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Yaron Wolf

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“A MEMORY WITHIN CHANGE ITSELF” BERGSON AND THE MEMORY THEORY OF TEMPORAL EXPERIENCE

Yaron WOLF

Introduction

When we consider our experience from a broad perspective — taking into account our cognitive, emotional, and evaluative attitudes — it is evident that in many cases memory does not possess a merely causal role in relation to experiences that have temporal contents. At least some of these aspects of experience are constitutively related to memory. That is, they would not be the kind of experiences they in fact are if memory did not figure in them.¹ Our experiences of nostalgia, of grief, our reflections on the way time has been passing faster as we have been growing older, our appreciation of the progress we’ve been making — all of these cases arguably include the experienced recollection of past events and are thus not only causally related to past experiences. A constitutive relation to memory also seems to obtain in the case of our more banal reflections on temporal order, for example when I try to remember whether I watered my plants yesterday, or the day before.

1. There are, broadly, two ways in which memory can constitutively figure in experience: (i) remembered things or events can be taken to be included in the contents of current experiences; (ii) the remembered things or events can be (further) taken to be experienced *as memories*. Marking a difference between the two is crucial in the context of the “modified” memory theory of change perception (James 1890; Stout 1930; Husserl 1991; O’Shaughnessy 2000; Phillips 2010; 2018), which I explore below.

My focus here, however, is on a much more tightly circumscribed topic — the relation between memory and our non-inferential experience of change and motion.² And my central claim will be that Bergson's views on this relation, which have not been discussed in significant detail in the literature, can shed new light upon recent debate on the topic.³ I approach this in three steps. First, I examine the “memory theory” of non-inferential temporal experience in its two main forms — a “traditional” version and a “modified account” — situating Bergson's views vis-à-vis this distinction. Second, I explore a contemporary defence of the memory theory (Phillips 2010; 2018) and underline a limitation in this account. Finally, I focus on a feature of Bergson's reflections on memory and temporal experience that can potentially address this limitation.

I. The Memory Theory: Tradition and Modification

Various thinkers have defended a *memory theory* of immediate temporal experience, on which memory is taken to be not only causally related to but also partially constitutive of our experience of change. An influential

2. The term “non-inferential experience,” frequently qualified as “immediate experience,” is meant to mark out the character of perceptual experience as distinct from reasoning expressed in personal-level judgments or inferences. See Chisholm (1957, 158-159) for highly influential discussion of non-inferential experience in this sense. Le Poidevin has described non-inferential temporal experience as follows: “We are indirectly aware of the passage of time when we reflect on our memories, which present the world as it was, and so a contrast with how things are now. But much more immediately than this is seeing the second hand move around the clock or hearing a succession of notes in a piece of music, or feeling a raindrop run down your neck. There is nothing inferential, it seems, about the perception of change and motion: it is simply given in experience” (Le Poidevin 2007, 87).

3. Bergson's views on the faculty of memory and its role in experience broadly construed have been, by contrast, the object of sustained study which has also extended beyond Bergson scholarship. For all the fact that Bergson's thought as a whole was not widely discussed after the first decades of the previous century, in the Anglophone context in particular, Bergson's reflections on the faculty of memory have exerted a significant influence upon the understanding of memory and its structure in 20th-century philosophy and psychology. This holds true, in particular, for the distinction between two types of memory — “habit memory” and “image memory” — advanced in *Matter and Memory* (Bergson 1988, 79-90). Key instances of this influence include Russell's chapter on memory in *Analysis of Mind* (Russell 1921, 166), and the distinction between “memory systems” in the works of two of the most prominent memory researchers in recent decades (Tulving 1986, 307; Shachter 1996, 165, 169-170; see also Tulving and Shachter 1994, 6, 8). For recent accounts of Bergson's views on memory, see Ricoeur (2000, 21-30; 50-53; 427-440); François (2008, 31-36); Ansell-Pearson (2018, Ch 4); Perri (2017); Sinclair (2019, Ch 4).

source for the position is Reid's view. According to Reid, sense perception is limited to the present moment in a "strict" sense:

[I]f we speak strictly and philosophically, no kind of succession can be an object either of the senses, or of consciousness; because the operations of both are confined to the present point of time, and there can be no succession in a point of time (Reid 1785, 325-326).

