

Theocrit 9245 [a]: Philosophy, the Life Sciences and Medicine. Tuesdays, 1:30-4:30

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Office Hours: after class, or by appointment

This course takes up the impact of the life sciences on philosophy and on the organization of knowledge more broadly, with reference to the mutually unsettling transferences and interactions between philosophy and its others, specifically life sciences that shift the very nature of philosophy. The course deals mostly with late 18th and early 19th century thinkers, but focalised through contemporary theorists, some to be studied and some just touched on. The course has five (entangled) areas:

1. The “encyclopedia”: a term used in a specific way by German Idealist thinkers and taken up by Derrida. I will look at Hegel’s, Schelling’s and Novalis’ theorization of an “encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences” that thinks even empirical fields of knowledge in terms of their philosophical potential, but also their contamination of philosophy and interimplication with each other within a (deconstructive) architecture of knowledge. Foucault’s work on a self-reflexive interdisciplinarity (in *The Order of Things*) and Derrida’s work on the university will provide a framework for looking at the above thinkers.
2. Hegel’s philosophy of nature, the most ignored and troublesome part of his Encyclopedia. Here I will be concerned not only with the argument but also with layout and narrative structure, in other words, with the *Philosophy of Nature* as writing/*écriture*, as phantasmology, as a “pathography.” Hegel’s own *Aesthetics* is one tool for approaching the *Philosophy of Nature* in this way, and raises the larger issue of how we read philosophy in ways that exceed and trouble exegesis.
3. F.W.J. Schelling, who more openly confronts the writing of philosophy and the very possibility of philosophy as “science” (or systematic and certain knowledge). We will be particularly concerned with the interdisciplinary implications of the life sciences (physics, chemistry, physiology, medicine, geology) for other domains of thought, as shown by the consequences of Schelling’s early *Naturphilosophie* for later works such as the *Freedom* essay and *Ages of the World*.
4. British life scientists: J.H. Green, S.T. Coleridge, John Brown, John Hunter (1728-1893). Coleridge and his follower Green are “idealists” who resist the troublesomeness of nature, and will form a brief point of contrast to the German idealists. Brown’s *Elements of Medicine* (1788) was an important influence on Hegel/Schelling/Novalis, and provides an example of how the Germans take empirical work in a more philosophical direction. The highly interdisciplinary intellectual corpus of John Hunter (1728-1893), whose collection of anatomical and fossil specimens was made a “national trust” in 1799, allows us to reflect on disciplines such as medicine, physiology, comparative anatomy, geology, paleontology and museology, as well as on the cultural management of knowledge. Unlike that of Hegel and Schelling, Hunter’s work is thoroughly empirical. But in their most radical forms Idealism and empiricism meet at a vanishing point, where the latter is as speculative as the former, especially when a troubled Idealism is used as a framework for potentialising the issues in empirical work. Considering these British thinkers in the framework of “continental philosophy” is also a way of thinking about the differences among what Derrida calls “philosophical continents.”
5. Contemporary theorists relevant to the above issues: Foucault’s work on medicine and organizations of knowledge (or epistemes), Catherine Malabou’s work on plasticity and Hegel, and Roberto Esposito’s work on the immunitary paradigm. This work will be threaded through the course, as a resource for approaching earlier thinkers, and also (time permitting) to be considered in itself..

This course is located within Romantic philosophy and thought, broadly conceived. However, the issues it raises about the nature of interdisciplinarity and the difference between speculation and positivism are also issues that animate contemporary Theory, and students are welcome to take the material of the course in these directions in their essays.

TIMETABLE (approximate)

[Please note: I have to cancel and reschedule the first class, some time before Thanksgiving, in consultation with the class. The Introduction of Reading Week has also reduced some first term seminars to 12 weeks. It may therefore be necessary to continue until 5 on some class days.]

