

PH 8122 Topics: Philosophy of Time
Ryerson University, Department of Philosophy
Fall 2015
Schedule: Fridays 3-6pm
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Course Description: While philosophy has long struggled with various perplexities surrounding the nature of time, in the first half of the 20th Century the issue of time came to the forefront in an unprecedented manner. Figures like Henri Bergson, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Jean-Paul Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, and Gilles Deleuze each made substantial new contributions to our understanding of time, and for many of these thinkers the issue of time became *the* defining question for philosophy. This course will focus on this recent turn towards time. We will select certain representative works from some of the thinkers mentioned—in particular Bergson, Heidegger, and Sartre—for close study, and we will consider such issues as: the nature of duration, whether there is such a thing as an instant, how our conception of time structures our conception of reality, how temporality comes to be central for understanding human existence in particular, whether time is subjective. We will also pay particular attention to the issue of the link between time and freedom, an issue central to all the figures mentioned.

Required Texts: The following three required texts are on order at the Ryerson Bookstore. If you choose to purchase them elsewhere (the second two in particular would be easy to find second-hand), just be mindful of the asterisked comments below. There will also be some additional required readings; however, they will all be made available to you in an electronic format at no further cost to you (other than the cost of printing them out).

- 1) *Henri Bergson, *Time and Free Will: An Essay on the Immediate Data of Consciousness*. Translated by F. L. Pogson. Dover Publications 2001.
- 2) **Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*. Translated by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson. Harper and Row, 1962.
- 3) Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by H. Barnes. Washington Square Press, 1993.

* There is only one English translation available of this text, but it comes in a couple of different editions. Do not purchase the General Books digital reprint edition, as it is extremely flawed.

**There are two widely available English translations of Heidegger's *Being and Time*, and it is recommended that you purchase the Macquarrie and Robinson translation. There are several editions of that translation—any are fine. If you already own the Joan Stambaugh translation, however, you may use that.

Grade Breakdown:

15% Participation: This participation grade will be divided up into two parts:

- 5% for constructive contributions to class discussions
- 10% for posting five “Reflections,” each worth 2%

40% Explication Papers: 4 short papers, approximately one page single-spaced.
Worth 10% each.

5% Proposal for Final Essay: a short proposal (maximum 2 double-spaced pages)
identifying and discussing the potential topic of your Final Essay

40% One Final Essay, of approximately 13-16 double-spaced pages.

Assignments:

- 1) **Reflections:** In the course of the semester you are to write five Reflections. You may choose the weeks in which you do these, but they cannot be done for the same weeks you are doing an Explication Paper. The Reflections are to be a maximum of 150 words, and are to have a brief title identifying the content of the Reflection. They are to be focused on the specific reading we are doing in a given week, and are to be posted on the course Brightspace website, for your peers to read, at least 6 hours prior to the class in which we are scheduled to discuss that particular reading. No late Reflections will be accepted. These Reflections ought to consist of a few sentences that will help give focus and provoke thinking about the reading on schedule for that week. Each Reflection should be in full sentences, and should aim to be a clear and coherent contribution to the class conversation. Each is worth 2% of the final grade, and will be assigned either: a “zero” (indicating either lack of completion, or that a posted Reflection was insufficient), a “one” (indicating that the Reflection made some contribution and showed some engagement with the material, but could have gone further), or a “two” (indicating that your Reflection was thoughtful and made a valuable contribution to the class).

The Reflections can take many forms, including:

- a. Identifying a particularly striking or important claim, and briefly stating why it is striking or important
- b. Proposing questions that probe or otherwise engage the assigned reading
- c. Suggesting fruitful connections between an idea in this reading and ideas that came up in other readings
- d. Identifying possible assumptions of the text
- e. Identifying important transitions or logical moves made in the reading
- f. Working to shed light on one or more of the key concepts at work in the reading
- g. Identifying apparent weaknesses that stand in the way of making one of the reading’s proposed claims compelling

- 2) **Explication Papers:** You are to write 4 short explication papers in the course of the semester. Each is to be approximately one single-spaced page, is worth 10%, and will be assigned a letter grade. The papers are to be focused on some aspect of the reading assigned for a given week, and are due six hours prior to the class in which that reading is to be discussed (they may be emailed to me, or a paper copy can be dropped under my office door). You may choose which weeks you will be writing the explications, but note that you may do no more than 2 explications in the final four weeks of class. In each paper, you are to choose a key idea that is being analyzed, or a key claim or insight that is being established, in that week's reading, and explicate it. That is, you should try to explain or "teach" it to your reader, for instance by giving the appropriate context for understanding it and by probing the rationale behind it. If you are having difficulty settling on a key idea or claim in any given reading, consult with me and I can offer some suggestions.
- 3) **Proposal for Final Essay:** The proposal, which is to be a maximum 2 double-spaced pages, is to be handed in on or prior to our November 27th class.
- 4) **Final Essay:** The Final Essay is to be approximately 12-15 double-spaced pages in length, and is to be written on a topic of your choosing. It will be due on December 17th, and is worth 40% of the final grade.

