

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



# FALL 2025 *Colloquium*

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CARLETON UNIVERSITY

## How do we become the kind of people who do not contribute to ecological destruction? Nature and Subjectivity Between Schelling and Adorno

The question of whether nature exists independently of, or in excess of, human subjectivity remains central to contemporary ecological debates, not least because of its implications for how we ought to respond to the ecological crisis. I defend the position that nature both precedes and exceeds the human being, while at the same time grounding human subjectivity. With reference to Schelling and Adorno, I examine three approaches to the concept of nature beyond the human—in Schelling's early Naturphilosophie, his late positive philosophy, and with Adorno's notion of the non-identical—while emphasizing that access to nature is always mediated. These approaches, I argue, help articulate a moral relation to nature that begins with understanding how nature grounds our individual self-relation, which, for Schelling, is the prerequisite for entering moral relationships with others. While this poses difficulties from an Adornian perspective, Adorno's analysis of the distinction and yet inseparability of subject and object remains productive for thinking about the development of moral character in relation to nature. In short, Schelling's view of nature as the unconscious ground of personality, complemented by Adorno's account of nature as presubjective, redefines moral responsibility as rooted in our relation to nature rather than opposed to it. On this view, we become the kind of people who do not contribute to ecological destruction by exercising freedom in relation to our natural ground, shaping our subjectivity as morally responsible beings embedded within the earth's ecosystems.

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