

Bergson's Arguments for Matter as Images in *Matter and Memory*

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Abstract: In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson identifies a problem with perception and resolves it by arguing that matter is an aggregate of images. However, it is unclear whether and how Bergson justifies this thesis, and interpreters differ considerably on this question. This paper formulates and analyzes Bergson's arguments for this thesis in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*. Bergson presents five arguments, some of which echo arguments in early modern philosophy. They jointly compose a substantive, well-structured defense of his thesis. This paper also illuminates an aspect of Bergson's method that departs from his famous reliance on intuition and is grounded in his conception of the clarity required in philosophy.

Keywords: Bergson, Berkeley, early modern philosophy, image, matter, perception

1. Introduction

In Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson seeks to solve the problem concerning the relation between material objects as they appear in our perception and their scientific conception. In our perception, material objects exhibit sensible qualities that appear in different ways depending on conditions such as the standpoint of the perceiver. In the scientific conception, objects do not have sensible qualities and they change or remain the same independently of how they appear to a perceiver. Both of these accounts of material objects seem undeniable, but also incompatible.

Bergson aims to explain how they are related and how they can both be correct by advancing the thesis that matter is “an aggregate of images” (MM 1/MME xi). This does not mean that matter is composed of mental states, as the term ‘image’ might suggest, but rather that material objects exist independently of any mind and at the same time possess sensible qualities. Rather than trying to deduce one from the other, Bergson claims that both the perceptual appearances of matter and the scientific conception of matter derive from the more basic nature of matter, namely, matter insofar as it is made up of images.

Although it is quite clear how this thesis solves the problem, Bergson's justification of the thesis is not clear, and interpreters differ considerably on how this justification should be understood.¹ The most popular interpretation imputes what I call a *mereological argument* to Bergson that, I shall argue, is related to arguments in Berkeley and Schopenhauer.² However, this argument has been criticized on the grounds that it "appears to beg the question."³ Some readers have gone so far as to contend that Bergson does not offer any argument at all for the thesis, and that he provides only "*description* in place of *analysis*"⁴ or introduces the concept of image merely as an "index" to mark the possibility that we directly perceive material objects.⁵

My aim in this paper is to examine the arguments in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory* in defense of Bergson's claim that matter is an aggregate of images. This analysis will show that, far from merely rephrasing the thesis in different ways, Bergson does actually present various arguments for it, some of which are related to arguments found in early modern philosophy, particularly in Berkeley. It also shows that these arguments combine to offer a substantive, well-structured defense of the thesis. Even the mereological argument turns out, I argue, to bolster the thesis.

My discussion thus elucidates the overall structure of Bergson's argument and reveals "his analytical abilities" and his capacity to "split logical hairs."⁶ It also sheds light on Bergson's idiosyncratic way of doing philosophy, such as his apparently disordered way of presenting arguments.

I begin, in section 2, by elucidating Bergson's problem of perception and his claim to have solved it with the thesis that matter is an aggregate of images. In sections, 3, 4, and 5, I reconstruct and clarify Bergson's arguments for the thesis. I conclude, in section 6, with some remarks on Bergson's philosophical method. These methodological remarks, and the paper as a whole, should lead us to reconsider the widely held view that Bergson's philosophy is one in which "argument will cease, and intellect will be lulled to sleep on the heaving sea of intuition."⁷

¹ Of course, the precise way in which the thesis solves the problem is not without any exegetical problems. On this point, see note 16.

² Interpreters such as Jankélévitch, Philonenko, Riquier, Sinclair, and Worms, among others, touch on this argument. For more detail, see note 47.

³ Lacey 1989, 91.

⁴ Couchoud 1902, 232; my translation; emphasis in original.

⁵ Riquier 2009, 326; see also 339; Riquier 2004, 267; Cornibert 2012, 137–138.

⁶ Gale 1974, 269.

⁷ Russell 1914, 36. In fairness to both Russell and Bergson, Russell also writes, on the

2. Bergson's Problem of Perception and his Solution

My main aim in this section is to explain Bergson's problem of perception and his solution to it. I shall begin where he begins, that is, by outlining the common-sense conception of matter (2.1). Both the problem of perception (2.2) and its solution (2.3) stem from this common-sense conception. Before doing so, I would like to clarify my use of some terms that are my own rather than Bergson's. I use the term 'perceptual appearance' in an ontologically neutral sense—that is, phrases such as 'a perceptual appearance of an object O' mean merely how O appears to a perceiver, not a mental state that represents O, nor a direct presentation of mind-independent O. When I refer to a perceptual mental state, I use the term 'perceptual consciousness.'

2.1 The Common-Sense Conception of Matter

At the very beginning of Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*, Bergson provides a rough account of what is involved in perception to establish the common-sense conception of matter. To aid our discussion, I have marked each sentence with a letter:

[a] We will assume for the moment that we know nothing of theories of matter and theories of spirit [...]. [b] Here I am in the presence of images, in the vaguest sense of the word, images perceived when my senses are opened to them, unperceived when they are closed. [c] All these images act and react upon one another [...] according to constant laws which I call laws of nature, and [...] a perfect knowledge of these laws would probably allow us to calculate and to foresee what will happen in each of these images. (MM 11/MME 1)

In [a], Bergson invites us to ignore philosophical conceptions of matter and to consider directly what happens to us when we perceive things. He does not, however, ask us to forget everything we know about the material world and confine ourselves to our perceptual consciousness. Sentence [b] suggests this idealist interpretation of his request,

same page: "It is true that Bergson continually employs [the intellect] in his own defence, by advancing arguments which plainly are intended to be intellectually satisfying."

but sentence [c] affirms that Bergson is inviting us not to withdraw into our consciousness but rather to return to our common-sense conception of matter.⁸

Sentence [b] presents components of this common-sense conception of matter. First, it states that material objects appear to us as collections of sensible qualities. This is why Bergson uses the term ‘image’ to refer to material objects. Second, the perceptual appearance of material objects is said to depend on the conditions of a perceiver: objects appear to us only when we perceive them, and, when we do not, they disappear. A few pages later, Bergson makes a further claim, noting that “the size, shape, even the colour, of external objects is modified according as my body approaches or recedes from them” (MM 15/MME 6).

In [c], Bergson describes how the interactions between material objects appear to obey “constant laws [...] of nature.” He also notes the predictive power of the laws that science seeks to discover. The success of scientific prediction strongly suggests that material objects obey these laws regardless of whether anyone perceives them and, hence, that they exist independently of our perceptions of them. Thus, Bergson is not simply delivering an introspective report on his perceptual consciousness; he clearly accepts that there are laws of nature and thus that matter has an independent existence.

To summarize, the common-sense conception of matter involves, according to Bergson, four claims. (The capital letters used below correspond to the small letters [b] and [c] above; for ease of discussion, I have divided these claims into two distinct claims and marked each with capital letters and numbers.) The four claims are as follows:

[B1] Matter possesses sensible qualities [B2] that constitute the perceptual appearance of matter and change in relation to the conditions of a perceiver.