- I: Sept. 18 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.
Readings: Hegel, Preface to the *Encyclopedia*; Foucault, *Order of Things*, Chapters IX (the quadrilateral of figures), X; Kant, "Architectonic" (first 3 pp.); Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, Table of Contents; pre-circulated handout with quotes.
- II: Sept. 25 Foucault continued. Hegel's "histories" of various subjects. Benjamin's concept of "natural history." The word natural history in its different meanings. Hegel's *Aesthetics* as an example of both kinds of natural history, and as an example both of the ruin of Hegel's dialectic and as a resource for approaching his work as writing/écriture. Begin Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*.
Readings: Foucault continued and brief selections from *Aesthetics*. "Introduction" to *PN*.
- III. Oct 2 Hegel, *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*).
- IV. Date TBD *PN* contd. Introduction to Schelling. His attempt to unify idealism and realism in one system. *On University Studies*: his "encyclopedia," the relation between ideal and real sciences, positive and absolute knowledge.
Hegel contd. Rodolphe Gasché, "Phenomenology and Phantasmatology" in *Georges Bataille: Phenomenology and Phantasmatology*. Schelling, selections from *University Studies. Introduction to the First Outline* (selections; at back of *First Outline*)

READING WEEK

- V. Oct. 16 Schelling's *First Outline*; 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. Selections will be specified later.
- VI. Oct. 23 *FO* contd. Schelling, "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science."
- VII. Oct.30 Schelling, *Freedom* essay.

- VIII. Nov.6 Introduction to Hunter. His radical empiricism, array of topics he covers, his Museum, loss of manuscripts, editing and reception of his work. Disciplinary categorization of his work. Cultural agendas of epistemic (dis)organization. Romantic vs Victorian.
- Readings for classes VIII-X: TBD depending on seminars, but will include
Lectures on Surgery, ToC, Chapters 2-4, 9, and a glance at 6 at 10 (*Surgical Works*, Vol. 1); “On the Stomach Digesting Itself After Death” (Works, IV); the Advertisement, and pp. I.1-41 of Owen (ed.), *Essays and Observations*; the ToC of both volumes of the above.
- IX. Nov.13 Above contd. “Philosophical Continents”– the different cultural and epistemic imperatives of German vs British science in the 18th-19thc. The German development of John Brown’s *Elements of Medicine*. British Idealism, with specific focus on how Green and Coleridge took up (immunized?) *Naturphilosophie*. Empiricism/materialism as a volatile (un)ground.
- X. Nov. 20 Above contd. if necessary. Classes XI and XII will focus on seminars. The exact readings for Classes X-XII will depend on seminars chosen.
- XI. Nov. 27 Esposito, Foucault, Malabou.
- XII Dec. 4 Esposito, Foucault, Malabou.

READINGS:

All material will be provided via Dropbox, though it is recommended that you buy Hegel’s *Philosophy of Nature*, Schelling’s *First Outline*, and Foucault’s *Order of Things*, as the experience of reading on screen rather than reading print is not conducive to retention. Even though I will be using selections, I will provide the whole text in many cases. I will also provide a sheet of crucial supplementary quotes that I’ll use in each class. Readings will be drawn from:

G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature* (section on *Organics*); *Aesthetics* (last section of the Introduction).

F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (selections); *Introduction to the Outline* (selections); *Freedom essay* (important sections to be highlighted); “On the Nature of Philosophy as Science” (important parts to be highlighted); *On University Studies* (brief selections)

Immanuel Kant: “Architectonic” section in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (3 pages)

John Hunter, selections, including *Lectures on Surgery*, Table of Contents, Chapters 2-4, 9, and a glance at 6 at 10 (*Surgical Works*, Vol. 1); “On the Stomach Digesting Itself After Death” (Works, IV); the Advertisement, and pp. I.1-41 of Richard Owen (ed.), *Essays and Observations*; the Table of Contents of both volumes of *E and O*. Possibly Hunter’s essays on Fossils

John Brown *Elements of Medicine* (very brief selections)

Joseph Henry Green, “Recapitulatory Lecture from *Vital Dynamics*.”

