

Einstein-Bergson Debate

Albert Einstein versus philosophy on the nature of 🕒 time.

An investigation of the debate that caused Albert Einstein to lose his Nobel Prize for the Theory of Relativity.

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👤 History professor Jimena Canales

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<https://cosmicphilosophy.org/einstein-vs-philosophy/>

CHAPTER 1.

Albert Einstein versus Philosophy On

The Nature of Time

And Philosophy's "Great Setback" For Scientism

On April 6, 1922, at a meeting of the French Society of Philosophy (Société française de philosophie) in Paris, Albert Einstein, fresh from the global fame for his Nobel Prize nomination, delivered a lecture on relativity in front of a gathering of prominent philosophers in which he declared that his new theory rendered philosophical speculation about the nature of  Time obsolete.

Einstein's opening salvo was direct and dismissive. In response to a question about the philosophical implications of relativity, he declared:

“ *Die Zeit der Philosophen ist vorbei* ”

Translation:

"The time of the philosophers is over"

Einstein concluded his lecture with the following argument, sealing his dismissal of philosophy:

“There remains only a psychological time that differs from the physicist's.”

Einstein's dramatic dismissal of philosophy had a massive global impact due to his Nobel Prize nomination.

The event would become one of the most major events in the history of both science and philosophy and would mark the advent of the era of *"the decline of philosophy"* and the rise of scientism.

CHAPTER 1.1.

The "Great Setback" for Philosophy

Philosophy had seen a period of flourishing most prominently represented by famous French philosopher Henri Bergson, who's life's work centered on the nature of 🕒 time and who sat in the audience of Einstein's lecture.

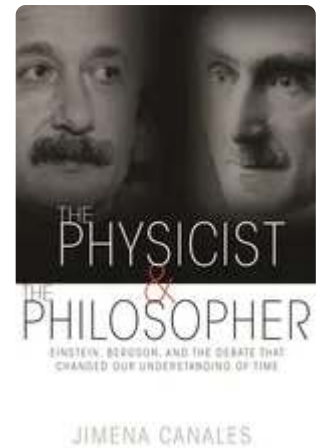
The multi-year long debate that ensued between Einstein and Bergson and that continued until their last messages shortly before their passing, would cause what historians describe as *"the great setback"* for philosophy that would fuel *"the rise of scientism"*.



Jimena Canales, professor of history at the University of Illinois who wrote a book on the debate, described the event as following:

☾ The "dialogue between the greatest philosopher and the greatest physicist of the 20th century" was dutifully written down. It was a script fit for the theater. The meeting, and the words they uttered, would be discussed for the rest of the century.

In the years that followed the debate, ... the scientist's views on time came to dominate. ... For many, the philosopher's defeat represented a victory of "rationality" against "intuition". ... Thus began "the story of the setback for philosophy", ... then began the period when the relevance of philosophy declined in the face of the rising influence of science.



The Physicist &
The Philosopher

(2016) This Philosopher Helped Ensure There Was No Nobel for Relativity

Source: Nautil.us | jimenacanales.org (website of professor)

CHAPTER 2.



Corruption For Scientism

This historical investigation will reveal that Henri Bergson lost the debate on purpose as part of philosophy's centuries ongoing self-imposed enslavement to dogmatic scientism.

While Bergson was successful in having Einstein's Nobel Prize for relativity revoked, this action caused a massive backlash for philosophy that helped fuel "*the rise of scientism*".

Bergson had become world famous in part through his work "*Creative Evolution*" in 1907 which provided a philosophical counter voice for Charles Darwin's evolution theory. A critical examination of this work reveals that Bergson was "*losing on*

purpose" to cater to Darwinists, potentially explaining his popularity (chapter 4.).

CHAPTER 2.1.

Bergson's Loss And A Win For "Science"

Bergson was largely perceived to have lost the debate against Einstein and public sentiments had sided with Einstein. For many, Bergson's defeat represented a victory of scientific "*rationality*" against metaphysical "*intuition*".

Einstein had won the debate by publicly pointing out that Bergson didn't understand the theory correctly. Einstein's win of the debate represented a win for science.

