The pertinent part of the letter of Bergson referred to at the end of Lecture III is here quoted in translation—though the translation does not do justice to the felicity of the French original.

The difficulties which you find in my description of duration are doubtless due to the fact that it is hard, if not impossible, to express in words a thing which is repugnant to the very essence of language. I can only attempt to suggest it. Duration is indivisible; but this nowise implies that the past and the present are simultaneous. On the contrary, duration is essentially succession; only it is a succession which does not imply a "before" and "after" external to one another. You will be able to have a clear feeling of all this if, while listening to a melody, you allow yourself to be lulled by the sound—at the same time making abstraction from all the visual images which, in spite of yourself, will tend to modify the auditory perception—visual images of notes of music written on paper, or musi-
cal instruments beginning and ceasing to play, etc. You will become conscious that the melody progresses, that it is a movement or a change, that it is a thing which lasts, and which, consequently, is not a simultaneity; but that, in this melody, the past is incorporated with (*fait corps avec*) the present, and constitutes with it an indivisible whole. It is only by an effort of reflection that, subsequently turning back upon this indivisible whole once constituted, you represent it to yourself as a simultaneity, because of its indivisibility:— which leads you to have a *spatial* image of it, capable of being cut up into distinct terms, decomposable into a “before” and “after”, which then would be juxtaposed. No doubt this melody, even in pure duration, seems divisible in the sense that at any given moment it may come to a stop; but if it actually came to a stop, we should have a *different melody*, which would itself be indivisible. When we pronounce a phrase all at once, without punctuation, we have, once more, the clear feeling of a succession without before or after, the feeling of a *solid*—by which I mean an indivisible—duration. Now, in precisely the degree in which we make a greater effort of attention to resume possession of ourselves, in that degree we tend to perceive our inner life which “expands” without ever permitting divisions, in absolutely the same way as a continuing melody. Our inner life, from the beginning to the end, is thus an indivisible continuity, —and it is this that I call our duration. It is suc-
cession, but succession without distinct and numerical multiplicity, that is to say, pure succession.

When one has once gained this experience one finds many great philosophical difficulties fall to the ground. For the rest, it is quite natural that when one has convinced oneself of the indivisibility of the fundamental duration, one should continue to give attention to a duration more or less spatialized—for the greater convenience of thought and of life. But I feel, for my part, incapable of philosophizing, except by bringing myself back to this fundamental duration. It is because of their failure to do this that the philosophers have failed to constitute a philosophy of change, even when they have felt that change was the true reality. They have talked of change, but I doubt whether they have had a perception of it. And it is because they have taken it under an artificial form that they have not succeeded in solving the enigmas of philosophy, to which, none the less, it affords us the key. I am quite sure that “temporalism” will end by establishing itself upon this basis—under penalty, if it does not, of remaining fruitless and of finding itself again confronted, in another form, with all the antinomies of the traditional philosophy.

To this should be added a passage in which Bergson gave an express answer to the question whether he himself recognized a contradiction in the attributes which he ascribes to “time.”
If I say to a philosopher that the immediate and naïve experience of the succession of the notes of a melody does not imply the perception of a “before” and “after,” although it also is in no sense the perception of a simultaneity, the thing seems to him “self-contradictory” only because he takes the word “succession” in the sense which he will afterwards give to it, when his perception is no longer naïve but has been translated into a spatial and intellectual form. This translation once made, “succession” becomes synonymous with “distinction of a before and after,” and it consequently becomes self-contradictory to speak of a succession in which before and after are not distinguished. But it would suffice, in order to avoid this contradiction, merely to give another name to the perception of succession in its naïve and primitive form. Call it, if you please, a perception of the “non-simultaneous” or of the “moving”; and reserve, if you will, the name of “succession” for the form (in appearance more clear because it is more social) in which this perception of the non-simultaneous or of the moving, when the spatial translation of it permits us to take with respect to it the double point of view of “before” and “after,” is clearly distinguished. This done, the contradiction at once disappears. I say, then, that real duration in no sense implies contradiction. It becomes contradictory only for one who proceeds as I have just said, and treats time as space; but in that case it is he who created the contradiction. In a general way I
consider the "principle of contradiction" as a principle of universal validity. But contradiction or non-contradiction can pertain only to our manner of formulating the real; as for reality itself, as it is immediately given to us, before being treated by the discursive intellect, it is neither contradictory nor non-contradictory. We ought to formulate things in such a manner as to avoid contradiction: that is always possible, and it is in this sense that the principle of contradiction has a universal validity. But one has never the right to oppose to an immediate perception of the real, the argument that it is self-contradictory, for the contradiction can come only from a defective way of formulating it.

