Epochal Time and the Creativity of Thinking: 
Henri Bergson and Alfred North Whitehead

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Epochal time and creativity
The Bergsonian and the Whiteheadian theories of time are both epochal. One can say that an epoch is any amount of time that is a unified and indivisible duration. Epochs do not coincide with mathematical instants, neither are they of equal duration. They are occurrences of becoming with temporal extension and no temporal divisibility. Epochal time is of the utmost importance to creativity. The “discovery” of epochal time restores time to life and philosophy. It shows how creativity happens. Creativity can happen through thinking, art creation and moral creation. Thus creativity generates temporal processes. Duration is in the very origin of creativity but the ultimate meaning of creativity is also duration.

Many of Bergson’s commentators hold that Bergsonian time is non-epochal due to Bergson’s emphasis on continuity. In Time and Free Will¹ Bergson does emphasise the continuity of psychological time. He also says that homogeneous time, the time we can measure with our clocks, reflects the spatial characteristics of the external world. “In consciousness we find states which succeed, without being distinguished from one another; and in space simultaneities which, without succeeding, are distinguished from one another, in the sense that one has ceased to exist when the other appears. Outside us, mutual externality without succession; within us, succession without mutual externality.”² In reading Bergson we must not confuse the continuity of duration with mathematical continuity, which is the equivalent of ‘space simultaneities.’ The continuity of duration is indivisible whereas mathematical continuity is infinitely divisible. Time is a continuous multiplicity. The states of consciousness are not external to one another; they form a continuous, heterogeneous multiplicity in which states of consciousness succeed and melt into one another. Time is thus a continuous flow of interpenetrating states of consciousness.

This description of time seems to deny any sort of epochal time, for time is depicted as continuous and qualitative. However, time’s continuity is also heterogeneous. Milic Capek characterized Bergsonian time as having ‘pulsational character’ and growing ‘by concrete drops of novelty.’³ The heterogeneity of duration means that there are internal differences within time. States of consciousness are all different from one another; as they come into existence they carry with them a whole past that is indestructible. Consciousness integrates memory. In Matter and Memory Bergson relates duration to extension and finds different rhythms of duration⁴. There is no sharp distinction between duration and extensiveness. Memory meets extensiveness, for every being has its own way of enduring. The rhythm of duration depends on the extension of memory. Memory is much more extensive in higher beings. Quoting Espinoza’s expression, Bergson says that as we come closer to matter, we approach mens momentanea. For memory in material entities is almost completely negligible.

The past engulfs the new states of consciousness and preserves them, so that new states of consciousness always integrate their whole antecedent past. The indestructible richness of duration flows and grows uninterruptedly. But it does so as the novel states of consciousness appear, by novel drops of existence. Bergsonian continuity is a creative, inexhaustible synthesis that

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includes all qualitative differences. Duration has no instants; instead, it has thickness, i.e. time endures. Such thickness of duration with its pulsations is the fundamental element of Bergsonian epochal time. Novelty is an essential, inherent characteristic of duration, which we cannot consider apart from duration itself. “Thus the living being essentially has duration; it has duration precisely because it is continuously elaborating what is new and because there is no elaboration without searching, no searching without groping. Time is the very hesitation, or it is nothing. ... Why, then, the unrolling? Why does reality unfurl? Why is it not spread out? What good is time? ... It must therefore, be elaboration. Would it not then be a vehicle of creation and of choice?”

The hesitation of time reveals this multiplicity of possibilities; the present duration is the continuous elaboration of what is new. Time comes into existence as it invents what is new and considers all its possibilities. Thus novelty means that there must be a difference between the successive phases of duration. Such a difference accounts for creativity and also for the thickness of duration, i.e. for the present time.

