The Reason, the Understanding, and Time

Lovejoy, Arthur Oncken

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

Lovejoy, Arthur Oncken.
The Reason, the Understanding, and Time.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/68498

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2412886
We are now to note in the doctrines of most of the writers thus far mentioned concerning the distinction between the Reason (or the intellectual intuition) and the Understanding—that is, between the true or "metaphysical" knowledge of "reality" and the specious though practically useful knowledge of "appearances" which constitutes natural science—another and, in the main, a quite different version of that distinction, not hitherto indicated. Before proceeding to the exposition of the second, let us recall the first in a very syncopated form.

We saw in the second lecture that the primary quest of the intuitionists was for an "immediate" knowledge, a direct apprehension, of that which is indubitably existent; that this (as they argued) cannot be given either through sense-perception or through concepts, or by reasoning about the logical relations or implications of concepts, but only by the Ego's consciousness of itself, in which the knower, the knowing act, and the reality known, subject and object, are identical; and that the reality thus revealed by the in-
tuition of the inner Self is "ineffable," "repugnant to the very essence of language," since words are merely the symbols or counters which we employ to refer to sensible objects or to concepts. We also saw this immediately known inner Self of every conscious individual reduced (at least by Schelling and Schopenhauer) to one unmultipliable entity, and that One divested of all attributes or predicates except pure "Being"—the God of the negative theology—and then, by another turn of the kaleidoscope, presented as the "undivided," yet spatially and temporally ubiquitous World-Soul which imparts life and movement to "all thinking things, all objects of all thought." Through all this we noted that, in setting forth and defending their theses, these epistemologists actually made copious use of concepts and of logical (or would-be logical) reasonings about the implications of concepts, and did not really limit themselves to reporting the "immediate intuition of inwardly experienced facts"; but this, of course, was presumably an unintended and inadvertent deviation of these philosophers from their initial aim, and not a part of the doctrine they were propounding. That doctrine professed to banish concepts, and everything that could be "represented" by concepts, to the limbo of the "mere Understanding"—and thus to deny to them any claim to "reality."
But at this point some of our epistemologists—and most patently of all, Schelling—forgot, or abandoned, the starting-point of their reasoning, as it has been outlined in the preceding lectures. They found themselves, after all, sure of certain truths about “reality” which plainly can not be reconciled with the proposition that a knower can not know “immediately,” and thereby with certainty, anything except its own act of knowing. That initial premise of the Identitätssystem obviously could by itself lead logically to nothing more than solipsism—and the “solipsism of the specious present.” True, it did not in fact lead Schelling to that barren outcome; he avoided it by that succession of bold metamorphoses—they were actually but not admittedly contradictions of his former premises—which we have seen him performing. But even after these strange transmutations of the “Ego” had been accomplished, Schelling and some other of these philosophers discovered that they were equally and “immediately” certain of several other theorems which did not relate at all, or did not relate solely, to their own “inner selves.” These theorems, undeniably, contained general concepts; but they were concepts which, so to say, the “Understanding” could not understand, and the theorems could not be proved by reasoning; they were not deducible from, and in some cases were (or seemed) contradictory of, the basic
assumptions of natural science in its “explanations” —its formulations of the causal processes which hold good of the physical world. Thus they were not within the province of the Understanding. Our apprehension of these concepts and our indubitable certainty of these theorems must, then, be due to the fact that the “higher” cognitive faculty, the Reason, enables us to intuit directly, to “see,” realities, or properties of “reality,” with which neither the ratiocinations of the intellect nor sense-perception, nor even the bare consciousness of our own existence, can make us acquainted.

I now turn to the exposition of some of these theorems.

1. QUALITY vs. QUANTITY AND NUMBER

It was one of the frequently reiterated theses of many so-called “Romantic” writers that the inferior cognitive—or rather, the pseudo-cognitive—faculty can think only in terms of quantities and numbers, that its operation is exemplified only in the mathematical sciences; and that, on the other hand, these categories are inapplicable to the realities which are known to us through the superior faculty, which appre-
hends only qualities. This doctrine, stated in the language of a species of faculty psychology—the usual antithesis of Verstand and Vernunft—is, of course, inconsistent with itself; for obviously the notion of number can and must be applied to qualities, if they are admitted to be many and distinguishable; color, e.g., is a quality, and there are seven colors in the spectrum of the rainbow.

But it cannot be denied, I fear, that numerous philosophers of the period we are considering simply had a distaste—perhaps born of an inaptitude—for mathematics, and tended to "rationalize" this by, so to say, giving a low epistemological rating to that science, and consequently a low intellectual rating to those addicted to it. Let me recall to you a few examples of this.

Schopenhauer, in spite of elements in his philosophy which might have justified the opposite conclusion, wrote in Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung\(^1\) that "persons of genius" are characterized by "an aversion from mathematics," and that experience shows that "great geniuses in art never have any mathematical ability," while "eminent mathematicians have little susceptibility for the fine arts"—both of which, of course, were false generalizations. It is especially "the logical procedure of the mathematical

\(^1\) Vol. I, sec. 36.
sciences” which, says Schopenhauer, “makes them repugnant to the genius,” since this procedure gives no place to “genuine insight,” but offers merely a chain of deductions. This rage against the mathematical found perhaps its most emotional expression in a passage by a French writer, Lamartine, who, speaking of the intellectual fashions of the period of the First Empire, “that incarnation of the materialistic philosophy of the eighteenth century,” wrote:

All those geometrizing men, who alone in those days held the public ear . . . fancied that they had forever dried up within us all the moral, the divine, the melodious elements of the human soul. . . . Everything was organized for the suppression of this resurrection of moral and poetic feeling; there was a general alliance of the mathematical studies against thought and poetry. Number (le chiffre) alone was permitted, honored, protected, rewarded. Ever since that time I have abhorred number, that negation of all thought; and there has remained the same feeling of horror for that jealous and exclusive power of mathematics, which the convict feels for the irons riveted upon his limbs. The mathematical sciences were the chains that bound human thought. But I can breathe now; for those chains are broken.²

² Les destinées de la pensée (1834); in H. F. Stewart and A. Tilley’s Romantic Movement in French Literature, pp. 48 f.
Carlyle was, somewhat less emotionally, echoing the same scorn of mathematics when, in *Sartor Resartus*, he spoke of that “shallow, superficial faculty” of man, the “Arithmetical Understanding.”

Such passages, however, do not present any definite philosophical reasons why the mathematical sciences should be so contemptuously characterized. But some writers of the period who took the same attitude, did seek to offer logical reasons for it. To both Jacobi and Schelling it seemed simply an obvious corollary of those theorems about the object of any “immediate” (and therefore certain) knowledge which we have reviewed in Lectures II-IV. Thinking by means of general concepts, we were told, cannot give us such knowledge, for concepts are never an immediate experience of *existence*, or Being; they are merely symbols for kinds of potential beings, which we do not actually and directly grasp and possess as within us. They serve well enough for the practically useful procedures of the Understanding, but they do not enable us to attain the goal of the metaphysical quest.

If these premises were accepted, and if it were also assumed that the mathematical sciences consist solely in abstract reasonings about concepts, you could infer that those sciences do not reveal the true nature of “reality.” And when, with Schelling, one went on to “prove” that the only object of immediate knowl-
edge, the Ego, is *gar nicht durch zahl bestimmbar*, it seemed evident that the whole realm of the quantitative and numerable is a realm of unreality—of the merely "phenomenal," or even of sheer illusion.

