

Ethics and Normativity Seminar Series

“Democracy and Poverty: Hegel on the Importance of the Welfare State”



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This paper revisits Hegel’s reflections on the political dimension of the welfare state in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1820). I will argue that behind Hegel’s model of civil society stands a surprisingly realistic understanding of the importance of welfare organized by the state, especially in relation to poverty, in order to safeguard civil society’s emancipatory potential. Nevertheless, Hegel has often been read to hold a communitarian position centered on the role of “corporations” in civil society in contrast to the function of the state. Some more recent interpretations have also emphasized the centrality of the market economy for Hegel’s understanding of civil society, which to some extent undercuts his seemingly communitarian commitments. Regardless as to whether we view Hegel as a communitarian or place him in a more liberal tradition, the starting point is an approach to his philosophy of right from an ethical perspective. In this talk, I will contend that Hegel’s argument in the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* is of a political kind and thus responds to very specific historical and socio-economic contexts. At the same time, I will suggest that much of what Hegel has to say about the role of the welfare state continues to hold today under the conditions of a neoliberal economy and an obvious crisis of democracy.

Friday, March 29th
Old Science Building, Room S102
1:00 – 3:00

Everyone is invited to continue discussion at *Axelrad* after the talk.