

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

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Western Philosophy
19th-century philosophy



G.W.F. Hegel

Name: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Birth: August 27, 1770 (Stuttgart, Germany)

Death: November 14, 1831 (aged 61) (Berlin
Germany)

School/tradition: German Idealism; Founder of Hegelia

Main interests: Logic, Philosophy of history, Aesthet
Religion, Metaphysics, Epistemology
Political Science,

Notable ideas: Absolute idealism, Dialectic, Sublatio

Influences: Aristotle, Anselm, Descartes, Goethe,
Spinoza, Rousseau, Böhme, Kant, Fic
Hölderlin, Schelling

Influenced: Feuerbach, Croce, Marx, Engels, Bau
Bradley, Lenin, Lukács, Heidegger, S
Barth, Küng, Habermas, Gadamer,
Moltmann, Kierkegaard, Giovanni Ge
Deleuze, Žižek

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (IPA: ['ɡeɔʁk
'vɪlhɛlm 'fʁiːdʁɪç 'heːɡəl]) (August 27, 1770 –
November 14, 1831) was a German philosopher
and, with Johann Gottlieb Fichte and Friedrich
Wilhelm Joseph Schelling, one of the
representatives of German idealism.

Hegel influenced writers of widely varying
positions, including both his admirers (Bauer,
Marx, Bradley, Sartre, Küng), and his detractors
(Schelling, Kierkegaard, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche,
Heidegger). Hegel discussed, arguably for the first
time, a relation between nature and freedom,
immanence and transcendence, and the unification
of these dualities without eliminating either pole or

reducing it to the other. His influential conceptions are of speculative logic or "dialectic," "absolute idealism," "Spirit," the "Master/Slave" dialectic, "ethical life," and the importance of history.

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Life

Early years: 1770-1801

Childhood in Stuttgart

Hegel was born on August 27, 1770 in Stuttgart, in the Duchy of Württemberg in southwestern Germany. Christened Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, he was known as Wilhelm to his close family. His father, Georg Ludwig, was *Rentkammersekretär* (secretary to the revenue office) at the court of Karl Eugen, Duke of Württemberg.^[1] Hegel's mother, Maria Magdalena Louisa (*née* Fromm), was the daughter of a lawyer at the High Court of Justice at the Württemberg court. She died when Hegel was thirteen of a "bilious fever" (*Gallenfieber*) which Hegel and his father also caught but narrowly survived.^[2] Hegel had a

sister, Christiane Luise (1773-1832), and a brother, Georg Ludwig (1776-1812), who was to perish as an officer in Napoleon's Russian campaign of 1812.^[3]

At the age of three Hegel went to the "German School". When he entered the "Latin School" aged five, he already knew the first declension, having been taught it by his mother.

In 1784 Hegel entered Stuttgart's *Gymnasium Illustre*. During his adolescence Hegel read voraciously, copying lengthy extracts in his diary. Authors he read include the poet Klopstock and writers associated with the Enlightenment such as Christian Garve and Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Hegel's studies at the *Gymnasium* were concluded with his *Abiturrede* ("graduation speech") entitled "The abortive state of art and scholarship in Turkey."

Student in Tübingen (1788-93)

At the age of eighteen Hegel entered the Tübinger Stift (a Protestant seminary attached to the University of Tübingen), where two fellow students were to become vital to his development—his exact contemporary, the poet

Friedrich Hölderlin, and the younger brilliant philosopher-to-be Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph Schelling. Sharing a dislike for what they regarded as the restrictive environment of the Seminary, the three became close friends and mutually influenced each other's ideas. They watched the unfolding of the French Revolution with shared enthusiasm. Schelling and Hölderlin immersed themselves in theoretical debates on Kantian philosophy, from which Hegel remained aloof. Hegel at this time envisaged his future as that of a *Popularphilosoph*, i.e., a "man of letters" who serves to make the abstruse ideas of philosophers accessible to a wider public; his own felt need to engage critically with the central ideas of Kantianism did not come until 1800.

House tutor in Berne (1793-96) and Frankfurt (1797-1801)

Having received his theological certificate (*Konsistorialexamen*) from the Tübingen Seminary, Hegel became *Hofmeister* (house tutor) to an aristocratic family in Berne (1793-96). During this period he composed the text which has become known as the "Life of Jesus" and a book-length manuscript entitled "The Positivity of the Christian Religion". His relations with his

employers having become strained, Hegel gladly accepted an offer mediated by Hölderlin to take up a similar position with a wine merchant's family in Frankfurt, where he moved in 1797. Here Hölderlin exerted an important influence on Hegel's thought.^[4] In Frankfurt Hegel composed the essay "The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate" (not published during Hegel's lifetime).

