

Editing Memory: Reply to Melanie White and Other Critics
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I would like to begin my response to Melanie White's reply (2015) by thanking her for taking the time to write it. I am always glad to have written something that other people consider worth disputing and discussing. I would also like to thank Dick Moodey and Steve Fuller, who joined the conversation in the comment threads to White's post. But I would like my more detailed reply to offer a picture of my own thinking that is more complex and comprehensive in scope than my original article, "Lessons for the Relationship of Philosophy and Science from the Legacy of Henri Bergson" (2015) could manage.

White's response does me great credit in a way she may not have expected: it seems I have successfully disguised myself as a reasonably doctrinaire analytic philosopher. I am a man, for example, whose ideas about Deleuze, Guattari, and process philosophy once made Brian Leiter joke about the need to send me to mental health services. To be fair, it was a joke over some whiskey at a party after a talk he gave about Nietzsche at McMaster University back in 2010, but it has some import. Reading White refer to me as an ordinary analytic philosopher having swallowed the official Kool-Aid regarding the legacy and importance of Bergson's thought impressed me with my own skills as an intellectual chameleon.

Analytic philosophy, following the fallout in that community of his debates with Einstein and Bertrand Russell's paradigm-setting scorn for him in the 1945 *History of Western Philosophy*, considers Bergson and his philosophy not worth learning as anything other than a bizarre antiquity. The locus of my *Social Epistemology* article was this blanket dismissal, and my aim was to probe some of the historical reasons why.

Coming Clean on Bergson and Me

Jimena Canales' (2015) scholarship of Bergson and Einstein's relationship in the relativity debates and the League of Nations gave me some historical background I could combine with my own critical uptake of Bergson's ideas into my own creative philosophical work. The result was my *Social Epistemology* article, which had already gone through several rounds of revision through reviewers at *Social Epistemology* and other publications where I had unsuccessfully submitted it.

Bergson's conception of lived time as duration and the related concept of becoming are part of the underlying bedrock of my take on process philosophy and its application to ecological and environmentalist issues, as in the forthcoming *Ecology, Ethics, and the Future of Humanity*. Among the many things this project does, it critiques the analytics' tendency to discuss environmental ethics solely as a search for universal moral principles. That book contends that only a more comprehensive transformation of human nature will let us survive and repair the Holocene Extinction.

Bergson-influenced concepts of time and becoming, as well as his account of the progressive power of mysticism, are important to my next major philosophical project, an

analysis of the utopian drive in politics. To my knowledge, few if any have run with Bergson's ideas from *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (1991) in an extended project of political philosophy, though I am happy for anyone to link me some examples.

So, it is not that I share some dismissive attitude toward Bergson that is depressingly common in institutionalized analytic philosophy (and analytic philosophy, as far as I can see, is entirely institutionalized). My article was concerned to understand where that dismissive attitude could have come from, and the degree to which Bergson created the conditions for his own downfall in his lifetime. This, even though I know his concepts are emerging triumphantly long after his death.

Social Creatures Need Social Networks

Returning to my three lessons from the Bergson-Einstein throwdown will clarify what I would have liked readers to take from my thinking. The first was, "Maintaining professional networks is more important to the reception of an idea than the strength of the idea itself." I consider this proposition particularly critical, given White's dismissive attitude to analytic philosophy, and Steve Fuller's further critique in her post's comment threads.

Fuller writes that I "adopt rather uncritically—and perhaps even unwittingly—today's analytic philosophers' Whiggish view of the history of 20th century philosophy." My conclusion was, in Fuller's words, "a formula for intellectual pandering." It seems odd that I would recommend intellectual pandering, given that I have chosen a career path in philosophical writing that openly rejects the university system as a place for my paid employment. I even recently wrote a blog post denouncing the university system for the hypocritical, entitled, and classist attitudes its culture encourages.

Turning to other avenues than the traditional university system of academic publishing to promote and distribute your work is a difficult task for today's progressive philosophical writers. The *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* (SERRC) is one of these venues, and I am grateful for its years of wonderful opportunities for intellectual engagement. But my generation of writers face uphill battles for recognition because we are cut off from offices of institutional prestige— access to institutionalized networks that determine the reception of a philosopher's work.¹

Many of those still in the university system remain trapped in vicious cycles of tiring, low-paid adjunct employment. Those like myself who continue to research, write, and publish philosophy in non-academic venues while working in business look forward to even more unorthodox (read: uncertain and strange) career paths. Analytic philosophy is certainly conservative and conformist, but it is the perfect style of philosophy for the institution in which it has become so powerful.

¹ Michèle Lamont's research on North American academic culture, including her insightful *How Professors Think* (2010), is excellent further reading on the institutional conservatism and insularity of academic cultures, especially university philosophy, and the control of such conservative networks over gatekeeping and funding access.

