THE NATURAL CYBORG: THE STAKES OF BERGSON’S PHILOSOPHY OF EVOLUTION

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ABSTRACT: Bergson’s engagement with evolutionary theory was remarkably up to date with the science of his time. One century later, the scientific and social landscape is undoubtedly quite different, but some of his insights remain of critical importance for the present. This paper aims at discussing three related aspects of Bergson’s philosophy of evolution and their relevance for contemporary debates: first, the stark distinction between the affirmation of the reality of change and becoming, on the one hand, and any notion of progress on the other; second, the insistence on the intimate interplay between forms of knowledge and forms of life; third, his idea that machines and organisms, technology and biology, are not separate domains but, rather, stem from and answer to the same problems and needs that living beings express. Such a Bergsonian framework may prove very helpful in reassessing the implicit assumptions of several contemporary debates on the ethical and political stakes of evolution, biosciences, and technologies, as well as the increasingly problematic boundary between “biology” and “culture.”

1. INTRODUCTION

Henri Bergson is certainly not a feminist philosopher: his remarks on women are sparse and as conservative and uninteresting as you can expect from any traditional male thinker of his time. His commitment to the improvement of the condition of women, if it exists, has nothing of the passion and sense of

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urgency of, say, John Stuart Mill. He is, however, one of the most important philosophers of evolution: few have engaged with evolutionary theory as closely as Bergson did, and, more importantly, some of his insights have lost none of their pertinence in spite of the major changes and breakthroughs undergone by the life sciences since the publication in 1907 of Creative Evolution. I further believe that some of these ideas may prove useful for contemporary debates in feminist theory where questions raised by the biosciences and biotechnologies play a prominent role. In what follows, I will discuss the aspects of Bergson’s philosophy of evolution that are, in my view, most significant for the present and try to make the case for a possible encounter with feminist stakes.

2. ALL IS NOT GIVEN

Bergson’s interest in evolution is directed by his ongoing effort to think the nature of time. Time is certainly not a particularly original topic for philosophers who, from Zeno of Elea to Heidegger and well beyond, cannot help being drawn to the elusive nature of time, being fascinated by its paradoxes, and trying again and again to grasp its secrets. What is peculiar to Bergson, though, is the idea that time can be understood only from the perspective of novelty, of radical becoming or, to use his favorite expression, from the perspective of “the new in the making” (le nouveau en train de se faire); the underlying claim is that we are naturally or metaphysically—which amounts to the same as we shall see shortly—most incapable of taking such a perspective. To look at the processes that bring about novelty does not come spontaneously to us at all but, rather, requires something like a conversion of attitude, a constant effort of attention.

Obviously, Bergson is aware that in modern science and philosophy, as well as in everyday life, nothing is more common than talking about change and becoming. But his point is that naming something does not amount to thinking it and that, in the specific case of change, movement, or becoming, our explicit or implicit assumptions prevent us from understanding what they truly are about.

Evolution is the perfect example of this predicament. On the one hand, evolutionary theory and paleontology incontestably show the successive emergence of new forms of life and thus bear witness to the reality of becoming. On the other hand, the very way in which different and competing theories of evolution understand its movement fail to grasp the reality of the creative power of time. Thinking through the temporality of evolution and the reason why it so easily eludes us is the task that Bergson sets for himself with the publication of Creative Evolution in 1907—the book that won him international renown.¹

An important part of the book is a close and informed engagement with the different strands in evolutionary theory and embryology of his time that Bergson, not without reason, sees as divided into two main lines: those of neo-Darwinian and those of neo-Lamarckian orientations. I cannot present the details of Bergson’s discussion here, but the arguments he advances to support the claim that something fundamental about the temporality of evolution is generally missed must be addressed.

In spite of Darwin’s breakthrough, the logic underlying Darwinism and neo-Darwinism remains, for Bergson, essentially the same mechanistic logic of Newtonian physics. The mutations of species are understood as the result of pregiven factors: though occurrences of mutations may well be random, they can nevertheless be entirely accounted for, at least in principle, by the presence of elements that precede them. In this picture, change is conceptualized as the result of the rearrangement of preexisting elements and the emergence of a new form of life is seen as the novel arrangement of old elements.²

Bergson obviously agrees that the appearance of new species must be produced by some definite causes and that their emergence can always be retroactively explained; what he finds objectionable, though, is the jump from the possibility of an after-the-fact explanation to the assumption that what can be explained could also have been predicted.³ In the case of evolution, Bergson argues, the possibility of explanation and the possibility of prediction are categorically different, and the mistake of mechanism is precisely to collapse one into the other. The idea that change is nothing but the reordering of a given set of elements, like reordering pieces of a puzzle to produce different pictures, is precisely what allows the equation of explanation with prediction—but it does so at the price of forgoing the reality of time.

