STUDIA UNIVERSITATIS BABEŞ-BOLYAI, PHILOSOPHIA, LIII, 1-2, 2008

DURATION AND IMMANENCE: THE QUESTION OF A LIFE IN DELEUZE

VERNON CISNEY[1]

ABSTRACT. The questions that my paper shall pursue are: 1) What path leads from Deleuze's early writings to his latter-day conception of a life, and 2) What can such a conception of life mean? Our path will trace a reversal and a return, respectively, through phenomenology to Bergson. For Deleuze, a genuine concept of *a* life is thinkable, only when the phenomenological subject, which Deleuze considers an illusion, has been jettisoned, reabsorbed into the flux of immanence. This implies a return to a century-old philosophical renewal, namely, the reformulation of the experience of time.

Keywords: immanence, duration, Deleuze, Bergson, *a* life (*une vie*)

"No one has hitherto laid down the limits to the powers of the body…"[2] or, as Gilles Deleuze paraphrases, "we do not even know what a body *can do*."[3] Spinoza's words mark for us the spacing of a question, one that, though not often explicitly posed in Deleuze's texts, nevertheless pervades, just beneath the surface, the entirety of his work: "What can a life be?" Such an exigency is arguably the legacy left behind by the French philosophers of the 1960's.[4] Giorgio Agamben, in an essay entitled "Absolute Immanence," famously notes that the coming philosophy "will have to take its point of departure in the concept of life…"[5] Deleuze, in his brief and final essay, confronts this question, and introduces the concept of "a life…" framing it in parallel with what he describes, with Félix Guattari in *What is Philosophy?*, as a *pure plane of immanence*. But the plane of immanence in *What is Philosophy?* serves more as a site of concept creation, the pre-philosophical field

[1] Purdue University, vcisney@purdue.edu.

[2] Spinoza, *Ethics*, III, 2 Proof.

[3] Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 39.

[4] It is important that the final philosophical engagements of Deleuze and Foucault focused on the concept of life. These essays are: Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life," *Pure Immanence: Essays on a Life*, Trans. Anne Boyman (New York: Zone Books, 2001); and Michel Foucault, "Life: Experience and Science," Trans. Carolyn Fawcett with Robert Cohen, *Essential Works of Foucault, 1954-1984: Volume II: Aesthetics, Method, and Epistemology*, ed. James Faubion, series ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: The New Press, 1998). The same holds for Derrida, whose final interview is entitled, "Learning to Live Finally: An Interview with Jean Birnbaum," in Jacques Derrida, *Learning to Live Finally: The Last Interview*, trans. Pascale-Anne Brault and Michael Naas, (Hoboken, NJ: Melville House Publishing, 2007).

[5] Giorgio Agamben, "Absolute Immanence," *Potentialities: Collected Essays in Philosophy*, ed. Trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 220.

presupposed for the creation and relation of concepts, rather than a plane of existence. The questions that my paper shall pursue are: 1) What path leads from Deleuze's early writings to his latter-day conception of a life, and 2) What can such a conception of life mean? Our path will trace a reversal and a return, respectively, through phenomenology to Bergson. For Deleuze, a genuine concept of *a* life is thinkable, only when the phenomenological subject, which Deleuze considers an illusion, has been jettisoned, reabsorbed into the flux of immanence. This implies a return to a century-old philosophical renewal, namely, the reformulation of the experience of time.

The dawn of twentieth century philosophy can best be described as a plethora of conceptual rifts, brought about perhaps by the sense of urgency one finds in early twentieth century thinkers. It is well-known that this moment in history faced what has come to be called a *crisis of foundations*; the *queen of the sciences* had been beheaded, and yet, no successor had assumed her throne. In the field of mathematics, but also in the sciences, in logic, in philosophy, and in art and culture, the *raison d'etre* had been uprooted. The task of the philosopher in the early twentieth century was to address this crisis. While some philosophers, the precursors of what has come to be known as the "analytic tradition," sought to found philosophical endeavor in a more rigorously formulated conception of logic, others, such as Henri Bergson and Edmund Husserl, followed by Martin Heidegger, sought to reestablish the foundational status of philosophy in a reformulation of ontology, an ontology more appropriate to the richness of existence as it is lived, thus returning to the sciences the ontological basis they required. Bergson, no less than Husserl, structured this reformulation in an ontology of duration and of consciousness (in the broadest imaginable sense of the word). Both Bergson and Husserl sought a reformulation of the concept of time, one grounded more appropriately in experience itself, and both based their respective methodologies on a structure of intuition (though these structures, to be sure, were markedly different). For reasons of chronology, we begin with Bergson.

