

Elements of the Philosophy of Right

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel , *Allen W. Wood (Editor)* , *Raymond Geuss (Editor)*

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This book is a translation of a classic work of modern social and political thought, Elements of the Philosophy of Right. Hegel's last major published work, is an attempt to systematize ethical theory, natural right, the philosophy of law, political theory and the sociology of the modern state into the framework of Hegel's philosophy of history. Hegel's work has been interpreted in radically different ways, influencing many political movements from far right to far left, and is widely perceived as central to the communication tradition in modern ethical, social and political thought. This edition includes extensive editorial material informing the reader of the historical background of Hegel's text, and explaining his allusions to Roman law and other sources, making use of lecture materials which have only recently become available. The new translation is literal, readable and consistent, and will be informative and scholarly enough to serve the needs of students and specialists alike.

Elements of the Philosophy of Right Details


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From Reader Review Elements of the Philosophy of Right for online ebook

Grant Francis says

Don't read this. It will make your head crack open and your brains fall out. Especially if you read Heidegger at the same time.

Manny says

THIS BOOK IS BORING I READ 3 PAGES THEN I SAID IM TIRED OF THIS

Davide Clementi says

Mettere cinque stelle a un testo di Hegel è come dare un voto al Giudizio Universale di Michelangelo. [Presto o tardi recensirò, o meglio, cercherò di dare l'idea in sé e per sé dei Lineamenti di filosofia del diritto]

Bradley says

While I cannot say that I fully agree with his views on Religion and the State... just look at the nutty things that religious folk believe these days? I do think that his sections on democracy could be construed as somewhat implicitly fascistic. Here we see the birth of the Continental Tradition in many ways. It was not Descartes, or Kant, but Hegel who first truly understood the promise of constructing a World Philosophy from the Enlightened Light on the Hill that was Modern Europe. So many contemporary post-modern philosophers have discredited his work, notably Derrida in Margins of Philosophy turns to one appalling footnote on "History moves progressively from East to West, the further West one goes the closer you get to Absolute Mind...etc." something like that.... come off it already you pinheads. How can you discredit something as beautiful and brilliant as the age-old question of understanding all of human existence. Hegel was really the last philosopher to attempt and possibly succeed at a universal metaphysical project. Bravo! Once more into the breach dear sir. Fight the good fight.

Matthew says

Incredible work, tough read, but worth the effort if you want a glimpse into the social development/realisation of 'Right', and what 'ideas' are. (Way beyond Nietzsche) This book will forever live on my top shelf- A life changer, and as yet perhaps, not fully recognised for the masterpiece it is. 'Truly to escape Hegel involves an exact appreciation of the price we have to pay to detach ourselves from him. It assumes that we are aware of the extent to which Hegel, insidiously perhaps, is close to us; it implies a knowledge, in that which permits us to think against Hegel, of that which remains Hegelian. We have to determine the extent to which our anti-Hegelianism is possibly one of his tricks directed against us, at the end of which he stands, motionless, waiting for us.'

(Foucault. Discourse on Language, Inaugural Lecture at the Collège de France, 1970-1971)

Eric says

I have a lot of feelings about this book. I came to it, really, in order to better understand the vast number of authors who have since tweaked and critiqued Hegel's philosophy and ethics (Kierkegaard, Marx, various post-structuralists). He's a bad writer forwarding a philosophy that--especially in hindsight--seems pretty heinous at the end, but here's my best attempt at a charitable summary:

Elements outlines an ethical philosophy that prioritizes/has its end in the state. That is, unlike a Kantian morality based on duty for duty's sake, or a Rousseauian approach that focuses on a social contract that aims to serve individual freedom, Hegel's "human being" only has being and only has its valid end in serving the state. It's worth noting that this is no burden to Hegel's humans, as the state he imagines will be one they'll happily and willingly serve. But let me step back to return to this point.

Hegel's definition of the individual being begins with a sort of reverse of Heidegger's ek-stasis. Instead of Dasein starting as a physical being that then stands outside itself and thus recognizes itself as such, Hegel begins with pure subjectivity—a sort of raw potentiality. This subjectivity, which constitutes the essential nature of individuality, must then recognize itself as a finite existence—a limited being that thus is not just pure subjectivity. But then, this individualized finite being that recognizes itself as such goes on to recognize the essential subjectivity at its core. This is what makes it a "human being": A sort of self-referential capability that allows objectified subjectivity to recognize its essence. It is not a simple "synthesis"—perhaps more of a balancing of poles.

But, for Hegel, Dasein only recognizes its objectivity within the framework of a state. In a "state of nature" it isn't present to itself because nature isn't present to it as such. It is immersed. It is only in the relation to others within the framework of the state that the self gives up the arbitrariness and contingency of its pure subjective will and both receives and grants recognition. The state becomes a sort of macrocosm of the human being recognizing itself as such, with humans forming families and corporations and civil societies that then enter into relationship with each other, only achieving actualization and reality (which is synonymous with rationality for Hegel) by submitting themselves to the end of the state. But they submit themselves willingly through a dialectical process of subordinating their will to the state, not through the force of the state. The latter's bad news. And then states enter into relationships of recognition with other states, and all are subordinated to the world-spirit in a similar manner to the individual human's subordination to the individual state.

