

Discussione

Pamela Sue Anderson on Bergson **Confidence, Commitment, and Cognition**

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The concern for going beyond established limitations on forms of thought and practice deeply marked Pamela Sue Anderson's wide-ranging philosophical work. Her radiant personality, her passion for engaged thought which were embodied in her research and teaching, provided a constant source of inspiration for her friends, colleagues, and students, up until her death after a struggle with cancer in early 2017.

Anderson's contributions included internationally acclaimed publications on feminism, the philosophy of religion, and the integration of both in considering the relations between justice and conceptions of truth. Her unique perspective on these topics combined with a fresh approach to the history of philosophy, and the way it figures in developing new paths for thought today. As a professor at the Oxford Faculty of Philosophy, her research traversed the rigid borders marking off the 'analytic' from the 'continental' and served to open Oxford, and the Anglophone philosophical world more generally, towards more extensive engagement with the philosophical tradition in exciting ways. Her work, from her doctoral dissertation³² up until the past decade, included numerous celebrated publications on Ricoeur's oeuvre³³. In more recent years, Anderson developed, in both published and yet-unpublished papers, novel lines of thought in relation to Bergson's philosophy. She stood out from the Oxford philosophical crowd with her reading of both aforementioned thinkers, but the debate was not one-sided. Anderson provoked a new sense of receptivity to the

³² Published as: P. S. Anderson, *Ricoeur and Kant: Philosophy of the Will*, Atlanta 1993.

³³ Including: P. S. Anderson, *From Ricoeur to Life: Living up to Death with Spinoza, but also with Deleuze*, in *From Ricoeur to Action: The Socio-Political Significance of Ricoeur's Thinking*, edited by T. Mei and D. Lewin, London 2012, pp. 151-162; *A Feminist on Forgiveness: When (Where?) Love and Justice Come Apart*, in *Paul Ricoeur: Honouring and Continuing the Work*, edited by F. Erfani, Lanham 2011, pp. 105-118; *Ricoeur and Women's Studies: On the Affirmation of Life and a Confidence in the Power to Act*, in *Ricoeur Across the Disciplines*, edited by S. Davidson, New York 2009, pp. 142-164.

philosophical ‘other’, a development which continues to take shape vigorously today.

It is in the context of her interest in Bergson’s thought that we came in contact, in frequent discussions of interpretations of Bergson, her work on Bergson and the history of philosophy, as well as ways she related it to her research in ethics – on the topics of vulnerability³⁴ and confidence (see below). Her vital contributions on these issues, and her collaboration and participation in the first Oxford conference on Bergson’s philosophy³⁵ were a model of philosophical energy and commitment. As a tribute to her work, and the abundance of insights it affords, in this context I would like to highlight some of the particular themes Anderson pursued in papers leading directly to her work on Bergson, and in those exclusively focused on his philosophy.

‘Metaphors of Spatial Location: Understanding Post-Kantian Space’, from *Contemporary Kantian Metaphysics: New Essays on Space and Time*,³⁶ constitutes a significant step towards Anderson’s publications focusing explicitly on Bergson’s work. In it, Anderson highlights ‘variation on Kantian themes’, or transformations of the Kantian tradition which she proceeds to locate in Bergson’s philosophy.

At the heart of the paper is Kant’s metaphorical description of the ‘land of truth’, that of the pure concepts of the understanding, and of the borders between it and the ‘ideas’ of the transcendental dialectic. Here is Kant, from the *Critique of Pure Reason*:

We have now not only traveled through the land of pure understanding, and carefully inspected each part of it, but we have also surveyed it, and determined the place for each thing in it. This land, however, is an island, and enclosed in unalterable boundaries by nature itself. It is the land of truth (a charming name), surrounded by a broad and stormy ocean, the true seat of illusion, where many a fog bank and rapidly melting iceberg pretend to be new lands and, ceaselessly deceiving with empty hopes the voyager looking around for new discoveries, entwine him in adventures from which he can never escape and yet also never bring to an end...³⁷.

³⁴ Anderson pursued research on the notion of vulnerability as part of the ‘Enhancing Life’ Project, based at the University of Chicago. For an overview of her invaluable work in the context of the project, see: <http://enhancinglife.uchicago.edu/blog/remembering-enhancing-life-scholar-pamela-sue-anderson>.

³⁵ ‘Bergson: *Thinking Life*. Anglo-French Perspectives’, which took place 4-5th November 2016, Oxford.

