

Course Syllabus

Course: PHL 557

Day/Time: Tuesday 1:00 pm – 4:10 pm

Professor: Frederic Seyler

Office Hours: Tuesdays 4:10-5:10 pm or by appointment.

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“Alle innere geistige Energie erscheint, im unmittelbaren Bewusstseyn derselben, als ein sich Zusammennehmen, Erfassen und Kontrahiren eines, ausserdem zerstreuten Geistes, in Einem Punkt, und als ein sich Festhalten in diesem Einheitspunkte, gegen das stets fortdauernde natürliche Bestreben, diese Kontraktion aufzugeben, und sich wiederum auszudehnen.” (Fichte)¹

Course Outline

In 1804 Fichte gave three series of lectures in Berlin on his renewed *Wissenschaftslehre* (Doctrine of Science or, according to the translation by W.E. Wright, Science of Knowing, or, in short, ‘WL’). The second set of lectures (Zweiter Vortrag), which is widely recognized as being of particular importance, was held from April 16th to June 8th.

This text, which is one of the most difficult texts in German Idealism, is perhaps also the most accomplished form that Fichte gave to his fundamental philosophical thinking. While developing his system after the atheism-controversy and after the debates with Jacobi and Schelling, Fichte integrates both the Absolute and Life as key concepts of the WL 1804. What is the meaning given to these concepts? And is Fichte’s distinction between a doctrine of truth and reason (*Wahrheits- und Vernunfilehre*) and a doctrine of appearance (*Erscheinungslehre*) to be seen as preparing the path to contemporary phenomenology?

The objective we will pursue through an analytical reading of this challenging text is not only to gain a better knowledge of the Fichtean doctrine 1804, but also to see if these lectures can enable us to gain a better knowledge of *ourselves*. At least this was Fichte’s hope.

Required Reading

J. G. Fichte, The Science of Knowing. J.G. Fichte’s 1804 Lectures on the *Wissenschaftslehre*, translated by Walter E. Wright, SUNY Press, 2005

Recommended Reading

J.G. Fichte, *Die Wissenschaftslehre. Zweiter Vortrag im Jahre 1804*, Meiner, 1986

Supplementary Readings

A selected bibliography of secondary sources will be forwarded separately.

¹ “All inward spiritual energy appears, in immediate consciousness, as a concentration, comprehension, and contraction of the otherwise distracted spirit into one point, and as a persistence in this one point, in opposition to the constant natural effort to throw off this concentration, and to become once more diffused abroad.” (trans. W. Smith)

Tentative Schedule

(NB: The schedule is subject to possible changes. If you miss a class, please check the assignments/dates with a classmate)

March 27	Introduction	Protocol:
April 3	No class	
April 10	Lectures 1-4	Protocol: <i>Talk by Guenther Zoeller (University of Munich)</i> 4-6 pm Library 400
April 17	Lectures 5-8	Protocol:
April 24	Lectures 8-10	Protocol:
May 1	Lectures 11-13	Protocol:
May 8	Lectures 14-16	Protocol:
May 15	Lectures 17-19	Protocol:
May 22	Lectures 20-23	Protocol:
May 29	Lectures 23-26	Protocol:
June 4 (Monday)	Conclusions of the seminar <i>bei Kaffee und Kuchen</i> / Lectures 27-28	

Requirements

1. A final 10 page double-spaced paper due at Thursday following our last class or earlier (but not later!)
2. One or two course protocols (containing: 1 page protocol and 1 page discussion/question) per student (according to the number of participants...). The student in charge of the protocol will present his protocol and discussion/question at the beginning of the following class.
3. Participation: class participation is expected of every student after the protocol presentation and at the other discussion/question-periods.
4. Attendance: everyone is allowed one absence for the quarter. Any more than one absence will result in the lowering of the final grade one to two notches.

Grading

Final paper = 75% of the final grade

Protocols & Participation = 25%