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HEGEL

One of the founders of modern philosophical thought, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831) has gained the reputation of being one of the most abstruse and impenetrable of thinkers. This first major biography of Hegel in English offers not only a complete, up-to-date account of the life, but also a perspicuous overview of the key philosophical concepts in Hegel's work in a style that will be accessible to professionals and nonprofessionals alike.

Terry Pinkard situates Hegel firmly in the context of his times. The story of that life is one of an ambitious, powerful thinker living in a period of great tumult dominated by the figure of Napoleon. Hegel's friendships and encounters with some of the great minds of this period feature prominently in the narrative: Hölderlin, Goethe, Humboldt, Fichte, Schelling, Novalis, the Schlegels, Mendelssohn, and others. The treatment of the philosophy avoids Hegel's own famously technical jargon in order to display the full sweep and power of Hegel's thought.

The Hegel who emerges from this account is a complex, fascinating figure of European modernity who offers a still-compelling examination of that new world born out of the political, industrial, social, and scientific revolutions of his period.

Terry Pinkard is professor of philosophy at Georgetown University and the author or editor of five previous books, including most recently *Hegel's Phenomenology* (Cambridge, 1996).

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To Susan

*“Wem sonst
als
Dir”*

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You can define a net in one of two ways, depending on your point of view. Normally, you would say that it is a meshed instrument designed to catch fish. But you could, with no great injury to logic, reverse the image and define a net as a jocular lexicographer once did: he called it a collection of holes tied together with string.

You can do the same with a biography. The trawling net fills, then the biographer hauls it in, sorts, throws back, stores, fillets and sells. Yet consider what he doesn't catch: there is always far more of that. The biography stands, fat and worthy-burgherish on the shelf, boastful and sedate: a shilling life will give you all the facts, a ten-pound one all the hypotheses as well. But think of everything that got away, that fled with the last deathbed exhalation of the biographee. What chance would the craftiest biographer stand against the subject who saw him coming and decided to amuse himself?

Julian Barnes, *Flaubert's Parrot*

The events and actions of this history [of philosophy] therefore have the characteristic that in their content and worth it is not so much personality and individual character which enters, whereas in political history the subject of deeds and events is the individual in his particular natural make-up, genius, passions, energy, or weakness of character—in a word, what makes him *this* individual. Here [in the history of philosophy] on the other hand the productions are all the more excellent the less is their merit attributed to a particular individual, the more, on the other hand, do they belong to freedom of thinking, to the general character of man as man, the more is thinking itself, devoid of personality, the productive subject.

Hegel, *Introduction to the Lectures on the History of Philosophy*

Contents

	<i>Preface</i>	<i>page</i> ix
	<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xv
	<i>Notes on the Text</i>	xvi
1	Hegel's Formation in Old Württemberg	1
2	The Protestant Seminary in Tübingen	19
3	From Berne to Frankfurt to Jena: Failed Projects and Fresh Starts	45
4	Texts and Drafts: Hegel's Path to the <i>Phenomenology</i> from Frankfurt to Jena	118
5	<i>The Phenomenology of Spirit</i> : Hegel Finds His Voice	203
6	Life in Transition: From Jena to Bamberg	221
7	Nuremberg Respectability	266
8	From the <i>Phenomenology</i> to the "System": Hegel's <i>Logic</i>	332
9	Heidelberg: Coming into Focus	352
10	Berlin: Reform and Repression at the Focal Point (1818–1821)	418
11	Hegel's <i>Philosophy of Right</i> : Freedom, History, and the Modern European State	469
12	Consolidation: Berlin, Brussels, Vienna (1821–1824)	495
13	Assertion: Berlin, Paris (1824–1827)	524
14	Thinking through Modern Life: Nature, Religion, Art, and the Absolute	562

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[More information](#)

viii

Contents

15 Home: 1827–1831

605

<i>Notes</i>	667
<i>Chronology of Hegel's Life</i>	745
<i>Hegel's Works Cited</i>	751
<i>Works Cited</i>	755
<i>Index</i>	767