So Hegel's philosophy of ethics depends on a sort of self-presence that's been challenged extensively by the psychoanalytic and post-structuralist traditions, and on a deference to the authority of the state that, especially post-World War II, seems incredibly problematic. He also sees rational truth as remarkably immanent and wholly comprehensible through the workings of states, chastising "those who believe that the divine is incomprehensible and that cognition of the truth is a futile enterprise" and hoping they "will take no further part in the discussion" (306). And yet, before he so thoroughly privileges the state and monarchs in the book's latter sections, some of his points about being only occurring when one encounters an other, and the divided nature of individuals, negative existence, and the difficulty of parsing responsibility within complex social structures are thought-provoking and prescient.

So three stars for the subsequent tweaks/critiques it made possible, though more like 1.5 if I were taking it in isolation.

tangible it gets easier to read – although section I on abstract right is probably a little easier going than all the stuff about subjectivity in section II. But Hegels' metaphysics is really heavy and it doesn't help that he writes in this Kant inspired – poor old Immanuel couldn't help it – chewy difficult way. Once you get through this and it finally clicks with you, it's amazing: the way it's expressed at the end section on world history is a particularly beautiful awe inspiring conception, and it's one that you'll only get the full force of if you diligently follow his method from the ground up - or the mind/spirit outwards or whatever.

Hegel wasn't a Nazi, there is some evidence that the Nazis may have read a bit of Hegel – of course the Nazis read him, he was German – he certainly wasn't a big influence on them (read Allen Wood's excellent introduction if you don't believe me, or much better read section 5 of Walter Kauffman's essay 'The Hegel Myth and its Method'), they clearly didn't read him very well because there's little if any of his ideas reflected in the way they ran things, so can we please shut up about it. Admittedly Hegel is deeply conservative and relatively right wing with it: he is very misogynistic; is pro arranged marriage and is a monarchist. But he is also staunchly anti-slavery and deeply concerned with poverty, and the kind of constitutional monarchy he recommends is in a sense actually more democratic than our 2-parties-that-aren't-going-to-listen-to-a-single-thing-you-say system.

Another thing to say about Hegel's conservatism is that he was writing shortly after the French Revolution: as a young man Hegel was reportedly quite excited about the revolution but you would probably become conservative if you lived through revolutionaries massacring thousands of innocent people, even so, he still had some fairly positive things to say about Napoleon even in the Philosophy of Right itself. Not only did he have clear motives for being conservative from a personal perspective but he also had good reasons from a political point of view, at the time universities were seen as a kind of hot bed for political activism and many lecturers had been fired because of suspicions they were inflaming anti-authoritarian ideas in their teaching.

One theory I found particularly exciting in Hegel is his theory of drives. It struck me that Hegel and Nietzsche's theories of drives are so similar that Hegel's must be a precursor to Nietzsche's theory, I won't go into any detail but I will say that both theories are vastly more plausible and sophisticated than Freud's tenuously reductive one.

Marx's debt to Hegel is vast, and there is obviously a lot written on it, but the thing that strikes me is he was very eager to attack Hegel in his young age but it's quite telling that in his later works he bends his words - particularly his metaphysics and his view of dialectics - to resemble something really not so far away from Hegel.

One of the really great things about Hegel is his consistent challenges to Kant, I take it here that this is Hegel's way of paying his respect to Kant by honouring him with a dialectical response. I particularly like Hegel's very sober intuitive challenge to Kant's good shopkeeper, but probably the most overarching manifestation of Hegel's antithesis is his commitment to contingency. Not only does this mean that Hegel is more committed to making sure his metaphysics fits with the real world it also means he actually goes into subjects as diverse as suicide, arranged marriage, constitutional monarchy, love, private property, industry. It's in these details that he reveals himself to be a little inconsistent but the real world examples give you a much richer contingent grounding in which to test your own intuitions on as well understand Hegel's thinking.

Similarly Hegel spells out much better than Kant how you should actually go about living your life, this makes it a practical book which whether you agree with him or not can have genuine everyday practical applications for you. The metaphysics of Hegel's theory of how to live your life I agree with in a sense and a great deal of the conclusions I very definitely don't, but because of the way the book goes from abstract to particular via the dialectical method means you can trace those inferences and find where you think the fault line is.

Another great benefit of this is that none of the more contingent matters remains mystical: as Dudley Knowles points out, Hegel and Nozick may have some fairly similar views on private property but in Nozick it remains completely mystical - however much you disagree with Hegel's rationale, at least it's there. Basically this book is a great reminder of what modern philosophy really lacks: for all of its benefits in terms

of specialisation one of the things that academic and particularly analytic philosophy suffers from is a lack of cohesion; too many topics are missed and there is too much duplication of labour throughout the various branches; Hegel's rigorous system philosophy is original, comprehensive and relatively cohesive if a little contradictory here and there.

