

Winter 2025 – Carleton University

PHIL 4006/PHIL 5600: Schelling and Adorno on Nature in relation to the Ecological Crisis

Tuesdays, 2:35 pm – 5:25 pm

Course Delivery: In-person

Instructor: Dr. Kyla Bruff

Email: kyla.bruff@carleton.ca

Office hours: Thursdays, 11AM-12:45PM in 3A56, Paterson Hall, or by appointment

I. Description:

The debate surrounding the ontological status of nature is not new, yet it resurfaces repeatedly in philosophical interrogations of—and even in everyday conversations about—the roots of the ecological crisis. At its core lies the question of whether nature exists independently, or in excess, of human concepts and society, and if so, how it can be thought or accessed. How we answer this question partly determines how we can respond, as (moral) subjects, to the human-caused destruction of nature.

This course will explore F.W.J. Schelling’s and Theodor W. Adorno’s respective approaches to nature and investigate their relevance for ecology. We will examine how their metaphysical positions might help (a) to contribute to how we understand the destructive, human-caused changes in nature, and (b) to assess the stakes and grounds of our moral response and critically examine our norms and actions in relation to the ecological crisis. More specifically, in this seminar, we will read texts by Schelling and Adorno, as well as scholarship on their work, that address nature itself, the human being’s paradoxical place within nature, natural history, and our capacity to morally and politically respond to nature’s destruction.

II. Preclusions: Additional credit for the same course under either PHIL 4330 or PHIL 5350.

III. Prerequisite(s):

Undergraduate students: eligibility for fourth-year standing in a Philosophy Honours program or permission of the Department.

Graduate students must be enrolled in the Graduate Philosophy Program.

IV. Learning Outcomes:

- to understand the philosophical stakes of the debate concerning the ontological status of nature and its significance for contemporary ecological thought.

- to develop a detailed understanding of F.W.J. Schelling's and Theodor W. Adorno's respective conceptions of nature, including their metaphysical commitments, theories of subjectivity, relationship to psychoanalysis, and points of divergence from one another.
- to discuss confidently and write analytically about key concepts such as nature, natural history, the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity, freedom and necessity, moral responsibility, moral character, and the normative grounds of ecological critique.

V. Course texts:

There are no required texts for this course. All readings will be provided online.

If you would like to purchase any of the full, physical books, we will be reading excerpts from the following:

- Dale Snow, *Schelling and the End of Idealism* (SUNY, 1996).
- F.W.J. Schelling, *Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature*, trans. Errol E. Harris and Peter Heath (Cambridge, 1995).
- Deborah Cook, *Adorno on Nature* (Routledge, 2014).
- Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E.B. Ashton (Continuum, 1986).
- Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford, 2007).
- Fabian Freyenhagen, *Adorno's Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly* (Cambridge, 2013).
- F.W.J. Schelling, *Philosophical Investigations on the Essence of Human Freedom*, trans. Love and Schmidt (SUNY, 2006).
- F.W.J. Schelling, *The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy: The Berlin Lectures*, trans. Bruce Matthews (SUNY, 2007).

VI. Calendar descriptions:

PHIL 4006 – Seminar in Modern Philosophy: Detailed study of selected philosophers or issues in modern philosophy. Also offered at the graduate level, with different requirements, as PHIL 5600, for which additional credit is precluded.

PHIL 5600 – Topics in the History of Philosophy: A detailed study of an issue or the work of selected philosophers in the general areas of ethics or political philosophy. Topics may vary from year to year. Also offered at the undergraduate level, with different requirements (in this case, as PHIL 4006), for which additional credit is precluded.