I. Bergson and Duration

At the height of his career, Bergson enjoyed something of a celebrity status. Edouard Le Roy, a contemporary, writes in 1913, "There is a thinker today whose name is on everybody's lips, who is deemed by acknowledged philosophers worthy of comparison with the greatest…"[6] And Joseph Solomon, in 1911, writes of "the curiosity and admiration he [Bergson] has aroused in wide circles in […] Europe and also in America."[7] One of Bergson's most famous concepts is his concept of duration, which is introduced as early as his *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, [8] in 1889, but which guides the entirety of his work.

[6] Edouard Le Roy, *The New Philosophy of Henri Bergson*, trans. Vincent Benson, (London: Henry Holt, 1913), 1.
[7] Joseph Solomon, *Bergson*, (Port Washington, New York: Kennikat Press, 1912), 5.
[8] The English translation of this title is *Time and Free Will*.

As Leonard Lawlor notes, the challenge of Bergsonism is "that we must think in terms of duration."[9]

Bergson's concept of duration is inherently connected to his concept of intuition, which marks the method of the philosopher. Deleuze notes, "without intuition as method, duration would remain a simple psychological experience."[10] All knowledge is either relative or absolute. It is relative if it is conceptual, in the sense that the concept, as Bergson understands it, is an abstraction from the object itself, highlighting a particular aspect of the object, but one that is conceptualizable only insofar as it is shared by other objects. Thus, multiply the concepts as we like, and we shall still remain on the outside of the object, still finding only greater and more precise degrees of generality. The concepts are merely symbols that, he says, *translate*[11] the object to me. This knowledge, Bergson thinks, is not without its own value and domain—this domain being the realm of the natural sciences, the only possible method of which is the method of *analysis*, of concept abstraction and appropriation. However, it is erroneous to assume that this method is proper to the study of philosophy. The philosopher, for Bergson, is a metaphysician, in the sense that she does not seek relative knowledge, always circumspective, but rather knowledge that penetrates to the very essence of the thing, to wit, absolute knowledge. Intuition is the method whereby this becomes possible. To use Bergson's metaphor, metaphysics is the science that does not employ translation, but speaks rather with perfect fluidity the language of each object of study. He thus defines metaphysics as "*the science which claims to dispense with symbols*."[12]

The most familiar example that Bergson could use, and indeed does, is the intuition whereby each of us becomes intuitively sympathetically aware of our individual person existing over time. Looking inward, he claims, we find within ourselves a flux that goes beyond any comparison we can produce. He refers to it as a "succession of states each one of which announces what follows and contains what precedes,"[13] but it is clear from his other claims that this formulation does not adequately articulate the specificity of this flow. The states are animated with a "common life"[14] in such a way that any attempt to punctuate the flow, to distinguish individual *nows*, one from another, is merely a falsification of or abstraction from the flow itself.

Bergson, for numerous reasons, has difficulty in attempting to describe this flux. Psychologists, he notes, attempt to describe the dynamic nature of the *Ego* in conceptual terms of individual psychic states. Bergson, however, has already

---

[9] Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), ix.
[10] Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 33.
[11] Henri Bergson, "Introduction to Metaphysics," trans. Mabelle Andison, *The Creative Mind*, (New York: The Philosophical Library, 1946), 187.
[12] *Ibid*, 191.
[13] *Ibid*, 192.
[14] *Ibid.*

foreclosed the possibility of employing the conceptual method of analysis, for any philosophical pursuit. And this foreclosure, if it were not certain before, is much more so in the case of duration, due to the very nature of what a concept is (again, as Bergson understands it,) and of the nature of this duration itself. The concept abstracts, generalizes, and makes static, (which is the error of the psychologist), imposing permanence into arbitrarily chosen *slices*, so to speak, of the whole, thus persuading that the whole has been reconstituted in terms of its parts. Such, however, cannot be the case, as the parts themselves have been falsified or *translated* in the course of the analysis. The attempt to think the temporal self of the duration in conceptual terms has led to what we might call a "double danger," with empiricist and rationalist interpretations as its poles. The empiricist seeks to isolate disparate individual psychological states, bring them together under what she calls the "ego," yet in the end discovers that this ego always eludes and escapes conceptualization, and thus concludes that the ego itself is meaningless, what he calls the "empty phantom."[15] The rationalist, however, in response to the elusiveness of the ego, asserts nonetheless the absolute unity of the person, as the locus that binds together and unifies the various states. It is, he claims a "form without matter," which he says, could not "characterize a living, acting, concrete personality."[16] Conceptual analysis is thus ruled out according to Bergson. We find ourselves mired in a quandary, as intuition cannot, it seems, serve as a descriptive method, any more than can analysis. How then does Bergson locate the self?