Roy Lotz says

Among the pantheon of philosophers, Hegel is one of the most intimidating. His very name evokes fear: the towering behemoth of obscure German prose, looming in the distance, spinning out sentences that can trip up the most astute and careful readers.

Yet, after reading two of his books, I feel that his reputation for obscurity is—like Kant's—significantly exaggerated. It's a certain style of writing, sure; and several sentences are, as far as I'm concerned, gobbledygook. But like any academic worthy of the title, Hegel takes care to repeat his points again and again; so the reader at least comes away with the gist of what Hegel wishes to say. What's more, Hegel's particular oracular style of writing can be alluring, even powerful.

Prose aside, Hegel is worth reading because his ideas are both extraordinary and extraordinarily influential. To understand either Marxism or much of continental philosophy, Hegel must be grappled with. So what is he trying to get across in this book? What are Hegel's views on politics? On the state? And why are they so controversial?

I'll do my best to summarize what I understand (or, more accurately, what I think I understand), to help any wayfarers that are battling their way through this German sage. But, to be clear, I'm no Hegel scholar. I'm just a man with a Goodreads account.

Hegel, to me, is Spinoza with a twist. Let's start with what the two thinkers have in common. For both, the kind of freedom prized by liberals—religious freedom, economic freedom, even free will itself—is, in a sense, illusory. This 'freedom' is really a misunderstanding. To think of people as being 'free' requires that you think of them as individuals distinct from their surroundings and the laws of the universe. But humans are products as much shapers of the universe, and obey the same fundamental laws; so humans cannot be adequately understood as free beings. Consequently, for Spinoza and Hegel, to think yourself 'free' is merely to fail to understand the reasons *why* you are doing something.

Both thinkers also consider the universe to be some kind of absolute. Every part of reality fits together into a perfect whole—a whole that can only be improperly understood when subdivided into its constituent parts. Therefore logic, not empirical science, is more effective at coming to grips with the nature of things, since logical categories are not bound by space and time. Furthermore, this reality is, for them, not something wholly material. For Spinoza, mind and matter are two aspects of the underlying substance of Nature; for Hegel, externality and internality are two aspects of Geist.

But now for their important differences. Spinoza thought that Nature went on its course indifferent to human survival: "Nature does not work with an end in view. For the eternal and infinite Being, which we call God or Nature, acts by the same necessity as that whereby it exists." Hegel couldn't disagree more. Hegel views history as the unfolding of the World Spirit. This leads him to making all sorts of teleological claims (claims about the purpose of things). When Hegel looks at human history, he does not see the chance machinations of politicians, princes, and priests, but the necessary and fated development of the World Spirit as manifest in human affairs. The Chinese, Indians, Greeks, and Romans become merely different aspects of this Spirit—rungs on the ladder in its climb towards perfection.

So what is the final stage of the World Spirit for Hegel? It is the realization that everything that is, is mind (or spirit; *Geist* is a difficult word to translate). Therefore, humans become sort of like Aristotle's prime-mover: thought thinking about thought. For mind to understand itself as everything is to understand everything in itself. All contradictions disappear. Objective and subjective turn into mere illusions.

This is Hegel's jumping-off point into the world of political thought. In this book, Hegel is trying to figure out what the end of history would be like, what form would the perfect state would take. He makes several twists and turns in his argument as he approaches this picture, all following his famous dialectic method. And he arrives at a state that many have found to be totalitarian. Several passages in this book are striking for the amount of power and authority Hegel thinks the perfect state should wield. Why did Hegel think that totalitarianism was a swell thing?

At times like this it is important to remember that you cannot understand Hegel through traditional categories, since these are the very things he is trying to leave behind. Something more is going on here; Hegel doesn't merely wish to set up a fascist tyranny. What separates his idea and a repressive regime hinges on his conception of freedom.

Consider this: if you were omniscient—if you knew everything—would you have free will? It seems to me that, to know everything would require knowing what will happen in the future; and to know what will happen in the future would mean that you aren't really choosing. It's like the Tralfalmadores in Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*. They see all things, past and future, and so the idea of choosing never even occurs to them: "I've visited thirty-one inhabited planets in the universe, and I have studied reports on one hundred more. Only on Earth is there any talk of free will."

Just so, at the final stage in Hegel's historic process, the idea of choice will disappear. That's because choice requires that you think of yourself as distinct from the external world. But at the end of history, mind understands itself as mind, and humanity understands itself as one with the world. "The gaily coloured world is before me; I stand opposed to it, and in this relation I cancel and transcend the opposition, and make the content my own. The I is at home in the world, when it knows it, and still more when it has conceived it." Therefore, the kind of freedom that liberals prize—"negative freedom" as it is normally termed—disappears: "Negative freedom is actuated by a mere solitary abstract idea, whose realization is nothing but the fury of desolation."