To put this another way: the guiding idea of mechanism is that past and future are calculable functions of the present, that if we could know exactly the present state of the universe we could in principle calculate all its past and future states.⁴ Such an ultimate goal regarding our knowledge of nature may not be achievable, or not yet, but the fact remains—and this is what matters to Bergson—that this conception of science implies a metaphysics where the totality of reality is already given from all eternity and where the duration of

² Ibid., 30.
³ Ibid., 37.
⁴ Ibid., 38.
things, that is, their temporal succession, expresses only the weakness of our human minds. Assuming that "all is given" (tut est donné), that change is nothing but the reordering of preexisting unchanging elements thus amounts to denying that time has any real efficiency, any agency, but if time does nothing, Bergson writes, it is nothing.  

We can now better understand why it is so essential for Bergson to try to grasp the nature of time from the perspective of the new in the making, of the creation of novelty: outside of this perspective, time remains—even in modern science and philosophy—the dispensable frame of eternity. 

But if neo-Darwinism, with its mechanistic and deterministic outlook, fails to provide an adequate understanding of the emergence and mutations of life forms, neo-Lamarckian theories don't rate any better. They rely, in one way or another, on some version of finalism and explain evolution in teleological terms, thus reducing the succession of species to a surface phenomenon and the movement of evolution to a series of chapters in a story whose plot and outcome are known in advance. Rather than being a true alternative to mechanism, finalism is just its inverted image: "It substitutes the attraction of the future for the impulsion of the past," writes Bergson.  

But exchanging the future for the past suffices neither to question the fundamental assumption that all is given nor to introduce time into the life of the universe. The inability of theories of evolution to truly come to terms with the emergence of novelty is not simply the result of bad science, bad scientific ideology, or bad metaphysics: if this were the case, they could be easily overcome and corrected, and there would be no need for discussing them at length. The problem, for Bergson, is that they reflect or express a deeply rooted attitude of human reason that makes us believe that knowledge is a matter of applying the conceptual categories we already possess to any new object we encounter. We may not know what something is, but we don't doubt that we have already at our disposal the concept that suits it; we just have to find out which of our cognitive tools is the right one to apply to the case at hand.  

Plato was the first to set up the theory that to know the real consists in finding its idea, that is, in forcing it into a preexisting frame already at our disposal—as if we implicitly possessed universal knowledge. But this belief is natural to the human intellect, always engaged as it is in determining what form former heading it shall catalogue any new object; and it may be said that, in a certain sense, we are all born Platonists.  

If our natural Platonism is not just a random mistake, if it is perfectly legitimate and appropriate in certain domains of everyday life as well as in some scientific enterprises, it does not follow that it cannot be, and is not frequently, misleading. What is particularly misleading in a vision of knowledge that claims to possess in advance the necessary elements for encountering all possible objects and events is that it blinds itself to the challenge of the new. It cannot admit, even in principle, that new objects may require new concepts and methods of thinking, that something in the world simply might not fit peacefully into old intellectual habits and categories. 

The invention of novelty that constitutes the very fabric of life calls for a vision of knowledge that is also in constant becoming, one that simultaneously expands the domain of objects it covers and its own procedures and cognitive schemes.  

Our natural Platonism may still accommodate a Euclidian–Newtonian universe, but Bergson's insight is that Newtonian physics provides an accurate description of only some natural systems, and that it cannot claim to cover all scientific fields, particularly not those—like evolution—where the creative power of time cannot be eluded. Hence, Bergson concludes that we need new concepts and methods of thinking if we want to give a scientific and philosophical account of evolution. 

3. LIFE AND KNOWLEDGE  

The first step to meeting such a challenge is to reassess the link between life and knowledge, a point Bergson strongly emphasizes as early as the introduction to Creative Evolution. 

