

1- Difficulty of self-knowledge

Everyone has noticed that it is more difficult to advance in the knowledge of oneself than in that of the outside world. Out of itself, the effort to learn is natural; it is given with increasing facility; we apply rules. Inside, the attention must remain tense and the progress becomes more and more painful; it's like going up the slope of nature. Is not there something surprising? We are inner to ourselves, and our personality is what we should know best. Not at all; our mind is there as a stranger, while the matter is familiar to him and that at home he feels at home. But it is that a certain ignorance of oneself can be useful to a being that has to externalize to act; it responds to a necessity of life. Our action is exercised over matter, and it is all the more efficacious as the knowledge of matter has been pushed further. No doubt it is advantageous, in order to act well, to think of what one will do, to understand what one has done, to imagine what one could have done: nature invites us to it; it is one of the features that distinguish man from animal, entirely at the impression of the moment. But nature only needs a glance within ourselves: we can then see the spirit, but the spirit preparing to shape matter, adapting in advance to it, giving something spatial, geometric and intellectual. Knowledge of the mind, in what it is properly spiritual, would rather distance us from the goal. We approach it, on the contrary, when we study the structure of things. Thus nature turns the mind away from the mind, turns the mind to matter.

Bergson, The thought and the moving, 1859-1941

Biography

Henri-Louis Bergson (1859-1941) was a French-Jewish philosopher who was influential in the tradition of continental philosophy, especially during the first half of the 20th century.

20th century until the Second World War. Bergson is known for his arguments that process of immediate experience and intuition are more significant than abstract rationalism and science for understanding reality.

He was awarded the 1927 Nobel Prize in Literature « in recognition of his rich and vitalizing ideas and the brilliant skill with which they have been presented ». In 1930 France awarded him its highest honour, the Grand-Croix de la Legion d'Honneur.

Bergson's great popularity created a controversy in France where his views were seen as opposing the secular and scientific attitude adopted by the republic's officials.

Problematic

The man has spiritual abilities which promote him the knowledge of the different objects that surround him, i.e. nature. But there remains a subject where the man is brought to know himself too; it is his inner universe or his own self. Will he come to know them with the same degree? What are the difficulties faced at the moment of knowledge?

Position of the author

Our knowledge is directed towards two subjects, one is interior is the self, the other is outside, it is nature. Everyone believes in the difficulty of the first and the ease of the second. This facility comes from potentiality proven in knowledge of the laws of nature. But, the difficulty of the first is ascertained and verified that it is impossible to come to know our self, and in this case our mind will become stranger therefore unknown and inactive. Bergson explains this paradox and resolves it by saying that it is necessary and useful to know the

outside world (matter) to use it in life, on the other hand to know the inner world is devoid of vital goals.

Text comment

The man acts on the matter, he shapes it example agriculture: he cultivates the land to give it more value, and thus to be able to feed itself. The initial survival of humanity then results from our action on matter. Our mind adapts to the outside world, to practice on it. Also, the greater this knowledge of the world, the easier it will be to act in the right way. The learning on the subject allowed the evolution of the man, who does not seek so much more to follow, but rather to live better. Progress, new technologies, spatial discovery ... could not have existed without an understanding of the high world. Life is possible thanks to our openness to the world; to turn to self-knowledge is secondary, because it does not respond to a necessity.

Bergson was influenced by: Emmanuel Kant, Rene Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, and others.