style, tone, and energy is something of incredible fame, but at a cost of difficulty in understanding. It is for this reason that even learned consumers of philosophy have trouble interpreting Nietzsche's work. Books have been written on the very topic of just the essence of Nietzsche's style; this alone should be evidence of the validity of this very case. All the euphemisms Nietzsche uses, though important, are difficult to understand in modern terms. With all of this, it becomes imperative to be a good hunter so to speak; To be able to navigate through the lines of text to conquer the work and be rewarded with an understanding of Nietzsche that many are so quick to miss.

Of all the difficult concepts, the will to power is probably the most misunderstood of Nietzsche's philosophical endeavors, with the Nazi's famously hijacking it during their short-lived totalitarian conquest of Europe. To rightfully define this will to power has been a task of many existential philosophers in the last century, resulting in differing levels of success. In this essay, a concise academic attempt will be made. *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, along with short excerpts from Nietzsche's other pieces, will be set as the main focus to derive a definition of the will to power. However, it would be very challenging to derive a proper definition from Nietzsche alone, and it is for this reason that the work of Gilles Deleuze will be supplemented. An analyzation of the will to power and self-overcoming will be accomplished through an analyzation of Nietzsche's various works (*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Beyond Good and Evil*,

Genealogy of Morals, The Gay Science). Then, from *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, Deleuze's understanding of Nietzsche will be compared to the text in hopes of arriving at a clear cut definition of the will to power.

Unlike Nietzsche's other literary accomplishments, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* exists as a classic philosophical narrative that overflows with Nietzsche's finest forms of symbolism. Though not its first appearance in Nietzsche's work, the will to power is made very apparent in one particular section of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* titled *On Self-Overcoming*. From line to line, Nietzsche's main character, Zarathustra, explains the concept of will to power while unfolding the idea of self-overcoming. Zarathustra begins by exclaiming that a subset of human beings throughout history, who he simply calls "the wisest," are naturally inclined to "make all being thinkable."²⁵ These wise people, whom Zarathustra is speaking of, are the great thinkers and philosophers of time (such as Aristotle and Kant). They dictate the knowledgeable world, reflecting an undeniable desire to define and recreate it in the way they see fit. To Nietzsche, these wise men and women of humanity have an immense desire to break down all that is their reality, and the world they encompass, into a certain level of controllable and predictable understanding.

They are driven by a so-called "will to truth," a certain manifestation of the will to power. Nietzsche pondered this will to truth in *Beyond Good and Evil* and asked, "what in us really wants truth?"²⁶ Nietzsche intends this question to unravel the true pretext of the will to truth. As

²⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold. Kaufmann. "Part Two." Chapter in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 113

²⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. "Beyond Good and Evil." Essay. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, 199. Random House Digital, 2011.

Zarathustra continues his proclamation, he states that their belief of being influenced only from this “will to truth” is simply a misinterpretation of the will to power. As Zarathustra explained, “it shall yield and bend for you. Thus your will wants it. It shall become smooth and serve the spirits as its mirror and reflection.”²⁷ Essentially, in a human being’s insatiable desire to seek objective truth, they are unwittingly recreating and reconstituting the knowledgeable world. It yields and bends not because the knowledgeable world is plastic, rather it bends and becomes smooth because they will it; and according to Nietzsche, thus becomes a reflection of their power which has been exerted. In a certain sense, it would be fitting to suggest that in this statement, Nietzsche hints towards the idea of subjectivism, however, nothing in the text directly makes that assertion. When Nietzsche wrote in *Beyond Good in Evil*, “What in is really wants truth?” he is ultimately culminating the fact that our curiosity to seek and discover objective truths is essentially an expression of the will to power.

Yet, exactly how is this action of truth-seeking a pure expression of the will to power? To form a synopsis of exactly what is meant by Nietzsche’s writing in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, let us continue to imagine these thinkers to which Nietzsche writes about are the great philosophers of history. They write their long and complex treatises and novels, their diaries and proclamations on the categorical imperative or the Socratic method, not to discover truth but to unwittingly strive to be the one that creates and dictates it. They are in the cycle, much reminiscent of a so-called paradigm shift, where they alter or destroy previous theories to institute their own. Millions of people, of aristocratic and common backgrounds, follow these

²⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold. Kaufmann. “Part Two.” Chapter. in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 113.

philosophers as if like a religious trance. In this process of discovery and expression, they deconstruct and make useless the meanings and values created by their intellectual predecessors. This gives these philosophers, or beholders of truth, ultimate power of morality and its constitution.

