

# Eschatological Temporality, Or: ‘Bergson and the Reign of *Theos*’

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Eschatology confronts us with a long list of problems. Clearly, the issue of temporality is one of these. How are we to conceive of time in the eschaton? How can we reconcile the biblical witness and church tradition with various philosophical accounts of temporality? This paper will demonstrate how Henri Bergson’s philosophical notion of duration is applicable to theological discourse. I will accomplish this by (1) placing Bergson within the theological and philosophical tradition of Augustine and Kant, (2) comparing Bergson to two of his contemporaries, Bertrand Russell and Albert Einstein, and (3) by describing Bergson’s notion of duration. Throughout the paper, one will find mention of the phrases “the kingdom of heaven”/“the reign of God” and a discussion of how this may be understood in light of Bergson’s theory. In conclusion, we will see that Bergson’s duration offers a remedy to many of the ambiguities surrounding temporality and the eschaton.

We often symbolize time as an hourglass or clock. “It is not easy,” writes Bergson, “to escape the image of the hour-glass.”<sup>1</sup> The common way people conceive of time is by spatializing it.<sup>2</sup> In doing so, we lose sight of what time actually is. This becomes highly problematic for theological discussions of eternal life. I think it would be safe to claim that heaven is not merely “a really long time.” For Bergson, “Real duration is what we have always called time.”<sup>3</sup> Later, the notion of duration will be discussed at length. For now, let us focus on the common way of conceiving time. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson states, “The time which the astronomer [or physicist or mathematician] introduces into his formulae, the time which our clocks divide into equal portions, this time, at least, is something

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<sup>1</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, translated by Arthur Mitchell (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1913), 18.

<sup>2</sup> The phrase “the common way” of understanding temporality is used throughout this essay to denote the spatializing of time that is commonly accepted. Typically, individuals understand time as a logical entity mathematically represented by the hands on a clock.

<sup>3</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Perception of Change,” in *The Creative Mind: An Introduction to Metaphysics*, translated by Mabelle L. Andison (New York: Citadel Press, 2002), 149.

different [from real duration].”<sup>4</sup> The common way one thinks of time is as movement over space, e.g., the movement of the earth around the sun or the hands on a clock. Zeno and the Eleatic philosophers found this to be a paradox. Zeno considered a scenario in which Achilles and a tortoise run a race in which the tortoise is given a head start. Of course, one’s experience would testify to the fact that Achilles, or any able human person, would inevitably catch up and surpass the tortoise. If time is a series of instants/presents/nows, then how can Achilles ever catch up to win? Numerical (clock) time cannot account for this. Zeno’s point is that Achilles would never reach the tortoise. Each step taken by the tortoise is one more ahead of Achilles. It is by confusing time with space that we arrive at Zeno’s paradox. In Bergson’s corrective to this, we also find a creative way in which we can understand the nature of reality and existence. This creative way, Bergson’s account of duration, may help us understand temporality in the eschaton. First, let us turn to two of Bergson’s historical predecessors.

## AUGUSTINE

In *Confessions* XI, Augustine raises the question of temporality in relation to creation. He first describes God as uniquely different from all created entities, which are in time. He writes, “It is not in time that You are before all time: otherwise You would not be before all time.”<sup>5</sup> There was no time before God created the world. God exists in “ever-present eternity.” Claiming that time was established synchronically with the material world, Augustine asserts that temporality is characteristic of creation and not of the divine.

He then raises the more difficult question of what time actually is: “If nothing passed there would be no past time; if nothing were approaching, there would be no future time; if nothing were, there would be no present time.”<sup>6</sup> How can one conceive of the past and future as real if neither exist in the present? The past is no longer now and future has not yet come to be now. Even the present fades into the past and is directed toward non-existence. True to the human experience, Augustine admits that one may speak of past and future in terms of duration—the central focus of Bergson’s concept of time—but not the present, which is always instantaneous as a discrete moment. Yet, if past and future do not exist in themselves, where can they be said to exist?

Augustine reconciles the existence of past, present, and future by placing all three times within the present. Each time exists only in the present as “a present of

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*, translated by F.L. Pogson (Mineola: Dover Publications, Inc., 2001), 107.

<sup>5</sup> Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by F.J. Sneed. Introduced by Peter Brown (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1993), XI.xiii, 218.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, XI.xiv, 219.

things past, a present of things present, [and] a present of things future.”<sup>7</sup> On the one hand, we attempt to measure the “length” of time. On the other, we cannot measure that which no longer exists or that which is not yet. The aporia of time is corrected in two stages. One, time is not the movement of entities over an extended space and, therefore, refuses to be measured empirically. Two, time is a mental construction experienced in the present and the measurement of time is rather the measurement of impressions of things passing through the mind in the present. The latter point is an important contribution to the development of philosophical accounts of time as a mental construct or intuition, e.g., as found in Kant’s account of temporality.