Jena, Bamberg and Nuremberg: 1801-1816

Early university career in Jena (1801-1807)

In 1801 Hegel came to Jena with the encouragement of his old friend Schelling, who was Extraordinary Professor at the University there. Hegel secured a position at the University as a *Privatdozent* (unsalaried lecturer) after submitting a *Habilitationsschrift* (dissertation) on the orbits of the planets. Later in the year Hegel's first book, *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, appeared. He lectured on "Logic and Metaphysics" and, with Schelling, gave joint lectures on an "Introduction to the Idea and Limits of True Philosophy" and held a "Philosophical Disputorium". In 1802

Schelling and Hegel founded a journal, the *Kritische Journal der Philosophie* ("Critical Journal of Philosophy") to which they each contributed pieces until the collaboration was ended by Schelling's departure for Würzburg in 1803.

In 1805 the University promoted Hegel to the position of Extraordinary Professor (unsalaried), after Hegel wrote a letter to the poet and minister of culture Johann Wolfgang von Goethe protesting at the promotion of his philosophical adversary Jakob Friedrich Fries ahead of him.^[5] Hegel attempted to enlist the help of the poet and translator Johann Heinrich Voß to obtain a post at the newly nascent University of Heidelberg, but failed; to his chagrin, Fries was later in the same year made Ordinary Professor (salaried) there.^[6]

His finances drying up quickly, Hegel was now under great pressure to deliver his book, the long-promised introduction to his System. Hegel was putting the finishing touches to this book, now called the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, as Napoleon engaged Prussian troops on October 14, 1806, in the Battle of Jena on a plateau outside the city. On the day before the battle, Napoleon entered the city of Jena. Hegel recounted his impressions in a letter

to his friend Friedrich Immanuel Niethammer:

I saw the Emperor – this world-soul – riding out of the city on reconnaissance. It is indeed a wonderful sensation to see such an individual, who, concentrated here at a single point, astride a horse, reaches out over the world and masters it [...] this extraordinary man, whom it is impossible not to admire.^[7]

Although Napoleon chose not to close down Jena as he had other universities, the city was devastated and students deserted the university in droves, making Hegel's financial prospects even worse. The following February Hegel's landlady Christiana Burkhardt (who had been abandoned by her husband) gave birth to their son Georg Ludwig Friedrich Fischer (1807-31).^[8]

Newspaper editor in Bamberg (1807-08) and headmaster in Nuremberg (1808-15)

In March 1807 Hegel moved to Bamberg, where Niethammer had declined and passed on to Hegel an offer to become editor of a newspaper, the

Bamberger Zeitung. Hegel, unable to find more suitable employment, reluctantly accepted. Ludwig Fischer and his mother (whom Hegel may have offered to marry following the death of her husband) stayed behind in Jena.^[9]

He was then, in November 1808, again through Niethammer, appointed headmaster of a *Gymnasium* in Nuremberg, a post he held until 1816. Here Hegel adapted his recently published *Phenomenology of Spirit* for use in the classroom. Part of his remit being to teach a class called "Introduction to Knowledge of the Universal Coherence of the Sciences," Hegel developed the idea of an encyclopedia of the philosophical sciences, falling into three parts (logic, philosophy of nature, and philosophy of spirit).^[10]

Hegel married Marie Helena Susanna von Tucher (1791-1855), the eldest daughter of a Senator, in 1811. This period saw the publication of his second major work, the *Science of Logic* (*Wissenschaft der Logik*; 3 vols., 1812, 1813, 1816), and the birth of his two legitimate sons, Karl Friedrich Wilhelm (1813-1901) and Immanuel Thomas Christian (1814-1891).

Professor in Heidelberg and Berlin: 1816-

1831

Heidelberg (1816-18)

Having received offers of a post from the Universities of Erlangen, Berlin, and Heidelberg, Hegel chose Heidelberg, where he moved in 1816. Soon after, in April 1817, his illegitimate son Ludwig Fischer (now ten years old) joined the Hegel household, having thus far spent his childhood in an orphanage.^[11] (Ludwig's mother had died in the meantime.)^[12]

Hegel published *The Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sentences in Outline* (1817) as a summary of his philosophy for students attending his lectures at Heidelberg.

Berlin (1818-31)

In 1818 Hegel accepted the renewed offer of the chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin, which had remained vacant



Hegel with students

since Fichte's
death in 1814.

Lithograph by F. Kugler

Here he published
his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821).
Hegel's efforts were primarily directed at
delivering his lectures; his lecture courses on
aesthetics, the philosophy of religion, the
philosophy of history, and the history of
philosophy were published posthumously from
lecture notes taken by his students. His fame
spread and his lectures attracted students from all
over Germany and beyond.