The latter manifestation of the will to power is but only a small facet of its constitution, hence the reason behind its complexity as a theory. Will to power is seemingly described as a dominant force of life, as Nietzsche's Zarathustra preaches that the nature of life is to obey and or command, exclaiming that "Where I found the living, there I found the will to power; and even in the will of those who serve I found the will to be master."²⁸ One need only recall the origins of morality as laid out by Nietzsche himself in the *Genealogy of Morals* to understand this statement. At a glance, it seems that the will to power is a force that drives all living things towards an intoxicating goal of domination over inept life forms. Without debate, it certainly is advantageous to be the master over others. But this conception should not be accepted at face value. The will to power is not, simply put, a theory that dictates living things as greedy, power-hungry constituents of nature. It is rather something far more elaborate, namely a theory of life itself.

Zarathustra describes the will to power as "the unexhausted procreative will of life,"²⁹ but what exactly are we to understand this? There exist a few different interpretations that we can investigate: scholars have suggested that it is a psychological concept, as well as a metaphysical concept; certainly it is a multi-faceted philosophical theory. It is a power that drives all living

²⁸ Ibid p. 114.

²⁹ Ibid.

things. Men and women, animals, trees and even the smallest insects all are entrenched by this so-called will to power. It may well be the very essence of life itself, however, it certainly can be expressed in clearly apparent and unrelenting power relations. When Gilles Deleuze wrote about the will to power, he made it very clear that it is a philosophical theory of power relations. Certainly, his interpretation of Nietzsche's work is extensive and well established. With that said, I also believe there is yet another way to understand the will to power: in internal and external states.

Externally, the will to power is exactly how Deleuze defines it: "The will to power is the element from which derive both the quantitative difference of related forces and the quality that devolves into each force in this relation."³⁰ In this understanding, the will to power is the principle of active and reactive forces. All things in life exist in a dynamic synthesis of power relations. For instance, if we refer to the slave and master moralities laid out in *The Genealogy of Morals*, clearly one can see that the master actively exerts power over the slave, to which the slave receives and reacts to that excretion of power (either by obeying or revolting via the revaluation of morals fueled by resentment). The forces at play in this relation are expressions of this will to power to which there must always be an actor and its subordinate. The will to power externally is the expression of continuously exploiting one's own power capabilities upon others. Similarly, It is fair to say the even inanimate substances are similarly affected by this power relation. Think of a rock in a flowing stream: the rock exerts a force on the water,

³⁰ Deleuze, Gilles. "Active and Reactive." Essay. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, 50. New York, NY: Columbia University Press., 2013.

resulting in the water becoming its subordinate as it diverts its momentum around the rock. All things exist in this synthesis, be it in a physical or a socio-political setting.

Certainly, the power dynamic of the will to power was insanely misinterpreted by the Nazis, deeming it as a desire for political, noble, and aristocratic domination; An intoxicating inclination to become the alpha. Historically speaking, during the First World War, copies of Nietzsche's work circulated throughout the German trenches as a method of proliferating radical German ideologies. Because of this radical political affiliation, the most important aspect of the will to power was purposefully forgotten to academia: the more internal valuation of the will to power which encompasses the idea of self-overcoming. When Nietzsche writes on self-overcoming in this famous statement: "Whatever I create and however much I love it—soon I must oppose it and my love: thus my will wills it," he expresses that this hidden manifestation of the will to power is a movement of transformation in which a formation of identity or value aims towards growth.³¹

For instance, imagine a ready to hatch egg of a bird of prey. Its entire life thus far has been of protection and warmth inside a thick speckled shell. But as Zarathustra stated, "life itself confided this secret to me: 'Behold,' it said, 'I am that which must always overcome itself.'" ³² It must destroy its current meaning and identity by destroying the shell that is its world. Dead is the black world of the shell and born is a new world of meaning, values, and identity. The chick thus shall become a powerful hunter through movement after movement of self-overcoming, via the

³¹ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold. Kaufmann. "Part Two." Chapter. in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 115

³² Ibid.

will to power that perpetuates a desire of growth. The will to power is the essence of life, aimed not at self-preservation but rather self-growth. This means that the primary goal of life is to express its native strength upon the world. Internally speaking, the will to power initiates self-overcoming to progress itself towards a future state of existence that gives more power. Just as Nietzsche wrote in the *Genealogy of Morals*, “Every animal instinctively strives for an optimum of favorable conditions under which it can expend all its strength and achieve its maximal feeling of power.”³³