Bergson made "*obvious mistakes*" in his philosophical critique *Duration and Simultaneity* (1922) and philosophers today characterize Bergson's mistakes as "*a great embarrassment for philosophy*".

For example, philosopher William Lane Craig wrote in 2016:

The meteoric fall of Henri Bergson from the philosophical pantheon of the twentieth century was doubtless due in part to his misguided critique, or rather misunderstanding, of Albert Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity.

Bergson's grasp of Einstein's theory was simply embarrassingly wrong and tended to bring disrepute upon Bergson's views on time.

(2016) Bergson Was Right about Relativity (well, partly)!

Source: [Reasonable Faith](#)

CHAPTER 2.2.

"Obvious Mistakes" And Einstein's "Contradiction"

While Einstein attacked Bergson in public for his failure to understand the theory, in private he simultaneously wrote that Bergson had '*understood it*', which is a contradiction.

In his diary while traveling to Japan in late 1922, months after the April 6th debate in Paris, he wrote the following private note:

Bergson hat in seinem Buch scharfsinnig und tief die Relativitätstheorie bekämpft. Er hat also richtig verstanden.

Translation:

"Bergson has challenged the theory of relativity intelligently and profoundly in his book. He has therefore understood it."

Source: Canales, Jimena. The Physicist & The Philosopher, Princeton University Press, 2015. p. 177.

Professor of history Jimena Canales, cited earlier, characterized Einstein's contradicting behaviour as '*political*' of nature.

Einstein's contradicting private notes are an indication of **corruption**.

Confession By The Nobel Committee

The chairman of the Nobel Committee Svante Arrhenius confessed that an influence was at play that deviated from public sentiments and scientific consensus.



"It will be no secret that the famous philosopher Bergson in Paris has challenged this theory."

Professor of history Jimena Canales described the situation as following:

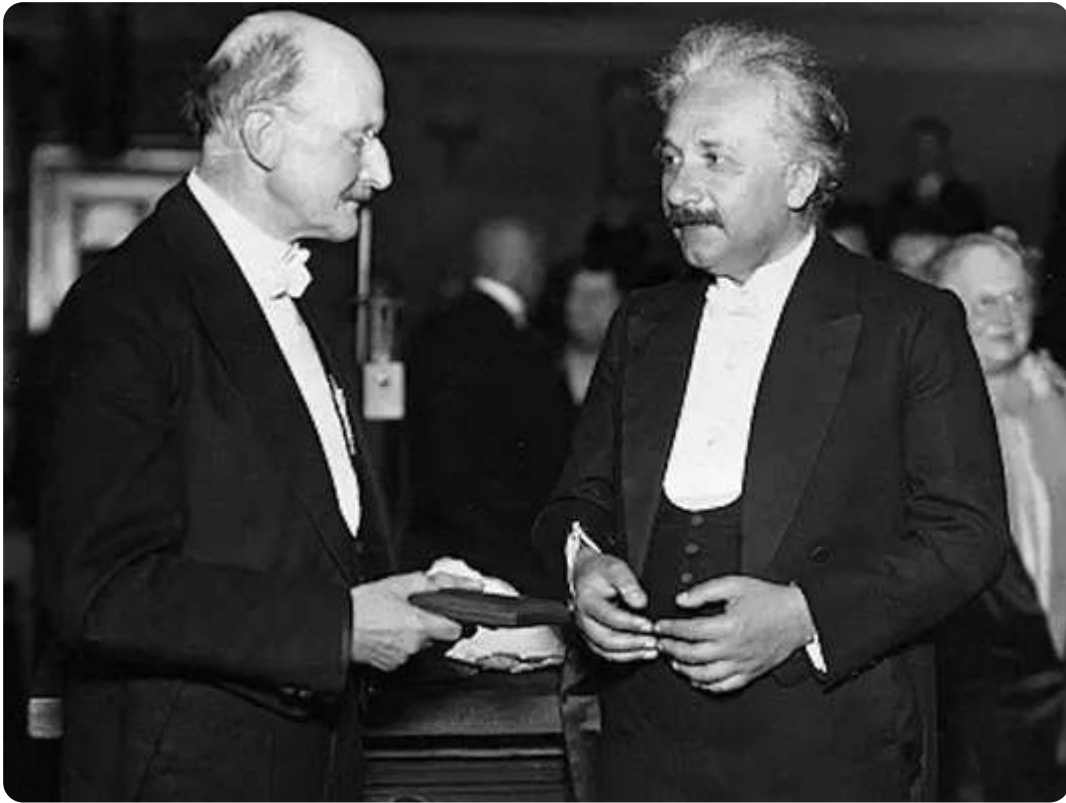
The Nobel Committee's explanation that day surely reminded Einstein of [his dismissal of philosophy] in Paris that would spark a conflict with Bergson.