Hegel was appointed Rector of the University in
1830. He was deeply disturbed by the riots for
reform in Berlin in that year. In 1831 Frederick
William III decorated him for his service to the
Prussian state. In August 1831 a cholera epidemic
reached Berlin and Hegel left the city, taking up
lodgings in Kreuzberg. Now in a weak state of
health, Hegel went out little. As the new semester
began in October, Hegel returned to Berlin, with
the (mistaken) impression that the epidemic had
largely subsided. On November 14 Hegel was
dead. The physicians pronounced the cause of
death as cholera, but it is more likely he died from
a gastrointestinal disease.^[13] In accordance with
his wishes, Hegel was buried on November 16 in

the Dorotheenstadt Cemetery next to Fichte and Solger.

Hegel's son Ludwig Fischer had died shortly before while serving with the Dutch army in Jakarta; the news of his death never reached his father.^[14] Early the following year Hegel's sister Christiane committed suicide by drowning. Hegel's sons Karl, who became a historian, and Immanuel, who followed a theological path, lived long lives during which they safeguarded their father's *Nachlaß* and produced editions of his works.

Works

Hegel published only four books during his life: the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (or *Phenomenology of Mind*), his account of the evolution of consciousness from sense-perception to absolute knowledge, published in 1807; the *Science of Logic*, the logical and metaphysical core of his philosophy, in three volumes, published in 1811, 1812, and 1816 (revised 1831); *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, a summary of his entire philosophical system, which was originally published in 1816 and revised in 1827 and 1830; and the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, his

political philosophy, published in 1822. In the latter, he criticized von Haller's reactionary work, which claimed that laws were not necessary. He also published some articles early in his career and during his Berlin period. A number of other works on the philosophy of history, religion, aesthetics, and the history of philosophy were compiled from the lecture notes of his students and published posthumously.



Hegel's Grave in Berlin

Hegel's works have a reputation for their difficulty and for the breadth of the topics they attempt to cover. Hegel introduced a system for understanding the history of philosophy and the world itself, often described as *a progression in which each successive movement*

emerges as a solution to the contradictions inherent in the preceding movement. For example, the French Revolution for Hegel constitutes the introduction of real individual political freedom into European societies for the first time in recorded history. But precisely because of its absolute novelty, it is also absolutely radical: on the one hand the upsurge of violence required to carry out the revolution cannot cease to be itself, while on the other, it has already consumed its opponent. The revolution therefore has nowhere to turn but onto its own result: the hard-won freedom is consumed by a brutal Reign of Terror. History, however, progresses by learning from its mistakes: only after and precisely because of this experience can one posit the existence of a constitutional state of free citizens, embodying both the benevolent organizing power of rational government and the revolutionary ideals of freedom and equality. Hegel's remarks on the French revolution led German poet Heinrich Heine to label him "The Orléans of German Philosophy".

Hegel's writing style is difficult to read; he is described by Bertrand Russell in the *History of Western Philosophy* as the single most difficult philosopher to understand. This is partly because Hegel tried to develop a new form of thinking and

logic, which he called "speculative reason" and which includes the more famous concept of "dialectic," to try to overcome what he saw as the limitations of both common sense and of traditional philosophy at grasping philosophical problems and the relation between thought and reality.

Teachings

The concept of freedom through Hegel's method

Hegel's thinking can be understood as a constructive development within the broadly Platonic tradition that includes Aristotle, Plotinus, and Kant. To this list one could add Proclus, Meister Eckhart, Leibniz, Spinoza, Jakob Boehme, and Rousseau. What all these thinkers share, which distinguishes them from materialists like Epicurus, the Stoics, and Thomas Hobbes, and from empiricists like David Hume, is that they regard freedom or self-determination both as real and as having important ontological implications, for soul or mind or divinity. This focus on freedom is what generates Plato's notion (in the *Phaedo*, *Republic*, and *Timaeus*) of the "soul" as having a higher or

fuller kind of reality than inanimate objects possess. While Aristotle criticizes Plato's "Forms," he preserves Plato's preoccupation with the ontological implications of self-determination, in his conceptions of ethical reasoning, the hierarchy of soul in nature, the order of the cosmos, and the prime mover. Kant, likewise, preserves this preoccupation of Plato's in his notions of moral and noumenal freedom, and God.