## KANT

Like Augustine, Kant places temporality within human consciousness. This, of course, is done with modification. In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant claims that time “is not an empirical conception” nor is it a “discursive or, as it is called, general conception, but a pure form of the sensuous intuition.”<sup>8</sup> Time is the necessary condition for the possibility of experience. His exposition of time accomplishes two objectives—one negative and the other positive. Kant wants to distance himself from Newtonian and Leibnizian views of time. Both understand one’s knowledge of time to depend upon one’s experience of external entities. While both Newton and Leibniz assert that time itself is independent of the human perceiver, Newtonian time has no observable properties in itself and Leibnizian time is merely one type of relation between entities. Kant rejects both views on the grounds that they propose time to be real in itself and fail to account for the *a priori* conditions for experience.

Kant’s positive description of time describes time as “a necessary representation, lying at the foundation of all our intuitions.”<sup>9</sup> In other words, time is a pure intuition that is a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. Time is not found solely within a particular experience; rather, it is already in the mind of the perceiver prior to any such experience. It is that which allows for any experience to be existentially possible. Time is already presupposed in an experience in order to allow for one to grasp relations such as “at the same time” or “succeeding in time.”

From his exposition, Kant draws the following three conclusions:

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., *Confessions*, XI. xx, 223.

<sup>8</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1990), 28.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 28.

1. Time is not something which subsists in itself, or which inheres in things as an objective determination, and therefore remains, when abstraction is made of the subjective conditions of the intuition of things.
2. Time is nothing else than the form of the internal sense, that is, of the intuitions of self and of our internal state. For time cannot be any determination of outward phenomena.
3. Time is the formal condition *a priori* of all phenomena whatsoever.<sup>10</sup>

Kant's conclusions reveal an interpretation of time as a subjective and formal condition for human experience. Consequently, it would be faulty to describe entities as "being in time" since transcendently ideal time is not real in itself or a quality of things independent of human consciousness.

The reader should note, for our present purpose, that both Augustine and Kant characterize time in relation to human consciousness. According to them, time is not an entity itself nor is it reducible to the level of physical properties. It cannot be reduced to space, which is the common way of understanding time, i.e., the movement of objects traversing space from one point to another. It fails to understand the reality of relativity as given in physics, the evolutionary development of the world, and the human experience of change.

## **TWO OF BERGSON'S CONTEMPORARIES**

In the early twentieth century, proponents of non-spatial accounts of time understood temporality in light of either logical positivism and mathematics or quantum physics. Bertrand Russell, one of the leading positivists and mathematicians of the time, claimed that change "over time" can only be understood objectively through mathematics. Continuity cannot be thought metaphysically but only logically. In *Our Knowledge of the External World*, Russell claims that change is "instants without duration."<sup>11</sup> However much two instants appear to be in succession, there exists an infinite amount of fractions between them. This is not to claim that Russell denies continuity, merely that continuity is a property belonging to the order of entities in the world in so far as logical analysis asserts the ordering. Russell's positivism leads him to conclude that time is not inherent in objects themselves but is inherent in the logical ordering

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>11</sup> Bertrand Russell, *Our Knowledge of The External World* (Chicago: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1914), 151. Russell frequently criticized Bergson's concept of duration as metaphysical speculation.

of objects. In other words, what one considers to be time is empirically experienced as a consequence of logical analysis.

In Physics, Albert Einstein's theory of relativity opened up new ways of understanding time.<sup>12</sup> Like the aforementioned, Einstein claims that time does not exist in itself. At the same time, Einstein retains the notion of the instant. What is relative is the simultaneity of instants. Gilles Deleuze notes Bergson's summary of Einstein's theory as "everything begins from a certain idea of movement that entails a contraction of bodies and a dilation of their time."<sup>13</sup> One philosophical critique of Einstein is that his notion of the relativity of multiple times implies a single unified time by which this plurality is measured. While physics attempts to measure the relative plurality of instants, it fails to account the duration of time. This is the point of departure for Bergson.<sup>14</sup> In Bergson's account, duration escapes being subject to mathematical investigation.

## **BERGSON**

Although Bergson was a major figure in the beginning of the last century, his philosophy was ignored in the wake of logical positivism and phenomenology. However, with the rise in studies on Gilles Deleuze, who was a scholar of Bergsonism, Bergson's philosophy regained subtle importance. Today, few major contemporary philosophers, e.g., Keith Ansell Pearson and Leonard Lawlor, are in dialogue with Bergson's corpus and often place him among philosophers such as Spinoza and Nietzsche. What are presently taken as his two major philosophical contributions are his conception of time as duration and his distinction between continuous multiplicity and discrete multiplicity. Continuous multiplicity implies duration and change. Discrete multiplicity is understood as a discontinuous, static series.