VII. Course calendar, readings, and overview:

Date	Readings
Jan. 6	<p>Course Introduction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dalia Nassar, “Kant, Schelling, and the Organization of Matter,” pp. 229-230, in <i>Kantian Legacies in German Idealism</i>, ed. Gerard Gentry (Routledge, 2021).
Unit 1: Schelling’s <i>Naturphilosophie</i>	
Jan. 13	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dale Snow, <i>Schelling and the End of Idealism</i> (SUNY, 1996), “The Philosophy of Nature,” pp. 57-92. • Optional reading: • Dalia Nassar, “Kant, Schelling, and the Organization of Matter” (full chapter in <i>Kantian Legacies of German Idealism</i>), pp. 211-235.
Jan. 20	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schelling, <i>Ideas for a Philosophy of Nature</i>, Prefaces (pp. 3-7), and first half of the Introduction (pp. 9-30). • Optional reading: • Dieter Sturma, “The Nature of Subjectivity: The critical and systematic function of Schelling’s Philosophy of Nature,” in <i>Debates in Nineteenth Century Philosophy</i>, ed. Kristin Gjesdal (pp. 109-120).
Jan. 27	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schelling, <i>Ideas</i>, Second half of the Introduction (pp. 30-42) • Vincent Le, “Schelling and the sixth extinction: the environmental ethics behind Schelling’s anthropomorphization of nature,” <i>Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy</i> 3, no. 3, 2017. • Optional reading: • Ben Woodard, “Schellingian Thought for Ecological Politics,” <i>Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies</i> 2 (2013): 86–108 • Dalia Nassar, “Nature as Unconditioned? The Critical and Systematic Function of Schelling’s Early Works,” in <i>Debates in Nineteenth Century Philosophy</i>, ed. Kristin Gjesdal (pp. 121-132).
Unit 2: Adorno on Natural History	
Feb. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deborah Cook, <i>Adorno on Nature</i>, Introduction and Chapter 1 (pp. 1-33).
Feb. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adorno, “The Idea of Natural History” (trans. Bob Hullot-Kentor), pp. 111-124.
Feb. 17	NO CLASSES – MIDTERM BREAK

Feb. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adorno and Horkheimer, <i>Dialectic of Enlightenment</i>, “The Concept of Enlightenment,” pp. 1-34. <p>Optional Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fabian Freyenhagen, <i>Adorno’s Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly</i>, “The whole is untrue” (pp. 26-51).
Mar. 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adorno, “Sociology and Psychology (Part II),” trans. I. N. Wohlfarth, <i>New Left Review</i> 47, pp. 79-97. Fabian Freyenhagen, <i>Adorno’s Practical Philosophy: Living Less Wrongly</i>, “Social determination and negative freedom” (pp. 75-100)

Unit 3: Subjectivity, Objectivity and Morality

Mar. 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adorno, “On Subject and Object,” trans. Henry W. Pickford in <i>Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords</i> (Columbia University Press, 2005), pp. 245-258. <p>Optional Reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Karen Ng, “Adorno and Hegel on Subject and Object” in <i>The Oxford Handbook of Adorno</i>, 2025 (pp. 1-18).
Mar. 17	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deborah Cook, <i>Adorno on Nature</i>, Chapter 2, “Nature, red in tooth and claw” (pp. 34-61) Selections from Negative Dialectics on the preponderance of the object and the body
Mar. 24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deborah Cook, <i>Adorno on Nature</i>, Chapter 5, “Adorno and radical ecology” (pp. 121-154)

Unit 4: A Return to Schelling and Speculative Metaphysics?

Mar. 31	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Selections from Schelling’s <i>Freedom Essay</i> Manfred Frank, “Against a priori Intersubjectivism: An Alternative Inspired by Sartre,” in <i>Critical Theory After Habermas</i>” (2004), pp. 259-279. <p>Optional reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sean J. McGrath, “The Non-Dialectical Personalism of the Late Schelling,” in <i>Schelling-Studien</i>, 2022 (pp. 111-150). Dieter Henrich, “Subjectivity as philosophical principle,” in <i>Critical Theory After Habermas</i>” (2004), pp. 233-258.
April 7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sean J. McGrath, “Is the Late Schelling still doing Naturphilosophie?,” <i>Angelaki</i> 21, no. 4, pp. 121-141. Dalia Nassar, “An ‘Ethics for the Transition’: Schelling’s Critique of Negative Philosophy and Its Significance for Environmental Thought,” <i>Schelling’s Philosophy: Freedom, Nature, and Systematicity</i>, ed. G. Anthony Bruno, pp. 231-248. <p>Optional reading:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Metaphysical Empiricism” in Schelling’s <i>The Grounding of the Positive Philosophy</i>, trans. Bruce Matthews (SUNY, 2007), pp. 171-192.