But these (supposed) reasons for relegating the categories of quantity and number to that realm were equally pertinent to the category of quality. For we assuredly do have concepts of qualities—not only the class-concept of quality in general, but of specific qualities; and the *gemeine Menschenverstand* is well acquainted with them, has definite and well-discriminated words for many (though not all) of them, *i.e.*, they are far from "ineffable"; and it employs them constantly in its thinking and in its planning for the accomplishment of its everyday utilitarian ends. Nevertheless, these epistemologists saw some radical and philosophically significant contrast between qualities as such and quantities as such, and sometimes made this the essential differentia between the "reality" known by the Reason and the world of mere "appearance" which is the realm of the Understanding.

From the thesis of the purely quantitative nature of conceptual thought, Jacobi deduced the obvious corollary that the whole realm of qualities is foreign to the Understanding.

Of qualities as such we have no concepts, but only intuitions and feelings. Even of our own existence
we have only a feeling and no concept . . . When we say that we have explained a quality, we mean simply that we have reduced it to figure, number, position and motion, have resolved it into those ideas—which is merely a way of saying that in the objective world we have annulled quality altogether.³

Schelling, as already indicated, connected this antithesis with the distinction between space and time, and defined time (i.e., “pure” time) as the realm of qualities, and space as an absolute homogeneity entirely destitute of qualitative differentiation. “What has magnitude in time only, we call quality. No one has ever supposed that color, taste and smell are something in space” (a remark resting upon an odd confusion of ideas, especially with regard to color).⁴

By Bergsonian logic also it follows that, since the intellect can deal only with the quantitative, it is incapable of knowing or representing qualities as such. Influenced by the peculiar propensities of the intellect, we tend to treat qualities as if they were reducible to magnitude and figure, and thus as susceptible of geometrical treatment. But in doing this we merely de-qualify the qualities, we turn our attention from them, as they are actually given in our experience, to a world of purely quantitative differences outside of us, which

⁴ SW, 1 Abt., 1, Abhandlung zur Erlauterung, usw.
science finds it convenient to postulate as the *causes* of our qualitatively irreducible sensations. "The fact is that there is no point of contact between quality and quantity. We can interpret the one by the other, set up the one as the equivalent of the other; but sooner or later we shall have to recognize the conventional character of this assimilation." While, then, the realm of the intellect is that of bare quantity without quality, the realm of intuition is that of absolute quality without quantity or number. *Le monde intérieur*, as Édouard Le Roy puts it, *est celui de la qualité pure.* To another follower of Bergson, Joseph L. P. Segond, this seems the most original and most fundamental of Bergson's discoveries. "It is this antithesis between quantity and quality," he thinks, "which is the principle of all the others" that form the framework of the Bergsonian system; that philosophy is in essence a "constant effort to give its proper place to pure quality, by means of which the real develops." It is to be noted, moreover, that since *le monde intérieur* is, by another principle of Bergsonism, identified with pure time, or duration, an equation of time with quality becomes necessary; so that one of Bergson's favorite names for the reality to be apprehended

---

5 *Time and Free Will*, p. 70.
6 Eng. tr. by V. Benson, p. 77.
7 *L'Intuition Bergsonienne*, p. 15.
through intuition is *le temps-qualité*. This at times seems to mean only the undeniable proposition that, on the one hand, space in itself is a "pure homogeneity" and involves no notion of qualitative differences between its parts and that, on the other hand, the perception of succession would be impossible without qualitative differences in the content of our experience. But this defensible thesis is, of course, irreconcilable with the doctrine of the inapplicability of the notion of number to real duration; and it therefore tends to pass over into a mere identification of time as such with quality as such.

2. THE REASON, THE UNDERSTANDING AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CONTRADICTION

We have next to note the emergence of the most radical opposition between the Understanding and Reason or intuition. The reasoning characteristic of ordinary thought and natural science depends upon the setting up of sharp contrasts between things, upon propounding dilemmas and formulating irreconcilable oppositions. The Understanding prides itself upon defining issues sharply and then taking sides. Its entire thinking, in short, is based upon the logical
principle of contradiction. But the higher insight of the Reason transcends these oppositions. It is all for embracing both sides of all questions. It makes the dialectical lion lie down with the dialectical lamb; it happily enables you, in speculative matters, to eat your cake and have it too. The Reason thus often declares propositions to be true which, so long as you remain upon the lower level of the Understanding, undeniably seem flatly self-contradictory.

That the Schellingian Absolute is a synthesis of contradictory attributes is manifest, especially in the Identitätslehre. The "identity of identities," which is here Schelling's name for the Absolute, is all opposed things at once—finite and infinite, real and ideal, temporal and eternal; and equally it is none of these things. The dialectic here is essentially the same as that of Bruno and of Neo-Platonism. Within the original and self-existent Being, the One, there can be no plurality, no division, and no change.

The essence of the Absolute can only be thought as an absolute, pure, untroubled Identity, i.e., as absolutely excluding all differentiation from its nature. The particular in it is the universal, and the universal the particular; quantity and quality are in it absolutely and inseparably one.  

Hegel expresses himself, in like manner, in his Schellingian period:

That these pairs of opposites—be it Self and Nature, pure and empirical consciousness, knowing and being, positing-of-self and positing-of-other, finite and infinite—are posited together in the Absolute: in this antinomy common reflection sees nothing but contradiction. Only the Reason recognizes in this absolute contradiction the truth, namely, that both opposites are posited and both are negated, that neither of them and at the same time both of them are.\(^9\)

Friedrich Schlegel too took his fling at this one among the numerous *bêtes noires* of the school: “the principle of contradiction,” he declared, “is not even the principle of mere analysis.”\(^10\)

It was, of course, in this aspect of the doctrine of knowledge that Hegel found the suggestion of his own characteristic logic. It is worth noting the relation of this logic to the ordinary position of the group whom we have been considering. In the “return to the immediate,” which Jacobi and Schelling in some passages had preached as the way to philosophical salvation, Hegel was able to see at best only a half-truth. To *return* to the immediate was to reverse the


\(^{10}\) *Athenaeum*, I, 2, p. 22.
movement of Reason, which consists rather in pressing forward to a higher immediacy wherein all the distinctions, all the richness of conceptual content, of the analytic Understanding are included—but also transcended.

Reason, inasmuch as being life and spirit, it is essentially mediation, is an immediate knowledge only through the sublation of this mediation. It is only a lifeless object of sense that is immediate otherwise than through the mediation of itself with itself. . . . If the immediacy of knowledge is understood in any other sense than this, it is not the immediacy of Reason that is in question, but the kind of immediacy that belongs to a stone. . . . In Jacobi, however, the transition from mediation to immediacy has rather the character of a mere abandonment or avoidance of mediation; . . . indeed, he goes farther, and represents the mediating movement of knowledge as actually obstructive and destructive of the intuition of Reason.\textsuperscript{11}

The attempt to reach "the immediate" immediately, that is, by merely ignoring the ordinary logic and by leaving out of consideration the characteristics of ordinary experience, seemed to Hegel to be an example of precisely that excessive subjection to the principle of contradiction from which the philosophers of the newer generation professed to have