The self seems to be, in its very essence, the duration that one finds in intuition. Having ruled out conceptual analysis, Bergson assesses the benefit of employing metaphoric images as a way of approximating the nature of duration. He concludes that, though no individual image will provide a *picture* of the duration, nevertheless, taken together, the various images might help to locate a point of convergence. And images, for Bergson, work more appropriately than do concepts, because unlike concepts, which are always static, images can represent movement. He thus offers what we might call the "insufficient metaphors." The first is an image of time as a thread taut between two spools, unwinding from one, onto the other. The second is the image of a color spectrum, consisting of a multitude of imperceptibly transitioning shades. The final image is one of an infinitely compressed point of elastic, which is gradually drawn out into a line, focusing on its path or its movement. All three fail to grasp the duration, because they, and (any other image will do the same), express either unity or multiplicity, but cannot represent both. Duration is at once "variety of qualities, continuity of progress, unity of direction,"[17] and no image (even less a concept), can represent it. The images serve to delimit the zone of indeterminacy to an infinitesimal point, which Bergson calls a point of "convergence."[18] But this convergence cannot be conceived as

[15] *Ibid*, 204.
[16] *Ibid*, 205.
[17] *Ibid*, 194.
[18] *Ibid*, 195.

overlap, as when the logic student draws her Venn diagrams on the chalkboard. The images after all are mutually exclusive—each emphasizes aspects that others exclude, and excludes aspects that others emphasize. The convergence, for Bergson, is the tension, the attunement of the mind required to think the images at all. Multiplying the images focuses the convergence, which can then be seized in intuition.

We note, however, that the method of intuition is the method of the metaphysician, of the philosopher, strictly speaking. The task for the philosopher is not to be shut up in "exclusive self-contemplation,"[19] but to dispense with symbols in the pursuit of absolute knowledge. As Deleuze notes, intuition is "the movement by which we emerge from our own duration, by which we make use of our own duration to affirm and immediately to recognize the existence of other durations, above or below us."[20] What Bergson referred to as the *tension* or *intensity* is important in this case. The intuition of one's pure duration puts one, not in the realm of isolated subjectivity, but in contact with a continuity of durations, accessible in varying intensities, the limits being weakened intensity, purely scattered homogeneity, and the infinitely intensified duration of eternity, which he calls an "eternity of life."[21] Intuition is Bergson's method of discovering duration, which occurs at various levels at various intensities, and through which is opened the possibility for absolute knowledge.

II. Husserl and the Absolute Foundation

Despite Bergson's stint of overwhelming popularity, it is also quite clear that this status was short-lived, and Bergson, by the mid-1920's, had fallen out of favor in most academic circles. His affinities with certain quasi-mystical tendencies engendered a fecundity within his thinking that provided critics with an array of charges: badly posed mysticism, irrationalism, and obscurantism, among many ideological and political accusations as well.[22] His fate was worsened by a very public engagement with Albert Einstein in 1922, after which it was widely agreed that Bergson had come out the weaker of the interlocutors.[23] In 1985, Leszek Kolakowski claims that Bergson's legacy has "survived only as a dead classic," and "that today's philosophers […] are almost entirely indifferent to his legacy."[24] It is not clear that there is any one factor that brought about the demise of French Bergsonism in the early twentieth century. What is clear, however, is that a decisive farewell took place in the event that was Husserl's baptism into French thought.

[19] *Ibid*, 217.
[20] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 33.
[21] Bergson, "Introduction to Metaphysics," 221.
[22] Bertrand Russell was one of the more noteworthy of Bergson's critics.
[23] For more on this historical discussion, see Suzanne Guerlac, *Thinking in Time: An Introduction to Henri Bergson*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2006), 12-13; and Keith Ansell Pearson, *Philosophy and the Adventure of the Virtual: Bergson and the Time of Life*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 55-65.
[24] Leszek Kolakowski, *Bergson*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 2.

This event was of course the Paris Lectures, given at the Sorbonne in February of 1929, assembled in 1930, and published as the *Cartesian Meditations.* As Foucault notes, this event "marked the moment: Phenomenology entered France through that text."[25] Levinas' first essay on Husserl appeared in the following months,[26] followed over the next few years by several others. 1930 saw the publication of Levinas' *Théorie de l'intuition dans la phénoménologie de Husserl*, which, famously, had a profound impact on Jean-Paul Sartre[27] who, in 1933, wrote his brief essay, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology,"[28] followed, in 1936 by his famous *La Transcendence de L'Ego*. Merleau-Ponty's *Phénomènologie de la perception* is published in 1945, followed by his more ontological works, inspired by the later writings of Heidegger. By this time, there was, as they say, no turning back. Phenomenology, through the lens of the existential movement, had overtaken French thought. Whatever initial intellectual disagreements Husserl had had with Bergson, Husserl, it seemed, had carried the day.

