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Revitalizing Bergson Within the Horizons of Race and Colonialism

Review: Andrea J. Pitts and Mark William Westmoreland (eds.)
Beyond Bergson: Examining Race and Colonialism Through the Writings of Henri Bergson
(New York: State University of New York Press, 2019), 255 pages.

Among Bergson's contributions to philosophical and empirical investigations – such as those centered on freedom, memory, and evolution – exists in the form of his last book, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. It is interesting because, as many readers of Bergson have remarked, it does not seem to fit well, primarily in method, with his other endeavors in the pursuit of philosophical exploration and elaboration. Having been mentored by a philosopher who holds this position, I have long shied away from the text that represents Bergson's last concerted philosophical effort of inquiry. Meanwhile, having been intrigued by the possibility of a more just world and compelled by a desire to serve such an end, I was interested in envisioning what a Bergsonian philosophy of social justice, revolution, or morality would contain. Early on in my readings of Bergson, I *felt* the seeming applicability of Bergson's method of intuition to moral and social questions. Over the years, I have devoted significant time to thinking through durational investigations of intensity to problems of social justice. While I have made some inroads to accomplishing this goal, I feel the journey has just begun for me.[1] It was in this context that I was excited at the prospect of this book, and it is this book that has

1) To be clear, much work has been done in the way of expounding political or moral philosophies in which Bergson's thought might be interpreted as a prelude. My reluctance to embrace *Two Sources* has been a self-imposed hindrance to my engaging in those extra-Bergsonian works for fear of running against the current of Bergson's earlier texts. My reticence is intended to be taken as neither a slight of Bergson's *Two Sources* nor a discounting of those who find inspiration in that work.

helped me to appreciate *some* of the ways that Bergson's philosophy could be adapted to thinking through moral and social questions.

Given my concern with *Two Sources*, I was pleased with this collection, initially, on two fronts. First, chapter one of the book speaks, in part, to the problems of method I mentioned above. In this chapter, Alia Al-Saji elaborates on a significant difference between the method employed in *Matter and Memory* and *Two Sources*. Her aim in doing so, as the title of the first chapter notes, is to decolonize Bergson – more on this momentarily.

To provide a basis from which to understand the methodological difference, Al-Saji utilizes an excerpt from *Two Sources* that describes the method employed there. Bergson writes, "we have alluded elsewhere to those 'lines of fact' each one indicating but the direction of truth, because it does not go far enough: truth itself, however, will be reached if two of them can be prolonged to the point where they intersect. A surveyor measures the distance to an unattainable point by taking a line on it, now from one, now from the other, of two points which he can reach."[2] Al-Saji explains the quotation: "The analogy to the surveyor makes us see that Bergson needs two accessible points of experience to which he can move (at least imaginatively), in order to triangulate from them the *desired* point of intersection" (BB, 25).[3] The problem is that the method, as it is conceived in *Two Sources*, is different from the method described in *Matter and Memory*. On this latter method Bergson writes, "It would be to take experience at its source, or rather above that decisive *turn* where, taking a bias in the direction of our utility, it becomes properly *human* experience."[4] Here, the method is of a differential calculus rather than a projected geometry. Al-Saji confirms this point.

While this may look like the same method, it is conceived *differentially* in *Matière et mémoire*, according to a different calculus than the linear geometry of the surveyor. In other words, the tendencies of experience are extended to their limit, but this is a limit that remains virtual and whose actuality can only ever be grasped within the mixture of experience. Tendencies are extended according to their curves (differentially by taking the tangent), and not in a geometrical projection from two points (BB, 27).

I have worked out neither the consequences nor the significance of the difference in method of these two books, but I suspect that the need for a transformation from a qualitative calculus to a linear geometry has much to do with the aim of each book. In *Matter and Memory*, Bergson gives us an account of human experience that undermines older metaphysical claims, thereby avoiding the problems that come from them. Bergson points to and suggests that the path to good philosophical investigation begins with experience as it is lived rather than as it has been understood.