As in the great mystic texts, all oppositions and contradictions disappear in this state of total knowledge. The distinction between slavery and freedom disappears because the citizens make no choices, and yet are not compelled by outward force to do anything, since all of reality is understood to be mind and, therefore, a part of them.

The opposition between citizens and the state also disappears. If you think about it, in order for the state to think of it as being opposed to the people, it has to think of itself as distinct from the people. But, of course, to understand the situation fully and completely is to understand that, in the perfect state, the interests of the people and the state exactly coincide. Therefore the ruler/ruled distinction also melts away in Hegel's utopia. The monarch, the legislature, the executive, and the people all become necessary and self-conscious aspects of a complete whole.

This all strikes me as (more or less) theoretically unimpeachable. But the reason it raises eyebrows and attracts condemnation is—as I'm sure many of you have thought by now—because this sort of perfect harmony is practically impossible. Almost 200 years after this treatise was written, the state and the people's 'superficial' differences in perspectives have not melted away; and too many examples from history since Hegel's time have shown the danger in trusting too much in the state. So how could Hegel suggest something so totally impracticable?

This is where the religious side of Hegel comes into play. It seems to me that Hegel's philosophy does not depend on logic alone—not even the idiosyncratic logic he liked to employ. Rather, to be a Hegelian (and to be a Marxist or a Freudian) requires a certain kind of faith. It is obviously not logically necessary that a World Spirit exist, and that it manifest itself in the few thousand years of human history—a mere blink of the eye in comparison with the history of the universe. To paraphrase Bertrand Russell, it is bizarre to think that a development of cosmic importance took place in a few hundred years in the vicinity of the Mediterranean.

I'll cut short my attempted summary and criticism here; I fear it has been banal and superficial enough. I will only add that students of this book should keep in the back (and front) of their minds Hegel's dialectical method. Look out for his tripartite divisions, and try and figure out how they're related. Also try and spot points where Hegel shifts from logical criticism to a kind of dogmatic insistence on his worldview. Or, if the feeling takes you, just let yourself get swept away in the torrent of gnomic prose, and enjoy the mad contortions of a mind both strange and profound.

Jason Marianna says

At times, you think you're reading a book in a foreign language. At other times, you KNOW you are. This is, BY FAR, the most difficult text I've ever read. Hegel's style and the clumsy translation force you to take hours to read and reread what other authors typically cover in minutes. It is a rare case where the cliff notes and online helps are better and more informative than the text itself.

The ideas themselves, while influential, are not worth the work it takes to understand them. From a game theory standpoint, the philosophy is useful to remember. In a real world setting, it's fantasy. It earns an extra star for being influential. Otherwise, it's garbage.

Cain S. says

At the heart of Hegel's *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821) is a conception of reason as a normative social institution. The practical use of reason in dealing with daily life is the peculiar human game of acting in accordance with laws—even those only taken true by convention. This rule directed behaviour consists of giving and asking for reasons [a], judging their appropriateness [b], justifying acts, and assertions, one has committed to by them [c], and modifying one's commitments to fall in line with judgements of appropriateness that we are bound to [d]. The essentially social character of the practical use of reason makes the rulishness of rules a somewhat loosely regulated matter. For, of course, we often find out we've committed to contradictory assertions, or judged someone's actions incorrectly, or given offence to reasons from our ignorance. But, for the most part the game of reasons is the most stable one.

Read a fuller exposition of the first 130 arguments of the EPR here:

<http://deonticscorekeeping.wordpress....>

Erik Graff says

I read this book for David Schweickart's course on Social and Political Philosophy during the second

semester of 1980/1 at Loyola University Chicago. Previously, I'd read Hegel's Phenomenology of Mind and his Logic only. Like the former, unlike the latter, Philosophy of Right is a relatively easy read. Unlike the Phenomenology, it is neither very profound nor challenging, intellectually speaking. It is, however, an important book as regards how it applies the very intriguing thought-forms of the Phenomenology to practical purposes in the real world.

I had appropriated the Phenomenology as a challenge. Kaufmann, in his Hegel, emphasizes how, in Hegel's time, it was possible to be on top of all the disciplines. Thus, a real dialectic of material facts to conceptual models was, at that time, at least plausible. One could appropriate world history personally as if it were a course of study leading ultimately to...the omega point of the Absolute Spirit. Certainly, the prospect of this was alluring in a mystical sort of way, the argument and its exposition pointing like an arrow ahead. Hegel's vision filled me with a sense of rapture.

Philosophy of Right, however, takes the world historical progress of the spirit in one of its aspects to a definitive conclusion and shatters the vision, Hegel becoming an apologist for the status quo and revealing himself, in his later years at least, as a sycophantic toady of his paymaster, the Prussian state.

The applications of Hegelian thinking in actual world politics give one pause. In addition to Hegel's own pathetic, apologetic performance one may adduce both the corporativism of fascistic and Nazi ideologies as well as the millenarian certainties of some "scientific" socialists.

I am decrying neither the vision nor the challenge posed by Hegel's early work, just those persons who believe they have captured the vision and mastered the challenge.