In his discussion of "Spirit" in his *Encyclopedia*, Hegel praises Aristotle's *On the Soul* as "by far the most admirable, perhaps even the sole, work of philosophical value on this topic" (par. 378). And in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* and his *Science of Logic*, Hegel's concern with Kantian topics such as freedom and morality, and with their ontological implications, is pervasive. Rather than simply rejecting Kant's dualism of freedom versus nature, Hegel aims to subsume it within "true infinity," the "Concept" (or "Notion": *Begriff*), "Spirit," and "ethical life" in such a way that the Kantian duality is rendered intelligible (as mentioned above), rather than remaining a brute "given."

The reason why this subsumption takes place in a *series* of concepts is that Hegel's method, in his *Science of Logic* and his *Encyclopedia*, is to begin

with ultra-basic concepts like Being and Nothing, and to develop these through a long sequence of elaborations, including those mentioned in the previous paragraph. So that a solution that's arrived at, in principle, in the account of "true infinity" in the *Science of Logic's* chapter on "Quality," is repeated in new guises at later stages, all the way to "Spirit" and "ethical life," in the third volume of the *Encyclopedia*.

In this way, Hegel intends to defend the germ of truth in Kantian dualism against reductive or eliminative programs like those of materialism and empiricism (which one can see at work in many of Hegel's critics, including Marx, Nietzsche, and Russell). Like Plato, with his dualism of soul versus bodily appetites, Kant wants to insist on the mind's ability to question its felt inclinations or appetites and to come up with a standard of "duty" (or, in Plato's case, "good") which goes beyond them. Hegel preserves this essential Platonic and Kantian concern in the form of infinity's going beyond the finite (a process that Hegel in fact relates to "freedom" and the "ought" ^[15]), the universal's going beyond the particular (in the Concept), and Spirit's going beyond Nature. And Hegel renders these dualities *intelligible* by (ultimately) his argument in the

"Quality" chapter of the *Science of Logic* that the finite has to become infinite in order to achieve "reality." This is because, as Hegel suggests by his introduction of the concept of "reality" ^[16], what determines itself rather than depending on its relations to other things for its essential character, is more fully "real" (following the Latin etymology of "real": more "thing-like") than what does not. Finite things don't determine themselves, because, as "finite" things, their essential character is determined by their boundaries, over against other finite things. So, in order to become "real," they must go beyond their finitude ("finitude *is* only as a transcending of itself" ^[17]).

The result of this argument is that finite and infinite--and, by extension, particular and universal, nature and freedom--don't face one another as two independent realities, but instead the latter (in each case) is the *self-transcending* of the former ^[18]. Thus rather than being merely "given," without explanation, the relationship between finite and infinite (and particular and universal, and nature and freedom) becomes intelligible. And a challenge is issued to reductive and eliminative programs like materialism and empiricism: What kind of "reality" do *your* fundamental entities or data possess?

Evolution through contradictions and negations

The obscure writings of Jakob Böhme had a strong effect on Hegel. Böhme had written that the Fall of Man was a necessary stage in the evolution of the universe. This evolution was, itself, the result of God's desire for complete self-awareness. Hegel was fascinated by the works of Spinoza, Kant, Rousseau, and Goethe, and by the French Revolution. Modern philosophy, culture, and society seemed to Hegel fraught with contradictions and tensions, such as those between the subject and object of knowledge, mind and nature, self and Other, freedom and authority, knowledge and faith, the Enlightenment and Romanticism. Hegel's main philosophical project was to take these contradictions and tensions and interpret them as part of a comprehensive, evolving, rational unity that, in different contexts, he called "the absolute idea" or "absolute knowledge".

According to Hegel, the main characteristic of this unity was that it evolved through and manifested itself in contradiction and negation. Contradiction and negation have a dynamic quality that at every

point in each domain of reality—consciousness, history, philosophy, art, nature, society—leads to further development until a rational unity is reached that preserves the contradictions as phases and sub-parts by lifting them up (*Aufhebung*) to a higher unity. This whole is mental because it is mind that can comprehend all of these phases and sub-parts as steps in its own process of comprehension. It is rational because the same, underlying, logical, developmental order underlies every domain of reality and is ultimately the order of self-conscious rational thought, although only in the later stages of development does it come to full self-consciousness. The rational, self-conscious whole is not a thing or being that lies outside of other existing things or minds. Rather, it comes to completion only in the philosophical comprehension of individual existing human minds who, through their own understanding, bring this developmental process to an understanding of itself.

(Note: “Mind” and “Spirit” are the common English translations of Hegel’s use of the German “Geist”. Some Hegelian scholars have argued that either of these terms overly “psychologize” Hegel, implying a kind of disembodied, solipsistic consciousness like “ghost” or “soul”. Geist

combines the meaning of spirit, as in god, ghost or mind, with an intentional force.)

