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Mary Daly's Philosophy: Some Bergsonian Themes

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Abstract

The primary goal of this article is point out certain close parallels between some ideas of the radical feminist theorist Mary Daly and those of the French philosopher Henri Bergson. These similarities are particularly striking regarding distinctions made by both authors between two fundamentally contrasting types of cognitive faculty, of time and temporal experience, and of self and emotion. Daly departs from Bergson inasmuch as she employs these distinctions in her own way. She does not—like Bergson—employ them to depict the result of a natural process of consciousness or life, and the dangers for human freedom and thought of not properly respecting these differences. Rather, she locates these differences within a more liberatory, ethical perspective to ground a sharp, inimical contrast between feminist creative movement on the one hand, and static, fixing, and “fixating” patriarchy, with its “technocratic” pretensions, on the other. My hope is that highlighting the similarities between Daly and Bergson will open new paths of appreciation and critique of Daly’s work.

Keywords: Mary Daly, Henri Bergson, radical feminism, intuition, time, memory, self, patriarchy, process philosophy, metaphor

Introduction: The Works of Mary Daly and Their Sources

The thought of pioneering radical feminist Mary Daly has been discussed principally within feminist theology, feminist studies in religion, and feminist spirituality (Monagle 2019; Wood 2015; Hunt 2014; Plaskow 2012), or more generally in relation to Daly’s historical role within feminist thought (Telling 2012). Daly has been extensively studied over the years within various strands of feminist theory regarding—among other things—her essentialism with respect to the category “woman” (Alcoff 1988; Suhonen 2000), her centering of patriarchy as fundamental to all forms of oppression (Lorde 1983; West 2012), even with the danger of implicit racism and colonialism in her own work (Narayan 1997; Kassam 2012), and for her

explicit transphobia (Stryker 1994; Kelly 2016; Partridge 2018).¹ These critiques have proven to be very important for the development of feminist theory, but I do not focus on them in this article. In the present project, rather, I show similarities between some of Daly's radical feminist ideas and those of Henri Bergson.

Still, one might ask what the value is of looking at Bergsonian strands in Daly's thought, given that several other authors have more explicitly, and in more detail, sought to engage Bergson's philosophy from the perspective of feminism, considering Bergson's relevance to issues of racism and colonialism. Authors such as Alia Al-Saji (2019), Pamela Sue Anderson (2015; Anderson and Bunnin 2020), Elizabeth Grosz (2004), Rebecca Hill (2017, 2019), Donna V. Jones (2010, 2016), Iris van der Tuin (2015) and Melanie White (2019) have all engaged with Bergson.² Valuable as these works are, the present project aims, nevertheless, to be a contribution to the history of antitrans feminist philosophy (hence, the focus on Daly) and its sources (with a focus on Bergson), rather than a placing in dialogue of Daly with other feminist authors influenced by Bergson. The emphasis here is decidedly exegetical: first, it must be shown that some of Daly's ideas can, indeed, be given a Bergsonian reading. Confronting these findings with more contemporary feminist readings of Bergson—about which I sketch some tentative ideas in the conclusion—is a subject for future work and far exceeds the bounds of the present article.

As regards theoretical influences, Mary Daly's debt to the protestant theologian Paul Tillich is commonly acknowledged (Rodkey 2015; Berry 2000; Schneider 2000). The sources of several of Daly's ideas in social theory and philosophy—with a marked focus on Simone de Beauvoir and existentialism, Thomas Aquinas, and Peter Berger—have been studied in some detail by Waslin (1998), again, mainly with a view to their theological implications. Philosophical treatments of Daly's sources have concentrated on religious metaphysics and Daly's concept of God. Focusing on Daly's *Gyn/Ecology* (1990), Frankenberry (2018), for example, notes similarities between elements of Daly's thought and the Stoic *logoi spermatikoi*³ that

¹ From a contemporary, trans-, anticolonial, and antiracist feminist viewpoint, Kubala (2020) states that one can view Mary Daly's writings as examples of "bad feminism," which should, nevertheless, be read and studied.

² I thank an anonymous reviewer for challenging me to answer the "Why Daly?" question more explicitly and point me towards these authors.

³ In the context of the present discussion, Frankenberry's reference to the *logoi spermatikoi* in relation to Daly's work presents a suggestive parallel. In his critical assessment of Bergson's metaphysics, Jacques Maritain (whose concept of intuition was the object of Daly's PhD dissertation in philosophy) attributes Bergson's only

link every human intimately to the divine, as well as Christian mysticism’s *scintilla animae*, the “spark of the soul,” an element of the divine within the human soul of the mystic. There are also similarities here with the Hegelian notion of “dispossession/repossession of the true, divine self” (ibid.).

Daly certainly used many literary, sociological, philosophical, and theological sources to create her own distinctive, radical feminist perspective. But few authors have noted the specifically philosophical influence Bergson has had—directly or indirectly—on Daly’s writings. Daly does not often discuss Bergson explicitly (an exception being Daly’s *Beyond God the Father* [Daly 1985b, 185–189], where Daly cites Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*). However, in the bibliography of her doctoral dissertation in philosophy, *Natural Knowledge of God in the Philosophy of Jacques Maritain*, Daly (1966, 131–132, 136) lists the Thomist philosopher Jacques Maritain’s early and later confrontations with Bergson’s thought—namely, *Bergsonian Philosophy and Thomism* (Maritain 1955) and *De Bergson à Thomas d’Aquin* (Maritain 1947), and also Bergson’s *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1933). Daly must thus have attained a degree of familiarity with Bergson’s thought, particularly since Maritain’s “intuition of being,” which figures prominently throughout Daly’s *corpus*, arises out of a synthesis of Bergsonian and Thomist influences (Sweet 2019; Gwozdz 2010). Besides Maritain, some candidate-sources for more indirect Bergsonian influence on Daly would plausibly include the, by Daly oft-cited, feminist novelist and essayist Virginia Woolf (see Gillies 1996), the philosophers William James ([1909] 2019) and Alfred North Whitehead (see Levanon 2018), as well as Paul Tillich (Tillich 1944; [1963] 2011, part 4, ch.1, A1, and part 5, ch.1, sec. A2.b; see Bandy 1984).

