

Two Different Kinds of Multiplicity in Bergson The Multiplicity of Conscious States and The Multiplicity of Material Object

PARK Dae Seung

Seoul National University

Abstract

The foundation of Bergsonian philosophy is the concept of pure duration which is first presented in *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, DI, 1889) Pure duration is considered to be distinguished from homogeneous space in which material objects are juxtaposed. The first purpose of DI is to establish the dualism of pure duration and space. This dualism imply a place where our perception remain, although it is not clearly stated in the text. The place must be memory and recollection. Thus there are two different kinds of multiplicity in memory: the multiplicity of conscious states and the multiplicity of material object. The multiplicity of conscious states cannot be counted without the symbolization in space. We can apprehend the multiplicity of conscious states, whenever we avoid representing it in space. It is successive, heterogeneous and qualitative, whereas the multiplicity of material object is juxtaposed, homogeneous and quantitative. The multiplicity of conscious states presents the idea of pure duration. Pure duration is the multiplicity which is successive, heterogeneous and qualitative in memory.

Introduction

Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, DI, 1889) is Bergson's doctoral thesis, its 2nd chapter's title is *The Multiplicity of Conscious States: The Idea of Duration*. The Idea of duration is first presented in the thesis, which is the foundation of Bergsonian philosophy. He advanced on his middle and late works (*Matter and Memory*, *Creative Evolution*, etc.) from it.

The duration is not defined clearly, but described through the multiplicity of conscious states in DI. There are two different kinds of multiplicity: the multiplicity of conscious states and the multiplicity of material object. In the early part of Chapter 2, Bergson tries to sharply distinguish the multiplicity of conscious states from the multiplicity of material object. The former that is in pure duration cannot be regarded as numerical without intervention of space¹, whereas the concep-

¹ DI, p. 65.

tion of number is immediately applicable to the later. The distinction between two multiplicities implies the difference between pure duration and space, the predicates to the multiplicity of conscious states (successive, heterogeneous, qualitative, continuous) can be those to the duration. We can approach the idea of duration as understanding the multiplicity of conscious states.

The idea of Number in space: The dualism of pure duration and space

Chapter 2 of DI begins with argument about what is number. “Number may be defined in general as a collection of units, or, speaking more exactly, as the synthesis of the one and the many.”² It is possible to interpret this definition as Bergson’s *theory of number* or *theory of arithmetic*. Although they are very interesting themes, we will focus on the another problem that Bergson purposes to investigate through the argument of number. The question is *Where does number take place, in space or in pure duration?*

The definition of number includes a hypothesis that each unit of the collection is identical to the others. When we count fifty sheep, they must be identical concerning the point that they are all sheep. The difference between things should be ignored so that they could be counted: they must be considered *homogenous*. So we count the same images of fifty sheep rather than fifty sheep which are feeding in the field. It seems that the process of counting these images lies in time. For example, when I count to five, I count five numbers for a few minutes rather than looking at five points in space at a time. This is exactly the view of Kant. Bergson’s view seems to be radically opposed to Kant, because he argue that it is not pure duration but time intervened by space. “In order that the number should go on increasing in proportion as we advance, we must retain the successive images and set them alongside each of the new units which we picture to ourselves: now, it is in space that such a juxtaposition takes place and not in pure duration.” This means that if the anterior acts of counting do not remain anywhere, we will do with only one sheep, so we are not able to advance to fifty, but repeat only *one* fifty times. The place where the anterior acts of counting remain is not time, because time is successive: the anterior moments of time disappear when the posterior moments appear or the past disappears when the future comes. (But the past actually never disappear. It is important subject of this article, and we will discuss that later.) In space, on the other hand, the anterior acts of counting does not disappear, they remain as points in space and coexist with the posterior acts, i.e. they are juxtaposed. So it is in space or in time intervened by space that the counting takes place. The idea of number implies the counting in space. Bergson’s idea seems to be easy to understand in everyday life. He shows that when we count something, the counting is done like marking points on a paper. That paper is space, and we must understand the idea of number in space.

The argument of number leads to two conclusion: the first is that pure duration has to be distinguished from space and time intervened by space, secondly, the idea of number consists in space. The dualism of pure duration and space is the main subject of chapter 2 of DI. It makes two different series of concepts: the one is *pure duration–succession–heterogeneity–qualitative multiplic-*

2 DI, p. 75.

ity, the other is *space–juxtaposition–homogeneity–quantitative multiplicity*. We will inquire into these concepts in order to advance to two different kinds of multiplicity.

Heterogeneity and Homogeneity

Although we discussed the dualism of pure duration and space, a response to the question, *what is space?* is not given yet. It is from the critical analysis of Kant's *Transcendental Aesthetic*. Bergson maintains that Kantian view about the reality of space is not stranger than popular belief. Kantian space is not abstract of sensations but independent of its content (sensations), it has reality as form without material. We think in our daily life that even if everything disappeared, space exists in itself. In Kant, even if any sensible object is not experienced, subject has the form of space *a priori*. The most remarkable result made by *Transcendental Aesthetic* is that space is separated from its contents. The contents of space, that is sensations, have qualities. So space separated from sensations is empty place or reality without quality. It is given as homogeneous extension. Homogeneity is the concept which is predicated on space.