The common way one conceives time is to think of it as a homogenous medium, as a linear progression of static points or presents. We derive the conception of time from the spatial arrangement of objects and the movement of objects from one point to another. For Bergson, however, time cannot be reduced to space; "as soon as we try to measure it, we unwittingly replace it by space."<sup>15</sup> To think spatially is not to properly think duration. "The challenge of Bergsonism,"

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<sup>12</sup> Bergson and Einstein met in Paris during April 1922. In their writings, both occasionally responded to the other.

<sup>13</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 79.

<sup>14</sup> Although this is unresolved in *Duration and Simultaneity, with Reference to Einstein's Theory* and in the earlier *Time and Free Will*, Bergson's middle writings do well at distinguishing between a single time and a single intensity of duration.

<sup>15</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 106.

according to Lawlor, “is to think in terms of duration.”<sup>16</sup> The present essay will focus on the development of Bergson’s key concept—duration—in order to meet this challenge.

The human perceiver does not have access to the instant/present/now as such. Rather, one has access to the intensity of that which is experienced in duration. The mental states that are exhibited in an experience affect the way in which the duration is perceived. One’s mood or attunement conditions one’s everyday experiences. For example, she who is happy to be with her loved one will find that “time flies” when the two are together. A bored student will feel as if an average lecture “lasted for hours.” No doubt, people are aware that some experiences feel longer or shorter than others; yet, when questioned, they will appeal to the mathematical time of homogenous, discrete instants. This, in turn, fails to account for the qualitative nature of experience that leads one to describe her or his experience by using expressions such as “time flies.”

“Time and change,” according to Paul Tillich, “are present in the depth of Eternal Life, but they are contained within the eternal unity of the Divine Life.”<sup>17</sup> Jesus, no doubt, understood this qualitative aspect of experience. While speaking of the kingdom of heaven, Jesus uses loose similes. On the one hand, the kingdom has its basis in the divine. On the other, the kingdom is experienced on an individual level with varying intensities of affect. Luke 17:20 records Jesus saying, “The coming of the reign of God cannot be observed, and no one will announce, ‘Look, here it is,’ or, ‘There it is.’ For behold, the reign of God is among you.”<sup>18</sup> The portraits of the kingdom as already actualized lend credence to the qualitative intensity. Experiences of the kingdom may be found in a multiplicity, e.g., in repentance or in feeding the poor.<sup>19</sup> The affect (and existence) of this kingdom cannot be measured qualitatively.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson criticizes the spatializing of temporality. Proponents of the common way reduce time to space by emphasizing extension and succession. We plot our mental states as points on a line in order to contemplate on them simultaneously. To do this, however, makes impossible the ability to think of these points as discrete and successive. Bergson provides two illustrations to make his point. In the first, he describes the movement of his finger over a surface. This experience is filled with a series of various qualities. He writes:

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<sup>16</sup> Leonard Lawlor, *The Challenge of Bergsonism: Phenomenology, Ontology, Ethics* (New York: Continuum, 2003), 80.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III: Life and the Spirit; History and the Kingdom of God (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 418.

<sup>18</sup> All scripture quotations are taken from the New American Bible.

<sup>19</sup> See Matthew 4:17; 10:7; 12:28; Mark 11:10; and Luke 10:9-11; 17:20-21.

One of two things happens: either I picture these sensations to myself as in duration only, and in that case they succeed one another in such a way that I cannot at a given moment perceive a number of them as simultaneous and yet distinct; or else I make out an order of succession, but in that case I display the faculty not only of perceiving a succession of elements, but also of setting them out in line after having distinguished them.<sup>20</sup>

In his second illustration, Bergson contrasts duration with the swinging of a pendulum.<sup>21</sup> For each second, the pendulum completes one oscillation. One minute, or sixty seconds, equals sixty oscillations. Bergson notes the impossibility of having one mental perception of all sixty oscillations at one moment and having this same perception include the idea of succession. This would be possible (as an abstraction) only by representing one oscillation by one point on a line. One minute is then reduced in representation as sixty points on a line, which denies the pure qualitative aspect of temporality.

It can then be said that a representation of space is implied in an order of succession. Consequently, to define time by space is merely symbolic. One cannot think of the series simultaneously and distinctly because to think of these instants together is to ignore the varying quality of sensations. Indeed, duration itself is wholly qualitative. Mental states fluidly mix together and cannot be investigated in their singularity; they have no definitive lines between them to signal the completion of one state and the beginning of another.

Bergson often contrasts his notion of duration with the paradoxes of Zeno, in which time is reduced to the movement of entity from one position to another.<sup>22</sup> Motion contains the following two elements: (1) the homogenous, divisible space that is traversed and (2) the indivisible, consciously real act of traversing. “The mistake of the Eleatics,” according to Bergson, “arises from their identification of this series of acts, each of which is of a definite kind and indivisible, with the homogenous space which underlies them.”<sup>23</sup> While space is infinitely divisible as extension, it would be a mistake to equate two simultaneous positions in space with the movement of entities as acts.

