

**9207 [a]: Life: The Impact of the Life Sciences on Philosophy and Other Philosophical Domains, from Kant to Esposito.** Time: Friday, 11-2

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Office Hours: after class on zoom, or by appointment on zoom

*Method of delivery:* Zoom. Students must attend classes with video on.

## **I. Course Description**

In his 1823 lecture “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science,” Friedrich Schelling takes issue with Kant’s preference for mathematics over metaphysics, and complains that Kant “prefers a stereometrically regular crystal to the human body because it never falls ill.” Schelling’s comment registers a shift in the early nineteenth century from static and spatial disciplines to more dynamic and existentially risky ones as central to knowledge: in other words, from mathematics and physics to the life sciences (including geology, physiology, biology and medicine). Central to this mutation is an increasingly complex notion of the organism, which can no longer be aestheticised as Kant does in his influential description of the organism as a “natural purpose” (*Naturzweck*) that can be conceived autopoetically and teleologically. “Organised life” was a major concern of science in the fifty years before Treviranus introduced the word “biology” in 1810. In the transition from Kant to Hegel “life” also became the basis for areas that might seem completely abstracted from it, such as logic. The question of what constitutes an organism has consequences for an array of topics to which the organic analogy is crucial: the work of art, systems. It also has consequences for “life” itself as something that exceeds normative concepts of “nature.” To cite Schelling again, “life” may be profoundly “unnatural.”

As the above indicates, beginning with Kant, this course will mostly focus on post-Kantian Idealism (Hegel, Schelling). Idealism (most explicitly in Hegel) established for philosophy an “encyclopedic” purview, in which philosophy claimed a right to think other domains (aesthetics, science, history), but was therefore reciprocally impacted by its “others,” most importantly the life sciences. This interdisciplinarity makes Idealism a first instance of “theory” and not just a corpus that can be read theoretically. In focusing on how Idealism exposes itself to a “life” that it occasionally embraces and more often struggles to contain, even to the point that the “writing” and epistemic personality of philosophy are affected, I will be refracting Idealism through the work of a number of contemporary thinkers (Canguilhem, the early Foucault, Derrida, Esposito and Malabou). We will take up some of these thinkers in the last third of the course, only briefly, given the lack of time. The central question in taking up these thinkers will be how they think transversally or diagonally across disciplines, with a focus on the role that the life sciences play in unsettling other areas.

## **II. TIMETABLE** (approximate and may be revised for later classes depending on seminars chosen)

- I: Sept. 9 Introduction to the course. Hegel’s Encyclopedia project and the relation between disciplines. Derrida on the “encyclopedia.” The life sciences in the period as this course’s particular way of focusing this larger issue, which pertains to what constitutes “theory” as opposed to “philosophy.” Foucault’s reprise of the encyclopedic project in *The Order of Things*. His discussion of the transition from “natural history” to the “history of nature” in the 19thc. Begin Kant, if possible.  
*Readings:* Hegel, Preface to the *Encyclopedia*. Foucault, *Order of Things*, extracts in OWL (from natural history to biology) Chapter IX (the quadrilateral of figures, 312-28), X (The Human Sciences); Kant, “Architectonic” section of 1<sup>st</sup> Critique (first 3 pp.).
- II: Sept. 16 Kant. Organising concepts, constituting his critical apparatus; Kant on organisms; relationship between aesthetic and teleological judgment and how this is framed within the critical apparatus. Kant in the history of biology.

Readings: extracts from 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Critiques as indicated below. Please consult Kant bibliography that I'll put in OWL.

- III. Sept. 23 Hegel. Approaches to Hegel, including Malabou; *Philosophy of Nature*.  
Readings: The Introduction and "Organics" section of the *Philosophy of Nature* (#343, #345 + remark, #348, #350, #351 [not including Remarks], #354 skim Remark, #356, #357 + Remark, #363-5 including Remarks; #370- #376 including Remarks). J.H. Green, pp. 99-108 from "Recapitulatory Lecture" (in *Vital Dynamics*); Download "Others on Hegel" in OWL, and look at Malabou, "The Wounds of Spirit."
- Sept. 30 No class, as I will be away at a conference. The class will be made up on Dec. 9th.
- IV. Oct. 7 Hegel contd. Rodolphe Gasché, "Phenomenology and Phantasmatology" in *Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology*.
- V. Oct. 14 Schelling. the *First Outline* (selections). The organization of the text, the lecture form vs. book, Schelling's multiple "systems." Fields and subsystems in the text – a new way of doing philosophy. The *Stufenfolge* or graduated stages of nature and its place in this mix, its analogical implications for other fields. Foucault on Cuvier vs Lamarck (in extracts from *Order of Things*).  
  
