

**Stephen Houlgate (Warwick). Abstract: “Hegel, Freedom and Trust”**

Many people think that freedom involves “doing what I want” or exercising my own “will”. For Hegel, however, true freedom requires us to live in what he calls “ethical life” (*Sittlichkeit*), which is a rational system of laws and institutions comprising the family, civil society and the state. Such institutions provide the foundation for our freedom as individuals, but they also make possible a distinctive form of freedom that consists in feeling *at home in* (and so not being alienated from) those very institutions. True freedom, in other words, entails *trusting* in the institutions of ethical life. Hegel’s position raises several important questions: How is such trust to be reconciled with maintaining a critical vigilance towards institutions? Can one be overly vigilant and overly suspicious of public institutions? How damaging to human freedom is it when institutions themselves can no longer be trusted? How does one restore trust when it is lacking?