Preface

HEGEL IS ONE of those thinkers just about all educated people think they know something about. His philosophy was the forerunner to Karl Marx's theory of history, but unlike Marx, who was a materialist, Hegel was an idealist in the sense that he thought that reality was ultimately spiritual, and that it developed according to the process of thesis/antithesis/synthesis. Hegel also glorified the Prussian state, claiming that it was God's work, was perfect, and was the culmination of all human history. All citizens of Prussia owed unconditional allegiance to that state, and it could do with them as it pleased. Hegel played a large role in the growth of German nationalism, authoritarianism, and militarism with his quasi-mystical celebrations of what he pretentiously called the Absolute.

Just about everything in the first paragraph is false except for the first sentence.

What is even more striking is that it is all clearly and demonstrably wrong, has been known to be wrong in scholarly circles for a long time now, *and* it still appears in almost all short histories of thought or brief encyclopedia entries about Hegel.

But if that isn't Hegel, who then was Hegel? And how did he come to be so badly misunderstood?

Hegel was born on the cusp of our modern era, and his life spanned the two great revolutions of the modern age. Born in 1770, Hegel grew up at a time when kings were secure on their thrones, and to the casual observer, society was in the shape it had assumed many years before. In

his teenage years, the French and the American revolutions exploded that world forever, and by the time he died in 1831 the industrial revolution was gearing up; train travel and photography were on the scene, steam engines were driving industry, and the world was witnessing the stirrings of the move toward economic globalization that we now find such a normal part of our world.

Although we in our own day like to think of massive technological change as rapidly altering our lives, probably no generation lived through such a wrenching transformation of ways of life as did Hegel's. The impact that industrialization and the upheavals of the political revolutions of the time had on people's lives was exceptional; the world was suddenly drawing closer, the prospect of revolution hung permanently in the charged atmosphere of the times, wars of revolution spread both hope and destruction across the continent, and by the 1830s former backwaters were suddenly being linked by steamships and locomotives to each other and to the great metropolises of the world. Whole new professions were suddenly springing up to service the rapidly emerging economies of the modern world. Young men and women of the time, not without justification, felt quite strongly that they were leading unprecedented lives, that the past and even the world of their parents were no longer adequate guides to life in the new world emerging before them. Some reacted against that giddy feeling of being cut free and longed for a restoration of the world that had been; others entertained revolutionary hopes of a transformed humanity in the future.

Hegel himself was not indifferent to those revolutionary events and to those deeply felt experiences of his own generation. He was drawn to them, he embraced them, and he made it his life's vocation to try to comprehend those circumstances and that experience, to make sense of the vast changes he and others personally encountered as young Germans and Europeans growing up at the end of the eighteenth century and living through the disruptions of that period and the dawn of the nineteenth century. Much of his philosophy was an attempt to come to terms with what those events might and must mean to us, "we moderns," who are still trying to grapple with the meaning for our own lives of market societies and the celebration of freedom. Hegel has been called, not without reason, the first great philosopher to make modernity itself the object of his thought.

Despite his influence on so much subsequent thought, Hegel remains

a figure of great mystery within a great deal of contemporary philosophy, and the mystery deepens and varies depending on whether one looks at the reception of his thought in the context of Anglophone philosophy or of continental European philosophy. In continental European thought, almost everybody has reacted to him, and he remains a force in that tradition of philosophy, a thinker whose influence can be picked up almost everywhere. Behind so many worries about, for example, the status of modern culture, the relation of science to the humanities, the role of the state, how we are to understand history itself, what are the possibilities for modern art – there stands Hegel, looming as one of the central figures in the debate.

Curiously enough, though, his thought has also repeatedly been declared to be definitively, once and for all, dead and gone, something that has long since been overcome – yet, equally curiously, the alleged corpse keeps reviving and reappearing. A contemporary French philosopher once remarked that the great anxiety for all modern philosophers is that no matter how many new paths they take, they will find all of them to be dead ends, with Hegel waiting at the end of each of them, smiling.

