TRIUNE

NEWSLETTER FOR SHAPING A NEW FORM OF UNIVERSITY

- The cultivation of a living, imaginative thinking as the fundamental aim in teaching and research – the inseparability of science and art.
- Goethean-style phenomenology as orientation in relation to all faculties; awakening the eye of the spirit.
- The university as the expression and practice of the threefold social life.

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CRISIS OF MEANING: THE HUMANITIES AND THE NATURAL SCIENCES

Anthony T. Kronman

N othing could be further from the truth than the claim that we do not need the humanities in the way, or to the degree, we now need the natural and social sciences. The truth is just the opposite. The truth is that our need for the humanities is desperate; that it is anchored in a real crisis to which others are responding with real effect; and that the recovery of the humanities, and of the space of observation and reflection they afford, is driven by a desire of the deepest and most durable kind which only the humanities can meet. The position of the humanities in our colleges and universities today is discouraging. They stand at the bottom of the hierarchy of authority and prestige. They lack the obvious value, and easy self-confidence, that the natural and social sciences possess. But anyone who grasps the depth of our need for the humanities; who understands the magnitude of the crisis that gives rise to this need; who appreciates the potency of our frustrated desire to understand the terrible and inspiring truth about ourselves and who recognises that the humanities alone can fulfil it, must conclude that forces outside the academy, far from working to keep the humanities in their present position of low esteem, press in exactly the opposite direction and exert a tremendous pressure on their behalf.

Outside our colleges and universities one finds the needs and motives to inspire a revival of the humanities and their restoration to the position of authority and self-confidence they one enjoyed. All that is required is a recognition of the depth of the crisis of meaning our civilisation confronts, of the humanities' unique ability to help us respond, and of the close connection between – indeed the identity of – the question which this crisis has brought to the fore with such urgency for so many people and the question to which the authority of the humanities has always been tied: the question of what living is for. \approx

> Excerpt from Anthony T. Kronman, *Education's End: Why Our Colleges and Universities Have Given Up on the Meaning of Life*, Yale University Press, New Haven, 2007, p.242.



SHAPING A GENUINE LIFE SCIENCE: AN OBLIGATION OF UNIVERSITIES

Nigel Hoffmann

The novelist D. H. Lawrence had the temerity to cast an artistic glance over the life sciences and conclude that they never deal with life at all, only with a dead world of mechanical functions and operations. Views of this sort tend to be regarded by scientists as sentimental or dangerously ignorant – and dismissed outright. Actually Lawrence is not quite accurate because he also asserted that the possibility of an authentic science of the living world is, as yet, entirely closed to us. In fact, long before his time the seeds of such a science had been planted in European culture, but their growth and development had taken place in relative obscurity, most beneath the surface of cultural life. This science had now reached the point where it unique character and the widereaching significance of its aims can be more easily discerned.

Organicism – as a philosophy or way of thinking - has been a powerful force in the evolution of Western civilisation. A coherent stream of such thinking can be traced at least as far back as the natural philosophy of Aristotle and had amongst its more recent representatives the philosophers Spinoza, Bruno, Hegel and Schelling, and the poet and natural scientist J. W. von Goethe. Goethe, around a century before Lawrence, had come to realise the inability of rationalistic science – the science of the eighteenth century Enlightenment – to come to grips with organic nature. Nourished by the German cultural movement known as *Naturphilosophie*, which brought together scientists, artists and philosophers in highly fruitful relationships, Goethe reached toward an artistic form of science, a science that is adequate to the world of the living, a science in which the human artistic faculties are formed into organs of cognition.

> "... to my mind there is a great field of science which is as yet quite closed to us. I refer to the science which proceeds in terms of life and is established on data of living experience and of sure intuition ... Our science is a science of the dead world. Even biology never considers life, but only mechanistic functioning and apparatus of life."

> > D.H. Lawrence, *Fantasia of the Unconscious*, Heinmann, 1961, p.6.