As we said before, time is heterogeneous. Phases succeed one another, notwithstanding the fact that continuity and heterogeneity are complementary aspects of duration. This succession holds qualitative differences between the succeeding phases. Diversity is the essential, distinguishing character of the Bergsonian multiplicities. Every being has its own duration with its own rhythm, and every being’s present time has its own thickness due to the being’s own rhythm. “The duration lived by our consciousness is a duration with its own determined rhythm.” A duration with its own determined rhythm must surely be epochal. It will grow ‘by concrete drops of novelty.’ Such drops of novelty are distinguishable from one another, for they carry the activity of the past and in so doing add novelty on to it. Bergson says that “by examining change more closely, we should see that it pursues its course without interruption, and that what we call a state is the appearance which a change assumes in the eyes of a being who himself changes according to an identical or analogous rhythm. A state is, then, an appearance that springs from the co-existence of two changes under certain peculiar conditions.”

The epochal nature of time becomes clear when we examine change. Change is the uninterrupted flow of reality, although one can identify states within it. Such states are the rhythms of change of every being. They are identifiable because every being changes according to a certain rhythm. Succession does include phases even though it is indivisible; its rhythmical nature ascribes an epochal nature to time. “On the other hand, assured of the indivisibility of change, we shall apprehend succession quite otherwise than as juxtaposition of a “before” and an “after” without on that account reducing it in any way to simultaneity. We shall obtain a pure feeling (sentiment) of succession, that which one experiences when one has eliminated from the perception of succession every spatial image.”

Bergsonian time then eliminates geometrical, spatial representations of time, without reducing it to an amorphous continuity always identical to itself. Duration carries novelty within itself as it engulfs and creates reality. Creativity emerges from duration, being duration itself creative. In fact, duration pursues its course carrying all the indestructible past with it and adding ‘unpredictable novelty’ on to it. The diversity of its phases of succession introduces novelty into the flow of reality, so that every phase differs from its previous one; there are no two identical phases in Bergsonian succession. Thus the continuity of the temporal process is nevertheless differentiated into the diversity of succession. However, this diversity of succession is not that of a series of distinct elements; phases are distinguishable, but they are not separate and clear-cut. Distinguishable phases of time are precisely what any epochal theory of time assumes. The introduction of novelty into the course of reality means that Bergsonian time can be nothing else but epochal time.

Whiteheadian time is also epochal. Its epochal nature is more easily recognised by commentators than Bergsonian time’s epochal nature. However, Whitehead’s epochal theory of time is not as discontinuous as some commentators take it to be. Actual entities, the final elements of Whiteheadian cosmological metaphysics, come into being like ‘drops of experience, complex and interdependent.’ Actual entities originate from other antecedent actual entities. The becoming of an actual entity forms its own being; “how an actual entity becomes constitutes what that actual entity is;” it comes into being as it becomes. Actual entities become and perish; and as they perish, they objectify themselves in other actual entities. An actual entity is a new actuality unifying
many antecedent actual occasions. It emerges from previous entities, but it is a novel entity. Creativity is responsible for this novelty. Actual entities that come into existence are always novel and temporal. They are time itself ‘taking its time’ in order to achieve individualization and determination. Thus in Whitehead’s philosophy creativity underlies all reality and is responsible for the novelty of process. It takes form in every actual entity, but in itself has no form or actuality. Whitehead describes it in beautiful terms: “The ultimate metaphysical principle is the advance from disjunction to conjunction, creating a novel entity other than the entities given in disjunction. The novel entity is at once the togetherness of the ‘many’ which it finds, and also it is one among the disjunctive ‘many’ which it leaves; it is a novel entity, disjunctively among the many entities which it synthesizes. The many become one, and are increased by one.” Creativity manifests itself through the novel occasions it originates, but it has no existence apart from them. The ‘creative advance’ consists in the ‘many’ synthesizing into a novel ‘one.’ For “there is no meaning to ‘creativity’ apart from its ‘creatures.”