³⁶ P. S. Anderson, *Metaphors of Spatial Location: Understanding Post-Kantian Space*, in *Contemporary Kantian Metaphysics: New Essays on Space and Time*, edited by R. Baiasu, G. Bird and A. W. Moore, New York 2012, pp. 169-196.

³⁷ I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* [1787], Cambridge 1998, pp. 338-339.

The 'region of illusion' is the domain of the Kantian dialectic, comprising the 'ideas' of freedom, the soul, and God, which are thinkable but not given within the bounds of the understanding. In the received view of Kant, these are banished to the unreachable noumenal. An 'intellectual intuition' could reveal them, but we ourselves are not in possession of modes of thought reaching further than the sensible.

In the paper, Anderson examines the 'land of truth' as a spatial metaphor which can indicate a path towards an imaginative extension of the Kantian project. Anderson emphasizes that the knowable, in Kant's view, is limited by space as the condition of the possibility of cognition belonging to sensibility. She then considers the Kantian idea of freedom, which lies beyond the knowable 'land of truth'. Providing an account of freedom cannot occur within the domain of the spatial, and of the temporal as understood on a spatial model. A full-blooded understanding of freedom (more than merely *thinkable*) means a position on space and time which differs from that which underlies the Kantian sensible.

This 'more than' the Kantian sensible, however, can be marked out from within an interpretation of Kant, Anderson proposes. She suggests that the Kantian restriction, separating the 'land of truth' from the 'stormy ocean' of the dialectic, confuses between *limits* and *bounds*. While we cannot possibly surpass bounds, limits are situated between domains which lie within our grasp. The distinction between the 'land of truth', of the knowable, and the domain of freedom (as the key example of reason's 'ideas') is one which can be seen as a limit rather than as a bound, Anderson suggests. This is understood in the context of a critical reading of Kant's metaphor as calling for an exercise of the imagination. The space beyond the 'land of truth' *is* indeed accessible, through movement which does not adhere to the same kind of certainty associated with the 'land', but adapts to the fluctuations of the 'stormy' sea. An analogical extension of our imagination can take us towards an understanding of freedom, extending empirical terms beyond Kant's explicit endorsement³⁸. Conceiving the possibility of a use of the imagination which allows us to form not only a mere thought but an *intuition* of freedom reveals the Kantian restriction in a new way, according to Anderson. It is a limitation we impose upon ourselves, in ways which impoverish our confidence significantly, in so far as that confidence is tied to a full-blooded sense of our freedom³⁹.

Anderson's interest in the notion of confidence, and of the ways that it is tied to a comprehension of the range of cognition, build into her paper 'Confidence in the Power of Memory: Ricoeur's Dynamic Hermeneutics of Life'⁴⁰. While focusing on Ricoeur's work, the paper also comprises an extended discussion of Bergson's influence upon him, in particular of the 'attachment' evinced in

³⁸ P. S. Anderson, *Metaphors of Spatial Location*, cit., p. 179.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

⁴⁰ P. S. Anderson, *Confidence in the Power of Memory: Ricoeur's Dynamic Hermeneutics of Life*, in *Hermeneutics and the Philosophy of Religion*, edited by I. U. Dalferth and M. A. Block, Tübingen 2015, pp. 51-70.

Bergsonian memory. In the main line of argument, Anderson considers the relation of memory to confidence. Her concern for the loss of confidence of the 'capable subject' takes the debate on memory beyond the typical scope of discussion in philosophy of mind and psychology, stressing an ethical perspective on our modes of cognition. This ethical concern for limitations of the 'capable subject' has, for Anderson, strong extra-theoretical roots and implications. It comes from an acute awareness of numerous concrete cases of loss of confidence, in particular of women in the academic world (in Oxford and beyond), as examples of injustices committed against women more generally. This scope of application can be glimpsed vis-à-vis the range of cases brought up by Anderson in the paper⁴¹. In court cases, for example, «epistemic injustice arises when the credibility of the subject of knowledge is undermined due to external factors affecting a subject's epistemic role. For instance, however capable the subject, her social and material markings may prevent her accurate and relevant knowledge from being acknowledged by those who hear her testimony... Wrongful convictions result from such situations that are lacking in 'ethical' confidence; the under-confidence of the subject who testifies is unfairly matched by the over-confidence of those who dismiss her testimony»⁴².