Husserl's philosophy underwent many transformations throughout the course of his career. His *Logical Investigations*, though inestimably important for philosophy in the twentieth century, maintain a preoccupation with concerns of logic and epistemology, based in the structures of consciousness and intentionality and for this reason, the concepts elucidated therein tend in the direction of stasis. Over the next few years, Husserl began to believe that phenomenology held a myriad of wealth for understanding all the various dynamic fields of experience and knowledge. Simply put, experience far exceeded what Husserl himself had allowed. Thus, in the wake of the *Investigations*, Husserl became engrossed in the question of the experience of time, which would push him into the direction of the transcendental phenomenology of the *Ideas*, and would preoccupy much of his work throughout his life. He began to think of time as the fundamental experiential framework from which all experiences are constituted. As such, he held, it was of fundamental priority for phenomenological study. Husserl's time-consciousness structure is what Deleuze appears to be reversing in "Immanence: A Life…" and so we now turn to a brief exposition of this structure.[29]

The *time-consciousness* lectures, as they are now called, were delivered as the final part of a four-part course in February of 1905 at Göttingen.[30] In paragraph 25,

---

[25] Michel Foucault, Introduction, *The Normal and the Pathological*, by Georges Canguilhem, (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 8. This introduction is an earlier version of Foucault's aforementioned final essay: "Life: Experience and Science."

[26] Emmanuel Levinas, "Sur les 'Ideen' de M.E. Husserl," *Revue Philosophique de la France et de l'Etranger*, CVII (1929), 54th year, no. 3-4, March-April, pp. 230-65.

[27] See Simone de Beauvoir, *Adieux: A Farewell to Sartre*, trans. Patrick O'Brian, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 157, as well as Ronald Hayman, *Sartre: A Life*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 97.

[28] *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol 1, no 2, May 1970, pp 4-5.

[29] Husserl is a prolific writer, whose project was far-reaching, and I realize that I am painting with very broad strokes in my descriptions. I hope to have represented responsibly his position.

[30] John Barnett Brough, Translator's Introduction, *On the Phenomenology of the Consciousness of Internal Time (1893-1917)*, by Edmund Husserl, (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1991), xiii.

Husserl mentions his notion of the "living present,"[31] which *is*, put simply, Husserl's structure of time consciousness. Husserl formulates the living present in response to what he takes to be inadequacies among psychologists in describing time in its experiential flow.[32] The living present for Husserl consists of the primal impression, "what is signified by the word *now*, insofar as it is taken in the strictest sense."[33] The primal impression is the ever-renewed, punctuated now moment, the moment of perception, strictly speaking. But the living present consists, in addition to the primal impression, of a halo, thickened with what Husserl calls *retention* and *protention*. Retention is a memory, but not in the sense that we normally use the term, as in a recollection of a past event; rather retention is a memory still living, still connected to the moment of primal impression, still being perceived. Likewise the living present contains an element of protention, a consciousness of expectation. But again, this expectation is primary; it is not the expectation of awaiting a friend, but more immediate—in perceiving the bus approaching the bus stop, I stand, expecting it to pull over and let me on. It has little to do with reflection. The living present, Husserl's structure of temporality, has as its absolute center, the primal impression, and is thickened with a halo of memory and expectation.

As I have hinted, it is in Husserl's exploration of the phenomenology of time-consciousness that he comes to develop his notion of absolute subjectivity. That is to say, time-consciousness pushes phenomenology into the transcendental realm. In the first edition of the *Logical Investigations*, Husserl, following Hume's lead, had denied the very possibility of experiencing anything like a pure subjectivity, or pure ego.[34] In the Second Edition of 1913,[35] however, Husserl writes in the Foreword, "I no longer approve of the rejection of the pure ego,"[36] stating however, that he has left the arguments in truncated form in order to sustain the dialogue into which he and Paul Natorp had entered on the subject. However, his claims in the Fifth Investigation with respect to the ego, are footnoted with the claim that "I have since managed to find it…"[37] In the time-consciousness lectures, paragraphs 34-36, Husserl provides an argument for the necessity of this discovery.

---

[31] Edmund Husserl. *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness.* Ed. Martin Heidegger. Trans. James Churchill. (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1964), 77.