Novelty is inexplicable in terms of the analytical elements composing an actual entity. The many antecedent entities do not per se give rise to a novel entity. Creativity introduces novelty amongst the ‘many’, so that they can unify into ‘one’ and become a new entity that adds to the previous entities. An actual entity becomes as one. As it becomes it individualises and then perishes. Whitehead writes that “actual entities perish, but do not change; they are what they are.” This means that because every actual entity becomes as a whole, its becoming is not divisible into parts. Also, there is not a ‘before’ and an ‘after’ in the process of becoming. Actual occasions have a duration of their own that is whole and indivisible. They create time as they become. Each duration is epochal. “Time is sheer succession of epochal durations.” The epochal duration is a whole, and an epoch is an actuality with certain duration. In Whiteheadian phraseology this actuality or epoch is an individual or an atom. Atoms, in this sense, are discrete unities of time, which become, and in so doing individualise. Whiteheadian atoms are not the equivalent of the atoms of Democritus and have no correspondence with the mathematical instant, represented as a point of a line. “As used here the words ‘individual’ and ‘atom’ have the same meaning, that they apply to composite things with an absolute reality which their components lack. These words properly apply to an actual entity in its immediacy of self-attainment when it stands out as for itself alone, with its own affective self-enjoyment. The term ‘monad’ also expresses this essential unity at the decisive moment, which stands between its birth and its perishing. The creativity of the world is the throbbing emotion of the past hurling itself into a new transcendent fact. It is the flying dart, of which Lucretius speaks, hurled beyond the bounds of the world.”

Epochal time is composed of extended unities of duration but it does not deny continuity. As they become, actual entities form a continuously extensive world. The actual world is continuous in its becoming. But the process of becoming of an actual entity cannot be continuous. For becoming is epochal and epochs become as wholes; they have no extensive parts. “There is a becoming of continuity, but no continuity of becoming. The actual occasions are the creatures which become, and they constitute a continuously extensive world. In other words, extensiveness becomes, but ‘becoming’ is not itself extensive.” The wholeness of epochs is a correlate of creativity. Creativity is the essential element in epochal time, for it permits that actual occasions come into being as epochs. The unities that constitute the world have duration and always emerge as novel creatures. They are novel creatures because, as they arouse from their past, they create time and come into existence. Novelty is introduced into reality because time has duration.

**Thought, Time and Creativity**

Human activity is temporal, and it is also creative. Thus it is not surprising to find that in Bergson and Whitehead’s philosophies thinking and creativity are intermingled.

Bergson examines intellectual effort; he follows the development of creativity as human thought comes into existence. He also unveils the process of intellectual effort and synthesises a methodology applicable to every form of creativity. In *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* moral creativity is described in an analogous way to that of intellectual creativity. In *Creative Mind* true art is depicted as the result of this process of creativity.

Bergsonian duration is always renovating itself. “Intuition, bound up to a duration which is growth,
perceives in it an uninterrupted continuity of unforeseeable novelty; it sees, it knows that the mind draws from itself more than it has, that spiritually consists in just that, and that reality, impregnated with spirit, is creation. Our minds can produce more than they ‘contain’; by means of ‘intellectual effort’ we can create something new, which did not pre-exist in our minds. Duration is the driving force involved in this effort that moves towards novelty.

Thought is not always carried out with ease because creative work mainly requires an effort. Intellectual effort results in a creative process. It unravels as a creative movement. In examining intellectual work Bergson starts with memory, which he holds to be the simplest instance of its kind. In recollection there is always a mixture of mechanical recall and intelligent mental rebuilding. Also there is normally a movement of the mind crossing different planes of consciousness. However, instantaneous recall develops in one and the same plane of consciousness. The mind moves from one element of memory to another but is always kept on one and the same level of consciousness. As they succeed one another mechanically, memories come near to sensation. In instantaneous recall there is no interpretation of memories because interpretation requires that the mind move from one plane of consciousness to another. Duration, so to speak, does not fully make its appearance in instantaneous memory.

