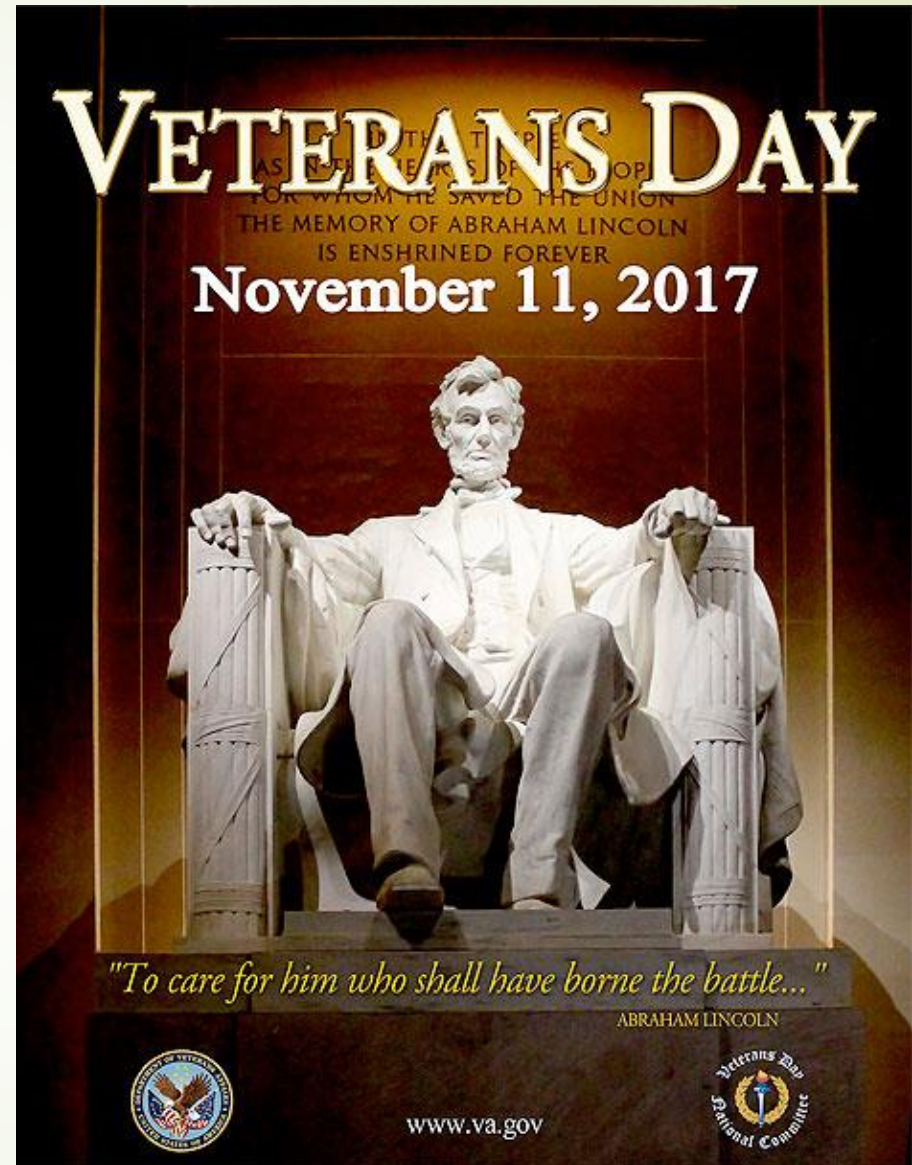


As one veteran to
another,

Thank you for your
service!