\textsuperscript{11} Hegel's \textit{Werke} (Berlin, 1835), XVII, 10–11.
escaped. For that attempt was governed precisely by the assumption that "immediacy" and "mediation" are irreconcilable; it simply set up one abstract notion in opposition to another, and sought to realize the one by blankly excluding the other. Thus the passion for the unification of opposites required, when properly understood, not, indeed, an abandonment, but a significant transformation, of that other element which consisted in a revulsion against all indirect or conceptual modes of acquaintance with Being and a craving for "the immediate." But for the same reason, even the overriding of the principles of identity and contradiction could not be, for Hegel in his final doctrine, the same simple and direct thing which it had been for these epistemologists. True, Hegel held, every category "passes over into its own other," "turns into its opposite"; and this seems a contradiction. But on the other hand, the necessity for this "passing over" lay, as he insisted, in each case in the fact that the category proved self-contradictory unless it thus embraced its own negation. Thus the principle of contradiction, so far from being simply abrogated and disregarded in the Hegelian Logic, is the vital nerve of the entire dialectic process. "It is easy work for the Understanding," Hegel writes,

to show that everything said of the Idee [the highest category of the Logic] is self-contradictory, The
same charge can, however, equally well be brought home to the Understanding itself, and, in fact, this is already accomplished in the Idee. To show this [contradiction in the Understanding] is the work of Reason—a work which is, it is true, not so easy as the work of the Understanding. When the Understanding demonstrates that the Idee contradicts itself, because the subjective is subjective only and is always confronted by the objective; . . . because the finite is finite only, the exact antithesis of the infinite, and so on; then the Logic proceeds to demonstrate the opposite of all this. It shows that a "subjective" which is subjective only, a "finite" which is finite only, an "infinite" which is infinite only, have no truth, but contradict themselves and pass over into their opposite.\[12\]

In other words, Hegel does not invite philosophy to reform itself by a bare repudiation of "the fundamental principle of the ordinary logic"; instead, he invites it to use that principle for the undoing of the ordinary logic. It is ostensibly in the name of the laws of the Understanding that he indicts the Understanding.

The result of this procedure, none the less, is that in the end the ordinary logic is effectually undone and the principle of contradiction ruthlessly trodden under foot. It is merely that, by a characteristically

\[12\] Encyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften, Erster Teil, no. 214, in Werke VI.
Hegelian paradox, it is, so to say, trodden under its own feet, and lies

Like a god self-slain on his own strange altar.

It is a naïve and erroneous criticism of Hegel to say that he merely flouts the principle of contradiction; but it is equally false and only a little less naïve to say with Croce that he "repudiates only false applications of the principle of contradiction" and that "a contradiction thought" after the manner of the Dialectic "is a contradiction overcome."¹³ The Dialectic is, indeed, a continuous overcoming of contradictions, yet contradiction in it is never overcome; for it is equally true of it that it is a continuous setting up of contradictions. What one means by a contradiction is a conjunction of ideas which are reciprocally repugnant and irreconcilable from the point of view of ordinary logic; and a contradiction is not logically overcome unless it be shown, in a way that satisfies the ordinary logic, that the ideas in question are not mutually repugnant and irreconcilable. But this Hegel makes no pretense of showing. If he had attempted this, indeed, he would have robbed his antithesis of Understanding, and Reason of all its point. Reason would in that case have operated upon the same principles as the

Understanding; it would have been merely a correct application of those principles, while Understanding would have been a hasty and mistaken application of them. But this is very far from Hegel's view of the relation of the two kinds of logic. In the passage already cited he expressly admits that it is easy for the Understanding to point out what for it are and must be actual contradictions in the final synthesis of the Dialectic, the Absolute Idee; he merely declares that the Reason can always reciprocate the compliment. We are, in fact, left at the end of the Logic with nothing better than the unedifying spectacle of the Vernunft screaming "You're another" in reply to the reproaches of the hartnäckige Verstand. It is not by such means that contradictions are reconciled or reduced to mere seeming.

Schopenhauer may, at first consideration, seem free from this trait of Hegel's logic—or illogic. He speaks with respect, on occasion, of the principle of contradiction and the rest of the four traditional "laws of thought." Yet it must, of course, be remembered that it, like all the other "principles of the Understanding," is, for Schopenhauer too, pertinent only to the phenomenal—to the world of common sense and of natural science—and not to that ulterior realm of Absolute Being with which alone metaphysics is concerned. That, in this realm, contradiction reigns, may
be sufficiently seen by a mere collation of the amaz-ingly incongruous attributes which Schopenhauer ascri-bes to “the Will,” as the “Thing-in-itself.” And in one passage, written in his later years, Schopenhauer, setting up in its most extreme form the antithesis be-tween a lower and a higher mode of knowledge, ex-pressly declares that the latter is, from the point of view of the former, self-contradictory. Thus in the concluding section of the dialogue “On the Doctrine of Life after Death” (Parerga und Paralipomena, II), Philalethes, the speaker, who represents the position of the author of the dialogue, is asked by the other interlocutor, Thrasymachus, to answer plainly and briefly the question: “What am I, after my death?” “Everything—and Nothing,” is the reply. Thrasymachus not unnaturally complains that this “solu-tion of the problem” is a mere contradiction in terms; to which Philalethes replies that “answering transcendent questions in the forms of speech designed for the expression of immanent knowledge may, indeed, lead to contradiction,” and he explains this distinc-tion in the following Kantian terms:

Transcendent knowledge is that which, reaching beyond all possibility of experience, strives to determine the nature of things as they are in them-selves; immanent knowledge, on the other hand, is that which keeps within the confines of the possi-
bility of experience, and consequently can tell us only of appearances. Thou, as an individual, endest at death. Only, this individuality of thine is not thy true, essential and ultimate being, but is, rather, a mere outward expression of it; it is not the thing-in-itself, but only its appearance, which is manifested in the form of time and consequently has a beginning and an end. This essence, in itself, on the contrary, knows nought of time, nor of beginning nor end, nor of the limitations of a given individuality; therefore it can be excluded from no individuality, but exists in each and all. In the first sense, therefore, thou becomest, through death, nothing at all; in the second sense, thou art and shalt remain all things.... This answer to thy question contains, it is true, a contradiction; for thy life is in time, thy immortality in eternity—it may accordingly be called an immortality without duration—which is once more, a contradiction. But this is what happens when one attempts to bring the transcendent within the limits of immanent knowledge; the latter suffers a sort of violence, when we misapply it to ends which it was not meant to serve.

This, after all, was more sweepingly, if less plainly, expressed, in the famous concluding passage of the first volume of *The World as Will and Idea*, where the same ultimate identification of the two most glaringly contradictory of all categories—“All” and “Nothing”—is declared to be the last word of Schopenhauer’s philosophy.
We freely acknowledge that what remains after the entire abolition of Will is for all those who are still full of will certainly nothing; but, on the other hand, to those in whom the will has turned and negated itself, this our so real world, with all its suns and Milky Ways is—Nothing.