It would be simply erroneous and misguided to claim that a true life science exists just because scientists occupy themselves with the analysis of organisms - plants, animals and humans - or because science is now acquiring a sophisticated knowledge of the structure and functioning of genes. Of course science provides comprehensive definitions of what functions distinguish one living thing from another, but these always turn out to be machinelike functions or mechanisms – forms and processes which can be isolated, analysed, computed and manipulated, in precisely the same way as machines are analysed and engineered. This science views only the "apparatus of life", as Lawrence puts it. A science of the living realm calls for art; it must be infused with the artistic and this means something far more than artistic practice as a kind of adjunct to the otherwise totally inartistic procedures of science. It calls upon human artistry and scientific discipline to reawaken to each other in such a way that the whole human being engages in the act of cognition.

"....we study only the corpse in science today."

Rudolf Steiner, *Therapeutic Insights, Earthly and Cosmic Laws*, Mercury Press, 1984, p.17.

Across the face of the globe university natural science faculties are hard at work, teaching about and researching the living world of nature as if it were a vast, complex mechanism needing to be unravelled. The immense sophistication of mechanistic science today is, however, not matched by the care and percipience necessary to grasp the limitation of this science, its extreme onesidedness. The time has come for universities to embrace and advance a genuine life science, a science which is able to actually think life. ≈

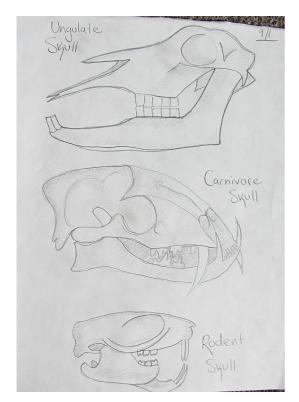
Excerpted, and slightly modified, from N. Hoffmann, *Goethe's Science of Living Form: The Artistic Stages*, Adonis Press, 2007, pp.5-6.

FORM AND PATTERN IN NATURE: GOETHEAN PHENOMENOLOGY IN UNIVERSITY TEACHING

Mark Riegner

or over thirty years, until my retirement in 2023, I taught a popular Block course (i.e., a 4-week intensive) called "Form and Pattern in Nature" at Prescott College, a small private university in north-central Arizona, USA (note that small, 4-year "universities" are called "colleges" in the U.S.). This hands-on, experiential course was mainly concerned with an application of Goethean phenomenology stemming from Goethe's insights into plant "morphology" (a term he coined). It also included the classic studies of D'Arcy Thompson (On Growth and Form), the mathematics of Fibonacci, the environmental art of Andy Goldsworthy, new developments in pattern analysis, fractal geometry and chaos theory, and other contributions.

Students explored the nature of cognition and examined in detail plant and animal morphology from aesthetic, functional, and phenomenological perspectives and ultimately applied these observations to an understanding of landscape quality and sense of place. Selected form elements, such as the sphere and spiral, which recur throughout nature, were studied, as well as the fluid dynamics of water. In addition, students were introduced to the application of projective geometry as a tool to understand the qualitative features and interrelationships of natural forms and the processes of metamorphosis. We had local field trips and each student was required to complete a final project that elaborated a theme from the course.



Examples of a student's drawing representing the threefold organisation of mammals.

The phenomenological approach taught throughout was Goetheanistic. This was cultivated in various ways in order to add experiential understanding to what was studied in key texts.¹ For example, in Week 1 of the course, to lay the foundation, students were introduced to the nature of metamorphosis, a ubiquitous dynamic pattern in nature. A key goal here was to understand the creative relationship of wholes and parts in organic nature – how a



Imaginary clay animals, created by students, which represent aspects of threefoldness.

living plant or animal "imparts" its wholeness through its constitutive parts. A clay assignment required students, for homework, to model a metamorphic sequence of five clay pieces (each the size of a golf ball). They had to bring their pieces to class in a container mixed up, and then exchange their five unordered pieces with those of another student. Students then placed the pieces they received in what they thought was the intended metamorphic sequence. Discussions around this activity included reference to their understanding of wholes and parts, as well as a grasp of how each student's guiding "idea" was embodied in the flow of their five pieces. Learning outcomes here were to enhance observation skills, experience the processes of unfoldment and metamorphosis, and relate what they learned to themes of the course.

