

## **Stephen Klemm**

BA in Philosophy with Honors, University of Iowa, 2008; MA in the Humanities with a concentration in Philosophy, University of Chicago, 2010; MA in German Studies, Cornell University, 2015; since 2015, PhD Candidate in German Studies, Cornell University; Visiting Doctoral student, Cornell-Humboldt University Fellowship, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, 2015-16.

### **Dissertation Project**

The project examines the relationship between the emergent discourse of the life sciences at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the influence of this discourse on the literary production, moral philosophy, and philosophy of history of the time. The dissertation investigates the way in which the paradigm shift that occurred during the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century from a mechanist understanding of nature to a vitalist one allowed for a fundamental reevaluation of the ontological status of the human being as a natural organism. Unlike the dominant Enlightenment discourses of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which typically viewed human reason as grounded in a divine or transcendental source and consequently, understood the human being as something fundamentally different from other natural organisms, the vitalist discourse in the biological sciences provided a theoretical framework within which the human being and its cognitive faculties could be understood according to fully naturalistic premises. The shift towards thinking of the human being as a fully natural organism generated a very different discourse to the dominant Kantian one at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century insofar as the naturalization of reason that this shift enabled strongly second guessed the existence of pure reason and the ability of reason to come to know and establish universal ends within morality and history. The dissertation investigates the impact of this shift on the conceptualization of the human being in the literary, philosophical, and natural scientific writings of Herder, Schiller, Goethe, and the Humboldt brothers, Wilhelm and Alexander.

### **Dissertation Committee**

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