Since I have in the preceding lectures called attention to the numerous and close similarities between the doctrine of Bergson and that of Schelling, it must now be added that the former did not explicitly and unequivocally subscribe to this article of the latter’s logic, and when it was formally put before him, he rejected it. Yet the attributes of “real duration” are in fact mutually contradictory. As I have already attempted to show, a duration to which the concept of quantity is inapplicable, a temporal succession in which there can be said to be no mutual externality of the successive moments, a “memory” in which the event remembered and the experience of remembering it are simultaneous—these appear to be perfect examples of the assertion of logically irreconcilable predicates of identical subjects. But this issue is sufficiently fully discussed in the Appendix to the present lectures, and the relevant arguments need not be repeated here.
3. **CREATIVE FREEDOM**

We have already recalled that in Kant's philosophy the *Verstand* is distinguished from the *Vernunft* as the "faculty" which, by its very nature, is constrained to a deterministic and mechanistic view of things. However, it seemed to Kant that there can be no moral responsibility without freedom, without something in the individual that is absolutely uncaused; but there can be no freedom in the spatio-temporal world. There all events are completely subject to the law of causality, and therefore every human act is simply the necessary effect of its antecedents. If, then, freedom is to be "saved... no other way remains to do so but to attribute it" to a non-temporal self—to the "intelligible character," good or bad which belongs, causelessly and eternally, to each noumenal Ego, yet somehow manifests itself in his temporal behavior as a whole, though without impediment to the determination of each moment of that behavior by antecedent natural causes. For Coleridge this was, not the only, but by far the most important, consequence of the "distinction of Reason and Understanding." Coleridge was deeply sensible that he and other men were miserable sinners; but he did not see how they could
be if their evil acts are necessitated, as in the order of time they clearly are. The way out Kant seemed to him to have discovered by his change of venue for the whole issue from the temporal to the eternal world. Coleridge thus found in Kant a vindication of the doctrine of Original Sin, which was to him "the fundamental premise of Christianity." Sinfulness is not, indeed, inherited by us from Adam; the traditional, mythic form of the doctrine Coleridge thought absurd and immoral. Sin is literally *original* in every man because it is inherent in his noumenal Ego which is out of time and extrinsic to the entire sequence of natural events. Since the unfortunate empirical self has never had any opportunity to choose his noumenal Ego—any more than he had to choose his temporal ancestors—this seems a curious way of demonstrating his freedom and responsibility. But it satisfied Coleridge as a philosophical proof of man's imputable iniquity; and from this he deduced the necessity for a supernatural and vicarious means of redemption, and other articles of the ancient creed.\(^\text{14}\)

The philosophers we are here considering, with some exceptions, were not less eager than Kant to

\(^{14}\) This part of Coleridge's philosophy and its relation to Kant's I have dealt with more fully in "Coleridge and Kant's Two Worlds," in *Essays in the History of Ideas* (Baltimore, 1948), pp. 254 ff.
vindicate freedom; but it was not—for most of them—the same freedom, and the motive for believing in it was not, chiefly, the same motive as Kant's. It was a freedom in the temporal order, not one relegated to a supratemporal world; and the usual moralistic and juristic motive for rejecting determinism—the desire to find some way of conceiving of the individual moral agent as somehow separately responsible for his deeds—was not their characteristic reason for affirming it. The assumption that a given event in time is fully "explicable" as the "effect" of preceding events might be objected to on three grounds of quite another type.

(a) It implies that all individual events are merely special instances of the operations of general uniform laws. The objection to this would rest, at bottom, on the same ground as another stricture upon the Verstand. It seems to deny that any event is unique. Doubtless, events differ from one another, and sometimes look unique; but when one of these is "explained," in the way in which the Understanding professes to explain it, it proves to be only a new example of a recurrent and invariant process; it is really the same old atoms shuffling about in accordance with the same old laws. The conception of the complete determination of an event by its antecedent thus appears to leave no room for genuine originality in the world—originality being the temporal form of
uniqueness or Eigentümlichkeit. But Eigentümlichkeit in general, and originality in particular, were concepts dear to the minds of these thinkers; and what is called the “uniformity of nature” was, when taken absolutely, antipathetic to those minds because it seemed incongruous with the possibility of true originality in art, as the achievement of the artistic genius—and in character.

(b) Aside from this first objection, the notion of efficient causation seemed to imply pre-determination; a happening is all settled before it happens. History is like the gradual unfolding before us of a scroll; our reading of what is inscribed on the scroll is successive, but the words inscribed upon it are not successive; they were there all the time. And this idea was peculiarly repellent to many writers because it seemed to deny to the time-process as a whole any creative potency. If the first morning of creation wrote what the last dawn of reckoning shall read, then there was only one act of creation; that it took time to disclose what had already been laid down once for all was a mysterious oddity of the scheme of things; but nothing except the disclosure was added to the content of the original creation. But Jacobi and Schelling and others (including Bergson) were convinced that creation keeps going on, that time is a creative process, and, indeed, they tended to use the two terms “time”
and "creation," as equivalent. If this were assumed, it followed, or was construed to follow, that the temporal antecedent does not explain the consequent. If it did, history would be like drawing out of a hat rabbits and other things which some magician had already put into it off-stage. But to these metaphysicians—in their temporalistic as distinguished from their eternalistic phase or mood—time is not at all like that; the rabbits are new and surprising rabbits, and there is, in fact, no hat.

(c) The notion of pre-determination, finally, may seem to rob the individual moment of human volition of its dramatic poignancy—of, in one sense of a sadly ambiguous word, its significance. What makes such moments seem, so to say, momentous, is the feeling that in them the issue is really open, that something not hitherto settled is actually getting settled. It does not add to the excitement of a football game to believe that the result has been prearranged between the coaches or the players. To a spectator who believes this, the game loses the character of a sporting event altogether; does it lose it less if he supposes that it has been prearranged by the Creator, or by the general constitution of nature—that, struggle as they may, the players are not then and there bringing about the outcome, but only explicating a decision that was already "fixed"—whether you call the fixer God, fate,
or the totality of antecedent events? A similar reflection could be applied to graver junctures in life than football games. But it was usually characteristic of Schelling and Jacobi and those who later continued their way of thinking, to want their moments momentous, and one not less so than another; to conceive that at every instant there is, at least potentially, “something doing,” that the self is then, in some absolute sense, “acting” and “striving.” But the conception of reality as perpetual Streben was, at least seemingly, incongruous with the conception of the complete causal pre-determination of everything; and the Understanding, being by hypothesis committed to the latter conception, was therefore, once more, a faculty which misrepresented the nature of things—though this was admitted to be in some respects a very useful misrepresentation.

I am not presenting these considerations as philosophically cogent; I have been trying only to distinguish some elements in the apparent motivation of the antipathy to determinism. That this strain was inharmonious with other strains, is, I suppose, obvious—e.g., with the eternalistic strain.

I pass now to some illustrations of this disparagement of the Understanding on the ground of its incapacity to recognize “freedom.” Jacobi writes:
To the Understanding freedom is wholly inconceivable—and consequently appears to it impossible. . . . It can conceive only of a freedom which is subject to the cosmic law of causal connection . . . not of the only kind of freedom which deserves the name, one which is self-produced and purposive, which initiates original works and deeds.\(^\text{15}\)

The last phrase is one of the expressions of a sort of equation frequent in Jacobi’s philosophy: Consciousness as such is equivalent to freedom, and freedom is equivalent to “invention,” the production of the unpredictable and unprecedented.

To be free and to be a spirit (or mind, Geist) are one and the same. Where spirit is, there is invention (Erfindungskraft), the power of creation (Schöpfungskraft), originality, selfhood.

And this freedom, since it involves a possibility of the transcendence of any “law” formulated at any given stage of scientific knowledge, is a sort of “miracle” and a proof that the miraculous is possible.

I too believe for the miracle’s sake (des Wunders wegen)—for the sake, that is, of the miracle of freedom, which is a continual miracle and has much analogy with the miracle by which Christianity was founded—the descent of the Holy Ghost at Pentecost.\(^\text{16}\)

\(^{15}\) Werke, II, 46.