Week 2 was concerned with form and pattern in biological phenomena (focus on mammals² with the help of an extensive skull collection and birds, as well as human form), including new and even "alternative" views of evolution. Apart from the study of key texts the students also carried out clay modelling exercises. They

¹ H. Bortoft, 1998, "Counterfeit and authentic wholes: Finding a means for dwelling in nature" in *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, D. Seamon and A. Zajonc eds.), SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.277-298.

² M. Riegner, 1998, "Horns, hooves, spots, and stripes: Form and pattern in mammals" in *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, (D. Seamon and A. Zajonc (eds.), SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp. 177-212.

modelled an imaginary, but conceivably possible, animal based on the principles of polarity and threefoldness they had been learning about in class; the students were asked to express a main emphasis—e.g., neurosensory, rhythmic (circulation/respiration), or digestive/metaboliclimb—as well as a secondary emphasis. Without telling their classmates what they intended, they placed their sculptures on the classroom table. The class tried to "read" what emphases were intended in each piece; we then heard from each student how each conceived their own piece.

In this week there was a field trip to a nearby small zoo/sanctuary (of mostly rescued local wildlife). We walked the zoo together, describing different animals from the perspectives of threefoldness. Next, students sat quietly by an animal of their choice to observe it carefully, make a rough sketch, and overall observe its form, behaviours, etc., recording their notes and observations, and then sharing their thoughts with the class. Afterward, sitting together in the shade on a green lawn, we discussed Craig Holdrege's essay on the horse and lion.³



Five of my students on the Tropical Biology field course in Costa Rica on a night walk (with headlamps) attempting to identify a frog or toad.

Week 3 included study of the theory of colour, in relation to the theories of Newton and Goethe. As part of this study the students carried out experiments with prisms and made drawings with coloured pencils, such as of Goethe's colour wheel. There was also an exploration of water and fluid dynamics, with observations of a campus creek as well as in-class demonstrations with a tank of water, viewing of water phenomena in various PowerPoint presentations, and finally an exploration of British sculptor John Wilkes's discovery and creation of Flowforms. We also studied and observed the morphology of clouds. Key texts⁴ included an excerpt from Theodor Schwenk's Sensitive Chaos, an article on Flowforms coauthored by myself and John Wilkes, and an article on clouds.⁵

Week 3 also included studies of "landscape as context" – towards a holistic understanding of place. We went on a field trip to a nearby natural area and each student had at least thirty minutes to sit alone quietly to observe the landscape. They were encouraged to "capture the essence" of the place with a sketch, some poetry or prose. Later the group gathered together to share their observations. The discussion of this place also referred to various key texts, including a reading on the Indigenous understanding of place.⁶ A learning outcome was to understand that, by working together, we are better able to develop a sense of place.

Drawing the course to a close in Week 4, students explored Projective Geometry by constructing in class (and for homework) several

³ C. Holdrege, 1998, "Seeing the animal whole: The example of the horse and lion" in *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of Nature*, (D. Seamon and A. Zajonc, eds.), SUNY Press, Albany, New York, pp.213-232.

⁴ T. Schwenk, *Sensitive Chaos: The Creation of Flowing Forms in Water and Air*, Rudolf Steiner Press, 2014; M. Riegner and J. Wilkes, "Flowforms and the language of water", in *Goethe's Way of Science: A Phenomenology of*

Nature, (D. Seamon and A. Zajonc, eds.), SUNY Press, Albany, 1998, pp.233-252.

⁵ A. Zajonc, 1984, "The wearer of shapes: Goethe's study of clouds and weather" in *Orion Nature Quarterly*, 3(1): pp.34-45.

⁶ L.M. Silko, 1987, "Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination", in *On Nature: Nature, Landscape and Natural History*, (D. Halpern, ed.), North Point Press, Berkeley, California, pp. 83-94.

geometric drawings, learned about fractals and chaos theory, as well as cymatics, and presented their final projects on the last two days. Student projects covered a broad range of topics inspired by the course, including further explorations of water phenomena, applications of threefoldness to various groups of organisms (e.g., snakes, fishes), photographic essays on landscape and on cloud metamorphosis, research on the Golden Mean in art and architecture and on the expression of the Fibonacci sequence in music composition, explorations of Quantum Physics in modern life, and how Waldorf education addresses the whole (i.e., threefold) child.