[C1] Matter exists independently of mind and [C2] obeys the laws of nature that

⁸ On that point, see also note 12. There is disagreement in the literature as to whether Bergson invites us in [a] to return to common sense or something else. The first view is adopted, for instance, in Goldschmidt 2002, 78; Naulin 1990, 100-101. Some scholars read [a] as an invitation to return to a perceptual consciousness and interpret the passage as a sort of phenomenological reduction: see, for instance, Barbaras 2004, 298; Cornibert 2012, 21; Mullarky 2010, 207; Prado 2002, 109; Riquier 2004, 263–270; Worms 2004, 122 and 125–126; see also Delbos 1897, 384, where he criticizes Bergson for admitting natural laws in [c]. Unlike these scholars, Hude is correct in saying that “what is required to assume is to know nothing ‘of theories of matter and theories of spirit’ and not to know nothing at all” (Hude 1990, 22; my translation), although he goes to the other extreme when he concludes that Bergson “retains something from both Ionian and Leibnizian dynamisms” (Hude 1990, 35; my translation).

science seeks to discover.⁹

2.2 Bergson's Problem of Perception

Although claims [B] and [C] are, as they stand, compatible with each other (MM 21/MME 14), [B2] and [C2] generate difficulties that were explored by Descartes and Berkeley. Bergson summarizes the problem as follows:

Descartes, no doubt, had put matter too far from us when he made it one with geometrical extensity. But, in order to bring it nearer to us, there was no need to go to the point of making it one with our own mind. Because he did go as far as this, Berkeley was unable to account for the success of physics. (MM 2–3/MME xiii; see also MM 21–24/MME 14–16)

On the one hand, philosophers who follow Descartes adopt the position that Bergson calls “realism” (MM 20–24/MME 12–16) or “scientific realism” (MM 73/MME 76).¹⁰ They begin by embracing the predictive success of physics, as asserted by [C2], and conclude that “geometrical extensity” and “the mathematical relations between phenomena” are the “very essence” of material phenomena (MM 3/MME xiii). However, this view has no room for sensible qualities, which makes it difficult to show how [B]—that is, the existence and mutability of sensible qualities—can be compatible with this scientific conception of matter. This is the realist predicament. Bergson writes that all types of realism are “bound to make perception an accident, and consequently a mystery” (MM 23/MME 16).

In response to this predicament, some philosophers, led by Berkeley, instead endorse what Bergson calls “idealism” (MM 20–24/MME 12–16).¹¹ Idealists regard the

⁹ We might be able to consider these two claims as an instance of two conditions of existence “with regard to matters of experience” (MM 163/MME 189) that Bergson presents in Chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory*: “(1) presentation in consciousness and (2) the logical or causal connexion of that which is so presented with what precedes and with what follows” (MM 163/MME 189). The first condition roughly corresponds to [B], and the second to [C].

¹⁰ Bergson refers to them and their conception also as “Materialists” (MM 19/MME 11) and “materialistic realism,” respectively (MM 21/MME 14).

¹¹ Bergson also refers to this conception as “subjective idealism” (MM 21/MME 14) and “English idealism” (MM 239, 242, 244, 259, 268/MME 282, 287, 289, 306, 318).

perceptual appearances of matter—more precisely, the sensible qualities that constitute these appearances—as fundamental. However, because perceptual appearances are, as [B2] clearly announces, relative to a perceiver, idealists “place matter within the mind, and make it into a pure idea” (MM 3/MME xiii), that is, a mental state. Idealists thus struggle to account for [C2], which strongly indicates the mind-independent existence of material objects. The idealist challenge is to make the predictive success of science intelligible solely in relation to mental states. Bergson notes that in this case it is science “that will become an accident, and its success a mystery” (MM 23/MME 16).

In short, in starting from either the law-like regularity of the behavior of material objects [C2] or the relativity of their perceptual appearance [B2], philosophers cannot get to the other component. Bergson’s account of perception seeks to resolve the seeming incompatibility of the two components of the common-sense conception of matter. He does so by advancing a conception of matter that allows both [B] and [C] to stand as true claims about one and the same material world. Thus, rather than replacing the scientific conception of matter with his own, Bergson’s conception of matter renders this scientific conception compatible with the relativity and mutability of perception.

2.3 Bergson’s Solution to the Problem

Bergson proposes the concept of image to solve the problem of perception. His idea is to start from neither [B] nor [C] but from a more basic concept of image, upon which both [B] and [C] are grounded. Bergson defines ‘image’ as follows:

[B]y ‘image’ we mean a certain existence which is more than that which the idealist calls a representation, but less than that which the realist calls a thing. (MM 1/MME xi)

Here, ‘representation’ means a Berkeleyan idea that possesses sensible qualities and is mind-dependent. An image is more than a mere representation because it has a mind-independent existence. On the other hand, an image is less than what realists call a thing because it does not have the power to produce mental duplicates of the material world, something that Bergson considers indispensable to a realist explanation of perception (MM 75/MME 79). If matter possesses no sensible qualities, these qualities must be generated somewhere, for, at the very least, matter has perceptual existence. An image

does not have to have this power to produce mental images, because sensible qualities that appear in our perception are “part and parcel (*éléments constitutifs*)” (MM 2/MME xii) of images from the beginning.

We can now formulate Bergson’s conception of matter. Matter is defined as an aggregate of images, and an image is defined as follows:

- (i) Images exist independently of mind.
- (ii) Images possess sensible qualities that constitute their perceptual appearance.

I will refer to the first of these points as *the independence claim*, to the second point as *the sensible quality claim*, and to the whole of this conception as *the image thesis*. As Bergson notes, the image thesis is almost identical to the common-sense conception of matter: the independence claim roughly corresponds to [C] and the sensible quality claim to [B].

Matter [. . .] is an aggregate of ‘images.’ [...] This conception of matter is simply that of common sense. [...] For common sense, [...] the object exists in itself, and, on the other hand, the object is, in itself, pictorial, as we perceive it: image it is, but a self-existing image. (MM 1–2/MME xi–xii)¹²

From now on, I shall use the terms ‘image’ and ‘material object’ interchangeably, although the term ‘image’ mainly appears in quotations from Bergson’s text and the term ‘material object’ mainly in my explanations.

