

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

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

Minors: Mathematics, Physics

AREAS OF EXPERTISE

AOS: 18th-19th Century German Philosophy, Philosophy of Action

AOC: Ethics, Social and Political Philosophy, Philosophy of Mind, Ancient Greek Philosophy, Early Modern

DISSERTATION

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

Abstract: My dissertation examines Hegel's account of the relation between self-consciousness, freedom, and human sociality in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. This account has long drawn attention for its claim that the freedom of self-conscious subjects can only be realized through social relationships, yet scholars have struggled to explain this convincingly. Prevailing interpretations understand his view as a kind of social-historical adaptation of Kant's notion of rational autonomy. On such readings, Hegel's theory of freedom is founded on the idea that the conditions of rational agency are defined not by a priori principles but by the norms of mutual accountability that govern our social practices. I argue, instead, that Hegel's response to Kant's notion of self-determination is rooted in more fundamental issues concerning the very concept of the self. Drawing on Aristotle, Hegel develops a concept of self-identity in terms of an internal purposiveness aimed at a form of independence or self-sufficiency (*'Selbständigkeit'*). But this aim, Hegel contends, can only be realized through enduring relations of reciprocal action with others, in which each regards the other not as a mere means but as an end in itself. His social theory of freedom is thus marked not by a special emphasis on socially-constituted norms or a 'social space of reasons' but, rather, by the concept of a higher form of internal purposiveness—one that both transcends and, by doing so, fulfills individual self-purposiveness. This is the shared life of a free community, realized through the reciprocal action of independent individuals.

HONORS AND NOMINATIONS

Departmental Nominee, *Dean's Distinguished Dissertation Award*
Division of Arts & Humanities, University of Chicago, 2026 (*decision pending*)

Nominee, *Markus Herz Prize*, North American Kant Society
for "Content as Schema: Kant on the Content of Concepts"
Southern North American Kant Society Annual Meeting, 2024

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Instructor of Record

Topics in Medical Ethics (University of Chicago, Winter 2025)
Philosophical Perspectives II: Early Modern (University of Chicago, Winter 2025)
Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* (University of Chicago, Winter 2021)

Teaching Assistant

Life, A Life (University of Chicago, Spring 2026)
Kant's Ethical Theory (University of Chicago, Autumn 2025)
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)

Tutor

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

ARTICLES

Cunniff, Stephen. "The Master's Problem: Revisiting Hegel's Critique of Social Domination." *European Journal of Philosophy*, forthcoming.

Under Review

"Desire and Hegel's Concept of Self-Consciousness" — Revise & Resubmit, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*

SELECTED TALKS

"The *Apeiron* and the Bad Infinity: Hegel's Critique of Immediate Desire," *Tulane German Philosophy Workshop*, Tulane University, February 2026

"The Master's Problem: Revisiting Hegel's Critique of Social Domination," *History of Philosophy Roundtable*, Loyola University Chicago, September 2025

“Content as Schema: Kant on the Content of Concepts,” *Southern North American Kant Society Annual Meeting*, University of South Carolina, 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, 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

SERVICE

Advisor, B.A. Capstone Project, Antonio Sanchez, “The Epistemic Architecture of Medical Spanish in Allopathic Education,” University of Chicago, 2026.

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.
Programing, 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, University of Chicago – mboyle@uchicago.edu

Dr. Matthias Haase, University of Chicago – haase@uchicago.edu

Dr. James Conant, University of Chicago – jconant@uchicago.edu

Dr. Anselm Mueller, University of Chicago/Universität Trier – muellera94@hotmail.de