

PL346 Conceptions of Nature in Classical German Philosophy

Seminar Leader: Thomas Raysmith
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Office Hours: Mondays 12:30-13:30 or by appointment
Class times: Mondays 0900-1215

Course Description

Conceptions of nature feature prominently in German idealism and romanticism. Indeed, many of the thinkers of these movements regard it as essential that conceptions of nature be coherently incorporated into their philosophical systems. Until recently, however, these conceptions have received relatively little attention. In this course, we will critically examine writings on nature by thinkers such as Herder, Kant, Goethe, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis, Günderröde, Hegel, and Schopenhauer. Our aim in doing so will be to develop an understanding of the positions taken up by the thinkers of classical German philosophy on questions like the following. What is the relationship between philosophy and the natural sciences? What must our cognitive capacities be such that it is possible for us to have knowledge of nature and living organisms? If we can have knowledge of nature and living organisms, then in what sense and to what degree? Are we set apart from nature by possessing some kind of freedom? Does nature impose moral obligations on us? We will also consider whether classical German philosophy holds any relevance for contemporary philosophy of science.

Requirements

Students are expected to attend all classes unless there are extenuating circumstances. Classes will be run as seminars, with students expected to read materials and contribute to the discussion. Students are also expected to submit all assignments by the due date.

As seminar leader, I will make myself available for meetings if they are requested. If you are struggling with the material, need help coming up with ideas for your essays or talks, etc., please do not hesitate to request a meeting.

Academic Integrity

Bard College Berlin maintains the highest standards of academic integrity and expects students to adhere to these standards at all times. Instances in which students fail to meet the expected standards of academic integrity will be dealt with under the Code of Student Conduct, Section 14.3 (Academic Misconduct) in the Student Handbook.

Accessibility

Bard College Berlin is committed to inclusion and providing equal access to all students; we uphold and maintain all aspects of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, the

Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, and the ADA Amendments Act of 2008, and Section 3 of the German Disability Equality Act of April 27, 2002 (Federal Law Gazette I p. 1468). If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, please contact the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, Atticus Kleen, (accommodations@berlin.bard.edu) to request an official accommodation.

Requests for longer-term accommodations should be made as early as possible to ensure adequate time for coordination and planning. Please note that accommodations are not retroactive and may require advance notice to implement.

If you have already been approved for accommodations with the Disability Accommodation Coordinator, please arrange to meet with me outside of class so that we can develop an implementation plan.

Students may face extenuating circumstances related to various personal or external factors, which impact their academic performance. While these circumstances often do not fall within the legal framework of Disability Accommodations, Bard College Berlin is committed to supporting students experiencing such circumstances. A student needing a short extension or a replacement assignment because of an extenuating circumstance is encouraged to make arrangements directly with instructors if possible. If further support is needed, please visit the [Bard College Berlin Accessibility page](#). Questions about this process can be directed to James Harker (j.harker@berlin.bard.edu) or Maria Anderson-Long (m.andersonlong@berlin.bard.edu).

Attendance

Attendance at all classes is a crucial part of the education offered by Bard College Berlin. To account for minor circumstances, two absences from twice-per-week courses or the equivalent (e.g. one absence from a once-per-week course) should not affect the participation grade or require documentation.

Students should not attend class when they test positive for COVID-19. It is the student's responsibility to contact the seminar leader regarding the content of missed classes. Remote participation in classes will not be offered.

Bard College Berlin may not offer credit for any course in which a student has missed more than 30% of classes, regardless of the reasons for the absences. The full Bard College Berlin attendance policy can be found in the Student Handbook, Section 2.8.

Assessment

Students will be required to submit 2 essays (1st essay due October 27, 2nd essay due December 10). Students must present essay plans for both essays to the seminar leader no later than 1 week before their respective due dates.

Students will also be required to give a 10–15-minute introductory talk to 1 class.

Assignments

Students are required to submit 2 essays. Each essay must focus on a topic covered in class prior to or during the week of submission. The word count of each essay must be 2500 (+ or - 10%). Each essay must reference at least 5 sources.

Students are also required to deliver an introductory talk to 1 class that covers the thinkers and material of that class. The talk must be 10-15 minutes in duration.

Policy on Late Submission of Papers

Essays that are up to 24 hours late can be downgraded up to one full grade (from B+ to C+, for example). Instructors are not obliged to accept essays that are more than 24 hours late. Where a professor agrees to accept a late assignment, it should be submitted by the new deadline agreed upon by both parties. Thereafter, the student will receive a failing grade for the assignment. Grades and comments will be returned to students in a timely fashion. Students are also entitled to make an appointment to discuss essay assignments and feedback during instructors' office hours.