Theory of knowledge and theory of life seem to us inseparable. A theory of life that is not accompanied by a criticism of knowledge is obliged to accept as they stand the concepts which the understanding puts at its disposal: it can but enclose the facts, willing or not, in pre-existing frames which it regards as final. . . . On the other hand, a theory of knowledge which does not replace the intellect in the general evolution of life will teach us neither how the frames of knowledge have been
constructed nor how we can enlarge them. It is necessary that these two inquiries, theory of knowledge and theory of life, should join each other, and, by a circular process, push each other on unceasingly.11

A century later, we no longer speak the post-Kantian language of 'theories of life' or 'theories of knowledge'. We speak instead of biosciences and biotechnologies, and our epistemological inquiries are more commonly referred to as 'philosophy of mind'. Needless to say, such a change is not just a change in terminology: it expresses major transformations in the scientific, intellectual, and social landscape. However, these profound transformations do not undermine Bergson's demand for acknowledging that reason and intelligence emerge from the evolution of life and that this fact cannot be ignored either in the study of life or of cognition. But the interest of Bergson's position goes beyond, I believe, questions about the epistemology of life and cognitive sciences.

Calling for a deep awareness of the reciprocal belonging of life and knowledge, Bergson goes against a long and powerful tradition that sees an unbridgeable gap between the supposedly pure, disembodied, and disinterested procedures of reason that produce knowledge, on the one hand, and the supposedly obscure and irrational force of life, on the other hand.

As a faculty of some living animals, reason is in touch with reality; it does not essentially separate humans from the realm of the living, as the Platonic, Cartesian, and Kantian traditions hold it does, in ways that differ yet fundamentally agree on this crucial point. Knowledge as human activity certainly opens up possibilities unknown to other species, but rather than setting humans aside from life, it expresses a form of life that emerged in evolution. But if this is true, life—whatever that might be or mean—cannot be a murky, blind force that is ignorant of, and opposed to, any form of knowledge. And, as a matter of fact, for Bergson human cognitive practices are a particularly powerful instance of a tendency that is expressed by all living beings, namely, the capacity to solve problems in new and creative ways.

Several decades after the publication of Creative Evolution, in the different political and intellectual context following World War II, Georges Canguilhem will make a very similar point in the short but dense text entitled “Thought and the Living,” which provides a programmatic opening to his volume of collected essays Knowledge of Life. Canguilhem’s piece is testimony to the continuing significance of the Bergsonian legacy.

What light are we then so sure we are contemplating that we declare all eyes other than man’s to be blind? What meaning are we so certain of having given to the life in us that we declare any behavior except our own gestures to be stupid? Doubtless,

the animal cannot resolve all the problems we present to it, but this is because these problems are ours and not its own. Could man make a nest better than a bird, a web better than a spider? And if we look closely, does human thought manifest in its inventions an independence from the summons of need and the pressures of the milieu that would legitimate man’s pity-tinged irony toward infrahuman living beings? Does not a specialist in technological problems tell us that “nobody has ever encountered a tool created wholly for a use yet to be found, on materials yet to be discovered”?11

It is important to notice that grounding knowledge in life does not amount for either Bergson or Canguilhem to questioning the ambitions of reason and rationality, to downplaying science as merely one utilitarian device among others. On the contrary, they aim to highlight the fact that life as such produces knowledge and does so across species, that there is nothing essentially irrational about its power, as it is assumed by all those who oppose life to thought and want to separate humans from the realm of the living.

Life, Bergson argues, is nothing but a tendency to change that expresses itself along divergent lines of evolution; what all those lines have in common, though, is that they are different, but equally elegant, solutions to problems.12 What differentiates vegetal and animal life, for example, is a tendency toward fixity in one case and toward mobility in the other, but this difference is the result of two opposite strategies (if one may use this term) to deal with the problem they share of sustaining life. Vegetal forms of life directly absorb the chemical elements they need from the soil and atmosphere, hence their relative immobility; animals’ nutrition on the other hand needs organic elements and thus requires some mobility. Each solution has its advantages and disadvantages, and Bergson unsurprisingly has his own preferences (linking movement to consciousness). What is important to notice is that, in his view, both solutions are active and creative ways of dealing with problems. This is another way of saying that for Bergson the difference of life does not consist in an inexplicable force that will forever elude science but in its internal and active relation to knowledge as the faculty of setting up and solving problems.13

It is in this context of advocating for the reciprocal belonging of life and knowledge, and of making the case that living beings are solutions to

13 Deleuze is the first to repeatedly highlight the importance that Bergson attributes to the category of the “problem” in biological evolution over the more traditional one of “need.” See Gilles Deleuze, Bergsonism (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 5–6, and Difference and Repetition, trans. P. Patton (New York: Routledge, 1994), 157–59.
problems—as Deleuze will say, faithful as always to the spirit of Bergsonism, if not to its letter—that Bergson develops some interesting remarks about the supplementarity of biology and technology—of organisms and machines you prefer—that, to my mind, have not yet received the attention they deserve and that I would like to discuss now.

