

# Hegel

## A Biography

*Terry Pinkard*  
Georgetown University



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# Hegel's Formation in Old Württemberg

“Wilhelm”

IN 1770, A LONG-STANDING CRISIS in the small south German duchy of Württemberg seemed to have found its resolution. The prince of Württemberg, Duke Karl Eugen, and the representative assembly of the estates, the *Landtag*, reached a constitutional settlement on the rights of Württemberg subjects and the appropriate powers of various bodies in the Württemberg government. The results of this settlement were to lead a British politician some years later to proclaim that there were only two constitutions worth noting, the British and the Württemberg.<sup>1</sup> The constitutional settlement itself and the circumstances surrounding it were both odd and yet also strangely typical for the time. The mere statement of the issues is enough to give a sense of the complexities of the old regime in Württemberg: The Protestant estates of Württemberg, a more or less untypical feudal institution that had survived into the modern world, had brought a suit before an imperial court of the increasingly irrelevant Holy Roman Empire, of which Württemberg was a member, to force their Catholic prince, Duke Karl Eugen, to legally acknowledge what they took to be their traditional rights; and Duke Karl Eugen, himself always inclined to absolutism and Catholic pageantry, and who had always rigidly resisted any such pressures from the Protestant estates, had come under immense pressure from the emperor of the Holy Roman Empire – the archduke of Austria, himself an absolutizing Catholic monarch – to settle in favor of the Protestants. To add to the complications, much of the pressure on the Catholic emperor of the Holy Roman Empire had come from Karl Eugen's wife's uncle, Frederick the Great, the Protestant monarch of Prussia, against whom Karl Eugen had allied Württemberg in a recent

war, and who was the enemy of the Catholic Austrian archduke. The settlement nonetheless reaffirmed the traditional rights and privileges of the Württemberg estates, and the Protestant victors took this as the triumph of a righteous Protestant people defending their traditional rights against the absolutizing despotism of a Catholic duke.

In the same year that the duke and the estates reached their constitutional settlement, a minor Protestant functionary at the court of Duke Karl Eugen, Georg Ludwig Hegel, and his wife, Maria Magdalena Louisa Hegel, announced on August 27 the birth of their first child, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

G. W. F. Hegel (addressed as “Wilhelm” by his parents, very close friends, and family) was thus born into and grew up in a world comprised of an odd and not terribly coherent mixture of the old and the new. In fact, Hegel did not grow up in anything that could really be called “Germany” at all; he was born instead into the duchy of Württemberg, which itself was part of the Holy Roman Empire – the butt of the joke that it was neither Holy nor Roman nor an Empire. That world was in fact to vanish early in Hegel’s life: By 1806, the Holy Roman Empire in which Hegel had spent his youth suddenly ceased to exist; the small provincial duchy of Württemberg had become the much-expanded kingdom of Württemberg by virtue of a later duke’s having allied himself with Napoleon Bonaparte; and the epochal “constitutional settlement” of 1770, the year of Hegel’s birth, had been ignored, dismantled, and, given its rapid slide into irrelevance, completely forgotten. The vivid contrasts between Hegel’s cultural background, complexities and oddities of old Württemberg, and his youthful introduction to the world of the Enlightenment both at home and through his education were to color his understanding of both himself and the world around him for the rest of his life. These odd pieces of an incoherent patchwork of practices and traditions set the stage for much of Hegel’s later thought, as the mature Hegel of the nineteenth century tried to come to terms with his eighteenth-century youth.

### Hegel’s Family and His Early Education

Hegel came from a moderately well-to-do family of solid Württembergers.<sup>2</sup> His father, Georg Ludwig Hegel, had studied law at Tübingen University and was at the time of Hegel’s birth a secretary to the

revenue office at the court. Hegel's father's family had several generations before been émigrés to Württemberg from Austria in the sixteenth century; when Austrian Protestants were required to convert to Catholicism in the 1500s, the ancestor of the Hegel family of Württemberg, Johannes Hegel, a pewterer, had moved from Catholic Austria to Protestant Württemberg rather than give up his Lutheran faith (or at least that was the story the Hegel family told themselves).<sup>3</sup> Generations of Hegels had been pastors in Württemberg, a position of no little esteem and importance in the duchy. (The poet Friedrich Schiller was, for example, baptized by a pastor named Hegel in Marbach.) Hegel's grandfather (Georg Ludwig Christoph) had been the *Oberamtmann* (ducal commissioner, a kind of high bailiff) for the town of Altensteig, and his great-grandfather (also Georg Ludwig Christoph) had been the *Stadtvoigt* (also a type of ducal commissioner) for the town of Rosenfeld. Hegel's mother, Maria Magdalena Louisa Hegel (whose maiden name was Fromm), had a father who had been a lawyer at the High Court of Justice at the Württemberg court; her family had been in Stuttgart itself for more than a century, and she traced her lineage on her mother's side back to Johannes Brenz, a noted Württemberg Protestant reformer of the sixteenth century.

