Winter 2017 Seminar

PHIL 675: Seminar in Contemporary European Philosophy

Seminar Topic: Philosophy of Time – Bergson and Deleuze
Tuesdays 2:35 – 5:00 PM (Leacock 927)

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Office hours: 5:30 PM – 7:00 PM (and by appointment)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Henri Bergson’s (1859-1941) philosophy can be read as a sustained effort to think time, a philosophy in and of time. Matter and Memory (1896) is exemplary in this regard, for it is a book that situates perception, embodiment, materiality and subjectivity in relation to a theory of memory. The purpose of this course will be to read closely Bergson’s main text, Matter and Memory. We will seek to understand Bergson’s concepts of duration, perception, memory, matter and difference.

At the same time, Bergson is a philosopher who has deeply influenced twentieth-century Continental philosophy. His philosophy of time is a precursor to post-structuralist philosophies of difference (Gilles Deleuze), more recently to new materialism and materialist feminism, and more ambivalently to French phenomenology (Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s later philosophy). In the last four weeks of the course, we will trace the reception and appropriation of Bergson’s thought by Gilles Deleuze, in particular in his Cinema books.

There will be two film screenings in the course. These are important for the readings from Gilles Deleuze’s Cinema 2. (Screenings will be scheduled outside of class time. Viewing the films is mandatory for the course.)

TEXTS
The English translations of Bergson’s and Deleuze’s books are available in Paragraphe Bookstore. Students with reading knowledge of French are encouraged to read the authors in the original French.

At Paragraphe Bookstore:

To be posted on MyCourses:

From time to time, relevant supplementary literature will also be posted on MyCourses.

You are encouraged to read the French texts, if you are able to do so (in particular Bergson’s texts):
• Henri Bergson, Matière et mémoire (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1939)
• Gilles Deleuze, Cinéma 1, L’image-mouvement (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1983)
• Gilles Deleuze, Cinéma 2, L’image-temps (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1985)

Registration Note
Seminars are open to graduate students and to undergraduates in U3 or higher. If you are an undergraduate and would like to take this course, please contact the professor for permission. (For undergraduates, there is a form to fill out and a requirement that you have a CGPA of 3.3 or higher, although exceptional cases will be considered.)

Prerequisite for undergraduate students: PHIL 474 or 475 (other courses in Continental Philosophy will be considered, by permission of the instructor).

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADES
The grade will depend on the following: a major term paper, 60%; one class presentation, 20%; and consistent and engaged participation in the class as well as regular attendance, 20%.

(1) The TERM PAPER, worth 60% of your grade, should be approximately 15-20 pages in length (closer to 15 pages for undergraduates; closer to 20 pages for graduate students). Formatting should be: Times New Roman 12 font, double spaced. The topic of this paper is to be designed by you, in consultation with the instructors. It is recommended that you begin work on this paper early, since you should consult secondary sources for the purpose. The paper will be due at the end of the term (date TBA).

(2) A short PRESENTATION, worth 20%.

Guidelines: Each of you will be expected to present one short class presentation (10-15 minutes) that focuses on a question with respect to the reading. The question can take up one specific problem or concept in that week’s reading. The aim is not to give an exhaustive interpretation of the reading; rather it is to interrogate as precisely and attentively as possible one issue in that week’s reading that you think is significant for understanding the text as a whole. Questions must be clearly formulated and elaborated in light of the text we are reading. (Please motivate your question by referring to passage(s) from the text, but avoid linear summaries of the text.)

Hints:
• Ask one question (this can have related sub-questions, but you should avoid multiple unrelated questions).
• Explain your question clearly. Remember that the question aims to motivate discussion, so others should be able to understand it. Try not to assume background that others in the class will not share.

• Make sure this is a real question, i.e., that there is something at stake in what you are asking. Avoid simple clarification questions. Your question should try to locate an important issue in the reading that calls for discussion.

• Remember that critical questions are more productive when internally motivated by the text, and based on a close and generous reading.