Central to Hegel's conception of knowledge and mind (and therefore also of reality) was the notion of identity in difference, that is that mind externalizes itself in various forms and objects that stand outside of it or opposed to it, and that, through recognizing itself in them, is "with itself" in these external manifestations, so that they are at one and the same time mind and other-than-mind. This notion of identity in difference, which is intimately bound up with his conception of contradiction and negativity, is a principal feature differentiating Hegel's thought from that of other philosophers.

Civil society

Influence

There are views of Hegel's thought as a representation of the summit of early 19th century Germany's movement of philosophical idealism. It would come to have a profound impact on many future philosophical schools, including schools that opposed Hegel's specific dialectical idealism, such

as Existentialism, the historical materialism of Karl Marx, historicism, and British Idealism.

Hegel's influence was immense both within philosophy and in the other sciences. Throughout the 19th century many chairs of philosophy around Europe were held by Hegelians, although Kierkegaard, Feuerbach, Marx, and Engels were all opposed to the most central themes of Hegel's philosophy. After less than a generation, Hegel's philosophy was suppressed and even banned by the Prussian right-wing, and was firmly rejected by the left-wing in multiple official writings.

After the period of Bruno Bauer, Hegel's influence did not make itself felt again until the philosophy of British Idealism and the 20th century Hegelian Neo-Marxism that began with Georg Lukács. The more recent movement of communitarianism has a strong Hegelian influence, although a Hegel specialist would argue that that influence is not strong enough, since communitarianism tends toward relativism, which Hegel's philosophy does not.

Hegel's legacy (interpretation)

Reading Hegel

Some of Hegel's writing was intended for those with advanced knowledge of philosophy, although his "Encyclopedia" was intended as a textbook in a university course. Nevertheless, like many philosophers, Hegel assumed that his readers would be well-versed in Western philosophy, up to and including Descartes, Spinoza, Hume, Kant, Fichte, and Schelling. For those wishing to read his work without this background, introductions to Hegel and commentaries about Hegel may suffice. However, even this is hotly debated since the reader must choose from multiple interpretations of Hegel's writings from incompatible schools of philosophy. Presumably, reading Hegel directly would be the best method of understanding him, but this task has historically proved to be beyond the average reader of philosophy. This difficulty may be the most urgent problem with respect to the legacy of Hegel.

One especially difficult aspect of Hegel's work is his innovation in logic. In response to Immanuel Kant's challenge to the limits of Pure Reason, Hegel developed a radically new form of logic, which he called *speculation*, and which is today

popularly called dialectics. The difficulty in reading Hegel was perceived in Hegel's own day, and persists into the 21st century. To understand Hegel fully requires paying attention to his critique of standard logic, such as the law of contradiction and the law of the excluded middle, and, whether one accepts or rejects it, at least taking it seriously. Many philosophers who came after Hegel and were influenced by him, whether adopting or rejecting his ideas, did so without fully absorbing his new speculative or dialectical logic.

Left and Right Hegelianism

Another confusing aspect about the interpretation of Hegel's work is the fact that past historians have spoken of Hegel's influence as represented by two opposing camps. The Right Hegelians, the allegedly direct disciples of Hegel at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität (now known as the Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin), advocated a Protestant orthodoxy and the political conservatism of the post-Napoleon Restoration period. The Left Hegelians, also known as the Young Hegelians, interpreted Hegel in a revolutionary sense, leading to an advocacy of atheism in religion and liberal democracy in politics.

In more recent studies, however, this old paradigm has been questioned. For one thing, no Hegelians of the period ever referred to themselves as Right Hegelians. That was a term of insult that David Strauss (a self-styled Left Hegelian) hurled at Bruno Bauer (who has most often been classified by historians as a Left Hegelian, but who rejected both titles for himself). For another thing, no so-called "Left Hegelian" described himself as a follower of Hegel. This includes Moses Hess as well as Karl Marx. Several "Left Hegelians" openly repudiated or insulted the legacy of Hegel's philosophy. The critiques of Hegel offered from the "Left Hegelians" radically diverted Hegel's thinking into new directions—and form a disproportionately large part of the literature on and about Hegel.

Perhaps the main reason that so much writing about Hegel emerges from the so-called Left-Hegelians is that the Left-Hegelians spawned Marxism, which inspired a global movement lasting more than 150 years, encompassing the Russian Revolution, the Chinese Revolution and even more national-liberation movements of the 20th century. Yet that isn't, to be precise, any direct result of Hegel's philosophy.

20th century interpretations of Hegel were mostly shaped by one-sided schools of thought: British Idealism, logical positivism, Marxism, Fascism and postmodernism. However, since the fall of the USSR, a new wave of Hegel scholarship arose in the West, without the preconceptions of the prior schools of thought.