\(^{16}\) Ibid., VI, 174–75.
Since Jacobi, like Kant, found in man's make-up both the *Verstand* and the *Vernunft*, and since he too applied to men's voluntary actions the principle of the *Verstand* that all events in time "follow one another nach einer Regel" in accordance with an invariable law of efficient causation—it might seem that he was committed to determinism. But he, also like Kant, thought it needful to find a way of believing that man as a moral agent is free. *Unlike* Kant, however, he did not assign this freedom to a "noumenal," supersensible Ego which supposedly never acts in time. It was, as he conceived it, a freedom present in each of our temporal acts of volition. To think of one and the same voluntary act of the same individual as completely predetermined and also as completely free may seem to some persons a rather difficult mental feat; but to Jacobi it offered no insuperable difficulty, so long as he kept in mind the distinction between the *Verstand* and the *Vernunft*. As viewed by the former the act is necessitated, as viewed by the latter it is free; and both views are correct—only, the latter view is *more* correct, since the Reason is the "higher" faculty, the sole revealer of ultimate *metaphysical* truth. Realizing, however, that, to some readers not sufficiently instructed in his philosophy, the assertion of these three theorems taken together might still seem unintelligible, not to say self-contradictory,
Jacobi endeavored to elucidate the matter in a short essay of 1799, “On the Inseparability of the Concept of Freedom from the Concept of the Reason.”

The precise meaning of my conception of freedom [he writes], can be stated as follows:

I understand by the word freedom that power (Vermögen) of man by virtue of which he himself is and by which alone his actions, both internal and external, are performed—by means of which he acts upon things and generates things which did not previously exist (hervorbringt). Insofar as he thinks and feels himself to be free, he ascribes solely to himself his personal qualities, his science and art, his moral and intellectual character. Only insofar as he sees in himself—in his mind (or spirit, Geist), in his intelligence, the originator, the creator, of all these [characteristics and attainments], and not in Nature, does he call himself free—though one part of his constitution (Wesen) has been produced in a necessitated manner, and in this part he belongs to and is involved in the general mechanism of Nature. Man, therefore, calls himself free only insofar as in a part of his being he does not belong to Nature and is not a product of Nature;

17 Ueber die Unzertrennlichkeit des Begriffes der Freiheit und Vorsehung von dem Begriff der Vernunft, in Werke, Bd. II, p. 311 ff. Vorschung here clearly does not mean “providence” in the theological sense. The argument of the essay clearly shows that Jacobi used it to signify “looking-towards-the future.”
he is free only insofar as he cuts himself off from Nature, raises himself above it and dominates it and, by his faculty of freedom, controls its mechanism and makes it serviceable to himself. The mind (Geist) alone, not Nature, is inventive and has design in what it brings forth; it alone imagines and aspires. The productivity of Nature is blind, devoid of reason, without purpose or foresight. . . . Thus Reason and Freedom are inseparably joined together in our consciousness; but not in such a way that the power to act with freedom (das freie Vermögen) is derived from what is called man's rationality, but in the sense that his rationality is derived from his power to act with freedom. 18

This passage is not likely to have convinced Jacobi's more acute-minded readers of the logical possibility of conceiving of the same temporal event as both predetermined and "free," i.e., not predetermined; and, indeed, the argument does not seem to have made that paradox intelligible to Jacobi himself, for in the end he admits that we cannot "understand" the paradox and, by implication, that we cannot even conceive of it. For to "understand" any particular event means to think of its occurrence as conditioned by its relation to something more general, i.e., by some general law of nature about the connection (Verknüpfung) of things and events with other things and events. But this way of thinking is peculiar to the Understanding.

which knows no “Unconditioned.” Freedom of the will, however, Jacobi insists, is unconditioned freedom—unbedingte und unverknüpfte. It is therefore beyond the comprehension of the Understanding and extraneous to “Nature”; it can only be called a “supernatural” (übernatürlich) reality. Of this reality, however, we have an immediate, intuitive certainty. Thus Jacobi’s proof of man’s freedom appears to rest ultimately upon a dogmatic assertion that he and all men have an indubitable intuition of the truth of a self-contradictory proposition. Reasoning of this sort was unlikely to convince determinists that their doctrine was false.

If this had been all that is to be said about the passage last quoted, it would not have been worth quoting at such length. But the passage is in fact highly significant. For, in spite of the queer illogicality of its principal argument, it also presented—incidentally, as it were—an historically important thesis: It clearly showed (I think) that Kant’s way of “saving freedom” was wholly beside the mark. If man’s voluntary actions are free, they must be free when they occur. But, as we have seen, Kant’s so-called freedom consisted (as he defined it) in everyone’s having (or being) a timeless or noumenal Ego which has no existence in the phenomenal and therefore temporal world, and which is endowed by the
Creator with a "character" which determines all the individual's temporal acts. For, says Kant, in a man's noumenal existence,

nothing is antecedent to the determination of his will, but every action [i.e., in time] and in general every modification of his existence, . . . even the whole series of his existence as a sensible being, is, in the consciousness of his supersensible existence, nothing but the result . . . of his causality as a noumenon.\(^19\)

This, taken in conjunction with the doctrine about causality of the *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, means that all human acts have a curious sort of twofold causation: as natural phenomena, they are caused by antecedent natural phenomena, and not free; they are also completely determined by the nature of the particular noumenal self whose acts they are.

Schelling's doctrine of freedom in his earlier writings is not unequivocal, and at times it seems hard to distinguish from what William James used to call a "soft" determinism. But whether the freedom that is in question be of a "sensible" or "supersensible" sort, it is at all events regarded by Schelling as the reality, and necessity as the appearance; and as responsible for this appearance the *Verstand* once more receives from him very hard words.

\(^{19}\) *Kr. d. pr. V.*, A, 175. Abbott's tr., p. 191.
We have now to speak of that cognition of the Understanding, which flatters itself upon attaining true knowledge (Wissen) and consists merely in referring the particular to the universal, and in inferring from cause to effect and vice versa. . . . It is the sort of cognition which rests entirely upon mechanical laws, and is dominant in all parts of so-called physical science. . . . To whatever objects it be applied, this mode of cognition never amounts to a knowledge of the Reason, but only of the Understanding. . . . That a knowledge which consists in inferring from effect to cause, which seeks to know a first principle through that of which it is the first principle, the original through the derivative—that such a procedure can never bring us to anything that exists in itself and of itself, is as clear as it is that it can never enable us to know what it regards as the cause in its intrinsic nature, apart from its effects. . . . It is not that this sort of cognition, which we may, in a word, call empiricism, . . . is sometimes more and sometimes less objectionable; it is wholly false, by its very principle, and a perpetual and inexhaustible source of error. Not its form only must be altered; the entire view must be reversed, and transformed in its principles, before there can arise a true knowledge of the objects which this sort of cognition takes for its own. . . . What greater superstition can there be, than to believe that the things which in physics, e.g., or chemistry, are represented
as causes actually produce the effects [with which those sciences deal]? 20

Bergson similarly dwells upon the thesis that intellect is constitutionally incapable of comprehending freedom. It necessarily links together all events, outer or inner, in the nexus of efficient causation; and "the more sharply the idea of efficient causality is defined in our mind, the more it takes the form of mechanical causality." 21 Thus the world of mechanism, and of mechanism alone, is the world in which the intellect finds itself at home. But the world of mechanism is not the real world; it is only a fiction serviceable to the requirements of action. Life and consciousness are essentially free; and once again, therefore, they elude the intellect's grasp. The essence of their freedom consists, for Bergson too, in their power to "create," to bring into existence the absolutely novel and unpredictable; he likes to speak of le temps-créateur. The fundamental reason for the inability of the intellect to think freedom is its incapacity "to admit complete novelty." Its chief func-

20 SW, I, Abt. IV, Fernere Darstellungen aus dem System der Philosophie (1802). It should be added that in his Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit (1809), Schelling admits a "moral necessity" in all choice, divine or human, and rejects the freedom of indifference.