The movements themselves, which are qualitative, do not occupy space. The common way one understands time is in terms of motion: the seconds on a clock,

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<sup>20</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 102.

<sup>21</sup> See *ibid.*, 104.

<sup>22</sup> See Bergson’s “The Perception of Change.”

<sup>23</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 113.

the orbit of the earth around the sun, or the arrow flying through the air. The reduction of time to motion and, therefore, space is the same mistake as that of Zeno and the Eleatics. Bergson's criticism runs as follows:

1. The space between two points is infinitely divisible into an infinite amount of intervals.
2. Movement is formed by the aggregate of intervals.
3. Therefore, the traversing of intervals becomes impossible.

Bergson's corrective is to understand the movement from one position to another as a mental synthesis. While it appears that Bergson claims that duration is not divisible, he is in fact claiming that "duration divides up and does so constantly."<sup>24</sup> This multiplicity is, for Bergson, continuous and not discrete. Deleuze writes, "That is why it is a multiplicity. But it does not divide up without changing in kind, it changes in kind in the process of dividing up: This is why it is a non-numerical multiplicity, where we can speak of 'indivisibles' at each stage of the division."<sup>25</sup> Duration, for Bergson, is a non-numerical, virtual multiplicity.

In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson claims that this virtual multiplicity exists in human consciousness, which places him in proximity to Augustine and Kant. However, unlike Kant, who grasps time as succession, Bergson understands the present as the co-existence of past and present. He states:

The interval of duration exists only for us and on account of the interpenetration of our conscious states. Outside ourselves we should find only space, and consequently nothing but simultaneities, of which we could not even say that they are objectively successive, since succession can only be thought through comparing present with the past.<sup>26</sup>

No mental state exists that is not continually changing. This is so because consciousness is formed by memory, which, when added to a mental state, qualitatively changes the mental state into something different. This is why Deleuze characterizes Bergson's duration as a non-numerical multiplicity—a multiplicity that is constantly changing into another "indivisible." Explaining how the past persists in the present, Bergson writes:

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<sup>24</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, 42.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>26</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 116.

Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present, whether the present distinctly contains the ever-growing image of the past, or whether, by its continual changing of quality, it attests rather the increasingly heavy burden dragged along behind one the older one grows. Without that survival of the past in the present there would be no duration but only instantaneity.<sup>27</sup>

Duration, therefore, exists only in consciousness: “Multiplicity is real only for a consciousness.”<sup>28</sup> Bergson later found ascribing duration and virtual multiplicity solely to consciousness was problematic for it did not account for the relationship between matter and memory and failed to account for evolutionary change.<sup>29</sup>

One finds in Bergson’s *Matter and Memory* an overcoming of Cartesian dualism. In his second major text, Bergson claims that the present, which is sensori-motor, is a perception of the past and a determination of the future. Subsequently, matter is “a present which is always beginning again [as] our present is the very materiality of our existence.”<sup>30</sup> The present is understood as one’s holistic attitude, by which I mean both conscious and material since neither are determinate nor divisible according to Bergson. This may have significance in developing a hybrid between Hebraic and Greek concepts of personhood. Greek analytic anthropology describes the human person in dualistic terms of body and soul, i.e., Platonism. The Christian appropriation of this dualism has led to many of the shortcomings of Christian philosophy/theology. In order to twist free of this Platonism, one may turn back to the synthetic anthropology of Hebraic theology. According to this view, the human person is one of flesh, life, and spirit. Unlike Platonism, the Hebrew anthropology is not suggesting that the human person consist of divisible different parts. Rather, an indivisible holism is being proposed.

The indivisibility of matter and memory is further discussed in *Creative Evolution*. For now, we should recall the fundamental idea of cell development. The cells within one’s body are ceaselessly changing. Even the miniscule atoms that compose the world are constantly in motion themselves. While an object may appear to be at rest, it is continually undergoing change. Imagine the following experiment. A person stares at a sheet of paper for three minutes. Did the paper change? The person responds in the negative. However, this person accepts the idea that the paper will deteriorate over centuries. This would be true even if the

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<sup>27</sup> Henri Bergson, “What is Metaphysics?,” 179.

<sup>28</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 120.

<sup>29</sup> For Bergson’s overturning of mind-body dualism, see *Matter and Memory*.

<sup>30</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, translated by Nancy Margaret Paul and W. Scott Palmer (New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1959), 131.

paper were to remain in the same spatial position for many centuries. The negative response given initially was based on confusing duration and change with space.