Readings: *Selections from the First Outline (dealing with dynamic atomism, the Stufenfolge, excitability, John Brown, disease)*. For background: *On University Studies*-Chapter 1. Chapter 2 pp, 21-2, Chapter 4, p. 42.
- VI. Oct 21 Schelling's *First Outline* contd. Also "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science" (selections)
- VII. Oct. 28 Schelling, the *Freedom essay*. I'd like to begin this class at 10, as I have to attend a conference at King's

#### READING WEEK

- VIII. Nov 11 First half of class: As a model for how a philosophy inflected by life and the life sciences can be used to analogically think other areas, I'd like to read between Hegel's Aesthetics and the section on "individual natures" and the "universal organism" in Schelling's *First Outline*. In the second part of the class we will begin Canguilhem.
- IX Nov. 18 Canguilhem; Foucault, *Birth of the Clinic*
- X Nov.25 Foucault
- XI Dec.2 Foucault; Esposito
- XII. Dec.9 Esposito. Maybe Malabou.

#### III. Texts

I will provide pdfs of all texts and selections, via e mail or OWL. Where I provide only selections for copyright reasons, you can usually download the full text from Library Genesis. However, you are urged to buy the following texts, especially if you intend to work on them, as reading a long pdf is not

conducive to retention and assimilation. I have not ordered texts at the bookstore.

Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. AV Miller. Oxford.

FWJ Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Keith Peterson., State University of New York Press.

Schelling. *Philosophical Investigations into the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Jeff Love and Johannes Schmidt, SUNY Press.

#### **IV. Readings**

**Immanuel Kant** (Classes 1 and 2): *Critique of Pure Reason (First Critique)*: I have given you the Introduction and some further selections. You should glance at the highlighted sections, and read pp. 308-14, 532-35 (regulative vs. constitutive ideas), and 651-53 (opening of the section on “Architectonic”). *Critique of the Power of Judgment* (3<sup>rd</sup> Critique):

**G.W.F. Hegel**, Introduction to the *Encyclopedia; Philosophy of Nature: Introduction* and section on Organics ( especially the Animal Organism); *Aesthetics*: last section of the Introduction.

**F.W.J. Schelling**, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (selections: possibly (pp. 13-21, 28-35, 39-54, 141-2; 158-60; “Introduction” to the *Outline* (193-9); “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” (selections); *Freedom essay*;

**Georges Canguilhem**, selections from *The Normal and the Pathological, Knowledge of Life*.

**Michel Foucault**: *The Order of Things* (selections on natural history vs biology, the quadrilateral of figures [Chapter 9], the human sciences [Chapter 10]). *The Birth of the Clinic* ((Introduction, Chs. 1,2,6, 8-10, Conclusion); *Death and the Labyrinth: The World of Raymond Roussel* ((Ch 1, 2, 4: 65-73, 8, Postscript)

**Roberto Esposito**: *Bios* (Chapters 1,4,5); *Immunitas*, “Introduction,” “The Implant”; *The Third Person*: Chapter 1.

**[Catherine Malabou**: selections from *What Can We Do With Our Brains, Ontology of the Accident*, and *The New Wounded*; “The Wounds of Spirit.”]. It seems like there will be no time to cover Malabou, but I’ll try to work in references to her work.

#### **V. Assignments and Evaluation:**

**SEMINAR**: 25%. Each student will give a 20-minute seminar, modelled on the academic conference paper. The seminar should be succinct, suggestive, but comprehensive within the limits of time. Since your seminar will have a respondent, please send it to your respondent and to me via e mail on the Monday before the class. If you wish to modify your seminar in the light of discussion, you can submit a new version no more than a week later; otherwise your grade will be based on the paper already sent in, on the seminar as pedagogical performance, and on your response to questions. You can use share screen or power point to share quotations, but *please do not design your seminar as a power point*: ie do not reduce it to a series of bullet points.