A special mention should be made here of de Beauvoir. Daly encountered de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex* for the first time in the mid to late 1950s (Daly 1992, 55), and of course her first book, *The Church and the Second Sex* (1985a), was largely an engagement with de Beauvoir’s analysis of women’s position within contemporary Western society and within the doctrines and practices of the Catholic Church. Michèle Le Doeuff (2004, 34)⁴ has claimed that “Bergson’s philosophy could be deemed a major but veiled source of inspiration for the whole introduction to de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*,” alluding to Bergson’s depiction of the contrast between closed, static societies on the one hand, and open, dynamic ones on the other, in his *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*.⁵ In addition, Margaret Simons has pointed to

formative, metaphysical source to Plotinus, specifically, to the Neoplatonic philosopher’s own notion of the *logos spermatikos* (Maritain 1941, 66).

⁴ Compare, also, Anderson’s (Anderson and Bunnin 2020) elaboration of Le Doeuff’s Bergsonian reading of de Beauvoir.

⁵ See also *The Second Sex* (1964, 70) where de Beauvoir depicts early, matrilineal human society in which “religion of woman was bound to the reign of agriculture, to

de Beauvoir's engagement with Bergson's *Time and Free Will* in her diaries from 1926 and 1927 (Simons 2003, 2012), an engagement that probably took place before de Beauvoir's encounter with the ideas of Marx, Hegel, Husserl, or Sartre. Simons isolates three methodological similarities that emerge when comparing the philosophical content of de Beauvoir's diaries and earlier works with the ideas of Bergson. First, the flux of reality is not completely expressible in concepts or literal language (requiring recourse, as de Beauvoir sees it, to the philosophical novel); second, exposing distortions in perception and thinking is a principal philosophical task; and third, a true philosophy must regain contact with immediate experience (Simons 2003, 2012). As a related, fourth point of similarity we find the depiction of a "true" and "false" self or "the social and the personal ego" that de Beauvoir draws from Bergson prior to her engagement with phenomenology (see also Hengehold 2017, 12, 37).

Daly, for her part, could not have read the diaries of de Beauvoir, at least not as far as her works up to the late 1990s are concerned. Nevertheless, in a way reminiscent of Bergson and the early de Beauvoir, Daly's project is also one of breaking through static perceptions and concepts to a new experience of self,

the reign of irreducible duration [*durée*], of contingency, of chance, of waiting, of mystery." In contrast, "the reign of *Homo Faber* is the reign of time manageable as space, of necessary consequences, of the project, of action, of reason." Bergson's idea of intellect's "distortion" of pure duration through the spatialization and conceptualization of time, and of mechanical causation, out of concern with the practicalities of life, are all present in this passage. Interestingly, one of Daly's bones of contention with de Beauvoir was the latter's insistence in *The Second Sex* that women had always been "the second sex" throughout history. Daly, however—relying mainly on Elizabeth Gould Davis's *The First Sex*—was convinced that a matriarchal stage of history, in which women were culturally dominant, had existed (see Daly 1985b, 138; 1998, ch. 3). It would thus seem natural for Daly to wish to "recover" this Archaic, more "natural," and "mystical" past, while avoiding de Beauvoir's presumptions of (real or perceived) passivity. Hence, her emphasis on the "Archaic future" (Daly 1998), in which women connect with a past time in the very process of creating a feminist future, and the importance of feminist *memory* as openness to future possibilities of freedom and creativity. In light of the above passage from de Beauvoir, one can see how this might involve returning to a Bergsonian experience of time and memory (see below). For an excellent discussion on the feminist potential of gynocentric origin stories in Daly, as well as in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde, see Keating (2000).

duration, life, and becoming (or what she consistently calls—in a more Thomist turn of phrase—“participation in Be-ing”⁶).

While the similarities between Daly’s and Bergson’s ideas are mapped out below, it is worth bearing in mind that one cannot say that Daly was a “disciple” of “follower” of Bergson. Her sources are far too diverse to make such a claim, and other authors are explicitly more influential on her ideas. Daly departs from Bergson inasmuch as she employs parallel distinctions in her own way, not—like Bergson—to describe the result of a natural process of consciousness or life, and the dangers for human freedom and thought of not properly respecting these differences, but rather to ground a sharp, inimical contrast between feminist creative movement on the one hand, and static, fixing, and “fixating” patriarchy, with its “technocratic” pretensions, on the other.⁷ Moreover, unlike Bergson (who was not a feminist), Daly’s concerns are more crucially ethical or metaethical in character.⁸ In particular, her point of departure is an acute awareness of patriarchal oppression and its various mechanisms. Her project is a liberatory one, and its language is provocative. Bergson, on the other hand, is principally concerned—above all in his earlier works—with shedding a new light on science, epistemology, and metaphysics, and in correcting their errors.

In what follows I will compare passages from Bergson and from Daly. First, I treat of Bergson’s distinction between two human faculties (intuition and intellect) which reveal different experiences of reality and time. These Bergsonian categories bear similarities to Daly’s distinction between Elemental feminist reason, on the one hand, and technical or abstract reason, on the other, and to feminist women’s experience of “life-time” as opposed to “fathered time.” Since these parallel distinctions in both authors are closely related to respective conceptions of memory,

⁶ Although not always consistent in her notation, Daly began to hyphenate the word “being” as “be-ing” in order to emphasize the dynamic character of the reality it denotes. In the “Original Reintroduction” to *Beyond God the Father*, Daly asserts: “This book takes on the task of de-reifying ‘God,’ that is, of changing the conception/perception of God from ‘the supreme being’ to Be-ing. The Naming of Be-ing as Verb—as intransitive Verb that does not require an “object”—expresses an Other way of understanding ultimate/intimate reality” (Daly 1985b, xvii). The word “be-ing” denotes the active participation in the ultimate reality, Be-ing (Daly 1994, 64). See Berry (2000).

⁷ This may be one of the reasons why Linda Alcoff (1988, 412) labelled Daly’s ontology “manichaeism.”

⁸ I thank an anonymous reviewer for adverting me to the importance of this difference.