21 Creative Evolution, p. 44.
tion is to foretell the future upon the assumption that the past, the already-given, furnishes the key to the future; and its typical expression is the mechanistic hypothesis, simply because the essence of that hypothesis is the assumption that “all is given” ab initio, that the world is made up of a constant number of component units, unalterable in their constitution and changing their relations only in accordance with unchanging laws, a knowledge of which would have made possible the prediction of the entire cosmic drama. This hypothesis, however, is not, for Bergson, wholly false; we should be in a bad fix if it were, since we could never infer from the past what any of the future effects of our present action will be. But he contends that there remains at every moment a marginal freedom; each present adds something which the past knew not of; and therefore the future cannot be assumed to be completely predictable.

4. CREATIVE EVOLUTION

From the outset Schelling was chiefly (I do not say, solely) preoccupied with two distinct theses. The first was primarily epistemological; it was the theory of knowledge of which the premises have already been outlined in the preceding lectures, the famous and
for a time widely influential thesis that we have two cognitive faculties, the Reason and the Understanding, of which the former is the organ of metaphysical knowledge of what really and certainly exists, while the latter is merely the organ of natural science and is only useful for the guidance of our bodily actions. When he was explicating the epistemological thesis about the *Vernunft* and the *Verstand*, Schelling attempted to prove that the reality known by the Reason is necessarily immutable and timeless. But what is now necessary to add is that at an equally early period of his philosophizing he was developing precisely the opposite thesis: that *nothing* that exists, including ourselves and even God, is immutable.

“Nature,” writes Schelling in 1799, “struggles against all permanence,” for no product which she has at any time achieved can exhaust her infinite creative energy. Into each of them, it is true, the whole power of Nature (*die Kraft der ganzen Natur*) is in a sense poured out; but just for this reason—because there is, as it were, a latent pressure towards infinity in it—no finite thing can remain unchanged; “it must be only apparently finite, but in reality in endless evolution (*Entwicklung*); . . . in each of them lies the germ of a universe.”

---

22 See pp. 77 ff.
23 *Naturphilosophie*, SW, 1, III, 290 (1799).
Of the incongruity between the conception of the eternal yet all-comprehending reality and this conception of a reality which is essentially a creative energy manifesting itself gradually in a temporal process, Schelling is aware; and he seeks to eliminate it by distinguishing between that which is logically possible but not now existent, and that which is not only possible but also actually "realized." In a sense, the former is, as the Schoolmen would have said, only \textit{in potentia} and not \textit{actu}. And what goes on in time is a \textit{Realwerdung}, a becoming actual, an acquisition of existence by what, apart from the temporal process, would remain, as it were, frustrate and incomplete, so long as it falls short of the existential status. The "timeless" Absolute is thus, after all, made subordinate, in \textit{The Philosophy of Nature}, to time; for it (Schelling postulates) cannot "realize" itself all at once. The concept, he writes, of "an absolute productivity implies that such a productivity is infinite; but this is, so far, merely an infinity in idea, not in actuality. The absolute productivity must therefore pass over into an empirical world of nature, and its infinity in idea into an empirical infinity." But in experience a literal, completed infinite is impossible; in other words, "an empirical infinity" can only be "an endless becoming." Now "the original infinite
series, the ideal of all such series, is time, in which our intellectual infinity unfolds itself."

This does not tell us in what concrete fashion the actual or "empirical" unfolding of the possibles in time, their *Entwicklung* or *Evolution* (Schelling employs both terms) takes place. But it was in fact *towards* the theory of organic evolution in its present sense that he was being led by these abstract metaphysical or dialectical reasonings. A year or two earlier he had already attributed to the "Spirit of Nature"—*i.e.*, the *anima mundi*, mentioned in Lecture four—a "steady and undeviating march towards the organic": and this, he declared,

clearly betrays a vigorous impulsion (*einen regen Trieb*) which, always struggling, as it were, with inanimate matter, now triumphs over it, now is subjected to it—breaks through it now in freer, now in more restricted forms. It is the universal *Spirit* of nature, which by degrees gives form to matter. From the bit of moss, in which the mark of the organic is almost imperceptible, to the most exalted form, which seems to have shaken off the chains of matter altogether, one and the same impulsion rules—working towards one and the same purposive Ideal, striving to express *in infinitum* one and the same model, the pure form of our mind (*die reine Form unseres Geistes*). It would be at least one step towards a scientific understanding of
organic nature if one could show that the graded sequence of all organized beings has formed itself (*sich gebildet habe*) through a gradual development of one and the same organization. The fact that our experience makes us acquainted with no transformations in nature, no transition from one form into another, is no proof against this possibility (though, indeed, the metamorphoses of many insects, and, if every bud is a new individual, also the metamorphoses of plants, may be cited as at least analogous phenomena). For a defender of this hypothesis could reply that the changes to which organic as well as inorganic nature is subject, can (until a general static condition of the organic world comes about) take place in ever longer periods for which our periods . . . can afford no measure—the former being so great that as yet no experience has been long enough to span one of them.

But for Schelling this does not imply the transformation of species.

There is an eternal model, which is expressed in every plant; for, however far back we go, we find that the plant, *i.e.*, a given species arises only from itself and returns to itself; only the matter in which it is expressed pays the tribute of mortality (*Vergänglichkeit*); but the form of the organism (the very concept of it) is indestructible.²⁴

²⁴ *SW*, 1, I, 387 (1796–97).
But even if Schelling’s temporalism, his thesis that the whole creation is a gradual process of the evolution and enrichment of reality, be accepted, could this thesis be true of the Creator? Is it also true that God has evolved and is evolving in time from a lower and more meager kind of existence to a higher and fuller kind? This latter and revolutionary thesis Schelling asserted quite clearly in the following passage from *Ueber das Wesen der menschlichen Freiheit* (1809):

Has creation a final goal? And if so, why was it not reached at once? Why was the consummation not realized from the beginning? To these questions there is but one answer: Because God is *Life*, and not merely being. All life has a *fate*, and is subject to suffering and to becoming. To this, then, God has of his own free will subjected himself . . . . *Being is sensible only in becoming.* In being as such, it is true, there is no becoming; in the latter, rather, it is itself posited as eternity. But in the actualization (of being) through opposition there is necessarily a becoming. Without the conception of a humanly suffering God—a conception common to all the mysteries and spiritual religions of the past—history remains wholly unintelligible.  

This novel thesis was not allowed to pass unchallenged. Jacobi published in 1811 an essay *Von den göttlichen Dingen und Ihrer Offenbarung* which

was largely devoted to attacking this contention of Schelling. "There can," he wrote, "be only two principal classes of philosophers: those who regard the more perfect (Vollkommnere) as derived from, as gradually developed out of, the less perfect, and those who affirm that the most perfect being was first, and that all things have their source in him; that the first principle of all things was a moral being, an intelligence willing and acting with wisdom—a Creator—God." Jacobi finally took his stand upon what he regarded as an elementary and obvious principle of ordinary logic: that something cannot come from nothing, nor the superior from the inferior. Such a philosophy as Schelling's, in fact, is, Jacobi asserts, a direct contradiction of a law of formal logic. For, as he observes—the observation is a commonplace of Platonistic theology—the relation of God to the world may, among other things, be conceived as the relation of a logical prius, a Beweisgrund or reason, to its consequences, the implications deducible from it. But "always and necessarily a Beweisgrund must be above that which is to be proved by means of it, and must subsume the latter under it; it is from the Beweisgrund that truth and certitude are imparted to those things which are demonstrated by means of it; from it they borrow their reality."