Jacob Aitken says

The mature epitome of Hegel's thought. If you aren't intimately familiar with Hegel's vocab (and the language of 19th century Idealism) then don't begin here. The first section begins with Hegel's discussion of modern rights, but one gets the feeling that by rights Hegel doesn't mean what we normally mean. It is not until one consults the "additions" at the end of the book does it become clearer.

Hegel's organization of civil society is nothing less than brilliant. The basic unit of social order (I am deliberately not using the terms "civil society" or "state" because they have specific Hegelian connotations) is the family, not the individual. However, the family will dissolve as its members marry off, move out, etc. They are then reabsorbed into the larger unity of the State.

Hegel isn't using the word "state" in the sense that we use it. By it he means 1) the mind of God on earth, (2) but more particularly he means the linguistic and cultural nexus of a people. He offers a number of trenchant criticisms of the chaos we call representative government and gives a balanced and profound, yet qualified defense of monarchy.

He defends monarchy on the grounds that Ideas have to be embodied. Societies have to have personal principles of unity. Sure, there are exceptions that have worked for a brief moment in time, but generally monarchy is to be preferred. In fact, that is the essence of Hegel's thought--the embodiment of Geist/idea. Hegel also responds to a number of criticisms of monarchy (what if the guy is incompetent, etc.? I always find it amusing that people are so eager to offer that criticism of monarchy after the last three American presidential administrations!).

Hegel believes in the market, but qualifies it by positing the Idea of the Corporation. By it he means what is

usually referred to as "the guild." The guild protects the average man both from Big Capital and the State. Hegel makes an interesting point that perhaps for this reason the powers that be--which both in his time and ours are the Rothschild banking clan--outlawed the Guild.

The language is hard but consistent. If read slowly and with a number of secondary works, it will pay huge dividends.

Leonardo says

En Philosophy of Right, Hegel argumentaba que el estado podía potencialmente resolver los intensos conflictos entre individuos, proporcionando, por un lado, un marco racional para la interacción en la sociedad civil y, por otro, una oportunidad de participar (a través de una forma limitada de representación) en la formación de «la voluntad política general».

Modelos de Democracia Pág.144

Jacob Aitken says

Hegel gives primacy to constitutional monarchy, but wants a government that allows civic participation. Citizens should participate in government as part of a subset of the whole—not as individuals. Hegel calls these subsets “corporations.” I don’t know to what extent corporations in the mid-19th century resemble corporations today. But we can view it another way by calling them “estates,” which is exactly how medieval many participated in the monarchical order.

Hegel wants a constitutional monarchy, to which I have grave misgivings. I understand why, though. At that time in Europe, the old liturgical tradition had largely been eradicated. Institutions tended to reflect raw power. Hegel likely says monarchies as absolute monarchies and wanted to mute that tendency.

Most interesting, he sees the monarch--properly understood--as the concrete embodiment of a culture's values. It's also important to point out that Hegel did not mean by "state" what we mean by it, simply the bureaucratic apparatus that takes away liberty. He meant the combined culture and volk.

The Foundations of the Modern State

Monarchy as the Representative Individual: consistent with his earlier points, Hegel notes that there must be some way for the individual to retain his subjective right, yet at the same time freely and fully identify with the community (Staat). This happens by way of monarchy. Beneath the monarchy are Estates, who mediate the King to the people. Nowhere does Hegel mean representation according to our usage today. The King does not "represent" the will of the people, but through his kingly majesty allows the people to identify.

The French Revolution: Political Terror

Hegel defines it as "absolute, unlimited freedom." Complete freedom means that outcome should be decided by me. Of course, since I am in society it is not decided by me alone. Therefore, complete freedom is decided by the strongest individual. This is the conclusion of individualism ala Locke.

I think the reason is that if Hegel is right and one should view the Modern Narrative as a continuation of the

French Revolution, then the only moral alternative is to reject said narrative. Hegel's challenge to modernity: the modern ideology of equality and of total participation leads to a homogenization of society. This shakes men loose from their traditional communities but cannot replace them as a focus of identity" .

Translation: all natural societies organically flow from a unified belief system/ethnos (cf. Augustine, City of God, 19.4). Modernity is the negation of this. Without this unified system of belief, men cannot "connect" to one another. Thus, no real community. Thus, no real unity and society is held together by force (ala Hegel on Rome) and terror (ala Hegel on France).

Hegel's conclusion, which Taylor rejects, is a rationalized monarchy. Hegel was a monarchist but he was not a traditionalist, and for that reason he was not a conservative. He agreed with the older conservatives that society must be founded on authority, estates, and a strong monarch; Hegel, however, based these spheres, not on divine right or tradition, but on reason. In this sense Hegel stands firmly in the Enlightenment.

According to Hegel France is utterly lost in terms of a political future. England is better, but she is not far behind in spiritual rot, for England (like America today) is run riot with an excess on particular rights. And in this chaos of individualism, special interest groups backed by powerful elites have taken control (like America today).

