

Life: The Impact of the Life Sciences on Philosophy and Other Philosophical Domains, from Kant to Esposito.

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(Half course; first term)

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 Schopenhauer). 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 Derrida). We will take up some of these thinkers in the last third of the course, too briefly, given the lack of time.

Tentative Readings:

Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, section on “Architectonic”; *Critique of Judgment*, section on organisms; in the context of a brief introduction to Kant’s critical apparatus.

G.W.F. Hegel, *Introduction to the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline (1817)*; *Philosophy of Nature* (Introduction and section on *Organics*); *Aesthetics* (last section of the Introduction, and brief selections on “Symbolic” art).

F.W.J. Schelling, *First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature* (extensive selections); *Introduction to the Outline* (brief selection); *Freedom essay*; *Ages of the World* [1815](selections)

Arthur Schopenhauer: *The World as Will and Representation* (selections)

Georges Canguilhem, *Knowledge of Life* (Part 3); selections from *The Normal and the Pathological*

Michel Foucault: Selections from *The Birth of the Clinic*, *The Order of Things*, *Death and the Labyrinth*.

Roberto Esposito: Selections from *Bios*, *Immunitas*, and *Third Person*.

(Possibly) Catherine Malabou: Selections from *What Can We Do With Our Brains* and *The New Wounded*; "The Wounds of Spirit."

(Possibly). Jacques Derrida, *Life/Death*.