On the other hand, other types of recollection, that are not instantaneous, favour the comings and goings of the mind from one plane of consciousness to another. In this kind of memory there is an effort involved and more time is needed for recollecting. This kind of memory develops according to a dynamic scheme. A multiplicity of images is condensed into one simple idea that holds them in a higher plane of consciousness than the initial one. Then there is a descent to lower planes of consciousness as the mind approaches sensation and the idea develops again into images. The "idea does not contain the images themselves so much as the indication of what we must do to reconstruct them. It is not an extract of the images, got by impoverishing each of them; if it were, I should not understand why the scheme enables us, as it does in so many cases, to recover the images integrally. The scheme is not an excerpt or a concise description of an idea. It is a whole that “contains, in the estate of reciprocal implication, what the images will evolve into parts external to one another. ... This reciprocal implication, and consequent internal complication, is so necessary, it is so much the essence of the schematic idea, that if it be just a simple image you are trying to evoke, the scheme may not be nearly so simple. Thus the dynamic scheme indicates mainly a certain direction of effort, for the images are not yet definite, clear-cut images. We get simply an indication of what to do to build them up again mentally.

The elements of the schematic idea interpenetrate like the states of consciousness, which succeed one another. The outcome of the effort of recall is a clear, definite idea. The dynamic scheme evolves in the same fashion as that of the states of consciousness that succeed one another. The diversity of its phases of succession introduces novelty into the flow of consciousness, so that there can be no two identical phases. However, the continuity of this temporal process, which is also a process of intellectual effort, is nevertheless differentiated into a diversity of planes of consciousness. The diversity of planes of consciousness, like the diversity of interpenetrating states of consciousness, is not that of a series of distinct planes; planes of consciousness are distinguishable, but they are not ready-made. The movement of the mind comes and goes between these planes, and the dynamic scheme introduces creativity in the flux of consciousness. States of mind can now draw novelty from their process of unravelling. The mystery of creation is unveiled by duration, which, through its own unfolding, is capable of thrusting novelty onto the world. Memories keep themselves whole and unaltered, but the recalling movement of the mind is unrepeatable. Each time we carry out the effort of recall, novelty comes about in the very effort of recollection.

The intellectual effort proceeds much in the same way as the effort of recall. Intellectual effort is a comprehensive effort of interpretation: “the mind (is) continually coming and going between perceptions or images, on the one hand, and their meaning, on the other.” It goes from the abstract to the concrete. The meaning comes first, not the concrete sentence we are listening to, or the particular idea we are trying to understand. Perceptions do not precede memory. Bergson holds that it is memory that guides us to our perceptions, for perceptions by themselves cannot
evoke the memory that resembles them. There is a slight first contact with images that sets abstract thinking on the right direction, so that it can develop concrete, full ideas. Once again the mind goes through different planes of consciousness, descending from the abstract to the concrete. It is a common mistake to think that the mind goes from the concrete to the abstract; if it were so, the mind would be lost. In order to understand the meaning of a sentence we have to construct a first meaning that sets the mind on its sinuous way, descending from higher planes of consciousness, so that it can perceive the actual sentence that is given to perception. It is the first rough meaning that triggers the development of the scheme itself. In the end, there may be nothing left of the first meaning, when the full perception is produced. Thought does not emerge from nothing, and neither does perception. Our experiencing has always some background. Vladimir Jankélévitch in his magnificent essay on Bergson’s philosophy says that the mind always precedes the mind25. In fact, there is no emergence of thought if we do not start with thinking; primary thinking is vague and indefinite but there is no clearness of the image without prior indefiniteness. Clear images originate in vagueness. The scheme gives place to concrete images.

Duration is an essential factor in this kind of intellectual effort. Its relevance is connected with the rhythm of duration, which characterizes each and every being. The process of creation is temporal. The needed effort for a certain creative work will express itself in temporal terms. Creative work takes time and is itself the way through which time happens. Every being endures in a particular way, so that it reflects its own creativity.

The effort of invention unfolds itself much in the same manner the typical intellectual effort does. The vague, primary meaning gives place to an effect, conceived by us in our minds as already obtained; we then try and find out all the elements we need to fill up the gap between the effect drawn in our minds, and the actual result we are trying to achieve. But this first effect is also conceived in vagueness. The attempt to fill up the gap consists in the dynamic scheme that ultimately gives rise to the invention.