VIII. Evaluation

• Seminar presentation + handout	25%
• Attendance, preparation for class, and contributions to discussions	25%
• Term paper (take-home exam) of 3000-3500 words (2000-2500 for undergraduates)	30%
Due on April 8, 11:59 pm	
• Oral exam during the exam period based on your term paper	20%

For the seminar presentation, you are required to produce a handout of 12-14 points of approximately two lines each (without quotations), summarizing the reading of the day for your classmates. You will present the reading and your handout in a presentation of approximately 20 minutes to the class. Your handout must be submitted by **the Monday before your presentation at 11:59 pm**. You are encouraged (but not required) to meet with me on Tuesday morning before your presentation to go over your main points. I will approve the handout and make copies of it for the class. Presentation dates will be assigned on the first day of the course.

For your final assignment, please make sure all sources are cited in line with Carleton's Academic Integrity guidelines, listed here:

<https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>.

Statement on AI:

It is prohibited to use generative AI (LLMs, Chat GPT, etc.) to compose any of your work for this course (e.g., seminar handout, final paper). All writing that you submit must be yours. I hope this course will help you think critically and understand nuanced, complex arguments, considered from multiple angles. LLMs often muddle such arguments, rather than help you to understand them. Schelling and Adorno's arguments and points can start to look deceptively easy (which they certainly are not), and contradictions and confusion can arise from the use of LLMs that are not based on textual content. I am here to help you understand these difficult texts (for example, during office hours), and you do not need to rely on AI. The work with the texts themselves will pay off.

If you do decide to use generative AI in the planning stage of your work, please provide a detailed description of this use in a footnote (e.g. "AI-assisted interpretation of point x"). And remember, if AI gets something wrong, you are still responsible for whatever is in your paper.

You will have an oral exam on your final paper, and during this exam, I may ask you about your writing process (e.g., the sequence of steps you took in writing your paper). It might help you to turn on "version history" in Microsoft Word, or simply keep a log of the major steps you went through in constructing your argument and criticisms.

Late papers will be penalized at a rate of 2% per day for a maximum of 5 days or 10%. -

IX. Department of Philosophy and Carleton University Policies (Fall/Winter 2025-26)

Assignments:

Please follow your professor's instructions on how assignments will be handled electronically. We no longer allow hard copies to be placed in the department's essay box.

Evaluation:

Standing in a course is determined by the course instructor subject to the approval of the Faculty Dean. This means that grades submitted by the instructor may be subject to revision. No grades are final until they have been approved by the Dean.

Deferrals for Term Work:

If students are unable to complete term work because of illness or other circumstances beyond their control, they should contact their course instructor no later than *three working days* of the due date. Normally, any deferred term work will be completed by the last day of the term. Term work cannot be deferred by the Registrar.

Deferrals for Final Exams:

Students are expected to be available for the duration of a course including the examination period. Occasionally, students encounter circumstances beyond their control where they may not be able to write a final examination or submit a take-home examination. Examples of this would be a serious illness or the death of a family member. If you miss a final examination and/or fail to submit a take-home examination by the due date, you may apply for a deferral no later than *three working days* after the original due date (as per the University Regulations in [Section 4.3 of the Undergraduate Calendar](#)). Visit the [Registrar's Office](#) for further information.

Plagiarism:

The University Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as '*presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own.*' This includes reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source.

Examples of sources from which the ideas, expressions of ideas or works of others may be drawn from include but are not limited to books, articles, papers, literary compositions and phrases, performance compositions, chemical compounds, artworks, laboratory reports, research results, calculations and the results of calculations, diagrams, constructions, computer reports, computer code/software, material on the internet and/or conversations

Examples of plagiarism include, but are not limited to:

- any submission prepared in whole or in part, by someone else, including the unauthorized use of generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT);
- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, paraphrased material, algorithms, formulae, scientific or mathematical concepts, or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings without appropriate acknowledgement;
- submitting a computer program developed in whole or in part by someone else, with or without modifications, as one's own;
- failing to acknowledge sources with proper citations when using another's work and/or failing to use quotations marks.