Reid is working with an Augustinian idea of the present as having no temporal extension whatsoever, an "interval with no duration" (Augustine 2008, 232) or an "indivisible point of time, which divides the future from the past" (Reid 1785, 326). And since sense perception is limited to the present, we cannot be said to perceive succession by sense. Now, and here Reid also follows Augustine, we do often *speak* as if the present has temporal extension. We say that we see motion (Reid 1785, 326), and we consider the present as varying according to the particular context of discussion — we speak of the present hour, year, or century (Reid 1785, 326; Augustine 2008, 231-232).⁴ This kind of inaccuracy, Reid notes, is perfectly legitimate in "common life" (Reid 1785, 326). Philosophers, however, should insist on a "strict" meaning of the expression "the present moment." This first point leads to the positive aspect of Reid's argument concerning the origin of our idea of succession:

[I]t is only by the aid of memory that we discern motion, or any succession whatsoever: we see the present place of the body; we remember the successive advance it made to that place: the first can then only give us a conception of motion, when joined to the last (Reid 1785, 327).

We do in fact experience temporal features, despite the fact that this awareness is not strictly perceptual. Reid is here offering a bare-bones version of the traditional memory theory. On the view, our awareness of change essentially depends on memory, it is memorial awareness.⁵

4. Augustine, unlike Reid, does not consider sense perception to be confined to the present, and does not make the Reidian distinction between memory and perception presented below (e.g., Augustine 2008, 242-243).

5. It might be suggested that Reid's account is of the way we acquire a "conception" (Reid 1785, 327), rather than an experience, of motion. Reid, however, is also arguably aiming for an account of the way we are made aware, "discern" (1785, 327) or "observe" (1785, 326) change. For relevant discussion, see Falkenstein (2017, 48-49). Additional important instances of the traditional memory theory can be found in Brentano's lectures on the consciousness of time, as described by Husserl (1991, 13-14), and Mellor's (1998, 122-123) explanation of our short-term awareness of time. Mellor's focus in the relevant passage, however, is solely on the directionality of temporal experience.

The Reidian account faces numerous challenges. Here's a first. Take the opening notes of Bach's Cello Suite #1 in G Major: G-D-B

FIGURE 1. Opening notes of Bach's Cello Suite #1

The form of the view as presented by Reid above needs to be refined in order to seem at least initially plausible. We would need, for example, to be able to account for a structure in our awareness of change (in memory) that maps onto the progression of the notes. When we experience the first B, it wouldn't be enough to say that we remember G and D together with the sense perception of B, which would be compatible with D having been heard before the G, and with the G having been heard two months ago (see Dainton 2006/2000, 124). We would want to say that we remember having *just heard D with a short-term memory* of G and having *previously heard G* when the D was played. Without temporal distance and order as part of the traditional memory theory, it is wildly implausible.

It could perhaps be claimed that Reid's view already includes something like the idea of temporal distance and order, when he writes (in relation to the spatial case) of remembering the "successive advance [the object] made to [its present] place." Even with the idea of distance and order in place, however, the view seems to face an insurmountable challenge. On the traditional memory theory, remembering what occurred a year ago and what happened two seconds ago involves experiences of the same kind. Likewise, noticing that something changed in relation to the way it was a minute ago, and being aware of a note played half a second ago on the cello involves the same type of awareness. This kind of identity lies in conflict with what is widely taken to be a striking experiential difference between *perceiving change* and *noticing that something has changed*, a difference influentially noted by Broad (1923, 351) and Russell (Russell 1927, 280-281).⁶ Watching a shooting star, for example, is different than noticing that the moon has changed its position. This kind of difference does not

6. Broad frames this as a "notorious fact" (Broad 1923, 351) rather than a particularly original insight. As we shall see below, the difference Broad and Russell are bringing out here can be accommodated by accounts which predate their work, e.g., James' (1890) and

seem to amount to one between being aware that change has taken place over one minute, say, rather than one second, a type of difference that can be accommodated within the traditional proposal. The suggestion is rather that are aware of change in the two cases in a *different way*.⁷

A way to respond to this challenge is available from conceptual resources supplied by a non-traditional form of the memory theory.⁸ On such a view, the perception of change is explained by the contribution of a particular type of memory, distinguished from recollection or episodic memory. The *locus classicus* of the position is James' chapter on memory from *The Principles of Psychology*. The type of memory associated with the

Bergson's (1988). See also Phillips (2018, 289) for discussion of this objection as lethal for the traditional memory theory.