The Nobel Committee had no logical ground for rejecting Einstein's Nobel Prize for relativity.

The Nobel Committee had no institutional inclination to defend metaphysical philosophy or to defy public sentiments and scientific consensus, and it was the Committee that had nominated Einstein in the first place, therefore their decision negatively impacted their own organization's credibility.

In the aftermath, the Nobel Committee faced intense criticism from the scientific community.

CHAPTER 2.4.



Einstein's Response To The Nobel Committee

Instead of the Nobel Prize for relativity, Einstein received a Nobel Prize for his work on the photoelectric effect.

Einstein responded by lecturing on relativity at the Nobel ceremony, therewith dishonoring the Nobel Committee's decision and making a statement.

Einstein's dramatic action to lecture relativity during the ceremony for his Nobel Prize for the photoelectric effect played

into the public sentiments of the time and caused a moral loss for philosophy that had an effect that went much beyond an intellectual loss.

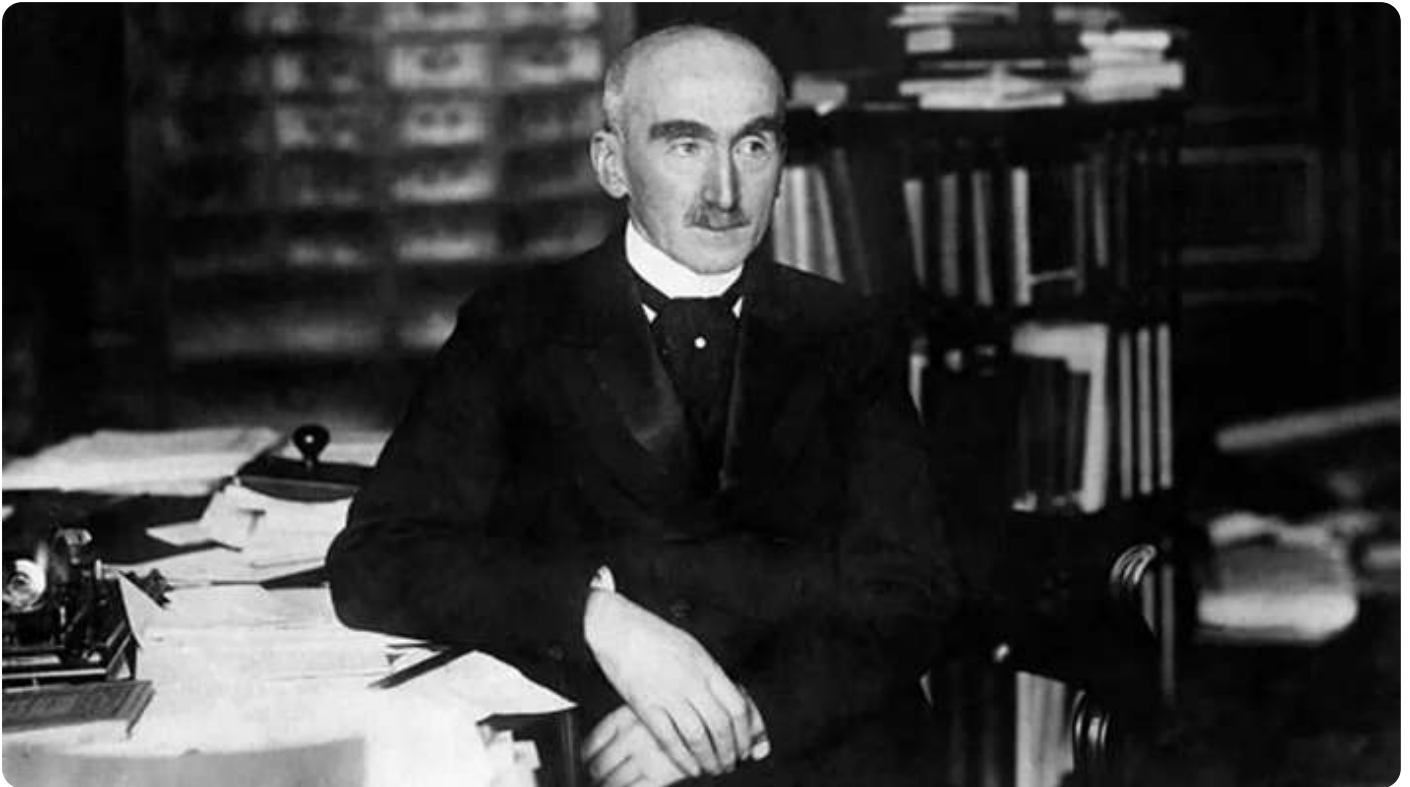
CHAPTER 2.5.