Admitting that building personal and professional relationships and networks is important to advance your reputation and career does not advocate intellectual pandering. It is basic advice. It recognizes that people with a variety of connections will access more opportunities than the socially ostracized and marginalized. No matter the quality of your ideas, no one will ever hear about them if you do not have the networks and connections to publicize them.

Analytic philosophy has quite a few of its own problems. But as a network of university departments across North America and Britain, analytic philosophers have been very good at maintaining orthodoxy of thought throughout their institutions. A sustained study of the academic job market on this continent will find that unconventional philosophical work is pushed into other departments like comparative literature and cultural studies, or out of universities altogether.

Bergson's intellectual marginalization in North American university philosophy departments was one of the first instances of the initially productive rebellious spirit of analytic philosophy hardening into anti-critical dogma. Analytic philosophy is inflexibly orthodox and tends to dogmatism, but it must not be dismissed precisely because it is ubiquitous in so much of institutionalized philosophy.

Lessons in Politics and Ethics

My second lesson is a guide to keep your search for explanations as comprehensive as possible: "Political conflict can be more important in contributing to a reputation than a person's work, but are often made invisible in professional histories."

Even though Bergson's fundamental ideas about time and becoming were lurking on the margins of Fuller's analytic education in the philosophy of science, their presence remained exactly that: marginal. I was primarily interested to understand some of the non-philosophical reasons behind Bergson's marginalization in those wide swaths of contemporary philosophy where his work is marginalized.

My article traced the events that led Bergson to lose so many of the connections to international professional networks that he had through university institutions. However important Bergson's ideas will be in the 21st century, his conflict with Einstein precipitated his fall from the status of intellectual superstar. Throughout the rest of the 1920s, he was in his "Lifetime Achievement Award" phase, at best.

Canales' research revealed a political conflict between Einstein and Bergson over the administration of the League of Nations body for Franco-German intellectual and scientific cooperation. Hers is the only work in that history of philosophy that I have discovered which acknowledges this political dimension to their conflict. Such political events—disputes over NGO policies (Bergson), life as a courtier (Leibniz), wartime service (Wittgenstein), civil insurrection (Spinoza), jail sentences (Russell and Negri)—rarely figure in histories of philosophy. Their place is most often in biographies.

In leaving out biographical and social historical details from the standard topics of histories of philosophy, the discipline has ignored an important dimension to philosophical thought: how the material conditions of a philosopher's life shapes her thinking. The standard approach to the history of philosophy isolates arguments and concepts from the world in which writers and thinkers live. If you ask someone in a doctrinaire analytic philosophy department why Bergson's thought was marginalized after the confrontation with Einstein, he will tell you only about their ideas. But their political engagements contributed just as much, if not more, to Einstein's animosity.

Humility as Comradeship

My last proposition aimed to be the most profound. "The relationship of the sciences and humanities disciplines can only be productive when guided by a humble spirit." I admit that the phrase is easily misinterpreted. So, I will take this opportunity to explain more clearly what I mean by humility.

Bergson is not completely to blame for his marginalization in analytic-influenced mainstream philosophy from the 1920s onward, but he is not blameless either. Bergson's reaction to his critics was simply to have said that they do not truly understand him, even that they had not read his books. But that does not matter when your enemies voices drown you out in public discourse and mock your books instead of encouraging people to read for themselves. Bergson suffered from his enemies' arrogance, but he also suffered from his own in refusing to come down to their level.

I have encountered philosophers of science who hold that a philosopher can only analyze a scientific discipline when they have trained and immersed themselves in that science. This is an attitude of deference. Fuller was right in his exchange with me, and in *Knowledge: The Philosophical Quest in History* (2014), that such an attitude restricts a philosopher's ability to understand the full range of possibilities of a scientific discipline. One only understands what the discipline does now, and defers to its canonical figures.

Deference to established expertise prevents a philosopher (or anyone at all) from criticizing those experts, and knowing when critique is and is not appropriate. You can only provide colour commentary, explaining in philosophical terms what the mainstream of a scientific discipline does. You cannot do the essential activity of philosophical thought: provoke progressive change.

But the swing against deference to authority cannot let the authority of your critical voice become more authoritarian. Servility's alternative is not a swaggering demand for others' servility. I have in mind the humility of comradeship, the ability of many partners in knowledge production processes around the world to offer their own specialized contributions to the enterprise.

The substance of the disagreement between Einstein and Bergson was that—whatever refinements and replacements relativity theory would eventually require—Einstein said that all inquiries on the nature of time were the proper domain of physics and physics alone. Bergson said that physics needed a complement for questions having to do with

the flow of time in experience, the dynamism of motion, change, and becoming as they are lived. Philosophy was this complement, a comrade to physics.

Bergson's reputation in analytic philosophy, the mainstream of the English-speaking world, was shattered because too many people interpreted his offer of comradeship as a demand for subordination. These people shouted him down until he, whose public lecture caused New York's first traffic jam, was thoroughly marginalized. He was marginalized not because of his ideas alone, but because he could not control the forces shaping the world that received him and his ideas.

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