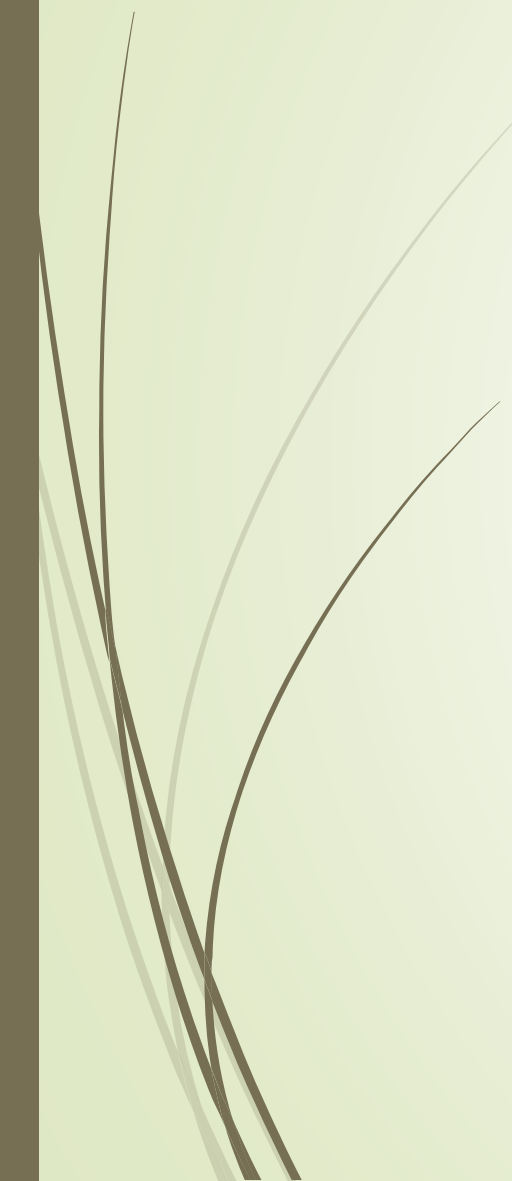


Exploring Bergson's Theory of Memory: A Way to Understand PTSD

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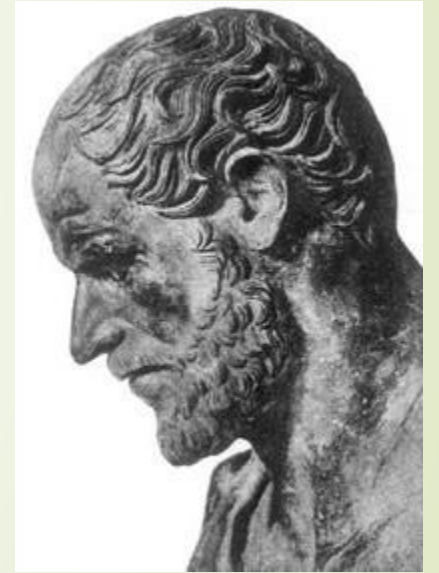


Exploring Bergson's Theory of Memory: A Way to Understand PTSD

- Understanding how memories are stored, remembered, and forgotten is an important part of how we see ourselves and how we perceive others
 - Remembered events, whether voluntary or not, are directly linked to memory
- 

Theory of Memory

- From ancient Greece until now, memory has been a topic of philosophers
- Aristotle defined memory as an image storage process based on the perception of time or the past
- Persistent recollection “is not under the control of...will” (Aristotle 91)



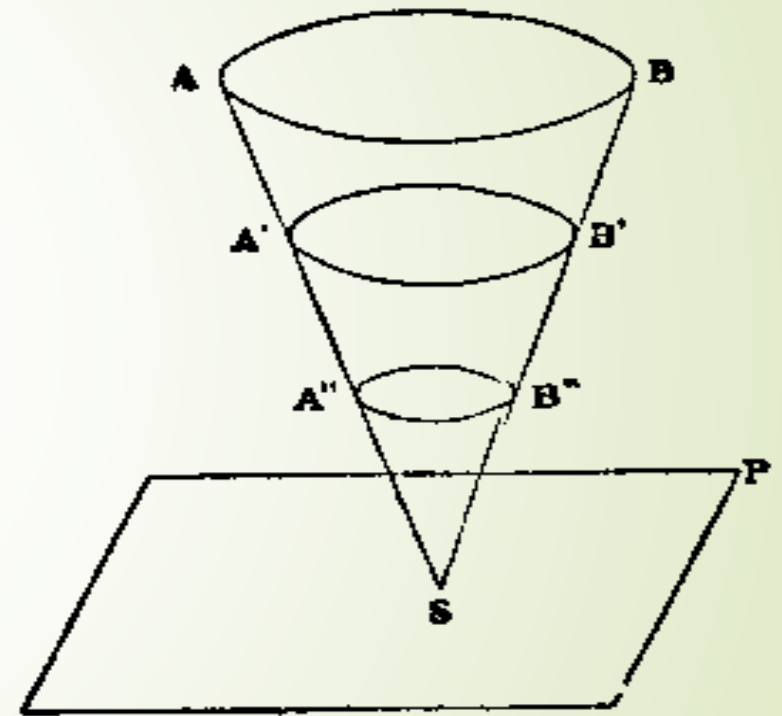


Henri Bergson's Theory of Memory

- “Memory is something other than a function of the brain” (Bergson 129)
- “Pure memory...interests no part of the body” (Bergson 77)
- “with memory we are...in the domain of spirit” (Bergson 129)