With the discussion of Nietzsche’s will to power and of self-overcoming, one should begin to question if Nietzsche’s will to power has any relation to 19th-century thinking on evolution, and whether he had intended his philosophical ideas to be interpreted as such. Though alive during the golden years of Darwin, it is slightly obvious to confirm the suspicion that Nietzsche was thinking in evolutionary terms. The main idea that might give light to this puzzling question is how Nietzsche writes about the Übermensch, the overman. Ponder for a second the moment Zarathustra enters into the marketplace and thus becomes witness to the tightrope walker. Zarathustra proclaims: “Man is a rope, tied between beast and overman—a rope over an abyss. A dangerous across... What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not an end.”³⁴ It should be quite clear that the idea of evolution as describe by the natural sciences of the 19th-century had imprinted Nietzsche’s writing. The tightrope is certainly a metaphor, evoking Darwin, that man is to further evolve to a state of being that which is even greater and

³³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. “The Genealogy of Morals Part III.” Chapter. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York, NY: Modern Library, 1967, p. 7.

³⁴ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold. Kaufmann. “Part One” Chapter. in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 12

more prosperous. The Übermensch represents this higher state of being in humanity, Zarathustra introduces this idea when he preaches to the townspeople in the market place stating that man is a “laughing-stock or painful embarrassment” to the Übermensch. The story and image of the failing tightrope walker falling to his death express the latter sentiment.

However, the similarities of Nietzsche and Darwinism become void of meaning the further one researches Nietzsche. Though the Übermensch exists as a greater being than man, the way in Nietzsche proclaims the basis of evolution strays far from Darwinistic evolution.

Although It has been debated about how thoroughly Nietzsche read into Darwin, it is clear that there is disagreement in certain aspects of the evolution. For Darwin, and other proponents of his theory, evolution occurs via a process of natural selection, where mutations in certain species are expected to have occurred by the virtue of self preservation. For Nietzsche, the latter understanding is inherently flawed. As he explained in *The Gay Science*, self-preservation does not drive a process of growth and evolution, it is rather all will to power:

“The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation... The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life. The great and small struggle always revolves around superiority, around growth and expansion, around power—in accordance with the will to power which is the will of life.”³⁵

³⁵ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. “349.” Essay. In *The Gay Science; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, 291–92. New York: Vintage Books, 1974.

From what has been investigated, it should be quite clear how we are to understand the will to power. Very similarly to Henri Bergson's *élan vital*, the will to power is the dominant procreative force and influencer of life. Nietzsche understood a similar force that directed all living things to strive towards one thing: power. But how this power is to be understood can be quite historically misleading. As Deleuze explained, externally the will to power encompasses unrelenting power relations which engulfs all of life. It is a force that drives men to become masters of the weak, but yet also internally influences life its self to aim towards procreative and truly greater ends. Through self-overcoming, living beings grow and transform, to become stronger and more prepared to express their power upon the world. It is a fire that simply forever burns within all of life, and un-relentlessly refuses to be extinguished. One could argue that this force of life may be the very reason for evolution itself. Certainly one could even construct the argument to be very similar to the *Elan Vital*.

Constructing the Bridge: Nietzschean and Bergsonian Philosophy

From the German trenches of World War 1 to the lecture halls of modern universities, Nietzsche's philosophy of forces and a will to power actively influenced generations of Europeans. Near the same time period, Bergson introduced his groundbreaking work on evolution and the creativity of life in *Creative Evolution*. On the surface, both Nietzsche and Bergson were heavily molded by similar intellectual thinking of the time period, which focused on religion, society, and evolution. However upon closer review they not only shared similar cultural influences but also, very clearly, shared similar ideas within their philosophical writings.

An investigation of these similarities should paint an interesting picture. To accomplish this, the following literature shall be heavily regarded: *On The Genealogy of Morals*, *The Gay Science*, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, *Creative Evolution*, and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. A short review of Nietzsche's typology of morals will be our starting point. From there we will do the same with Bergson's open and closed moralities, ending with a thorough review of what can be compared and contrasted between the two philosophies. Then, an introduction of Bergson's and Nietzsche's thoughts on evolution will be compared as the final comparative argument, on the will to power and the *élan vital*, will be properly constructed. Throughout this essay, professional secondary works will be used to better understand the original texts of both Nietzsche and Bergson.

The best way to describe Nietzsche's work is as a philosophy of forces, and when defining his typology of morals it is very difficult not to direct one's attention to the work of

Gilles Deleuze. Nietzsche's typology of morals is the conjunction of morality, the good and the bad/good and evil. The good and bad cognate is commonly known as master morality and the other of good and evil is known as slave morality. However, Deleuze best explains this typology as modes of active and reactive forces: "In a body, the superior or dominant forces are known as *active* the inferior or dominated are known as *reactive*."³⁶ However, to understand why Deleuze is writing this, we need to understand this typology in a basic format, and to do that we need to define what are the masters and the slaves.