Let us briefly examine how the image thesis solves Bergson’s problem of perception. The image thesis preemptively avoids the realist challenge of explaining the emergence

¹² Bergson emphasizes many times that the image thesis is accepted by common sense: MM 3, 41, 46, 61, 76/MME xiv, 38, 44, 62, 81; as for Bergson’s attitude toward common sense in *Matter and Memory*, which is not always favorable, see also MM 1, 154, 158, 202, 213, 215, 219/MME xi, 179, 183, 236, 250, 254, 259. I omitted two elements of the common-sense conception of matter from the image thesis: the lawful nature of material objects and the relativity of their perceptual appearance to a perceiver. Bergson does not explicitly include these elements in his characterization of ‘image.’ The image thesis is, in this sense, a component of the common-sense conception of matter, and restoring the two omitted elements would require other theories. In relation to the relativity of perception, we would need Bergson’s theory of pure perception; and in relation to the lawful nature of material things, we would need his metaphysics of matter, developed in Chapter 3 of *Creative Evolution*. I shall discuss these points briefly below.

of sensible qualities from matter. Bergson does not need to explain their emergence because, as the sensible quality claim makes clear, an image itself possesses sensible qualities, which constitute its perceptual appearance. Bergson calls perceptual appearance ‘consciousness’ and writes: “To deduce consciousness would be, indeed, a bold undertaking; but it is really not necessary here, because by positing the material world we assume an aggregate of images” (MM 31/MME 26).

The relativity of perceptual appearances is attributed to a kind of pragmatic and unconscious selection by a perceiver. We do not perceive all the sensible qualities of the objects around us because, according to Bergson, the “origin of our perception of things” is “purely utilitarian” (MM 176/MME 206). We instead perceive only what is relevant to our actions: “Our representation of matter is the measure of our possible action upon bodies: it results from the discarding of what has no interest for our needs, or more generally for our functions” (MM 35/MME 30). Hence, Bergson writes that “there is for images merely a difference of degree, and not of kind, between *being* and *being consciously perceived*” (MM 35/MME 30; emphasis in original).¹³

The image thesis, particularly the independence claim, also meets the idealist challenge of explaining the law-governed mind-independence of matter by asserting that the necessary conditions obtain for the laws of nature to be valid. If we do not follow Berkeley, who relied on God to explain the laws of nature, we have no choice, Bergson argues, but to admit that material things exist independently of our mind.¹⁴

However, the image thesis does not fully account for the existence of these laws. It does not explain why material objects obey these laws, nor why such and such laws govern such and such phenomena. It is helpful to compare Bergson and Kant on this issue. In a sense, Bergson’s intention is similar to Kant’s in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, specifically in the Transcendental Aesthetic and the Analytic of Principles, in which Kant advances his conceptions of space, time, and causality, among other things. Kant does not

¹³ This conception of perception also explains the title of Chapter 1, which reads: “Of the Selection of Images for Conscious Presentation. What Our Body Means and Does” (MM 11/MME 1). Bergson devotes a large part of Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory* to prove this conception of perception as selection, which he calls “theory of pure perception” (MM 67/MME 69 et passim). However, in this paper, I shall not discuss this conception, instead merely touching on it, because the subject of this paper is not Bergson’s conception of perception but of matter, which is a necessary component of the former.

¹⁴ For more discussion of this issue, see 3.1. As for Berkeley’s argument, see Berkeley, *Principles*, §30. Citations from this work are according to section number in Jessop’s edition.

seek to use these conceptions to explain why matter obeys the laws of nature or to explain particular laws of nature. He instead aims to explain what makes it possible for material things to (seem to) obey the laws of nature, whatever these laws may be. Bergson seeks to answer the same question but is, admittedly, less ambitious than Kant. Kant attempts to prove the necessity of the laws of nature, whereas Bergson merely attempts to show that the minimally necessary conditions for there being such laws do obtain.¹⁵

3. The First Stage: Establishing the Basic Points of the Image Thesis

In reconstructing Bergson's argument for the image thesis, I do not follow the order of his discussion because his argumentative style does not proceed in a strict linear order. Bergson rather presents the same arguments many times in many places, sometimes in combination with other arguments and usually without explicitly formulating or distinguishing each argument. Although there is some methodological justification for this style, which I shall discuss in the concluding section, I set this topic aside for now and reconstruct Bergson's argument as clearly as possible.

In this section, I elucidate Bergson's arguments in support of two claims: that material objects have mind-independent existence and that they possess sensible qualities. This might seem sufficient to prove the image thesis. However, these two claims do not prove the latter part of the sensible quality claim, namely, that the sensible qualities of material objects constitute their perceptual appearances or, to make the same point from the other direction, that sensible qualities in perceptual appearances are themselves constitutive elements of material objects. Without this claim, it remains possible that, even though material objects do have sensible qualities, what we perceive in material objects is different from these inherent qualities and is instead generated in, say, the brain. The second stage of my reconstruction (section 4) rules out this possibility by way of two further arguments.

Bergson defends the sensible quality claim in both Chapters 1 and 4 of *Matter and Memory*. The arguments for this claim in Chapter 1 are indirect, in the sense that they infer from the conclusion that we cannot otherwise explain the perceptual appearance of material objects. As Bergson puts it, "[e]verything becomes clearer [...] if we start [...]"

¹⁵ Bergson took on the task of proving the necessity of the laws of nature in Chapter 3 of his next book, *Creative Evolution*.

from the totality of perceived images” (MM 62/MME 63–4; see also MM 63–67/MME 64–69). This form of reasoning might seem insufficient, because it does not solve the ontologically basic question of how material objects, as depicted by the physical sciences, can possess sensible qualities. Bergson addresses this question only in Chapter 4.¹⁶ However, in this paper, I do not examine his discussion in Chapter 4. This is because, first, it can be separated from that in Chapter 1 (as shown, most obviously, by it being in a different chapter) and, second, because Chapter 4 includes explorations of movement, memory, and time, as well as of matter, the examination of which goes far beyond the scope of this paper.

3.1 The Mystery Argument for the Independence Claim

I first examine the argument for the independence claim. This argument is similar to one advanced by Putnam and commonly referred to as the ‘miracle argument.’ Putnam characterizes a “realist (with respect to a given theory or discourse)” as a person who “holds that (1) the sentences of that theory or discourse are true or false; and (2) that what makes them true or false is something external,”¹⁷ and argues that “[r]ealism with respect to empirical science [...] is the only philosophy that doesn’t make the success of science a miracle.”¹⁸ Although Putnam does not specify what the success of science is, the most evident examples are the success of “empirical predictions, retrodictions, and explanations of the subject matters of scientific investigation, often marked by astounding accuracy and intricate causal manipulations of the relevant phenomena.”¹⁹

¹⁶ In relation to Bergson’s conception of matter, Chapters 1 and 4 differ in three respects: first, Chapter 1 deals with both the independence claim and the sensible quality claim, whereas Chapter 4 deals only with the latter; second, Chapter 1 proves the sensible quality claim indirectly, whereas Chapter 4 proves it directly; and, third, Chapter 1 considers the problem of matter in relation to that of perception, whereas Chapter 4 considers matter as such. The last point is touched on in, e.g., Cornibert 2012, 222–227; Worms 2004, 122. Some commentators interpret these chapters differently. On one view, Chapter 1 focuses on epistemology and Chapter 4 on ontology: see, for instance, Goldschmidt 2002, 93; Riquier 2004, 281. Another view (compatible with the preceding one) is that Chapter 1 merely prepares the ground for Chapter 4 and does not reach or defend any substantial conclusion: see, by way of example, Cornibert 2012, 29 and 137–138; Riquier 2004, 267; Riquier 2009, 326; Sinclair 2020, 120–121. However, I argue in sections 2 and 3 that Chapter 1 also makes substantive claims about the ontology of matter.