7. Another *prima facie* powerful argument against the memory theory, which can also be levelled against the "modified" form of the view presented below, has been discussed by Dainton (2006/2000, 126-7; 2010/2001, 1056) and Tye (2003, 87-88). If, for example, we are considering the experience of a bird's movement through positions L1, L1, L3 in times t1, t2, t3, the memory theory would account for this as an experience of the bird in L1 (at t1); then in L2 (at t2) together with a short-term memory of the bird in L1 (at t1); and then of its position L3 (at t3), together with short-term memories of its location L1 (at t1) and L2 (at t2). This might seem problematic, because we experience not only phases of the movement or change, but also the phases as *succeeding* one another. We experience the bird in L2 (at t2), as *following upon* it being in location L1 (at t1). How can the memory theory account for this experience of succession? By hypothesis, we cannot remember what we have not perceived, but it is in part due to memory that we are meant to be supplied with an experience of succession. It seems that the memory account has to presuppose what it is attempting to explain. As Phillips (2018, 288-289) notes, however, this is not necessarily the case. The memory theory can be seen as offering an account of succession, in that it explains the experience of succession as involving the connection of a short-term memory with the present precept. This, I take it, requires us to attribute to memory the capacity to make a positive contribution within experience, namely in supplying the connection implied in succession. But considering memory as productive in this sense does not seem to present a significant obstacle. In describing Phillips' response, I've used "connection" instead of Phillips' "conjunction." Conjunction is symmetrical, and succession strikingly isn't.

8. Another way for a theory of temporal experience to accommodate this difference is to understand it as a difference between memory and perception. Memory would supply our experience of noticing that change has occurred, while perception endowed with noticeable temporal extent is what gives us the experience of perceiving change. This would mean opting out of a memory theory altogether. See my discussion further below in this section, for a response on the part of this kind of proposal to Phillips' modified memory theory.

immediate perception of change is termed, in James' account, "primary" or "elementary":⁹

[W]hat elementary memory makes us aware of is the just past. The objects we feel in this directly intuited past differ from properly recollected objects. An object which is recollected, in the proper sense of that term, is one which has been absent from consciousness altogether, and now revives anew. It is brought back, recalled, fished up, so to speak, from a reservoir in which, with countless other objects, it lay buried and lost from view. But an object of primary memory is not thus brought back; it never was lost; its date was never cut off in consciousness from that of the immediately present moment. In fact, it comes to us as belonging to the rearward portion of the present space of time, and not to the genuine past (James 1890, 646-647).

James is here articulating the idea setting apart what can be called the modified memory theory (following Phillips 2010; 2018 and Hoerl 2009) from the traditional account. Our perception of change, on this version of the view, is accounted for by the constitutive contribution of memory, in that temporal perception would not be what it is were it not for the involvement of primary memory. This involvement, however, is not susceptible to the challenge expressed by Broad and Russell. The modified view allows us to bring out a difference in kind between perceiving change (e.g., watching a shooting star) and noticing that change happened (e.g., noticing the moon has moved). Direct, or immediate, perception of change is due to the preservation of the perceived which is characteristic of memory, but this is a preservation of an object which "was never cut off in consciousness from [...] the immediately present moment."¹⁰

The relation of Bergson's thought to the development of the memory theory has not been examined in significant detail.¹¹ In *Time and Free Will*, Bergson hints that memory plays an essential role in our perception of change, when he explains the experience of temporal properties as due to the "synthesis carried out by our consciousness between the actual positions and what our memory calls the former positions [*la synthèse opérée par notre conscience entre la position actuelle et ce que notre mémoire appelle les positions antérieures*]" (Bergson 1910, 124). But this is not decisive. The work does not explore the relations between perception and memory, so it

9. The type of memory described here has also been called "retention," following Husserl (1991), although retention theorists frequently resist calling it "memory."