• The question need not have only one answer. Indeed, it is better if the question does not have a simple answer but rather calls for multiple interpretations and positions.

A summary of the question should be submitted to me by email, by Monday at 2 PM. This summary should be approximately 300 words. If two students are presenting on the same week, you will be expected to coordinate your presentations and to collaborate during class discussion.

(3) Since this is a discussion-based seminar, ATTENDANCE and PARTICIPATION are crucial to your role in the seminar. Together they are worth 20% of your grade.

Expectations with respect to Participation and Attendance
It is your responsibility as a member of this graduate seminar to come to each class, having done the readings and prepared for substantial and nuanced discussion. You are expected to attend all sessions of the seminar (unless you have a valid medical reason for absence).

You are also expected to engage seriously with the questions, interventions, and presentations of your fellow students. Oral participation should be thoughtful, respectful of others, and constructively critical, as well as on-going.

Short Weekly Questions: Beyond the question that you present, you should come to the other weeks of class with one short written question/reflection, designed to generate discussion. You should be ready to contribute the question orally, if there is a lull in discussion or when called on. Questions will not be individually graded, but I ask that you hand them in at the end of each class; taken as a whole, they will form part of your participation grade. (No question is required on the week you present. As a rough guideline, short weekly questions should be about 75 words in length.)

McGILL UNIVERSITY VALUES ACADEMIC INTEGRITY. THEREFORE ALL STUDENTS MUST UNDERSTAND THE MEANING AND CONSEQUENCES OF CHEATING, PLAGIARISM AND OTHER ACADEMIC OFFENCES UNDER THE CODE OF STUDENT CONDUCT AND DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES (see www.mcgill.ca/students/srr/honest/ for more information).

In accord with McGill University’s Charter of Students’ Rights, students in this course have the right to submit in English or in French any written work that is to be graded.

In the event of extraordinary circumstances beyond the University’s control, the content and/or evaluation scheme in this course is subject to change.

Instructor generated course materials are protected by law and may not be copied or distributed in any form or in any medium without explicit permission of the instructor.
SCHEDULE OF READINGS

January 10  Organizational matters. Introduction to the course.

Bergson’s Matter and Memory

January 17  *“Introduction” and chapter one (pp. 9–44) [Matière et mémoire, pp. 1-42]

24  *Continue chapter one (pp. 44–76) [Matière et mémoire, pp. 42-80]

31  Chapter two (pp. 77–107) [Matière et mémoire, pp. 81-117]

February 7  Continue chapter two (pp. 107–131) [Matière et mémoire, pp.117-146]

14  Chapter three (pp. 133–177) [Matière et mémoire, pp. 147-198]

21  Finish chapter three.

February 27 – March 3 is reading week

March 7  Chapter four (pp. 179–210) [Matière et mémoire, pp. 199-235]

∞  Continue chapter four (pp. 210–223). [Matière et mémoire, pp. 235-251]
   And “Summary and Conclusion.”

∞ Scheduling Note: During February or March, an extra class will be scheduled to replace the cancelled class at the end of term. We will discuss the rebooking date on the first day of class.

Bergsonism: Deleuze and Cinema

TBD  SCREENING: Je t’aime, je t’aime (Alain Resnais, 1968, 94 min)

March 14  *Bergson, “The Possible and the Real”
   Deleuze, Bergsonism, chapters 1 and 3.

21  Bergson on the “cinematographic illusion,” Creative Evolution, pp. 298-308.
   Deleuze, Cinema 1: The Movement-Image, chapters 1 and 4. [Optional: Chapter 2]

28  Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image, chapters 3 (§ 1-2) and 4 (§ 1-2).
   [Background: chapter 2, § 3]

TBD  SCREENING: Last Year at Marienbad (Alain Resnais and Robbe-Grillet, 1961, 94 min)

April 4  Deleuze, Cinema 2: The Time-Image, chapter 5.
   We may also read Chapter 6, if time permits.

April 11  Class cancelled.

TERM PAPERS will be due at the end of the semester. Date to be announced.