In *Two Sources*, Bergson suggests an ideal disposition, individual and societal, by elaborating upon two seemingly opposed tendencies of humanity and locating a complementary intersection where those dispositional tendencies would help to avoid situations that lead to events like World War I. It is currently unclear to me whether the transformation of Bergson's method was necessary to accomplish his goal. Nevertheless, I suspect that the method deployed in *Matter and Memory*, or, more broadly, the method of intuition, could provide us with some insight into the domain of moral philosophy.

In that vein, the second pleasing aspect of *Beyond Bergson* was that the book did not exclusively focus on the content of *Two Sources* in order to accomplish its work. There were several essays that drew upon other Bergsonian texts. For example, Clevis Headley draws from several sources within the Bergsonian corpus, including *Time and*

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2) Henri Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, trans. R. Ashley Audra & Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), 248.

3) My emphasis.

4) Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, trans. Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Cosimo, Inc., 2007), 240–241.

Free Will, Creative Evolution, and The Creative Mind. Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel contributed an exemplary piece entitled "The Spectacle of Belonging." This work primarily applies Bergson's work on laughter to conversations had by black intellectuals in the 1930s about black bodies as a site of laughter that exhibits the interpretation of black bodies as whiteness in disguise. Adriana Novoa contributes a piece on the influence of Bergson's concept of intuition on Spanish America in the early twentieth century. She writes, "Bergsonian philosophy was introducing the youth to feeling and intuition, and through this experience they were acquiring the new eyes to see what had been invisible so they might 'listen to the voice of the race'" (BB, 155). In fact, aside from the first three chapters, we are hard pressed to find more than a mention of *Two Sources*, the latter chapters spending a great deal more effort on how intuition and duration influenced non-white intellectuals interested in liberatory projects, often in tension with the deterministic materialist leanings that were shaping the way race was understood at the time.

Having addressed my initial concern with the book, I will now move on to focus on my engagement with the text. The book is organized into three parts preceded by a forward contributed by Leonard Lawlor and an introduction by Adrea J. Pitts and Mark William Westmoreland. The first part could be characterized as encounters with Bergson's works in light of liberatory projects as they are generally understood. The final two parts of the book, in contrast, attend to historical movements and thinkers who were influenced by Bergson and contributed, as indicated by the title of the text, to the development of his thought by adapting his work to questions related to justice, racial identity, and organizing social action. The second part is dedicated to the Négritude movement and the third part to Bergson's influences in Latin America.

I found each of the authors' contributions to be valuable and insightful, but, given the time I have available for the task of reviewing this book, I will only be able to highlight a few of the essays that, given my experience, were significant to me. With that in mind, I return to the work of Al-Saji. Her effort to decolonize Bergson is constituted by two complementary movements that are "a critical and a creative reconfiguration of Bergsonian philosophy" (BB, 15). On the critical side, Al-Saji is concerned about the concepts of "primitive" and "civilized" societies that Bergson puts forth as part of his work to achieve a method.[5] This troubling distinction is made all the more disconcerting by the fact that, as Al-Saji rightly notes, it does not seem necessary to his work. The heavy-lifting done in *Two Sources* is accomplished by the closed-open dichotomy that Bergson emphasizes through a distinction between the way that societies function via obligation and the transcendence of culturally created habits of obligation via creative emotions that are exemplified by mystics.[6] Both "primitive" and "civilized" societies have a tendency to be closed. What, if both primitive and civilized societies have the closing tendency, do we gain from distinguishing between them?

To further complicate this problem, Bergson asserts that there is only a difference of degree between the two social orders. Both of them gain cohesion through structures of obligation. Both of them manifest static religions that function as sources of resistance to individual desires to self-interested behaviors. Additionally, Bergson's seeming interest in "primitivity" is taken in a general sense. That is, Bergson is interested in whatever underlies or is "natural" to humanity prior to enculturation. It is from this vantage that Bergson develops, borrowing from *Creative Evolution*, the canalizations of adaptation and growth that are allotted to instinct and intellect in order to talk about human sociality.

To arrive at a discussion of society through this more general understanding of primitivity seems to be sufficient to move forward in Bergson's thought. Nevertheless, he continues to speak of "primitives," in other

5) It is not just the use of the term "primitive" that Al-Saji is concerned about. She is troubled by the construction of the concept and the way it perpetuates a Eurocentric superiority (that is my description, not hers) over non-European communities.