¹⁷ Putnam 1979, 69–70.

¹⁸ Putnam 1979, 73.

¹⁹ Chakravartty 2017, §2.1.

Similarly, Bergson writes that as soon as the idealist “attempts to connect the present with the past and to foretell the future, he is obliged [...] to treat [all the images] as though they made part of a system in which every change gives the exact measure of its cause” (MM 22/MME 14–15), that is, to treat them as existing independently of any perceiver. Bergson continues: “On this condition alone a science of the universe becomes possible; and, since this science exists, since it succeeds in foreseeing the future, its fundamental hypothesis cannot be arbitrary” (MM 22/MME 15). And, in the next paragraph, Bergson claims that on the idealistic conception of matter, in which

you begin by excluding the order of nature [...], [y]ou will have to bring back this order by conjuring up in your turn a *deus ex machina*; I mean that you will have to assume, by an arbitrary hypothesis, some sort of preestablished harmony between things and mind [...]. *It is science now that will become an accident, and its success a mystery.* (MM 23/MME 16; my emphasis)

This argument is quite similar to Putnam’s miracle argument. The best way to make sense of the predictive success of science is to accept the hypothesis that material objects exist independently of mind. Otherwise—for instance, if we adopted the idealistic conception that material objects are mind-dependent entities—we would have no choice but to introduce some arbitrary hypothesis to explain the success of science, thus rendering it a mystery. We should, therefore, accept the independence claim that material objects exist independently of the mind.

Although Bergson’s argument is similar to Putnam’s, his ambitions are more limited, so I call it not the miracle argument but *the mystery argument*. Putnam’s miracle argument can lead us to embrace various kinds of realism: the view that some mind-independent entities exist; that scientific propositions are true only with respect to the observable objects; or that scientific propositions are literally true, whether or not the objects in question are observable.²⁰ Bergson’s argument, by contrast, applies only to the “fundamental hypothesis” of science. Bergson writes: “phenomena [of matter] present relatively to each other an order so strict and so indifferent as to the point of origin chosen, that this regularity and this indifference really constitute an independent existence” (MM 37/MME 33). Bergson seeks only to prove an “independent existence” manifested in the

²⁰ On this point, see Chakravartty 2017, §§1.2, 2.1, and 4.

“regularity” of an “order” of material phenomena, i.e., the existence of something mind-independent that obeys some law of nature. The mystery argument is, therefore, an especially modest version of the miracle argument.²¹

3.2 The Inconceivability Argument for the Sensible Quality Claim

The sensible quality claim contends that material objects possess sensible qualities that constitute their perceptual appearance. I focus in this section on the first half of this claim, namely, that material objects possess sensible qualities, and discuss the second half in the next section. Bergson repeatedly discusses the first half of the sensible quality claim, although he uses different terms, including ‘image,’ ‘photograph,’ and ‘virtual perception.’ As he puts it,

by positing the material world we assume an aggregate of images, and moreover [...] *it is impossible to assume anything else. No theory of matter escapes this necessity.* Reduce matter to atoms in motion: these atoms [. . .] are determined only in relation to an eventual vision and an eventual contact. (MM 31–32/MME 26; my emphasis)

[W]e imagine perception to be a kind of photographic view of things [...]. But is it not obvious that the photograph, if photograph there be, is already taken, already developed in the very heart of things and at all the points of space? *No metaphysics, no physics even, can escape this conclusion.* (MM 35–36/MME 31; my emphasis)

This is no hypothesis. We content ourselves with formulating data with which no theory of perception can dispense. For no psychologist can begin the study of external perception without assuming [. . .] the virtual perception of all things. (MM 36/MME 32; my emphasis)²²

²¹ In Bergson’s time there was a controversy similar to the contemporary debate between scientific realism and antirealism. Antirealist views were called ‘nominalism’ or ‘conventionalism’ and their proponents included Édouard Le Roy and Henri Poincaré. Although Bergson criticizes many aspects of science, his attitude toward scientific knowledge is not necessarily antirealist. On the controversy among Bergson’s contemporaries and his position in this debate, see Worms 2002; Worms 2009, 80–96.

²² I adapted Paul and Palmer’s translation and replaced ‘no philosopher’ with ‘no psychologist’ according to the French original ‘*Nul psychologue.*’

In these repeated statements, Bergson does not seem to offer much by way of argument for the sensible quality claim. It is my contention, however, that Bergson does offer an argument, albeit implicitly and without stating its underlying principle. To identify and formulate his argument, let us partly repeat the first quotation above, this time with the passage that follows it:

Reduce matter to atoms in motion: these atoms [. . .] are determined only in relation to an eventual vision and an eventual contact [. . .]. Condense atoms into centres of force, dissolve them into vortices revolving in a continuous fluid: this fluid, these movements, these centres, can themselves be determined only in relation to an impotent touch, an ineffectual impulsion, a colourless light; they are still images. (MM 32/MME 26–27; see also MM 36/MME 31–32)

In my interpretation of this passage, Bergson is arguing that whether we conceive of material objects as moderate-sized specimens of dry goods, “atoms in motion,” “centres of force,” or “Leibnizian monads” (MM 36/MME 31), etc., we cannot conceive of them as entirely lacking in sensible qualities. From this inconceivability, he infers that material objects possess sensible qualities.²³ I propose that Bergson’s argument can be formulated as follows:

- (i) If it is inconceivable that P , then it is impossible that P . [Premise]
- (ii) It is inconceivable that there exists an x such that x is a material object and does not have sensible qualities. [Premise]
- (iii) It is impossible that there exists an x such that x is a material object and does not have sensible qualities. Equivalently, it is necessary that for all x , if x is a material object, x has sensible qualities. [From (i) and (ii)]

²³ See also MM 21, 38, 39–40, 264/MME 13, 34, 36, 312. Cornibert and Sinclair also discuss Bergson’s remarks on the necessity of assuming images: Cornibert 2012, 51–58; Sinclair 2020, 113. Cornibert interprets this necessity as that of intentionality, namely that all consciousness is consciousness of something. However, this necessity concerning consciousness is irrelevant to the necessity involved in the theory of matter with which Bergson is concerned here. Sinclair rightly points out the similarity between Bergson and Berkeley, but neither Sinclair nor Cornibert attempt to reconstruct Bergson’s argument, nor do they refer to the key premise concerning inconceivability.

I call this *the inconceivability argument*. While the argument is valid, both of its premises are highly contentious. Two further comments help to clarify the argument, if not to fully justify it, and so bolster the plausibility of my interpretation.