Bergson thus finds the empirical *samples* of the intuition of duration in two kinds—or rather, two instances of a single kind—of common experience; the correctness of his description of these, he believes, anyone can easily verify for himself. The two are the perception of a melody—of a temporal musical pattern—and the pronouncing of a phrase "all at once," by which he presumably meant, "very rapidly." About these, at least, there is no mystery. They are everyday occurrences, about the character of which Bergson offers his own introspective report; and he invites us to compare it with the results of our own introspection.
If we do so, we shall first of all, I think, recognize a fact which may be, and probably is, the root of Bergson's account of "duration"; whether that account accurately expresses the fact is another question. It is true—and is, indeed, a commonplace of the psychology books, in their chapters on time-perception—that in the apprehension of, e.g., a melody or a rhythm, the notes or beats are, and must be, apprehended together, yet not together in the way in which the parts of a spatial pattern, e.g., a picture, are. Physically the stimuli, i.e., the sound-waves are, of course, successive; physiologically, their effects are successive, i.e., the actions of the receptor mechanisms occur one after another; but the notes are apprehended as integrated into a Gestalt, all the elements of which are, in some sense, present to consciousness at once. If it were not so, no melody would be perceived; for simply to hear a succession of separate notes is not to recognize a melody. But it is equally true that no melody would be recognized if the notes were given as simply simultaneous; for it is of the essence of the experience that the notes should be apprehended as having a temporal order, and the entire series as characterized by transition and "flow."

Nor is this seemingly paradoxical dual character peculiar to the perception of melodies or rhythms; it belongs to any perception of succession. Kant long
ago pointed out that a succession of perceptions is not the same thing as a perception of succession. To experience succession is to be conscious of a contrast between at least two bits of content of awareness—of the passing over from one to the other, or the substitution of one for the other; and this also means that both must—again, in some sense—be present for awareness together.

Such, then, are the familiar psychological facts about time-perception which may reasonably be supposed to have given the cue for Bergson’s description of “real duration.” But does his description accurately correspond to the facts? In considering this question, we may well be guided by his judicious remark that if there appears a contradiction in an account of an immediate perception, “the contradiction can come only from a defective way of formulating it.” Now Bergson’s report, in the first place, still, I must confess, appears to me to be, at the crucial point, contradictory. To speak of a “succession which does not imply a ‘before’ and ‘after’ external to one another” is to assert and deny the same thing of the same subject of discourse, namely, a supposedly given experience. The same is true of the alternative proposition that, in the experience in question, past and present are given as “non-simultaneous,” or “moving,” yet still without being given as “before” and “after” one
another. Of course, if the experience is really "repugnant to the very essence of language," we ought not to talk, to use words, about it at all; and if you don't talk, you are in no danger of contradicting yourself. But since Bergson is using words to tell us of the nature of the intuition of duration, we may legitimately require that the words, taken together, should convey a meaning—i.e., should be free from contradiction.

But the ultimate appeal in the matter is, admittedly, to introspection; the crucial question is: What do you find that the perception of a melody, or of succession in general, is experienced as? And on this every man must report for himself. Let us, for brevity, limit the question to Bergson's own example of the perception of a melody. For myself, I can only say that I have never experienced a melody in which the notes had no "distinct and numerical multiplicity," or were not apprehended as in the relation of "before" and "after." I seem to myself, indeed, to hear each separate note, one after the other, though, while hearing each, I may be continuously aware of the total musical unit, or pattern, of which it is a part. If the melody is wholly new to me, I do not become aware of this pattern in its entirety until the last note sounds, unless, when the melody has partly run its course, I seem to "catch" it by anticipating, perhaps errone-
ously, the notes I have not yet heard. That Bergson's experience was really the same seems implied by his remark that "at any given moment the melody may come to a stop; but if it actually came to a stop, we should have a different melody." Only a sequence of which the units are experienced as before and after one another can "come to a stop"; a temporally "indivisible" unity would have all its elements present at once, and there could be no question of stopping or not stopping. The result of my own introspection thus seems to be confirmed, unconsciously, by Bergson himself; and I am thereby encouraged to surmise that it would also be confirmed by others.