Returning to the question of movement, Bergson again claims that motion is indivisible and that real instants are impossible. Instants exist only as heterogenous, non-numerical duration. The pure multiplicity found within duration (as duration) is that by which body and mind become epistemologically distinct. At the same time, there is a unity of the conscious subject. Deleuze describes Bergsonian duration as “duration, tendency is the difference of self from self; and what differs from itself is immediately the unity of substance and subject.”<sup>31</sup> In other words, the two are distinguished by time and not space. “You define the present,” he states, “in an arbitrary manner as that which is, whereas the present is simply what is being made. Nothing is less than the present moment.”<sup>32</sup> Human existence is immanently manifest in change, in duration; the human is becoming. The question of whether or not duration is characteristic of non-human entities remains ambiguous. It is not until *Creative Evolution* that Bergson provides an ontology of duration.

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson describes duration as immanent to the world—a world that is itself living and conscious. The evolutionary whole of life is understood here as a qualitative, virtual multiplicity. On this point, *Creative Evolution* is best seen as a work in philosophy and not biology. The sciences only observe abstracted isolated wholes and, therefore, cannot account for the endurance of the universe as holistic and concrete. “Life,” writes Bergson, “is no more made of physico-chemical elements than a curve is composed of straight lines.”<sup>33</sup> Life occurs within an open system and along actualized divergent lines within “an indivisible continuity.”<sup>34</sup> In other words, life is not arranged along a straight outline; rather, (the whole of) life is marked by its fluidity, by multiplicity.

Like the evolution of life, the kingdom of heaven has a creative growth. The Gospels testify to this on a few occasions; e.g., the kingdom is like a mustard seed.<sup>35</sup> Like yeast permeating through dough, the kingdom of heaven spreads throughout the world.<sup>36</sup> These illustrations reveal the organic, evolutionary nature of God’s kingdom. This is a reign of freedom and choice, not coercion and

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<sup>31</sup> Gilles Deleuze, “Bergson’s Conception of Difference,” in *The New Bergson*, translated by Melissa McMahon, edited by John Mullarkey (New York: Manchester University Press, 1999), 48.

<sup>32</sup> Henri Bergson, *Matter and Memory*, 143.

<sup>33</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 31. See Bergson’s discussion of the *elan vital* on pp.87-97.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>35</sup> See Matthew 13:31-50 and Luke 13:18-19. See also Mark 4:26-29 and Luke 13:6-9.

<sup>36</sup> See Matthew 13:33 and Luke 13:20-21.

necessity. The reign of God is one of infinite love. It cannot be divided into a numerical multiplicity for it exists only in its dynamism as pure multiplicity.

Contra Darwin, Bergson portrays the evolution of life as creative and not mechanistic. His ontology of duration is as follows: “Duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new.”<sup>37</sup> In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson posits duration with psychological experience. However, later, in *Creative Evolution*, he posits duration as existence. He writes, “We are continually creating ourselves...to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly.”<sup>38</sup> Bergson extends his notion of duration to apply to all other living organisms.<sup>39</sup> Entities that are external to human consciousness endure (change) without the determinations of human mental states. In other words, duration is not something we intuit onto other entities. Rather, to summarize *Creative Evolution*, duration is change. Change is life. Life is existence.

In his fashion, Bergson returns to the theme of temporality. Criticizing numerical and spatial description of time, he writes, “There is no instant immediately before another instant; there could not be, any more than there could be one mathematical point touching another.”<sup>40</sup> The distance between points can always be divided, thereby making measurement superfluous. Likewise, the evolution of life cannot be accurately understood if grasped in terms of discrete forms changing over periods of time. This is true even if these forms are characterized by speciation, variation, selection, and adaptation. For Bergson, each organism is ceaselessly in a mode of change. My reader has undergone change, e.g., physiologically and psychologically, since beginning reading this paper. Even while remaining in the same spatial location, the reader has acquired knowledge, has had new cellular formations, and has possibly varied in her or his attunement toward the present. In evolutionary history, there are no static steps, no discrete transitional species. This is why Bergson asserts that “time is invention or it is nothing at all.”<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 11.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 7. Bergson’s famous “sugar illustration” is found on p.9.

<sup>39</sup> The present paper is not concerned with non-living entities. Recall that Darwin gave a biological theory about the development of organisms. Darwin does not give a systematic account of the origin of the universe; nor does he try to apply biological principles to physical laws and vice versa. See Jacob Klapwijk’s *Purpose in the Living World: Creation and Emergent Evolution*, translated by Harry Cook (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Likewise, Bergson, in *Creative Evolution*, is concerned with living organisms. For a helpful diagram of Bergson’s theory of creative evolution, see Deleuze’s *Bergsonism*, 102.

<sup>40</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 21.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., *Creative Evolution*, 341.

