

Philosophy 640-301: Problems in Ethics
Valuing the Natural World through Landscape: Alexander von Humboldt's Romantic Views of Nature
Wednesdays 6-9:15 p.m.
Arts and Letters Hall, Room 206

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Office Hours: Fridays 11-1 at the Department of Philosophy, 2352 N. Clifton (Clifton Corners), Suite 150, Office 150.9 and by appointment.

Course Description:

The early German Romantics placed aesthetic experience and nature at the center of much of their philosophical work. An interest in the aesthetic appreciation of nature may shape much contemporary thinking on landscape and the environment in general. Alexander von Humboldt (1769-1859) was a thinker whose voluminous writings focused on nature, both its most minute empirical aspects and its splendors. *Ansichten der Natur/Views of Nature* (1808) was an early work that provided accounts of the scenes of nature Humboldt had observed during his voyage to the “equinoctial regions of the earth” (1799-1804). Humboldt’s insights can be most fully appreciated if we understand the historical context that shaped his views of nature and also if we put his insights into dialogue with some contemporary work on the matter of the aesthetic appreciation of nature. After carefully studying the insights offered by the early German Romantics on the poetry of nature they developed and after looking at some contemporary accounts of valuing the natural world, of coming to an aesthetic appreciation of nature, we will read and discuss Humboldt’s, *Views of Nature* and evaluate his role in developing a kind of environmental aesthetics.

Required Texts:

1. J.M. Bernstein, editor, *Classic and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). [CRGA]
2. Alexander von Humboldt, *Views of Nature*, edited by Stephen T. Jackson and Laura Dassow Walls, translated by Mark W. Person (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014). [VN]
3. Sarah Johnson, editor, *Landscapes. Themes in Environmental History* (Cambridge: The White Horse Press, 2010). [LT]
4. Salim Kemal and Ivan Gaskell, editors, *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). [LNB]

There will also be some readings on d2l.

Schedule of Topics and Readings:

- Week One (W 4/1)* Introduction to the course. General introduction to early German Romantic Philosophy and Distinctions between *Frühromantik* and classical German Idealism. General remarks on the aesthetic appreciation of nature and the central role of nature for the early German Romantics.
Read Bernstein's introduction to CRGA (vii-xxxiii), pp. 185-187 (Oldest Programme for a System of German Idealism (1796)) and Schiller in CRGA (pp. 145-183) as well as Schiller on the Sublime (reading on d21).
- Week Two (W 4/8)* Philosophy and Aesthetic Power/Schiller on Beauty and Nature.
Read CRGA 203-268.
- Week Three (W 4/15)* Novalis and Schlegel on Philosophy, Nature, and Beauty.
Read 269-307.
- Week Four (W 4/22)* Schlegel and Novalis on Goethe and the Romantic Path to Nature.
Read LNB pp. 43-64 (Diffey) and pp. 65-80 (Hepburn).
- Week Five (W 4/29)* The Aesthetic Appreciation of Nature.
Read LNB, pp. 199-227 (Carlson) and LT, pp. 1-14 (Hepburn), 15-29 (Brady), 57-77 (Hinchman and Hinchman).
- Week Six (W 5/6)* Valuing the Natural World through Landscape.
Read VN, front matter-p. 115.
- Week Seven (W 5/13)* Humboldt's *Views of Nature*.
Read VN, pp. 117-241.
- Week Eight (W 5/20)* Reading the text of nature: Humboldt on waterfalls and the nocturnal life in the primeval forest
Read VN, pp. 243-293.
- Week Nine (W 5/27)* The Aesthetics of Nature.
- Week Ten (W 6/3)* Final Discussion.

Evaluation:

There will be a 12-15 page paper due at the end of the quarter. The paper should address a topic that we have discussed in class. I would like each person to come to see me before the fifth week, that is, before April 29, to discuss the topic and organization of the paper. Ideally, each student would have a draft finished well before the end of the quarter so that I could offer feedback for the final version.

In addition, each participant is expected to do one in-class presentation of 20 minutes. The paper may be a longer version of what you present in class. I will distribute a list of presentation topics. One week before your presentation, you should meet with me (discussion via email is fine too) to go over what you plan to discuss and the structure of the presentation.