I will include a brief discussion of memory in both Bergson and Daly in this section. Second, I show how, in a similar way to Bergson, Daly distinguishes two different types of “self,” and two different ways of experiencing emotion, depending on whether women participate in “the powers of Be-ing” or are still ensnared within the deceptive structures and mechanisms of patriarchy. In this section, I also point to a similar understanding of both authors for the requirement of metaphorical language in the expression and enablement of the recovery of self and authentic emotional experience.

Bergson and Daly on Intuition, Memory, and the Experience of Time Intuition and Intellect in Bergson: Duration and Spatialization

Henri Bergson can be grouped in a broad way with philosophers of process “along with Heraclitus, the Stoics, Hegel and Whitehead” (Lacey 1989, ix).⁹ Bergson’s intuition is a kind of empirical apprehension that has as its object duration [*durée*], which—in *Creative Evolution* and later works—tends to also take on the characteristics of life, desire, or will (Sinclair 2016). Within this apprehension, duration is an expansive becoming, marked by a “qualitative multiplicity” in which successive “states” of consciousness (whether these are states of feelings, sensations, muscular tensions, or so on) merge and interpenetrate, each moment being a creative expansion or unfolding of what has preceded (Bergson [1910] 1959, 104–107).¹⁰ It is the insight into the nature of duration within consciousness that, according to Bergson, is the basis of metaphysics and makes it quite unlike the sciences. For the latter deal with distinct, spatialized perceptions and—importantly—with concepts and language that have a discreet and discontinuous character. The heterogeneous, qualitative multiplicity of duration is thus to be contrasted with quantitative, homogeneous spatial multiplicity. The latter is characterized by clearly distinct, juxtaposed objects, such as when we perceive objects as distinct units, view time (or motion) as a collection of “points,” or view number as a collection of units.

Bergson will claim that the recovery of experience of vital duration will be effected through the method of intuition. Intuition is “the metaphysical investigation of what is essential and unique in an object” (Bergson 1912, 18). Intuition transcends concepts (21) which present duration to us directly (22), being a kind of “sympathy by which one is transported into the interior of an object” to coincide “with what is unique and thus inexpressible in it” (7). It is a type of direct perception, by which

⁹ While remaining noncommittal on the influence Bergson may have had on Whitehead, Levanon (2018) contends that Bergson’s and Whitehead’s philosophies represent “the two main versions of process thought.”

¹⁰ “Duration means invention, the creation of forms, the continual elaboration of the absolutely new” (Bergson [1911b] 1998, 11).

observers immerse themselves into the flow of life. Metaphysics and science deal with two distinct methods, respectively with intuition and with analysis; the attempt to apply analysis in metaphysics leads to philosophical conundrums and confusion (28).

In light of Bergson’s perspective on qualitative multiplicity, duration, and intuition, one can understand his sustained critique of “intellect.” As contrasted with intuition, intellect is “the faculty of connecting the same with the same, of perceiving and also of producing repetitions” (Bergson [1911b] 1998, 52). It has evolved as a productive, means–end strategy, geared towards action, and attends primarily to spatial objects. This attention fragments the flow of becoming that is accessed only by intuition. Preoccupied as it is with bodies in space, intellect generates concepts, which are generalized, unchanging “snap-shots” or “cut-outs” (cf. 52) of reality.¹¹ The latter cannot attain reality as it is—that is, in its unique becoming. Intellect, in fact, deals in the foreseeable and the predictable, since this is of paramount importance for the realization of practical interests. It focusses on mechanism, in which a predictable end result is produced by the interaction of efficient causes. Spontaneous creativity, or the production of the radically novel, does not lie within intellect’s interest. The nature of the intellect is thus also constructive, in that it constructs new arrangements out of elements already encountered.¹² Inasmuch as concepts identify what is common among several objects, they help us make generalizations and predictions. But at the same time, they “reify” or “fragment” the durational experience of life, feeling, and desire.

Intellect’s means–end reasoning is intimately connected to the production of tools, and to manufacture and fabrication in general:

Fabrication works on models which it sets out to reproduce; and even when it invents, it proceeds, or imagines itself to proceed, by a new arrangement of elements already known. (Bergson [1911b] 1998, 45)

¹¹ Bergson ([1911b] 1998, ix): “Our concepts have been formed on the model of solids.” Compare Bergson, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, (1912, 51); and (54): “The various concepts into which a change can be analyzed are therefore so many stable views of the instability of the real.”

¹² Bergson ([1911b] 1998, 29): “The essential function of our intellect, as the evolution of life has fashioned it, is to be a light for our conduct, to make ready for our action on things, to foresee, for a given situation, the events, favorable or unfavorable, which may follow thereupon. Intellect therefore instinctively selects in a given situation whatever is like something already known; it seeks this out, in order that it may apply its principle that ‘like produces like.’”

In Daly's writings, as we shall see, spatialization, repetition, fabrication, and rearrangement of parts are notable aspects of the "man-made." The man-made is not just various "elementary" (waste) products of technology (to be contrasted with the natural "Elements") but also human selves "fabricated" by patriarchal mechanisms.

Daly on Feminist Intuition and Experience of Time

Daly insists that intuition is crucial to the feminist participation in full Be-ing. Although Daly does not describe intuition in terms particularly reminiscent of Bergson (i.e., as a kind of "sympathy" or "entering into" its object), intuition does play the role of the cognitive and emotional faculty required by women to recover their full, genuine potentialities (Daly 1984, 136). It is also called "ontological Elemental reason" (160–162). Indeed, "Elemental Feminist philosophy" is "reason, rooted in instinct, passion, intuition" (Daly 1994, 72). By this, Daly clearly means a form of liberating, creative metaphysics which allows women to discover a Self of creative potential. Moreover, it is intuition that allows women to experience that "Powers of Be-ing are constantly Unfolding, creating, communicating," enabling women to "move beyond the fixed questions and answers" of the patriarchal world (Daly 1994, 86).