[32] Brentano serves as his chief opponent in this critique and reformulation. However, whether or not Husserl realizes it, in his critique lies a criticism of the Western model of time dating back to Aristotle. See *Physics*, IV.9, where Aristotle describes time as a succession of now points, which serve to measure change. For Aristotle, there is no time without change, and no change without time. This punctilinear model of time, coupled with the incapability of early twentieth century psychology to conceptualize a different sort of memory, to wit, Husserl's notion of *retention*, led to the obvious insufficiencies of Brentano's account of time. This is what Husserl sought to overcome.

[33] *Ibid*, 92.

[34] Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume II*, ed. Dermot Moran, trans. J.N. Findlay, (New York: Routledge, 1970), 92.

[35] Contemporaneous with *Ideas I*.

[36] Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume I*, 8.

[37] Husserl, *Logical Investigations Volume II*, 353 n8.

Each object of consciousness, he claims, is, in some sense, a process—it exists over time, and is continuous in time, which is to say, *as* a process (which, of course, does not preclude the possibility of change over time). At root, this first premise claims that nothing whatsoever can be conceived as existing at any particular now point, *except* as part of a larger process. Secondly, any object, of logical necessity, is either static or changing; any moment of stasis can open up to alteration, and any moment of alteration can crystallize into a stasis. The constitutive phenomena themselves, however, bear no resemblance to other objects of consciousness. Each phase of its flux is a "continuity of shading,"[38] such that no particular phase can be conceived as continuous succession. On the contrary, what we find in the constitutive phenomena is the paradox of continuous alteration. It is thus senseless to say that the phenomena do exist, and *did* exist before, (as the ego is the timeless sourcepoint). Nevertheless there is a certain sort of continuity to be ascribed to it, namely, a continuity of flux, consisting of the structure of the *before*, the *now*, and, it would seem, the *not yet*. Even if it may appear as though this structure would itself be a succession, Husserl claims that this is not the case. The structure itself, of before, now, and not yet, is itself, timeless, unchanging. It is filled out in an ever-changing stream of consciousness, but the structure itself maintains its form. This is the "absolute subjectivity," having "absolute properties,"[39] describable only metaphorically as "flux" or "flow."

III. A Philosophy of Immanence

Avowed torchbearers of the phenomenological tradition, such as Heidegger,[40] Merleau-Ponty, and Derrida, have offered many sophisticated critiques, reformulations, radicalizations, and deconstructions of the Husserlian project. By comparison, Deleuze's critique actually seems quite simple: Husserl's structure of time-consciousness is, in the end, a structure of transcendence and, though it would seek to provide a thoroughly phenomenological account of experience, any philosophy of transcendence will of its very nature exceed the limits of experience and will thus falsify or "denature" immanence. Deleuze finds a companion in his critique in a most unlikely source, namely, Jean-Paul Sartre's 1936 *La transcendence de l'ego*. Deleuze calls this essay "decisive," and claims that Sartre exposes therein the conditions according to which a philosophy of immanence must be undertaken: "an impersonal transcendental field, not having the form of a synthetic personal consciousness or a subjective identity—with the subject, on the contrary, being always constituted."[41]

The Transcendence of the Ego, published in 1937, is one of Sartre's earliest and most groundbreaking works. This early engagement with Husserlian

[38] Husserl, *The Phenomenology of Internal Time-Consciousness*, 99. Brough's translation here uses the word 'adumbrations' in place of 'shading.'
[39] *Ibid*, 100.
[40] Heidegger's *ecstatic temporality* is structurally similar in many striking ways to Husserl's notion of the living present.
[41] Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas, trans. Mark Lester with Charles Stivale, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 98-99.

phenomenology emphasizes both the extent to which Sartre's project was indebted to Husserl's, and at the same time, the great difference between the transcendental phenomenology that Husserl had erected, and the existentialist ontology of freedom that Sartre was beginning to formulate. In some ways, the essay marks this transition.

The guiding contention of Sartre's essay is that the transcendental ego is not found in consciousness, or behind consciousness, but rather, if it is discovered at all, it is discovered only beyond or outside of consciousness, constituted, as a transcendent object in the world. Early on, the element of Husserlian phenomenology that had most captivated Sartre was the spontaneity of consciousness. Consciousness is defined by its intentional structure, its inherent capacity to 'burst toward,'[42] to explode outward, in a perpetual spontaneity, an unceasing act of self-transcendence and escape. Husserl's claim that the ego is required in order to explain the primordial unification of consciousness is, for Sartre, fundamentally mistaken, precisely because of the structure of intentionality. This structure, by its very definition, makes impossible the discovery of a substantial, unifying *I* behind consciousness. Consciousness is conscious *of*—this is Sartre's battle cry. It is always transcending, so if the ego is discovered at all *by* consciousness, it can only be as a transcendent object. He claims that, although Husserl acknowledges that the transcendence of the ego is of a different sort than that of objects of consciousness, this changes nothing. In the end, it is admittedly a transcendent, and it is precisely the factical existence of transcendent objects that phenomenology has suspended in the εποχή. "Let us be more radical," he claims, "and assert without fear that *all transcendence* must fall under the εποχή."[43]