Bergson's Memory Cone

- Bergson's theory of memory, grounded in the idea that 'pure memory' is not a thing, not stored or filed in the brain
- 'Pure memory' has no container and is accessed by a plane of action through perception as demonstrated with Bergson's 'cone' model



Bergson's Theory of Memory

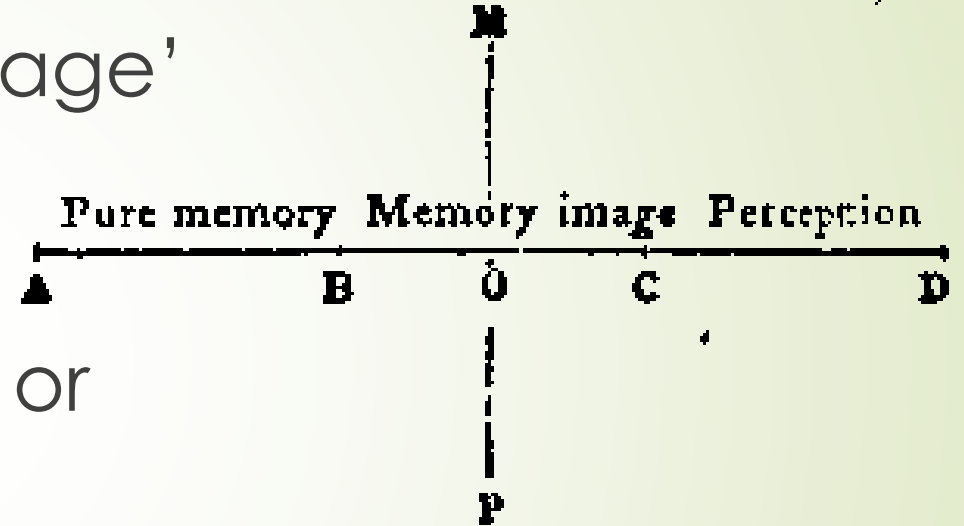
- “prolonging of the past into the present...is what Bergson calls ‘duration’”
- “Duration is the experience of time passing”
- Bergson compared duration to melodic phrasing

(Middleton 62)



Bergson's Theory of Memory

- ➔ Memory is not matter or an 'image' but a constant flow existing in varying planes of duration
- ➔ "An image is, then, a snapshot or provisional stable view that is artificially cut out of this ongoing flow" (Middleton 67)



PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- “PTSD is a mental health condition that's triggered by a terrifying event — either experiencing it or witnessing it. Symptoms may include flashbacks, nightmares and severe anxiety, as well as uncontrollable thoughts about the event”
(Mayo Clinic)
- PTSD has been known as soldier's heart, nostalgia, shell shock, railway spine, battle fatigue, and combat stress reaction



PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- *All Quiet on the Western Front*, describes a WWI battlefield, “We see men living with their skulls blown open; we see soldiers run with their two feet cut off, they stagger on their splintered stumps into the next shell hole...another goes to the dressing station and over his clasped hands bulge his intestines; we see men without mouths, without jaws, without faces; we find one man who has held the artery of his arm in his teeth for two hours in order not to bleed to death” (Remarque 134)

(Fig. 6. Melancon, Dave. “Victory Corps Played Vital Role in Meuse-Argonne Offensive of WWI.” *US Army*. army.mil/article/13448/victory_corps_played_vital_role_in_meuse_argonne_offensive_of_world_war_i. Accessed 4 November 2017.)

PTSD – Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Shell shock came into prominence as a war related mental affliction during WWI
- “the incidence of PTSD may have risen sharply with the arrival of...gunpowder, shells, and plastic explosives” (Melchior 219)
- During WWI “in the Battle of the Somme, the British army suffered 57,470 casualties, including 19,240 dead” (van der Kolk 187)

Treatment of PTSD



(Fig. 7. "WWI." *History of PTSD*, historyofptsd.wordpress.com/world-war-i/. Accessed 4 November 2017.)

(Fig. 8. "Army Field Hospital Inside Ruins of Church." *Library of Congress Prints & Photographs Division*, Washington DC, 1918. [lc.cn.loc.gov/2006679083](http://lccn.loc.gov/2006679083). Accessed 4 November 2017.)