Schelling replied in 1812 in his Denkmal der
I posit God [says Schelling] as the first and the last, as the Alpha and the Omega; but as Alpha he is not what he is as Omega, and in so far as he is only the one—God "in an eminent sense"—he can not be the other God, in the same sense, or, in strictness, be called God. For in that case, let it be expressly said, the unevolved (unentfaltete) God, Deus implicitus, would already be what, as Omega, the Deus explicitus is.\(^{26}\)

Upon what grounds, in the face of Jacobi's objections, does Schelling justify this evolutionary theology? First of all on the ground that it accords with the actual character of the world of our experience, as that character is disclosed to our everyday observation and to the more comprehensive vision of natural science. On the face of it, the world is precisely a system in which the higher habitually develops out of the lower, fuller existence out of emptier. The child grows into a man, the ignorant become learned; "not to mention that nature itself, as all know who have the requisite acquaintance with the subject, has gradually risen from the production of more meagre and inchoate creatures to the production of more perfect

\(^{26}\) SW, I, Abt. 8, 81.
and more finely formed ones." A process which is constantly going on before our eyes can hardly be the inconceivability which Jacobi had made it out to be. The new philosophy had simply interpreted the general or "ultimate" nature of things, and their order in being, in the light of the known nature and sequences of all particular things with which we are acquainted. The "ordinary theism," defended by Jacobi, had, on the contrary, given us "a God who is alien to nature and a nature that is devoid of God—*ein unnatürlicher Gott und eine gottlose Natur*."

Again, Schelling observes, the fact of evil, the imperfection of the world, is irreconcilable with the belief that the universe proceeds from a being perfect and intelligent *ab initio*. Those who hold this belief "have no answer when they are asked how, from an intelligence so clear and lucid, a whole so singularly confused (even when brought into some order) as the world can have arisen." In every way, then, Schelling finds the picture of reality which accords with the facts is that of a more or less confused and troubled ascent towards fuller and higher life; and the only admissible conception of God is that which is in harmony with this picture. Nor has the contrary view, he declares, the religiously edifying and consoling character to which it pretends. For it "derives the not-good from the Good, and makes God, not the source and
potentiality of the good, but the source and potentiality of the not-good.” Conceived—as in the theology of absolute becoming it is conceived—as a good in the making, als ein ins Gute Verwandelbare, evil or imperfection itself is not the hopeless and senseless piece of reality which it must be if conceived as good in the unmaking, as a lapse from a perfection already realized. The God of all the older theology, moreover, had been a God eternally complete, “ready-made once for all,” as Schelling puts it. But no conception could be more barren and unprofitable than this; for it is really the conception of a “dead God,” not of the God that lives and strives in nature and in man. It is inconceivable, Jacobi had declared, that life should arise out of death, being out of non-being, higher existence out of lower. Is it, then, asked Schelling, easier to conceive that death should arise out of life? “What could move the God who is not a God of the dead but of the living, to produce death. Infinitely more conceivable is it that out of death—which cannot be an absolute death, but only the death which has life concealed within it—life should arise, than that life should pass over into, should lose itself in, death.” Jacobi’s error, however,—Schelling observes—is a natural consequence of the logical doctrine of the older philosophy from which he never fully emancipated himself; it is, indeed, the crowning
example of the pernicious results in metaphysics of the acceptance of the Wolffian theory of knowledge, which based everything upon the logical Principle of Identity, and regarded all certain judgments as "analytical." According to this view, says Schelling—not with entire historical accuracy—"all demonstration is merely a progression in identical propositions, there is no advance from one truth to a different one, but only from the same to the same. The tree of knowledge never comes to bloom or to fruitage; there is nowhere any development." But true philosophy and truly objective science are not a chanting of tautologies. Their object is always a concrete and living thing; and their progress and evolution is a progress and evolution of the object itself. "The right method of philosophy is an ascending, not a descending, one"; and its true axiom is precisely opposite to that pseudo-axiom which Jacobi had enunciated:

Always and necessarily that from which development proceeds (der Entwicklungsgrund) is lower than that which is developed; the former raises the latter above itself and subjects itself to it, inasmuch as it serves as the matter, the organ, the condition, for the other's development.

It is—as has too little been noted by historians—in this introduction of a radical evolutionism into metaphysics and theology, and in the attempt to re-
vise even the principles of logic to make them harmonize with an evolutionary conception of reality, that the historical significance of Schelling chiefly consists. The question at issue in his controversy with Jacobi is, indeed, as he clearly recognized and emphatically declared, one of the most fundamental and momentous of all philosophical questions, both by its relation to many other theoretical problems, and also by its consequences for the religious consciousness. Schelling's thesis meant not only the discarding of a venerable and almost universally accepted axiom of rational theology and metaphysics, but also the emergence of a new mood and temper of religious feeling.

For Schelling himself, however, the implication of this doctrine of a God-in-the-making could not be simply a blandly cheerful evolutionary meliorism. The progress of the world, the gradual manifestation or self-realization of God, is a struggle against opposition; since the full possibilities of being were not realized all at once, and are not yet realized, there must in the original nature of things be some impediment, some principle of retardation, destined to be triumphed over, indeed, but not without suffering and temporary defeats. The Life-Force advances fumblingly, by trial and error. There is a tragic element in
cosmic and in human history; the world-process is ein Wechselspiel von Hemmen und von Streben. 27

The questions at issue between Jacobi and Schelling show themselves again in the philosophy of Bergson, which appears to have passed through at least three phases. 28 (a) In the first phase, Bergson, as we have seen, conceived of the "genuinely real" as eternal and immutable. (b) In what is perhaps his most widely read volume, L'evolution creatice (1908), Bergson seems to represent the whole of reality, including divinity itself, as temporal and progressive. Bergson's conception of the most fundamental force in the universe, the élan vital, is described as an urge, an impulsion, anterior to and independent of the bodies of which it takes possession. It makes not only for novelty, for increasing variation in definite directions, for expansion, but also for individuation. It drives on insatiably and unwearyingly towards more life, fuller and more diversified. It more and more, as Bergson's characterization progresses, comes to resemble the Schopenhauerian Wille zum Leben, on the more posi-

27 For a more comprehensive treatment of the Schelling and Jacobi controversy see The Great Chain of Being, Chapter XI, from some of which the above is taken, especially pp. 323, 324, 325.

28 I do not consider here Bergson's later work, The Two Sources of Morality and Religion.
tive side of that versatile entity. For the élan vital too is defined as of the nature of volition. This vital impulsion has a sort of purposiveness, though a purposiveness without prevision or conscious design. Life is like a blind giant; it runs up many blind alleys, diverges a thousand times from its straight course, yet upon the whole forges ahead in one prevailing direction. When thwarted in its endeavor towards its characteristic though unforeseen ends—as it is constantly thwarted by its eternal antagonist, inert matter—it is endlessly fertile in devices for overcoming opposition or circumventing obstructions. It is, moreover, not a power existing separately in individual living things and operating in them disconnectedly; rather is it a cosmic force in and by which all individual organisms live and move and have their being, and to whose vaster strivings all their groaning and travailing are but incidents. And thus—to quote once more the now celebrated passage which concludes the third chapter of Creative Evolution:

With this doctrine we feel ourselves no longer isolated in humanity, humanity no longer isolated in the nature that it dominates. As the smallest grain of dust is bound up with our entire solar system, drawn along with it in that undivided move-

ment of descent which is materiality itself, so all organized beings, from the humblest to the highest, from the first beginnings of life to the time in which we are, and in all places as in all times, do but evidence a single impulsion, the inverse of the movement of matter, and itself indivisible. All the living hold together, all yield to the same tremendous urge. The animal takes its stand upon the plant, man bestrides animality, and the whole of humanity, in space and in time, is one immense army galloping beside and before and behind each one of us in an overwhelming charge which is able to beat down all resistance and to overcome the most formidable obstacles—perhaps even death.