Walter Jaeschke and Otto Pöggeler in Germany, as well as Peter Hodgson and Howard Kainz in America, are notable for their many contributions to post-USSR thinking about Hegel as published by the Hegel Society of America. Perhaps the most challenging publication from that source has been the new English edition of Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion (1818-1831)* which has challenged most 20th century views about Hegel.

Triads

In previous modern accounts of Hegelianism (to undergraduate classes, for example), Hegel's dialectic was most often characterized as a three-step process of "Thesis, antithesis, synthesis", namely, that a "thesis" (e.g. the French Revolution) would cause the creation of its "antithesis" (e.g. the Reign of Terror that followed), and would

eventually result in a "synthesis" (e.g. the Constitutional state of free citizens). However, Hegel used this classification only once, and he attributed the terminology to Immanuel Kant. The terminology was largely developed earlier by Johann Fichte the neo-Kantian. It was spread by Heinrich Moritz Chalybäus in a popular account of Hegelian philosophy, and since then the misfit terms have stuck.

Believing that the traditional description of Hegel's philosophy in terms of thesis-antithesis-synthesis was mistaken, a few scholars, like Raya Dunayevskaya have attempted to discard the triadic approach altogether. According to their argument, although Hegel refers to *"the two elemental considerations: first, the idea of freedom as the absolute and final aim; secondly, the means for realising it, i.e. the subjective side of knowledge and will, with its life, movement, and activity"* (thesis and antithesis) he doesn't use "synthesis" but instead speaks of the *"Whole"*: *"We then recognised the State as the moral Whole and the Reality of Freedom, and consequently as the objective unity of these two elements."* Furthermore, in Hegel's language, the "dialectical" aspect or "moment" of thought and reality, by which things or thoughts turn into their opposites

or have their inner contradictions brought to the surface, what he called "aufhebung", is only preliminary to the "speculative" (and not "synthesizing") aspect or "moment", which grasps the unity of these opposites or contradiction. Thus for Hegel, reason is ultimately "speculative", not "dialectical".

To the contrary, scholars like Howard Kainz explain that Hegel's philosophy contains thousands of triads. However, instead of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis," Hegel used different terms to speak about triads, for example, "immediate-mediate-concrete," as well as, "abstract-negative-concrete." Hegel's works speak of synthetic logic. Nevertheless, it is widely admitted today that the old-fashioned description of Hegel's philosophy in terms of "thesis-antithesis-synthesis" was always inaccurate. At the same time, however, those same terms survive in scholarly works, such is the persistence of this misnomer.

Advocates

In the latter half of the 20th century, Hegel's philosophy underwent a major renaissance. This was due to: (a) the rediscovery and reevaluation of

Hegel as a possible philosophical progenitor of Marxism by philosophically oriented Marxists; (b) a resurgence of the historical perspective that Hegel brought to everything; and (c) an increasing recognition of the importance of his dialectical method.

The book that did the most to reintroduce Hegel into the Marxist canon was perhaps Georg Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness*. This sparked a renewed interest in Hegel reflected in the work of Herbert Marcuse, Theodor W. Adorno, Ernst Bloch, Raya Dunayevskaya, Alexandre Kojève and Gotthard Günther among others. The Hegel renaissance also highlighted the significance of Hegel's early works, i.e. those published prior to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. The direct and indirect influence of Kojève's lectures and writings (on the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in particular) mean that it is not possible to understand most French philosophers from Jean-Paul Sartre to Jacques Derrida without understanding Hegel.

Beginning in the 1960s, Anglo-American Hegel scholarship has attempted to challenge the traditional interpretation of Hegel as offering a metaphysical system: this has also been the approach of Z.A. Pelczynski and Shlomo Avineri.

This view, sometimes referred to as the 'non-metaphysical option', has had a decided influence on many major English language studies of Hegel in the past 40 years.

U.S. neorightist political theorist Francis Fukuyama's controversial book *The End of History and the Last Man* was heavily influenced by Alexandre Kojève. Among modern scientists, the physicist David Bohm, the mathematician William Lawvere, the logician Kurt Gödel and the biologist Ernst Mayr have been interested in Hegel's philosophical work.

A late 20th century literature in Western Theology that is friendly to Hegel includes such writers as Dale M. Schlitt (1984), Theodore Geraets (1985), Philip M. Merklinger (1991), Stephen Rucker (1995) and Cyril O'Regan (1995). The contemporary theologian Hans Küng has also advanced contemporary scholarship in Hegel studies.

Recently, two prominent American philosophers, John McDowell and Robert Brandom (sometimes, half-seriously, referred to as the Pittsburgh Hegelians), have produced philosophical works exhibiting a marked Hegelian influence.

