

Philosophy 567 (CRN 6604, January 2012)
Seminar in 19th Century Philosophy: German Idealism

Wednesdays: 4:35 p.m. to 6:25 pm., Leacock 927

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Open to graduate students and advanced undergraduate. Prerequisite: Phil. 336 and/or Phil 460 (Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*), or the instructor's written permission.

Course description: This course will be mainly, but not exclusively, on the works of the post-Jena Fichte, i.e. the Fichte who was forced to leave the University of Jena in 1800 under suspicion of atheism. I have chosen this last period of Fichte's authorship because, although I am inclined to believe that the philosophical position underlying his authorship remained essentially unaltered throughout, its presentation changed considerably after 1800. Moreover, as of 1800 Fichte was defining his position deliberately in opposition to that of Schelling, at a time also when Hegel was making his first appearance on the philosophical scene. This post-Jena Fichte thus also provides a point of reference for considering the other two major protagonists of early nineteenth century post-Kantian Idealism. Fichte's output in this period was enormous, even though much of it remained unpublished. My choice of the texts was determined both by considerations of time limits and also by what is available in English translation. The same considerations will dictate the seminar format which will alternate between student presentations and lectures on my part. Relevant texts and related papers will be posted on the WEB-ct page for the course.

I intend to develop three themes in the course of the seminar: (1) There are good reasons why Fichte's *Wissenschaftslehre* tended to assume in the post-Jena period an ever more pronounced religious tone, adding to the moralism of its earlier presentations a new mystical dimension. Fichte's phenomenology of this mystical factor is brilliant. (2) One does not have to accept Fichte's alternative: either his doctrine of freedom or (Schelling's) naturalism. Hegel developed a position that transcended that alternative. (3) Manfred Frank's and Frederick Beiser's interpretation of Idealism, especially where Hegel is concerned, is deeply flawed if not outright wrong. This last polemical theme will remain peripheral.

Kant will of course figure prominently in the background of the seminar's materials. It must be kept in mind, however, that we are viewing him only through the conceptual lens of Fichte, Schelling and Hegel, and that he might well have had good reasons to protest. Moreover, the intellectual landscape in these early decades of the 19th century was very complex in Germany. One need only think of the pervasive influence of Goethe, Schiller, the Schlegel brothers; the romanticism of Novalis; the positivism of Fries; Jacobi's attack on Schelling: the list could continue. I shall have occasion to refer to these factors occupying the landscape, but per force only incidentally.

Below is a tentative list of seminar topics and of texts especially associated with each.

1. January 11. Organizational session.

2. January 18. Preparatory lecture: the case of Fichte.

Texts:

Fichte, *Die Bestimmung des Menschen*, 1800 (*The Vocation of Humankind*). There is more than one translation into English of this text. A handy one can be found in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Popular Works: That Nature of the Scholar; The Vocation of Man; The Doctrine of Religion*, General Books Club (cheaply available at Amazon).

Dieter Henrich, *Fichte's Original Insight*. This text will be posted on the Seminar's webpage.

George di Giovanni, *Freedom and Religion in Kant and his Immediate Successors*, Ch.8: The Vocation of Humankind Revisited. To be posted.

3. January 25. Seminar presentation(s): Schelling's Idealism.

Text:

F. W. J. *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800), tr. Peter Heath, pp. 1-50; 219-236. To be posted.

4. February 1. Lecture: Fichte's reaction to Schelling's System

Texts (all available in the critical edition of Fichte's works: *J. G. Fichte – Gesamtausgabe*): *Ankündigung (Announcement)*, also known by the first three words, "Seit sechs Jahren": the announcement of a new W-L that Fichte published in the *Allgemeine Zeitung* 1801, Beilage Nr. 1, 24 January, 1-4.

Sonnenklarer Bericht über das eigentliche Wesen der neuesten Philosophie, 1801 (*Sunlight-Clear Report Regarding the Essence of the Most Recent Philosophy*)

W-L 1801 (Fichte's lecture notes)

Epistolary exchange between Fichte and Schelling regarding Schelling's System, and Fichte's private notes on the same subject.