If duration is understood as change, then Bergson's "The Perception of Change" provides a helpful exposition of temporality. For Bergson, change is indivisible, despite the common way of understanding change/duration/temporality. The common way offers an "artificial schema [that] we interpose unknowingly between reality and us."<sup>42</sup> This indirect perception of reality through the artificial schematic lens is what gives us discrete, mathematical time. The result of indirect perception of temporality is clock time. In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson writes, "When I follow with my eyes on the dial of a clock the movement of the hand which corresponds to the oscillations of the pendulum, I do not measure duration, as seems to be thought; I merely count simultaneities, which is very different."<sup>43</sup> The hand of the pendulum occupies only one position in a space since all previous positions are no longer. The clock, therefore, is taken as an illustration and not the measuring instrument of temporality. Indeed, pure duration cannot be measured.

Bergson is continuing here his distinction between pure duration and mathematical (clock) time. Duration is continuous, indivisible time; it cannot be reduced to mathematical quantification. Quantitative time is measurable "duration," which is divided into (spatialized) units. Attempting to measure time—what would be abstractions of time—results in discontinuity. Bergson's duration is neither eternity nor a multiplicity of presents or nows. Every experience is qualitatively different. Understanding duration as either of these two is to think temporality with immobility.

Bergson further illustrates his point by displaying the movement of his hand from point A to point B. The traversing of AB is a simple motion. We hypothesize that we could cease moving our hand at any intermediary point. To do this, however, would alter the experience and no longer have the same movement. It would be two distinct movements. Movement, for Bergson, is indivisible. One might respond, "Each movement is divisible. Even if one did not stop at an intermediary point, there would still be a division of space and time. You could subtract the amount of time that elapsed at the intermediary point and get the total amount of time elapsed during the single movement AB." This response fails to see the insight of *Creative Evolution*; it tries to understand reality in terms of immobility, as if each point were always exactly the same. In reality, there is only synchronized motion. "Movement is reality itself."<sup>44</sup> All is undergoing ceaseless change.

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<sup>42</sup> Henri Bergson, "The Perception of Change," 142.

<sup>43</sup> Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will*, 108.

<sup>44</sup> Henri Bergson, "The Perception of Change," 143.

Portraying reality as immobile was the cause of Zeno's paradoxes. The Eleatics confused indivisible motion with the space traversed. Bergson claims that, if we were to ask him, Achilles would make a remarkable statement;

Zeno insists that I [Achilles] go from the point where I am to the point the tortoise has left, from that point to the next point it has left, etc., etc., that is his procedure for making me run. But I go about it otherwise. I take a first step, then a second, and so on: finally, after a certain number of steps, I take a last one by which I skip ahead of the tortoise. I thus accomplish a series of indivisible acts.<sup>45</sup>

The race between Achilles and the tortoise cannot be divided like the space through which the race occurred. In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson claimed that "time is invention or it is nothing at all."<sup>46</sup> There is no immobility in reality in so far as real existence implies change. Likewise, "If movement is not everything it is nothing."<sup>47</sup>

Change, like motion, is indivisible. Although we commonly describe motion as a series of points and change as a series of states, we have, in reality, change that is synchronic. Bergson describes an object, of which the color changes. As the object changes color, one's perception of the object changes; as the object changes, the perceiver changes. "There is no perception," according to Bergson, "which is not constantly being modified. So that color, outside of us, is mobility itself, and our own person is also mobility."<sup>48</sup> At the same time, he admits that "the breaking up of change into states enables us to act upon things, and it is useful in a practical sense to be interested in states rather than in the change itself."<sup>49</sup> In other words, confusing synchronicity with mobility does have practical use; in fact, this is how we function in daily life. Bergson sees this problematic only for metaphysics in so far as the interest in states focuses on appearances rather than reality.

For clarity, Bergson illustrates his point by describing the experience of a melody. Although one may focus on the abstraction of a series of notes, one's hearing of the melody as a whole is a step closer to understanding duration. A melody is indivisible. He writes, "There is simply the continuous melody of our inner life—a melody which is going on and will go on, indivisible, from the beginning to the end of our conscious existence. Our personality is precisely

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 145.

<sup>46</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 341.

<sup>47</sup> Henri Bergson, "The Perception of Change," 145.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 146.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 146.

that.”<sup>50</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Pope Benedict XVI uses this same metaphor to describe the redeemed: “In their being together as the one Christ, they *are* heaven. In that moment, the whole creation will become song.”<sup>51</sup> To break a melody into intervals would create two distinctly different melodies even if the notes were arranged in the exact order. Christian identity is intrinsically linked to Christ and the community of believers. Likewise, our own inner states cannot be divided along straight lines. While listening to the entirety of a melody, one experiences a fluid, continuous event in the same manner that one reflects on one’s continual consciousness. One cannot divide the qualitative experience into smaller units without diminishing the qualitative changes produced by the experience.

