

Summer School in Neo-Kantian Philosophy

Ernst Cassirer and the Autonomy of Culture

June 3rd-6th, 2019



Organizer:

Dr. Gregory S. Moss

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<http://www.phil.arts.cuhk.edu.hk/web/academic/moss-gregory/>

Keynote Lecturers:

1. Professor Titular Hernán Pringe, Universidad Diego Portales, Chile
2. Professor Gerald Hartung, Bergische Universität Wuppertal, Deutschland
3. Professor Sebastian Luft, Marquette University, United States

Application Instructions:

Please send the following documents to gsmoss@cuhk.edu.hk by **March 15th, 2019**.

- CV of no more than 3 pages.
- 1 Page Statement of Intent.
- Short Writing Sample under 3000 words in either English or German.

Conditions for Application:

All applicants must have at least *one* degree in philosophy. (All readings and seminars will be conducted in English. The course will be open to a maximum of 10 international participants. All participants will be provided with the required readings.)

Financial Support:

The Summer School in Neo-Kantian Philosophy is generously supported by the Research Grants Council of Hong Kong, as well as the Chinese University of Hong Kong. All accepted international applications will be provided free accommodation from the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Description:

As is well known, Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms extends Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* to a critique of *culture*¹. Perhaps less well appreciated is Cassirer's insistence that the extension of the Copernican revolution to all forms of cultural life entails the acknowledgement of the *autonomy* or independence of other forms of culture beyond science, such as myth and language. Early in each of the three volumes of the *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms* Cassirer explicitly commits himself to the autonomy of myth, language, and science respectively. In addition, such autonomy is a *necessary* condition for explicating philosophical problems central to the task of developing a transcendental philosophy of culture. In his seminal text, the *Phenomenology of Knowledge*, Cassirer claims that mythology constitutes "an individual and peculiar mode of intuiting and perceiving reality" that is subject to completely different principles than that "governed by wholly empirical laws." Cassirer claims that "the same is true of language"². As Cassirer states in his first volume: "Each form, in a manner of speaking, is assigned to a special plane, within which it fulfills itself and develops its specific character in total independence [...]"³. Likewise, in the second volume on mythical thought, Cassirer affirms the autonomy of myth when he claims that myth "may not be measured by outside criteria of value" and ought to be measured by "its own immanent, structural law"⁴.

Once the autonomy of these forms of culture is recognized, "a whole world of formal problems arises"⁵. One such formal problem concerns the *interconnectivity* of the autonomous forms. If each cultural form develops in total independence, then the goal of providing a system of culture is endangered. As Cassirer states, the philosopher of culture finds himself in a dilemma: either each form "stands side by side" and "they no longer express a common ideal content" or one appears forced to reduce the forms of culture to different instantiations of "*one* form of logic"⁶. In the former case, one fails to give an account of culture on the whole. On the latter case, one gives an account of the whole while sacrificing the autonomy of each form of culture. This same problem is expressed in a different way regarding myth: "But though a subordination of myth to a general system of symbolic forms seems imperative, it presents a certain danger. For if a comparison of the mythical form with other cultural forms is taken in a purely objective sense, i.e. based on purely objective parallels and connections, it may well lead to a leveling of the intrinsic form of myth"⁷.

During the course of the summer school, we will meditate on the meaning of *autonomy* in Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms with special focus on the putative autonomy of myth, language, and science. Special attention will be given to the various problems and questions regarding the autonomy of culture, in addition to tentative solutions to these problems. In the course of our investigations, we will also give special consideration to the historical context and influence of other philosophers and philosophical systems on Cassirer's philosophy of culture.

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- ¹ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 1: Language*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 80
- ² Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), 15
- ³ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 1: Language*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 95
- ⁴ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 2: Mythic Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 4
- ⁵ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 3: The Phenomenology of Knowledge*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1957), 15
- ⁶ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 1: Language*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 84
- ⁷ Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms. Vol 2: Mythic Thought*, trans. Ralph Manheim (New Haven: Yale UP, 1955), 21