Hegel was one of six children born to his parents; only he and two of his siblings survived into adulthood: a sister, Christiane Luise, and a brother, Georg Ludwig. This is not surprising, since high rates of child mortality were a fact of life in those days; smallpox alone killed one out of every thirteen children in Württemberg in the 1770s, and Hegel himself had to survive several serious life-threatening illnesses as a youth. Indeed, his health was for the rest of his life to be plagued off and on by various illnesses. When Hegel was eleven, his mother died (September 20, 1781) of a "bilious fever" that was raging in Stuttgart, which also came close to claiming Hegel and his father. That Hegel survived and his mother did not no doubt affected him more than we can ever discover; Hegel developed a kind of speech impediment, and the underlying reason may well have had to do with his mother's death, his own survival, and some antagonism between himself and his father, although these are virtually impossible to ferret out. (Hegel almost never speaks of his father in his letters; there was apparently some tension between them; for example, when he was at university, he and his father apparently engaged in some rather impassioned disputes about the vir-

tues of the French Revolution.) Hegel's brother, Georg Ludwig, had a brief but apparently glorious career as a military officer, rising to the rank of captain; he was ennobled and thereby became Georg Ludwig *von* Hegel; he marched off with Napoleon on the Russian campaign in 1812, never to return. His sister, Christiane, was to outlive him only by a few months; a very cultured, independent woman, she never married, electing to stay home and care for her father.

Education and "culture" were clearly stressed in the Hegel household. Hegel's parents put him in what was called the German School at the age of three, and at five he was put in what was called the Latin School. His mother taught him Latin at home so that when he went to the Latin School, he already knew the first declension of Latin and the nouns that went with it. Indeed, Hegel's life-long infatuation with learning and his unconditional respect for it almost certainly began with those early experiences of learning Latin from his mother and his attachment to her. That Hegel's mother was capable of doing this already says something about the remarkable state of learning in the Hegel household, since it was, to put it mildly, uncommon for women in this period to receive the kind of education that would have enabled them to teach their four- and five-year-old sons Latin at home (a fact noted explicitly by Christiane Hegel in her recollections of their youth).<sup>4</sup> Hegel's father in fact paid for his son's private lessons in geometry by a noted local mathematician, K. A. F. Duttenhofer, when Hegel was only ten years old; as Hegel grew older, his father continued to pay for private lessons in other subjects. (For example, Hegel most likely learned French in this way).<sup>5</sup>

Although Hegel almost never spoke of his father in any letters, there is a striking difference with regard to his mother. In 1825, at the age of fifty-five, he sent off a short note to his sister, Christiane, that said only, "Today is the anniversary of our mother's death, which I will hold forever in my memory."<sup>6</sup> It seems clear *whose* memory dominated his adult life. He and sister were united by an identification with their mother; their brother, Georg Ludwig, seems to have taken after their father, which seems to have been part of the painful estrangement that Hegel had with his father. Both Hegel and his sister took after their mother in their bookishness, and their mother's death left them without their "protector" in the family, elevating Georg Ludwig most likely into the position of favorite. Hegel dealt with this by rebelling, devel-



oping a stutter, and pursuing a career of which his father did not exactly approve; Christiane dealt with it by remaining at home to care for her father until his death and turning down a number of different suitors for marriage during that period.

