

Course Syllabus

Course: PHL 590 Contemporary French Philosophy: Bergson

Day/Time/Location: Wednesdays 3:00 pm – 6:10 pm, O’Connell Center Room 240

Professor: Frédéric Seyler

Office Hours: Mondays 2:40 - 4:10 pm or by appointment.

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Course Outline

The recent publication of the first critical edition of Bergson’s works at *Presses Universitaires de France* marks an important step for the renewal of Bergson studies. This year’s seminar will take advantage of the new critical edition, in particular with regard to two major books: *Time and Free Will* (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889) and *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932), that is, Bergson’s first book and his last, thus encompassing the beginning of his philosophy as well as its mature form.

While *Time and Free Will* develops a concept of “authenticity” based upon the distinction between a deep seated self and a superficial self, it seems to imply an ethics that goes beyond, and even sometimes opposes, conventional norms and their habitual enacting in social interactions.

More than 40 years later, the *Two Sources* renew this critique by opposing moral obligation and “static religion”, on the one hand, to moral progress and “dynamic religion” on the other. However, and as we will have to study in detail (through the analysis of both the English translation and the critical edition in French), the concept of authenticity seems to have evolved: anchored in the deep seated self or in personality and its history as a whole in *Time and Free Will*, it is now (in the *Two Sources*) thought of in terms of divine life and its manifestation through the actions of the mystic. Graduate student papers will have the opportunity to enrich this study by combining it with other angles on Bergson’s philosophy, for instance its reception by Deleuze.

Required Reading

Henri Bergson,

- *Time and Free Will*. Translated by F. L. Pogson. Elibron Classics: 2005 (*Essai sur les données immédiates de la conscience*, 1889. Paris: PUF 2013)

- *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Translated by R. A. Audra & C. Brereton. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press 1977 (*Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, 1932. Paris: PUF 2008)

Suggested Supplementary Readings

Gilles Deleuze, *Le bergsonisme* (1966). Paris: PUF 2014. Translated by H. Tomlinson & B. Habberjam. New York: Zone books 1991.

Frédéric Worms, *Bergson ou les deux sens de la vie*. Paris: PUF 2013.

Tentative Schedule

(NB: The schedule – as well as this syllabus – is subject to possible changes. If you miss a class, please check the assignments/dates with a classmate)

Week 1 – 4: *Time and Free Will*

Week 5 – 10: *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*

Requirements

1. **A final 10-15 page double-spaced paper (max. 7000 words)** due on **Monday March 13th 11:59 pm latest**. Please forward both an electronic copy by that date. No incompletes will be given for this course. Possible paper topics will be suggested in the first weeks of the quarter. Papers should follow usual article guidelines (footnotes, bibliography)
2. **One 15 minutes protocol-presentation** (a 3 page summary of the preceding class and ending with a question, max. 1800 words). The student in charge of the presentation will present her/his paper at the beginning of the next class.
3. **One 10 minutes analysis-presentation** (max. 1200 words, ending with a question) that analyzes a selected text-excerpt.
4. **Participation:** seminar participation is expected of every student.
5. **Attendance:** everyone is allowed one absence for the quarter. Any more than one absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches.

Grading

Final paper = 70% of the final grade

Presentations & Participation = 30%

Presentation schedule (protocol date in bold, text-analysis date normal)

1/4; 3/8

1/11; 3/1

1/18; 2/22

1/25; 2/15

2/1; 1/11

2/8; 1/18

2/15; 1/25

2/22; 2/1

3/1; 2/8

3/8; 2/15

1/25; 3/1

2/8; 2/1