Heterogeneity takes place in the opposite extreme. First, it is the character of sensations. Everything that we perceive has its proper qualities, so it is given to us as qualitative heterogeneity. For example, when you see around, every sensation from every place is shown differently, or when you touch a desk with left and right hand, sensations that each of them gives you is not the same. However, we think that one place where an apple lies on is the same place where a pen lies on, so they are parts of space, namely, the same space. What is given as qualitative heterogeneity is perceived under form of extensive homogeneity. Bergson points out that the form of extensive homogeneity is the result of the human intelligence and insists that we know two realities of different order, the one is sensible quality, that is heterogeneous, the other is space, that is homogeneous.³ The concept of heterogeneity is applied as a predicate on sensation in this step, but it will lead to the character of pure duration later.

Succession and Juxtaposition

Succession is an essential concept in DI but not defined clearly. It is employed in various context with different senses and seems to be common words. Whether in time or in space, the aspect that something appears one after another is described with the concept of succession. When it is used in connection with pure duration, the definitive *pure and simple* is attached, so 'the pure and simple succession' will be inquired here.

As stated above, the pure and simple succession is described as the anterior moment immediately disappears when the posterior moment appears. In film, one scene has to go away in order that the other scene comes, that is exactly successive. So time is, precisely, pure duration is successive.

On the other hand, juxtaposition prescribes the order of space. It is like that some terms lie somewhere with the others simultaneously, and they must be distinct clearly. Therefore, that num-

³ DI, pp. 71–72.

ber takes place in space means that they have to be juxtaposed in space. For example, in order that you count pens on your desk, you have to imagine them to be points as many as the pens, reduce their qualitative difference to positional difference, and juxtapose them in homogeneous space. While you count the pens, it spends a few minute, however, the counting does not needs only duration, but also space where you represent the pens as points.

So far, we have traced the argument of DI about pure duration and space. Now, we have to deal with a issue that Bergson supposes, but does not make clear.

Succession with Memory

The sequence of scenes in film is successive. However, if we admit the definition of succession, nobody understands the narrative of film, because the preceding scenes go away, the following scenes do not come yet, there is only one scene of present. The above definition of the pure and simple succession confines us in present. Only present exists. However, this is not the Bergson's true purpose. He gives another implication to succession without a clear statement: that is succession with recollection (or memory).

The concepts of memory and recollection are the main subject of *Matter and Memory*. The terms of memory and recollection are used in DI, they do not seem to be technical terms. Moreover, memory is not found in chapter 2 of DI, only recollection is employed.⁴ However, it is reasonable to interpret recollection in DI as philosophical concept. Though not emphasized in the text, it is considered as the foundation of pure duration as well as space.

The role of recollection in thinking pure duration and space is presented in the example of a pendulum's oscillation. Two ways to represent the oscillation are distinguished. One way is a presentation without recollection, the other is with it.⁵ The pure and simple succession is a character of the former in which we cannot count the oscillation in space or think pure duration. In the later, we can choose two different ways again: juxtaposition and succession with recollection. Juxtaposition helps us count number of the oscillation and makes recollection to be space. In succession with recollection, on the other hand, we perceive images of the oscillation like the notes of a tune which are organized and permeated in the other. The images cannot be counted and distinct from the others unlike material things in space. They appear as if range of red is not determined in continuous gradation.

The Multiplicity of Conscious States

Succession with recollection gives us the image of pure duration which is considered as the process of our conscious states. We can apprehend pure duration in which the conscious states flow, whenever we avoid representing it in space. For example, the conscious states flow with emotions which are associated with the notes of a tune, but the qualities of them are removed as soon as our

⁴ In a few words, recollection (souvenir) is the moment of memory (mémoire). In Bergson, Memory is almost identical with consciousness or spirit. Recollection is similar to a piece of memory.

⁵ DI, p. 78.

understanding tries to count them. These characters of pure duration converge on the concept of the multiplicity of the conscious states. The multiplicity of conscious states is distinguished from the multiplicity of material object. Material object which lies on space is clearly distinct from the others, we can count it without difficulty. On the other hand, the multiplicity of conscious states which is in pure duration cannot be counted without the symbolization in space. In order to count strokes of a bell, we should not limit ourselves to gather the impression of them but arrange images of them in empty space. (This operation is the symbolization in space.)

The two kinds of multiplicity, each takes their places in the two different series of the concepts which are produced by the difference between space and pure duration. Therefore, the multiplicity of conscious states is qualitative, heterogeneous and successive, the multiplicity of material object is quantitative, homogeneous and juxtaposed.

Conclusion: The Idea of Duration

The multiplicity of conscious states presents the idea of pure duration. Pure duration is multiplicity which is heterogeneous, successive and qualitative and the form which the succession of our conscious states assumes. It seems that pure duration is defined by the concepts concerning conscious states, but we should notice that pure duration cannot be apprehended adequately by *concepts*. Pure duration is what we go through in everyday life without the symbolization rather than what we speculate or infer. It is not just the epistemological object but life itself. This view is the foundation of Bergsonian philosophy.