How do we address such loss of confidence in one's testimony? Beyond the political and social questions which arise here, or rather 'behind' them, lies a certain comprehension of an attachment characteristic of our capacity to remember, Anderson insightfully argues. Following Ricoeur's *History, Memory, Forgetting*, Anderson underscores the centrality of affective traces in acts of remembering, and the insight Bergson provides in uncovering them⁴³. A discussion of passages from Bergson's *Matter and Memory* allows Anderson to highlight the 'attached' character of memory. As Bergson writes:

Our memory remains attached to the past by its deepest roots, and, if when once realized, it did not retain something of its original virtuality, if, being a present state, it were not also something which stands out distinct from the present, we should never know it for a memory⁴⁴.

Reinstating lost confidence involves being attentive to the kind of attachment described by Bergson, which we can see fragilized in the interplay of (oppressive) social forces, and within our exclusive focus on the present moment. For Anderson, as for Ricoeur, this confidence, borne of attentiveness to the persistence of memory, connects us not only to our past; it also forward-looking, an assured confidence that a «trace of me will survive».

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 53-61.

⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 61ff.

⁴⁴ H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory* [1896], New York 1991, p. 171.

In 'An Eruption of Mystical Life in Feminist Action: Mysticism and Confidence after Bergson'⁴⁵ Anderson turns to explore Bergson's work and its influence directly. Developing an adventurous and fascinating proposal, Anderson considers Bergson's role in Simone de Beauvoir's philosophical development and the implications of this influence for contemporary feminism. She finds in Beauvoir's encounter with Bergson's philosophy, noted in her 1926-27 *Diary of a Philosophy Student*, the first instance of a «profound sense of self and freedom from individual and collective self-deception»⁴⁶. This sense of freedom which Anderson locates in the influence of Bergson's work upon Beauvoir also leads into her characterization of the importance of Bergson for a 'mystical' conception of feminist action. She is careful, however, to distinguish the mysticism drawn from Bergson from an unmediated, or intimate relation to an ideal or 'sensible transcendental' described in late 20th century forms of feminism⁴⁷. The Bergsonian, or Beauvoirian, mystic is attached to an open morality of collective action, based on a universal vision of the human as such. It is a mystical or direct relation on the level of *social commitment*.

'Reorienting Ourselves in Bergsonian Freedom, Friendship and Feminism' (yet-unpublished) further extends this line of thought. «When exactly is intuition not just philosophical, but also mystical?» Anderson asks. An intuition takes mystical signification, she contends, «when its activity is transformed into a liberating creativity rather than into reactive emotions». The decisive move involves considering freedom apart from political ideology or a deduction from ideals, as a capacity for unmediated interaction. Freedom is first and foremost our capacity for «making and doing», according to Anderson. But it is significantly also of *un-doing* and *re-making*, a capacity for «becoming undone by others in love and loss, and at other times, becoming once again confident in recognizing our freedom in human capability, that is, in our creative energy».

A further innovation in the paper sees Anderson developing a proposal regarding the distinction between the 'superficial' and 'profound' self in Bergson. Targeting a reading which places intuition in the obscurity of the 'self-soul', or as accessible solely from the perspective of a disengaged subject, Anderson articulates the division between the profound and superficial on an 'external' plane. Intuition involves affirming *complexity* (as the external manifestation of the 'profound') as primary in relation to 'superficial' *simplicity*. This would mean that the modes of duration revealed in intuition, complex temporal relations which underlie our actions, are subjects' modes of access to the external world, and that the 'superficial', or spatial, is only an *aspect* of that external contact with the real.

⁴⁵ P. S. Anderson, *An Eruption of Mystical Life in Feminist Action: Mysticism and Confidence after Bergson*, in *Mysticism in the French Tradition*, edited by L. Nelstrop and B. Onishi, Farnham 2015, pp. 37-58.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 42-43.

‘Bergsonian Intuition: When European and Analytic Philosophers Meet’ is Pamela’s last (and unpublished) paper on Bergson, presented and discussed in the *Bergson: Thinking Life* event in Oxford in November 2016. In the paper she develops compelling lines of response to Adrian Moore’s (Anderson’s longtime friend and colleague) chapter on Bergson – ‘Bergson: A Metaphysics as Pure Creativity’ – from his *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*⁴⁸. Part of Moore’s rich discussion in the chapter involves outlining the Bergsonian opposition between intuition and analysis as two kinds of ‘sense-making’: intuition as giving us non-perspectival knowledge of duration, as sharply contrasted with analysis as involving the presentation of symbolic, perspectival, representations which are practically-oriented. «Nowhere in the history of metaphysics ... has the drawing of a distinction between different kinds of sense making been more pronounced, or more relentlessly pursued ... than in Bergson»⁴⁹, Moore writes.

