



Introduction to Metaphysics

by *Henri Bergson (1859 - 1941)* Translated by *T. E. Hulme (1883 - 1917)*

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Introduction to Metaphysics is an essay by French Philosopher Henri Bergson about the concept of reality initially published in 1903 and later included in his book *The Creative Mind: Introduction to Metaphysics* (1923). The essay challenges classical notions of reality, asserting that it is mistaken to think of it as a series of discrete states, but instead it is an ongoing fluid process that resists reductive analysis. Reality can only be grasped through intuition, which Bergson described as a process of “entering into” an object. Classical philosophy of Plato and Aristotle posited true reality as consisting of timeless substances, with process and change subordinated as accidental. Bergson’s concept draws instead from the ontology of constant change as the es-

sence of the universe, best summarized in Heraclitus’ famous dictum that “no man ever steps in the same river twice”. The essay contains two notable examples of the distinction. In the first, he posits that analysis may enable us to construct a model of a city from a composite of photographs taken from every possible angle, but that only intuition can give us the sense of dimension of walking through the city. The second is that numerous translations and commentaries on the components of a line in Homer will never duplicate the experience of the line in the poem itself. *Introduction to Metaphysics* stands as an important document in the emergence of process philosophy and serves as foundation to his three major works, *Time and Free Will* (1889), *Matter and Memory* (1896), and *Creative Evolution* (1907).

Henri Bergson (October 18, 1859 – January 4, 1941) was a major French philosopher influential in the first half of the twentieth century. He was born in Paris the son of a pianist from a prominent Polish Jewish family and the daughter of a Yorkshire doctor. He lost his faith in his early teens and discovered Darwin’s theory of evolution. He won prizes at the Lycée Fontanes for science and for his solution to a mathematical problem, which was published in *Annales de Mathématiques* in 1878. He entered the prestigious *École Normale Supérieure*, earning two degrees. Upon graduation he taught first in Anjou and then Auvergne, and published a critical study of the materialist cosmology of Lucretius in 1884. His dissertation, *Time and Free Will*, earned him a doctoral degree from the University of Paris and was published in 1889. He published his second major work in 1896, *Matter and Memory*, an analysis of perception and memory with a focus on the biological function of the brain. In 1898 he became a professor at the *École Normale Supérieure*. *Introduction to Metaphysics* was published in 1903 in *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*. *Creative Evolution*, his third major work and the best known, appeared in 1907. He was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1927 “in recognition of his rich and vitalizing ideas and the brilliant skill with which they have been presented”. In 1930 he was awarded France’s highest honor, the Grand-Croix de la Legion d’honneur.