Joseph Hamilton

Department of Philosophy, Columbia University
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Areas of Specialization: Hegel's Practical Philosophy, Kant, Moral Psychology

Areas of Competence: 20th-Century Continental Thought (esp. Foucault and Heidegger), Ethics, Political Philosophy

Dissertation Abstract

My dissertation concerns the concept of evil in Kant's and Hegel's accounts of rational agency. Both understand rational agents to be agents who self-consciously act on principles, and both think that this involves a distinct way in which the will may go wrong, which they term evil. On many interpretations, Kant's concept of evil involves agents understanding their own happiness to be an unconditional reason for action. I argue instead that Kant thinks evil is not a misconception of one's reasons for action, but a voluntary rejection of the proper organization of principles of agency. I show that this has surprising implications across Kant's account of agency. It requires Kant to argue against the existence of akrasia, or free action against one's best judgment, putting him at odds with prevailing contemporary action theory and moral psychology. It also means that evil agents are more, not less, concerned with the moral evaluations of others. I then argue that Hegel inherits much of Kant's conception of evil. But while Kant understands moral principles to be formal principles of practical reasoning, Hegel understands them to be immanent to the practices and institutions which constitute an ethical form of life. This approach to evil informs Hegel's position on core tenets of ethics and moral psychology in ways that have been undiscussed in the extant literature, including his objection that Kant's ethics is empty, his understanding of the guise of the good thesis, and his account of the role of forgiveness in ethical relationships.

Education

Columbia University — 2020-2027 (expected)
Ph.D. in Philosophy
Dissertation: 'Evil in the Practical Philosophy of Kant and Hegel'

DAAD Doctoral Fellow at Potsdam Uni. — 2025-2026

University of Cambridge — 2018-2019 (awarded 2020)
M.Phil. in Political Thought and Intellectual History *with Distinction*
Dissertation: 'Foucault's Critical Engagement with Heidegger, 1966-1984'

King's College London — 2015-2018
B.A. in Philosophy *with 1st Class Honors*

Awards and Fellowships

Kluge Graduate Fellowship	Columbia Uni. 2026-7
DAAD 10-Month Research Fellowship	Potsdam Uni. 2025-6
Jonathan Lieberson Prize (best graduate paper, ethics/political philosophy): 'Fichte on Evil and Freedom'	Columbia Uni. 2024
Lead Teaching Fellowship	Columbia Uni. 2023-4
Jonathan Lieberson Prize (best graduate paper, ethics/political philosophy): 'Heidegger on Freedom, Finitude, and Failure'	Columbia Uni. 2023
Jonathan Lieberson Prize (best graduate paper, ethics/political philosophy): 'Meaningful Work and Internal Goods'	Columbia Uni. 2022
Associate of King's College London (AKC)	KCL 2018

Papers

'Moral and Prudential Weakness in Kant' (under review)

'Fichte on Evil, Freedom, and Responsibility' (under review)

'Hegel's Concept of Forgiveness' (draft available)

'Kant Against Akrasia' (draft available)

Presentations (* indicates peer reviewed)

'The Sociality of Prudential Reason'*

NAKS Midwest Division Workshop, University of Chicago, December 2026

'Hegel's Concept of Forgiveness'

Thomas Khurana's Colloquium at the University of Potsdam, April 2026

'Kant's Concept of Weakness of the Will'*

NAKS Southern Division Workshop, Louisiana State University, April 2025

'Can I have a Desire to Have that Same Desire?'

Philosophy Graduate Student Workshop, Columbia University, October 2024

Teaching Experience

<u>As Lead Instructor</u>

Existentialism	Summer 2024
Political Philosophy	Summer 2025
Columbia Journeys Seminar (interdisciplinary humanities seminar)	Fall 2026
Columbia Journeys Seminar (interdisciplinary humanities seminar)	Spring 2027

As Recitation Instructor

History of Philosophy II: Aquinas through Kant (Christina Van Dyke)	Spring 2023
History of Philosophy I: Pre-Socratics through Augustine (Dhananjay Jagannathan)	Fall 2023

As Teaching Assistant

Philosophy of Art (Lydia Goehr)	Fall 2021
Phenomenology and Existentialism (Taylor Carman)	Spring 2022
Philosophy and Feminism (Christia Mercer)	Fall 2022
Phenomenology and Existentialism (Taylor Carman)	Spring 2024

Graduate Coursework (* indicates audit)

Montesquieu	Sylvana Tomaselli	Cambridge Uni. 2018
The Anthropocene	Duncan Kelly	Cambridge Uni. 2019
The Notion of Work in Modern Political Philosophy	Axel Honneth	Columbia Uni. 2020
Hegel*	Frederick Neuhouser	Columbia Uni. 2020
Modal Logic	Tamar Lando	Columbia Uni. 2020
Aesthetics	Lydia Goehr	Columbia Uni. 2021
Kant's Moral Psychology	Patricia Kitcher and Francey Russell	Columbia Uni. 2021
Philosophy and Romanticism	Wolfgang Mann	Columbia Uni. 2021
Heidegger's *Being and Time*	Taylor Carman	Columbia Uni. 2021
Problems of Social Philosophy: Marx and Piketty*	Frederick Neuhouser	Columbia Uni. 2021

Topics in Afromodern Political Thought*	Robert Gooding-Williams	Columbia Uni. 2021
Topics in Metaphysics: Events	Achille Varzi	Columbia Uni. 2021
Fichte (Independent Study)	Frederick Neuhouser	Columbia Uni. 2021
Topics in Political Philosophy: Reification-Dehumanization-Objectification*	Axel Honneth	Columbia Uni. 2021
Practical Reason	Dhananjay Jagannathan	Columbia Uni. 2022
Advanced Topics in Philosophy of Mind*	Christopher Peacocke	Columbia Uni. 2022
Rousseau	Frederick Neuhouser	Columbia Uni. 2022
Freudians and Post-Freudians	Alan Bass	The New School 2022
Hegel's Aesthetics*	Axel Honneth	Columbia Uni. 2022
Kant and Goethe	Eckart Förster	New York Uni. 2022
Kant on Erkenntnis	Anja Jauernig	New York Uni. 2023

Service to the Profession

Assistant Organizer, Conference in Honor of Patricia Kitcher	2024
Co-Organizer, New York German Idealism Workshop	2023-2025
Lead Organizer, MAP (Minorities and Philosophy), Columbia Chapter	2022-2025
Graduate Student Department Representative	2022-2023
Co-organizer, German Idealism Reading Group	2022-2025
Co-organizer, 21st Annual Columbia-NYU Graduate Conference	2021

Reviewer: *Noûs* (x2)

Languages

English (native speaker)

German (advanced reading, intermediate speaking)