"The only force which could cure this would be a strong monarchy like those late medieval kings which forced through the barons the rights of the universal. But the English have crucially weakened their monarchy; it is powerless before Parliament which is the cockpit of private interests.

Charles Taylor continues to the conclusion,

Hence the vehicle by which rational constitution could best be introduced and made real was a powerful modernizing monarchy...Hegel had hopes for the future based on the climate of his times. Germany had been shocked into reform by the Napoleonic conquest. It consisted of societies founded on law in which principles of rational Enlightenment had already gone some way and seemed bound to go further. It had a Protestant political culture and hence could achieve a rational constitution unlike the benighted peoples of Latin Europe, and it was not too far gone in rot like England. It held to the monarchical principle and the monarchs retained some real power unlike England, and yet the societies were law societies (454-455).

Hegel wanted man to participate in civic life, and I think he was able to avoid the two extremes of absolute monarchy and oligarchic Republicanism. While Hegel wanted man to participate in the civitas, he knew that man as an individual among (often wealthier and more powerful) individuals, could not participate in civic life. For example, if all that matters is "individualism," then the strongest individual wins--and your claims are marginalized. This is more often a problem in Republics than in monarchies, for a monarch (or a Putin-like figure) can often block and shut down the "rich oligarchs."

What Hegel opted to do was posit the Guild (he calls it "corporation." I will not call it that because it connotes and denotes something different today). The Guild (or Guilds), which represents the workers and the individuals, can allow man to face "Big Business" and "Big Capital," not as a mere individual, but as a group of workers.

This raises the problem of Unions today. Admittedly, I don't like Unions. 9 times out of 10 they are merely fronts for the Democratic Party, agitators, etc. That is an unfortunate accident of the Guild System; I do not believe it is the essence of the Guild system. (For a perfect analysis of the above sentences, see the Simpsons Episode where Homer is elected "union president" and mistakenly thinks he is an organized crime boss).

Jason Williams says

All hail the State!

Erick says

The Philosophy of Nature allowed Hegel to don the hat of a natural scientist and the Philosophy of Right introduces us to Hegel the politician and lawyer. Hegel is never at his most intolerable than when he leaves the realm of speculative philosophy for other disciplines in order to apply his philosophy and make it absolutely comprehensive. This is usually when he is the most arrogant and the most annoyingly tedious. Hegel's political philosophy is a bizarre amalgam of collectivism and monarchy. It is bizarre because its application and actual practice seems altogether paradoxical and ludicrous. Hegel sees the monarch as the embodiment of the will of the state; the state is the very manifestation of God and the spirit in the world and in history. The church, instead of being a moral check for the state, is simply a tool in its hands and must have blind allegiance. The people, according to Hegel, cannot be trusted with democracy (not that I totally disagree), so he has accorded to the monarch the embodiment of his collectivist fantasy. The people have some voice as public opinion, but only after education (or re-education) that conditions them to the monarch and his role as their sovereign voice. Apparently, Hegel does believe in constitutionalism and branches of government, but not as checks and balances -that would destroy Hegel's vision of unity! That unity is embodied in the monarch, and maybe to some degree in a cabinet of advisers. Hegel says the citizens are capricious, but, one must assume, the sovereign monarch is not. Exactly how the sovereign monarch is to be kept in check is not altogether clear. Presumably, he will naturally be dedicated to the constitution and his advisers. He will have to be a Hegelian, I assume.

If no one as yet sees the problem with Hegel's politics, I am afraid there is a problem with your judgment. While I certainly agree that the masses of people are often idiotic as a majority, and often unruly, the idea that any monarch can be trusted to be less so, is incredibly naive; history is full of examples otherwise. Hegel's system does look incredibly like Fichte's system as laid out in the Characteristics of the Present Age - a work I detested. If you want to know what Fichtean and Hegelian society would look like, imagine a colony of ants; that's it, just a colony of ants. That is Fichte's and Hegel's ideal society. If this brings images to mind of a bunch of goose stepping storm troopers, it does that to me as well! Oh, the irony! And, yet, Hegel still believes that his system embodies some kind of freedom. Hegel was sadly deluded.

This book has the most obvious examples of what Kierkegaard disliked about Hegel: collectivism, statism, arrogance, system building, etc. I certainly would encourage people who read this to read Kierkegaard; he is quite the opposite of Hegel. I would also highly recommend William Stringfellow. Stringfellow is the most astute at showing why collectivism and statism should not ever be confused with divine authority.

I give this book two and a half stars. There are still some elements of the idealist dialectic in here I find interesting and there's an interesting section on the rather intriguing notion of punishment as a right. That is something I have never considered before.