Hegel's family life after the death of his mother was probably quite strained, and all the evidence points to a sharp sense of alienation on his own part toward his family. In keeping with his mother's ideals for him, Hegel was from the standpoint of his teachers (if not of his father) a model student who read voraciously, was always the first in his class from the age of ten until he left for university at eighteen, and, like many young men of his day and age, kept a diary during his teenage years. In his diary, he recorded long excerpts from his many readings, a practice also not uncommon in an age where owning books was still a luxury. One indication of the sense of alienation he felt was that as a teenager, he tended to spend Wednesdays and Saturdays entirely at the ducal library, which was open to the public and which was also quite close to his home. Since his home was not without its cultural resources – the family subscribed to the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, an influential journal of ideas (in which, incidentally, some of the early debates about Kant's philosophy appeared) – the decision to spend so much time away from home all the more sharply reflected his sense of not being “at home” in his home in Stuttgart. Hegel did, however, enjoy the company of his teachers, and, as the model student he was, would go for walks with them, during which the conversations would turn to academic subjects in which the young man showed such a keen interest. One of his teachers, a Mr. Löffler, gave him at the age of eight a present of Shakespeare's works translated by Eschenburg, with the advice that although he would not understand them at that point, he would soon learn to understand them. (Hegel recorded years later in his teenage diary a laudatory remembrance of Löffler when he died.)

Hegel's family was certainly well connected but was not included among what in Württemberg were known as the *Ehrbarkeit*, the “non-noble notables,” who staffed the Württemberg assembly of estates (its parliament) and who had a near-monopoly on the better, more prestigious positions in Württemberg. The *Ehrbarkeit* had achieved their status largely because of the sheer oddness and complexity of Württemberg's history; the Württemberg nobility took no part in the governance of the duchy, instead understanding their noble status as having to do

entirely with a direct, “immediate” relation to the Holy Roman Emperor, and thereby de facto leaving everything to the *Ehrbarkeit*, which more or less consisted of some important clergy, certain urban elites, and important rural magistrates. The *Ehrbarkeit* continually contested with the duke for power. To add to the complexity of Württemberg’s (and Stuttgart’s) social milieu, the duke’s own privy council (*Geheime Rat*) had over the years gradually ceased to be simply an extension of the duke’s authority and had come instead to regard itself as a semi-independent body, which itself then contested with not only the duke but also with the estates (and thereby with various parts of the *Ehrbarkeit*) for power and influence.<sup>7</sup> The privy council itself had come to be composed of what had more or less gradually evolved into a professional class of bureaucrats, almost always trained in law at the university in Tübingen (located in Württemberg just a few miles south of Stuttgart).

In addition to Württemberg’s idiosyncratic political arrangements, the form of social life that prevailed within the Württemberg of Hegel’s youth can be described (following Mack Walker) as that of the German “hometowns,” a form of life that took root in other German *Länder* within the Holy Roman Empire, but not so much in places like Prussia.<sup>8</sup> The structure of the hometowns could in a broad sense be called “communitarian.” There was clearly a sense of who belonged (and equally as clearly and forcefully, who did *not*) in the hometowns, and each hometown had a clear social sense of what groups had what rights and privileges without there being any need for a written statement of them. The guild system in Württemberg played a central role in the structure of its hometowns in the sense that the guild functioned as a kind of “second family” (a description that Hegel was later to use in his mature political philosophy in his attempt to revivify the old corporate structures within the modern Prussian state): It served to protect its members’ particular privileges and rights, to buffer individuals against life’s contingencies; it convened elaborate ceremonies at various stages of a member’s life, it provided the circle in which one socialized, it offered assistance when bad luck befell one or one’s family, it oversaw moral and professional standards – in short, it regulated a person’s life from apprenticeship to death.<sup>9</sup> In the year that Hegel was born, the hometown structure of Württemberg seemed finally to have triumphed against the contrivances of its absolutizing Catholic duke; however, only a few years later, the structure of hometown life all over Germany was

to be threatened by the modernizing influences emanating from the French Revolution.

We cannot know with certainty what Hegel's mother and father actually thought about the political events in Württemberg and the developments in Württemberg culture at the time of Hegel's birth, but the evidence strongly suggests that they were a family who were at once quite comfortable with the old Württemberg traditions and at the same time clearly oriented toward the ideas of the German Enlightenment and its modernizing tendencies. They most likely saw no contradiction between the Enlightenment's goals and the traditions and patterns of existing Württemberg life. Although not members themselves of the *Ehrbarkeit*, Hegel's family clearly moved in the social circles close to them; and they also moved in the circles of the people who staffed the privy council. Hegel's parents were thus the kind of people who were tied into the traditional order of Württemberg and, no doubt, as Protestants also disdainful of the impertinence of their Catholic ruler and proud of Württemberg's constitutional tradition, but who were attempting, however unconsciously, to go beyond the confining borders of their limited Württemberg world. As already mentioned, they subscribed to the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, one of the major publications of the German Enlightenment, and Hegel's mother was uncharacteristically well educated for a woman of her day. Shortly after Hegel was born, the family moved to a very fashionable address in Stuttgart, which indicates that they both were and thought of themselves as a family on the way up. If anything, it seems to be the case that Hegel grew up in a family that communicated to him a strong sense of being "somebody" while at the same time also being an outsider to the official circle of the *Ehrbarkeit*; moreover, on his mother's side, Hegel was descended from a long line of prominent Protestant reformers. The up-and-coming Hegel family staked their claim to social status on the basis of a certain attitude toward learning and achievement rather than on family connections.