Moreover, he denies Husserl's assertion that the ego is somehow required to unify consciousness. Consciousness unifies itself in the consciousness of other consciousnesses, present and past, and Husserl's time-consciousness structure already shows this, according to Sartre. We saw already that in Husserl's living present the primal impression is always accompanied by memory. Sartre explains this, not in terms of an absolute subjectivity, but in terms of "'transversal intentionalities' which are concrete and real retentions of past consciousnesses."[44] Consciousness unifies itself in being conscious of an object, and in being conscious of *having been* conscious of that object. Consciousness is thus unified in the objects, [Back to the things themselves!] rather than an absolute timeless interiority.

Finally, the transcendental ego would, given its factical reality, serve a pernicious end—it would divide consciousness, and "tear consciousness from itself […] The transcendental *I*," he claims, "is the death of consciousness."[45] It would,

[42] Jean-Paul Sartre, "Intentionality: A Fundamental Idea of Husserl's Phenomenology," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology*, vol 1, no 2, May 1970, pp 4-5.
[43] Jean-Paul Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego: An Existentialist Theory of Consciousness*, trans. Forrest Williams and Robert Kirkpatrick, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989), 51.
[44] *Ibid*, 39.
[45] *Ibid*, 40.

in one sense, hypostatize what can only be described as pure spontaneity. In another sense, it would impose a fissure in consciousness itself, thus divesting consciousness of its *absolute*—and we must take care to note Sartre's unique sense of *absolute*—status. Sartre's sense of *absolute* entails that pure consciousness is conscious of itself. But not as a self-reflective act, but as a pure immediacy, "all lightness, all translucence,"[46] on a level where Being and appearance are no longer distinct. This is perhaps difficult to parse out, but we may state that for Sartre, the consciousness that is conscious of itself can be expressed in this manner—as an awareness of an awareness, where Husserl's formulation is perhaps expressible in this way—an awareness of the *I* in its act of awareness. For Sartre, not only is this, as we have seen, a falsification, but it is one that takes away from consciousness that which is most fundamentally its own, its absoluteness. Therefore, Sartre concludes, being an unnecessary entity, one that falsifies and divides consciousness, one that can be posited only in an act of transcendence, there is no room for the transcendental ego in a philosophical methodology that deems itself to be, in the manner of William James, a "radical empiricism."

Sartre's essay ends with a list of "Conclusions," but these conclusions are far more than a mere "taking stock" of the critique he has leveled—occupying fourteen pages, they mark rather the ontological field that has been exposed, which Deleuze repeatedly notes as an example of a plane of immanence.[47] Sartre calls this field the "Transcendental Field,"[48] which, purified of the egological heaviness under which it had been bound, "recovers its primary transparency."[49] The transcendental subject is reabsorbed into the field itself, as a constituted object, not as a factically real entity behind consciousness. Thus purified, consciousness finds once again its absoluteness, in two senses of the term. It is absolute in the sense that it is a *nothing*. Consciousness itself has no contents, but consists in perpetually bursting forth. And yet, it is an *all* as well, as it is consciousness of all those things transcendent to it. The chimaeras of psychological states, which on the basis of the language we use would seem to point towards inherence and from here to interiority, are to be described purely in terms of *act* and *performance*. Thus what Sartre has describe is a sphere of pure immediacy, or what he calls "pure spontaneities,"[50] to anticipate Deleuze, we might say "pure movement." The field is impersonal, asubjective, and is determined only by its spontaneities, its burstings, which are determined only by themselves. For Deleuze, this essay is the key to moving beyond

[46] *Ibid*, 42.
[47] See, for example, Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 98-99; Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 47-48; Gilles Deleuze, "Immanence; A Life…," trans. Anne Boyman, *Pure Immanence: Essays on A Life…*, (New York: Zone Books, 2001), 26, 32n2.
[48] Sartre, *The Transcendence of the Ego*, 93ff. This is another concept that Deleuze will take up and use.
[49] *Ibid*, 93.
[50] *Ibid*, 96.

the limitations of the subject. This essay is the movement of the reversal, the reversal that "restores the rights of immanence,"[51] and clears the way for something new. We turn now to the discussion of immanence as found in *What is Philosophy?*