Bookshark says

I deduct a star from this great philosophical work for the following passage, which it was infuriatingly ironic to read as a woman PhD student in political philosophy who just read two of Hegel's own works and a great deal of the Western philosophical canon more broadly: "Women can, of course, be educated, but their minds are not adapted to the higher sciences, philosophy, or certain of the arts. These demand a universal faculty. Women may have happy inspirations, taste, elegance, but they have not the ideal. The difference between

man and woman is the same as that between animal and plant. [?!?!] The animal corresponds more closely to the character of the man, the plant to that of the woman. In woman there is a more peaceful unfolding of nature, a process, whose principle is the less clearly determined unity of feeling. If women were to control the government, the state would be in danger, for they do not act according to the dictates of universality, but are influenced by accidental inclinations and opinions. The education of woman goes on one hardly knows how, in the atmosphere of picture- thinking, as it were, more through life than through the acquisition of knowledge. Man attains his position only through stress of thought and much specialized effort." Preeeeetty sure my education has been accomplished through stress of thought and specialized effort, not "picture- thinking." And really, plants? Even Aristotle knew better than that, and he's not exactly the most enlightened thinker on the topic of gender. Thanks for playing, asshole.

Otto Lehto says

For a book that is wrong about almost everything, it is remarkable how much I enjoyed it.

Much ado is made about Hegel's impenetrable style, but after one gets used to it, it isn't all that bad in itself. But it relates to the German philosopher's tendency to be vague where precision is needed, and to emphasize holistic harmony as a masturbatory poetic license where differentiated, more analytical approach would have revealed the devil in the details. Hegel, in other words, has a bad habit of waxing lyrically about idealized versions of events (it is called idealism for a good reason), and of eschewing traditional analysis in favour or a "logic" of his own making (i.e. the dialectic).

Hegel attempts to create a theory where religion, phenomenology, individual freedom, laws of the state, and the divisions between social classes, are harmonized in an organic whole. (He uses the living body metaphor, where all parts are members of the whole, in more places than one.)

In practice, it exalts the state as the highest form of rationality and spirituality (for Hegel pretty much identical), and the German state, with its peculiar habits and constitution, as the highest of them all. The end result is a total absurdity, and it led German thought to a vacuum filled by Marxist nonsense (of the class struggle) and the eventual rise of fascism (of the corporate state). All those evil results are contained in Hegel, who openly advocated for corporate fascism. The analysis arises from a particular *Zeitgeist* (another term Hegel perhaps invented), and is limited in scope to a particular era's needs. This does not excuse Hegel's shortsighted megalomania, however.

Taking all of this into consideration, how is it possible to rate Hegel's achievement so highly? Well, we should be able to distinguish between CORRECTNESS of analysis and the VALUE of the said analysis. The former relates to the specific solutions it poses (and which we can deem problematic); the latter relates to the new perspectives it opens up (which we can deem highly successful).

In Hegel's case, the merit lies in a few factors: 1) It had an undeniable impact on thinkers as wide-ranging as Marx, Feuerbach, Stirner, etc. (who, after all, developed Hegel into wonderful and crazy directions). Hegel's unique analysis was dynamite. It was stronger than any aphrodisiac. One could call it intellectual opiate for the elites. 2) It launched a whole new way of looking at the relationship between society and individuals. The idea of rationality expressed in concrete organization launched sociology. The idea that individuals, in their freedom, can embody, ethically and politically, "concrete universality" launched a new analysis of individual rights as social constructs. 3) The dialectical method, while logically iffy, provided a tool of analysis that is undeniably important, regardless of one's persuasion and political leaning, in understanding the the ever-rising struggle for power and recognition between individuals, classes, ideologies and nation states. 4) And yes, even the most ridiculous part of the book, Hegel's apotheosis of the Prussian state as the highest

culmination of world history (at least SO FAR), can be interpreted, with a dose of excessive generosity and hindsight, as a valuable insight into the progressive nature of history. Today, with Fukuyama and others professing the end of history, such analyses are quite vital. The concept of Pax Americana, and of 1 billion Facebook accounts, are totally Hegelian insights about world spirit realizing itself in absolute, concrete freedom - even while under a total surveillance state. 5) Overall, since the underlying theory - the application of his Phenomenology to Society - is so strong, the end result, while a complete mess and a moral travesty, is highly illuminating. It's like the first attempt at manned flight: sure, people died, and we didn't get very far, but we DID it.

Overall, while Hegel's greatest accomplishments are undoubtedly his other books, i.e. his Phenomenology and Logic - which are purely FORMAL INNOVATIONS for PURE THEORY - his "practical" philosophy, in this book, is nonetheless a valuable, useful and inspirational sub-chapter in German philosophy, and a valuable (if problematic) addition to Hegel's corpus. The book can be read as madness that one can learn from (fully aware of its danger to one's health and sanity), even if we are cognizant of its utter failure to satisfactorily meet the particular challenges it poses itself.

And this, indeed, how the best Hegelians - from Marx and Stirner to Sartre and Zizek - have read him: without scruples, without veneration. They have realized that Hegel provides visions rather than solutions. Dreams of clarity obscured by bad faith. To be a good Hegelian, in other words, is to go BEYOND Hegel; but to go beyond him, you need to read him. Ignoring him is not an option, since Hegel never died. Corporatism, socialism and political liberalism still exist, as Hegel foresaw. Being unaware of the foundations of modern thought is a formula for self-defeat. And great philosophy is a philosophy that moves - intellectually and emotionally - in the subterranean caverns of modern society, hidden behind the empty facade of public opinion. That is the dance of the dialectic.

