Comparative study of the concept of organism between Bergson and Kant

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Introduction
This is a comparative study of the concept of organism between Henri Bergson and Immanuel Kant. They regard organisms as self-creating and self-organizing respectively. Both these determinations contain the sense of not being made by an external cause. Therefore, the two philosophers' conceptions of organism are sometimes equated (cf. F. Dagognet). This study clarifies how Bergson and Kant consider organisms and indicates the differences between their two approaches by referring to L'évolution créatrice (Creative Evolution) by Bergson and Kritik der Urteilskraft (Critique of Judgment) by Kant.

Kant: Organisms are self-organizing.

Bergson: Organisms are self-creating.

→ Differences between them?

Background
With regard to the phenomena of organisms, two doctrines often contend with one another: mechanism and teleology. It is certain that organisms are difficult to explain in terms of mechanism since they have finality or purposiveness. However, people hesitate to adopt teleology since it often introduces supernatural and unobservable factors such as external intelligent cause, purpose, and intention. We call such a teleology “anthropomorphic” since its organisms (according to analogy) are much intelligent cause, whether its existence is regarded as objective or potentially including it, without ceasing being the natural phenomena.

The concept of organism by Bergson
Bergson explains organisms as self-creating according to the following procedures: 1) negation of the reality of material elements that constitute an organism; and 2) comprehension of organisms by analogy with psychological duration. Through the first procedure, the common presupposition of mechanism and teleology is denied. Teleology as well as mechanism supposes that organisms consist of a multiplicity of material elements. In other words, just because the reality of material elements is supposed, there should be an intelligent cause that intentionally produces systematic unity such as organisms. Bergson denies the reality of material elements. According to him, the number of elements is relative to the analysis of an observer. In this manner, Bergson attempts to overcome both mechanism and teleology.

Based on the second procedure, Bergson explains organisms through an analogy with psychological duration. Psychological duration is movement as an indivisible continuity, and it potentially contains distinct moments. It is a certain unity, which is dynamic. This dynamic unity is regarded as more than systematic unity, which is static and given by an external cause. Therefore, through such an analogy with psychological duration, organisms are conceived to be what is self-creating. In another words, Bergson denies the absolute reality of the nature described by science, revises the concept of nature, considers organisms that have more than systematic unity, potentially including it, without ceasing being the natural phenomena.

Conclusion
Based on the findings, we can conclude that in Kant, organisms are not completely explained as what are not made by an intelligent being but self-organizing. On the other hand, according to Bergson, they are not what are made by such a being at all. Kant does not completely detach himself from anthropomorphic teleology. It is also important to note that there is a difference in the overall position between the two philosophers. Kant considers the concept of natural purpose (organisms) or intelligent cause to be a subjective reality while Bergson insists on the objective validity of his theory of organism.

Problems for future discussion
Is there some possibility that, in Kant, the characteristic of self-organization in organisms will be compatible with the causality of an intelligent being?

Is Bergson’s analogy of organisms with psychological duration valid? More precisely, what enables Bergson to consider in some sense that movement such as psychological duration is more than systematic unity?

References
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