Visiting Speaker: We will have the privilege of being visited by Dr. Alia Al-Saji, Associate Professor of Philosophy at McGill. Dr. Al-Saji's research is focused on various aspects of time as it has been taken up in 20th Century continental philosophy. She has agreed to run a special lunch session with our class on November 19th, and she will also be giving a talk to the department on November 18th.

Schedule of Readings:

The following is a tentative schedule of readings. The readings must be done in advance of the class on which they are scheduled. We may decide to modify the schedule of readings to better fit the pace of our class conversation. Any modifications will be announced in class and posted on the Brightspace website. All the readings below are required, however those in bold will be our main focus and ought to be given extra attention.

- 1) Sept. 11th Introduction to the course; brief discussion of Kant and Husserl readings (available on Brightspace)
- 2) Sept. 18th Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, pages **75-115**, 121-128
- 3) Sept. 25th Bergson's *Time and Free Will*, pages 129-139, 145-150, 152-154, **158-201**
- 4) Oct. 2nd Bergson's "The Retrograde Movement of the Truth," pages 17-26, and "The Perception of Change" pages 142-158 (both readings on Brightspace)
- 5) Oct. 9th Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, The Origin of Negation **33-44, 56-85**
- 6) Oct. 16th Study Week; no class

- 7) Oct. 23rd Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, Value, Possibility, and Temporality: **147-155, 159-187** (a helpful supplement would be: pages 133-146)
- 8) Oct. 30th Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, The Temporality of Action: pages 575-585, **585-602, 602-612, 637-647**
- 9) Nov. 6th Heidegger's *Being and Time*: Being-Towards-Death and Anticipation: sections 46-47, **48-50, 51, 52-53.**
- 10) Nov. 13th Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Anticipatory Resoluteness and Temporality as the Meaning of Dasein's Being: sections 54, **58** (starting at page H283 (paragraph starting "Nevertheless..."), **60, 62, 65**

**November 19th, 12-2pm, Lunch with Alia Al-Saji, McGill University

- 11) Nov. 20th Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Temporality of Everydayness: sections **68, 69** (a and c)
- 12) Nov. 27th Heidegger's *Being and Time*, Historicity, sections **73-75**; The Time of Worldly Concern, sections **79-81**
Note: Essay Proposals Due by Nov. 27th
- 13) Dec. 4th Heidegger's *Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics*, The Temporality of Boredom (selected pages, on Brightspace)

Final Essays Due by December 17th

Supplementary Reading:

If you have not read Heidegger before, you may find it useful to prepare for our study of Division II of *Being and Time* by familiarizing yourself somewhat with the following selections of Division I: Sections: **9, 12** (up to top of pg. 84), **15, 20** (up to bottom of pg. 130), **25, 27, 29** (up to bottom of pg. 176), **31** (up to top of pg. 186), **38, 40.**

Below are a few other works by Bergson and Heidegger that you might consult to supplement our study.

- Bergson, *Creative Evolution*: This text, arguably Bergson's most accomplished work, further develops Bergson's account of duration, and applies it in particular to the interpretation of living beings and biological evolution. In addition to the interesting material on life, the final sections of the book, on becoming and on the "cinematographical" character of previous philosophies, may be worth consulting.
- Bergson, *Matter and Memory*: Explores Bergson's theory of memory and his claim that perception is always linked to action. This is probably Bergson's most influential, but most difficult, text, and it cannot really be approached without a sustained and dedicated study. Nevertheless, there are some parts (particularly in the latter half of the book) that can be excerpted and some of these may be of use in expanding your knowledge of Bergson's approach.

- Heidegger, *Basic Problems of Phenomenology*: Among other things this lecture course offers another extended study of the nature of time. It covers much the same ground as the study of time in *Being and Time*. It is somewhat more schematic; however, in certain places it offers a helpful supplement to *Being and Time*, and is in certain places more accessible (for instance, Heidegger's account of Aristotle on time, and his phenomenology of the common conception of time, are particularly useful). Also, Section 15 of *Basic Problems* is helpful as a basic introduction to some of the main themes developed in the first Division of *Being and Time*, and could be useful especially if you've never read that text.

Secondary Sources

In general, I encourage you to focus your energies first and foremost on the study and interpretation of the primary texts we are reading, and to consult secondary literature, if at all, only once you yourself have already established a developed, working relationship to the details of the primary text. However, because some of the primary texts (especially the Heidegger readings) are extremely difficult, you may find it worthwhile to accompany your study of them with some engagement with the secondary literature. A couple of general rules of thumb: 1) *never* consult a secondary source *prior* to reading/studying the portion of the primary text that this source attempts to illuminate; and 2) always try to write the first draft of your explications without consulting any secondary sources.

A Note on Plagiarism:

It is assumed that all the writing you hand in is in your own words, and that all the particular ideas contained in your writing are derived from your own thinking, unless you indicate otherwise (with a proper citation of the source text). If you derive any of the ideas contained in your essays from an external source (from the internet, from another person's essay, from an encyclopedia or journal), you must cite this source in your essay, and must indicate exactly what you are using from this source. Failure to do so is a serious matter, and could result in an academic dishonesty charge. For more information on academic dishonesty, consult me or see Ryerson's Academic Integrity website, at <http://www.ryerson.ca/academicintegrity/graduate/index.html>.