

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, especially Hegel and Kant

AOC: Philosophy of Action, Philosophy of Mind, Ancient Greek Philosophy, Phenomenology, Early Modern, Formal Logic

DISSERTATION OVERVIEW

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. The standard view interprets Hegel as combining a Kantian notion of rational autonomy with a conception of reason and norms of rationality as socially constituted. I argue this is mistaken, both as a reading of this chapter of the *Phenomenology* and as an interpretation of Hegel's broader social theory of freedom. Instead, I argue that 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. It centers on the internal teleological structure of self-conscious life and action and its implications for human freedom. I argue that its central insight is that 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 rests not primarily on shared rights or shared norms but, rather, a shared *life* in the strict sense of the term: a unified internal purpose sustained through reciprocal activity, in which each member of the whole is both a necessary means and an end in itself.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Sole Instructor

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

Teaching Assistant*

Kant's Ethical Theory, University of Chicago, Fall 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

*Teaching Assistantships at UChicago's Humanities Division center on leading weekly discussion sections, alongside grading, office hours, and student mentorship.

Tutor

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

ARTICLES

Work under Review

"The Master's Problem: Revisiting Hegel's Critique of Social Domination"

"Subject as Substance: Freedom and Self-Identity in Hegel's Account of Self-Consciousness as Desire"

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

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

SELECTED TALKS

"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 (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.
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 – mbboyle@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