The issue of the plane of immanence is raised following the discussion of the concept of the concept, what a concept is. The plane of immanence is a conceptual plane, (which is not to say that the plane itself is a concept). Rather, it is the prephilosophical plane that is presupposed in the institution of any philosophy, in the creation of any system of concepts. To understand why, we need to take a short detour through the discussion of the concept. Every concept is a multiplicity of components, and is in fact defined by these components, which are "heterogeneous components traversed by a point of absolute survey at infinite speed."[52] The components are united in that each one of them shares some degree of overlap with at least one other component. In this space of overlap, the components are indistinguishable, and these zones of indeterminacy serve as bridges or ties that unite the components, and hence the concept, together. Every concept has a history, but also has a becoming. (And on this point we will begin to see the plane of immanence being employed). Its history is the way in which the concept has been employed through various planes, various philosophies. The becoming is the way in which the concept connects and relates to other concepts on the same plane. The history and becoming may or may not be the same for any given concept. For instance, Husserl's cogito is a concept that operates on a plane with concepts such as εποχή, reduction, and eidetic variation, while Descartes' cogito operates on a plane with concepts such as the Natural Light and continuous creation. Husserl's cogito thus shares with the other concepts on the plane a becoming, but not a history. The components of concepts themselves are concepts, and the concepts reach out to one another. This reaching out, this interaction is why the plane of immanence is required.

This plane, as we have said, is a conceptual plane, but not in the sense that it is itself a concept—it is precisely that which defies conceptualization—but that it is required for the interrelations of any configuration of concepts. It is prephilosophical. This does not imply that it is non-philosophical, but that concepts must always refer to a non-conceptual understanding.[53] Philosophy, they claim, constructs, but construction presupposes two things: 1) the site of the construction, and 2) that which occupies the site. This being the case, philosophy is the creation of concepts, *and* the institution of the site. The problem of thought has always been, according to Deleuze and Guattari, the infinite speed of thought—the way concepts relate to one another, the way, when necessary, new connections are

[51] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 47.
[52] *Ibid*, 21.
[53] Heidegger and Descartes are two good examples. Heidegger invoked what he calls a preontological understanding of being. And for Descartes, that thinking entails being is so obvious that it is not even up for grabs.

instantaneously formed and old ones, no longer required, slip out of being. The speed and movement of thought require, according to Deleuze and Guattari, a milieu that itself moves, that *is* movement, we might say. To elucidate, they employ the metaphor of the wave: "Concepts are like multiple waves, rising and falling, but the plane of immanence is the single wave that rolls them up and unrolls them."[54] A wave rises and falls, peaks, and levels off. Its surfaces can touch at any point, encompassing multiple points in one intersection, and just as quickly as this intersection is formed, it can be undone. The wave, we might say, is nothing more than the movement of its surfaces. The plane of immanence is the presupposed milieu of movement—its very life and purpose is this movement that brings concepts into interplay. With this in mind, we see in *What is Philosophy?* a clearer turning away from Husserl's phenomenological structure, and more specifically, the structure of the subject as the internal time-consciousness structure. Movement is precisely what cannot be sacrificed in our image of thought, and for Deleuze and Guattari, movement is the very element that is and must be sacrificed in the positing of the transcendental subject. Daniel W. Smith writes, "when one says that the field of consciousness is immanent *to* a transcendental subject, one is already erecting the subject as an element of transcendence that goes beyond the flux of experience."[55] Immanence becomes immanent *to* a transcendent, in whatever sense, religious or secular, of the word. "When misunderstood in this way, the plane of immanence […] is a simple field of phenomena that now only possess in a secondary way that which first of all is attributed to the transcendent unity."[56] This could very easily be a description of Husserl. We recall that the subject is *timeless*, but that its internal structure is such that it imposes, or constitutes time *in* experience, because this is what it is its very nature to do. Deleuze reverses this structure: "Ce n'est pas l'immanence qui est « à » la conscience, mais l'inverse."[57] For Deleuze and Guattari, the movement itself is primary, and must remain so.

IV. An Image of A Life…

Notice, that everything we have said thus far regarding immanence has to do with immanence as a movement of thinking, a conceptual plane, rather than a plane of existence. Why then, in 1995, in Deleuze's final essay, does he claim, "We will say of pure immanence that it is A LIFE, and nothing else."?[58] Something has shifted, it seems, though it is not clear what that might be. The primary theme

[54] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 36.
[55] Daniel W. Smith, "Deleuze and Derrida, Immanence and Transcendence: Two Directions in Recent French Thought," in ed. Paul Patton and John Protevi, *Between Deleuze and Derrida*, (London and New York: Continuum, 2003), 47.
[56] *Ibid*, 45.
[57] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie*, (Paris: Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991), 50.
[58] Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life…," 27.