This strong sense of his own proper standing in the world, along with his touchiness about possible affronts to it, characterized Hegel for his whole life. Firmly etched on the young Hegel's view of the world was that his family, which was just as middle-class and probably more educated than most of the members of the *Ehrbarkeit*, were nonetheless effectively excluded from the very best positions in the Württemberg

government simply and solely because they were not part of the “non-noble notables.” Hegel’s sense of social inclusion and exclusion was thus not that of the middle-class *Bürger*’s exclusion from the world of the aristocracy; it was the sense ingrained at an early age of the simple injustice of exclusion from status by virtue of something completely contingent, of being the same and yet excluded. It also gave him a certain anger that often came to full expression in his more polemical writings.

Most telling was his father’s decision to send Hegel in 1784 to the *Stuttgarter Gymnasium Illustre*. The school was in some respects a complete mess, as most schools in Württemberg were at the time; however, it was a place in which Enlightenment thought had taken some foothold alongside the more traditional Protestant humanistic learning of the Renaissance (although the school could hardly be said to have been a bastion of Enlightenment thought). Since it seems that quite early in his life he or his parents (very likely his mother) decided that he was to study theology, the more natural choice would have been to send Hegel to one of the “lower seminaries,” the “cloister schools,” which were the traditional path in Württemberg for students destined for theological study at the university at Tübingen and a subsequent career in the omnipresent Protestant church of Württemberg. (Hegel’s friend at Tübingen, the poet Hölderlin, for example, went to such a “cloister school.”) The importance of theological studies is shown by the fact that even in Hegel’s *Gymnasium* more than fifty percent of the graduates went on to pursue some kind of career that involved theological studies.<sup>10</sup> Although Tübingen University reserved the great majority of its places in theological studies for the students graduating from the lower seminaries, it also reserved a few places reserved for students of the *Gymnasium Illustre*, and this seems to have been one of the likely reasons for sending Hegel there. At the *Gymnasium Illustre*, Hegel could get an Enlightenment education and still be prepared and qualified for theological training at Tübingen.

Of course, Hegel might have been sent instead to the *Karlsschule* in Stuttgart – a military academy founded by Duke Karl Eugen to train officials and military officers in the new sciences – which was regarded not only as the better institution but also as the more “Enlightenment oriented” of the two schools. Since Hegel’s father seems to have cared deeply for his son’s education, there must have been a special reason to

send him to the *Gymnasium Illustre* rather than to the *Karlsschule*. The decision could not have been based on any special dislike that Hegel's father had for the *Karlsschule*, since he later sent Hegel's younger brother, Georg Ludwig, there. Indeed, it seems likely that it was Hegel's mother's desire that he become a theologian and not his father's; after all, she taught him Latin at an early age, clearly preparing him for a career in the church or as a learned man. Hegel's father, on the other hand, was a civil servant, a prudent, rational man trained in law, who displayed (at least in the records) no particular ecclesiastical piety and did not seem in any way inclined to send Hegel's brother to seminary training. His mother's desire that the young Hegel become a theologian and his father's desire that he nonetheless attend some "modern" (that is, Enlightenment, vocationally directed) institution must therefore have been the motivating factors in the decision. According to Hegel's own memories, it was at least one year after his mother's death that his father decided that he was to study theology at the Protestant Seminary in Tübingen.<sup>11</sup> The decision in favor of the *Gymnasium Illustre* was very likely a compromise between Hegel's father and his dead mother's wishes, a wish to keep a foot in both camps.