**BOOK REVIEW**: (15%). **DUE Oct. 25th**. This assignment is meant to develop your skill with handling important secondary material and critiquing arguments, and should be modelled on book reviews in journals. The review should be 2.5-3 pages single-spaced, and in the case of a long book it may deal with the general argument and then concentrate on crucial part of the book (though you must still read the whole book). The assignment will be graded but will not receive more than a short comment due to its own brevity. The book reviews are also a resource for the class, and so will be included in an OWL subfolder. No more than two students should review any one book, so choices should be cleared with me. So you are strongly advised to do this assignment sooner rather than later.

**Major Research Paper** (50%): **Due Dec.21st**. 5000-6000 words, not including bibliography. The major paper should show evidence of secondary reading and original research. It should therefore include a Bibliography, rather than Works Cited. This should be an “annotated bibliography” in which you provide

capsule summaries (1 or 2 sentences) of the arguments of THREE entries which may be either articles or books. Please use either MLA or Chicago Style format for references. Some overlap between the final essay and either the book review or seminar is permissible, but please discuss this with me. For instance, if you do a seminar on chemistry in Schelling's *First Outline*, you could write a paper on interrelationships between chemistry, physics and physiology in that text; or you could write a paper on the role of chemistry in Schelling and Hegel.

**Due date for final paper:** By 3 pm Dec. 21st at the English Department main office in UC, or by 6pm on Dec. 22<sup>nd</sup> at my house (870 Wellington Street, SE corner of Wellington and Grosvenor). All essays **must** be submitted in **hard** copy, and also sent to me electronically as a precaution in Word 97-2003, Compatibility Mode. After the 22<sup>nd</sup> there will be a late penalty of 2% per day. Papers submitted after the 25<sup>th</sup> will not receive comments.

**PARTICIPATION:** 10%

This grade will be based on your seminar response, attendance and general participation.

*Response:* Each student seminar will have a student respondent. The response must take up the argument of the seminar, but may critique it (constructively), offer another point of view, or take up an aspect of the topic not covered in the seminar. In any case it should offer something substantive, and raise discussion points (no more than 5-8 minutes). The respondent should coordinate with the student presenting the seminar about seeing the seminar in advance. It follows that the respondent is also responsible for reading the whole text being covered in the seminar, and not just a selection (or in the case of a formidable text such as the *Philosophy of Nature* or the *First Outline*, responsible for glancing at the whole text and reading the assigned section thoroughly)

*Questions:* In classes where there is no seminar (beginning in Wk 2) two students will be assigned to raise one or two provocative and far-reaching questions about one of the readings for the day. You should have some speculative answers to your own question

*Other Participation* (including attendance): Attendance is a required part of this course. If you miss more than two classes without good reason (ie medical or compassionate reasons), you will upto 5% out of the total 10% grade.

## **VI. Late Penalties and Incompletes**

Failure to deliver a seminar creates a problem for the entire class and its scheduling. Anyone who fails to deliver a seminar on the assigned date will have to submit it in writing within a week in order to receive a grade no higher than 70%.

Late essays will be penalised at the rate of 2% per day.

Incompletes must be approved by the Centre Director (or by the student's home department) in consultation with the instructor. Academic accommodation for reasons of illness will be granted, following the university's policy, which requires documentation to be submitted to the Dean of the Faculty in a timely fashion. The policy can be obtained from the Centre Office. Accommodation on compassionate grounds (defined as death or serious illness in the family) will be granted by the Director and instructor in consultation. In very unusual circumstances (e.g. the student is taking more than the normal number of courses), extensions or an INCOMPLETE on written (not oral) work may be granted, or penalties reduced, if a request is made to the Director and instructor *two weeks* in advance of the due date. As stated in the Centre's policies "an incomplete should not be a way of avoiding a late penalty or getting a higher grade than someone who respects the deadlines." If an incomplete is granted, a date will be determined for submission of outstanding work, after which the full penalty will apply.

## **VII. Academic Offences**

As part of university policy we are required to stress that Scholastic offences, including but not limited to plagiarism (whether of direct wording or arguments), are taken seriously. Students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Website: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic\\_discipline\\_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/handbook/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

In addition, please note (with apologies for saying this if it is unnecessary) that a graduate course that

draws on the professor's published and unpublished research is not like an undergraduate course which may organise existing information that is "in the public domain." Any arguments that you take from this course, which are not common knowledge, and which you use in a class essay or outside this class (e.g. in a thesis, conference paper or article) must be duly acknowledged.