6) Al-Saji is ultimately concerned about the closed-open dichotomy and the way this distinction is potentially grounded in colonialist thought.

words, coexisting societies that are peopled by those who are not "civilized." His understanding of the difference between the two social organizations is that primitive sociality is static, whereas civilized sociality is dynamic. Although Bergson does note that we are all equally evolved, as we have all been around for the same amount of clock time, we have not done so similarly. Bergson writes, "Marking time, they ceaselessly add and amplify [natural but irrational tendencies]. Through the double effect of repetition and exaggeration the irrational passes into the realm of the absurd, and the strange into the realm of the monstrous."[7] The characterization of these "primitives" as amplified irrational beings is problematic enough, but we must add to this unnerving characterization another troubling fact. Bergson contends that the "primitive" society is stagnant because the people become habitually lazy, in part, because they practice magic as a method for solving their problems.

Al-Saji argues, contra those who defend Bergson on the ground that he is only interested in "primitivity" rather than "primitives," that Bergson relies upon actual coexisting non-European communities to successfully execute his argument. This is because, she says, "Bergson needs two accessible points of experience to which he can move (at least imaginatively), in order to triangulate from them the desired point of intersection (the conditions of both experiences in duration). The experience of mystics provides one such point, allowing Bergson to imagine, or more precisely 'intuit,' a tendency to openness that he calls '*élan d'amour*'" (BB, 25). One side of the two accessible points of experience is provided by mystics. The other point, Al-Saji notes, is not just the tendencies of closed societies, but is best located within the experience of "primitives." This is because, she says, "Bergson believes that theirs is a thinner layer of cultural acquisitions, 'the road may be shorter' to arrive at the tendency to closure that grounds social life, the pressure that explains not only obligation but also static religion" (BB, 26).[8] So, the dichotomy of the open and the closed relies upon the mystic-primitive couple.

Al-Saji goes on to lay out what she sees as a deeper problem with the open and closed dichotomy, one that results in what she sees as internal inconsistencies across his other works and *Two Sources*. Her positive contribution to the decolonization of Bergson is that we ought to think of societies as neither open nor closed but, rather, as half-open or ajar. By doing so, we could more adequately line up Bergson's work in *Two Sources* with his durational, always unfinished, ever transforming philosophy of life as presented in his other works. A good deal of this effort is to minimize or rid ourselves of hierarchical ranking of societies. This logic of hierarchies, she says, is what "we see in contemporary cultural racism, where discrimination against so-called illiberal cultural-religious minorities (in particular, Muslims, but often also Hasidic Jews) is justified based on their supposed intolerance and closure to change" (BB, 15). This positive contribution was astute and insightful, but the significant impact Al-Saji made on me was in her articulation on Bergson's colonialist concepts.

I am a habitual defender of Bergson's philosophy, but, in the spirit of Bergson's own thought, to give in to that habit on all fronts is to become mechanical, to elicit laughter from those engaged in living life, and to halt the growth and flourishing that is made possible by striving. To defend Bergson's characterization of "primitive" societies would be, for me, to give in to that habit. Thus, I was glad to be given an introduction to *Two Sources* (I have succumbed to the impulse to read it, and I am working my way through that text along with writing this review) by Al-Saji and the other contributors to part one of the volume, all of whom prepared me for the difficulties I am encountering as I struggle to overcome my habitual tendencies regarding Bergson.

Given that Bergson is the great developer and practitioner of the method of intuition, one that relies upon developing a certain sympathy with the object of investigation in order to develop an understanding of its durational rhythms, one would expect that Bergson would be better than others at developing sympathy with his so-called "primitives." In this light, Al-Saji's contribution to my understanding of Bergson is different from

7) Bergson, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 137.

8) The lack of cultural acquisition is, according to Bergson, what leads to the stagnation that characterizes "primitive" society.

what she intended. For all of the interesting things we learn using a Bergsonian approach to philosophy, I now understand that the method of intuition is, like most methods, subject to the constraints of epistemic blindness (such as blindness to privilege, blindness to racial injustice, blindness to deeply ingrained white-supremacist beliefs). Because of this, we need to ensure that, when we utilize this method, we not only maintain humility in light of this blindness, but, also, knowing that we are subject to these shortcomings, we ought to find ways to enhance the powers of sympathy to mitigate the possibility that we stray too far on the path of error.

Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel's essay, entitled "The Spectacle of Belonging," is a historical piece that documents black intellectuals in France who engaged with Bergson's work on laughter. The topic of their interwar conversation, found primarily in *La Revue du monde noir*, a journal dedicated to black artists and thinkers in literature and science, concerned black experience in France. The question they were intent to answer was whether or not to assimilate to Parisian cultural norms (in fashion, speech, and other performative ways) and, further, in what modes should assimilation take place. More specifically, the question posed in *La Revue du monde Noir*'s was "Why does the sight of a Negro dressed in European fashion provoke the laugh of the white man?"[9] This question, as Joseph-Gabriel notes, is a misquote of Bergson's original question, which asked, "Why does one laugh at a negro?"[10] However, given the topic of the conversation as it was embedded in the context of black intellectuals in France, the misquotation is understandable as an adaptation that gets to the heart of what those whom were engaged in the operation were interested in investigating.

Bergson's response to his original question is worth quoting at length:

> And yet I rather fancy the correct answer was suggested to me one day in the street by an ordinary cabby, who applied the expression "unwashed" to the negro fare he was driving. Unwashed! Does not this mean that a black face, in our imagination, is one daubed over with ink or soot? If so, then a red nose can only be one which has received a coating of vermilion. And so we see that the notion of disguise has passed on something of its comic quality to instance in which there is actually no disguise, though there might be.[11]

The key to understanding this passage is to recognize that the source of white laughter at the black body is that the white viewer sees that body as disguised whiteness. Under the darker skin of the black body resides a white one that needs to be revealed (presumably through washing) to alleviate the tension of the comic that qualitatively permeates the intensity of white experiences of black bodies. Thus, Joseph-Gabriel writes, "It is important to note Bergson's use of the verb *barbouiller*, indicative of blackness as whiteness that is smeared or dirtied by ink or soot. Similar to the case of the viewer who laughs at the hunchback because she or he sees first an able-bodied man who then twists himself into a deformed shape; here too we find whiteness to be the point of departure, the normative state of being which is then deformed by the costume of black skin" (BB, 124).

For Bergson, the social functions of laughter include maintaining a cohesive order by ensuring individual conformity to social norms. When those norms are threatened, we laugh at the one who acts in a way that conflicts with the norm in order to awaken her to her self-extrication from the group. Laughter, then, is a warning to act appropriately or risk losing community membership. Simultaneously, this function of laughter is complemented by its capacity to form social identity. Joseph-Gabriel writes, "Bergson argues that laughter is above all an act of

9) *La Revue du Monde Noir: The Review of the Black World, 1931-1932: Collection Complete*, 1 à 6 (Paris: Jean-Michael Place, 1992), 129.

10) Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton & Fred Rothwell (Cabin John, MD: Wildside Press, 2008), 22.

11) Ibid., 22–23.

complicity, an act by which the individual creates a form of identification with a larger group. Thus, if laughter as mockery suggests an inability to identify with a person or group deemed as other, it can also serve as a form of identification with those deemed similar to the person who laughs" (BB, 125). That social identity is established through laughter with others clarifies why the French black intellectuals were interested in the question. If the black person is laughed at because she is black, there is little to nothing that she can do in the face of that laughter to enter into the community. She remains barred from the community, perpetually cast as an outsider. Further, this act of being laughed at, says Joseph-Gabriel, in "this process of defining community and the attendant impulses of inclusion and exclusion enact a measure of violence" (BB, 127). So, faced with the seeming impossibility of escaping otherness in the space of Parisian streets, markets, and homes, the black intellectuals of France sought to find out how to lay claim to the spaces that constitute Parisian communities. In other words, they sought to find a way to be at home in a space that rejected their authenticity as both black and French persons.