First, premise (i), that inconceivability implies impossibility, is a widely held view in the history of Western philosophy. It seems to be asserted by some early modern philosophers, such as Descartes, Leibniz, and Berkeley.²⁴ Descartes uses this premise in the Fifth Meditation, as part of his proof of God's existence, not with respect to God but with respect to the relation between a mountain and a valley:

From the fact that I cannot think of [*non possim cogitare*] a mountain without a valley, it does not follow that a mountain and valley exist anywhere, but simply that a mountain and a valley, whether they exist or not, are mutually inseparable [*sejungi non posse*]. (AT VII 66–67/*Meditations* 46)

In this passage, Descartes infers the impossibility of there being a mountain without a valley from its inconceivability. That this premise seems to have been so widely endorsed in the history of philosophy makes it understandable that Bergson does not make it explicit or seek to defend it in his work.

Second, premise (ii) has a historical precedent in Berkeley's work:

[E]xtension, figure, and motion, abstracted from all other qualities, are inconceivable. Where therefore the other sensible qualities are, there must these be also, to wit, in the mind and no where else. (Berkeley, *Principles*, §10)

The first sentence is a statement of premise (ii), that is, the inconceivability of extension without sensible qualities. In the second sentence, Berkeley uses premise (i) to deduce the impossibility of extension without sensible qualities. As an idealist, Berkeley concludes that extended objects, as well as sensible qualities, are mind-dependent. This

²⁴ Other examples are Hume and Cavendish. On the use of this premise, commonly called *the inconceivability principle* or *the principle of intelligibility*, by Leibniz, Berkeley, Hume, and Cavendish, and on the question of whether they really endorse the principle, see Rutherford 1992; Holden 2019; Lightner 1997; West 2022. For a recent discussion of Descartes' use of this principle, see Saint-Germier 2018.

is the opposite position to that held by Bergson, who holds that material objects exist independently of the mind and possess sensible qualities in themselves. Nevertheless, Berkeley and Bergson share the crucial premise that material objects cannot be conceived without sensible qualities and that “[primary] qualities are inseparably united with the other sensible qualities, and not, even in thought, capable of being abstracted from them” (Berkeley, *Principles*, §10).²⁵

However, neither Berkeley nor Bergson offers any argument to support this premise. Bergson provides us with examples such as atoms and centers of force, and Berkeley “appeals directly to introspection.”²⁶ To present a more satisfactory reconstruction of Bergson’s argument, we would have to investigate his conception of conceivability by considering his discussion of the formation of concepts, or general ideas, in Chapter 3 of *Matter and Memory* and ‘Introduction (Part II)’ of *Creative Mind*, the latter of which contains a criticism of our “belief in the absolute reality of Ideas in general” (PM 63–64/CM 70).²⁷ This, however, lies beyond the scope of the present paper.²⁸

4. The Second Stage: Improving the Sensible Quality Claim

We now turn to Bergson’s argument for the second half of the sensible quality claim: that the sensible qualities of material objects constitute their perceptual appearance or, to put it another way, that the perceptual appearance of material objects is their direct presentation. This claim requires some defense because, even if material objects do indeed possess sensible qualities, it remains possible that the sensible qualities that constitute perceptual appearances do not come from the perceived material objects but are generated somewhere else, perhaps in the brain. I contend that Bergson’s text contains

²⁵ This is precisely the point that Bergson particularly appreciates in Berkeley: “Philosophy made a great step forward on the day when Berkeley proved [...] that the secondary qualities of matter have at least as much reality as the primary qualities” (MM 2–3/MME 13).

²⁶ Dancy 1998, 200.

²⁷ The situation is the same with Berkeley, whose idealism is apparently founded, at least partly, on a theory of abstract ideas. On that point, a brief survey of the scholarship up to 1992 is offered in McKim 1997–1998; for a recent discussion, see Rickless 2012.

²⁸ Bergson’s criticism of a purely mathematical approach to the physical in *Time and Free Will* is also relevant to the application of the inconceivability principle to the sensible qualities of material objects (DI 153–156/TFW 204–207; see also DI 105–107/TFW 140–142), examination of which would go far beyond the scope of this paper (I am thankful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this point).

arguments in support of the rejection of this possibility.

His first argument, which I discuss in 4.1, is that the brain cannot produce sensible qualities. The second, which I discuss in 4.2, is that, even if we try to explain perceptual appearances by other things than these appearances themselves, something important would remain unexplained. From these two arguments, Bergson concludes that, given that material objects exist and that they possess sensible qualities, the best explanation of sensible qualities in perceptual appearances is that they come directly from material objects.

4.1 The Causal Closure Argument

The first argument is simple, and Bergson uses it many times. Bergson claims that, if material objects are what scientific realism takes them to be—that is, devoid of any sensible qualities—then they cannot produce perceptual appearances or, more specifically, the sensible qualities that compose such appearances.

Bergson states the principle that underlies this argument in the following passage:

[M]atter cannot exercise powers of any kind other than those which we perceive. [...] To take a definite example, [...] the nervous system [...] may well possess unperceived physical properties, but physical properties only. And hence it can have no other office than to receive, inhibit, or transmit movement. (MM 75/MME 78–79; see also MM 29/MME 23 and DI 111/TFW 148)²⁹

Objects with only physical properties produce nothing but movement. In another passage, Bergson says more concisely that “movement produces nothing but movement” (MM 108/MME 119).³⁰ This principle has its roots in early modern philosophy. Hobbes says

²⁹ I omitted one phrase for the sake of simplicity. In the original text, the nervous system is paraphrased as “a material mass presenting certain qualities of colour, resistance, cohesion, etc.” One might object that, if a material mass possesses certain sensible qualities, such a material mass (e.g., the brain) could produce sensible qualities in perceptual appearances. Bergson does not examine this possibility, but he would reply that, even if this were the case, how the sensible qualities of the brain are transformed into those of the material things we perceive remains unexplained.

³⁰ This principle is concerned only with what motion produces and not with what produces motion.

that “motion produceth nothing but motion”³¹; Locke talks of “Motion [...] being able to produce nothing but Motion”³²; and Berkeley, albeit indirectly, states that “though we give the materialists their external bodies, they [...] are never the nearer knowing how our ideas are produced; since they own themselves unable to comprehend [...] how it is possible it should imprint any idea in the mind.”³³

Bergson uses this principle to make the following argument:

[Realists] show us a brain, analogous in its essence to the rest of the material universe, an image, consequently, if the universe is an image. [...] Then, since they want the internal movements of this brain to create or determine the representation of the whole material world [...] they maintain that these molecular movements [...] are not images like others, but something which is either more or less than an image—in any case is of another nature than an image—and from which representation will issue as by miracle. (MM 17–18/MME 9; see also MM 22–23/MME 15–16)

Although Bergson uses the term ‘image’ here, the point is not whether the brain is an image in the Bergsonian sense but rather whether or not we can explain the production of sensible qualities if we assume that the brain has only physical properties. If this is correct, “the internal movements of this brain” produce nothing but movement, according to the abovementioned principle. But perceptual appearances contain something other than movement, namely, sensible qualities. Therefore, the brain cannot produce perceptual appearances. If we insist on their being produced by the brain, we must regard the brain as being “of another nature,” which contradicts the assumption that it is purely physical.