Whatever the grounds for sending Hegel to the *Gymnasium Illustre*, however, the decision turned out to have fortunate consequences for him. The bookishly inclined young Hegel, attached to his mother and missing her after her death, was thus not packed off to a "cloister school" but instead continued living with his father and siblings in a family environment that clearly indulged his bookish interests; and he was able to spend four years at a school in which he came into contact with teachers who were to recognize and encourage his love of learning and in which he was given a humanistically oriented education that steeped him in the classics, in ancient and modern languages, and in modern science and mathematics.<sup>12</sup>

The main importance of Hegel's stay at the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* was that its environs and its mixture of Enlightenment and Renaissance humanistic approaches introduced the young Hegel to the world of modern, up-to-the-minute ideas and promoted a sense of distance from the traditional world of the Württemberg "non-noble notables." His sister, Christiane, remembered her brother especially loving the study of physics at the *Gymnasium*, and we know that he was also fascinated with mathematics during this period.<sup>13</sup> He himself remembered learning

by the age of twelve the Wolffian doctrines of “clear ideas” in school, and by the age of fourteen having learned all the classical rules of the syllogism taught to him in school.

Quite commonly, in his diary, he would also make long excerpts from various books. In his diary he did not, however, tend to record his feelings, nor did he record, with one exception, any adolescent musings on girls, something one might expect from a teenage boy. Hegel’s diary entries clearly show him to be a voracious reader of all kinds of material even if, as one can expect from a diary kept by a fourteen- to sixteen-year old boy, they do not contain much that is of overwhelming philosophical interest. The entries nonetheless display a keen and observant adolescent trying out different ideas, doing his best to appear earnest even to himself, and recording various things he was reading and took to be noteworthy.

Hegel’s diary entries might thus seem to make him out to be some kind of reclusive bookworm, a kind of premature old fogey – his nickname, after all, among his friends while he was a student at Tübingen University was “the old man” – unless one keeps in mind that diary entries, like all forms of autobiography, tend to be highly selective. They present not so much the unvarnished truth about someone as they do the diarist’s own attempt to appear to himself (or to his “best friend,” as the addressee of diary entries of the time were often called) in a certain light. Hegel’s diaries thus give us a slightly one-sided picture of Hegel’s personality as a youth, but nonetheless one that he was intent on creating for himself in his own imagination. His sister, for example, remembered him as having many friends (although she also remembered him as lacking any “bodily agility” and, while loving gymnastics, being very “clumsy” at dancing, one of Hegel’s enduring deficiencies that is also attested to by other young women who danced with him at the time).<sup>14</sup> Hegel, on the other hand, in his diary entries keeps trying to portray himself as living up to his mother’s dreams for him as a future man of learning and Württemberg theologian. But even Hegel, the youth who tried so hard to appear to himself as the ever-serious and oh-so-earnest young man of learning, notes in his diary on the first of January, 1787, that he went to a concert apparently given every year, that he could not hear the music for all the toasts being given, but that since he got to see some old friends, time passed quickly and pleasantly, and “looking at pretty girls added no little amount to our entertain-

ment.”<sup>15</sup> Hegel's gregarious nature and sociability were features of his personality for his entire life, and there is no reason to doubt that they were present in him as a youth. Hegel's youthful diary nonetheless reveals his intellectual bent; even in his adolescence, he does not talk much about himself or his feelings, a trait he was to keep his entire life.

He also records on that same day in 1787 that he could not tear himself away from reading *Sophies Reise von Memel nach Sachsen* (*Sophie's Journey from Memel to Saxony*), a sentimental, picaresque novel famous both for its lack of any real literary merit and for its extreme popularity in its day. (When Hegel's first biographer, Karl Rosenkranz, publicized this fact in the 1840s, it prompted Arthur Schopenhauer, who harbored a lifelong passionate dislike for Hegel, to write to a friend, “My favorite book is Homer; Hegel's is *Sophies Reise*.”)<sup>16</sup> What interested Hegel in the novel were no doubt what were for him the vivid descriptions of the landscape, both natural and human, in Sophie's travels, and the descriptions and accounts of the various characters she met along the way; to the young sixteen-year-old Hegel, who tried to think of himself as quite the serious fellow, who came from an ambitious, rising family and whose own ambitions were growing, but who had spent all of his life in relatively provincial Stuttgart, these descriptions of far-away parts of the empire must have seemed particularly enticing and romantic, the kind of thing, no doubt, it would have seemed that a serious young fellow like himself should explore. But this was hardly appropriate reading for a pure “man of learning,” much less for a premature old fogy. Hegel had plenty of adolescent enthusiasm for matters that did not fit his own picture of what he liked to think he was about.

