

The Labour of the Negative

4th Biannual Conference of the Australian Hegel Society

Call for Abstracts
November 30th & December 1st, 2023

The Fourth Biannual Conference of The Australian Hegel Society, 'The Labour of the Negative', hosted by UNSW Sydney, will take place on November 30th - December 1st, 2023, in person in Sydney Australia and online via zoom.

Call for abstracts:

Abstracts should be sent as attachment to theaustralianhegelsociety@gmail.com.

Deadline: September 1, 2023.

Conference theme:

At crucial junctures in his writings, Hegel makes use of the theme of labour to articulate the thrust, movement, and nature of his philosophical project. Famously the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a highway of despair that "immediate spirit must laboriously travel down" if it wants to become 'genuine knowing'. And labour is no less essential to Hegel's conception of truth for which this labourious path prepares us: the grasping of truth as not only substance but also as subject. As Hegel writes, a proper grasp of this idea [Idee], must involve "the seriousness, the suffering, the patience, and the labour of the negative". Labour and its logic are at the heart of Hegel's *Phenomenology*. It is thus not surprising that the young Marx would later claim that "the outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phenomenology* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is that he thus grasps the essence of work". Marx's intuition would guide Alexandre Kojève to foreground the thematic of work in his influential lectures on the *Phenomenology* which would determine so much 20th century French reception of Hegel.

Yet one need not confine oneself to the *Phenomenology* if one wants to think through the connection between Hegel and labour. Hegel had been extensively engaging with the nature of labour in both his *System of Ethical Life* (1802) and in his notes preparing to lecture on his *Philosophy of Spirit* (summer semester 1803; winter semester 1803–1804, and winter semester 1805–1806), i.e., before he penned those famous lines in the *Phenomenology*. This engagement was further preceded by a youthful encounter with the philosophy of the Scottish Enlightenment and Scottish political economy which dealt extensively with such questions. The relationship between

Hegel and labour is far from reducible to the use of labour as a metaphor for a philosopher in his comfy nightcap.

But what of negativity and its specific work? Hegel was, after all, the thinker of negativity par excellence and his work has been essential to philosopher and non-philosophers alike. In the century following his death, the work of the negative in Hegel and Hegel's works on negativity became essential to the projects of existentialists, psychoanalysts, and theologians alike. One could not imagine Jacques Lacan's Seminar, for instance, without his engagement with Hegel's Phenomenology and the thoughts on the work of the negative contained therein. It is not without consequence that Lacan attended Kojève's lectures or that Jean Hyppolite was invited to present a commentary on Freud's *Die Verneinung* (Negation) in Lacan's seminar.

This year's conference of the Australian Hegel Society (AHS) invites scholars working on Hegel and the post-Hegelian tradition to rise to the challenge of thinking through the significance of the "labour of the negative". What work does the concept of labour do in Hegel's philosophy? How might Hegel's detailed engagement with political economy shed light on Hegel's endeavours? Why did Hegel's earliest biographers so emphatically insist upon the slow and methodical labour which undergirded the slow construction of his mature philosophy? To what extent does Hegel's philosophy shed light on the contemporary nature of work? How has Hegel's work been taken up to inform discussions of negation and negativity? Is there fertile ground still to be covered on the question of Hegel's relation to psychoanalysis? What role has the 'labour of the negative' played in shaping the reading of Hegel among continental philosophers?

Instructions:

Papers are welcome that address the conference theme.

The Australian Hegel Society welcomes submissions also from early career researchers and advanced graduate students. To notify your interest in presenting at the conference, please send an abstract of your paper to the following address, by September

1: theaustralianhegelsociety@gmail.com

Your abstract should include the following items:

1. 'Submission Australian Hegel Society Conference 2023' in the subject line
2. The paper title
3. Author's name
4. Institutional affiliation
5. Email address
6. Description of the paper (no more than 300 words)

Sessions at the conference are likely to be around 30 minutes per paper including question time.

Conference Organising Committee:

Paul Redding

Jean-Philippe Deranty

Heikki Ikahemo

Simon Lumsden

Giovanna Luciano

Daniel Badenhorst