What, then, can then be said of the present? Bergson’s concept of the present is a significant modification of the Augustinian present. The present is usually thought to exist, whereas the past no longer exists and the future has not yet come into existence. Adherents to the common way consider the present in mathematical terms as an instant analogous to a point on a line. Bergson considers this an abstraction with no real existence. “You could never create time out of such instants any more than you could make a line out of mathematical points.”<sup>52</sup> The analogy used in the common way fails to account for the relation between points. In between A and B are an infinite amount of other discrete points. By thinking the common way, one cannot account for the relation between the points and the catalyst by which the immobile becomes mobile. Again, this is due to the confusion of time with space.

For Augustine, the past and future survive in the present. Bergson asserts that the past preserves itself automatically. The present, for Bergson, varies by one’s field of attention. It contains as much to which we give attention.<sup>53</sup> He writes, “Our present falls back into the past when we cease to attribute to it an immediate interest.”<sup>54</sup> Moreover, that which had previously transpired still affects the present. We are continually being inscribed upon by our past. This so because the indivisibility of change is that which allows the past to be preserved in the present. What can be said of the nature of the future is far more difficult.

## DELEUZE’S PRESENT

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>51</sup> Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Eschatology: Death and Eternal Life*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., translated by Micheal Waldstein (Washington D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1988), 238.

<sup>52</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Perception of Change,” 151.

<sup>53</sup> This assertion implies that all of the one’s history could be held in one’s present. This is why Bergson poses the problem as one of forgetting and not remembering. See pp.153ff.

<sup>54</sup> Henri Bergson, “The Perception of Change,” 152.

Let us now briefly turn to Deleuze's portrayal of temporality in *The Logic of Sense*.<sup>55</sup> Deleuze claims that there are two readings of time: *chronos* and *aion*. According to *chronos*, "past, present, and future are not three dimensions of time; only the present fills time, whereas past and future are two dimensions relative to the present in time."<sup>56</sup> The present absorbs these two dimensions into itself. We should recall the accounts of temporality by Augustine and Kant:

Augustine:

- A. Past: memory in the present.
- B. Present: direct experience
- C. Future: anticipation in the present

Kant:

- A. Time and Space are the two forms of intuition.
- B. Time is not a concept. It is an intuition.
- C. It is presupposed in order to discuss relations such as "at the same time" or "succeeding time" or change.
- D. Without *A Priori* time, perception of alteration or change is not comprehensible.

Deleuze claims that the present of *chronos* is "in some manner corporeal. It is the time of mixtures."<sup>57</sup> Past and future are excesses within the embodied present. These excesses are regulated by the present and are, therefore, subject to measurement. The measuring is that of Being, which, in the tradition of Plato, is static. The present for a being is, subsequently, that which gives rise to clock time.<sup>58</sup> However, duration must be thought in terms of becoming.

According to *aion*, there is no present as such. Deleuze writes, "Instead of a present which absorbs the past and future, a future and past divide the present at every instant and subdivide it ad infinitum into past and future, in both directions at once."<sup>59</sup> The history of humanity is a record of our past that is always open to the future. While we live between the cross and the eschaton, the aionic present is conditioned by the meeting of these two events. The kingdom of heaven remains mysteriously upon us as "the already" and the awaited "not-yet." Yet, it is in this

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<sup>55</sup> Throughout Deleuze's corpus, one will find numerous accounts of temporality. It would be a case of neglect if we were to assume that this one account of time has the last word for Deleuze.

<sup>56</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, translated by Mark Lester (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 162.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>58</sup> The metaphysics of presence is that which Jacques Derrida has taken as the problematic characteristic of Western metaphysics.

<sup>59</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 164.

present and coming kingdom that we hope.<sup>60</sup> This hope gives rise to action, perpetuating the multiplicity of events.

Aion is time of the event, of experience. There is a ceaseless rupture between past and future that gives rise to that which is called the present. The past and future are continually crashing against one another according to various intensities that allow for the qualitative nature of duration. “Aion,” according to Deleuze, “is the past-future, which in an infinite subdivision of the abstract moment endlessly decomposes itself in both directions at once and forever sidesteps the present.”<sup>61</sup> Consequently, we do not have access to a present as such since the abstract moment of the present is a “coming and going” that never exists in and for itself. That which we call “present” is the dynamic rupture of temporality. Our existence, therefore, is marked by ceaseless change, by an ever-growing radical altering of the self, in which creative evolution never ceases.

## RESOLVING ESCHATOLOGICAL TEMPORALITY

In conclusion, I will provide several ways in which Bergson’s notion of duration acts as an aid for conceiving temporality in the eschaton. Since time is understood as duration/change/ existence, Bergson would disapprove of describing eternal life as timelessness. Timelessness would mean non-existence. One must think temporality as duration. In *Time and Free Will*, one discovers Bergson’s claim that we only have access to the qualitative intensity of duration. Perhaps our fellowship with God in eternity bears such great intensity that our existence is ceaselessly inscribed by the divine. In heaven, human persons will still be characterized by change. Furthermore, the manner in which human persons relate to God here and now is continually evolving. Human persons are not God and will not reach a static point at which they become God themselves. The identity of God and humanity does not radically morph into one whole. Rather, the relation between the two remains a relation—one that is dynamic in its becoming.