In the first part of *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche describes humanity as it was like a Greek aristocracy, where there are those who are the noble masters and those who are essentially the weak slaves. The nobles are the ones in a society that have the characteristics of strength, power (in both political and physical), and ultimately superior health. They are the conquerors of life; beings of the superior prowess of life itself. Nietzsche writes, "the noble felt themselves to be men of a higher rank. Granted that, in a majority of cases, they designate themselves simply by their superiority in power (as "the powerful," "the masters," and "the commanders") of by the most clearly visible signs of his superiority, for example, as "the rich," "the possessors"."³⁷ They act immediately upon instinct, to which they express such powers in an instinctual manner.

As humanity progressed, it became the case that the noble, with their characteristics of physical superiority, were known as good and their opposite as bad. According to Nietzsche in

³⁶ Deleuze, Gilles, and Hugh Tomlinson. "Active and Reactive." Essay. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. p. 40.,

³⁷ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Kaufmann. "On the Genealogy of Morals." Essay. In *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*. Modern Library, 1968. p. 464-465.

The Genealogy of Morals, it is the case that human beings of noble and aristocratic characteristics “established themselves and their actions as good.”³⁸ It is because of this establishment, they thus looked upon the slaves in all their ineptitude and passionately declared their existence as the very representation of what is bad. According to Deleuze, it is important to understand that the nobles are an active force. He describes them quite well, “Appropriating, possessing, subjugating, dominating-these are the characteristics of active force. To appropriate means to impose forms, to create forms by exploiting circumstances.”³⁹ This actively self-initiating force which Deleuze describes is the pure essence of the masters which Nietzsche writes of. They exploited the weakness of the slaves for thousands of years, until a zeal for revolution had dawned upon the minds of slaves.

As the masters oppressed the slaves, a revolt occurred. This revolt began with “ressentiment,” as Nietzsche explained in *The Genealogy of Morals*: “The slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values: the resentment of natures that are denied the true reaction, that of deeds, and compensate themselves with an imaginary revenge.”⁴⁰ Ressentiment is a French term that translated simply as resentment. However, to Nietzsche it is a spiritual and physical condition that evolves out of a constant feeling of weakness in relation to an opposite position that can successfully turn their own wants and needs into reality. The slaves qualities are interpreted as the essence of the

³⁸ Ibid p. 462.

³⁹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Hugh Tomlinson. “Active and Reactive.” Essay. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. p. 42.

⁴⁰ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Kaufmann. *Basic Writings of Nietzsche: On the Genealogy of Morals*. Modern Library, 1968. p. 472.

reactive force. As Deleuze explains, “reactions cannot be grasped or scientifically understood as forces if they are not related to superior forces. The reactive is a primordial quality of force but one which can only be interpreted as such in relation to and on the basis of the active.”⁴¹ The that this reactive energy would come to encompass the very nature of humanity.

The weak and common slave thus conceives something of legend. He creates something so groundbreaking that it shakes the world. The weak and common slave looked at the noble, their “hostel external world,” and say “No” to the nobles and everything that is not slave like. This “No” is the reactive deed that rejects the nobles and forms the inversion of the master value equation: the good and bad cognate of morality. Now, what we get is the slave morality, which views the noble’s power and wealth as not only “bad,” but “evil.” From this, the weak common slave therefore takes their own characteristics of physical ineptitude and thus values them as “good.” Now, through resentment, reactive forces become dominant over the active, eventually bringing forth a massive wave of nihilistic religion upon the world. Together, the slave and master moralities make up Nietzsche’s typology of morals. Active and reactive forces that are intertwined by the will to power.

A similar typology is also brought to light by Bergson in his writing, as Idella J. Gallagher well explains: “What does experience, in the broad and true sense, tell us now about morality? It tells us that there are two distinct forces at work in the moral life of man: (1) a pressure or constraint exerted by society upon its members, and (2) an appeal or attraction

⁴¹ Deleuze, Gilles, and Hugh Tomlinson. “Active and Reactive.” Essay. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983, p. 42.

exercised by certain privileged persons upon the rest of mankind. Reflection upon these facts reveals that there are two distinct and irreducible moralities, the closed and the open.”⁴²

Bergson begins to explain a closed morality as being natural and instinctive, much like the force that drives the simple honeybee: “let us consider two divergent lines of evolution with societies at the extremities of each. The type of society which will appear the more natural will obviously be the instinctive type; the link that unites the bees of a hive.”⁴³ Bergson held that man had evolved as creatures that which were properly suited for small sectioned off societies. They promote only themselves and are quite prone to war with other small societies. The reason for this is well explained by Bergson: “Murder and pillage and perfidy, cheating and lying become not only lawful, they are actually praiseworthy. The warring nations can say, with Macbeth's witches: ‘Fair is foul, and foul is fair’.”⁴⁴