10. The modified memory theory is defended, for example, in Stout (1930), Husserl (1991), O'Shaughnessy (2000), and recently in Phillips (2010; 2018).

11. Though see a number of remarks in Sinclair's *Bergson* (2019, 47-48, 93), and a brief related note in Perri (2017, 510-511).

does not seem to be possible to ascertain whether the view is a “traditional” or “modified” version of the account. From 1896’s *Matter and Memory*, however, we can see Bergson presenting an account of change perception which appeals to memory, and which involves distinguishing this kind of memory from recollective or “secondary” memory:

However brief we suppose our perception to be, it always occupies a certain duration, and involves, consequently, an effort of memory which prolongs, one into another, a plurality of moments [...] Memory in [...] two forms, covering as it does with a cloak of recollections a core of immediate perception, and also contracting a number of external moments into a single internal moment, constitutes the principal share of individual consciousness in perception, the subjective side of the knowledge of things (Bergson 1988, 34).

The relevant point in this passage is the distinction Bergson makes between (i) recollection and (ii) a memory which preserves phases forming the continuity characteristic of *durée* in a “single internal moment,” and in that sense seems to be part and parcel of immediate perception itself.¹² Memory is constitutive of the “concrete present” — the present as experienced — quite a different thing than what one might suppose when taking up a “strict” definition of the present as an “indivisible limit which divides the past from the future” (Bergson 1988, 150).

The relation of *durée* to memory, and the difference between the two types of memory is made further explicit in a passage from *Duration and Simultaneity*’s third chapter (“Concerning the Nature of Time”), in which Bergson characterises the continuity of immediate experience:

What is this continuity? That of a flow or passage [...] and this transition, all that is naturally experienced, is duration itself. It is memory, but not personal memory, external to what it retains, distinct from a past whose preservation it assures; it is a memory within change itself, a memory that prolongs the before into the after (Bergson 1965, 44).

Two things can be underlined here. First, Bergson explicitly *identifies durée* with memory, which rules out taking memory to possess only a causal role with regards to the experience of change.¹³ Secondly, Bergson further distinguishes between the type of memory implied in the continuity of experience, a “memory within change itself” (James’ primary memory, which is not “cut off in consciousness [from] the immediately present

12. This distinction is noted by Sinclair (2019, 93) and Perri (2017, 510-511).

13. By the claim that *durée* “is” memory, I take Bergson to be arguing that memory plays an essential role in *durée*. There is perhaps a certain looseness in the claim regarding identity. See also fn. 20.

moment”), from “personal memory”¹⁴ which is “external to what it retains” (James’ secondary memory, which “has been absent from consciousness [...] and now revives anew”).

We can, then, secure an understanding of Bergson’s position as taking up the idea central to the modified memory theory: memory of a specific kind, a memory “within change itself,” plays a constitutive role in immediate temporal experience.¹⁵

II. The Preservation of Past Psychological Success: Phillips’ Defence of the Modified Memory Theory

Contemporary work on temporal experience does not frequently appeal to the memory theory. Accounts of the non-inferential experience of time typically fall under one of three models: cinematic, retentional, or extensional. The cinematic view, on which perception is limited to instantaneous “snapshots,” relies rather straightforwardly on the memory theory in its traditional form. A cinematic theorist seems to need recourse to memory in order to explain our experiential grasp of temporal properties. But the cinematic model has been largely rejected during the past century (though see Chuard 2011; 2017 for a recent defence of the view).

Both the retentional and extensional models allow for the immediate perception of temporal properties, while differing with regards to the relation they describe as obtaining between temporal experience and its content. On the retentional view, temporal properties (succession,

14. Bergson’s recently published Collège de France course on memory, delivered between the years 1903-1904, includes extended reflections on the notion of “personal” memory (Bergson 2018, 116, 119ff.).