Beginning in the 1990s, after the fall of the USSR, a fresh reading of Hegel took place in the West. For these scholars, fairly well represented by the Hegel Society of America and in cooperation with German scholars such as Otto Pöggeler and Walter Jaeschke, Hegel's works should be read without preconceptions. Marx plays a minor role in these new readings, and some contemporary scholars have suggested that Marx's interpretation of Hegel is irrelevant to a proper reading of Hegel. Some American philosophers associated with this movement include Clark Butler, Vince Hathaway, Daniel Shannon, David Duquette, David MacGregor, Edward Beach, John Burbidge, Lawrence Stepelevich, Rudolph Siebert, Theodore Geraets and William Desmond.

Since 1990, new aspects of Hegel's philosophy have been published that were not typically seen in the West. One example is the idea that the essence of Hegel's philosophy is the idea of freedom. With the idea of *freedom*, Hegel attempts to explain world history, fine art, political science, the free thinking that is science, the attainment of spirituality, and the resolution to problems of metaphysics.

Detractors

Hegel used his system of dialectics to explain the whole of the history of philosophy, science, art, politics and religion, but he has had many critics over the centuries.

Perhaps the most famous critics were the Left-Hegelians, including Ludwig Feuerbach, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and their followers in the 19th century.

Arthur Schopenhauer despised Hegel on account of the latter's alleged historicism, among other reasons.

Actually, Hegel had the most well-attended classes of any philosopher of his time. The belief that Hegel once said, "Only one man understands me, and even he does not" (Strathern, 1997), is incorrect, since it was actually stated by Fichte about Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling when Hegel persuaded Schelling to abandon his teacher Fichte.

Søren Kierkegaard, one of Hegel's earliest critics, criticized Hegel's "absolute knowledge" unity, not

only because it was arrogant for a mere human to claim such a unity, but also because such a system negates the importance of the individual in favour of the whole unity. In *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, one of Kierkegaard's main attacks of Hegel, Johannes Climacus, Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author, writes: *"So-called systems have often been characterized and challenged in the assertion that they abrogate the distinction between good and evil, and destroy freedom. Perhaps one would express oneself quite as definitely, if one said that every such system fantastically dissipates the concept existence. ... Being an individual man is a thing that has been abolished, and every speculative philosopher confuses himself with humanity at large; whereby he becomes something infinitely great, and at the same time nothing at all."*

Some 20th century critics suggested that Hegel glosses over the realities of history in order to fit it into his dialectical mold. Erich Heller opines in his *The Disinherited Mind* (1952) that Hegel was proved wrong — by the poets who succeeded him, not by the unfolding reality. Some newer philosophers who prefer to follow the tradition of British Philosophy have made similar statements. In Britain, Hegel exercised an influence on the

philosophical school called "British Idealism," which included Francis Herbert Bradley and Bernard Bosanquet, in England, and Josiah Royce at Harvard. Analytic philosophy, which dominated philosophy departments in the United States and the United Kingdom, was virtually founded when G. E. Moore and Bertrand Russell rejected British Idealism and their colleagues' admiration for Hegel. Hegel remained largely out of fashion in these departments for much of the twentieth century.

Perhaps the harshest criticism has come from the famous psychologist, Carl G. Jung, who seemed to charge Hegel with mental illness when he wrote:

A philosophy like Hegel's is a self-revelation of the psychic background and, philosophically, a presumption. Psychologically it amounts to an invasion by the Unconscious. The peculiar, high-flown language Hegel uses bears out this view -- it is reminiscent of the megalomaniac language of schizophrenics, who use terrific, spellbinding words to reduce the transcendent to subjective form, to give

banalities the charm of novelty, or pass off commonplaces as searching wisdom. So bombastic a terminology is a symptom of weakness, ineptitude, and lack of substance."

– Carl G. Jung, *On the Nature of the Psyche*, 1928

Obscurantism

A well known charge of obscurantist "pseudo-philosophy" against Hegel was made by Arthur Schopenhauer, who wrote that Hegel's philosophy is:

... a colossal piece of mystification which will yet provide posterity with an inexhaustible theme for laughter at our times, that it is a pseudo-philosophy paralyzing all mental powers, stifling all real thinking, and, by the most outrageous misuse of language, putting in its place the hollowest, most senseless, thoughtless, and, as is confirmed by its success, most stupefying verbiage...

– Arthur Schopenhauer, *On the Basis of Morality*

The height of audacity in serving up pure nonsense, in stringing together senseless and extravagant mazes of words, such as had been only previously known in madhouses, was finally reached in Hegel, and became the instrument of the most barefaced, general mystification that has ever taken place, with a result which will appear fabulous to posterity, as a monument to German stupidity.