But now is this characterization of the élan vital to be understood as equivalent to a definition of the Being usually called God? Bergson argues with much force and emphasis in that volume against the assumption which, as he says, "lies at the base of ancient"—more correctly, of all Platonistic—"philosophy: that there is more in the motionless than in the moving, and that we pass from immutability to becoming by way of diminution or attenuation." He argues with no less energy against the tendency of post-Kantian idealists to regard the forms which succeed one another as deducible "directly from the one complete being which they are supposed to manifest"; this, he insists, "is to deny to derivation all efficacy." Clearly,
the philosophical undertaking to which he appears to commit himself, that of construing reality through and through as a thing *se faisant*, and not *tout fait*—would preclude the recognition of any self-sufficient and perfect reality either transcendent of time, or temporally or logically antecedent to the evolutionary process. The reader of *L'evolution creatice* would, I am sure, be likely to suppose that the term *élan vital* was his equivalent of the term God. Indeed, in one sentence he definitely enunciates and adopts the conception of a God in the making. As defined by the argument which he has presented, writes Bergson, “God has nothing of the already made; he is unceasing life, action, freedom.” And it is in this life, we seem to be told, that we human individual persons subsist. So in his *L'Intuition philosophique* Bergson declares that “human consciousness is affiliated to a vaster and higher consciousness. The forces which are at work in all things, we feel also in ourselves; whatever be the inner nature of that which is and which is making itself, we are of it.” It is, then, a species of evolutionary pantheism which one would suppose to be the philosophy of religion implied by *L'evolution creatice*.

(c) But in 1912, to the surprise of many, Bergson gave a reply to an inquiry on the subject which at first seems to suggest that it is not such a philosophy of religion which he holds or had intended to con-
vey. A Belgian Jesuit, Father de Tonquédec, published in the Études, the scholarly review maintained by members of the Society of Jesus, an article on the religious aspect of Bergson’s philosophy in which he pointed out that Bergson had, after all, given an ambiguous answer to the theological problem of the relation of God to the world. His philosophy repeatedly bids us “reascend the current of life to its source.” But is that source of the same nature as, and identical in being with, the movement which proceeds from it, “or is there dans les régions transcendantes something radically distinct from even the purest current of created life?” There are texts in Bergson’s books, and aspects of his reasoning, Father de Tonquédec observed, which readily suggest the former interpretation, the conclusion that for him “there cannot be substantial identity between life and its source.” But there are many other expressions, and other implications of the Bergsonian argument, which appear to demand the contrary construction. Thus, as Father de Tonquédec concluded, one cannot determine, “in reading Bergson, whether ‘God’ is a name given to a reality which will become the world, or whether the world designates quelque chose ou quelqu’un de plus reculé dans l’au-delà.”

Being thus invited to define his theological position with more explicitness, Bergson replied in two letters
to his critic, which have since been published in the *Études*; and in these he seemed to authorize the former of the two interpretations mentioned by Father de Tonquédec.

I speak of God [he wrote] as the source from which proceed, one after another, as an effect of his liberty, the currents or *élans* of which each constitutes a world; he therefore remains distinct from these and it is not of him that one can say that 'most often it comes to a stop' or that it is 'at the mercy of the materiality which it has taken upon itself.' Finally the argument by which I establish the impossibility of non-existence is not at all directed against the existence of a cause transcending the world; on the contrary, I have explained that it has reference to the Spinozistic conception of being. The outcome of it is simply that something must have always existed. On the nature of this something, to be sure, it expresses no positive conclusion; but it in no way says that what has always existed is the world itself and the rest of the book says explicitly the contrary.\(^{30}\)

In a later letter, Bergson goes so far as to represent his entire philosophical work as constituting a long, connected proof of the existence of God, and of an external or transcendent God, not one with the world

---

\(^{30}\) I may add that Bergson neglects at this point to give references to the passages in his book in which this is explicitly said.
which he creates. "The considerations," Bergson writes, "which I have set forth in my Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness culminated by bringing to light the fact of liberty; those in Matter and Memory made palpable, I trust, the reality of spirit [or mind]; those in Creative Evolution presented creation as a fact. From all this there clearly emerges the idea of a God who is a creator and who is free; who generates at once matter and life; and whose creative effort continues, on the side of life, through the evolution of species and the formation of human personalities. From all this, consequently, there results the refutation of monism and of pantheism in general."

That Bergson has not formally excluded the possibility of a transcendent deity, prior and external to the evolving world, and setting it in motion without being implicated in that motion, is true enough. But had he, as a matter of fact, offered anything remotely resembling a demonstration, or a serious attempt at a demonstration, of the theological conclusion to which in the letters cited he represents his entire course of reasoning as tending. If you turn to the particular pages of Creative Evolution to which he especially refers as giving his conception of God, you will, indeed, discover that he there figuratively describes

\[31\] Eng. tr., pp. 247–51.
"God," with a somewhat Dantesque boldness of metaphor, as "a center from which worlds shoot out like rockets in a fireworks display." But he adds that we must not—as the intellect tends to do—represent this center as a thing, but as a continuité de jaillissement, a continuous shooting out; and there immediately follow the significant words already quoted; "God thus defined has nothing of the already made; he is unceasing life, action, freedom." And the nature of this creative activity, we are further told, "we experience ourselves whenever we act freely." Now in this similitude, I think you will agree, there is not suggested the conception of a transcendent deity in the Jesuit theologian's sense—the term God is distinctly not applied to something in "the transcendent regions distinct from the purest current of created life," and there is no approach to the assertion that there "cannot be any substantial identity between life and its source." On the contrary, the identity in nature between all life and its perennial source is plainly affirmed. In the entire passage in question Bergson simply gives the name of God to the inexhaustible reservoir of vital energy in which he believes; but he warns us that we must not be misled by the figure—the reservoir is not a receptacle containing this energy, it is not a reserved quantity of life-force kept temporarily in an inactive condition until needed; it is just
the endless "shooting out" of life itself, regarded as inexhaustible—viewed, so to say, under its aspect of inexhaustibility.

No, I am afraid that in his correspondence with Father de Tonquédec, Bergson has added a gloss to his published doctrine which does not, as it is likely to be understood, faithfully render the natural sense and dominant tendency of that doctrine. His books contain no real "refutation of monism and of pantheism in general"; and, so long as he is speaking of a world of Becoming that really becomes, his God is simply that Becoming—or, if you please to use such expressions, is the soul or ever-pulsing heart of it.

Bergson, then, is here expressing in this phase of his doctrine essentially the same conception as that of Schelling. And for contemporary religious thought the relatively more novel and the more influential aspect of Bergson's teaching is certainly to be found in his conception of creative evolution, and in those expressions of his which suggest as the central feature of a philosophy of religion the conviction that the whole evolutionary process is the manifestation of an expansive life-force, inexhaustible and ever active, yet not omnipotent and never at the goal of its activity; a power which manifests itself at first in low and feeble forms of life, and even in its ascent frequently deviates from its true course, but always extricates
itself, always continues to produce fuller and richer and more various and more highly individualized forms of life, culminating thus far in man, and by this culmination revealing the meaning and main direction of that blind, unknowing striving which has from the first urged life unceasingly upward.