Although this paper does not devote much space to *Matter and Memory*, it is worth noting one significant connection with theology. Bergson asserts that perception involves both body and soul.<sup>62</sup> His depiction of the human person as a unity of matter and memory is compatible with biblical witness of resurrected bodies. While it may not aid us in understanding an intermediary state, *Matter and Memory* does provide philosophical support for the claims regarding a material, physical heaven—the New Jerusalem.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> See 1 Corinthians 15:20-28.

<sup>61</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, 77.

<sup>62</sup> See Bergson’s *Matter and Memory*, 216ff.

<sup>63</sup> Certainly, the Biblical text suggests several variations of heaven, paradise, eternal life, etc. For instance, in Johannine literature, particularly the Gospel of John, “eternal life,” or *zoe*, is the kind

In *Creative Evolution*, Bergson describes God as “unceasing life, action, freedom.”<sup>64</sup> Tillich resolves the quandary of God and temporality as follows:

God is eternal; this is the decisive characteristic of those qualities which make him God. He is subjected neither to the temporal process nor with it to the structure of finitude. God, as eternal has neither the timelessness of absolute identity nor the endlessness of mere process. He is ‘living,’ which means that he has in himself the unity of identity and alteration which characterizes life and which is fulfilled in Eternal Life.<sup>65</sup>

Bergson, like Tillich, notes an ontological distinction between God, who “has nothing of the already made,” and the created world. In a Heideggerian sense, God is the ground of being from which beings arise. The divine spark within humanity bears close resemblance to Bergson’s *elan vital*. This eternal pulse ceaselessly emanates from the divine. Consequently, all of creation is directed toward the divine.<sup>66</sup> This directionality is understood as intentionality, as “beings-towards.” For Rahner, this is understood as the “supernatural existential.” His Greek counterpart, Christos Yannaras, would describe this as *theosis*, becoming divine—an ontological structure and existential process in which we already find ourselves.

If life is constituted by duration, then eternal life is constituted by a divine duration in which past and future continue to clash against one another. John Macquarrie writes, “The past event, made present through memory, discloses possibilities for decision in the present moment...the future through anticipation, prediction, decision.”<sup>67</sup> As a consequence, the aionic present is formed out of this mixture. The kingdom of heaven is described in a similar fashion as that which will be established and that which has already come. This kingdom and humanity are already evolving in their relationship. Likewise, the overflowing creativity and love of God provides such an intensity of affect that eternal life may easily be thought of as union.

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of life that God has. According to the writer(s) of John, this life occurs within our earthly existence, not something in the future or other-worldly.

<sup>64</sup> Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, 248.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, Vol. III, 420.

<sup>66</sup> Teilhard de Chardin is indebted to the philosophy of Bergson, despite one unique difference regarding the direction of evolution. While de Chardin views life as directed toward one omega point, Bergson sees life evolving into a multiplicity.

<sup>67</sup> John Macquarrie, “Eschatology and Time,” in *The Future of Hope: Theology as Eschatology*, edited by Frederick Herzog and Jurgen Moltmann (New York: Herder & Herder, 1970), 112.

Temporality has become problematic in eschatological discourse due to conceiving time in the common way. Accounts of mathematical time fail to accurately perceive change by grasping temporality as the traversing of positions on a plane. This certainly fails to account for eternal life, which is not an endless series of static points. Bergson's "The Perception of Change" offers a corrective from which we can describe temporality in the eschaton. The point here is not to deny the spatiality of heaven; rather, it is to shed light on the nature of change.<sup>68</sup> Change occurs regardless of traversing space. Bergson's account of duration can easily be used to describe existence in the heavenly city as well. There should be no confusion on this point as long as eternity is not thought of as "a really long time." God, who, according to Bergson, is energy itself, summons all of creation to be relationally united with him.<sup>69</sup> At the same time, we are free to make ourselves who we become. The human person is characterized by a "clear and irreversible forward orientation."<sup>70</sup> This characteristic, of which the mystics were well aware, does not cease in heaven since there are overdeterminations of God. In other words, human persons will always be in a state of evolving with the divine. There will always be something of the divine that is beyond our grasp. While certain matters of eschatology escape human certainty, we can in fact hope for a future in which all are united with God.

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<sup>68</sup> In other words, this paper is not concerned with whether or not heaven is a place, a state of being, or a way of living. The focus here is solely on temporality, which, according to the author, is the condition for all possible modes of life.

<sup>69</sup> See Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, translated by R. Ashley Audra and Cloudesley Brereton (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1986), p.257ff.

<sup>70</sup> Karl Rahner, "Theological Observations on the Concept of Time," in *Theological Investigations*, XI, translated by David Bourke (New York: Crossroad, 1982), 299.

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