BERGSON, Henri (1859-1941)

Henri Bergson was a leading philosopher of France’s Third Republic. A graduate of the prestigious École Normale Supérieure, he was appointed Chair of Modern Philosophy at the Collège de France in 1904. Bergson is best remembered for his critique of the “spatialized” model of time underwriting scientific and Kantian understandings of causality. Bergson argued that the data of consciousness in fact confront us as pure duration (*la durée*), which is heterogeneous but also continuous and indivisible. It therefore cannot be broken down into a series of juxtaposed events, as the notion of causality requires. *Creative Evolution* (*L’Évolution créatrice*, 1907) deepened these insights in an effort to rescue human freedom from the determinism of mechanistic and finalist models of change. It explained the phenomenon of evolution by positing the existence of an original creative force (*élan vital*) that accounts for both the continuity of all beings and their differentiation into species, without limiting the scope for genuine novelty and human creativity. Bergson’s work had an important impact on William James, Gilles Deleuze, Catholic Modernism, Cubism, and literature.

Bibliography: P. A. Y. Gunter, *Henri Bergson: A Bibliography*, Rev. 2nd ed. (Bowling Green, Ohio: Philosophy Documentation Center, Bowling Green State University, 1986).

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