19TH C. PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 309
19TH C. Philosophy
M, W 2:40-4 p.m.
FISK 412
Wesleyan University

Asst. Prof. Susan Hahn
Dept. of Philosophy
Office: Russell, room 10, x2932
e-mail: shahn@wesleyan.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION
The late 18th-19th century was one of the most exciting, revolutionary, and difficult periods in the history of philosophy. Among the prominent philosophers working in the period were Hume, Kant, Goethe, Hegel and the post-Kantian German Idealists. In the late 18th-19th century, certain philosophical conceptions of nature, naturalism, and natural philosophy originated out of reflections on the empirical sciences and scientific methods of the day. Rather than gain a superficial overview of the developments in this historical period, we will try to delve deeply into the philosophical conceptions of nature, naturalism, natural purposiveness, and natural philosophy that grew out of late 18th-early 19th century empirical theories of life and nature.

We will begin with Enlightenment theories of matter, life, and generation in the age of Goethe [1749-1832]; an application of Goethe’s empirical and scientific method in his botanical writings and theory of the metamorphosis of plants. We will then explore Goethe’s theory of color within the larger philosophical framework of empirical theories of life and nature. Our background will begin with Newton’s optics, and Goethe’s rejection Newton’s physicalist theory; Goethe’s own physiological theory of colors; and color experiments as a means of mediating between subject and object; and Goethe’s appropriation of Kant’s notion intuitive perception.

Goethe's natural philosophy will provide the key background to examining how German Idealists’ romantic conception of life and nature peacefully coexist with materialist proposals. A number of the figures we will examine have traditionally been grouped together under the label “Idealists” in virtue of their rejection of objective, mind-independent sources of ideas and emphasis on phenomenal experience as a source of knowledge. Topics will include: Kant on the purposiveness of organic nature; Hume’s skeptical doubts about causation and induction, as providing a catalyst for Kant’s thesis of subjective Idealism in the Prolegomena.

Our investigation of 19th c. natural philosophy will end by examining the concept of life and nature in Hegel’s natural philosophy. We will see Hegel develop a new research methodology (dialectical naturalism), in order to develop the very concepts that we need to make sense of nature’s complexity. Texts will include passages on the concept of life and the logic of living organisms (from Hegel’s Encyclopedia: “Organics” The Plant Nature” and later Logic). These texts will bring us full circle, as they investigate some of the same natural phenomena we encountered in Goethe’s scientific writings.

REQUIRED TEXTS:

• Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Botanical Writings (Woodbridge, Conn: Oxbow Press, 1952) ISBN: 0-918024-68-4


• David Hume, A Treatise of Human Nature [1739-40] [T], 2nd ed. Selby-Bigge (Oxford UP, 1978) [0-19-824588-2].

- Immanuel Kant. *Prolegomena to any Future Metaphysics*, revised by James Ellington (Hackett, 1977) [0-915144-25-5]. Based on Paul Carus translation (Open Court Classics) [0-87548-057-8]


**REQUIREMENTS:**

1. **Two papers**

All students taking the course for credit are required to write two (2) papers:

(1) One short paper 5-6 pages: due March 5, Wed.

(2) Final term paper 8-10 pages: due May 12, Monday, the last day of the reading period.

Time permitting, students will have the option of giving a short, ungraded 15 minute oral presentation in class on one of the topics we are covering. Not required, but pedagogically very useful.

2. **Grading**

Overall grades will be based on 2 papers and contributions to class discussions. Each assignment will be weighted as follows:

- 1<sup>st</sup> paper: 40%
- 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: 50%
- class participation 10%

**SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

**PART I: SCIENTIFIC METHOD IN THE AGE OF GOETHE**

Jan. 27, M

Introduction to course: Scientific model of nature
Goethe’s Empirical Methodology:
Two Methods: Empirical Realism and Idealism
Read: “Empirical Observations and Science” (1798) [pdf]

Jan. 29, W

Goethe’s scientific method:
Read: The Experiment as Mediator between Subject and Object” (1792) [pdf]