In response to Moore, Anderson outlines several paths of critique which seek to integrate Bergson into the Post-Kantian philosophical tradition and to articulate a broader understanding of the concept of intuition. One line of argument is particularly notable. It involves Anderson taking issue with Moore’s contention regarding the intuition-analysis distinction being *unique* to Bergson («there is nothing else quite like it»⁵⁰, Moore writes). Without denying the novelty in Bergson’s conception of intuition, Anderson argues that seeing the distinction as uniquely Bergsonian obscures ways in which Bergson seeks to critically engage with the Kantian restrictions concerning the scope our understanding. «Bergson himself», Anderson writes, «remained close to both Kant’s critique of metaphysics (when it came to theoretical reason), and Kant’s metaphysics of morals (when it came to practical reason). These Kantian critiques led Bergson to seek a philosophical conversion of Kantian intuition». Kantian intuition is transformed in Bergson by a significantly wider understanding of the sensible. An interpretation which sees Bergson working with the Kantian limitations, Anderson argues, is one which can truly flesh out the kind of novelty involved in Bergson’s proposal regarding intuition.⁵¹

At present, I would like to indicate one particular avenue of further development, which takes cues from Anderson’s work on Bergson. One way in which we can continue the line of thought regarding the scope of our faculties,

⁴⁸ A. W. Moore, *The Evolution of Modern Metaphysics: Making Sense of Things*, Cambridge 2012, pp. 406-428.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

⁵¹ For a recent in-depth perspective on Bergson’s ‘Kantianism’, see also: Camille Riquier, *La relève intuitive de la métaphysique: le kantisme de Bergson*, in *Lire Bergson*, edited by C. Riquier and F. Worms, Paris 2011, pp. 36-59.

one which also brings to the fore an approach to Bergsonian intuition as a place where 'European and analytic philosophers meet', concerns the relation between intuition and conceptual thought in Bergson's philosophy.

A paper Pamela brought up frequently during discussions on Bergson, in relation to contemporary debates in analytic philosophy, is Adrian Moore's appreciative discussion of Derrida's philosophy, 'Arguing with Derrida'. The point Anderson stressed with regards to this paper, striking for its place and time (when and where the philosophical establishment was largely hostile to Derrida's thought), did not involve Derrida's work directly. It rather had to do with Moore's description of the interests of analytic philosophy, which *prima facie* run against a common understanding of Bergson's project.

Moore, in the paper, characterizes a central strain of analytic philosophy as interested primarily in the analysis of concepts, encompassing «on the one hand the formal techniques to demonstrate ways in which concepts come together, and on the other hand the creative use of the imagination to demonstrate ways in which they come apart»⁵². This dominant concern⁵³ since Frege's foundational work, means pushing aside, at least to some extent, claims about reality in favor of a focus on *thought* about the real. Now, while 'conceptual' analytic philosophy is certainly animated by a commitment to the truth,⁵⁴ there are distinctive problems which arise when this commitment is cashed out. One such problem, underscored by Moore, concerns ways to differentiate concepts from objects, given a Fregean framework. If in fact concepts and objects cannot be clearly distinguished, as seems to be the case in Fregean 'conceptual philosophy', it is hard to see how we can gain an understanding of how thought comes into contact with, or detaches from things. It seems difficult, then, on a traditional view of the resources of 'conceptual philosophy', to discuss what Moore considers to be of primary philosophical importance: the «ineffable unity – of language, of reality, and of languages with reality – which makes it possible to talk about anything at all». This is one way, according to Moore, in which 'conceptual philosophy' «fails on its own terms»: its resources do not enable an account of the way thought relates to the world⁵⁵.

This point regarding the relation of language and thought to reality indicates a wide-ranging debate, expressed in recent analytic philosophy in contributions exploring ineffable knowledge,⁵⁶ and regarding the status and

⁵² A. W. Moore, *Arguing with Derrida*, in *Arguing with Derrida*, edited by S. Glendinning, Oxford 2001, p. 58.