15. One can also find frequent discussion of the relation between memory and temporal experience in the period between his first two works and 1922’s *Duration and Simultaneity*. “Introduction to Metaphysics” (1903), for example, includes an emphatic endorsement of the constitutive role of memory in *durée*: “There is no mood, however, no matter how simple, which does not change at every instant, since there is no consciousness without memory, no continuation of a state without the addition, to the present feeling, of the memory of past moments. That is what duration consists of. 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” (Bergson 1946, 211). Memory is described here by Bergson as implicated both in non-inferential, or immediate, temporal experience as well as in the “long term” unity of experience. Further passages in which Bergson notes the relation between memory and *durée* include Bergson (2019, 43, 55, 63 and 1911, 4, 20).

order, duration) are considered as contents of instantaneous, or quasi-instantaneous experiences. The model is sometimes understood as involving the application of a general lesson concerning representation to the case of temporal experience: just as we do not take our experience of a red flower, for example, to be *itself* red, our experience of time need not be taken to possess (significant) temporal structure. The representational vehicle (in this case, the experience representing temporal properties) need not be understood as possessing the structure of its contents (the temporal properties).¹⁶ The extensional model, by contrast, involves identifying an explanatory connection between the experience of time and its contents. On this view, our experience of temporal properties *itself* unfolds, or progresses in time. Our experience of temporal properties is explained by the temporal extension of experience.¹⁷ Versions of both the retentional and the extensional theories, the two competing models of temporal experience in contemporary literature, do not typically employ the memory theory. One can find, for example, explicit criticism of the memory theory in Lee's (2014) retentional model,¹⁸ as well as in Dainton (2006/2000) and Hoerl's extensional accounts of temporal experience (Hoerl 2009).

In recent work, Phillips has defended a form of the memory theory which he takes to apply to both the retentional and extensional models (Phillips 2010; 2018). A broad aim of his paper involves suggesting that the distinction between the models of temporal experience does not hinge on whether they appeal to the memory theory. Seeing that all the models might well involve attributing to memory a constitutive role in change perception would allow us, according to Phillips, to focus on the central issue with regards to which the views diverge: the relation between temporal experience and the temporal profile of experience itself. More specifically, on the question of whether temporal experience itself unfolds

16. See Tye (2003), Grush (2005; 2007; 2016), and Lee (2014) for recent versions of the retentional model. Earlier variants of the view can be found in James (1890) and Husserl (1991).

17. See Dainton (2006/2000; 2008; 2014; 2016), Phillips (2010; 2018), Hoerl (2009; 2013; 2017), and Soteriou (2010; 2013) for recent extensional accounts of temporal experience. Bergson is arguably a proponent of the approach, and another early variant of the position can also be found in Stern (2005).

18. Lee's (2014) view is a version on the retentional model, in that on his account our experience of change is the content of quasi-instantaneous states, and there is thus no explanatory relation between the structure of temporal experience and its content. Lee explicitly denies, however, a constitutive role for memory (including "retention" memory, as described by Husserl) in change perception. In light of this rejection, Lee terms his position the "atomic view" of temporal experience.

in time (Phillips 2018, 294-295). I will return to this suggestion in the conclusion of this paper.

Phillips pursues this goal by specifying the claims made within the memory theory in its modified form and showing that the theory can be understood as applicable to an understanding of temporal experience on the retentive view — contra Lee's rejection of the memory theory (Lee 2014) — as well as the extensional view — as defended by Dainton (2006/2000). Phillips' argument starts from appreciating that the distinguishing feature of all forms of memory is a preservation of "cognitive contact" with the past, or the continuation of past psychological success.¹⁹ Episodic memory, James' "secondary" memory, involves preservation of past acquaintance with things or events; semantic memory involves the preservation of past knowledge (Phillips 2010, 194; 2018, 291). Primary, or elementary, memory can be seen as involving the continuation of past psychological success by allowing us to have experiences of things succeeding one another. If we are considering the succession of notes *do* to *re*, for example:

[H]earing *re* involves primary memory insofar as it involves hearing *re* in a particular way, namely as succeeding from *do*. This modification of one's manner of awareness plausibly counts as a form in which psychological success (namely awareness of *do*) can be preserved (Phillips 2018, 291).

Crucially, the idea of preservation of past psychological success in primary memory does not depend on the presentation of preceding parts or phases of a succession *as past* — the modified form of the memory theory does not involve tensed experiences of the phases in succession (Phillips 2018, 290-291). Successive phases can be considered as parts of one unified, albeit complex, perceptual experience of change. In that way, the modified memory theory can hold on to the distinction between noticing that change happened — which would include tensed experiences — and the immediate perception of change. The latter involves the preservation of past success in a memory "internal to change," experiences which are not retrieved since they have never been absent.

