

Our second philosophy graduate colloquium is this evening. Here are the presentation abstracts:

Hegel Contra Moral Theory

Bryan Richard

In this paper I argue that Hegel's far-ranging socio-political and ethical insights in his 'Philosophy of Right' cannot be easily co-opted by those who try to read him within (broadly Rawlsian) commitments over the independence of moral theory from metaphysical and epistemological concerns. First, I attempt to clarify what such independence could mean, and why someone would want to claim it. Then I consider why Hegel fundamentally rejects the presuppositions underwriting such a claim. Finally, I demonstrate, through one specific example (personal identity), how a systematically integrated Hegelian moral philosophy can satisfy a standard demand that Rawls thinks must be met, if there is to be any meaningful assertion that a moral theory ought to depend on other areas of philosophy to do its work. Thus, in working through this rather specific (and somewhat idiosyncratic) pairing of figures, I try to show that what is at stake between them, in fact, has a much broader significance for the question of what a suitably appropriate method in moral philosophy might be.

Thom Campbell

In the Introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel characterizes consciousness' path towards absolute knowledge as a "path of despair" (§78). My talk will consider the role of despair in the *Phenomenology*. Far from being a contingent psychic process that the protagonist experiences from time to time, I will show that despair is constitutive of the development of self-consciousness. That is, the 'path of despair' constitutes the formation (*Bildung*) of the protagonist. Consciousness loses itself again and again on the path of despair as it is shattered, broken and crushed. Nevertheless, it begins anew with each stage of the dialectic. How is the formation of the protagonist possible if this very formation is characterized by "the loss of itself" and, at the same time, its object (§78)? In order to begin answering this question we will focus on two cases of despair in the *Phenomenology*: (i) the end of Ch. 1 ("Sense-Certainty") where Hegel suggests that the "eating of bread and drinking of wine" is a form of despair (§109) and (ii) the shift from Lordship and Bondage to Unhappy Consciousness. Drawing on the psychoanalytic work of Freud, Klein and Kristeva, I will flesh out Hegel's characterization of despair by distinguishing between melancholic (depressive) despair and despair as mourning. Whereas mourning involves separating oneself from a lost object, melancholia is characterized by the incorporation of a lost object within oneself and self-identification with it. To my mind, this distinction—which I think is implicit in Hegel's account—should enable us to offer a more precise account of the path of despair as the process of loss in which the protagonist learns how to grasp herself as a subject of meaning. In short: despair is the formative process through which we become subjects.