

STEPHEN CUNNIFF

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EDUCATION

University of Chicago

PhD, Department of Philosophy (August 2025)

Dissertation Advisors: Matthew Boyle (Chair), Matthias Haase, James Conant

McGill University, Montreal

BA Honours (1st Class) in Philosophy (May 2014)

Minor in Mathematics

Minor in Physics

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

AOS: 18th-19th Century German Philosophy, especially Kant and Hegel

AOC: Ancient Greek, Philosophy of Mind, Philosophy of Action, Early Modern (Theoretical and Political), Formal Logic, Phenomenology

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

Title: Freedom through Shared Purpose: Hegel on Self-Consciousness, Recognition, and the Teleological Structure of Agency

Abstract: My dissertation is about Hegel's account of the connection between self-consciousness, freedom, and human sociality in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. That account has long attracted readers for its claim that the freedom of self-conscious subjects can only be realized through social relationships. But scholars have struggled to give a clear and convincing account of that claim. The standard view takes Hegel to combine a Kantian notion of rational autonomy with a conception of reason and norms of rationality as socially constituted. I argue that this view is mistaken, both as a reading of this chapter of the *Phenomenology* and as an interpretation of the broader social theory of freedom that Hegel introduces in it. The central theme of Hegel's account of recognition is not that of overcoming natural heteronomy through universal normative principles—regardless of whether or not such norms are socially constituted. Instead, I argue, Hegel's account of recognition marks a turn away from Kantian conceptions of freedom toward more Aristotelian conceptions of subjectivity and the collective self-sufficiency of a community. Specifically, Hegel's account focuses on the internal teleological structure of self-conscious life and action and its implications for human freedom. Accordingly, I argue that the central claim in Hegel's account of recognition is that the subject's individual freedom and self-fulfillment can only be truly realized through relations of reciprocal action and shared internal purposiveness with other subjects. For Hegel, the higher practical freedom achieved through social life is not primarily founded upon shared rights or shared norms but, rather, a shared *life* in the strict sense of the term: a unified internal purpose sustained through the reciprocal action of its members, where each is both a necessary means and an end in itself.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Sole Instructor

'Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*,' University of Chicago, Winter 2021

Course Assistant*

'Introduction to Political Philosophy: "What is Democracy?'," University of Chicago Collegiate Scholars Program, Summer 2024

'Does Virtue Make You Happy?,' University of Chicago, Spring 2022

'Einstein for Everyone,' University of Chicago, Winter 2022

'History of Philosophy III: Kant and the 19th Century,' University of Chicago, Spring 2020

'Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*,' University of Chicago, Spring 2020

'Introduction to Phenomenology,' University of Chicago, Winter 2019

*Course Assistantships in Humanities at the University of Chicago require not only grading and assisting in course administration, but also leading weekly hour-long discussion sections, holding office hours, and generally providing guidance and mentorship to students.

Tutor

Individual tutoring as well as large group sessions (10-20 students) for 'Introduction to Deductive Logic,' McGill University, 2012-2015

ARTICLES

Works under Review

"Desire and the Concept of Self-Consciousness: Re-examining the Opening of Hegel's *Phenomenology*, chapter IV"

"Content as Schema: Kant on the Content of Concepts"

(Nominated for the North American Kant Society's Markus Herz Prize for best graduate student paper presented in 2024)

Works-in-Progress

"Why the Master is Unfree: Hegel's Immanent Critique of the Social Domination in *Phenomenology*, Chapter IV"

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"Saving the Patient: Practical Knowledge and the Problem of Receptivity"

SELECTED TALKS

"Content as Schema: Kant on the Content of Concepts," Southern North American Kant Society Annual Meeting, University of South Carolina (Columbia, SC), May 2024

"What Are Friends Good For? Aristotle on Friendship, Self-Knowledge, and the Joint Exercise of Virtue," Southern Political Science Association Annual Conference, New Orleans, LA, January 2024

“Examining Aristotle’s Account of Friendship,” Ancient Greek and Roman Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, May 2024

“Saving the Patient: Practical Knowledge and the Problem of Receptivity,” Practical Philosophy Workshop, University of Chicago, May 2023

GRADUATE COURSEWORK

The Passion of Being: Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*, Autumn 2016, R. Moati
Marx’s Capital Volume 1, Autumn 2016, A. Ford
First-Year Seminar, Autumn 2016, D. Finkelstein
On Aesthetic Form, Winter 2017, R. Pippin and D. Wellbery
Kant: *Critique of Pure Reason*, Spring 2017, M. Boyle
Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right*, Spring 2017, R. Pippin
The Pantheist Controversy: Spinoza to Hegel, Spring 2017, B. Ziporyn
Plato and Aristotle on Craft and Wisdom, Autumn 2017, G. Richardson Lear
Conceptual Foundations of the Modern State, Autumn 2017, Q. Skinner
Wittgenstein’s *Philosophical Investigations*, Winter 2018, J. Bridges
The Philosophy of Howard Stein, Winter 2018, T. Pashby
Kant’s Transcendental Deduction and its Contemporary Reception, Spring 2018, J. Conant
Recent Ethical Theory, Spring 2018, M. Haase
Aristotle’s *De Anima*, Spring 2020, M. Boyle*
Hegel’s *Philosophy of Mind*, Winter 2023, M. Haase*
The Problem of Moral Evil in German Idealism, Winter 2024, W. Gobsch*
Aristotle’s *Metaphysics*, Spring 2024, A. Brooks*

*Denotes Course Audited

SERVICE

Co-organizer, Conference: [“The Future of Capitalism: Neo-Feudalism?”](#), University of Chicago, May 2024.

Coordinator, [German Philosophy Workshop](#), University of Chicago, July 2022 – June 2023.
Programming, administration, and communications for a bi-weekly workshop with graduate student and faculty speakers from within and outside the University of Chicago.

Visiting Week Co-Coordinator, UChicago Philosophy Department, January-April 2018
Organizing accommodations, travel, events, meetings, and outreach for the Philosophy Department’s visiting week for prospective PhD students

RESEARCH LANGUAGES

English, French, German

REFERENCES

Dr. Matthew Boyle (Chicago), mbboyle@uchicago.edu
Dr. Matthias Haase (Chicago), haase@uchicago.edu
Dr. James Conant (Chicago), jconant@uchicago.edu
Dr. Anselm Mueller (Chicago, Trier), muellera94@hotmail.de