In short, if the brain has only physical properties, it cannot produce sensible qualities except by a miracle. I call this *the causal closure argument*.³⁴ Bergson repeatedly applies this argument, both explicitly and implicitly, whenever he highlights the strange capacities that are implicitly supposed by the realist conception of the brain. He gives these capacities various names: “a mystery” (MM 23/MME 16); “a miraculous power” (MM 25/MME 19); “some unknown (*je ne sais quel*) chemical and psychical process of

³¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, 7. This quotation is from its Part 1, Chapter 1, §4.

³² Locke, *Essay*, 541. This quotation is from its Book IV, Chapter III, §6.

³³ Berkeley, *Principles*, §19.

³⁴ Jankélévitch and Lacey refer to this type of argument, but neither of them provide page references to *Matter and Memory* or mention the principle of causal closure: Jankélévitch 1989, 86; Lacey 1989, 90.

elaboration” (MM 36/MME 31); and “a magicians wand” (MM 37–38/MME 32–34).

It is instructive to compare this argument with the ‘explanatory gap,’ pointed out by Levine, between our knowledge of the physical world and our perceptual experience.³⁵ As explained by Tye, this gap means that

no matter how deeply we probe into the physical structure of neurons and the chemical transactions which occur when they fire, [...] we still seem to be left with something that we cannot explain, namely, why and how such-and-such objective, physical changes [...] generate so-and-so subjective feeling, or any subjective feeling at all.³⁶

In Bergson’s words, no matter how much knowledge physical science acquires about the movements within the brain, the production of sensible qualities will be left unexplained.

This comparison sheds light on two features of Bergson’s argument. First, Bergson takes the strongest possible position on the explanatory gap in that he understands this gap to be not only currently open but also unbridgeable, perhaps even for an omniscient being. The gap could be bridged only by a miracle (which would require omnipotence). Second, like the suggested explanatory gap, the causal closure argument is compatible with many views about the ontological status of sensible qualities: they could be mind-dependent, mind-independent, or they could not exist at all.³⁷ An additional argument is therefore needed if we are to accept that material objects possess sensible qualities, i.e., the inconceivability argument, which we have examined in 3.2.³⁸

4.2 The Extensity Argument against Current Psychology

In the preceding subsection, I discussed Bergson’s argument that the brain cannot produce sensible qualities. This subsection investigates the argument that, even if we attempt to

³⁵ Levine 1983.

³⁶ Tye 2021, §5.

³⁷ On that point, see, for instance, Tye 2021, §5 and Van Gulick 2021, §5.2.

³⁸ This second point is in tune with the abovementioned historical roots of the principle used in the causal closure argument. In spite of using the same principle that movement produces nothing but movement, Hobbes, Locke, and Berkeley endorse widely differing conceptions of matter. It is because the principle is compatible with many accounts of the ontology of matter and the ontological status of sensible qualities.

explain perceptual appearances by other things than these appearances themselves, something important would remain unexplained. I wish now to introduce Bergson's third opponent, in addition to the realist and the idealist, namely, "current psychology" (*psychologie usuelle*; MM 63/MME 64), because it is prominent in the passages I analyze here.³⁹

What does Bergson see as the defining characteristic of current psychology? He argues that "the psychologist declares [sensation] unextended, and thence makes sensation in general the simple element from which we obtain by composition all external images" (MM 59/MME 60). The term 'sensation' roughly denotes a mental state that is presumed to be caused by the sensory nerves. In Bergson's words, it is a state of "affections localized within the body" (MM 52/MME 51; see also MM 59, 63/MME 59, 65). The crucial point here is that psychologists consider sensations to be unextended (*inextensif*) and perceptions of material things to be produced by some kind of composition of sensations—what Bergson calls a "synthesis" (MM 48/MME 47), "aggregate" (MM 60/MME 60), or "exteriorization" (MM 52/MME 52; see also MM 45, 49, 69/MME 43, 48, 71). Let us call this conception of sensation and perception *the composition principle*.⁴⁰

Interestingly, Bergson says that both realism and idealism embrace this principle:

[W]e pass by insensible degrees from the representative state which occupies space, to the affective state which appears to be unextended.⁴¹ Hence it is inferred that all sensation is naturally and necessarily unextended, so that [...] the process of perception consists in an exteriorization of internal states. [...] Realists and idealists are agreed in this way of reasoning.⁴² The latter see in the material universe nothing but a synthesis of subjective and unextended states; the former add that, behind this

³⁹ Bergson refers to the same opponent also as "psychology" or the "psychologist" (e.g., MM 45, 61/MME 44, 62). The adjective 'current' is a translation of a French term *usuel*. This French adjective not only means 'current' in the sense of contemporary. In the context of Bergson's discussion, it has multiple connotations, including 'commonly accepted,' 'folk-psychology,' and 'superficial.' For want of a better translation, I continue to use Paul and Palmer's translation.

⁴⁰ See also MM 37, 69, 73/MME 33, 71, 76–77.

⁴¹ In the same paragraph, Bergson cites the example of the transition "from the contact with a pin to its prick."

⁴² I have here adapted Paul and Palmer's translation and replaced "in this method" with "in this way" as the translation of the French original *de cette manière*, because this French phrase does not have a nuance of routine procedure in this context.

synthesis, there is an independent reality corresponding to it. (MM 54/MME 53)

Bergson does not specify any thinkers – whether realist, idealist, or psychologist – whom he believes adopt the composition principle. Moreover, although he mentions the inferences that lead adopters to this principle, he merely describes a process of hypothesis-formation.⁴³ It is therefore difficult to know exactly why thinkers would adopt it and to evaluate their reasoning. We must be content, for now, with stating that Bergson considered the principle to be an option for both realists and idealists.

Bergson discusses the composition principle in two passages. In the first, he presents many facts that psychologists of his time took to support the principle, points out that some constitutive elements of perceptual appearance are left unexplained, and offers a more reasonable interpretation of the same facts (MM 45–63/MME 43–64). In the second passage, he proceeds more directly, listing many facts that cannot be explained by the principle (MM 63–65/MME 64–67). As we can cover the same points with either of these two passages, I shall examine the second, simpler one.