This construal of the memory theory in its modified form, in line with the ideas from James and Bergson presented above, allows Phillips to argue that both the retentive and extensional accounts can be understood as appealing to memory (Phillips 2018, 289-294). The idea of the preservation of past psychological success, according to Phillips, is implied in the very idea of an experience of succession, regardless of the relation a theory of

19. Phillips here draws upon Martin's (2001) account of episodic memory.

temporal experience takes to obtain between the content of temporal experience and its structure. That is, regardless of whether experiences of succession are themselves successive. Both the retentional and extensional approaches assert that we immediately experience succession, and experiencing succession involves the preservation of past psychological success — and hence memory.

One may wonder, however, whether the turn to memory has been decisively motivated in the context of Phillips’ argument. The preservation of past psychological success is meant to explain our experience of temporal properties, but it has seemed to a number of theorists that the appeal to memory in this context is unnecessary. Hoerl, for example, sketches out an alternative on which succession simply falls under the scope of a temporally extended experience (Hoerl 2009, 8), which need not involve any appeal to memory. The modified memory theory, according to Hoerl, does not seem to describe a real contact with the past, but only a “proxy for that contact” (Hoerl 2009, 4). As I understand Hoerl’s point, it is that when we look at what the memory theory is meant to account for — the experience of succession — perception itself already possess all the necessary resources.

Dainton also expresses a similar thought, recently noting with regards to the involvement of memory in Bergson’s *durée* that “a case can be made [...] for holding that in these contexts [i.e., the contexts in which Bergson examines the relation of *durée* to memory] Bergson’s ‘memory’ is simply the unifying relation which connects the earlier and later phases into a single episode of *durée*” (Dainton 2017, 104). On Dainton’s view of temporal experience, the experiential unifying relation which binds together phases of change into a single experience — “co-consciousness” — does not involve memory of any kind (Dainton 2006/2000, 126-127; 2010/2001, 105-106). An analogous line of thought comes up in Lee (2014), who takes it that a single state, devoid of any relation to memory, can satisfactorily be considered as having succession as its content. There is no work to be done by memory in the immediate apprehension of succession.

It is difficult to make out who has the upper hand in this debate. Given that what we are accounting for is the experience of succession, there does not seem to be a decisive reason either in favour, or against, the memory theory of change in its modified form. Phillips’ version of the view, in line with the aforementioned points mentioned in relation to James and Bergson, is coherent, and successful in escaping the challenge articulated in Broad’s work. There is a measure of intuitive appeal to the idea of a preservation of

past psychological success as required for an account of change perception, but it seems that the modification of awareness involved in experiencing succession can just as well be thought (as suggested by Hoerl, Dainton, and Lee) to be inherent to temporal experience itself, as distinct from memory.

III. The Dynamic Memory Theory

Bergson, as noted above, presents a view in accordance with the idea at the heart of the modified memory theory. As in James' and Phillips' accounts, on Bergson's view a type of memory distinct from recollection is implied in our non-inferential experience of change. Memory prolongs the "before into the after" (Bergson 1965, 44) and is thus essential to our experience of succession. As I noted with regards to Phillips' proposal, this idea in itself does not seem to decisively carve out an explanatory niche for the memory theory. What I would like to suggest, at this stage, is that we can find in Bergson an additional claim that could make the appeal to memory more persuasive. The claim is that our awareness of change does not only involve the preservation of past psychological success; it involves the preservation of that which is "receding" within the present of our perception, the prolongation of that which is no longer in what is.