Like Bergson and others, Daly distinguishes intuition or "ontological reason" from means–end, technical reason.¹³ Neither Bergson nor Daly are against science

¹³ The distinction between "ontological reason" (later, "Elemental reason") and "technical reason" is attributed by Daly to Tillich (Daly 1985b, 39–40, 105; 1984, 153–166). However, one should bear in mind that, although not uncritical of Bergson, Tillich himself highlights affinities between his own "existential" approach to theology and ideas of philosophers such as Bergson. The commonality includes an emphasis on direct experience, an appreciation for the need of special forms of expression, a rejection of the identification of Reality with the objects of thought, and an emphasis on qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, notions of time (Tillich 1944). Tillich claims that, although certainly not identical, Bergson's "Philosophy of Life" contains "most of the distinctive motives of Existential Philosophy" (46). Like Schelling, Schopenhauer, and Heidegger, Bergson has realized that in human experience lies "the only possible approach to existence itself" (Tillich 1951, 62; see also 168) and Bergson also sees, like Duns Scotus and Heidegger, "an ultimate indeterminacy"—that is, creative openness—within the ground of being (168). Also of note, is Tillich's analysis of nonspatialized, qualitative time, creativity, and life in *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3 ([1963] 2011, part 5, ch.1, sec. A2.b) which contains prominently Bergsonian elements. Daly becomes increasingly critical of Tillich's notion of "ontological reason." She comes to view it as too static and confining, and laden with patriarchal insinuations, such as "penetrating" and "grasping" (Daly 1984, 154–160). It is clear that she seeks an even more dynamic notion of be-ing than even Tillich proposes. It is

and technology *per se*. They both warn, however, against the dangers of neglecting intuitive forms of human cognition (Daly 1985b, 186–187). That said, in many passages, from her more ethical standpoint, Daly tends to emphasize the harmful effects of the alliance between patriarchal thinking and technology, devoid of recourse to the intuition of be-ing. “Tyrants of technology” indoctrinate women through the media, seek to destroy female power through “man-made femininity,” the result of therapies and gynecological treatments for women, and prepare weapons for war and the destruction of the natural environment (see, for example, Daly 1990, 89–110 and ch. 7).¹⁴ What is characteristic for these technologies is their fragmenting and “fixating” tendencies—that is, the masking, constraining, and stabilizing of women’s intuitive movement, as well as of the movement of nature. “War,” although usually understood more broadly by Daly as the assault on women’s minds, bodies, and on the natural environment, has, for both Daly and Bergson, its origins in technology that has been stripped of its spiritual, intuitionistic—and for Daly, women-centred—underpinnings.¹⁵

Related to the intuitive and liberating apprehension of women’s powers of being is the experience of a temporal dimension that is qualitatively different from standard, measured time. It is true—as Stenger notes (Stenger and Stone 2002)—that Daly expresses a keen sense of the *Kairos* of the feminist movement; she often speaks (for example, in *Beyond God the Father*) of “this point in history” as particularly significant for women’s liberation (Daly 1985b, *passim*). This would concord with Tillich’s notion of the biblical *Kairos* as a time of fulfilment and decision. However, Daly also has the notion that feminists live in a special kind of time, distinct from patriarchal time—namely, a “life-time” that is specific to them. This is how she describes it:

Participation in unfolding of God means also this time breakthrough, which is a continuing (but not ritually “repeated”) process. The center

then not surprising that her notion of be-ing would take on a more open, indeterminate, and future-oriented traits that are, in fact, characteristics of the *élan vital* that Tillich found objectionable in Bergson’s philosophy (Tillich 1951, 100, 180–181, 275–276).

¹⁴ Compare the definition of “phallotechnology” in the *Wickedary* (Daly 1994, 217).

¹⁵ Compare Bergson’s analysis of mechanization and its relation to war in *The Two Sources* (Bergson 2002, 304–310) as well as his depictions of wartime Germany as a result of the soulless mechanization of a nation (Bergson 1915, 35–36; on this point, see Jones 2016, 17–19). One should note, however, that, unlike Bergson, Daly does not discuss war as natural or inevitable, or as a result of overpopulation and lack of resources (cf. Bergson 2002, 276, 283–284, 289).

of the new time is on the boundary of patriarchal time. What it is, in fact, is women's *own* time. It is our *life-time*. It is whenever we are living out of our own sense of reality, refusing to be possessed, conquered, and alienated by the linear, measured-out, quantitative time of the patriarchal system. Women, in becoming who we are, are living in a qualitative, organic time that escapes the measurements of the system. (Daly 1985b, 43)¹⁶

For Daly, Be-ing is the unfolding of God. In the above passage it is now associated with a specific experience of life and time. Feminist time is contrasted with patriarchal "clock-time" and is Archaic Time. This is defined as "Original creative time," that is, "the measure of original motion/E-motion/movement" (Daly 1994, 62). It is also known as Tidal time and "cannot be measured by the clocks of father time" (286). Chapter 8 of *Pure Lust* contains a heavily metaphor-laden account of this feminist temporal experience. It is a qualitative, not quantitative, time, marked by varying intensities of emotion and action. It is contrasted with "fathered time" (or "father time") which is the "tidily Man-Dated World" of monotonous repetition and routine, imposed upon, and fragmenting, the creative "biorhythms" of the genius (elemental spirit) of feminist women's Self (Daly 1984, 287–293). Overcoming tidy divisions of life, these women liberate "the flow of luminous Realizing Presence, releasing the radiant Race of Words" (293). We thus find the idea that a participation in flowing, undivided, feminist life-time can release a creative use of words—words that express participation in Tidal or Archaic time—and can also elicit a similar experience in other women. This creative participation is a "Metaphoric Hearing/Naming," a process both receptive and creative, beyond mere linguistic expression, that "transport[s] the Hearer/Namer into Metabeing" (293).

Daly contrasts "foreground" with "background." The former is the patriarchal world, a world in which subliminal messages, patriarchal religious myths, fragmentations, and deceptions of all kinds prevent females from participation in their original life, the world of background. It is noteworthy that the patriarchal time of foreground consists of "instants," not of "moments":

Instants, then, are units of foreground time. They are incalculably small. They are mere points in time. They do not imply Motion, Movement, Momentousness, Momentum. They are elementary, foreground Imitations of Moments. They do not open into the Background. (Daly 1992, 4)

¹⁶ Compare the definition of "Life-time" in the *Wickedary* (Daly 1994, 143).