I shall post some notes of mine on these texts.

5. February 8. Seminar presentation 1: W-L 1804².

This and the following three seminars will be on Fichte's 1804 lecture notes on the W-L, the only extensive posthumous text of Fichte which we have in English translation. There are two versions of these lectures as given in two different terms. We shall use the second, 1804², which is the one in GA II.8, and in English translation. Of the 28 lectures, we shall take only the first 19. The 19th concludes with the remark: "And so the *primordial facticity*, the original objectification of reason, as existing and genetic, is thereby clarified from the original law of light, and our task has been completed in its highest principle." This is a good point where to stop, considering time limitations. We shall also examine a brief text, included as an appendix in the English translation (pp. 203-206),

in which Fichte sums up the concept of transcendental philosophy. I expect four seminar presentations on this 1804² text

Text: *The Science of Knowing: J. G. Fichte's 1804 Lectures on the Wissenschaftslehre*. Tr. With an Introduction by Walter E. Wright. SUNY, 2005. Available at Amazon. For those interested in the German text, See GA II.8.

I have rung across a quote that could serve as a motto for these four seminars: “In the Gita we encounter a Krishna we can find absolutely nowhere else. This Krishna tells Arjuna that **it is he who is the source of everything: and yet he is ‘invisible’.**” *TLS* 12 August 2011.

6. February 15. Seminar presentation 2: W-L 1804².

7. February 29. Seminar presentation 3: W-L 1804².

8. March 7. Seminar presentation 4: W-L 1804².

9. March 14. Seminar: Pathway to a Blessed Life or else Philosophy of Religion, Lecture notes for 1805-06 (*Anweisung zum seligen Leben oder auch Religionphilosophie*)

An English translation is available in *Johann Gottlieb Fichte's Popular Works*, see Session 2 above.

10. March 21. Lecture: There is a group of unpublished notes, all just before or around 1810, that supplement the 1804 text. I shall comment on these writings:

WL (1807); WL (1810), *WL im Umriß* (1810: The WL in Outline), *Die Tatsachen des Bewußtseyns* (1810-1811: The Facts of Consciousness).

Two of these texts are available in English translation: “The Science of Knowledge in its General Outline,” tr. E. Walter. *Idealistic Studies*, 1976, pp. 106-117; “The Facts of Consciousness,” tr. A. E. Kröger, *The Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, 5(1871), pp. 53-60, 130-143, 226-231, 338-349; 6(1872), pp. 42-52, 120-125, 332-340; 7(1873), pp. 36-42; 17(1883), pp. 130-141; 263-283; 18(1884), pp. 47-71, 152-161. I shall try to post them.

For W-L (2007), there is a very good commentary: Gaetano Rametta, “The Speculative Structure of the 1807 *Wissenschaftslehre*,” tr. Garth Green. I shall post this text.

I shall also post a paper of mine on these texts.

11. March 28. Lecture: Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* – Phenomenological versus Constructive Method.

12. April 4. Lecture: Hegel's Logic: Speculative Logic versus *Wissenschaftslehre*.

13. April 11. Open.

GdiG

Relevant Readings

Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism, 1781-1801*, 2002.

Andrew Bowie, *Schelling and Modern European Philosophy*, 1993.

Manfred Frank (tr. Andrew Bowie), *The Subject and the Text*, 1989.

Manfred Frank, *Einführung in die frühromantische Aesthetik: Vorlesungen*, 1989.

Manfred Frank (tr. E. Millán-Zaibert), *The Philosophical Foundations of Early German Romanticism*, 2004.

Günter Zöller, *Fichte's Transcendental Philosophy: The Original Duplicity of Intelligence and Will*, 1998.

Note that many of Fichte's early texts are available in very good English translations. The same applies for Schelling. In his case some late texts are also available in English. There is an extensive literature in English on Schelling.

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