

Cognizing Life Conference 2025



Tübingen, July 16 to 19, 2025

International Philosophical Conference on Cognition of the Living Organism

Tagungszentrum Westspitze, Eisenbahnstr. 1, 72072 Tübingen

Over the past 25 years, the recognition that genetics and Darwinism are not sufficient to fully explain organisms – since only living beings can contain genes and undergo evolution – has led to a renewed philosophical engagement with the question of life. The organism has drawn attention both as an ontological reality and as an epistemological category. This growing interest involves a reconsideration of the ideas of the German Romantics and Idealists – among them Kant, Goethe, Schelling, and Hegel – as well as of twentieth-century organicist thinkers. Whereas Kant and Schelling examined the epistemological preconditions for grasping the organic, Goethe developed a phenomenological method for understanding life. The Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner analyzed Goethe's approach in depth and gave rise to a largely overlooked tradition of empirical research. The conference will explore the challenge of cognizing the organism from historical, ontological, metaphysical, epistemological, and Goethean perspectives.

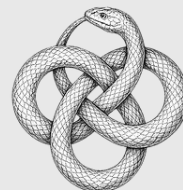
Contributors: Benjamin Bembé (Witten), Bohang Chen (Zhejiang), Luke Fischer (Sydney), Andrea Gambarotto (Vienna), Levi Haeck (Ghent), Craig Holdrege (Ghent, NY), Christoph Hueck (Tübingen), Philippe Huneman (Paris), Jan Kerkmann (Freiburg), Dalia Nassar (Sydney), Daniel Nicholson (Fairfax), Greg Rupik (Toronto), Ulrich Schlösser (Tübingen), Matthew Segall (San Francisco), Joan Steigerwald (Toronto), Georg Toepfer (Berlin), Gertrudis Van de Vijver (Ghent), Denis Walsh (Toronto).

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Akanthos Akademie Stuttgart

Cognizing Life Conference 2025

Public Lecture



Prof. Dr. Joan Steigerwald

Tübingen's Place in the Formation of Biology: Kielmeyer, Schelling, and German Contributions at the turn of the Nineteenth Century

Wednesday, July 16, 20:00 s.t.

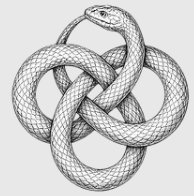
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At the turn of the nineteenth century, the University of Tübingen became a center for the development of both biology and philosophy, significantly influenced by Carl Friedrich Kielmeyer and Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Kielmeyer pioneered a systematic approach to biology in his famous 1793 lecture, proposing that life is governed by a balance of vital forces and developed first ideas on the connection between embryology and a potential evolution of organisms. Schelling expanded on these ideas, seeing nature as a self-organizing, living whole rather than a mechanical entity. Together, their work redefined nature as a dynamic, interdependent organism, influencing both nineteenth-century science and philosophy and laying the groundwork for interdisciplinary approaches to studying life.

Joan Steigerwald is a professor in humanities and science and technology studies at York University in Toronto. She is the author of *Experimenting at the Boundaries of Life: Organic Vitality in Germany around 1800* (2019). She has edited a special issue of *Kabiri*, “*Schelling and Philosophies of Life*” (2024), as well as two special issues for *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science*, “*Entanglements of Instruments and Media in Exploring Organic Worlds*” (2016), and “*Kantian Teleology and the Biological Sciences*” (2006). She has published widely on Kant, Schelling, Goethe, and the German life sciences. Her current project is *A Romantic Natural History*.

Organized by Akanthos Akademie Stuttgart

Program & Registration



	Wed, July 16	Thu, July 17	Fri, July 18	Sat, July 19
09:00-10:15		Philippe Huneman: The Unity of Kant's Account of the Organism and its Dual Fate	Dalia Nassar: Life and Death in Schelling's Philosophy of Nature	Jan Kerkmann: Metaphysical Implications of Goethe's Philosophy of Nature
10:15-10:45		Coffee break	Coffee break	Coffee break
10:45-12:00		Andrea Gamberotto: Kant's Controversial Legacy for Contemporary Biology	Matthew Segall: Revitalizing the Life Sciences: Whitehead's Organic Realism and the Return of Romantic Science	Christoph Hueck: Rudolf Steiner on Goethe's Morphology as Rational Organicism
12:00-13:15		Gertudis Van de Vijver/Levi Haeck: Functional Accounts of Organisms: Divided Between Imaginary and Symbolic	Gregory Rupik: Goethe and the Challenge of Representing Metamorphosis	Georg Toepfer: Viewing in Thinking. On the Methodology of the Goethean Understanding of the Organism
13:15-14:45		Lunch break	Lunch break	Round Table Closing
14:45-16:00		Bohang Chen: Aspects of Chronic Vitalism: A Historico-Critical Reflection	Craig Holdrege: Practicing Goethean Science	
16:00-16:30	Welcome and Coffee	Coffee break	Coffee break	
16:30-17:45	Ulrich Schlösser: On Philosophy of Nature (Naturphilosophie)	Daniel Nicholson: The Failed Organicist Revolution During the First Half of the 20th Century	Benjamin Bembé: Mammalian Morphology in a Goethean Perspective - Polarity and the 'Open Secret' of the Middle	
17:45-19:00	Denis Walsh: [What is an organism?]	Round Table Discussion	Round Table Discussion	
19:00-20:00	Dinner	Dinner	Dinner	
20:00-21:30	Joan Steigerwald (public) Tübingen's Place in the Formation of Biology: Kilmeyer, Schelling, and German Contributions at the Turn of the Nineteenth Century		Luke Fischer: Public Poetry Reading Christoph Hueck: Exhibition on Goethe and Steiner	

Please register under www.clc2025.de
No registration fee.

The conference will be livestreamed and recorded. Once you have registered, you will receive a video link via email two days before the conference.