As little, then, in the perception of a melody as in any verifiable case of memory, do we find a mode of actual human experience to which Bergson's description of la durée réelle is applicable. We have, it is true, seen in such perception a peculiarity which enables us to understand how he can have been led to that description, but this peculiarity he has misinterpreted. In consequence of an insufficient introspective analysis he has overlooked distinctions actually given as elements in the type of experience in question; and as a result of missing these distinctions, he has been left struggling in a morass of sheer self-contradiction. Thus the verifiable empirical example of the "metaphysical intuition" in which the mutual
externality, the before-and-afterness, of the moments of our temporal existence is transcended, still eludes us.

It may be objected, however, that the same contradiction appears in this account of time perception as in Bergson's. For I have said that, in any such perception, at least two items of content—for example, notes—recognized as earlier and later, and therefore as "mutually external," must nevertheless be, in some sense, present together for awareness. But the solution is that they are not experienced as present in the same sense of "present." There is a happy phrase of Dewey's which succinctly describes the most essential and pregnant peculiarity of our temporal experience. Things, he observes, can be "present-as-absent." Even in what the psychologists call "primary memory," the basis of all perception of succession, this is illustrated. In the specious present which is called "now," part of the sensory or other content of which I was aware a moment ago is still present; but it is present as "old stuff," more or less clearly discriminated from the "new stuff" which is the fresh sensory material of which I was not aware a moment ago. It is given as a survival, if not an encore; and to recognize it as either is to refer it backward to a prior moment of existence which is not the "now." If this were not so, the psychologists would have no justification for
speaking of the phenomenon as a mode of memory. In every moment of consciousness which has any temporal character whatever, three components are present: first, some especially vivid content, usually sensory or affective, which feels "new," and thus serves to identify the moment as "now"; second, imagery, vague or clear, or fading sense-content, which is not felt as simply "new"; and, third—implicit in this very notion of "newness"—a conceived pattern or schema of relations of before-and-after, in which all the other elements of content, including the "now" itself, are thought as having relative positions, or dates of existence—i.e., beforeness or afterness or togetherness with respect to one another. And in this schema the content of the "now" is present as just present, as that of which I am immediately and indubitably aware; while a part of that same content, for example, the imagery, is recognized as re-presented or pre-presented; it signifies events or existents which are not "now," but past or future—which have been or perhaps will be, but of which I cannot in the same sense say that they now are. Even if it be said that I still "hear" the first notes of the melody when the last is sounding, I hear them as past, as having existed in experience when the last note did not exist, and as not existing in the way in which that note does, at this instant, exist.
This means that any particular item of experience which can truly be called past, relatively to any given now, is never experienced as present in *propria persona* in that same now. The notion that it can be so experienced seems to rest at bottom upon a confusion of particulars with universals—of existence with essence. The same *essence* may, no doubt, be an object for awareness, or contemplation, through a series of continuously successive moments. If, meanwhile, there is no experienced change of content whatever—if the *kind* of thing that I am perceiving or thinking of, together with all the concomitant visceral sensations, feelings, *etc.*, remains absolutely the same—then no experience of either succession or duration occurs; the so-called "moments" are moments only in physical or clock time, not in "psychological time." But whenever any new content supervenes, and therewith a new "now" is recognized, another particular existent is born into the world, namely, a moment or pulse of experience, its particularity consisting in its having temporal limits and a relative date as after (or before) another such existent; for essences as such have by definition no dates. It is only to particulars that the terms past, present, and future have any relevance at all. And to play fast and loose with these terms, when speaking of *one and the same particular*—*i.e.*, to say that a particular specified as past with respect
to another specified as present, is also compresent with the latter—is manifestly to falsify the fact of experience by a “defective,” i.e., a contradictory, formulation of it. This is “repugnant to the very essence of language” simply because it is repugnant to the very essence, not only of intelligible discourse, but of coherent thought.