For many, of course, Hegel's own reputation has been inextricably entwined with the reputation of the most famous person to claim to adapt his thought to new circumstances, Karl Marx. Marx and his followers claimed to have transformed Hegel's supposedly "idealist" dialectic into a "materialist" theory of history, society, and revolution. Not unsurprisingly, the reaction to Hegel after Marx became intermingled with the reaction to Marxism itself, and depending on what one thought about that, one took a different stance toward Hegel. For much of the twentieth century, "Hegel" seemed only to be the nonindependent part of a phrase, "from Hegel to Marx."

Likewise, because of a bowdlerized presentation of his philosophy by the deservedly obscure Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus, which was immensely popular in Germany in the middle of the nineteenth century (and read by Marx), Hegel's thought quickly became synonymous with the rather arid formula of thesis/antithesis/synthesis, a formula that Hegel himself never used and which in any event misrepresents the structure of his thought. But the characterization stuck, and to many, Hegel remained simply the idealist progenitor of the materialist Marx, which (depending on one's attitude toward Marxism) made him a hero

or a villain, but in both cases, somebody whose own thought was not important and whose only real importance lay in the people he influenced.

Hegel's reception in Anglo-American philosophy has always been much different from his reception on the European continent. Although Hegel has always had his devoted readers in Anglophone intellectual circles, he has also been firmly, sometimes even vociferously, rejected by a large and important segment of Anglophone philosophy as having nothing of any importance to say.

In many places in Anglophone philosophy, it is probably safe to say that he has not been so much rejected as simply ignored. It is not out of the ordinary to find major departments of philosophy where he is not taught at all, especially at the graduate level. It is hardly a secret that there are large numbers of Anglo-American philosophers who refuse to read Hegel, who seem to have completely absorbed Bertrand Russell's criticisms of Hegel without ever having paused at Hegel himself. Among them, the suspicion remains, first fostered by Russell and the other great analytic critics of German Idealism at the beginning of the century, that the clarity and argumentative rigor that count as one of the great achievements of modern analytic philosophy can only be attained and sustained by a thorough refusal and avoidance of the dark prose and dense continental thought of Hegel. For these people in contemporary philosophy, Hegel stands not as one of the great thinkers of the modern era, someone with whom one simply must come to terms, but as somebody to be avoided virtually at all cost, who has nothing of importance to say, and whose thought is at best only a wicked temptation from which pliable young minds especially must be protected.

Almost as if he were an unwanted guest, though, Hegel has refused to go away even in analytic philosophy itself; instead, he keeps popping up on many of the byways of contemporary intellectual life. Why, though, was he shunted off to the side? What happened to Hegel to make him such a pariah?

Part of the explanation is straightforwardly historical. Hegel was blamed in Anglophone countries for the German authoritarianism that led to the First World War and for the kind of nationalist worship of the state embodied by the Nazis that led to the Second World War. Not only was he suspected of teutonic obfuscationism and of being an imposter within the halls of the academy, his name became associated

with the moral disasters of the twentieth century. When after the Second World War Karl Popper published his immensely influential book *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, laying blame for much of the German catastrophe on the baleful influence of Hegel's thought, the final nail in the coffin for Hegelianism seemed to have been put in place. That Popper's treatment of Hegel was a scandal in itself did nothing to assuage the fears of many that the study of Hegel's works as if they might have something to say was itself a dangerous enterprise.

Hegel survived the attacks and still remains around, although not entirely so. It is still not unusual at any number of major universities to find famous professors in one department celebrating Hegel as one of the intellectual giants of the modern world while equally famous professors in another department at the same university deride him as humbug, poppycock, maybe even a fraud. Hegel, the mystery figure, still remains as controversial as if he had been lecturing on the campuses only yesterday.

Why, though, if he is long since dead and gone, if his thought has clearly long since been superseded and shown to be false and maybe even dangerous – why has he remained around? The passions he provokes within the academy seem oddly out of place for a figure in the history of philosophy whose influence has supposedly already come and gone.

Who then was Hegel?