that dominates the early part of the essay is a familiar one. He writes, "What is a transcendental field?[59] It can be distinguished from experience in that it doesn't refer to an object or belong to a subject…"[60] The driving theme is the a-subjective consciousness that is proper to the plane of immanence. With this in mind, he again draws the distinction between his brand of transcendental empiricism and any system of knowledge having to do with the subject/object distinction. He once again emphasizes that immanence is immanent to nothing, except for itself. Immanence is immanent only in immanence. But again, these themes have been laid out elsewhere. What has changed that engenders the declaration of immanence as "a life"? There is one word introduced, used only once, and used in such a manner that one can easily pass over it quickly as obvious. Yet, this word is a technical term for Deleuze, such that its use is not and cannot be accidental or arbitrary: duration. Immanence, he says, is a "qualitative duration of consciousness without a self."[61] This word, duration, is new in describing immanence. Not one time through the course of the chapter on Immanence in *What is Philosophy?* does the term appear. Yet here, in the opening lines of the essay, it is used to characterize immanence. This term is the introduction that makes possible the shift to defining immanence in terms of a life.

Duration, in Deleuze's *Bergsonism* text, is defined as "an internal multiplicity of succession, of fusion, of organization, of heterogeneity, of qualitative discrimination, or of *difference in kind*; it is a *virtual and continuous* multiplicity that cannot be reduced to numbers."[62] Duration is not indivisible, rather, its divisibility consists in a perpetual heterogeneity—it divides by changing the kind of thing it is. For Bergson, the past and present differ, not in degree, but in kind. Duration might then be defined as succession which differs from itself.[63] And indeed, in an early essay on Bergson, Deleuze defines duration as "*what differs from itself.*"[64] Immanence is pure movement, but Deleuze and Guattari also refer to it as "pure variation,"[65] or we may even say that immanence is pure immediacy, as the significance of the movement of immanence is that it instantaneously brings concepts into contact with one another. Thus, A Life, as Deleuze conceives it, is immanence, infused with duration. The use of the indefinite article is important. It does not mark an empirical indeterminacy, but a determinacy by the transcendental field, by immanence itself. It is the indeterminacy of the individual, which is to say that it is not *his* life

[59] This points back to Sartre's essay.
[60] Deleuze, "Immanence: A Life…," 25.
[61] *Ibid.*
[62] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 38.
[63] This again distinguishes Bergson's duration from Husserl's time-consciousness. For Husserl, retention marks a now that was, but is no more. It is in the mode of shading off, but it retains the temporal impression, the temporal stamp, that it received when present in the mode of primal impression.
[64] Deleuze, "Bergson's Conception of Difference," ed. David Lapoujade, trans. Michael Taormina, *Desert Islands and Other Texts: 1953-1974*, (Los Angeles and New York: Semiotext(e), 2004), 37.
[65] Deleuze and Guattari, *What is Philosophy?*, 39.

or *her* life. It is not *the* life belonging to this or that subject. But this particular indeterminacy marks the determination of the singular. A life is a pure plane of immanence, pure immediacy, pure variation, suffused with duration which is the constant movement of differentiation.

V. Conclusion

What can a return to Bergson mean? Deleuze asked this question in 1988, and he offered this as a response: "A 'return to Bergson' does not only mean a renewed admiration for a great philosopher but a renewal or an extension of his project today, in relation to the transformations of life and society…"[66] A return to Bergson is the extension of his project. And this speaks to the way in which Deleuze always approaches the history of philosophy, as a counter-historian, actualizing a virtual that has never been actualized before, in a grand experimentation of thought. In the famous conversations between Deleuze and Claire Parnet, Deleuze describes his own method: "I liked writers who seemed to be part of the history of philosophy, but who escaped from it in one respect, or altogether: Lucretius, Spinoza, Hume, Nietzsche, Bergson," and he goes on to say, "Bergson, of course, was also caught up in French-style history of philosophy, and yet in him there is something that cannot be assimilated, which enabled him to provide a shock, to be a rallying point for all the opposition, the object of so many hatreds…"[67]

At the dawn of the twentieth century, there stood two opposing philosophies of consciousness. One presented an ontology of duration, memory, and the *élan vital*. The other presented an ontology of the transcendental subject, the εποχή, and of constitution. One triumphed, while the other was marginalized and in many ways, forgotten. A return to Bergson implies tracing the trajectory that Bergson's thought might have taken, to extend it into a relevant discussion with today's crisis, which Agamben has identified as the question of life. What can this extension bring? What can Deleuze's final reflections on life be? Perhaps an opening to explore the frontiers, to unsettle and dislocate anything that we unreflectively take to be a 'given' of human nature. Perhaps to question, with Spinoza, and with Deleuze, to explore what a body can do.

[66] Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 115.
[67] Gilles Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 14-15.