

Attending the 44th Annual Collegium Phaenomenologicum in Umbria, Italy

With the financial support provided by the Royal Holloway Travel Award I was able to travel to Italy this summer and attend the 44th annual Collegium Phaenomenologicum. The Collegium is longstanding institution aimed at connecting faculty members, postdoctoral students, and graduate students in philosophy and related disciplines. The core of the Collegium is made up of three weeklong lecture courses with related stand-alone lectures and intensive seminars on the texts discussed in the week's course. This year the theme of the Collegium was 'Critical Phenomenology: Rethinking Politics, Affect and Normativity.' One of the central aims of the Collegium is to bring student and faculty together from around the world, meeting in a small town in Umbria, Italy in order to facilitate in-depth and lasting conversations. Before the program begins each student participant is invited to present a paper at the 'Participants Conference.'

My PhD topic is principally concerned with the political philosophy of Hannah Arendt as it can be taken up in relation to anthropogenic climate change. Arendt's work structured the lecture series given during the Collegium's first week by Prof. Peg Birmingham, whose own work on Arendt and more broadly has been instrumental to the development of my own thesis. As such, the opportunity to work alongside Prof. Birmingham and receive her support was particularly special. During this first week of the Collegium I was able to critically refine some of the core elements of my project, something which really helped when positioning myself to contribute during the Collegium's following two weeks. The first week was thus the ideal introduction into the three-week long program. During the second week our focus was on critical race studies and the phenomenology of affect. This week really pushed me to think through some of the historical claims that I make in my project and has really helped me to clarify certain elements. During the third week, we turned more closely to questions of the environment, allowing me to really connect each of the three weeks.

Alongside the lecture series we attended small reading groups where we were able to closely engage with the thinkers whose work had informed the lectures. The reading groups gave us the chance not only to develop more sophisticated understandings of the complex texts but to position ourselves as young academics. It was during these sessions that I was really able to push myself to develop original lines of argumentation. What began in the lecture hall was thus broken down and rethought during the reading group, creating spaces for discussions that endured beyond what might have been conceived as 'the classroom.'

The Collegium fostered a space of immense learning as all participants stayed in the same hotel and dined together every evening. Equally, there was a host of extra activities ranging from daytrips to Siena and Perugia to gallery visits and nature walks. Being able to really immerse myself in this world where political philosophy became almost a natural second language was an incredible experience. Not only have I been able to position myself as a young scholar by

virtue of attending the Collegium I have made some really great friends with whom I can continue these conversations.