Acknowledgments

ROBERT PIPPIN read some early drafts of this work; if I footnoted all the instances where a formulation was made better because of his criticism, the book would probably be twice as long as it is now.

Footnoting all the points at which Rolf-Peter Horstmann gave me invaluable advice about various things would constitute a manuscript in itself.

H. S. Harris also generously read the whole manuscript in draft and offered a wealth of tips and criticisms, bringing his own vast erudition regarding this subject to my assistance. I have profited from Professor Harris's insights into the subject, and I am very grateful to him for sharing his busy schedule with my manuscript.

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Axel Markert of Tübingen University helped me out with all kinds of details, both logistical and otherwise, during my periodic trips to Germany, which were financed by summer research grants from the Graduate School at Georgetown University and by a stint as a visiting professor teaching a class at Tübingen.

Susan Pinkard is the real inspiration behind this work. Her historian's eye led her to suggest various lines of thought and ideas for improving the manuscript. Without her input and suggestions, it simply would not have been written.

Notes on the Text

IN ORDER TO accommodate the variety of readers who might want to read something about Hegel, I have broken the book up into sections that might appeal to those different readers, where feasible. Some will be more interested in the story of Hegel's life, some will be more interested in the particular works under discussion, and some will be more interested in different parts at different times. I have tried therefore as far as possible to make room for these selective readers. Sometimes, especially when I was dealing with the earlier periods in Hegel's life, the goal of keeping the purely biographical material separate from discussion of the works was impossible; but I have tried to demarcate those sections in the relevant chapters. Some chapters (such as that on Hegel's *Science of Logic*, I would think) will be of primary interest mostly to Hegel scholars. But for those, for example, who want to know what Hegel's life was like in Nuremberg but do not particularly want to read about the *Science of Logic* (and vice versa), I have separated those chapters off from the more biographical story of his life. Likewise, I have treated Hegel's intellectual development in the extant texts from his Jena period in a completely separate chapter (Chapter 4) from the one devoted to his life during that period. Chapters 4, 5, 8, 11, and 14 are thus purely "philosophical" chapters.



Besides the quantity and well-known obscurity of Hegel's own works, despite the controversy that surrounds them, there is also the fact that his life intersected with his thought in a variety of deep ways, such that one sometimes cannot firmly pry apart the biographical from the philosophical in his development. But despite that being the case, Hegel himself firmly resisted the idea that the philosophical author's life sheds

any light on his works. He was never particularly forthcoming about his own life, and it sometimes seems as if he wanted simply to vanish into his works altogether. Although a voluminous amount of material has been found and published by the diligent and careful scholars associated with the Hegel Archives in Germany, there thus still remains much about Hegel that is not and perhaps never can be known.

A *fully* comprehensive study of Hegel's life and work would therefore necessarily be a multivolume affair, and this was to be a one-volume work intended for a wider audience than that of Hegel scholars and professors of philosophy. To create such a work, I have had to make some compromises along the way. For example, I have had to cut short what for specialists would have been many interesting discussions, and I have sometimes been forced to take a stand on some issue or another without being able to go into all the details explaining why I took that stand or why I disagree with some other readings. To give only one example: There is by now an immense amount of literature on the authorship of one extremely short Hegelian text (a couple of pages in its transcription) that has gone by the name "The Oldest System Program in German Idealism." Although the manuscript is in Hegel's own handwriting, Hegel's authorship of the text is hotly disputed. I devote only a few sentences to who the author may be, even though an entire book could be devoted exclusively to that issue.

Nonetheless, I have tried to make my case for telling this particular story about Hegel's life, how his works are to be interpreted, and how his life and his works intersect within the body of the book, taking into account the exigencies of keeping it shorter than it obviously could have been. Such a goal demands that one take a variety of shortcuts. I have not given, for example, much emphasis to Hegel's relationship to his onetime friend Issak von Sinclair, although there are those who think that his influence on Hegel's life and thought is much more profound than I do; I disagree, but making the full case for my disagreement would have taken more pages than would be feasible here. In all instances, though, I have tried to indicate at least what I take the points to be, even if sometimes those assertions might strike those Hegel scholars whose concern is with a very particular and limited period in his development as a bit dogmatic. I have also not given much consideration at all to the differences between the various editions of Hegel's *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1817, 1827, 1830), although

that is surely an interesting and important story in itself. Unfortunately, taking into account all the small nuances of Hegel's relationships and concerns would produce something like a virtually unreadable eight-volume biography, and that was not my aim. I have also tried to situate Hegel's life within the revolutionary events that transpired around him, since one simply cannot understand Hegel's own experience without also having some grasp of the circumstances surrounding his life and the connections among them.