Backlash For Philosophy

The revocation of Einstein's Nobel Prize for relativity for "*critique by 'famous' philosopher Henri Bergson*", while public opinion had sided with Einstein, fueled a moral justification for science to break free from philosophy.

This investigation will reveal that Einstein's private notes should be considered leading for a perspective on Bergson's actual understanding of the theory, despite his "*embarrassing mistakes*", which implies that Bergson "*lost on purpose*" for the supposed '*higher interests of science*' (Darwinism and correlated scientism), a feature that was already visible in his work *Creative Evolution* in 1907.

CHAPTER 3.



Philosopher Henri Bergson

French philosophy professor Henri Bergson, a world famous philosopher and a titan of French intellectual life (member of the Académie française, Nobel laureate in Literature, 1927), was widely perceived as one of the most prominent philosophers in the history of philosophy.

“*The Most Dangerous Man In The World*”

The philosopher Jean Wahl once said that "if one had to name the four great philosophers one could say: Socrates, Plato — taking them together — Descartes, Kant, and Bergson".

Philosopher William James described Bergson as "an exquisite genius, perhaps the most so among the living".

The philosopher and historian of philosophy Étienne Gilson categorically claimed that the first third of the 20th century was "the age of Bergson".

Professor of history Jimena Canales described Bergson as following:

☾ Bergson was simultaneously considered "the greatest thinker in the world" and "the most dangerous man in the world"

Bergson's life's work centered on *la durée* (Time as Duration) — a concept of time as lived and qualitative.

For Bergson, time was not a series of discrete moments but a continuous flow intertwined with consciousness. Einstein's reduction of time to a coordinate in equations struck him as a profound misunderstanding of human experience.

At Einstein's lecture event, Bergson challenged Einstein directly:

*☾ "What is Time for the physicist? A system of abstract, numerical instants. But for the philosopher, time is the very fabric of existence — the *durée* in which we live, remember, and anticipate."*

Bergson argued that Einstein's theory addressed only "*spatialized time*", a derivative abstraction, while ignoring the temporal reality of lived experience. He accused Einstein of conflating measurement with the thing measured — a philosophical error with existential consequences.

In 1922, Bergson published *Durée et Simultanéité* (Duration and Simultaneity), a dense critique of Einstein's relativity.

The book was a direct response to the debate in Paris where Einstein had declared "*The time of the philosophers is over*". The cover of his book specifically referenced Einstein in a generic sense and titled "*About Einstein's Theory*".