– Arthur Schopenhauer

Moreover, modern analytic and positivistic philosophers have considered Hegel a principal target because of what they consider the obscurantism of his philosophy.

Hegel was aware of his 'obscurantism' and saw it as part of philosophical thinking that grasps the limitations of everyday thought and concepts and

tries to go beyond them. Hegel wrote in his essay "Who Thinks Abstractly?" that it is not the philosopher who thinks abstractly but the person on the street, who uses concepts as fixed, unchangeable givens, without any context. It is the philosopher who thinks concretely, because they go beyond the limits of everyday concepts to understand their broader context. This can make philosophical thought and language seem mysterious or obscure to the person on the street.

The Absolute

Nietzsche criticized Hegel's claims about the Absolute.

Words are but symbols for the relations of things to one another and to us; nowhere do they touch upon absolute truth. ... Thus it is, today, after Kant, an audacious ignorance if here and there, especially among badly informed theologians who like to play philosopher, the task of philosophy is represented as being quite certainly "comprehending the Absolute with the consciousness," somewhat completely in the form "the

Absolute is already present, how could it be sought somewhere else?" as Hegel has expressed it.

– Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks*, § 11.

Totalitarianism

Santayana interpreted Hegel as defending whoever held power, as though dominance equated with goodness.

The worship of power is an old religion, and Hegel, to go no farther back, is full of it; but like traditional religion his system qualified its veneration for success by attributing success, in the future at least, to what could really inspire veneration; and such a master in equivocation could have no difficulty in convincing himself that the good must conquer in the end if whatever conquers in the end is the good.

– George Santayana, *Winds of Doctrine*, I

Karl Popper, a critic of Hegel in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, suggests that Hegel's system forms a thinly veiled justification for the rule of Frederick William III, and that Hegel's idea of the ultimate goal of history is to reach a state approximating that of 1830s Prussia. Popper argued that Hegel's philosophy eventually inspired both Marxism and fascism.^[19]

Indeed, Hegel points out that all personal relations can thus be reduced to the fundamental relation of master and slave, of domination and submission. Each must strive to assert and prove himself, and he who has not the nature, the courage, and the general capacity for preserving his independence, must be reduced to servitude. This charming theory of personal relations has, of course, its counterpart in Hegel's theory of international relations. Nations must assert themselves on the Stage of History; it is their duty to attempt the domination of the World.

– Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its*

Following Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard, Popper also accused Hegel of having a vacuous philosophy, labelling it "bombastic and mystifying cant".

Notes

1. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 2-3; p. 745.
2. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 3, incorrectly gives the date as September 20, 1781, and describes Hegel as aged eleven. Cf. the index to Pinkard's book and his "Chronology of Hegel's Life", which correctly give the date as 1783 (pp. 773, 745); see also German Wikipedia http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Georg_Wilhelm
3. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 4.
4. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 80.
5. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 223.
6. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 224-5.
7. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 228.
8. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 192.
9. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 238.
10. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 337.

11. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 354-5.
12. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 356.
13. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, pp. 658-9.
14. ^ Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography*, p. 548.
15. ^ See *Science of Logic*, trans. Miller [Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities, 1989], pp. 133-136 and 138, top
16. ^ *Science of Logic*, p. 111
17. ^ *Science of Logic*, p. 145
18. ^ See *Science of Logic*, p. 146, top
19. ^ This view of Hegel as an apologist of state power and precursor of 20th century totalitarianism was criticized by Herbert Marcuse in his *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, on the grounds that Hegel was not an apologist for any state or form of authority simply because it existed: for Hegel the state must always be rational. Other scholars, e.g. Walter Kaufmann and Shlomo Avineri, have also criticized Popper's theories about Hegel [1]. An analysis against Popper's arguments can also be found in Joachim Ritter's influential work, *Hegel and the French Revolution*.

See also

- Thesis, antithesis, synthesis

- Political consciousness

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External links

- The new HegelWiki
- A superior biography of Hegel with graphics

- Hegel.net - resources available under the GNU FDL
- Hegel.net - wiki article on Hegel
- Alicia Farinati - Hegelian Works Several articles on Hegel. Available in English, Spanish and French
- Commented link list
- Hegel mailing lists in the internet
- Explanation of Hegel, mostly in German
- Discussion of the Hegelian tradition, including the Left and Right schism
- The Hegel Society of America
- Hegel in Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
- <http://www.gwfhegel.org/>
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Hegel texts online

- Works by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel at Project Gutenberg
- Philosophy of History Introduction
- Hegel's The Philosophy of Right
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