The reason for this war and hive-like nature of early human societies is due to its moral attitude. It is an attitude, evolved by the *élan vital*, that is one of obedience, interest in the group, and a negative outlook towards outsiders. However, as Bergson explained, what is most important is an attitude of obligation: “An individual forming part of a community may bend or even break a necessity of the same kind, which to some extent he has helped to create, but to which, still more, he has to yield; the sense of this necessity, together with the consciousness of

⁴² Gallagher, Idella J. "Bergson on Closed and Open Morality." *New Scholasticism* 42, no. 1 (1968): doi: 10.5840/newscholas19684213, p. 48-71.

⁴³ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 26.

⁴⁴ *Ibid* p. 31.

being able to evade it, is none the less what he calls an obligation.”⁴⁵ I believe a great historical example is an ancient Greek city-state.

These societies create an order based on law, and through continuous habit, brought about through generations of following these laws, the people begin to see these as natural laws.

Bergson writes, ”The laws which it promulgates and which maintains the social order resemble, moreover, in certain aspects, the laws of nature.” Religion, also, plays a role in this development:

“in societies such as our own the first effect of religion is to sustain and reinforce the claims of society.”⁴⁶ A social order that is formed for self-preservation of the whole became habit, and

through this habit, it became thought as natural law. Religion then reinforced this, Is it any coincidence that the ten commandments closely resemble the Code of Hammurabi? I would say it is not nearly a coincidence but rather an example of religion influencing social order.

Though a closed morality originated via the creative tendency of the *élan vital*, it is, however, a representation of this force being halted. A society that which is shut off is doomed to stagnation, which Gallagher properly explained, “From the viewpoint of evolution, it represents a halt in the forward movement of the *élan vital*. All of its activities are geared to self-

protection.”⁴⁷ It is a society of self-preservation. An example that Bergson uses to explain this social attitude is the remorseful murderer. Bergson claims that the remorse of the murder is the same to that of a man is “unjust” to a child, but most importantly the murderer, having

⁴⁵ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 14.

⁴⁶ Ibid p. 12.

⁴⁷ Gallagher, Idella J. "Bergson on Closed and Open Morality." *New Scholasticism* 42, no. 1 (1968):. doi: 10.5840/newscholas19684213, p. 48-71.

committed the crime, feels isolated from the group. When he confesses, to either a friend, family, or anyone within his group, he “re-attaches himself to society at a single point,” and finds himself again one again with the group.⁴⁸

Although the murderer seeks to reattach himself to his society, closed morality does not take all of humanity into consideration insofar as to feeling love or compassion for it. This leads us to Bergson’s other morality explained in *The Two Sources*, open morality. As humanity progressed within these closed societies, exceptional individuals brought forth higher moral goals. These moral goals and their attractiveness gave birth to a more open and human morality. This open morality is more characterized by progress, creativity, and a greater desire to appreciate and love all of humanity. The open morality is not of nature but has its origins in the human species, as Gallagher explained, “While the closed morality is natural to man, the open morality must be achieved.”⁴⁹ Therefore, the question being asked is: How is it that this open morality is achieved.

The way in which this morality can be achieved is through a creative emotion. This creative emotion is brought forth and made appealing by exceptional humans who then influence others: “In all times there have arisen exceptional men, incarnating this morality. Before the saints of Christianity, mankind had known the sages of Greece, the prophets of Israel, the Arahants of Buddhism, and others besides. It is to them that men have always turned for that

⁴⁸ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 18.

⁴⁹ Gallagher, Idella J. "Bergson on Closed and Open Morality." *New Scholasticism* 42, no. 1 (1968): doi: 10.5840/newscholas19684213, p.48-71.

complete morality”⁵⁰ This emotion is the same that which the musician feels when he writes his great symphony, or the artist when he creates his master piece. This emotion in its strongest essence is love brought about by a specific form of mysticism, as Gallagher explains it best: “The individual who succeeds in breaking the bond of nature and achieving contact with the creative élan, that is, the mystic, discovers at once that the essence of this élan is love. Opening his soul to its love, he is uplifted by an emotion capable of transforming human life, for the love he feels is not directed only to the members of his own society but embraces all mankind.”⁵¹

It is a morality for all of humanity, brought about by a truly pure and incredible soul whose actions and appearance becomes so contagious that it appeals to all of humanity. As closed morality is of social obligation, open is of an aspiration of love. Both are products of the élan vital, but only the open morality continues its progression, wherein the closed society its halted. However, the greatest difference between open and closed morality is that open morality is inherently creative and expression of human intelligence over human nature: “but intelligence, expanding through its own efforts, has developed unexpectedly. It freed men from restrictions to which they were condemned by the limitations of their nature.”