Jesse says

Possibly the most morally repugnant treatise on political theory this side of Leviathan, Hegel's Philosophy of Right is ostensibly an account of the modern state, but it is in fact a collection of cheerleading anthems for power by an evil pedant desirous of the destruction of our species. There are three agonizing sections. The first is about how, as a particular human being, you are contradictory and therefore untrue; in contrast, the state, being the embodiment of contradictionless Reason, is true; hence, you have rights insofar as it pleases the state, and there's a hefty price to pay - you have to conform to society! Hegel here takes up the classic right-wing position of how you have to earn your way into civil society, the following "dialectical stage", by conforming to one of its institutions, e.g. the military, which he thinks should consist of a standing army, and he says only analytical, i.e. freedom-loving, thinkers will argue against the evil of a standing army (which happens to be the entire Enlightenment tradition! see, e.g., James Madison Federalist No. 42), or the corporation, which, Hegel thinks, should be the only vehicle for rights. What should be striking you by now, and what immediately struck me, was how much closer this treatise is to present day U.S. political norms (how we, in effect, have a standing army: how we, in fact, get our rights from the "dialectical" mediation of corporate insurance companies, etc.) than those outlined in Locke's Second Treatise, i.e., the treatise that the U.S. is actually supposed to be in support of as a culture, but with the simple fact that Turner owns a third of the nation, we are obviously sitting upon Hegel's lap (who also mentions how the "infinite will", as far as property, i.e., things, goes, cannot be infringed upon). To highlight the contrast, observe: Locke said, representing the liberal and Enlightenment tradition, that the state exists for its citizens as a means. Hegel says here that "the state is an end in itself" and that it exists for itself, nevermind those ghostly particulars, i.e., citizens. Enlightenment said, individuals are ends in themselves. According to the over-generous (every kind interpretation of Hegel is over-generous) interpretation of Allen Wood, Hegel thinks that the citizen is neither an end nor a means, but a member of "the organic unity". What Hegel means by organic unity is a

state where no individual rights are asserted. Hegel is against social contract theory, such as Locke's, simply to the extent that it proclaims the rights of individuals. For Hegel, there are no rights for individuals, except what they can find by conforming to the institutions provided by the state (again, note the unbelievable likeness to U.S. neoliberalism here). The next section is simply Hegel's denunciation of Kantian secular ethics insofar as they are secular and rational, and suggests that there is nothing ethical here because, here, there are only individuals thinking for themselves! What brazen stupidity! So, with a real big hint, Hegel titles the next section, Ethical Life. This is the largest section, and there are again three sections, because there were two things that made Hegel orgasm – the state and threes (proof enough that the man's books should be distrusted). The first section is on the Family, with a long sub-section on how women are inferior to men. And so the man must run away from the feminine element of the family (which in the Phenomenology is called the realm of the living dead – Hegel's poetic take on the female spirit) and be robbed and exploited in the marketplace. This section is Civil Society, and it contains the theoretical foundation for much of what Friedman and Rand were to satanically spew on to the public in the twentieth century, specifically corporate externalities: “[P]rivate actions become a contingent matter that passes out of my control and which can wrong or harm other people or actually does so.” Hegel with Rand, in paragraph 299, says that the means for organizing society can be mediated by one of two things: money or the slave whip. He also advocates ethical egoism, calling anything else, like Kantian ethics, merely “formal”, i.e., non-objective. Why do Rand and Hegel think this? Hegel speaks for everyone on the bourgeois Right when he says: “[S]ubjective selfishness turns into a contribution towards the satisfaction of the needs of everyone else.” Imagine if BP used this quote in their defense, though it takes an even greater stretch of the imagination to think BP would ever be tried for their criminal negligence because of Hegel's defense of externalities, previously cited. Hegel's dialectical totality is, in fact, simply the totality of bourgeois hatred for humanity and excuses for their crimes. The last section is about the State proper. Hegel talks about how the rabble must be controlled, or at least organized, and that means lots of testing (standardized testing! Actually, not only can you find Bush's No Child Left Behind in these pages, but also the Bush Doctrine itself – see paragraph 335!). Hegel's intellectual attraction stems from his ability to “dialectically unfold” the hidden relations between everything; the book's merit is, in fact, how successful that declared philosophical goal is – one can see where all the thoughts and opinions of the Right come from. But it is morally worse than Leviathan for the simple reason that, at the very least, Hobbes' gives the citizen the right of self-defense, even before her monarch – Hegel agrees with Rousseau in that death-row inmates should be celebrating their freedom. One cannot help thinking of how GULAG inmates, with Hegelian futility, wrote birthday cards to Stalin. The Enlightenment was well aware how much more dangerous the modern state with its corporations would be compared with the absolutism of the divine-right monarchy; Jefferson warned us, but, it seems, we have heeded the likes of Rand, a true Hegelian, instead.