In such passages, we encounter a cluster of Bergsonian ideas in Daly around intuition and the experiential access intuition grants to feminist life and experience of time. There is the contrast between duration and “spatialized” time. The former, for Daly as for Bergson, is a continuous flow, marked by differing qualities and emotional intensities. Just as for Bergson, so for Daly, the experience or intuition of this lived time and Self is creative; it is a kind of “hearing” of rhythm and can lead to poetic composition.¹⁷

Bergson and Daly on Memory

For Bergson, memory is the temporal accumulation of experience, a direct effect of becoming. It is not a faculty for storing recollections. It never ceases, as past incessantly “piles up” on the past:

In reality, the past is preserved by itself, automatically. In its entirety, probably, it follows us at every instant; all that we have felt, thought and willed from our earliest infancy is there, leaning over the present which is about to join it, pressing against the portals of consciousness that would fain leave it outside. The cerebral mechanism is arranged just so as to drive back into the unconscious almost the whole of this past, and to admit beyond the threshold only that which can cast light on the present situation or further the action now being pre-*pared*—in short, only that which can give useful work. At the most, a few superfluous recollections may succeed in smuggling themselves through the half-open door. These memories, messengers from the unconscious, remind us of what we are dragging behind us unawares. But, even though we may have no distinct idea of it, we feel vaguely that our past remains present to us. (Bergson [1911b] 1998, 5)

Our character or personality is being constantly built up as memory swells. It follows that “we are creating ourselves continually” in what we do and experience (7). This line of thought determines Bergson’s notion of existence: to exist is to “to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly” (7). What the above passage also indicates, however, is that specific recollections are geared to action.

This means that memory and qualitative duration are intimately connected. It is the flow of the past into the present:

¹⁷ On the “rhythm” of life as duration, see, for example, Bergson 1911a (209, 240, 258).

Inner duration is the continuous life of a memory that prolongs the past into the present, the present either containing within it in a distinct form the ceaselessly growing image of the past or, more probably, showing by its continual change of quality the heavier and heavier load we carry as we grow older. Without this survival of the past into the present, there would be no duration, only instantaneity. (Bergson 1912, 44–45)¹⁸

Although moments of memory play an important role for Daly, particularly in her “re-calling” of significant moments from feminist history and from her own life, she also stresses the value and importance of “Memory” (often capitalized), a process that is distinct from specific—and, in particular, patriarchally constructed—recollections (“elementary memories”¹⁹):

What women find by Naming—through writing, speech, all forms of art—is something like a stream that runs deep within the soul. Its sounds are musical, rhythmic. Significantly, the word stream is etymologically connected with rhythm. Both are rooted in the Greek *rhein*, meaning “to flow.” Underneath the elementary unrhythm of mediated, master-full memories flow rhythms of empowering Memory.

And she continues:

The rhythms of Naming deep Memory are quite unlike the tidy, tedious tick-tock of patriarchal clocks and watches. The rhythms of remembering are Tidal. (Daly 1984, 175)²⁰

In contrast with Bergson, and consistent with Daly’s ethical, liberatory approach, returning to memory serves a role in the liberation from patriarchal images

¹⁸ For a discussion of the relationship between memory and subjective consciousness in Bergson, see Kebede (2014).

¹⁹ Daly (1994, 79) defines “elementary memories” as “standardized memories, fabricated in fatherland which function to mask and stifle Deep Memory; mass-produced collective memories intended to obliterate the past and to control the present and future.”

²⁰ It is worth recalling Bergson’s comparison of qualitative multiplicity in duration with rhythm. See, for example, *Creative Evolution* ([1911b] 1998, 11–12, 127–128, 300–301, 345–347).

and counter-memories that have been insinuated into women’s memory. Freeing oneself from these requires female “re-remembering,” reversing the process of patriarchal “dis-membering.” In *Outercourse*, Daly characterizes her own recovery of feminist history as an “unforgetting,” as a movement towards be-ing. The recollections of her life in which she managed to glimpse be-ing are “Momentous” (provide momentum) for her journey. Indeed, Daly traces the etymology of “moment” to the Latin *momentum*, rooted in *movere*, to move (Daly 1992, 3). Her own personal voyage is similar to the general female process of liberation from patriarchy, involving “Moments/Movements of participation in Be-ing which carry Voyagers beyond foreground limitations.” These experiences are not “momentary” in the linear sense, but “carry us into an Other kind of Duration/Time” (4). Thus, Memory is often characterized in a way that is very similar to a Bergsonian view of intuition. It involves a “re-immersing” oneself into a past that becomes present and anticipates future possibilities.

The Fundamental Self, Authentic Emotion, and Metaphoric Expression
Bergson on Recovering the Self, Metaphor, and Artistic Expression

Bergson refers to spatialized perceptions, to concepts, and to language as “symbols.” Symbolization fragments the flow of consciousness into distinct elements. The mind has a tendency to “project” the qualitative multiplicity of consciousness onto a homogeneous, quantitative multiplicity. This corresponds to a split into two selves. One self has well-defined states of consciousness; the other is constituted by an ongoing and dynamic interpenetration and enrichment of qualitative experiences. And Bergson remarks that “below the self with well-defined states” there is a “self in which *succeeding each other* means *melting into one another* and forming an organic whole” (Bergson [1910] 1959, 128). We thus get the idea of two “selves” that de Beauvoir pondered in her diary entries (see Ansell-Pearson 2018, 55–72). It is, in fact, notable that Bergson goes on to link the spatialized, fragmented self with the practical need of linguistic articulation within a social context.²¹ And it is clear that, although Bergson views the spatial symbolization of time and consciousness as convenient and “natural,” it is duration and qualitative multiplicity that are more valuable. At the level of the self, the consciousness of becoming and temporal flux is “the fundamental self.” To reach this self, a determined and focussed effort is required, one of “isolating the fluid inner states from their image, first retracted, then solidified in homogeneous space” ([1910] 1959, 129). And it is in this solidification of processes or “progresses”

²¹ Bergson ([1910] 1959, 130): “Our outer and, so to speak, social life is more practically important to us than our inner and individual existence. We instinctively tend to solidify our impressions in order to express them in language.” (But cf. *ibid.*, 167.)

[*progrès*] that we must realize again the complicity of our language, a point of great importance for Daly, as we shall see presently.