The book's preface starts with the following passage:

*(first sentence of the book) A few words about the origin of this work will clarify its intent. ... Our admiration for this physicist, the conviction that he brought us not only a new physics but also new ways of thinking, the idea that science and philosophy are **distinct disciplines** but made to complement each other—all this inspired in us the desire and even imposed on us the duty to undertake a confrontation.*

The book is published in our books section ⁽¹⁾ based on a physically scanned copy of the first edition in 1922, and an AI translation into 42 languages optimized to preserve Bergson's original linguistical intent and subtle communication. Each

paragraph provides an option to examine the original French text using AI (by hovering the mouse over the paragraph).

⁽¹⁾ The book "*Duration and Simultaneity*" (1922) by Henri Bergson is published in 42 languages in our book collection. [Download or read online here.](#)

CHAPTER 3.3.

Bergson's Effort To Revoke Einstein's Nobel Prize

In the years following the debate, Bergson actively used his influence through hidden "*networks of prestige*", which had given him the title "*most dangerous man in the world*", to pursue the Nobel Committee to reject Einstein's Nobel Prize for relativity.

Bergson was successful and his efforts culminated in a personal triumph handed out by the chairman of the Nobel Committee, who '*confessed*' that Bergson's criticism was a primary reason for rejecting Einstein's Nobel Prize for relativity:

"It will be no secret that the famous philosopher Bergson in Paris has challenged this theory."

The terms "*famous*" and the reference of "*Paris*" reveal that the Nobel Committee was elevating Bergson's personal influence and standing as a justification for their decision.

CHAPTER 4.

Losing On Purpose

Did Bergson fail to understand Einstein's theory of relativity?

The author of this investigation is a long time defender of free will since 2006 through the Dutch critical blog  [Zielenknijper.com](https://www.zielenknijper.com). He started a study of Henri Bergson in 2024 shortly after his study of philosopher William James.

The author read Bergson unbiased and was in the assumption that Bergson would provide '*strong logic*' for the defense of free will. His first impression however, after reading Bergson's "*Creative Evolution*" (1907), was that Bergson was '*losing on purpose*'.

CHAPTER 4.1.

***"Creative Evolution"* Versus Darwin's Evolution Theory**

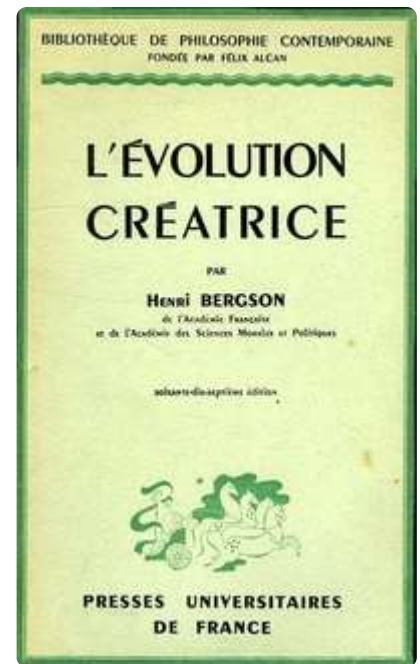
Bergson's book *Creative Evolution* played into the public interest at the time for a philosophical counter voice for Charles Darwin's evolution theory.

The author's first impression was that Bergson intended to cater to both readers: admirers of Darwin's evolution theory (scientists

more generally) and believers in 🦋 free will. As a result, the defense of free will was 'weak' and in some cases the author recognized a clear 'intent' to lose on purpose.

Bergson apparently attempted to give 'Darwinists' an underbelly feeling early on in the book, that they would come out as winners on the end of the book, by making an "obvious contradiction" in his logical arguments that fundamentally undermined his own reasoning.

The author's first idea was that Bergson was attempting to secure the success of his book from a general public perspective that had come to favor Charles Darwin's evolution theory, explaining in part why Bergson had become world famous in a world dominated by "the rise of science".