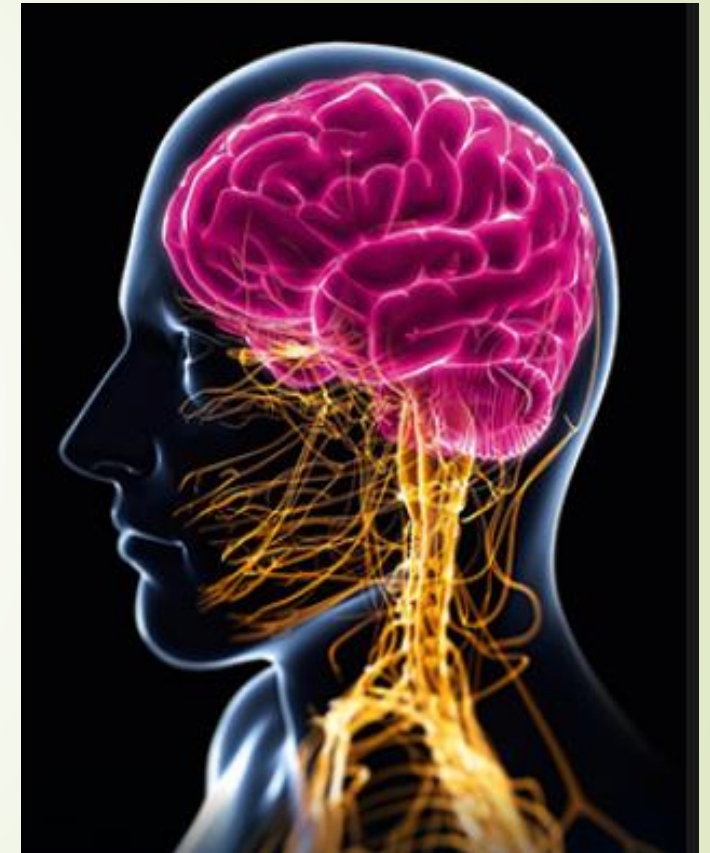


Treatment of PTSD

- Later in WWI, instead of sending soldiers home to recover from shell shock, treatment was “carried out near the frontline” with the “emotional support of their comrades” (Crocq 50)
- Because “the most natural way for human beings to calm themselves...is by clinging to another person” (van der Kolk 103)

From Matter to Memory

- The brain is “an electrical device which generates every one of our sensations, thought, feelings, and actions” (Carter 14)
- And “trauma results in a fundamental reorganization of the way mind and brain manage perceptions” (van der Kolk 21)



(Fig. 9. *The Amazing Brain*, Edited by BBC Science Focus, Immediate Media Company Bristol Limited, 2016, cover image.)

From Matter to Memory

- “As our understanding of what causes PTSD grows we may find a paradox: distance weapons, developed to...shield troops from the fear and horror of close combat, may in fact cause more trauma” (Melchior 222-223)
- In *All Quiet on the Western Front* we find evidence of this paradox: “there is no quietness...the droning ...muffled noise of shelling is always in our ears” (Remarque 120)
- It is “strange that all the memories that come have...two qualities. They are always completely calm and...soundless” (Remarque 118)



From Matter to Memory

- Descriptions of combat in Vietnam are similar describing that “in any war story, but especially a true one, it’s difficult to separate what happened from what seemed to happen. What seems to happen becomes its own happening...angles of vision are skewed...when a booby trap explodes, you close your eyes...and float outside yourself” (O’Brien 67-68)
- And Bergson explains, “when we pass from pure perception to memory, we definitely abandon matter for spirit” (Bergson 127)

(Fig. 10. Lieberman, Jeffrey A. “From ‘Soldier’s Heart’ to ‘Vietnam Syndrome’: Psychiatry’s 100-year Quest to Understand PTSD.” *The Star*, Toronto Star Newspapers Ltd., 1996-2017, thestar.com/news/insight/2015/03/07/solving-the-riddle-of-soldiers-heart-post-traumatic-stress-disorder-ptsd.html. Accessed 4 November 2017.)

Summary

What insight does Bergson's philosophy have to offer as greater understanding of PTSD?

- “There comes a moment when the recollection...is capable of blending so well with the present perception that we cannot say where perception ends or where memory begins” (Bergson 57)



Summary



- By examining Bergson's theory of memory and considering the implications of perception and archive in the role of remembering as well as forgetting, understanding PTSD could be different
- Society might benefit from what Bergson can teach us, how we perceive our own memories, and the effect our memories have on ourselves and those around us

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