In the final chapter of *Time and Free Will*, Bergson develops his theory of freedom or, perhaps more accurately, indicates how the fragmentation and spatialization of consciousness in outer experience, in dealings with matter and the needs of everyday life, can rob humans of their freedom. It is inner, fundamental self, the self of qualitative multiplicity and pure duration, that is truly free. It is only the fragmented view of consciousness, the view of science, with its well-defined concepts and objects or states, based on predictability from clearly definable initial conditions, that conceives consciousness (will) as predetermined. As already discussed above, this is because prediction involves reconstructing an effect from elements already present in a cause. There is, then, no room in such a view for unforeseeability and true spontaneity. If we could only get back to the authentic experience of inner, undetermined multiplicity and duration, we would realize our freedom:

Hence, there are finally two different selves, one of which is, as it were, the external projection of the other, its spatial and, so to speak, social projection. We reach the former by deep introspection, which leads us to grasp our inner states as living things, constantly *becoming*, as states not amenable to measure which permeate one another and of which the succession in duration has nothing to do with juxtaposition in homogeneous space. But the moments at which we thus grasp ourselves are rare, and that is just why we are rarely free. (231)

Access to freedom is a difficult task indeed. Most of us, most of the time, live in the external world of ghostly shadows in which our true self has been projected into spatialized feelings, percepts, concepts, and language. We thereby become passive, governed by causes and conservation laws. Bergson states emphatically: “To act freely is to recover possession of oneself, and to get back to pure duration” (232). Of course, the way to “get back to pure duration” will be, as we have seen, through the method of intuition.

What I wish to emphasize for my analysis of Daly’s notion of “plastic” emotions below, is that Bergson also has an analysis of two fundamentally different types of emotion. Authentic feeling is a “confused mass” of interpenetrating emotional hues that form a heterogeneous multiplicity, and it develops uniquely according to its own dynamic. But—in accord with the external needs of material and social life—we tend to analyse this multiplicity into a homogeneous, static one. We name distinct, fragmentary, emotional states within consciousness according to what is generic and purportedly common in human experience, thereby breaking up our original emotion, removing its uniqueness, and stabilizing it in language:

By separating these moments [of duration of feeling] from each other, by separating out time in space, we have caused this feeling to lose its life and colour. Hence, we are now standing before our own shadow: we believe that we have analyzed our feeling, while we have really replaced it with a juxtaposition of lifeless states which can be translated into words, and each of which constitutes the common element, the impersonal residue, of the impressions felt in a given case by the whole of society. And this is why we reason about these states and apply our simple logic to them: having set them up as genera by the mere fact of separating them from one another, we have prepared them for use in some future deduction. (Bergson [1910] 1959, 133).

This idea of the falsification of the nature of feeling through analysis and language is taken up in Bergson's essay on laughter. Here he writes of inner passions that arise in our contact with other people. We experience revulsion and attraction, an "electrification of the soul known as passion" (Bergson 1911a, 158). If they were left to their own devices, these passions would naturally lead to violent outbursts. But utility demands that society and morality impose their normative constraints upon such passions. Under this influence an outward layer of feelings, common to all, forms to cover the "inner fire of individual passions" (159).

This is where we come to the importance of art in general, and of literary art, in particular, for getting us back in touch, so to speak, with our natural passions. Just as in *Time and Free Will*, Bergson attributes a kind of liberating power to the "bold novelist" whose talent allows them to extract feelings from the "common domain" to which language had "brought them down," (Bergson [1910] 1959, 163) and tears down "the cleverly woven curtain of our conventional ego" (133), so, in *Laughter*, it is the dramatist who, through his artistic work elicits in us, if not "volcanic eruptions" exactly, then at least a sense of the inner stirrings of our passionate nature. Drama offers nature its "revenge upon society" (Bergson 1911a, 159) by either summoning up strong passions directly, or by revealing the shams of society and so bringing us back to the "inner core" of true, natural feeling (160). In fact, this is the role of art in general:

So art, whether it be painting or sculpture, poetry or music, has no other object than to brush away the utilitarian symbols, the conventional and socially accepted generalities, in short, everything that veils reality from us, in order to bring us face to face with reality itself. (Bergson 1911a, 157)

Generally speaking, concrete images and metaphor can—according to Bergson—express something of the experience of intuition. In *The Creative Mind*, Bergson states:

Intuition will be communicated only by intelligence. It is more than idea, nevertheless in order to be transmitted, it will have to use ideas as a conveyance. It will prefer, however, to have recourse to the most concrete ideas, but those which still retain an outer fringe of images. Comparisons and metaphors will here suggest what cannot be expressed. (Bergson 1946, 48)

Mary Daly will take a very similar position, insisting that feminist philosophy *requires* metaphorical expression. However—due to the existence of patriarchal forms of artistic expression—Daly is more attuned than Bergson to the question, *Which* forms of literary art and linguistic expression are conducive to feminist liberation? In fact, creating new metaphors and expressions is crucial for feminism, and this is aptly illustrated in Daly's skepticism regarding Bergson's approach, which lacks a feminist lens. In *Gyn/Ecology*, she writes:

"The way back to reality is to destroy our perceptions of it," says Bergson. Yes, but these perceptions were/are implanted through language—the all-pervasive language of myth, conveyed overtly and subliminally through religion, "great art," literature, the dogmas of professionalism, the media, grammar. (Daly 1990, 3)

The purported quotation is probably a gloss on ideas presented in several of Bergson's works, or perhaps heard from others. However, Bergson is clearly not interested in "destroying" perception but in refocussing attention to obtain a perception (intuition) of duration. Compare, for example, the following passage from *The Creative Mind*, in which Bergson is describing the way of accessing the intuition of change and duration: "What is required is that we should break with certain habits of thinking and perceiving that have become natural to us. We must return to the direct perception of change and mobility" (Bergson 1946, 167).