According to Bergson, *durée* is the "continuous life of a memory which prolongs the past into the present" (Bergson 1946, 211). In this sense, the role of (primary) memory in immediate temporal experience involves the preservation of the past, the "building up" of states in the course of changes and movements. My experience of the succession of the notes *G-D-B* in the opening of Bach's Cello Suite #1, for example, is in this sense due to memory. So far, we are in the realm of the modified memory theory as presented by James (1890), and as recently defended in Phillips (2018). But the awareness of the change also involves memory because these notes *recede* into the past as they are perceived; or rather, as Bergson might have preferred, a new present is arising at each stage of the succession, constantly replacing the past moments. This is particularly evident in a passage from *Duration and Simultaneity*:

[I]t is impossible to distinguish between the duration, however short it may be, that separates two instances and a memory that connects them,²⁰ because *duration*

20. There is a certain looseness to the expression "impossible to distinguish between" here (as also noted in fn. 13 with regards to the passage from Bergson 1965, 44). I take to mean that it is impossible for *durée* to be a feature of experience without memory being involved.

is essentially a continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist. This is real time, perceived and lived (Bergson 1965, 49; italics mine).

The idea, I think, is experientially compelling, even if we seldom pause to appreciate it or its significance. When we hear the note B in the phrase G-D-B of the cello suite phrase, for example, there is a sense in which the G is *no longer*, though it is still present, or preserved, in our consciousness. Jumping into a cool lake on a summer's day, when we hit the water our experience of swiftly moving through the air is preserved in our awareness but is "no longer." What is recognised by Bergson's suggestion is quite simple, notwithstanding the apparently paradoxical formulation of a "continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist."

The idea of a continuation of what no longer is into what exists is arguably absent from the modified form of the memory theory as discussed above, on which what memory explains is only the preservation of past moments. And it seems to allow decisively singling out a role for memory in change perception. Beyond preservation of successive terms, the experientially appealing idea of a perception of what is "no longer," in the present, is the key.²¹

Now, the immediate response to this idea could well be that it seems to bring us within the remit of the critique applied to the traditional version of the memory theory, based on the idea captured in Broad's (1923) and Russell's (1927) remarks. The criticism would apply if what we would be describing was an experience that is *of the past*, in the same sense that episodic memories are. This would mean that when we experience the note B in the succession of notes G-D-B within the specious present, for example, the G would be "no longer" in the same sense that hearing the G 30 seconds or 5 hours ago would be "no longer." Watching a shooting star would involve phases which are "no longer" in the same sense that the moon has moved involves past experiences which are "no longer." We would not then be able to account for a distinction between *noticing that change happened* and *perceiving change immediately*, which is the important insight expressed by Broad. This would indeed be a bad result.

This, however, is not what the version of the memory theory which involves recognising "the continuation of what no longer exists into what does exist"

21. Dainton's point concerning the relation of memory to *durée* noted above — that it is "simply the unifying relation which connects the earlier and later phases into a single episode of *durée*" (Dainton 2017, 104, fn. 15) - does not, then, fully capture the scope of Bergson's position.

implies. The key, I think, is that the “continuation” we’re invited to notice is not of an object or content as *past* (e.g., in the past experiences of the moon’s location), but rather what might be called *the becoming present of the past*. To put it in terms of tense, we’re invited to consider not a tensed experience, but an experience which can be put in terms of “dynamic tensing” — of the moments *becoming present*, *becoming past*, continuously. This experience of “tensing” in the scope of the present, absent from the account presented by James and Phillips, indicates the manner in which a primary form of memory (distinct from episodic, or “personal,” memory) is constitutive of the non-inferential experience of change. The experience is tensed when it is no longer within the scope of the specious present, but while it is, it is dynamically experienced as being preserved while becoming past.

Bergson’s ideas on memory and temporal perception allow us, then, to articulate what might be called a “dynamic memory theory.” The view can be considered as a version of the modified memory theory, insofar as the role attributed to memory as partially constitutive of change perception, prolonging the “before into the after” (Bergson 1965, 44), is essentially the same as that described by Phillips. The dynamic view, as with Phillips’ construal of the modified account, avoids the objection which was seen to be deadly for the traditional memory theory. The modified theory as such, however, is meant to be compatible with views (e.g., Lee 2014) that deny any role for tense in non-inferential temporal experience. As I’ve suggested above, Phillips’ articulation of the theory does not in itself provide a conclusive motivation for the appeal to memory. The motivation, I’ve claimed in this section, can be provided in the context of the dynamic view, differentiated from other possible versions of the modified theory by the way it accommodates the phenomenon of “dynamic tensing” within the scope of non-inferential change perception.²²

IV. Conclusion

I have argued that Bergson’s view is in agreement with insights expressed as early as William James’ work and more recently in publications by Phillips, concerning the involvement of a form of primary memory in temporal experience. I have also suggested that Bergson’s construal of the memory

22. The dynamic memory theory I’m describing has interesting similarities with Husserl’s “modal retentionalism,” on which successive phases are presented under different temporal modes — i.e., as receding more and more into the past — but a comparison between the views lies beyond the present scope.

theory might allow to address a challenge arising with regards to a recent formulation of the account.