The question has a similar tone that is reminiscent of the question posed to W.E.B. Dubois (presumably by white interrogators) in his own writings. He writes, "How does it feel to be a problem?"[12] If it were framed in the style of the question posed by those French black intellectuals engaged in the conversation Joseph-Gabriel speaks of, it would likely be written a bit differently: "Why does the white American think of black persons as a problem?" Dubois would continue to struggle with this question until died. He knew what the ideal solution was, at least in the abstract. He writes:

> The history of the American Negro is the history of this strife, – this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America, for America has too much to teach the world and Africa. He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world. He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without having the doors of Opportunity closed tightly in his face.[13]

It is the exclusive disjunction of the terms "black" and "American" that Dubois marks out that is analogous to the disjunction the French intellectuals of the black community were working through (only the nationality, in the abstract, changes in the French question) nearly three decades later in *La Revue*. As noted before, and congruous with Dubois' early answer to the question, a degree of assimilation along with a substantive demand for legitimized (or authentic) difference seems to be the appropriate response advocated by the French intellectuals that Joseph-Gabriel notes.

For example, Joseph-Gabriel includes the response of Marie-Magdaleine Carbet, who wrote under a pseudonym (Magd Raney). Carbet's answer to the question was that black people ought to wear the dress of the European, and she provides accounts of her conversations with her tailor and milliner, both of who give "advice on how to valorize skin tone and body build, all the while adhering to the latest Parisian fashion" (BB, 129). One point of interest is that Carbet does not think that accentuating the best features of black bodies will have a desirable effect. She writes, "For we must keep in mind that 'the sight of a Negro dressed in European fashion *always* proves the laughter of the white man."[14] So, there is no amelioration of the issue. The Europeans would

12) W.E.B. Dubois, "Of Our Spiritual Strivings," in *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, 1994), 1.

13) Ibid., 2-3.

14) Marie-Magdaleine Carbet, *La Revue du Monde Noir: The Review of the Black World, 1931–1932: Collection Complete,* 1 à 6 (Paris: Jean-Michael Place, 1992), 182.

continue to dehumanize black persons regardless of their attire. Nevertheless, each of the contributors remarked upon by Joseph-Gabriel recommend that the black French person adhere to the comings and goings of French fashion. One thing made clear to me is that these intellectuals knew that their positions in French culture was precarious and, regardless of their merit or actions, there were always at risk of being reduced to something less than human because of the color of their skin. This meant that navigating social spaces successfully required a continual effort of attention and negotiation to assert their authenticity as a human being, as a person.

What is striking to me, as a white, straight, cisgendered male, is that this perpetual struggle to maintain and negotiate an authentic identity is easy for me to forget. I have read many accounts of black authors engage with questions like the one *La Revue* asks. Each time I do so, the brutal reality of perpetually facing social death via the process of othering is like a slap to the face. Reading and rereading the descriptions of these encounters is like seeing an old recognizable acquaintance whom I remember having a long history with. However, given the ease of forgetting these perpetual struggles as I navigate my own spaces (ones that are rarely contested), this old acquaintance and I do not and cannot have a deep relationship. While we may converse, and I may gain a temporary intellectual and emotional appreciation for the difficulties that those contributors to *La Revue* faced, the perpetuality of these struggles adds a rich qualitative coloring and patterning to the fabric of black experiences that I know I can never truly understand.

What I personally appreciated most about Joseph-Gabriel's essay was the final portion of it which provides an account of another author's commentary on the question of *La Revue* in the form of a short story. I will not spoil it for you here. You really should read it yourself. I learned from that last part of her essay that, as a member of so many hegemonic social strata, there is no such thing as being "woke." There is only the possibility of a continual process of waking briefly to see the difficulties others struggle with that is followed by sleepiness and slumber for a time.

Finally, Jaime Hanneken's "Antagonism and Myth: José Carlos Mariátegui's Revolutionary Bergsonism" was a splendid exemplification of the deployment and adaptation of Bergsonian philosophy to the problems of systemic exploitation of the indigenous people of postcolonial Peru. Dissatisfied with the traditional dialectical method of Marxist materialism, Mariátegui sought to find a way to organize and catalyze revolutionary action in a country where indigenous people were suffering some of the worst conditions of colonialism and capitalistic reductions of human beings to units of labor. Hanneken draws out some of the philosophical influences on Mariátegui in thinkers such as Marx, Sorel, and Bergson.