There is much more that can be said on the open morality. However, just as one would learn more from comparing one object to another, it is fitting that we now begin to compare the moralities of Bergson with that of Nietzsche. The open and closed moralities compare to the

⁵⁰ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 34.

⁵¹ Gallagher, Idella J. "Bergson on Closed and Open Morality." *New Scholasticism* 42, no. 1 (1968): doi: 10.5840/newscholas19684213, p.48-71.

slave and master cognate, as both typologies differ yet strangely feel related to one another. Both master and closed moralities seemed to be expressed as a natural order or hierarchy. Nietzsche clearly makes this case with his definition of the masters, calling them the nobles, the strong, the commanding. Bergson relates it to a hierarchy directly: we should compare it to an organism whose cells, united by imperceptible links, fall into their respective places in a highly developed hierarchy, and for the greatest good of the whole naturally submit to a discipline that may demand the sacrifice of the part.”⁵²

The greatest comparison we should see in these two moralities, the master and the closed, is the designation of what is good and what is bad. For the master, everything that is like himself is good: strength, power, health, these characteristics are what is considered good where all that is the opposite is bad. For the closed, we start to see a bit of similarity. The closed moral society is self-preserving. All things outside the social circle are bad and therefore should be either hated or destroyed. Therefore war with outside societies is not only deemed justified but clearly lawful. Not only this, but the easiest connection between the two moralities is its origin: both seem to be of human nature. Nietzsche begins his genealogy with this statement, “The judgement “good” did not originate with those to whom “goodness” was shown! Rather it was “the good” themselves...who felt and established themselves and their actions as good.”⁵³

⁵² Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 9.

⁵³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. “The Genealogy of Morals Part I.” Essay. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York, NY: Modern Library, 1967, p. 461-462.

The important word to notice in that statement is not “the good” nor who it was that truly coined the term, it is the word “shown” that holds true interest here. It was not human intelligence, as Bergson would put it, that brought forth this morality. It was a natural and animalistic reasoning that designated what was good and bad. These peoples were strong and powerful, giving them the natural ability to form a functioning society based on an aristocratic hierarchy. The society was closed. It cared little for others as all others were simply not part of the self. Additionally, it was through habit that the laws and rules of the closed society soon became natural law: We are good, outsiders and all others that which are our opposite are bad.

The similarities continue when we look at the slave and open moralities. To begin, both are heavily influenced by Christianity. For Nietzsche, it was Christianity that brought about the success of the slave revolt. Nietzsche explains: “With the Jews there begins the slave revolt,” to which he continues, “it was Jesus of Nazareth, the incarnate gospel of love, this “redeemer” who brought blessedness and victory to the poor.” For Bergson it was the mystics of Christianity that spread the creative emotion to the masses: “Humanity had to wait till Christianity for the idea of universal brotherhood.”⁵⁴ But even one can find bits and pieces of a similar slave revolt in Bergson closed society, “There will one day arise ambitious men from among them (the ones of the aristocracy) who mean to get the upper hand and who will seek support in the lower class.”⁵⁵

Both the open and slave moralities bring forth an end to the aristocracy and a beginning to historic socio-political movements, such as democracy and communism. It is no longer the

⁵⁴ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 77.

⁵⁵ Ibid p. 73.

individual, nationalistic society that is the origin of morality. Nature was trumped by a progressive intelligence that gave birth to new and creative values, which both Bergson and Nietzsche point out: “The slave revolt in morality begins when resentment itself becomes creative and gives birth to values,”⁵⁶ “In the second, it would seem that the solid materials supplied by intelligence first melt and mix, then solidify again into fresh ideas now shaped by the creative mind itself.”⁵⁷

Thus far, the similar theses of Bergson and Nietzsche, focusing only on a genealogy of morals and humanity, have been compared, albeit while ignoring one very important factor: the very idea’s shared between Bergson and Nietzsche which elicit the very creation of humanity itself. Certainly both believed their theories explain life’s creative tendencies. Both can also justifiably be compared when being understood in evolutionary terms. Yet Nietzsche was unfortunately limited by his time and lifespan, meaning he never quite lived to see the peak culmination of the socio-political, philosophical and scientific debate on the subject of evolution. Although, interestingly enough, Nietzsche (though his understanding of evolution was less complete than Bergson’s) came to a surprisingly familiar conclusion: Life evolves through a life force which aims towards growth, creativity, and power rather than a basic instinct of self-preservation. John Richardson, a PHD of philosophy at UC Berkeley, wrote extensively on the subject of Nietzsche and evolution in his work *Nietzsche’s New Darwinism*. According to

⁵⁶ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. “The Genealogy of Morals Part I.” Essay. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York, NY: Modern Library, 1967, p. 472.