⁵³ Moore is careful to qualify his claim, as analytic philosophy is certainly not *exclusively* centered on the analysis of concepts.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

⁵⁶ Largely following Adrian Moore's discussion. See: A. W. Moore, *Points of View*, Oxford 1997. For a recent and lucid perspective on the topic, see: S. Jonas, *Ineffability and its Metaphysics: The Unspeakable in Art, Religion, and Philosophy*, New York 2016.

possibility of non-conceptual modes of knowledge⁵⁷. In the present context, let us notice that Anderson's work directs us to Bergson as an important interlocutor in this discussion. In understanding intuition as involving the expression of living action rather than action defined by the limits of language, Bergson might offer a novel way to talk about the way concepts 'latch on' to aspects of the real, in ways that feed into recent debates.

Once we read Bergson through the prism of prevalent interpretations of his thought, however, a challenge emerges. Bergson's view of intuition, as involving the unmediated relation to duration, seems to be separated entirely from an understanding of concepts. This widespread view of Bergson is encapsulated in George Canguilhem's account of Bergson in 'Le concept et la vie', which includes a lengthy critical examination of the latter's views on concepts. For Canguilhem, concepts are entirely unrelated to living activity as conceived by Bergson, they are the mechanized result of a mediated relation to the environment⁵⁸. This problem comes up acutely when one reads Bergson's early work, in particular noting the *Essai's* separation between the 'depth' self of living activity, and the conceptual associations structured by language on the self's 'surface'⁵⁹.

The tension between concepts and life, and a way to attenuate it, is underscored by Anderson's insistence on eschewing Bergson's conception of the 'profound' self, of intuition as giving us access to a reality divorced from that of intersubjective interaction. As noted above, 'depth' is refashioned in Anderson's reading in terms of surface detail or complexity. Following Anderson here, we can see intuition as a way to inquire into the *relation* of concepts and life – or of duration to processes of environmental adaptation – rather than as a way to discuss that which remains essentially ineffable. But this reading of Bergson need not remain only an exegetical suggestion.

In a subtle development which begins to take place in *Matter and Memory*, we can see Bergson becoming interested in describing the way conceptual skill fits within his dynamic conception of experience. The shift from the earlier *Essai* can be located in ways Bergson criticizes theories of the origin of concepts in the third chapter of *Matter and Memory*, in his analysis of 'general ideas' originating in a *direct* experience of relations between worldly structures.⁶⁰

The recent publication of Bergson's College de France courses, delivered during the decade following the publication of *Matter and Memory*, affords us further insight into the development of Bergson's views on the way concepts relate to living experience. In a meeting of the 1902-1903 course *Histoire de l'idée de temps*, Bergson turns to discuss «qualitative generalities», as seized

⁵⁷ Central contributions which structure this ongoing debate include: G. Evans, *The Varieties of Reference*, Oxford 1982; C. Peacocke, *A Study of Concepts*, Cambridge MA 1992; J. McDowell, *Mind and World*, Cambridge MA 1994.

⁵⁸ G. Canguilhem, *Le concept et la vie*, «Revue Philosophique de Louvain», 82, 1966, pp. 206-208.

⁵⁹ H. Bergson, *Time and Free Will* [1889], Mineola 2001, p. 129ff.

⁶⁰ H. Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, cit., pp.158-160.

within primitive modes of animal consciousness. General qualitative concepts, he argues, are based on «vital necessities», expressed in bodily «attitudes». Importantly, Bergson is careful to emphasize that these generalities are not merely mechanical reactions to the environment.⁶¹ These bodily attitudes establish a realm of *intentions* and their satisfaction through action. A close reading of this development and its ramifications for additional conceptual domains, I would like to suggest, can show the way in which ineffable duration lies not separate from, but rather at the core of our conceptual skill. This would give us a different vision of Bergson's thought, one which would see certain interests of 'European and analytic' philosophers converge. A vision of Bergson in line with Anderson's illuminating suggestions.

The enduring trace of Anderson's philosophical work, highlighted here all too briefly, comprises much more than the influence of her inclusive appreciation of the history of philosophy, and her sensitivity to the interrelations between diverging traditions, which included her sketching new horizons for contemporary readings of Bergson. It is the trace of an energetic and creative philosophical voice, which should inspire us to make the grand connection which she outlined in her work, between our *conceptions* of the human, and the ways in which we *live* through these conceptions: in injustice, in individual and collective self-deception, and in ways of going beyond them in joyous affirmation of our modes of attachment.

⁶¹ H. Bergson, *Histoire de l'idée de temps. Cours au Collège de France 1902-1903*, Paris 2016, p. 64ff.