An environmental sculpture, created by a team of three students, representing the logarithmic spiral.

In conclusion, the students in this interdisciplinary course—which links the sciences and the humanities—develop confidence in their ability to observe phenomena to seek patterns of connections. They understand the difference between, and the importance of, both analytical and holistic thinking and that "reading" forms, that is, observing phenomena in an open, unbiased, and focused manner, can lead to new insights. Furthermore, in this context, students develop an appreciation of Goethean science, not just as a historical curiosity, but as having value for contemporary efforts to understand natural phenomena as well as to understand the complexities of the human physical and psychological being. Many students have shared with me that "Form and Pattern in Nature" was their favourite course, and even years later some (who have stayed in touch with me) still think about what they learned, with at least a handful, to my knowledge, applying a subset of the learning outcomes to their work in their later adult lives.

Commenting on his way of seeing, Goethe (1749-1832) contended that "[t]here is a delicate empiricism which makes itself utterly identical with the object, thereby becoming true theory. But this enhancement of our mental powers belongs to a highly evolved age".⁷ Echoing this sentiment, Rudolf Steiner, who met Goethe's scientific work as a young man, understood the seedlike quality of Goethe's way of apprehending the natural world, of grasping the dynamic *Idea* in Nature which would flower only in the future. Thus, he noted that "the materialistic phase of natural science [is] a transition... a method of learning how to yield [only] to the pure sensory experience.⁸ Today, 200 years after Goethe pioneered his method of "delicate empiricism," there is a continually growing literature, and therefore expanding interest, in Goethe's way of science, not only contextualised in historical accounts, but also evidenced in examples of contemporary applications.⁹ Thus, while it's not possible for me

https://doi.org/10.1080/02698595.2024.2426193 See the annual issues of *Jahrbuch fur Goetheanismus* [with articles in German and in English], and the Nature Institute website:

https://www.natureinstitute.org/bibliography-of-writings-on-goethean-science

⁷ Quoted in D.E. Miller, (ed. and transl.), 1995, *Goethe: Scientific Studies*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, p.307.

⁸ Excerpted from a lecture by R. Steiner, 6th March 1922, Berlin GA 81, *Reimagining Academic Studies*, SteinerBooks, 2015.

⁹ C. Hueck, review of G. Rupik, *Remapping Biology with Goethe, Shelling and Herder: Romanticizing Evolution,*

Routledge, 2024, in International Studies in the Philosophy of Science;

to gauge if and when Goethean phenomenology may become more established within the global scientific community and within culture in general, there is clearly a gestation period underway. ≈

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THE FUTURE OF NATURAL SCIENCE: UNIVERSITY EDUCATION AND GOETHEAN PHENOMENOLOGY

Rudolf Steiner

t was the wish of the committee for this University Week that I give an introduction each day to the topic which will be discussed later from a scholarly perspective. This decision was based on the view, perhaps that the various branches of science and of life could be enriched by the perspective of anthroposophy.



Anthroposophy represents a viewpoint that —at least for me it comes from this, if I might make a personal remark—is based on the Goethean understanding of nature. Anthroposophy is established on the foundation of a phenomenological understanding of nature. In modern times this phenomenology was in a way explained again by Ernst Mach. The way he explains it makes it look as if it provides very productive viewpoints, as long as we stay within its parameters. We can find Goethe's explanation in his statement that "the world of phenomena is a theory in itself, and we do not need to take another step toward creating artificial theories." The blue of the sky is a phenomenon in which we do not have to look first for the hypothetical, assumed explanations of the meta-phenomena in a rationalist way through simple thoughts. This is how Goethe came to the realisation of what he calls the original phenomena.

Many of Goethe's ideas concerning natural science have certainly been outdated in the very creative nineteenth century. Nevertheless, we could say that the methodology or the way of thinking that Goethe introduced into natural science is not only still relevant now, but it also, in my view, is not yet fully understood. I do realise that many or almost all the details of Goethe's explanations about natural science were outdated in the course of the nineteenth century. And yet, I would like to refer to something I said before the end of the last century about Goethe's view of nature: that Goethe is both a Copernicus and a Kepler for natural science.



