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## THE INTUITION AS A METHOD OF SOCIAL COGNITION

**R. Yordanova\***

Karlsfeld, Germany

### ABSTRACT

This report compares the outlooks of two significant thinkers in modern philosophy - Descartes (1596-1650) and Bergson (1859-1941). It is known that the problem of the method is not new to French philosophy. Since the 17th century, it is mostly associated with the ideas of these philosophers. The merit of Bergson's philosophy is in proposing and applying a new research method consisting not in the building of a system of outlooks but rather in following specified lines of facts. No single form of cognition exists for the French thinker but there is a privileged form based on the intuition as a method.

**Key words:** science, metaphysics, Descartes, Bergson, experience data, concept, intellectualism and anti-intellectualism.

The problem of the method is not new to French philosophy. Since the 17th century, it is mostly associated with the names of Descartes and Bergson. In his works, the first one gives vent to a kind of, let's so call, epistemological egocentrism proposing a reliable knowledge of existence and the essence of the autonomous thinking Ego. After his concepts, it becomes impossible to prevent the man from being conceived as "pure thinking". This is that Hegel discovers Descartes' philosophy uniqueness and merit in, and its "program role" for the New Time culture. Descartes' Ego became "the all-embracing horizon" and therefore, there is no other position to look at itself from. We may find here the essential difference in the metaphysical arrangements of Descartes and Bergson. The tuning of the modern European philosophy, in particular the French one, from the first one in the second one comes to be painfully slow. Hegel's type of philosophizing predominates over Montaigne's. Shifting the philosophic reflexion perspective to individual Ego – in its universality! – is a natural reaction of the New Time with respect to preceding

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\*Correspondence to: *Rozaliya Yordanova, Schwarzhölzstr. 34 D, 85757 Karlsfeld, Germany; Tel. 0049-15209415422; E-Mail: rozaliay@yahoo.fr*

Middle Age and Renaissance. It is as late as around the beginning of the 20th century that the final step is made to the clean thinking, freed up from psychologically naturalistic elements. However, the individual, unrepeatable, non-uniform feature disappears along with this. Man as a "thinking thing" inevitably turns into homo faber (1). Actually, man is not an absolute activity and not contemplation either, in which the reality broken into things is gathered into a multiform unity. Contemplation extinguishes the aggressive activity of the intellect that breaks the existing world into subject and object, into activity and passivity. In contemplation, being gets back to itself as self-knowing, as long as thinking reaches the being essence and is identical to it with respect to the contents. In view of above, I will remind Hegel's statement regarding the correlation between thought and being: "... they are inseparable, i.e., they make an identity; what is inseparable is still different: but this difference does not impact the identity, they are a unity." (2)

The 20th century thinkers (how many times in the history of philosophy?) ask the big question of philosophical anthropology: "What is man?" . Thought – from being a technique that designs both itself and the outside world – turns again into "the talk that soul has with itself about the question it examines". (3) Regardless of the

differences in the methods of Descartes and Bergson, in their person French philosophy possesses a priceless acquisition of thought: the problems faced by human mind can be resolved if only the researching method is properly selected. So, the most important thing is to find the method that is adequate to the purposes set and to evaluate the value of such method according to the outcomes obtained. Therefore, for both thinkers, the method is "rather in Practice than in Theory" (4), the method requires from us to have the necessary experience and time to follow it (5), the method is a condition for all the rest (6). The difference is in its starting point and in the direction of movement: with Descartes from *intuitus mentis* and the native ideas to the things studied: "(.) there are lots of things that can be recognized through the natural light, which nobody has ever think about (7), with Bergson - from "the difficult and long way of facts to the ideas" (8). This difference is conditioned by the completely opposite thinking arrangement of both Frenchmen: Descartes' universal methodical doubt and the incontestability of his *cogito* only, with Bergson - the long-lasting closeness to the object of study; his positive and good faith study where knower and known merge into an indivisible whole; the identification with the thing. The comparative analysis of the "methodologism" of Descartes and Bergson requires to stress that they both do not intend the creation of a philosophical system but only to outline the thought axes.

That's why I find that is necessary to pay attention to the form in which Descartes exposes his method, namely the intellectual confession - in the autobiographical lines of his works and in his letters (9) and Bergson defines his method by applying it to various problems in the entire sequence of his works and also in his personal correspondence, lectures, discussions. Obviously, they both felt that a living method could not be translated in the words of a single book. The method details are detailed in the extent that the study progresses at; the method is not a ready recipe or algorithm. The method is integrally associated with the exercise of thought and cannot be taught dogmatically. The method can be understood only if put in action. I feel that it will be interesting to

support the above by the statement of the Renaissance thinker Marsilio Ficino. In Plato's *Theology*, On the Immortality of the Soul, XIV, 319, he notes, "... a kind of unity is formed from our mind and from the shape of the thing thought. But what assumes a specified shape in a way to allow an unity to be formed almost turns in the thing, the shape of which it has assumed." And further, "... when the intellect tries to think all the things and, by thinking them, to get dressed in their shapes, it actually tries to get all things..." Obviously, Ficino uses as synonyms the words "mind" and "intellect" that have a different meaning with mature Bergson but the closeness of their points of view is more important in this case. I don't know whether the French thinker had read the Florence Platonist in original, but they both know Plato's philosophy very well.