But even if the criticisms of Bergson’s account of “duration” which I have been expressing should be invalid, and his report of the nature of the perception of a melody be accepted as correct—and intelligible—another question suggests itself. Why should this subjective phenomenon of perceiving a melody be regarded not only as the key to metaphysical knowledge, but as exemplifying the supreme “satisfaction” which philosophy can furnish us? For it is to be remembered that Bergson’s account purports to be merely a description of what anybody’s experience when perceiving a melody actually is, or at all events can be, if he will but keep his mind free from irrelevant visual imagery while listening. Is this everyday experience so potent and precious a thing as to justify the rhapsodical language which I have previously quoted? The answer to the question seems to be that our ordinary perceptions of melody are for Bergson merely small-scale models of what it is to “see things sub specie durationis,” but are not the full realization
of that beatific vision. In such perceptions (as Bergson describes them) we find at least a little of our past experience made “indivisibly” one with the present, but obviously only a very little—the few notes which preceded the last one. But we attain the true metaphysical intuition, that is to say, “resume possession of ourselves as we really are,” only in “a present moment . . . which we can dilate infinitely towards the past”—a moment which would thus be “the concentration of all duration,” and therefore “eternity.” Since it is not suggested that in perceiving a melody we even approximate any such achievement, Bergson’s attempt at an introspective analysis of that phenomenon, even if successful, would still fail to point out to us any phase of experience open to us mortals in which the self is truly intuited as eternal. For that we should have, at best, to turn again to the hypothetical experience of instantaneous total recall. That no such experience has been shown to occur, I have already observed; but let us now assume that it might occur, and seek to understand, if possible, why even a literal and total incorporation of all past experience in a present moment is regarded by Bergson as so inexpressibly valuable.

The principal difficulty in answering this question lies in the character of Bergson’s conception of “eternity” which has some obscure foreshadowings in
Schelling and Coleridge. It is, we have seen, apparently a one-way eternity, a “concentration” or perfecta possessio all at once of the life that has been but not of the life that is to be. Now, the nature of the values, the emotional satisfactions, which have been felt by men in many ages to attach to the idea of eternity are not unfamiliar nor psychologically unintelligible; but it is not easy to see how these satisfactions could be furnished by the idea of a unilateral or (if we may so express it) merely retrospective eternity. In its relation to the emotions, the eternal has usually been the refuge of the tired or the disillusioned; the thought of it, or the conceived identification of one’s own being with it, has brought relief from the weariness of an endlessly renewed outreach of desire and endeavor after ends which, being themselves subject to the tooth of time, the all-devourer, cannot lastingly satisfy, even if attained. It has, in short, provided an emancipation from the anxious restlessness of the will, by making what is happening in the present or to happen in the future seem unimportant and valueless.

“Time,” says Aldous Huxley’s mystical philosopher, “is evil” because “time and craving—craving and time—[are] two aspects of the same thing. . . . The feeling [of eternity] is a non-personal experience of timeless peace.” Opposed to this “are all personal feelings evoked by temporal situations, and charac-
terized by a sense of excitement. . . . Being obsessed with time and our egos we are forever craving and worrying. But nothing [the mystical philosopher somewhat anticlimactically adds] impairs the normal functioning of the organism like craving and worrying."

Here, patently, the “experience of timeless peace” is valued because it is an escape from every form of emotional preoccupation with the future; it is taking no thought for the morrow, since, outside of time, there is no morrow. Eternity, for Huxley, is apparently just timelessness in the abstract, not an eternity which comprehends the content of time. But also when it is conceived in the latter sense, it is still usually its effect in freeing the mind of the sense of strain in the present and of the vexing unattainedness of the future that constitutes the value of the idea—the assurance (which we have seen Novalis expressing) that one’s own self—or alternatively, as such idealists of another fashion as Bosanquet, Bradley, and Royce asserted, that the Absolute, that is to say, the universe—is now and forever at the goal, be the vicissitudes and seeming frustrations of time what they may. But no such assurance would seem to be derivable from the conception of an “eternity” which—supposing it

\(^3\) *After Many a Summer Dies the Swan* (1939), pp. 117–35 and passim.
to be capable of being experienced—would be only an *omnium-gatherum* of antecedent existences, and would not embrace what, in the temporal order, is called the future. It may perhaps be supposed that the value which Bergson ascribes to the experience of a retrospective eternity is due to an oversight—that he has simply read into the notion of a “concentration” of all past duration the practical or emotional implications of the historic conception of genuine or complete eternity. This, however, would, I think, be a mistake. The unilateral character of Bergson’s eternity is symptomatic of a highly characteristic feature of his philosophy. He was—if I may put it so—not interested in the thought of an eternity which would rob the present of its poignancy and the future of its absolute futurity. The present moment is “that which is acting,” while the past is “that which acts no longer”; or rather, the pure present “is the continuous progress of the past which gnaws into the future, and which swells as it advances.” 2 And it is with movement, change, the perpetual pushing-forward of life into new moments and new forms, the *élan vital*—in a word, with becoming—that his thought is most characteristically preoccupied; “that continuity of becoming,” he writes in *Matter and Memory*, “which is reality itself.” It would be repugnant to the temper of