⁵⁷ Bergson, Henri, R. Ashley. Audra, Cloudesley Brereton, and W. Horsfall Carter. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013, p. 45.

Richardson, the following lines of text from *Twilight and The Idols* and *The Gay science* express Nietzsche's sentiment on self-preservation:

“As for the famous “struggle for life,” so far it seems to me to be asserted rather than proved. It occurs, but as an exception; the total-aspect of life is *not* distress, not hunger, but rather riches, profusion, even absurd squandering,—where there is struggle, one struggles for power... one should not mistake Malthus for nature.”⁵⁸

“The wish to preserve oneself is the symptom of a condition of distress, of a limitation of the really fundamental instinct of life which aims at the expansion of power and, wishing for that, frequently risks and even sacrifices self-preservation... The struggle for existence is only an exception, a temporary restriction of the will to life.”⁵⁹

These two quotes stand as the strongest evidence as what is known about Nietzsche and his understanding of evolution in terms of the will to power. Though challenging, it should be apparent that Nietzsche felt the Darwinian idea of self-preservation to be faulty in its explanation of evolution, and that it is rather a desire of power that drives life to evolve. It would be significant to point out Nietzsche's referencing of Thomas Malthus, who criticized excess food production as an eventually downturn in humanities ability to survive in the future as it would lead to an extensive and overbearing population, perfectly expresses the general idea of survival being life's enduring goal in existence.

⁵⁸ Nietzsche, Friedrich, Tracy B. Strong, and Richard F. H. Polt. “Raids of an Untimely Man.” Essay. In *Twilight of the Idols: or: How to Philosophize with a Hammer*, Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997, p. 59.

⁵⁹ Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold Kaufmann. “349.” Essay. In *The Gay Science; with a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs*, New York: Vintage Books, 1974, p. 291–92.

John Richardson does an exceptional job at briefly explaining Nietzsche's writings on evolution:

“Apparently, from such passages, he conceives these two to be competing answers to the question of the end or goal of life: he takes Darwin to claim that organisms are ‘toward’ survival, and he argues that they’re toward power. More specifically, he supposes that both of these are meant as goals of a “will” or “basic drive” of life... Nietzsche’s main point is that this life will is not a will to life, but to power.”⁶⁰

Nietzsche’s claim that the will to power is the major driving force in life is certainly philosophically significant. Yet, what is truly important is whether it can be properly evaluated in terms of evolution certainly pushes the boundary, especially if it can be aligned with Bergson’s *élan vital*. After a simple evaluation, one would naturally conclude that Bergson differs from Nietzsche in that the *élan vital* asserts life as a process of unwitting yet pre-determined goal of creativity and evolution, while the will to power is rather predominately focused on power and domination. However, self-overcoming posits the will to power as a creative force of life.

Therefore it would be quite sensible to pose the following question: can the will to power explain evolution insofar that it doesn’t conflict with Bergson’s critiques from *Creative Evolution*?

Additionally, can the will to power explain evolutionary phenomena such as the creation of the eye?

Bergson’s famous critique of the theory of mechanism and finalism states that neither are capable of properly accounting for the creation of the eye. Bergson states, “The eye is, in short,

⁶⁰ Richardson, John. “Biology .” Essay. In *Nietzsche's New Darwinism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 19.

composed of an infinity of mechanisms, all of extreme complexity. Yet vision is one simple fact... Just because the act is simple, the slightest negligence on the part of nature in the building of the infinity complex machine would have made vision impossible.”⁶¹ The conclusion made is that the only worthwhile theory to account for such a complex organ is the original impulse and or impedes known as the *élan vital*. The reasoning for this is simple: mechanism does not represent the important factor of creation. Further, this creative goal through evolution cannot be reached through pure accident, even with millions of years to waste. Bergson then concludes finalism is just as faulty by its assumption of the whole being given. That is to say, finalism falsely assumes that life progresses via the addition of one building block to the next which forms a structure which aims to a predestined and perfect end.