The same process applies to creative artistic work. The musician and the poet also conceive a first idea, which they take as the goal they want to achieve. Their goal is taken as a whole that develops into different parts. The dynamic scheme gives rise to the images, even though most of the time in artistic work nothing remains of the original scheme. The scheme is also modified, as it develops, by the images that it is trying to produce, which will fill it up. There is effort in this movement that goes from the scheme to the image. Creativity lies in the whole movement; it lies especially in the attempts of the images to modify the scheme as the whole dynamism develops. The scheme itself may be elastic with no clear outline, so that it can adapt to different images trying to fill in the scheme.

Because intellectual work takes time, it requires an effort in addition to ordinary work. Whenever there is effort, work takes longer because the mind is busy converting the scheme into the images. This kind of effort consists of a special diversity of states of consciousness that move from the scheme towards the image, carrying out trial experiments in order to develop the scheme into images. Different trial experiments follow one another; it may take minutes or even hours, sometimes it takes a lifetime. The different states of consciousness that follow one another are trial efforts that unfold in uninterrupted succeeding phases, coming and going one after another until one of them finally fits into the scheme. It may happen that none of these trial efforts succeeds. In such a case the scheme will modify itself, and in the end there may be nothing left of the original scheme. There is hesitation all along this process of elaboration. Thus there is essentially duration in intellectual effort, be it artistic work or the sheer effort of recall; intellectual work endures precisely because there is this continuous hesitating elaboration of novelty. “Time is the very hesitation, or it is nothing.” Intellectual effort is duration. Like everything that comes into being, it is a passage from vagueness into definiteness, from virtuality into realization. This intermediate phase between haziness and accomplishment endures in its very hesitation; hesitation is the essence of novelty itself.

One could say that what characterizes creative work is the sinuous movement of the mind that points the way to definiteness. A true work of art will find out and depict this movement. True artists are not interested in depicting abstractions, nor are they interested in the detailed portrait of their
models. They look for the fundamental movement that hides behind each individual.24

One can also identify this wavelike movement in the effort of moral creation. Bergson gives us a thorough description of the method of moral creation. “The method consisted in supposing possible what is actually impossible in a given society, in imagining what would be its effect on the soul of society, and then inducing some such psychic condition by propaganda and example: the effect, once obtained, would retrospectively complete its cause; new feelings, evanescent indeed, would call forth the new legislation seemingly indispensable to their appearance, and which would then serve to consolidate them.”25

Moral creation unfolds itself by experiment trials, just like art creation. The success of the method of moral creation lies in the dynamism that sets the direction that should be taken in order to achieve moral reform. The mystics who drive humanity to a fuller and more creative way of life employ this method. They blindly tackle what seems to be unfeasible to achieve real moral novelty. The movement implied in their effort gives rise ultimately to new forms of morality that set humanity tracking towards a new age.

Art creators, like moral creators, ultimately manage to bring into existence a new atmosphere induced by the presence of what was in the first place an unacceptable work of art. The new work of art makes way for a new artistic atmosphere and so becomes retroactively a new masterpiece. The presence and the endurance of the work of art in a given society are able to create its own successfulness and its own acknowledgement as a new conception of art.

In Whiteheadian philosophy, experience is not the outcome of a synthesis of clear and distinct perceptions. It starts from vagueness, not from definite data. “The truth is that our sense perceptions are extraordinarily vague and confused modes of experience.”26 We relate to a vague totality. Definiteness and clarity come later. Our experience is not a response to clear and well-defined details. Details are “interpretive and not originative. What is original is the vague totality.”27 Clarity results from abstraction, which is a subsequent process.

Abstractions arise from the totality of reality, but they may end up working quite separately from the concreteness from which they evolved. Abstractions may even jeopardise all the diversity in reality necessary to survival and the preservation of life. Abstraction often induces us to take the abstract for the concrete, and so contradict life itself. We thus incur in the fallacy of misplaced concreteness. But life is process and process, going the opposite way of abstraction, preserves fruitful experience.

In Whitehead’s philosophy abstraction is not to be confused with generalization. Whiteheadian generalization takes process into account, whereas abstraction is only concerned with timeless relationships. Abstraction may obscure generalization, for concentration on certain aspects of things may jeopardise a global comprehensive perspective and impair the complete meaning.