More interesting than whatever Hegel's boyish lapses in literary taste might have been are the diary excerpts Hegel made from various books that he read, for they reveal not only the books he was reading but also the kinds of things he was thinking about at the time (or at least that he liked to appear to himself to be thinking about). He excerpted extensively from a book on world history, for example, and he shows himself to be reading modern authors such as Klopstock. He also excerpted passages from various figures of the German Enlightenment. In many of those excerpts, he copied out various passages from those authors on what “Enlightenment” consists in, and he himself recorded his own reflections on the matter, namely, that he took Enlightenment to come

from the study of the sciences and the arts and to have various levels of learning within itself (a received view of the time).<sup>17</sup> This self-conscious fascination with the Enlightenment is consistent with entries that display no deep skepticism about religion (a trait not merely to be ascribed to a Protestant Württemberg teenager recording thoughts in a diary, but a feature of the mainstream of the German Enlightenment that distinguished it, for example, from the French version). He displayed a knowledge of Rousseauian themes (although it is very unclear whether he actually read Rousseau at this stage in his life or whether he only read *Neuer Emil*, the work of the German Rousseauian J. G. Feder).<sup>18</sup> His entries also show that he read and liked Christian Garve, one of the leading “popular philosophers” – the German equivalent of the Scottish Enlightenment “educators” – and even the Scottish philosopher Adam Ferguson (whom Garve translated). He seems to have been particularly attracted by Garve’s distinction between personal knowledge and the knowledge one gets from books, which itself would have fit well into Hegel’s interest in Rousseauian ideas and with the kind of pietistically influenced, emotionalist Protestantism prevalent in Stuttgart in those days. His entries also show him to be in the process of acquiring a sense of the alleged superiority of Greek culture to modern life, an idea that Johann Joachim Winckelmann had established in German culture and which Garve had helped to refine for a larger public.

The young Hegel was also very aware of the Württemberg hero J. J. Moser; he made a note in Latin in his diary on the date of Moser’s death about the status of the great man.<sup>19</sup> (Moser only lived a few houses down from the Hegels in Stuttgart.) More importantly, Hegel’s own Württemberg background, and the articulations of it by people like Moser, endowed him in his youth with a keen appreciation for the rhetoric of constitutionalism and rights and, more importantly, implicitly gave him a conception of the basis of such rights as lying somehow in social practice; as a young and aware Württembergian, he would have naturally had the idea that these rights can be derived not from abstract precepts but only from the way the traditions and practices of a form of life are interpreted. The young Hegel cut his intellectual teeth hearing stories about how Württemberg had defended itself against tyranny, not by appealing to the rights of man but appealing to what it had established as valid within its own history, to its own socially bounded sense



of the way things are to be done, which was itself deeply rooted in the hearts and characters of Württembergers themselves by virtue of their religious, social, and political institutions.<sup>20</sup>

Interestingly enough, Hegel also seems to have been at least vaguely aware of Kant's philosophy in his Stuttgart days, although given Kant's difficulty and Hegel's age at the time, he can be excused for not saying much about it and can be completely exempted from questions about whether he understood it. He excerpted essays from authors who wrote about Kant; for example, one of his favorite authors, Garve, wrote the first review of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*, only to have the editor of the journal in which it appeared, J. G. Feder (the German Rousseauian whom Hegel also excerpted), chop it up and insert certain accusations into it – namely, that Kant's idealism was only a replay of Berkeley's idealism – which were not in the original. (The intact original was printed in 1783 in the *Allgemeine deutsche Bibliothek*, so Hegel may have seen it.)<sup>21</sup>

Perhaps most significant, though, was his friendship with Jacob Friedrich von Abel, who was on the faculty of the *Karlschule* and who was one of the older teachers who played an important role in Hegel's life. Hegel's sister said in an account of Hegel's life that von Abel “fostered” Hegel (or made Hegel his “protégé,” depending on how one translates her letter).<sup>22</sup> Abel, who had earlier taught and befriended Schiller, later became a professor of philosophy at Tübingen in 1790 (although this was after Hegel had formally finished his prescribed course of “philosophical” studies there and had already begun his theological training). Abel had joined the debate on Kant's philosophy and had in fact published in 1787 (while Hegel was still in the *Gymnasium*) a book on Kant – *Versuch über die Natur der speculativen Vernunft zur Prüfung des Kantischen Systems* (roughly, *An Assay into the Nature of Speculative Reason for a Test of the Kantian System*) – which concerned itself with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics*.<sup>23</sup> In that work, Abel defended the findings of traditional rationalist metaphysics against Kant's critique, asserting against Kant the idea that the world simply must have a creator and that this divine creator establishes the relation of our experience to the world. Whereas Kant had argued that the ways in which we must experience the world and conceive of it could not be extended to apply to things-in-

themselves beyond our experience, Abel rebutted that claim with the simple assertion that Kant's major points, as he put it, were "unconvincing" and did not follow from Kant's own premises.