To pass Bergson’s test, the will to power must similarly reject mechanism and finalism. To begin, the story of the tight robe walker in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, along with the idea of the *Übermensch*, certainly elicit the idea of the will to power as a theory more in line with finalism, insofar that an end is predetermined. However, just as with the *élan vital*, it is justifiable in its resemblance to finalism. The will to power is a creative force through self-overcoming, and as such dictates life in such a way that power is the ultimate end rather than an end that can be intellectually understood. In fact, it seems the only goal that can be rationalized is the *Übermensch*. Even then, it does not seem to exactly be the ultimate end in human evolution but rather the next great leap. Furthermore, the *Übermensch* seems to represent the possible/impossible alignment of humanity to an absolute truth much like Bergsonian intuition. Just as

⁶¹ Bergson, Henri, and Arthur Mitchell. “Chapter One.” Essay. In *Creative Evolution*. Authorized Translation by Arthur Mitchell, . Holt, 1928. p. 93.

Zarathustra spoke, “Behold, I teach you the overman. The overman is the meaning of the earth. Let your will say: the overman shall be the meaning of the earth!... To sin against the earth is now the most dreadful thing, and to esteem the entrails of the unknowable higher than the meaning of the earth.”⁶² This statement begins Zarathustra’s rant on the very nature of the Übermensch. Though it certainly is a leap, it is sensible to suggest that the Übermensch is one with absolute truth, represented here as the earth. To sin against the earth is to go against truth itself. Therefore the Übermensch is one with the very essence of life itself. That is to say, the Übermensch is a pure representation of the will to power as the absolute force of life.

The eye is an organ that posits the singular and simple ability of sight, and yet it is also a complexity of mechanisms in which every part is just as important as the next. How is it that an organism could ever have the capacity to evolve from sightlessness to sight, absent of intelligence, without making a single error in its construction as a whole? The will to power, just as the *élan vital*, can perfectly explain this account. The will to power harmoniously influences all of life into a world of unharmonious circumstances. Just as Nietzsche described it in the *Genealogy of Morals*, it is a power of “spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions.”⁶³ It is also a power which sacrifices the preservation of the self for the will of life that circulates around superiority.

For the will to power, there are no previous facets in which mechanistic variations can progress from. In terms of evolution, there are only physical structures with which to dispose of.

⁶² Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, and Walter Arnold. Kaufmann. “Part One” Chapter. in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra: a Book for All and None*, Modern Library, 1995, p. 13.

⁶³ Nietzsche, Friedrich, and Walter Kaufmann. “The Genealogy of Morals Part II.” Chapter. In *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, New York, NY: Modern Library, 1967, p. 515.

In fact, the preservation of these structures are the very representation of the reactive force, as described by Deleuze, that fully disables and hinders growth.⁶⁴ There is likewise no determination nor direction with which to construct the eye, but rather a strong impulse for power. Without intelligent thought, organism evolve via the will to power. If one contemplates the very basic function which the eye posits to a living creature, it becomes incredibly clear that not only does the eye gift a creature the ability to better manipulate its environment, but it is itself a pure representation of power. Sight represents a progressive mastering of an environment. The creature can now rationalize a material world with an instinct that screams, ‘that which I can see, I must conquer.’

As Bergson had expressed, finalism fails to account for the creation of the eye due to the fact that as a theory of predetermined ends, it automatically assumes a sort of harmony in biology that simply cannot exist. It also assumes that every step in evolution is preordained. The will to power certainly rejects finalism, even with its flirtatious relationship with the Übermensch. For the will to power, the only thing which is preordained is the continuous desire for power. It is by the very nature of what the will to power is which ultimately rejects any true semblance to finalism. It also fails to represent the supposed biological harmony which finalism surly accepts. The will to power is the very epitome of the vicious competitiveness seen in nature. It is a force of life that always looks to conquer, dominate, and destroy. Every stage in evolution that a creature reaches was born of the creative yet dominating impulse that is the will to power.

⁶⁴ Deleuze, Gilles, and Hugh Tomlinson. “Active and Reactive.” Essay. In *Nietzsche and Philosophy*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1983. p. 41.

Bergson's *élan vital* and Nietzsche's will to power have been heavily reviewed, torn apart, and flipped upside down. It has been an investigation that has reached a clear cut conclusion. These two predominate theories are justifiably synonymous. Both can account for the creation of the eye and ultimately explain the powerful and creative force that drives and or influences all of life. Similarly, Nietzsche's account of the active and reactive forces which exemplify the master and slave moralities are just as synonymous with Bergson's open and closed moralities. What this means, and the questions that can be raised, open up new possibilities in how we may understand Bergson and Nietzsche philosophies. It also reflects a grand tragedy: the unpleasant and unanswerable question of what could have been. What brilliant work could have been produced if these two great men in philosophy had been gifted the ability to converse?

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