Feb. 3, M

Goethe on Intuitive Perception:
Read: Goethe, “Fortunate Encounter” [pdf]
Read: selections from Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*:
Part II: Teleology of Judgment: §§76-77
On Kant’s distinction between intuitive and discursive understanding

Feb. 5, W
Goethe’s Botanical Writings: Goethe’s Metamorphosis of Plants:
“Ur-Leaf” or Archetype

Sept. 19, M
Metamorphosis of Plants:
Preformation Theory and Epigenesis

Feb. 10, W
Metamorphosis of Plants (cont):
Gaps and transitions
Problems with “idea” of Archetype

Feb. 12, M
Goethe’s experimental scientific procedures applied to color:
Goethe’s criticisms of Newton’s Physicalist account

Feb. 17, M
Goethe’s Theory of Color
Read: Goethe, *Theory of Color* (1810): Part I: Physiological Colors:
“Phantoms of the Eye”
Read: pp.2-44, §§1-100.

Feb. 19, W
Part II: Physical Colors
Critique of Isaac Newton’s Optics:
Read: pp.56-126, §§136-305.

Recommended: Sir Isaac Newton. *Opticks or, a Treatise of the Reflections, Refractions, Inflections and Colours of Light. 4th edition* [1730]

Feb. 24, M
Color skepticism:

**PART II: PURPOSES AND ORGANIC NATURE**

Feb. 26, W
Kant’s notion of purposiveness in organic nature:
Part II: Teleological Judgment
Mechanical v. a special kind of causality in nature

Mar. 3, M
Objective Purposiveness in Organisms
External v. internal purposes, relative v. internal purposes
Read: Kant, CJ: §§61-68

Mar. 5, W
Dialectic of Teleological Judgment
Read: Kant, CJ §§69-78,
especially CJ: §70-77, on regulative v. constitutive principles of purpose

1st short paper due

spring vacation
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<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>Mar. 24, M</td>
<td>Kant on difference between discursive v. intuitive intellect:</td>
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<td>Read: Kant, CJ: especially §§76-77.</td>
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<td>PART III: SKEPTICISM ABOUT CAUSE AND INDUCTION</td>
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<td>Mar 26, W</td>
<td>Hume’s general skeptical method</td>
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<td>Mar 31, M</td>
<td>Hume’s skepticism about causation</td>
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<td>Apr 2, W</td>
<td>Read: Hume, Treatise [T]: book I, part IV: “Of the Skeptical and Other</td>
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<td>Apr 7, M</td>
<td>Hume on natural belief</td>
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<td>Readings: Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding, tba</td>
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<td>Apr 9, W</td>
<td>Kant’s arguments refuting Hume:</td>
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<td>Read: Kant, Prolegomena, Preamble §§1-5</td>
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<td>Apr 14, M</td>
<td>Kant’s defense of metaphysics:</td>
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<td>Read: Prolegomena, Part II: How is the Science of Nature Possible?</td>
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<td>Apr 16, W</td>
<td>Kant’s explanation of mathematical cognition</td>
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<td>Read: Prolegomena, Part II: “How is pure mathematics possible?”</td>
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<td>Apr 21, M</td>
<td>Kant continued</td>
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<td>Apr 23, W</td>
<td>Hegel’s Organic Conception of Life:</td>
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<td>Read: Encyclopedia, Part II, Philosophy of Nature: chapter on plant</td>
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<td>nature [CP]; see esp. pp.303-311, on Goethe’s Metamorphosis of Plants.</td>
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<td>Apr 28, M</td>
<td>Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature (cont)</td>
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<td>Apr 30, W</td>
<td>Hegel’s dialectical naturalism: The Logic of Life:</td>
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<td>Read: the categories of “Life” and “Teleology” in later Logic [CP]</td>
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<td>May 5, M</td>
<td>catch up day</td>
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<td>May 7, W</td>
<td>Last class</td>
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<td>May 9-12</td>
<td>Final term paper: due last day of reading period, May 12, 2014</td>
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