In this passage, Bergson enumerates six facts: (i) that “two sensations [from two retinae], held to be distinct, combine to form a single perception corresponding to what we call a point in space”; (ii) that sensations, supposedly unextended, “acquire extension”; (iii) that “each elementary sensation” makes “a choice [. . .] of a definite point in space”; (iv) that “visual extension [. . .] reunite[s] with tactile extension”; (v) that the ordered world that our senses of vision and of touch reveal to us “is the same for all men”; and finally, that (vi) this ordered world “constitutes a material world in which effects are linked with causes, in which phenomena obey laws.” Having presented these facts, Bergson concludes that we thus arrive “at last to the hypothesis of an objective order, independent of ourselves; that is to say, of a material world distinct from sensation” (MM 64/MME 66). The point might appear to be the same as that of the mystery argument: if we refuse to rely on mysteries, the ordering of certain facts can be explained only by assuming a material world. This is true of (i), (iv), (v), and (vi). However, (ii) and (iii) raise additional issues, as suggested by Bergson’s elaboration:

⁴³ If the inference is supposed to be a logical one, it is evidently false. Based on Bergson’s report, the inference can be generalized as follows: if an x changes into a y by insensible degrees, x is composed of y . However, even if good weather changes into a storm by insensible degrees, it does not follow that good weather is composed of storms (nor vice versa).

The sensations in question are unextended; how will they acquire extension? Whether we see in extensity a framework ready to receive sensations, or an effect of the mere simultaneity of sensations coexisting in consciousness without coalescing, in either case something new is introduced with extensity, something unaccounted for; the process by which sensation arrives at extension, and the choice by each elementary sensation of a definite point in space, remain alike unexplained. (MM 63–64/MME 65; see also MM 45, 48–49/MME 44, 47)⁴⁴

The argument is simple. The composition principle states that perceptual appearances are composed of unextended sensations. If we accept this principle, however, we cannot explain why perceptual appearances seem to us to have spatial properties or where these properties come from, because sensations are hypothesized as being unextended and therefore as carrying no spatial information. Therefore, the principle is false. I call this *the extensity argument*.⁴⁵

The causal closure argument demonstrates that perceptual appearances do not originate in the brain. The extensity argument shows that they do not originate in unextended sensations located within the body. So where, then, do they originate? Bergson proposes the “hypothesis,” that “[p]erception [...] is then, in very truth, a part of things” (MM 65–67/MME 67–68). The aim of this section is thus accomplished, because this hypothesis is another way of stating the second half of the sensible quality claim, namely, that images possess sensible qualities that constitute their perceptual appearance.

5. The Mereological Argument

If my interpretation is correct, we have now surveyed all the arguments for the image thesis in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*. At this point, I wish to examine one additional

⁴⁴ At the end of the passage under consideration here, Bergson writes: “Though the matter which we have been led to posit [by the mystery argument] is indispensable in order to account for the marvellous accord of sensations among themselves, we still know nothing of it, since we must refuse to it all the qualities perceived [...]. It remains a mysterious entity.” (MM 65/MME 66) The first half of this quotation (until “among themselves”) concerns idealism and the latter half concerns realism. This quotation also shows that Bergson considers the composition principle to be endorsed by both idealism and realism, and that he is criticizing both views in this passage.

⁴⁵ Lacey refers to this argument in Lacey 1989, 92 and 116.

argument that Bergson offers in the third paragraph of Chapter 1:

The brain is part of the material world; the material world is not part of the brain. [...] To make of the brain the condition on which the whole image [of the material world] depends is in truth a contradiction in terms, since the brain is by hypothesis a part of this image. Neither nerves nor nerve centres can, then, condition the image of the universe. (MM 13–14/MME 3–4)

We can reconstruct this argument as follows:

- (i) The brain as an image is a part of the material world, which is made up of images. [Premise]
- (ii) The part cannot produce the whole. [Premise]
- (iii) The brain as an image cannot produce the material world, which is made up of images. [From (i) and (ii)]

Bergson concludes in the next paragraph that my body “cannot give birth to a representation” (MM 14/MME 5). I call this *the mereological argument*.⁴⁶ This argument might seem to support the sensible quality claim in the following way:

- (iv) The brain as a mind-independent object cannot produce sensible qualities that constitute perceptual appearances of the material world. [From (iii)]
- (v) The best way to explain these sensible qualities is to accept the sensible quality claim. [From (iv)]⁴⁷

However, if this interpretation were correct, Bergson would be begging the question: once we accept premise (i), we also accept the image thesis, because (i) contains the term ‘image’ in the sense defined in the image thesis and the image thesis implies the sensible

⁴⁶ Bergson also uses this argument in MM 17–18, 21, 39, 168/MME 8–10, 13, 35, 196.

⁴⁷ Many seem to interpret this argument as such, e.g., Jankélévitch 1989, 86; Philonenko 1994, 120–121; Riquier 2009, 321–322; Worms 1997, 27. Sinclair offers a nuanced interpretation according to which this argument is based on “an idealist notion of ‘representation,’ or Bergson’s notion of images” (Sinclair 2020, 113). However, his interpretation neither explicates the aim of this argument nor refutes the charge that it begs the question.

quality claim, which is yet to be proven.⁴⁸ Moreover, it is only on the basis of the image thesis that we can infer (iv) from (iii). The image thesis states that images exist independently of the mind and possess sensible qualities, and we can therefore restate ‘the brain as an image’ in (iii) as ‘the brain as a mind-independent object’ in (iv), and ‘the material world’ in (iii) as ‘sensible qualities’ in (iv).⁴⁹

If the mereological argument were indeed intended to defend the sensible quality claim, it could not avoid these criticisms. However, a close reading of the context of this passage reveals a quite different aim and shows that these objections rely on a misunderstanding of Bergson’s text.

As we saw in 2.1 of this paper, Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory* begins with the following phrase: “We will assume for the moment that we know nothing of theories of matter and theories of spirit” (MM 11/MME 1). This assumption is maintained for a while (at least until MM 17/MME 8), and the mereological argument is presented while it is in place. Under the auspices of this assumption, Bergson formulates the common-sense conception of matter, free from philosophical prejudices. He also sketches his entire theory of perception, founded on the image thesis, and briefly explores the relation between perception and action and the role of the brain in this relationship.

This context suggests that the mereological argument aims to eradicate a prejudice that can persist even after we accept the image thesis, rather than to defend that thesis. The prejudice is that the brain has a special power to produce perceptual appearances of material things. In short, the mereological argument assumes the image thesis and does not seek to defend it. It is targeted at those who maintain this deep-rooted conception of the special status of the brain—a conception contradictory to the image thesis.⁵⁰ The mereological argument thus prepares the ground for another topic, namely the role of the body in perception, which Bergson briefly discusses just after he presents the mereological argument (MM 14–16/MME 5–7).

Indirect evidence for this interpretation can be found in Schopenhauer’s discussion in

⁴⁸ A similar remark is made in Lacey 1989, 91.

⁴⁹ Worse still, despite begging the question, the inference to (v) is not valid. The inference proceeds by way of (ii); owing to this, the intermediate conclusion (iv), from which (v) is inferred, does not imply the sensible quality claim, as originally implied by the image thesis.