4. THE NATURAL CYBORG

The reciprocal belonging of life and knowledge, as we have seen, is not restricted to humans only but runs through, albeit in different forms and degrees, the entire domain of the living. The way in which Bergson describes instinct and intelligence is a particularly interesting example of such a co-belonging, and one whose implications are far reaching.

In his view, instinct and intelligence are not different degrees of one and the same tendency—as if intelligence were, so to speak, a smarter instinct, and instinct were a dumber form of intelligence. If it is true that in most cases of animal and human behavior instinct and intelligence are mingled, it does not follow that they express the same attitude at different levels of intensity. For Bergson, instinct and intelligence are divergent, although potentially complementary, forms of knowledge: two different methods for acting upon and transforming the material environment. They are different in kind, not in degree.

Intelligence, be it human or animal, is for Bergson above all “a manufacturing kind of thinking” (une pensée de la fabrication): we date the appearance of the human species, he writes, with the finding of prehistoric tools or weapons, and we judge the intelligence of animals by their capacity to make, use, or at least recognize some tools. Technological innovation, he further argues, is the most essential trigger in the development of societies: new machines and technologies not only reshape human relations, but they also produce new ideas and affects. Their effects usually take a long time to fully unfold, which may explain why we are inclined to pay more attention in the short run to political events, but their impact is significantly deeper and truly defines an age.

A century has elapsed since the invention of the steam engine, and we are only just beginning to feel the depths of the shock it gave us. But the revolution it has effected in industry has nevertheless upset human relations altogether. New ideas are arising, new feeling are on the way to flower. In thousands of years... our wars and our revolutions will count for little, even supposing that they are remembered at all; but

Bergson was among the first to recognize the importance of technology, to the point of suggesting that the human species would be better characterized as Homo faber rather than Homo sapiens. He speaks to the fact that intelligence is indeed primarily the faculty to create tools and tools that create other tools, in an open-ended process that expands not only the economic and social fabric of the human form of life but also its affective, artistic, philosophical, and religious horizons.

The importance granted to technology is accompanied in Bergson by an insight that largely anticipates many contemporary developments in philosophy and anthropology, namely, the idea that tools and machines open up the possibility of new functions, within and beyond the scope they were originally created for, and thus react back on humans, to provide them with what Bergson does not hesitate to call—and let us remember that Creative Evolution was published in 1907—“new organs” that prolong and expand the “natural” organism (the reason for the quotes on “natural” will become clear shortly). “Above all, it reacts on the nature of the being that constructs it; for in calling on him to exercise a new function, it confers on him, so to speak, a richer organization, being an artificial organ by which the natural organism is extended.” In sum, one could say that for Bergson technology supplements biology and, in this regard, he belongs to, and anticipates, a line of inquiry developed in France by philosophers, anthropologists, and historians of science such as Leroi-Gourhan, Simondon, Derrida, or, more recently, Stiegler.

No less surprising is the outcome of Bergson’s definition of “instinct.” In his view, instinct, like intelligence, is a form of knowledge aimed at acting upon the environment. But while the latter is the faculty of creating tools and machines, the former is the faculty of using—and, in rare cases, even of creating—organs. While the idea that instinct is attuned to the functions and potentialities of organic life is rather conventional, Bergson’s take acquires its full and, I believe, innovative significance when we consider that for him there is no ontological difference whatsoever between organs and machines. In Bergson’s account nothing essential differentiates organs and machines; what distinguishes them is just the “stuff” of which they are made. Organs are “organic tools,” while machines are “inorganic tools”; that is to say, they are different chemical formations, but they serve analogous purposes and have analogous functions.