Mariátegui's frustration with Peru is its stagnation in the process of modernizing. His book, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, is an attempt to document this stagnation. Hanneken writes, "In sum, the overarching thesis of the *Seven Essays* is precisely that Peru does not change. Its failure to establish itself as a modern nation, to secure material progress, and to assimilate indigenous populations must be understood in his eyes first and foremost as a failure to act, to actualize as motive force the qualitative differences that conquest, colonialization, and independence imposed on the Peruvian socius" (BB, 201). Given this stagnation, it is easy to understand how the materialist determinism prevalent during this period was not offering adequate answers to the question of Peruvian liberation. Myriad issues that plagued the Peruvian people led to strikes and student activist movements. They, writes Hanneken, "announced an urgent need for the democratic opening of the nation's economic and political structures. But such a transformation, as Peru's intellectual class realized, would not be achieved in material terms alone, without a profound revision of the cultural, institutional, and philosophical edifices that had sustained neocolonial dependency" (BB, 195). It was presumably this very frustration that compelled Mariátegui to find alternative philosophical outlooks in order to bring about a more socially just nation.

Hanneken first draws on the influence of Sorel on Mariátegui to explain how Mariátegui understood the failings of the popular materialists of the time. Sorel was a philosopher of conflict, in contrast to the mainstream

conceptions of socialism that turned concepts of revolutionary liberation into party platforms. Hanneken writes, "Parliamentary socialism's emphasis on compromise, negotiation, and gradual reform signaled to Sorel its conservative, antirevolutionary essence" (BB, 196). Sorel, it seems, felt that the efforts made to achieve advances in the revolution had been coopted by the bourgeois to slow or stop labor movements from accomplishing their goals. Hanneken draws from David Ohana's explanation to illustrate this: "The purpose of Sorel's radical analysis was to reveal the dangers of the bourgeois state of mind: the search for harmony, illusions of progress, democracy, rationalism and optimism were a cover for class interest, attempts to temper conflict, appease strife, suppress vitality and harmonise the reality of conflict."[15]

Sorel's discontent with the illusion of harmonization in the face of real class strife contributed to his theorization of conflict. To accomplish this theorization, he drew on Bergsonian conceptions of duration and qualitative difference as well as Nietzsche's will to power and Jean-Pierre Proudhon's ideas about syndicalist activism. This served an important purpose for Mariátegui's reconceptualization of history through what we might call "durational vitalism." Hanneken writes, "Where the nineteenth century's reigning philosophical models of liberalism and positivism compelled Peruvian elites to assess their society's lack of 'progress' through the rationalist view of the Hegelian march of history of social Darwinism, vitalism [via Bergsonian duration] legitimized a nonlinear, nonrational conception of modernity" (BB, 195).[16] The value of this reconceptualization of vital life, in light of its critique of Hegelianism, Hanneken writes, "allowed for the revalorization of non-Occidental, premodern, and 'primitive' cultures that science and reason had pronounced naturally and irrefutably inferior" (BB, 195).

The second contribution that Sorel's philosophy of conflict provides to Mariátegui is the creation of two concepts that ground his philosophy of conflict: myth and antagonism. For Sorel, myth is primarily conceptually developed for the purpose of his creation of the "myth of the general strike." Mariátegui would take this concept of myth to create his own "myth of indigenous socialism." Sorel writes that myths "are not descriptions of things but expressions of a will to act."[17] Myths suggest, to the people who maintain them, instances of struggling against socially oppressive systems or for socialist outcomes. These individual subjective memories or imaginative historical understandings are held together as an indivisible whole that galvanize the will. An important piece of this understanding of myth is that it draws out a second concept that Mariátegui will utilize in his own work. Whereas Hegelian history relies upon internal contradiction to bring about historical change, in the indivisibility of the myth of the general strike, there is "no longer any place for the reconciliation of opposites through the nonsense of official thinkers."[18] Deemphasizing Hegelian contradiction as the primary force of history leaves us with an emphasis on antagonism.