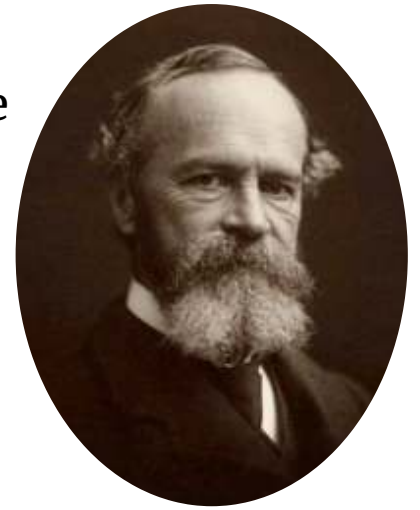


CHAPTER 4.2.

Bergson's Global Fame

Bergson's global fame might have been caused in part by American philosopher William James as a 'thank you' for what otherwise might be considered a 'minor intellectual contribution', when considered by itself, that helped James resolve a major philosophical problem that hindered his own philosophy.

William James was engaged in what he called "*The Battle of the Absolute*" against idealists like F.H. Bradley and Josiah Royce, who argued for an eternal Absolute as the ultimate reality.



James saw Bergson as the philosopher who finally prevented the idea of the Absolute. Bergson's critique of abstraction and his emphasis on flux, multiplicity, and lived experience provided James with the tools to defeat the reification of Absolutes. As James wrote:

The essential contribution of Bergson to philosophy is his criticism of intellectualism (the Absolute). In my opinion he has killed intellectualism definitively and without hope of recovery.

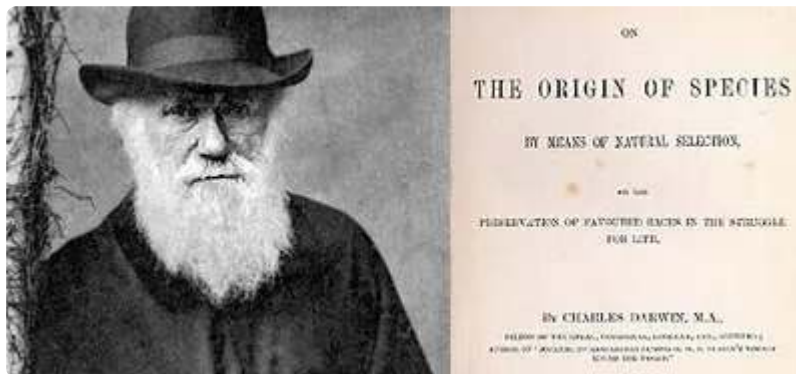
In the early 20th century, when Bergson's work was not yet widely known outside of France, James played a crucial role in introducing Bergson's ideas to the English-speaking world.

Through his writings and lectures, James helped to popularize Bergson's ideas and brought them to the attention of a wider audience. Bergson's reputation and influence grew rapidly in the years following James's championing of his ideas.

CHAPTER 4.3.

The Rise Of Science

Bergson's rise to world fame coincided with the rise of science and the popularity of the evolution theory of Charles Darwin.



Charles Darwin's Evolution Theory

By writing a philosophical counter voice for Darwin's evolution theory early in his career, Bergson had positioned himself at the forefront of the "*emancipation-of-science from philosophy*" movement of which philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote the following in his book *Beyond Good and Evil* (Chapter 6 – *We Scholars*) in 1886:

☾ *The declaration of independence of the scientific movement from philosophy, is one of the subtler after-effects of democratic organization and disorganization: the self-glorification and self-conceitedness of the learned man is now everywhere in full bloom, and in its best springtime – which does not mean to imply that in this case self-praise smells sweet. Here also the instinct of the populace cries, “Freedom from all masters!” and after science has, with the happiest results, resisted theology, whose “hand-maid” it had been too long, it now proposes in its wantonness and indiscretion to lay down laws for philosophy, and in its turn to play the “master” – what am I saying! to play the PHILOSOPHER on its own account.*



Science aspired to become the master of itself and to break free from philosophy.

CHAPTER 4.5.

Philosophy's Self-Enslavement To Scientism

From the works of Descartes, Kant, and Husserl to the contemporary era with Henri Bergson, a recurring theme emerges: the self-imposed attempt to enslave philosophy to scientism.