Abel's book was short in length and even shorter in argument, but it was probably known to Hegel as one of the first things he learned about Kantianism. It is likely that the teenage Hegel thereby inherited some slightly anti-Kantian ideas from Professor Abel, particularly the ideas, first, that Kant's "pure reason" was simply too general and too formal to do the work that Kant said it could do (something that his Württembergian background would have predisposed him to believe); and second, that the traditional proofs of God's existence and of the necessity of a final cause of the world had been left untouched by Kant's system, which itself would have meshed nicely with everything else Hegel was learning about Kant from his excerpts. In addition, it may have filled the young Hegel's mind with the idea that Kant, for all his brilliance, had not offered a serious challenge to the traditional metaphysics of religion, so that he could remain convinced that the truly serious issues had to do only with what an enlightened heart could discover for itself (all opinions he was later, of course, to revise entirely, although his suspicion of what he took to be Kant's formalism was never to go away).<sup>24</sup>

Whatever knowledge the young Hegel had about Kant, though, he was clearly influenced by and quite taken with Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Hegel even recorded in his diary that he had read Lessing's play *Nathan the Wise* (published in 1779). The play, although rather didactic, made a big impression on Hegel (as it did on countless other young men at the time). In the play, Nathan, a Jew, exemplifies what Lessing took to be the ideals of Enlightenment religion: that all religions are inherently one, that the true teaching of enlightened religion is that we should acknowledge our fundamental common humanity, but that nonetheless the differences between people are neither to be eradicated nor disavowed but instead tolerated. Nathan's "message" – that the same basic moral and spiritual characteristics that make one man a Jew make another man a Christian, and that therefore many different forms of religion can peacefully and fruitfully coexist in an enlightened, cosmopolitan polity – both expressed and affirmed that the young Hegel's religious convictions and his Württemberg heritage were not at odds with his Enlightenment and humanistic education, that he could be a

good Württemberger *and* a man of the Enlightenment (although his diary entries show him nonetheless manifesting a typical Württemberg Protestant disdain for Catholic practices). More generally, Nathan's "message" expressed for Hegel the idea that adherence to one's traditions and practices was both important and did not necessarily exclude one from recognizing the common humanity of others. If one followed Nathan's example, one could be both religious and rational, emotional and enlightened, proud of one's own traditions without impugning those of others – all the kinds of things that were quite radical for their own day, however clichéd they may seem to us now. They were the kinds of things to fill the mind of a young man like Hegel with heady dreams of Enlightenment progress. In the very youthful essays on religious and political topics that he was to write immediately after leaving the university, he was to return time and again to the figure of Nathan as a paradigm of enlightened, humane religiosity.

The figure of Lessing himself made, it would seem, an equally big impression on Hegel. When Lessing began his career, there was little to no German literature, no German theater, no German literary criticism to speak of, and virtually no public for such things had they existed. Lessing carved out for himself a German equivalent of the career of a "man of letters" (an idea imported from France), and to do this he had first to educate and virtually create his public. Lessing admirably succeeded in almost all of his tasks; his accomplishments and his character (particularly, his uncompromising honesty about himself) made him the uncontested hero of German literary culture. In this sense, he was the absolute paradigm of an "educator of the people," a *Volkserzieher* – Lessing even titled one of his better-known books *The Education of the Human Race* – and Hegel cluttered his diaries with observations on what it would mean to be such an "educator of the people," clearly imagining such a role for himself. For Hegel, the example of Lessing helped to flesh out in imagination the idea of being a "man of letters," one who would live off his writings (and perhaps also preach at a parish to help pay the bills, since "men of letters" rarely earned a living simply from their letters), who would educate a public towards its enlightenment, and who would embody in his own life the unities of Enlightenment rationality, Rousseauian emotionalism, religious piety, and open-minded, wide-ranging thought.

