

# INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON KANT'S THEORY OF BIOLOGY



April 23rd–25th, 2010

Schloss Hohentübingen, Tübingen

Mechanism and materialism, animism and vitalism polarize the rich field of biological theories of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, which are primarily concerned with the question of how the origin of organic life is to be explained. Is the ultimate principle of an organism a divine, preformed germ which - like a russian doll - entails en miniature all predispositions of the prospective living being? Is this germ to be described as the female egg, like ovism presupposed, or as the male sperm, like animalculism believed? Or does organic life begin with an unstructured matter, which inheres a self-organizing power, like epigenetic theories claimed? Is it possible to describe this force mechanically, in Newtonian terms of attraction and repulsion, or does it require completely new terminological categories like sensitivity, irritability, intelligibility, and spontaneity - in short: a vitalistic power?

Notes from the year 1755 already confirm that Kant was aware of an irreducible difference between organisms and things which can be fully explained mechanically. Nevertheless he was not able to designate the specific law of biological beings. Although familiar with most of the contemporary theories of the organism of his own time, he follows none of them entirely; and he conceals the problem of the inexplicability of organisms for more than three decades in his philosophical system which he presents as if it were complete. As late

as 1788, Kant discovers that the teleological lawfulness of organic beings considered as a principle of transcendental philosophy enables him to theoretically explain biological organisms while at the same time allowing for their integration into the project of transcendental philosophy. Kant presents the most mature version of his doctrine of the teleology of organic nature in the §§ 61, 62–78, 80 and 81 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* in 1790.

## Speakers

Angela Breitenbach (Norwich)

Mark Fisher (University Park)

Hannah Ginsborg (Berkeley)

Ina Goy (Tübingen)

Paul Guyer (Philadelphia)

Philippe Huneman (Paris)

Luca Illetterati (Padua)

Peter McLaughlin (Heidelberg)

Ernst-Otto Onnasch (Utrecht)

Marcel Quarfood (Uppsala)

Siegfried Roth (Köln)

Predrag Šustar (Rijeka)

Eric Watkins (San Diego)

Paul Ziche (Utrecht)

Rachel Zuckert (Evanston)

## Registration

The conference room at the castle Hohentübingen offers 30 places for guests. The registration opens on January 25th, 2010, and is free. Please indicate your interest and explain in short why you wish to be among the guests:

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## Organization

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