For example, Emmanuel Kant's 'apodictical certainty' concept, which is knowledge that is necessarily true and that cannot be doubted, and that more specifically concerns the belief in the realness (non-disputableness) of space and time, is dogmatically adopted and fundamentally underlays his whole philosophy.

Kant's concept of apodictic certainty goes beyond just a "strong claim" and is a claim of absolute, indubitable truth, which is akin to religious dogma. Kant scholars write the following about Kant's account of reason that fundamentally underlays the concept:

☾ *We might note that Kant never discussed reason as such. This leaves a difficult interpretative task: just what is Kant's general and positive account of reason?*

The first thing to note is Kant's bold claim that reason is the arbiter of truth in all judgments—empirical as well as metaphysical. Unfortunately, he barely develops this thought, and the issue has attracted surprisingly little attention in the literature.

Kant's "Reason"

Source: plato.stanford.edu

Similar to religions, by neglecting to address the fundamental nature of "reason", Kant abused the fundamental mystery of existence for an absolute truth claim and that provides evidence of 'intent' to establish **dogmatic scientism** when viewed in light of the purpose clearly communicated at the start of Kant's philosophical project: the grounding of science with 'indubitable' certainty.

☾ Critique of Pure Reason (A Edition Preface - 1781):

"Human reason has this peculiar fate that in one species of its knowledge it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself (which Kant never directly addressed according to Kant scholars today, equalling it to the mystery of existence), it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer... A critique of pure reason itself ... is now the most important task with a view to that propaedeutic [preparatory discipline] to metaphysics as a science which must be able to exhibit its claims dogmatically and with mathematical certainty..." (A vii, A xv)

The same abuse of the mystery of existence is seen in René Descartes famous claim cogito ergo sum ("I think, therefore I am") that similar to Kant's apodictical certainty seeks to establish indubitable truth to ground science.

In the work of "pillar of philosophy" Edmund Husserl, the aspiration to 'ground science with certainty' is set forward from the start and Husserl even profoundly deviates from his past philosophy, described by contemporaries and scholars as "betrayal", in a later attempt to serve that primary purpose: the grounding of science, which in practice means "to enable science to depart from philosophy through dogma".

☾ Sebastian Luft (The Space of Culture, 2015): "Husserl's transcendental turn... was motivated by the need to find an absolute foundation for knowledge... This foundation could only be

found in the transcendental ego... This move was perceived by his Munich and Göttingen students as a betrayal of the descriptive, pre-theoretical attitude of the Logical Investigations."

CHAPTER 4.6.

Bergson's Promotion To Pillar Of Philosophy

Bergson's strategic ability to "*lose on purpose*" for the advancement of scientism and his positioning at the forefront of the emancipation-of-science from philosophy movement through his work *Creative Evolution* (1907) may have been the reason that Bergson was promoted to pillar of philosophy, rather than for his actual philosophical contributions.

Bergson received a Nobel prize not for philosophy, but for literature, which involves the ability to write strategically.

A philosopher on the discussion forum "*I Love Philosophy*" asked the following questions that provides an insight in the situation:

☾ *Show me some examples of this "most genius person alive at the time". Show me an example of this famous amazing supergenius philosophy of Bergson.*

(2025) **Einstein's Philosophy**

Source: I Love Philosophy Forum

These questions aspired to reveal: there is no evidence that would justify the idea that Bergson was "*the greatest philosopher of all time*".

CHAPTER 5.

Corruption

Bergson's "*great embarassement for philosophy*" that would cause "*the great setback for philosophy*" in history is unlikely to have been an accident.

Einstein's contradicting behaviour in his private notes, revealed in chapter 2.2., is an indication of corruption.

This investigation revealed that Bergson appears to have "*lost the debate on purpose*" for the supposed '*higher interests of science*' (Darwinism and correlated scientism), a feature that was already visible in his work *Creative Evolution* in 1907.





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- ▶ [🦋 GMODEbate.org](https://gmodebate.org/): A project that investigates the philosophical underpinnings of eugenics, scientism, the "emancipation-of-science from philosophy" movement, the "anti-science narrative" and modern forms of scientific inquisition.