In short, Hegel's diary entries, his excerpts, and the essays of his

school days in Stuttgart display a keen young mind that is throwing around a lot of thoughts without coming down to anything like a settled position on things. He reveals himself as “for” the Enlightenment in the sense of an unbiased, critical approach to things; he is “for” religion, especially a religion that actually claims the hearts of people and can make equal claim to being “enlightened”; he is “against” dry abstract reason and “mere” book learning (although, ironically, he is clearly a person steeped beyond his years in such “book learning”); he is “for” progress; and, like any good young Rousseauian, he is “for” learning from “experience,” from “life,” from “activity.” He seems to have fully absorbed the emerging German ideal of *Bildung* – a multipurpose term that included the ideals of education, art, culture, and the formation of cultivated taste – which people such as the revered Moses Mendelssohn had identified with Enlightenment itself. A person of *Bildung* was thus “fit” to be the kind of person who was morally entitled to be an “educator of the people,” since he himself could make good claims to being supremely “cultivated and educated” himself. In Württemberg, the ideal of *Bildung* was also fused with a religious dimension – a person of *Bildung* would also have a properly formed religious conscience, and Hegel was no exception. The young Hegel thus applied himself to his studies to become such a man of *Bildung*, and he did so with a striking confidence in his own intellectual powers, a trait that was to be with him for his entire life; the teenage Hegel never seemed to be especially worried that he might be in over his head, or that he might be misrepresenting to himself the content of what he had been reading. He was instead fully confident that he could master any subject, and his experience at the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* (and, we assume, at home) had only helped to support that self-conception and self-confidence.

Hegel was one of a few students selected to give graduation speeches at the *Gymnasium*. Like the others who were selected, he was required to speak on the topic of Turkey. Hegel chose to speak on “The abortive state of art and scholarship in Turkey.” The conventions of the talk were to give the schoolboy the opportunity to display his erudition, praise his teachers, and, of course, to praise the wise administration of Karl Eugen for providing them with a much superior educational environment than was supposedly available in poor, benighted Turkey. Hegel accomplished both tasks dutifully, even if somewhat long-

windedly. With that, he brought his life as a *Gymnasium* student to a close.

His head full of mixed ideas, Hegel set off – full of confidence in his powers but also, no doubt, with a little anxiety about his future – to study theology at the university at Tübingen, a seat of learning where almost all the notables of Württemberg had studied since the fifteenth century. In his own mind, he most likely foresaw himself following a career path partly modeled on that of Lessing: He was to become a minister or at least a theologian; he was to help to “educate” and “enlighten” the public with his learning – in science, philosophy, theology, languages, and literature – and he was to become a “man of letters.” Since almost one quarter of the books being published at the time in Germany were theology books, his career path as a theologian seemed no doubt to him a wise, although – given the already small and rapidly diminishing number of positions for ministers available at the time – also a somewhat risky choice. But, after all, had not Lessing started out his career as a student of theology? At this point in his life, Hegel had firmly allied himself with the Enlightenment, at least as he understood it, and the future he ambitiously imagined for himself as a young man had him playing a role in continuing that progress promised by more Enlightenment. The issue of what was genuinely modern and of how to bring the past up to date, make things more enlightened, formed the hazy edges of the future he was beginning to envision for himself. To that end, so he thought at the time, he would pursue a career in theology, he would preach a new, “enlightened” religion to his parish, and he would write essays (or novels or plays or poetry – at this stage the teenage Hegel could not really have said which) that would assist in the project of increasing enlightenment.

Once at Tübingen, however, he was to strike up a friendship with two other students that would change his life forever; he was to find that the ideas he so self-confidently brought with him were not as clear as he had thought, nor was their fit with each other as seamless as he had imagined it to be; and he was fully to abandon the idea of becoming a pastor, deciding instead at first to embark on the more dangerous path of leading something like an independent life as a “man of letters.” Although Hegel could not have known it at the time, as he left for Tübingen, his Württemberg upbringing had equipped him with an

ambition, a somewhat overweening self-confidence, and a set of ideas that were to generate many of the problems that would eventually lead him fairly late in his career to decide to become a professor of philosophy in a university setting. Indeed, as Hegel's world began to widen for him at the university and immediately thereafter, he came to find that reconciling the particularistic appeal to social mores he had acquired through his Württemberg upbringing with the demands of the more universalistically inclined Enlightenment rationality that he had acquired at home and at the Stuttgart *Gymnasium* was neither personally easy nor immediately achievable. His doubts and frustrations about these ideas would begin at Tübingen but would not be resolved, as he was to find out, until much later.