14 Deleuze, Difference and Repetition, 212.
15 Bergson, Creative Evolution, 137.
16 Ibid., 138.
17 Ibid., 141.
As a result, and again using Derridian terminology, not only does technology supplement biology, for Bergson, but biology in its turn supplements technology. Or, to say it otherwise, there is no clear-cut line that divides organisms and machines, “artificial” devices and “natural” organic functions: only different cognitive strategies and material formations for the purpose of coping with and modifying the environment—strategies that run through, although at different degrees, all animal forms of life, human and nonhuman alike, and that expand and transform the boundaries of experience.

What is important to notice is that taking the reciprocal belonging of knowledge and life as his starting point and recognizing that knowledge is a way of acting on the environment allow Bergson to undermine one of the most powerful, persisting, and influential aspects of Cartesian dualism.

We have already seen the reason why Bergson dismisses the very premises of the Cartesian method that seeks the ground for the certainty of knowledge in the metaphysical isolation of a pure act of thinking—in the position of a “I think, I am” that can be misled about everything but its own existence. Such an isolation could be true of a spirit born to dream or speculate but not of an intelligence primarily oriented toward action that no evil genius will ever be capable of fundamentally misleading.

We are now in position to understand how Bergson’s conceptions of life and knowledge undo the necessary complement of the cogito, namely, Descartes’s famous—or infamous—theory of animal-machines. From the assertion that the act of thinking is the sole defining property of humans, Descartes quite consistently concludes that we are not, in any essential way, animals, that what we share with animals are bodies, but that bodies are nothing other than matter in motion, exactly like some human-made machines—clocks and other automata—only more complex.\(^{18}\)

The influence and consequences of Descartes’s position could hardly be overestimated and, obviously, I cannot discuss them here at any length. There is a point, though, that I wish to emphasize. Not only does Descartes break ground for all sorts of mechanistic accounts of the living, he is also successful in largely shaping the very terms of the debate for all those who want to oppose his philosophy, as is always the case for truly powerful ideas. Most modern and contemporary debates about organisms and machines, the reducibility or irreducibility of the living to mechanical models, or, more broadly, the relation of biology to technology accept the framework laid out by Descartes, if not his conclusions.

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Bergson believes, human beings are the best outcome of evolution so far, it is precisely because of their superior ability to create all sorts of new tools, organs, and machines, taking the movement of evolution further along utterly unexplored lines and creating even more new and unpredictable forms of life.23

But the true question, of course, is what ‘natural’ means in this context. What notion of nature, if any, is in play in Bergson’s account of evolution and in his philosophy in general? Plainly, the broader set of questions is whether Bergson’s insights that I have discussed so far—one on time, evolution, the reciprocal belonging of life and knowledge, and organism, machines, and natural cyborgs—may directly or, more likely indirectly, contribute to the complex theoretical and political agenda of twenty-first century feminism.

There is no need to emphasize how problematic the category of nature has been, and continues to be, for feminism across its multiple brands and varieties and at the different moments of its history. If some feminists have looked at nature and the body as the first target in the history of violence perpetrated by the alliance of patriarchy, capitalism, science, and technology, and hence have reinvested nature as the true site of resistance, then for the most part feminism—to my mind rightly—has been wary of “nature” and even more wary of the way that nature is conceptualized and what it is used for.

With her claim that “one is not born a woman, but rather becomes one,” Simone de Beauvoir gives one of the first and most elegant accounts of how nature is used to explain and justify the subordinate place of women in society and the need for women to “denaturalize” social and cultural roles if they want to find a voice as historical subjects.24 Ever since, the critique of nature, naturalization, biological determinism, and a whole array of related notions have been in the foreground of feminist theory and politics. Feminism has not failed to analyze, submit to criticism, or put in historical perspective the constraints of a binary logic that couples nature with culture, making the concept of the one depend on the concept of the other and vice versa.

This is not to say, though, that the troublesome legacy of nature is over and can be dispensed with. As Donna Haraway, among others, insightfully remarks, feminist critiques of the traditional categories of nature and culture and their binary interplay fall short of submitting to this same kind of criticism another conceptual couple—that of sex and gender—in spite of the fact that the distinction between sex and gender is fully dependent upon the nature—culture distinction.