Plagiarism is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly by the course's instructor.

The Associate Dean of the Faculty follows a rigorous [process for academic integrity allegations](#), including reviewing documents and interviewing the student, when an instructor suspects a violation has been committed. Penalties for violations may include a final grade of “F” for the course.

It is the responsibility of each student to understand the full meaning of ‘plagiarism’ as defined in the Undergraduate or Graduate Calendars, and to avoid both committing plagiarism and aiding or abetting plagiarism by other students. ([Section 10.1 of the Undergraduate Calendar Academic Regulations](#))

Statement on AI:

As our understanding of the uses of AI and its relationship to student work and academic integrity continue to evolve, students are required to discuss their use of AI in any circumstance not described in the course outline with the instructor to ensure it supports the learning goals for the course.

Mental Health:

As a student you may experience a range of mental health challenges that significantly impact your academic success and overall well-being. If you need help, please speak to someone. There are numerous resources available both on- and off-campus to support you. For more information, please consult <https://wellness.carleton.ca/>.

Academic Accommodation:

Carleton is committed to providing academic accessibility for all individuals. You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. The accommodation request processes, including information about the Academic Consideration Policy for Students in Medical and Other Extenuating Circumstances, are outlined on the Academic Accommodations website (students.carleton.ca/course-outline). Examples of special arrangements include:

- *Pregnancy or religious obligation:* write to your professor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details visit the [EIC](#) website.
- *Academic accommodations for students with disabilities:* The [Paul Menton Centre](#) for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520-6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class test or exam requiring accommodation. After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with your professor to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.
- *Survivors of Sexual Violence:* As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per [Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy](#).
- *Accommodation for Student Activities:* Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Please contact your instructor with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist.

Important Dates:

Sept. 3 Classes start.

Sept. 16 Last day for registration and course changes for fall term and fall/winter (two-term) courses.

Sept. 30 Last day for entire fee adjustment when withdrawing from fall term or two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.

Oct. 13 Statutory holiday. University closed.

Oct. 20-24 Fall Break – no classes.

Nov. 21 Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, before the official examination period.

Dec. 5 Last day of fall term classes. ***Classes follow a Monday schedule.*** Last day for academic withdrawal from fall term courses. Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for term work for a fall term course.

Dec. 6-7 No classes or examinations take place.

Dec. 8-20 Final examinations for fall term courses and mid-term examinations in two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.

Dec. 20 All take-home examinations are due.

Jan. 5 Classes begin.

Jan. 16 Last day for registration and course changes in the winter term.

Jan. 31 Last day for a full fee adjustment when withdrawing from winter term courses or from the winter portion of two-term courses. Withdrawals after this date will result in a permanent notation of WDN on the official transcript.

Feb. 16 Statutory holiday. University closed.

Feb. 16-20 Winter Break – no classes.

Mar. 15 Last day for academic withdrawal from fall/winter and winter courses.

Mar. 25 Last day for summative tests or examinations, or formative tests or examinations totaling more than 15% of the final grade, in winter term or fall/winter courses before the official examination period.

Apr. 3 Statutory holiday. University closed.

Apr. 8 Last day of two-term and winter term classes. ***Classes follow a Friday schedule.*** Last day for handing in term work and the last day that can be specified by a course instructor as a due date for two-term and for winter term courses.

Apr. 9-10 No classes or examinations take place.

Apr. 11-23 Final examinations for winter term and two-term courses. Examinations are normally held all seven days of the week.

Apr. 23 All take-home examinations are due.

Addresses:

Department of Philosophy:

www.carleton.ca/philosophy

520-2110

Registrar's Office:

www.carleton.ca/registrar

520-3500

Academic Advising Centre:

www.carleton.ca/academicadvising

520-7850

Writing Services:

<https://carleton.ca/csas/support/>

520-3822

MacOdrum Library

<http://www.library.carleton.ca/>

520-2735