There might be reason to worry, however, that the memory theory of temporal experience lies in tension with an additional theoretical commitment taken up in Bergson's work. As I noted above, Phillips' argument in favour of the memory theory is meant to apply to both the retentive and extensional models. And Bergson's position on the experience of time is arguably a version of the latter — on his proposal, temporal experience itself unfolds in time just like its content.²³ Now, the problem here concerns the fact that the contribution of memory in (immediate) experience seems to rely on a notion of simultaneous presence with a precept or sensation. Taking memory of phases, a change (e.g., the opening notes G-D of Bach's suite) to be partially constitutive of the experience of change appears to amount to the view that the remembered contents are simultaneous with the successive phases (e.g., the B note which succeeds them). The result would be pulling apart the content (the succession G-D-B) from the time it takes the experience to occur, since the temporal content allegedly results from the simultaneous conjunction of a precept (e.g., the note B) and the memory of preceding phases (e.g., notes G-D). The conjunction might itself have some temporal extension (e.g., of experiencing the B note), but this extension does not conform to the extension of the experienced content (e.g., of the phrase G-D-B).

This issue merits further discussion, but one way to approach this concern is to consider the memory constitutive of the immediate experience of change apart from the notion of simultaneous presence. Primary memory, a memory "within change itself," might not rely on the kind of simultaneous conjunction with present precepts which characterises the availability of secondary, or episodic, memory. It can be taken to be implicated in the "distention," or "stretching out" of the perceived present, characteristic of experience itself and not merely its objects.

23. See Dainton (2017). In recent and forthcoming work (Wolf 2020), I discuss Bergson's relation to the view.

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Yaron Wolf is Assistant Professor of Philosophy at University College Roosevelt, Utrecht University. His research interests lie in the philosophy of time, philosophy of mind, and the history of modern philosophy. He studied in Israel, the UK, and France, obtaining a DPhil in Philosophy from the University of Oxford (2020). He is co-editor of *The Bergsonian Mind* (Routledge, 2021).

Abstract: This paper examines Bergson’s position concerning the relation between memory and the immediate experience of change. I argue that Bergson’s view, which has not been discussed in significant detail in the literature, can shed new light upon recent debates on the topic. I approach this in three steps. First, I examine the “memory theory” of immediate temporal experience in its two main forms — a “traditional” version and a “modified” account — situating Bergson’s views vis-à-vis this distinction. Second, I explore a contemporary defence of the memory theory and underline a limitation in this account. Finally, I focus on a feature of Bergson’s reflections on memory and temporal experience that can potentially address this limitation.

Keywords: Henri Bergson, temporal experience, primary memory, William James, Thomas Reid.

Résumé: Cet article examine la position de Bergson concernant la relation entre la mémoire et l’expérience immédiate du changement. Je soutiens que le point de vue de Bergson, qui n’a pas été discuté en détail dans la littérature, peut apporter un nouvel éclairage au débat récent sur le sujet. J’aborde cette question en trois étapes. Premièrement, j’examine la “théorie de la mémoire” de l’expérience temporelle immédiate sous ses deux formes principales — une version “traditionnelle” et un compte “modifié” — en situant le point de vue de Bergson par rapport à cette distinction. Ensuite, j’explore une défense contemporaine de la théorie de la mémoire et je souligne une limitation de ce compte-rendu. Enfin, je me concentre sur une caractéristique des réflexions de Bergson sur la mémoire et l’expérience temporelle qui peut potentiellement résoudre cette limitation.

Mots-clés : Henri Bergson, expérience temporelle, mémoire primaire, William James, Thomas Reid.