

## introduction to the special issue on henri bergson

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When the philosopher Henri Bergson wrote *Creative Evolution* in 1907, different theories of evolution were being debated. While transformism was generally accepted, the question of the mechanism of evolution was not yet settled. In this text, Bergson criticizes the different theories and proposes the image of the *élan vital* to conceive what these theories leave out: the unity and unpredictability of evolution.

This book brought Bergson international fame but also led to Bergson being labeled a “vitalist”. The term “vitalism” has a complex history and is used to refer to very different theories, so much so that it is difficult to produce a clear definition enabling to identify theories as vitalist. Generally, the term is used as an accusation: to say that a thinker is a vitalist is generally to say that he or she

has no understanding of science and that his or her theory is therefore at best outdated and at worst inept or even dangerous. Thus, Bergson's association with the controversial label "vitalism" has led to his disrepute among most scientists, but also philosophers of biology. The importance of Bergson's philosophy of life, both in the history of science and in that of the philosophy of biology, has therefore been long underestimated.

Wishing to reassess the relationship between Bergson's philosophy of life and vitalism, and the importance of Bergsonian philosophy in the history and philosophy of biology, we organised, together with Gertrudis Van de Vijver, Charles T. Wolfe and Giuseppe Bianco, an online workshop in April 2021. This workshop was an opportunity to deepen the stakes of Bergsonian philosophy, its inclusion in the scientific debates of the time and its more global contribution to biological thought, whose stakes are not only scientific but also political. This special issue, largely based on the discussions of this workshop, will study the relationship between Bergson's philosophy and vitalism from four research angles.

The first section 'Bergson and the history of vitalism', including essays by Wolfe, Rates and Posteraro, analyse the inscription of Bergsonian philosophy in the history of vitalism and the philosophy of biology.

The second section 'Actuality of Bergson's vitalism: Bergson and contemporary Biology', including essays by Tenti and Majic, studies the contribution of Bergsonian philosophy to contemporary debates in biology.

The third section 'Bergson's vitalism, between spiritualism and pan-psychism, including essays by Dolbeault, Hirai and Van Gemert', focus on the relationship of Bergsonian vitalism to spiritualism and panpsychism.

Finally, the last section 'New perspectives on the implications of Bergsonian vitalism', including essays by Fujita, Stumm and Hill, bring a new perspective on Bergsonian vitalism, by studying the stakes of his philosophy beyond the history of science.

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aims at confronting Bergsonian evolutionary thought with contemporary biology. She has contributed to the collective work *The Bergsonian Mind*, edited by Mark Sinclair and Yaron Wolf (2021), and published several articles on Bergson and biology. She is a board member of the Société des Amis de Bergson.