When Whitehead deals with dynamic thought, he is mainly interested in the experience of generalization, which he considers to be a vast, comprehensive effort that aims at the apprehension of the totality of reality. Generalization is not abstraction from the concrete. It is comprehensiveness in its vastness embracing diversity. “The true method of discovery is like the flight of an aeroplane. It starts from the ground of particular observation; it makes a flight in the thin air of imaginative generalization; and it again lands for renewed observation rendered acute by rational interpretation. … Such thought supplies the differences which the direct observation lacks. It can even play with inconsistency; and can thus throw light on the consistent, and persistent, elements in experience by comparison with what in imagination is inconsistent with them.”28 The true method of discovery may also be called creative thought. For the preliminary observation from which it starts is then considerably enriched by imaginative generalization, so that the new observation will be a novel thought. It will include all the diversity that cannot be found in ordinary observation and that is normally ignored in abstraction. There is in Whitehead’s philosophy what we might call a true effort of generalization, i.e. an all-embracing, imaginative attempt to understand reality in its immensity.

Although no primary principle is unknowable, our understanding is limited because we are finite.29 Our understanding is always partial even though
“whatever exists, is capable of knowledge in respect to the finitude of its connections with the rest of things. In other words, we can know anything in some of its perspectives. But the totality of perspectives involves an infinitude beyond finite knowledge.”

The aim of the effort of generalization is precisely an increase in the comprehensiveness of perspectives. It is a dynamics that starts from usual observation in order to generalize; it then goes from the general to the concrete in order to enlarge generalization and in so doing preserve and enhance the diversity of the concrete. By including this diversity in generalization without abstracting its differences, we attain larger and more comprehensive perspectives. But these perspectives give us an understanding that is ever incomplete. No state of mind comes definitely to an end. Our process of thinking is never complete, for it is a temporal process and time is by its very nature incomplete.

Whitehead writes in *Modes of Thought* that understanding is “a process of penetration, incomplete and partial.” Penetration as well as broad comprehension is essential to understanding. There is no true understanding unless there is a reference to process. The introduction of novelty, made possible by the very existence of the incompleteness of time, supplies the enlargement necessitated by generalization.

The understanding of ideal abstract notions usually bears no reference to passage. Classical mathematical understanding illustrates how time is abstracted from in current science, how mathematics are devoid of motion and change. Nevertheless, Whitehead holds that mathematical entities are not static and that they play their roles in various mathematical processes. He also holds that mathematical analysis is built on self-evidence and that “self-evidence is understanding.” He believes there is “a clarity of insight” that stands out when we deal with simple, mathematical operations, but there is no comprehensive mathematical understanding because, in human thought, there is no broad self-evidence of mathematics. Clarity of insight is limited in human beings. Proofs and inference are secondary procedures that presuppose some kind of self-evidence. They can help extend it but the premises of logic always start from self-evidence. Therefore understanding rests on self-evidence, although full comprehensiveness is denied to human beings. “We can never fully understand. But we can increase our penetration. ... For the finite individual

there is penetration to novelty in its own experience.” Understanding is a fully temporal process that depends on the introduction of novelty for its increase in comprehensiveness; the effort of generalization justifies thought, even though we can never fully understand. Generalization is an imaginative scheme that renews primary observation. It enlarges understanding for it takes diversity into account. It can also account for inconsistency.

Inconsistency means contradiction; logical incongruity is known to undermine any logical constructs. Consistency increases with abstraction. Penetration goes the opposite way; concrete apprehension leads us towards inconsistency. Whiteheadian generalization is enriched as diversity is taken into account. “As we enlarge self-evidence the abstraction shrinks, and our understanding penetrates towards the concrete fact. Thus, sooner or later, growth in knowledge leads to the evidence of antagonism involved in difference.”