⁵⁰ In his *Dialogues*, Berkeley presents a discussion whose aim is analogous to that of Bergson’s in the mereological argument, that is, not to justify idealism but rather to eradicate a prejudice about the special status of the brain, which can persist even after we accept idealism. See Berkeley, *Dialogues*, 209.

§7 of *The World as Will and Representation*, where he writes that

everything material [...] possesses a merely relative existence. This is because it can only present itself as something extended in space and acting in time because it has gone through the production machinery of the brain [*durch die Maschinerie und Fabrikation des Gehirns*] and passed into its forms (time, space and causality).⁵¹

In this passage, Schopenhauer claims that the material world is wholly relative because it is produced by the brain.⁵² Bergson would reply to this by arguing that the brain must also be material and is therefore a small part of the material world. Schopenhauer's claim thus implies the contradictory premise that the part produces the whole and is, hence, an example of the claim that the brain, while being the same as other material things, has the power to produce these things. This sort of claim is plausibly the implicit antagonist of the mereological argument.

Indeed, in a lecture held on March 13, 1904, Bergson describes the problem of the relation between mind and body and mentions “the doctrine Schopenhauer proposes at the beginning of his great work, *The World as Will and Representation*,” which advances that “the brain contains in it the representation of the whole universe.”⁵³ Bergson refers to Schopenhauer here without criticism or a specific textual reference. However, his critical intention is evident from the subsequent criticism of Cabanis, who, according to Bergson, influenced Schopenhauer on this point.⁵⁴ And the quotation above is indeed “at the beginning” of *The World as Will and Representation*.

6. Conclusion

Let us first summarize the five arguments that we have examined, the aim of which was to defend Bergson's image thesis. This thesis comprises two claims: (i) the claim that

⁵¹ Schopenhauer, *Welt*, 63/*World*, 50.

⁵² Gueroult makes this point when he compares the role of the brain in Kant, Fichte, and Schopenhauer: Gueroult 1977, 257–259. Jankélévitch, Philonenko (who quotes Gueroult), and Sinclair already mentioned Schopenhauer's claim in relation to *Matter and Memory*, although none provide a specific textual reference: Jankélévitch 1989, 86; Philonenko 1994, 120; Sinclair 2020, 113.

⁵³ Bergson, HTM, 330; my translation.

⁵⁴ Bergson, HTM, 331.

material things exist independently of mind, and (ii) the claim that material things possess sensible qualities that constitute their perceptual appearances. Bergson advances four arguments to justify the thesis: for (i), he provides the mystery argument; for the first half of (ii), he provides the inconceivability argument; and for its second half, the causal closure argument and the extensity argument. Finally, he offers the mereological argument, which assumes the image thesis, to eliminate a deep-rooted prejudice about the brain, a prejudice that can persist even after we accept the image thesis. This is the entire structure of Bergson's discussion of the image thesis in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*. He develops his theory of pure perception, which is the main subject of Chapter 1, on the basis of this thesis.

My reconstruction of Bergson's discussion might seem excessive in that it seems to gather fragments from various places in the text and combine them into arguments that are not really there. Indeed, as I have mentioned, Bergson's style of discussion is labyrinthine. He seldom follows a linear order of premises and conclusions and he presents the same arguments many times, sometimes in combination with others, without clearly formulating or distinguishing them. In the passages that I have examined, the extensity argument is presented in combination with, and without being clearly distinguished from, the mystery argument (see 4.2). Above all, the mereological argument, which I have interpreted as assuming the image thesis, is presented at the beginning of Chapter 1—that is, prior to any justification of the image thesis. I make two replies to this charge of excessive reconstruction.

First, I believe that I have offered sufficient textual evidence for my interpretations. My order of presentation is different from Bergson's, but all the materials of my reconstruction come from Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*. Second, Bergson's style of argumentation may reflect his conception of the clarity required by philosophical discussion, which he succinctly summarizes in 'Introduction (Part II)' of *Creative Mind*. Here, he describes "the origin of [the] method," which he believes "should be recommended to the philosopher" (PM i/CM 7). He writes that, in addition to the clarity of stipulative concepts,

There is another kind [...]. It is the clarity of the radically new and absolutely simple idea [...]. [L]et us accept it provisionally [...]: we shall see that, itself obscure, it dissipates obscurities. By it the problems we considered insoluble will resolve themselves [...]. [I]t will clear up the obscurity which surrounded them, and will, as

a result, become itself still clearer. (PM 31/CM 40)

I take Bergson's discussion in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory* to embody this method. Bergson finished 'Introduction (Part II)' in January 1922, that is, about a quarter of a century after *Matter and Memory* was published, so it would perhaps be better to say that Bergson developed his account of his own method through his philosophical practice, which includes Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*.

Rather than beginning his argument by simply stipulating clear definitions of key concepts, Bergson here commences by asking us to provisionally accept the concept of image "in the vaguest sense of the word" (MM 11/MME 1) and then surveying many features of this concept and problems concerning matter and perception.

This approach may seem disorganized because these features and problems are initially described by using existing terms and concepts. Bergson has to redescribe them one at a time by using his own concept of image, and he therefore repeats the same points in various ways, aiming to make the concept of image clearer as the discussion proceeds. This may be why we can reconstruct many arguments from the text despite its seeming disorder. The following passage supports this interpretation. With respect to the composition principle, Bergson writes:

There are so many illusions gathered round this belief in the originally unextended character of our external perception; there are [...] so many misconceptions, so many lame answers to badly stated questions, that we cannot hope to throw light on the whole subject at once. We believe that light will increase, as we show more clearly, behind these illusions, the metaphysical error [...] and the psychological error [...]. But these illusions are, nevertheless, connected with real facts, which we may here indicate in order to correct their interpretation. (MM 47/MME 45)

Bergson adopted this style in all his major works, the examination of which goes far beyond the scope of this paper.⁵⁵ My aim in this paper has been simply to reconstruct his

⁵⁵ There is a possibility that Bergson's way of writing here is also influenced by the writing style of French philosophers, especially those at the end of the 19th century, although Bergson refines the style into his own method of exposition (I am thankful to an anonymous referee for suggesting this point). Examination of this point would take us far beyond the scope of this paper. On the state of French philosophy at the end of the 19th century, see Benrubi 1933 and Parodi 1925. On the social and historical environment of

arguments for the image thesis in Chapter 1 of *Matter and Memory*. This reconstruction hopefully illuminates Bergson's argumentative ability, his deep connection with early modern Western philosophy, and his distinctive style, which was well motivated and arguably remained consistent throughout his entire philosophical career.⁵⁶

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French style of thought and writing, see Fabiani 1988, Fabiani 2010, and Hazareesingh 2015.

⁵⁶ I would like to express my gratitude to Ken-ichi Hara and Yoshiki Kokuryo for providing detailed and insightful feedback on an earlier version of this paper. Additionally, I appreciate the helpful comments from two anonymous referees, and I extend my thanks to Karin de Boer for enhancing my discussion. Special thanks go to Kaoru Kamiyama for her invaluable support and more.

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