Hanneken goes to Ernesto Laclau, another thinker influenced by Sorel, to provide us with an understanding of antagonism. Laclau explains contradiction as the results of the logic of production that bring about a halt in the advancement of productive forces. Hanneken writes, "Antagonism, on the other hand, describes the motivations for human resistance to existing material conditions, which originate in a variety of milieus of social interaction and cannot be fully explained within the objective structure of economic reality" (BB, 204). In other words, antagonisms occur at the level of felt frustration with circumstances that are not just. When they are felt by a group, they become powerful emotional experiences, and, when they are organized by myth, they are expressions of a communal will to act.

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15) David Ohana, "Georges Sorel and the Rise of Political Myth," *History of European Ideas* 13, no. 6 (1991): 736.

16) Bracketed text is mine. Hanneken does not tie vitalism explicitly to duration. I have taken the liberty to do so myself.

17) Georges Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, ed. Jeremy Jennings (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 28.

18) Ibid.

In this differentiation and emphasis on antagonism as important to social change, we discover a significant problem with Marxist thought. Hanneken writes, "Marxism's long-standing assumption that contradiction necessarily implies antagonism – that the logic of the former subsumes the latter – manages to convert history into a 'rational and coherent process,' but in doing so it limits social transformation to a predetermined horizon where all possible developments are already accounted for in advance" (BB, 204). When the addition of the interiority of the human condition and the motives and nuances of living that have efficacy in the choice of action are introduced back into the explanation of the process of social change, it makes way for Mariátegui to understand and explain why Peru has remained stagnant in its development.

The development of the Peruvian people has been stymied, in Mariátegui's eyes, by a transformation of the Peruvian spirit that occurred, at least in part, because of the Catholic Church. Hanneken writes, "Because of its historic focus on the administration and pacification of colonial subjects, evangelization in Spanish American contented itself with coercing the outward signs of piety rather than carrying out the spiritual conversion of its flock" (BB, 203). This pacification of spirit, in turn, replaces properly religious spirituality, argues Mariátegui, because authentic religious spirituality can only be strengthened in combat.

Having little knowledge of this history, I am left wondering how Mariátegui would have engaged with Bergson's *Two Sources*. I think he would likely have distanced himself from Bergson on the basis of his understanding of "primitives." However, there does appear to be some evidence that he might not have. He did advocate that that the Peruvian people were stuck in a historical rut because of the imposition of a superficial religious spirit on their communities. This rut left them in a position of almost pure cultural repetition. For Mariátegui, this stasis was beneficial because what was repeated was essential to his myth of indigenous socialism. He writes, "In Indian villages where families are grouped together that have lost the bonds of their ancestral heritage and community work, hardy and stubborn habits of cooperation and solidarity still survive that are the empirical expression of a communist spirit."[19] The very seed of revolution was there the whole time. It simply needed to be cultivated by a transformation of the Peruvian understanding of history and organized by myth.

This final essay of the text was influential for me because it chronicled actual deployments of Bergson's philosophy in ways that addressed social injustice and provided avenues to rethink those problems in ways that allowed for adaptation and growth. The feeling that Bergson's thought could lead to an intensive understanding of morality that would shed light on our understanding of the human experience was validated in the chapters apportioned to the last part of the book. Whereas I was still trying to work out how a Bergsonian account of morality might come to be before I read this book (given my hesitance to embrace *Two Sources*), *Beyond Bergson* showed me not only that his thought could be employed to accomplish this task, but, more importantly, it illustrated that it has.

In conclusion, this book would make an invaluable contribution to the library of any Bergson scholar, and those interested in the philosophy of race, or philosophy of liberation, among others. While the difficulties associated with understanding Bergson's philosophy may make these essays a little tough to digest, it seems as though each of the authors have taken pains to make Bergson as clear as possible while not getting bogged down in long technical descriptions that would be required to produce a greater appreciation of his work. This economical explanation of Bergsonian concepts that balanced complexity with exploration of applications of Bergson's thought was nicely struck.

19) José Carlos Mariátegui, *Seven Interpretive Essays on Peruvian Reality*, trans. Marjory Urquidi (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1971), 58.