Daly on Two Selves, "Plastic" Emotions, and the Need for Metaphor

In many passages, Daly speaks of "Self" (capitalized) and "self" or "selves." The former is the personal core of women who are moving beyond patriarchy, whereas the latter denote patriarchally constructed "selves" that lack the dynamic movement and realization of women's potential. The Self has "moving reality" at its centre (Daly

1984, 155). Daly cleverly relates patriarchal industrial fabrication and artificiality to the difficulty posed to women of recovering their true Selves (188), which is “participation in be-ing.” A woman who is cut off from her genius is “lost from her Self” (293). Whenever a woman becomes one with the “Creative Spirit of the individual” she is her Self (301). Reminiscent of Bergson, there is a way of recovering the true Self. It is the way of separatism, whereby Daly means, in the first instance at least, an *internal* separating away from patriarchal structures, language, and ideologies:

It is Crone-logical to conclude that internal separation or separatism, that is, paring away, burning away the false selves encasing the Self, is the core of all authentic separations and forms of separatism. It is axiomatic for Amazons that all external/internalized influences, such as myths, names, ideologies, social structures, which cut off the flow of the Self’s original movement should be pared away. (Daly 1990, 381)

Interestingly, Daly’s lone mention of Bergson’s term *élan vital* comes in a passage on selfhood. Women’s Original Self and living spirit are identified with this impetus of life, with this *élan vital* (Daly 1984, 238). This is reminiscent of Bergson’s characterization of mysticism in *The Two Sources* as contact with the impetus of life (Bergson 2002, 213), which is in some sense discoverable or recoverable through a turning to intuition (212).²²

²² It comes as somewhat of a surprise that Daly does not take up any of the major themes of Bergson’s late work, *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. There is no analysis of a socio-biological genesis of obligation as “resistance to resistances” (Bergson 2002, ch. 1) or any discussion of the origins of sacred objects, myths, and religion as defensive reactions against the dissolvent tendencies of intelligence, and against the intellect’s depressing representations of inevitable death or practical failure (ch. 2, 205). It is not, perhaps, incorrect to interpret Daly’s feminism as a philosophy of dynamic religion (cf. Bergson 2002, ch. 3) and as a condemnation of closed patriarchal society (as Anderson [Anderson and Bunnin 2020] has done in the case of de Beauvoir). It is also true that there is a dynamic openness within feminist sisterhood, as conceived by Daly, but there is an important difference compared to Bergson: After *Beyond God the Father*, in particular, Daly becomes critical of universal and “humanist” approaches to social and political issues, since they can be a cloak for patriarchy (Daly 1984, 383–384). In addition, Daly’s analysis of women’s lusty friendships does not have the same universalistic indeterminacy as does Bergson’s notion of the mystic’s love, viewed as a hallmark and exemplar of dynamic religion (see, for example, Bergson 2002, 233–235). I thank an anonymous reviewer for

One aspect of “false selves,” no doubt, are what Daly calls “plastic” emotions. In many of Daly’s texts, we find an emphasis on female, passionate emotion as a source of power to participate in Be-ing, one which has its origins in that participation. Elemental Lust is “pure Passion: unadulterated, absolute, simple sheer striving for abundance of being” (Daly 1984, 3). What opposes this kind of E-motion—masks, distorts it, and struggles against it—are the patriarchal “man-made fabrications that fracture female substance,” the “State of Lechery.” The latter is a kind of unreality, opposed to “the desire, eagerness, vigor, enthusiasm of/for expanding be-ing, which philosophers have called final causality.” The state of Lechery throws up “blockage/blockers” to this reaching of be-ing (Daly 1984, 3). Not surprisingly for Daly, passions are to be understood as “movements” of sensitive appetite not as “static, inexplicable blobs of ‘feeling’” (198). Patriarchy, in contrast, produces “pseudopassions” which “paralyze women, containing and concealing our Fires, our true desires” (200).

One form of patriarchal pseudopassion is “plastic passion,” which causes disconnectedness and fragmentation. Plastic passions include “unmoving, paralyzing” feelings such as guilt, anxiety, depression, bitterness, and fulfilment (201). Although they can be experienced, they are nevertheless “man-made” and “products of fixocracy,” serving as “substitutes that poison our powers, preventing E-motion” (201). Daly astutely observes—in a way that is strikingly reminiscent of Bergson—that conventions of generalizing language can distort authentic emotion and deprive it of its dynamism. In the case of women, however, it is not societal convention in general but patriarchal “therapeutic” ideology that labels women’s rage “out of existence” through the static categorization of women’s emotional states as “hostile,” “bitter,” or “resentful” (203).

The problem of freeing feminist emotion from encrusted and fragmented selves is confronted in Daly’s theory of metaphor. As in Bergson, different, nonliteral modes of expression are required to return women to genuine life and feeling. As Rycenga and Barufaldi note, Daly’s stated aim in her work—as eminently illustrated in her work *Pure Lust* (1984)—is a “combination of philosophy and poetry—one of Daly’s stated life goals” (Rycenga and Barufaldi 2017, part 3). Daly’s images and vibrant metaphor, incomprehensible and frustrating to some of her readers, provide, among other things, a jolt²³ in provocative and vivid imagery to others, communicating that, at its root, being is a “process,” not a substance (Berry 2000, 30).

challenging me to address more explicitly the role of Bergson’s *The Two Sources* in Daly’s work.

²³ Daly’s phrase from *Beyond God the Father* (Daly 1985b, 190) that liberation from patriarchy requires “a kick in the imagination, a wrenching of tired words” and that

It is in *Pure Lust* that Daly provides a methodological rationale for the use of metaphor. The employment of metaphor and symbol has been held in disregard by philosophers, but Daly counters that the employment of symbol is what is methodologically most appropriate when discussing metaphysics:

The point is, however, that symbols and “mere” metaphors are required, not because of some deficiency or lack in the sphere of abstract conceptualization, but because of the demanding, rigorous nature of the work itself. (Daly 1984, 25)

Symbols reveal deeper and “hidden” realities of our souls. Daly affirms that Elemental feminist philosophy cannot speak adequately without symbols. Metaphors, moreover, “function to Name change, and therefore they elicit change” (25). Daly continues

Metaphors are necessary for Elemental feminist philosophy, for this is about and is transformation, movement. It is philosophy in a basic sense of “love or pursuit of wisdom: search of the underlying principles and causes of reality.” (Daly 1984, 26)

So the deep “spinning power” of Metaphor is crucial to the task of the kind of “first philosophy” or ontology that Daly is developing. But the complexity of the metaphysical task requires not just metaphorical intensity and concreteness, but also the abstract, analytic tools of “honed logic” (28). So we find again the idea of two kinds of rationality: one, based in intuition of Be-ing and life-time, requires the expressive and concrete tools of metaphor; the other is employed in discursive abstraction and analysis.²⁴ The latter “breaks the bonds of patriarchal assumptions” (408), a statement which suggests that discursive analysis serves a primarily critical function towards patriarchal systems of thought and expression. However, because of its sheer novelty and truly metaphysical reach, it quickly morphs into a metaphorically articulated ontological reason:

In contrast to patriarchal metaphors and abstractions, metapatriarchal abstract thought can evoke Metamorphosis. Such Nag-Gnostic abstract thought—passionate theoretical reasoning that breaks the bonds of

feminism “is movement” provides the backdrop for Jennifer Rycenga’s and Linda Barufaldi’s introduction to *The Mary Daly Reader* (2017, 1–9).