Translation of Hegel's key terms has not always been easy, and there does not exist even an unvarying set of agreements among translators about how to render certain key terms. I have therefore taken the liberty of altering almost all of the English translations where I cite them in order to preserve a certain uniformity of language and style throughout the text.

This of course required me to make some decisions about how to render key terms. Sometimes in a translation I give the German word in parentheses, but I have tried to avoid this practice as much as possible. With some words such as *Willkür*, which I render as "freedom of choice" and sometimes as "choice," I often enclose the German word in parentheses, since that particular rendering is not without controversy among philosophical scholars, and it is good for those who care about those controversies to be able to see where those terms occur. In most cases where I thought that an issue of translation might be at hand, I have put the German terms in the footnote. Unlike some other translators of Hegel, I have always rendered *Begriff* as "concept."

Many of Hegel's earlier translators – dubiously, to my mind – decided that Hegel's technical terminology was so special that it deserved capitalization, but I have resorted to capitalizing only one word in Hegel's lexicon: "Idea" for "*Idee*." That term has a technical meaning that departs sharply from the English word "idea," so that calling attention to it via capitals and quotation marks seemed the prudent choice.

As any reader moderately familiar with Hegel knows, there simply is no good term by which to directly translate his use of *Aufhebung* and its cognates. On the whole, I have used the term of art earlier translators coined expressly for the purpose of translating the term, namely, "sub-

lation.” “Sublation” means raising, canceling, and preserving simply because that is what the coiners stipulated; Hegel used the ordinary German term because it actually does carry those different meanings in different contexts.

For those readers who might skip a couple of chapters and find themselves encountering what seem to be unexplained technicalities or German words, a quick look at the index should point one to the pages on which an explanation of the term is given. There are several places where I use the German terms “*Bildung*” and “*Wissenschaft*” in their original forms, having explained them earlier. The index is also a guide to getting at the meanings of those terms.



Those who find footnotes distasteful can, on the whole, safely ignore the tiny superscripted numbers in the text. The notes to the text are mostly there to give sources for quotations and references and for the most part will only be of interest to other Hegel scholars (particularly for all chapters after the first two). I should also point out that in those notes, I have self-consciously violated one or two common conventions of footnoting where following them would, I thought, make life more difficult for the reader; thus, I have avoided entirely the use of “op. cit.,” since, when one is trying to track down the source of a note, finding an “op. cit.” is usually more irritating than enlightening; instead I give a shortened citation for the source in question. Full citations can always be found in the list of Works Cited.

I have also had to resist the always-present temptation to enter into various lengthy debates with other scholars in the footnotes; the grounds for doing so were simply to restrict the size of the present volume. This will be regretted, I am sure, by those who will think that I really should have bothered to argue against so-and-so’s alternative interpretation on such-and-such point or who think that so-and-so’s views on some controversial point really should have been aired. On the whole, I have to admit that I agree with them. I too regret it, but in a book such as this, there would simply be too many such points to argue, and the notes would have ended up being as long as the text itself. This is a decision that obviously involves a lot of trade-offs, not all of them entirely happy; but at least it keeps an already weighty volume down in size.

I can only hope that all those who think that this or that point should

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have been stated differently will take that as an invitation to state that disagreement itself. Disagreement is the nature of contemporary philosophy in a fragmented world, and if the book serves as a catalyst to such disagreements and objections, so much the better. Hegel, who loved the power of oppositions, might himself have been ironically amused, and, who knows, maybe even deeply pleased by that prospect.