Process, however, dissolves all inconsistencies. Process can appease different, even contrary states of affairs. Whitehead says, “This is the sort of perplexity that Plato alluded to, when he makes one of his characters say, "Not-being is a sort of being." Indeed, consistency precludes the existence of contradictions, but process reintroduces harmony between being and non-being. “Process is the immanence of the infinite in the finite; whereby all bounds are burst, and all inconsistencies dissolved. It carries with it all possibilities, even though we cannot embrace all of them in our condition of finite beings. “But what distinguishes men from the animals, some humans from other humans, is the inclusion in their natures, waveringly and dimly, of a disturbing element, which is the flight after the unattainable. This element is that touch of infinity which has goaded races onward ...

The nature of things has no preclusions, translatable into logical propositions. Therefore inconsistency relates to the finitude of things, not to enduring process. Thought proceeds mainly when novelty is introduced into conceptual activity. What was previously abstracted from and taken to be irrelevant originates a new perspective. Novel experience requires the introduction of novel elements and a novel integration of new constituents. Inconsistency
does not apply to novelty, for novelty emerges from the very details previously taken as irrelevant, which have become novelty itself.

Abstraction is not to be confused with generalization, for generalization is the enlargement of perspectives that become ever more diverse. Novelty comes with the imaginative scheme; generalization includes mainly the whole so that it can take diversity into account. As understanding is based on self-evidence, it also outruns any form of symbolism like language or logic. It does so because it goes beyond inference and abstraction taking novelty into account. If we consider Whitehead’s neologisms, we find them to be of the utmost importance, for they express the enhancement of understanding. Philosophy tends to be comprehensive understanding. It is not based on inference; it relies on self-evidence. In Modes of Thought, Whitehead writes twice, “Philosophy is akin to poetry.” The poet captures the fresh liveliness of life that lies behind the sharpness of words. Poetry includes ‘irrelevant’ and forgotten concreteness that originates novelty. In so doing, poetry like philosophy increases generalization and introduces ‘novel, verbal characterizations’. Philosophy like poetry is a process of disclosure. Creative, rational thought such as philosophy comes close to poetry due to its great effort of comprehensiveness. True understanding is process that allows for real novelty.

**Final remarks**

Duration, novelty, creativity, intellectual and aesthetic creation are interrelated notions in the philosophies of Bergson and Whitehead. Time is epochal; it comes into existence by drops of experience that differ from one another, and so constitute the diversity of reality. Every entity is temporal, and is itself the creator of time. Novelty is introduced into reality because reality is duration. Successive states or entities are wholes that emerge from previous ones but differ amongst themselves. Although they emerge as individuations, there is a continuity of being that is usually described as process. Creation, be it intellectual, aesthetical or even moral, is immersed in duration. It is creativity becoming novelty itself.

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1. *Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience.*
4. Bergson says afterwards that there is only one universal time. However, universal time does not preclude different rhythms of duration for different beings. Cf. *Durée et simultanéité.*
Cette implication réciproque, et par conséquent cette complication intérieure, est chose si nécessaire, elle est si bien essentiel de la représentation schématique, que le schéma pourra, si l’image à évoquer est simple, être beaucoup moins simple qu’elle. » *Ibid.*, p.164.


*The Creative Mind*, p.75.


The Two Sources of Morality and Religion, University of Notre Dame Press, p. 78. « La méthode consistait à supposer possible ce qui est effectivement impossible dans une société donnée, à se représenter ce qui en résulterait pour l’âme sociale, et à induire alors quelque chose de cet état d’âme par la propagande et par l’exemple : l’effet, une fois obtenu, compléterait rétroactivement sa cause ; des sentiments nouveaux, d’ailleurs évanouissants, susciteraient la législation nouvelle qui semblait nécessaire à leur apparition et qui servait alors à les consolider. » *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, Presses Universitaires de France, p.78.

*Modes of Thought*, p.153.


*Process and Reality*, p. 5 [7].

*Cf. Ibid.*, p. 4 [6], and *Modes of Thought*, p. 42.

*Modes of Thought*, p. 42.


P. 43.

*Modes of Thought*, p. 46.


*Modes of Thought*, p. 60.


*Function of reason*, p.65.

P. 49-50, 174.

*Modes of Thought*, p. 174.