²⁴ In *Outercourse*, Daly states that from 1975 onwards her “synthesis of abstract reasoning and Metaphoric expression evolved explosively” (Daly 1992, 195).

patriarchal assumptions—is essential to the Metamorphic process. Unlike the prevailing abstractions, which function to isolate bits of knowledge, metapatriarchal theory manifests connections on the level of be-ing. Since such thinking is Original, almost invariably it begins to assume Mantic Metaphorical dimensions. Its language is Metaphorical in the sense that this is characterized by multileveled meanings and imagination-arousing newness, evoking Spiraling movement. (Daly 1984, 408)

This is a particularly interesting remark, since it suggests that the “balance” between abstract, discursive reason and intuition is, as regards modes of linguistic expression, difficult to maintain in practice. We might contrast the above observation to Daly’s concern in *Beyond God the Father* to overcome man-made dichotomies. In regard to Bergson’s philosophy, Daly points to a particular dichotomy—namely, one between theoretical concepts and poetic imagery. In Daly’s interpretation of Bergson, it is only the latter that have any power to analyze process. Daly comments: “I do not think that radical women trying to express our intuition of being can settle for this route. We will have to reject this ‘either/or,’ and conceptualize as well as image our process in a manner that breaks out of stale male spatial patterns” (Daly 1985b, 187–188). However, it is clear to those familiar with Daly’s works that—even though patriarchal systems of oppression are often expounded and analysed in a literal, discursive language—Daly’s language almost inevitably becomes metaphorical and imagistic, playing upon etymologies of words and various word associations, particularly when Daly begins to describe women’s participation in Be-ing.

Conclusion

The main goal of this article has been to exegetically document certain close parallels between some aspects of Mary Daly’s thought and some aspects of Henri Bergson’s philosophy. Besides the textual parallels, there are, of course more general thematic similarities that result from an adoption of an intuition-based, processual, life-centered philosophy. Yet, if I have been successful in the endeavour of demonstrating deeper affinities between the philosophies of Daly and Bergson, the findings suggest some interesting lines for further comparative philosophical critique of Daly’s thought. To conclude, let me sketch possible directions for future work.

My first point relates to Daly’s treatment and portrayal of trans people. Daly depicts trans women, in particular, as man-made artifacts, both physically and emotionally (Daly 1990, 64–72; 1994, 225; see Stryker 1994). This claim itself again suggests the intellectualizing (in Bergson’s sense) of the patriarchal *homo faber*. More broadly, however, “transsexing” has a metaphysical sense. The scholastic God of “pure act” (*actus purus*) is the static, reified version of transcendent and dynamic

“Active Potency” of feminist women; the former is the “transsexed counterfeit” of the latter (Daly 1984, 87). Daly implies that Be-ing as becoming and movement is original and primordial, and that attempts to reify it and reduce it to *stasis* are metaphorically equivalent to “transsexing.” In a similar vein, religious symbols are “transsexed” inasmuch as matriarchal religious metaphors have been morphed by patriarchy for patriarchal ends (93, 130). In light of what I have attempted to establish in the body of this article, it becomes clear that—from a metaphysical point of view—trans folk are products of technical intellect. They are attempts to “freeze” the flow of liberating female consciousness and to catch or “freeze” its life-giving powers. One of the principal accusations aimed specifically at transsexual women is that they remain “immobilized” by and within patriarchal sex roles. In Daly’s (and Bergsonian) terms, the technical solution of surgery or hormones is thus simply the extension of (patriarchal) mechanism which aims to mimic through construction, the qualitative multiplicity of creative (feminist) consciousness.

In light of this, one can ask why—and under what other influences—Bergson’s distinctions have been molded by Daly into dichotomies of enmity, to which trans people fall victim. The question is potentially fruitful for another reason. I stated earlier that Bergson’s distinctions—although, as he claimed, dangerous if neglected—are generally the result of natural processes. However, during the First World War Bergson “weaponized” his metaphysics in a propagandistic turn against Germany and, more specifically, against Prussia (Bergson 1915; see Sinclair 2016; Jones 2016; Klein 2020). “Artificiality marked the creation of Prussia,” says Bergson, and its administration, military, and economy are purely mechanical, aligned like “clockwork.” Germany, while “working out [its] organic self-development” chose badly when it imposed upon itself these characteristics under Bismarck and rejected “the unity that comes from within by a natural effort of life” (Bergson 1915, 20). Opposed to Germany stand France and Belgium whose soldiers “to the force which feeds only on its own brutality” oppose a force “that which seeks outside and above itself a principle of life and renovation” and is “continually remaking itself” (47).

The parallel metaphysical strategies of Bergson’s wartime pamphlet and Daly’s antitrans rhetoric raise the additional question of how metaphysics in *both* Bergson and Daly comes to serve a propaganda of “us versus them.”²⁵ This is also noteworthy given Bergson’s support of France’s colonial ambitions in North Africa (Sinclair 2016, 486; Al-Saji 2019). The distinctions between intuition and intellect (Elemental reason and technical reason), duration and spatialization (feminist “life-time” and “fathered time”), and between two selves and two types of emotionality, become potential theoretical vehicles—whether intentionally or unintentionally—for implicit and

²⁵ Compare the questions asked of Bergson’s wartime interventions in Kisukidi (2014) and Jones (2016).

explicit marginalization and colonialism. What are the philosophical assumptions underlying this instrumentalization in both authors? These and related questions open up perspectives for a renewed scrutiny of Daly and early antitrans feminism through the current renewal of interest in Bergson (see Deleuze 1988; Pitts and Westmoreland 2019; Ansell-Pearson 2018).

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