Second-wave feminists early criticized the binary logic of the nature–culture pair. . . But these efforts hesitated to extend their criticism fully to the derivative sex–gender distinction. That distinction was too useful in combatting the pervasive biological determinism constantly deployed against feminists . . . In the political and epistemological effort to remove women from the category of nature and to place them in culture as constructed and self-constructing social subjects in history, the concept of gender has tended to be quarantined from the infections of biological sex . . . Thus feminists have argued against “biological determinism” and for “social constructionism” and in the process have been less powerful in deconstructing how bodies, including sexualized and racialized bodies, appear as objects of knowledge and sites of intervention in “biology.”25

Bergson’s philosophy does not provide direct insights into how to undo these problematic distinctions without losing the critically important political and theoretical possibilities they have opened up; I, at least, cannot find them in his work. On the other hand, his understanding of nature—or, more precisely, of its limits—may prove quite helpful. Let me explain what I mean.

“Nature” is not a key concept for Bergson. When it appears in his writings, it is always under the utterly conventional sign of fixity and stability. In Creative Evolution, what living beings do “naturally” is to cling to their form and resist, as much and as long as they can, the evolutionary tendency to change, which tendency is, for Bergson, no less than the élan vital itself, the creative power of life as radical becoming. In Two Sources of Morality and Religion (1932), Bergson is even more explicit in his characterization of “nature” as essentially conservative—and the political implications of the term ‘nature’ are quite central to Bergson’s argument. Bergson notices that human societies change very little or, more exactly, that the changes they undergo remain at the surface and don’t deeply affect their nature, which tends to constitute and sustain “closed groups,” always ready to close themselves off even further in order to attack the enemy. The aspiration to be an open society—to be a society that would not be defined by the exclusion of the other and would in principle include all of humanity—is for Bergson quite literally against nature; and so are the principles expressed by the American Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of Human Rights, as well as the idea of a democratic government. The chance for an open society, which Bergson strongly advocates, thus rests on the human capacity for “turning against nature” (se tourner contre la nature), something that can be done, it should be noticed, only if we know what this nature is.26

It is clear from these examples that nature has no normative value for Bergson. No moral, religious, or political claim can be made or justified in the

23 I will discuss shortly why the belief in newness and radical novelty should not be confused with some sort of optimism.


name of nature. That is not to say, however, that nature is irrelevant when it
comes to ethics and politics; there are some facts of nature that we would be
foolish to ignore, particularly if we want to counter them. In the domains of
politics, morality, and religion, Bergson’s position is interesting insofar as he
rejects any form of naturalism or naturalization without falling to the opposite
position, to what we nowadays would call some unrestricted form of social
constructionism. Instead of ignoring or denying the constraints of nature,
Bergson calls for a strategy that aims at countering nature, so to speak, from
within—looking for ways to go against “natural tendencies,” to change and
modify their direction with the help of other tendencies that are already
available to us or that we can create with our “natural” organic and inorganic
tools. In short, Bergson’s strategy is to counter nature with its own weapons.

But if this is the case, it is not only because Bergson does not believe in the
autonomy of culture over nature; it is also because he believes that “culture”
and “nature” alike emerge [are born] from, and participate in, the movement
of evolution that is larger than both of them. What Bergson calls
“nature”—in individuals, species, or societies—is the result, the product of
evolution; the relative fixity and stability of living beings and groups—their
natural tendency to cling to their present form—emerge from the becoming
of evolution that, as such, has neither stability nor form. We can go against
nature because its stability, its conservatism, is never absolute; it is a tendency
relative to, and dependent upon, the more essential tendency to change. And
when we do indeed counter nature, we turn away from one of its aspects to
renew our alliance with the other. “It might be said,” Bergson writes in Two
Sources, “by slightly distorting the terms of Spinoza, that it is to get back to
Natura Naturalis that we break away from Natura Naturata.”97 But just as
Spinoza is not Bergson’s favorite reference point, so ‘nature’ is not his favorite
term for expressing either the essential mobility of evolution or the universe in
becoming to which evolution itself belongs.

“Time is the invention of novelty, or is nothing at all,” Bergson writes
repeatedly in Creative Evolution: the life of the open universe, in which all is not
given once and for all in a mythical beginning or recaptured in an equally
mythical end, coincides with such an ontological agency of time. But Berg-
son’s affirmation of novelty should not be confused—and this will be my last
point—with any blind optimism or faith in the progress that will inevitably
bring us a better future.

The idea of progress—or of decline, for that matter—implies that history
is the unfolding of a teleology. But history, like evolution, does not follow any
preestablished path. For Bergson, one of the consequences of the affirmation

97 Bergson, Two Sources of Morality and Religion, 56.