Students receive mid- and end-of-semester grades for their seminar work. Students are entitled to make an appointment with an instructor to discuss seminar participation, or may be asked to meet with the instructor at any stage in the semester regarding class progress.

Grade Breakdown

1st essay = 25% of total grade

2nd essay = 25% of total grade

Introductory talk = 20% of total grade

Seminar preparation and participation = 30%

Schedule

Class date	Readings	Assignments
September 2	Corti, L., and Scülein, J.-G. (eds.), <i>Nature and Naturalism in Classical German Philosophy</i> : selections	
September 9	Kant, I., <i>Critique of Pure Reason</i> : selections Kant, I., <i>Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics</i> : selections Friedman, M., <i>Kant and the Exact Sciences</i> : selections	
September 16	Kant, I., <i>Critique of the Power of Judgement</i> : selections	

	<p>Roe, S., <i>Matter, Life, and Generation</i>: selections</p> <p>Ginsborg, H., 'Kant on Understanding Organisms as Natural Purposes'</p>	
September 23	<p>Herder, J. G. von, <i>Philosophical Writings</i>: selections</p> <p>Gjesdal, K. <i>Herder's Hermeneutics</i>: selections</p> <p>Goldstein, A., 'Irritable Figures: Herder's Poetic Empiricism'</p>	
September 30	<p>Fichte, J. G., <i>The Vocation of Man</i>: selections</p> <p>Phillips, R., 'Transcendental Idealism and Naturalism: The Case of Fichte'</p> <p>Breazeale, D., 'Against Nature? On the Status and Meaning of the Natural World in Fichte's Early Philosophy'</p>	
October 7	<p>Schelling, F. W. J., <i>First Outline of a System of the Philosophy of Nature</i>: selections</p> <p>Fisher, N., 'Freedom as Productivity in Schelling's Philosophy of Nature'</p>	
October 14	<p>Günderrode, K. von, 'Philosophy of Nature'</p> <p>Günderrode, K. von, 'The Idea of Nature'</p> <p>Günderrode, K. von, 'The Idea of the Earth'</p> <p>Nassar, D., 'The Human Vocation and the Question of the Earth: Karoline von Günderrode's Philosophy of Nature'</p>	First essay due October 27
October 28	<p>Guest Lecturer: Dr. Troy Vine</p> <p>Goethe, J. W. von, <i>The</i></p>	

	<p><i>Essential Goethe</i>: selections</p> <p>Goethe, J. W. von, <i>Theory of Colours</i>: selections</p> <p>Vine, T., TBD</p>	
November 4	<p>Goethe, J. W. von, <i>The Metamorphosis of Plants</i>: selections</p> <p>Nassar, D., <i>Romantic Empiricism</i>: selections</p> <p>de Staël, G., 'On the Influence of the New Philosophy on the Sciences'</p>	
November 11	<p>Humboldt, A. von, <i>Views of Nature</i>: selections</p> <p>Pausus, J., and Bond, W., 'Humboldt and the Reinvention of Nature'</p>	
November 18	<p>Hegel, G. W. F., <i>Science of Logic</i>: selections</p> <p>Kreines, J., <i>Reason in the World</i>: selections</p> <p>Ng, K., <i>Hegel's Concept of Life</i>: selections</p>	
November 25	<p>Hegel, G. W. F., <i>Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences</i>: selections</p> <p>Kaufmann, M., Lyssy, A., Yeomans, C., 'Hegel's Philosophy of Nature'</p>	
December 2	<p>Schopenhauer, A., <i>The World as Will and Representation</i>: selections</p> <p>Vasalou, S., <i>Schopenhauer and the Aesthetic Standpoint</i>: selections</p>	
December 9	<p>Marx, K., <i>Capital</i>: selections</p> <p>Marx, K., <i>The German Ideology</i>: selections</p>	Second essay due December 10

	Akimoto, Y., 'Marx's Philosophy on Natural History' Schmidt, A., <i>The Concept of Nature in Marx</i> : selections	
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Essay Deadlines

1st essay: October 27

2nd essay: December 10

Grades Submission

Midterm grades will be submitted by end of week 8, i.e., 1 November 2024

Final grades will be submitted by December 2024 for graduating students and 3 January 2025 for all other students.

Library and Book Purchase Policies

Digital versions of all reading materials will be provided to students by the seminar leader.