

# THE METAPHYSICS OF LIFE AND PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

PHIL 550 (Term 1 2022-23)

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Tuesday 2-5 PM. BUCH D324

The theme of this course is the metaphysics of life (living beings), particularly as seen in light of process philosophy and theories of biological organization and biological autonomy.

## REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance at every seminar is mandatory unless you have a legitimate reason for being absent (in which case you need to communicate this to me).
2. Seminar presentations. The aim of your presentation is to generate discussion. You can assume that everyone has done the readings, so you do not need to summarize them. Instead, you should raise one or two issues for discussion. Your presentation should give the context and motivation for the issues of interest to you. Your presentation should last no more than 15 minutes.
3. Mid-term paper. Your midterm paper should be a detailed prospectus of your final paper. It should have a 250 word abstract, a bibliography, a statement of the problem/topic you plan to address, including a mini-literature review, and a statement of your planned analysis and argument. 5000 words maximum.
4. Final paper. Your paper should include a 250 word abstract. Length: 8500 words maximum. You should think of this paper as modelled on a philosophy journal article. I will say more about this in class.

## READINGS

All readings listed below on the schedule are available electronically in this Dropbox folder:

## PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

### Week 1: Sept. 6

Nicholas Rescher, *Process Philosophy: A Survey of Basic Issues*

Johanna Seibt, "Ontological Tools for the Process Turn in Biology: Some Basic Notions of General Process Theory," in Dupré and Nicholson, *Everything Flows*

#### Recommended:

Johanna Seibt, "Process Philosophy," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/process-philosophy/>

## BIOLOGY AND PROCESS PHILOSOPHY

### Week 2: Sept 13

John Dupré, *The Metaphysics of Biology*

### Week 3: Sept. 20

John Dupré and Daniel J. Nicholson, "A Manifesto for a Processual Philosophy of Biology," in *Everything Flows*

John Dupré, “Processes Within Processes: A Dynamic Account of Living Beings and Its Implications for Understanding the Human Individual,” in *Biological Identity*  
 Anne Sophie Meincke and John Dupré, “Biological Identity: Why Metaphysicians and Philosophers of Biology Should Talk to One Another,” in *Biological Identity*

#### **Week 4: Sept 27**

Peter Simons, “Processes and Precipitates,” in Dupré and Nicholson, *Everything Flows*  
 Rani Lill Anjum and Stephen Mumford, “Dispositionalism: A Dynamic Theory of Causation,” in *Everything Flows*  
 James DiFrisco, “Biological Processes: Criteria of Identity and Persistence,” in *Everything Flows*  
 Thomas Pradeau, “Genidentity and Biological Processes,” in *Everything Flows*

### **AUTOPOIESIS**

#### **Week 5: Oct 4**

Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The Realization of the Living*  
 Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life*, chapter 5.

### **HANS JONAS’S PHILOSOPHICAL BIOLOGY**

#### **Week 6. Oct 11**

Hans Jonas, “Biological Foundations of Individuality”  
 Hans Jonas, “Is God a Mathematician? The Meaning of Metabolism,” in Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*  
 Hans Jonas, “Cybernetics and Purpose: A Critique,” in Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*

### **JONAS AND AUTOPOIESIS**

#### **Week 7. Oct 18**

Andreas Weber and Francisco J. Varela, “Life After Kant: Natural Purposes and the Autopoietic Foundations of Biological Individuality”  
 Ezequiel Di Paolo, “Autopoiesis, Adaptivity, Teleology, Agency”  
 Evan Thompson, *Mind in Life*, chapter 6.

### **ENACTIVE PERSPECTIVES**

#### **Week 8. Oct. 25**

Tom Froese and John Stewart, “Life After Ashby: Ultrastability and the Autopoietic Foundations of Biological Autonomy”  
 Ezequiel Di Paolo and Evan Thompson, “The Enactive Approach”  
 Ezequiel Di Paolo, “The Enactive Conception of Life”  
 Ezequiel Di Paolo, “Enactive Becoming”  
 Evan Thompson, “Could All Life Be Sentient?”

### **BIOLOGICAL AUTONOMY**

#### **Week 9. Nov. 1**

Alvaro Moreno and Matteo Mossio, *Biological Autonomy: A Philosophical and Theoretical Enquiry*, chapters 1-4

**Week 10. Nov. 8**

Alvaro Moreno and Matteo Mossio, *Biological Autonomy: A Philosophical and Theoretical Enquiry*, chapters 5-8

**METAPHYSICS OF THE ORGANISM****Week 11. Nov. 15.**

Daniel J. Nicholson, "Organisms≠Machines"

Daniel J. Nicholson, "Is the Cell *Really* a Machine?"

Daniel J. Nicholson, "Reconceptualizing the Organism: From Complex Machine to Flowing Stream," in *Everything Flows*

**Week 12. Nov. 22**

Anne Sophie Meincke, "Autopoiesis, Biological Autonomy, and the Process View of Life"

Spyridon A. Koutroufinis, "Toward a Logic of the Organism: A Process Philosophical Consideration"

**Week 13. Nov. 29**

Christopher J. Austin, "Organisms, Activity, and Being: On the Substance of Process Ontology,"

David Wiggins, "Activity, Process, Continuant, Substance, Organism," in *Biological Identity*

**Week 14. Dec 6**

Denis M. Walsh and Kayla Wiebe, "The Being of Living Beings: Foundationalist Materialism Versus Hylomorphism," in *Biological Identity*

Denis M. Walsh, "Objectcy and Agency: Towards a Methodological Vitalism"

James DiFrisco, "Hylomorphism and the Metabolic Closure Conception of Life"