With phenomenology we come to a subject that has had many arguments directed against it. To me, the arguments are all based on misinterpretations. We are talking primarily about the fact that we consider a *phenomenon* to be anything that the external world offers to the senses, or anything that is part of experience or of an experiment. Goethe – and with him the entire scientific phenomenology - is trying not to jump from the sensory phenomenon directly to some atomic process hidden behind it. Rather, Goethe focuses primarily on the purely sensory phenomena and on the unique elements of sensory facts, without drawing a connection to "I cannot tell you how anything behind them. What readable the book of nature he searches for are simply is becoming for me; my long efforts at deciphering, letter elements in the phenomenal by letter, have helped me; world that are related to now all of a sudden it is each other, and he tries to having its effect, and my find the connections quiet joy is inexpressible." between them.

Here, I would like to give a very simple

phenomena, it does not want to go back from the complex to the small atomic structures.

Hence, this is all about accepting the realm of the phenomenal, and about learning how to read its own internal meaning.



Without complete clarity we will never be able to establish the foundation for a real discussion. Anthroposophy has no desire to commit ter the sin of superficiality against any legitimate methods; it does not want to sin against what is legitimate in atomism. However, anthroposophy wants to clear the way for the establishing of thought systems similar to those established earlier in the study of

inorganic matter, systems that should now be established in other areas of nature too. This

example. Let us assume that we are given a written word to look at. What do we do? Well, if we have never learned how to read, we will stare at it as if it is something inexplicable. But if we have learned how to read, then, unconsciously, we will put together the different forms of the letters and we will experience the meaning of the word in our soul. One thing we certainly would not do is try to explain the meaning of the world on the basis of the form, say of W, considering the beginning of the upward stroke and then the one going downward, thinking that in this way we will discover something profoundly significant about that letter. In other words, we will be reading, rather than trying to explain things through assumptions. This is how phenomenology wants to read. It wants to stay within the context of phenomena and it wants to learn how to read, and, if it has to deal with a complex of

Drawings of leaf metamorphosis by Goethe.



J.W. von Goethe to Charlotte

von Stein (from his journey to

Italy), 1786.

could happen only if we say to ourselves, reading is the goal of looking at phenomena. In other words, what I see as the essence of natural laws is already in the phenomena, in the same way that the meaning I discover when I read a word is already in the letters. If I remain within the phenomena, lovingly, and I do not attempt to impose some kind of hypothetical thought system on reality, then my sense of science will be free to develop new concepts. This ability to remain free is what we need to establish.

We should not restrict ourselves to the use of one paradigm when we shift to examining a different area of nature, even if the first one was rightfully established. We can develop a



Goethe's drawings of cloud phenomena.

completely different relationship to thinking if we establish a pure phenomenology – something that would certainly be possible only if we come to the natural laws by interspersing the phenomena that we look at (or that we present through experiments) with thoughts, and if we make connections between them. In other words only by remaining within the phenomena can we experience how natural laws that appear in our thoughts are already present in the phenomena themselves. If we accept this idea, it will make no sense to speak about the "opposition" between subjective thoughts and natural phenomena, at least not insofar as we remain within the phenomena. We simply submerge ourselves in the phenomena and then, in the essence of natural laws, the essence of thoughts is given to us, coming directly from the phenomena. This is why Goethe remarked naively, "Then I see my ideas," (which were actually natural laws, in nature) "with my eyes".

If this is our approach to the phenomena in inorganic nature, then it will be possible to transfer it to organic nature, including the scientific study of organic nature. And if we see then that a horse is brown or white, we are not going to ascribe this phenomenon to inorganic colours. Instead, we will see it in relation to

something that lives as a spiritual or a soul being in an organism. The created inner organisation will teach us to understand that animals, as well as plants, give themselves a colour.