The nature of the object studied suggests every time the methods of acting towards it. Such conception of the method explains Dewey's statement that "the other name for a method" is "intellect in action" (10). We may easily find a reason for this conception. This results from Descartes' position that the method of the mind management consists in rules that, on their part, are determined by the mind itself.

Under the form of intuition, the mind lays down the line of its own movement. The intuition emanates from the natural light of the mind, therefore, the mind is managed by itself. For Descartes, the intuition consists in a single and indivisible step and the deduction results from it. The self-obviousness of the "*cogito*" acknowledged as a standard of a clear and distinct, i.e., reliable knowledge is achieved, in Descartes' opinion, through the intuition but not through the deductive conclusion. So, the method cannot misguide us, lead us into a wrong direction. Descartes understands the intuition and the deduction as purposeful ways for conceiving and endorsing the truth. Here, I will remind Hegel's evaluation of Descartes' philosophy, in the basis of which "is the need for the thought to proceed from itself" (11). Descartes' presence in European philosophical space is very significant because "he was the first to start the philosophy from the very beginning" (12).

The subject of the positive metaphysics that Bergson champions three centuries later is not a kind of illusory world, the principle and the end of which would be non-existence but a real world - as it is and as it is keeps existing. In his personal correspondence, the French thinker emphasizes several times that on the bases of this real philosophy he would oppose the freedom of determinism, the reality of the the spiritual principle - to the materialistic monism, the creative principle - to pantheism as a whole. Bergson undertakes a long journey too to look for the truth. His credo is faithful service to truth but not inventing truth (in the meaning of "making up")... Philosophy, in his opinion, should be closely related to the positive science as well as to the inclination and the practice of internal self-analysis.

As to the nature of Bergson's ideas, there were and there still are ardent disputes carried out between his followers and opponents and the evaluations float between two extreme points: "intellectualism of a quite new type" (L. Husson, Ch. Peggy) and "anti-intellectualism" (J. Benda, A. Cresson, Fr. Grandjean). It seems to me that such disagreements are mostly due to the fact that too few researchers of Bergson's conception of intuition comply with thinker's statement during the discussion on the psycho-physical parallelism in 1901: "(...) there are two types of parallelism, true parallelism that lives with its ideas and false one that closes its moving ideas into frozen concepts to handle them as tokens. As to these two types of parallelism, the second one has always been an enemy to the first one, the way as the letter is enemy to the spirit" (13).

In a thorough study of Bergson's work, we could make the following conclusions regarding the intuition as a method of intellectual knowledge:

First. In his books *Time and Free Will*, *Matter and Memory*, *The Laughter* and articles such as *The Intellectual Effort* written in the period between 1885 and 1902, the method proposed by the philosopher is rather shown than expressed; experimented but not formulated.

Second. This method is experimented on "the long and difficult trip of facts", which, on its part, requires a thorough, careful and accurate study of the results of the casual scientific knowledge because the true metaphysics should be a science that is empirical as the other ones. This method continuously uses the experience data.

Third. The continuous contact with the reality provided by the method application emphasizes the gradualness in bringing the results out but also their lack of being final. Our knowledge is limited, incomplete, but not relative. A single truth is actually valuable not by itself but in the continuous contact with all the others.

Fourth. The method proposed by Bergson requires the flexibility of mind, mind's capacity to forget itself to closely track all changes and essential objective laws of being, i.e., a refusal of "the habits we have acquired, even of the natural arrangements that we could further develop in ourselves". Fifth. In French thinker's opinion, the intuition is a capacity to capture at once the completeness of the quality variety, of the "true time", i.e., of duration.

In Bergson's early work, we have, on one hand, the intuition of duration - an act that we use to "descend" into our own depths, by realizing, at the same time, the ideas of unity, of substance, of cause and aim, while living our own life, on the other hand, since the very beginning of his philosophical career, he applies the intuitive method to reformulate or reject as groundless the problems of "the old metaphysics" and by which philosophy gets the legal right to exist amongst and above the other empirical sciences because of using the data of our experience.

## REFERENCES

1. In *The Creative Evolution*, Bergson shares: "If we could shake off our entire pride, if, for providing a definition of our species, we strictly adhere to what history and prehistory give us as a constant characteristic of man and mind, we would probably say not Homo Sapiens but Homo Faber." - in: H. Bergson, "Evolution creatrice", Paris 1930, Alcan, 35e ed., p. 151.
2. Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, Sofia, 1982, publ. NI, v. 3, p. 304.

3. Plato, *Theaetetus*, 189e - in: Plato, *Dialogues*, Sofia, 1990, publ. NI, volume 4.
4. A letter of Descartes to Mersen dated March 1637 - in: AT, I, 349.
5. A letter of Descartes to Mersen's friend most probably dated 27.04. 1637 - in: AT, I, 370.
6. See *A Talk on the Method* - in: R. Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Works*, Sofia, 1978, publ. by NI.
7. A letter of Descartes to Mersen dated 16. 10.1639 - in: AT, II, 598.
8. "Ecrits et paroles", vol. I, p. 149.
9. See AT, I, 370 as well as *Rules of Mind's Management* - in: R. Descartes, *Selected Philosophical Works*.
10. The quotation is after J. Buchler, "The concept of Method", N. I. 1961, p. 81.
11. *History of Philosophy*, volume 3, p. 302.
12. As above, p. 296.
13. "Ecrits et paroles", vol. I, p. 160.