S.T. Coleridge *Theory of Life* (selections)*

Michel Foucault: *The Order of Things* (selections). Possibly *The Birth of the Clinic* (selections) and/or *Death and the Labyrinth* (selections);*

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.”

* The extent to which I use these materials will depend on seminar choices.

Assignments and Evaluation:

You will be required to give a seminar (written up and handed in a week later), to respond to a seminar, to post a book review, and to write a major essay. The essay can be in part a development of the seminar, but if so, it should add something significant to the seminar (see below).

The distribution of grades is as follows:

PARTICIPATION: 10%

This grade will be based on your seminar response, your questions (assigned for a particular week, and 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 (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) a student will be randomly assigned to raise 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, NOT because you have to write an essay for another course), you will lose 3-5% out of the total 10% grade (ie your final course grade will be 3-5% lower).

BOOK REVIEW: (10%) In order to develop your skill with handling important secondary material and critiquing arguments, you will be required to submit to me and to post (in Dropbox), a 2-3 page *single-spaced* review of a book or crucial part thereof. This assignment will be graded but will not receive comments due to its brevity. The book reviews are also a resource for the class, and so will be included in a Dropbox subfolder. A list of books will be sent out shortly. No more than two students should review any one book, so choices must be cleared with me. You may choose to review something not on the list, but it must be relevant to this course and the choice should be cleared with me. Reviews will be due between Oct 16th and Nov. 13th, depending on when we are covering the relevant material. They are due no later than Nov. 6th to avoid backup of assignments. There will be a penalty if this deadline is not met.

SEMINAR: 25%. The seminar should be modelled on the academic conference paper. It should take no more than 25 minutes, should be succinct, suggestive, but comprehensive. Please send the paper to me via e mail on the Monday morning before the class. Please also send it to your respondent by then or preferably earlier. No more than a week after presentation of the seminar, please give me a hard copy of your formal write-up of the seminar, which has taken account of any relevant class discussion and which includes a Works Cited. Seminar Topics will be distributed shortly.

ESSAY: (55%). The major paper must show evidence of secondary reading and original research. Just focusing on one or two primary texts is not sufficient, as more is expected in the professional contexts for which the final paper stands in (ie conference papers, articles, even SSHRCC applications). Indeed if you limit yourself to one text, evidence that you are familiar with other work by the theorist is necessary (ie don't write a paper just on Schelling's "On the Nature of Philosophy as Science."). You may develop your seminar in further and new directions for the final paper, but if you do so, you must add significantly in content to the seminar; i.e. you can't just lengthen the seminar by adding more quotations. 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. Students doing a final paper that is completely different from their seminar must submit a paper of 5000-6000 words. A paper of 15 pages will be considered insufficient. Students doing a final paper that overlaps with their seminar should submit a longer paper of 6000-7500 words and should hand in their seminar with the paper. Please consult with me if taking this option. The paper must contain a bibliography (not just a Works Cited; a Bibliography with just 2 or 3 works is not sufficient). The paper should follow either the MLA or Chicago Style format for references.

Due date for final paper: By 4 pm Dec. 18th at the English Department main office in UC, or by 6pm on Dec. 19th 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. I will be out of the country from Dec. 20th-Jan. 9th, and will not have reliable access to e mail, or access to printing facilities (also, please note, I'm a technological dinosaur, and although I have Word 2015, my computer refuses to download except in Word 97-2003, and messes up the formatting of word 2015). After the 19th, there will be a late penalty of 2% per day.

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.

*Attendance in class is part of the participation mark. A student who misses more than two classes without a good reason will forfeit part of the participation mark.

*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.

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

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 on-line undergraduate course which organises 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 outside this class (e.g. in a thesis, conference paper or article) must be duly acknowledged.