Anthroposophy should see the materialistic phase of natural science as a transition, as a method of learning how to yield to the pure sensory experience. This phase was highly educational for human civilisation. We can have a clear overview of certain things only after we have experienced this kind of learning. Only one who is armed with such a sense of science can observe the external material world and see how the external material world *mirrors* itself within us, if I may use this expression. ≈

> Excerpted from a lecture by Rudolf Steiner, 6th March 1922, Berlin, GA 81. Published in *Reimagining Academic Studies*, SteinerBooks, 2015.

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LINKS AND INITIATIVES

This space is reserved for news, relevant links and outlines of initiatives.

Please send any information to be included here.

AUSTRALIA

INDUS UNIVERSITY PROJECT

The Indus Project is a pioneering tertiary educational initiative feasibility-researched for Western Australia. The educational dimension of the campus (the "faculty") is not any kind of corporation or legal association which pays salaries. Tuition is paid for through gift capital.

Go to: <u>https://www.educationforsocialrenewalfoundation.com/</u>

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE NEWLETTER

To help develop an international community of people together striving to shape a new kind of university. **Please share this newsletter widely.**

To share insights and information which will help to develop the content, methods and organisational principles of this kind of university

BACKGROUND - ON THE EVOLUTION OF THE UNIVERSITY

The university, since its inception in the medieval people, has become a central organ of the cultural and spiritual life of society. It has been called a "little city", a melting pot for new ways of thinking and for shaping the world creatively.

All knowledge in the medieval university was unified by faith in a transcendent God. During the time of Renaissance humanism, and later in the early-modern Kantian and Humboldtian universities, the human rational faculty became seen as the unifying power. The university came to be thought of as a centre for universal knowledge. The modern university can better be called a "multi-versity"; faith in God or the rational striving toward the universality of knowledge is not its central concern. It is essentially materialistic in outlook, serving mainly practical ends through its teaching and research.

SHAPING A NEW FORM OF UNIVERSITY

This means stepping toward a future in which the university is completely free of the state -

financially, in terms of course content, and in relation to the awarding of degrees. This freedom is the responsibility and duty of this central organ of the cultural-spiritual sphere of the threefold social organism; it is already recognised in academic freedom. Ways this freedom can be further achieved can be discussed and advanced through this newsletter.

Following the indications of Rudolf Steiner, the aim of lower and higher schooling is not to educate but to awaken – to help awaken the modern human being to the spirit, the spirit working in the human being itself. What can be achieved at the tertiary level will fructify the whole field of education into the future.

Thus we can state boldly: the aim of the new university is to help open the "eye of the spirit" to the working of creative spirit in all forms of nature and the human world. In every faculty, in every aspect of teaching and researching, the task will be to advance human life towards an understanding of the world as a manifestation of spirit.

For this reason the orientation of the new university is fundamentally phenomenological. This is the method which is taught, guided and inspired by what others have perceived in this way. Modern individuals need to learn to see for themselves.

Seeing is grounded in physical perception, in what appears to us in the world (phenomenon literally means – "what appears"). But physical appearance hides what is invisible and essential. When teaching and researching focuses one-sidedly on the physical we have everything technical, the approach which considers what is "real" as only observable, empirical phenomena. Academic thinking then becomes highly materialistic and objective. However, when teaching and learning reaches through what appears to us physically, it rises to the artistic through a "knowing of the heart". In the works of the later Heidegger and the later Merleau-Ponty we have the vision of the invisible within the visible. We find that "more appears than appears to appear".* The appearance hides the innate idea (*eidos*) which may nevertheless come to presence through the pathway of phenomenology; this innate idea Plato equated with *to ekphanestaton* ("what properly shows itself as the most radiant of all is the beautiful").

The new university is focused on a highly practical, applied phenomenology, on all the phenomena which come within the scope of the different faculties. Different minerals and soil forms; plants and animals; the forms and structures of the human body and human consciousness; the different stages in the growth of children, their different soul gestures and temperaments; all the disease and health appearances; social forms and social processes – and so on. For this advanced practical phenomenology, we look mainly to the indications of German philosopher and artist Rudolf Steiner, who in turn drew greatly on the artistic phenomenological natural science of the poet Johann von Goethe.

Editor

* R. Bernasconi, "The Good and the Beautiful" in *Phenomenology in Practice and Theory*, Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, Dordrecht, 1985, pp.179-184.