



Hegel

Frederick C. Beiser

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Hegel (1770-1831) is one of the major philosophers of the nineteenth century. Many of the major philosophical movements of the twentieth century - from existentialism to analytic philosophy - grew out of reactions against Hegel. He is also one of the hardest philosophers to understand and his complex ideas, though rewarding, are often misunderstood.

In this magisterial and lucid introduction, Frederick Beiser covers every major aspect of Hegel's thought. He places Hegel in the historical context of nineteenth-century Germany whilst clarifying the deep insights and originality of Hegel's philosophy.

A masterpiece of clarity and scholarship, *Hegel* is both the ideal starting point for those coming to Hegel for the first time and essential reading for any student or scholar of nineteenth century philosophy.

Additional features:

glossary chapter summaries chronology annotated further reading.

Hegel Details

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From Reader Review Hegel for online ebook

Hadad heydari says

One of the best books that has been published about the Hegel's philosophy in late decades; Frederick Beiser is a professor of Hegel's studies which he is German originally and one of the familiar Hegel's professors. This book actually have universally viewed of Hegel's philosophy and it could be very good suggestion for those who are beginner student of Hegel's philosophy, which they're need a universal point of view of Hegel's thoughts, to read it. Although, more and less you may found some deficiency and needs about Hegel's logic, but you could be a half-professional Hegel's studies student by reading this book. It have good enough writings and parts about Hegel's metaphysics, religious thoughts, epistemology, political views and historical thought which these are very important subject matters of Hegel. You can read, similarly, attraction criticises upon Hegel's thoughts and other philosophers impress -like Spinoza and Kant- on the philosophy of Hegel. Beside, I think it's could be a good idea for students that also read the Hegel: A very short introduction by Peter Singer to familiarization other demensions of Hegel's philosophy. Certainly, however, for further reading, the Reason and Revolution by Hebert Marcuse is a famous and helpful book for those who want to know more about political and society's thought of Hegel, it has elaborated by a great thinker of twenty century.

Andrew says

Beiser always writes exceptional introductions to German philosophy and this book on Hegel doesn't disappoint. Hegel is one of the more caricatured philosophical figures, and this book serves incredibly well to dispel many of the misunderstandings about him by emphasising the fundamental systematic role of metaphysics in his thought. Thereby showing how many of the mythical claims about him (that he was a proto-Fascist, that he misunderstood and regressed from Kant, that his system necessitates world communism, etc) cannot be sustained if his system is properly understood.

I've wrestled with the Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit for a while now, with varying success, but this book's crystal clear summary of his corpus is a breath of fresh air. It has definitely helped me to stand back and have a good look at the system as a whole, to figure out what some of its larger assumptions and problems are. Beiser is exceptional at encouraging a generous but critical eye on Hegel. This is something I find hard sustain when immersed in the more detailed and complex acrobatics of thought within Hegel's own tortured prose.

Of course, this is no substitute to reading Hegel himself, but I've found it to be an excellent sampler and tour guide.

globulon says

I really enjoyed reading this. I am definitely not qualified to pass judgment on his resolution of any of the interpretive questions that he discusses. However, the presentation was very clear and made a lot of sense. I don't claim to be able to understand Hegel despite a fair bit of effort trying, but I would say that Beiser integrated a lot of what I have been able to understand into a larger and more sophisticated picture. At the

same time, I felt he introduced new readings of specific theoretical questions doing a good job presenting the conflicting viewpoints and defending his interpretation with interesting arguments as well textual references. I agree strongly, for instance, with the notion that we can't do away with the metaphysical dimension of Hegel's thought, and that it needs to be a key to understand much of what he was doing. I highly recommend to anyone who wants to get a good introduction to Hegel's thought.

David Balfour says

Hegel is a good example of the philosopher as product of his time, and Beiser does an incredible job of explaining the contemporary issues he was responding to. He only mentions the Left Hegelians briefly at the end, and almost completely ignores the later French revival. It's all about who Hegel was within his specific historical context. Beiser bluntly dispels the myth of thesis-antithesis-synthesis, but it seems to hold implicitly for each chapter. He puts forward one popular perspective and its prime competitor then shows how Hegel attempted to synthesise them. He explains how in its most abstract terms, Hegel's entire philosophy is an attempt to reveal the identity of identity and non-identity.

Philip says

Succinct and highly informative. Confirmed some things that I had suspected and cleared up much more that I didn't know I was mistaken about.

tom bomp says

Pretty interesting and well written introduction to Hegel. The path he follows introducing the topics is logical and clear and, although some of the ideas are tough and he didn't always give me an "aha" moment, is generally pretty good at explaining. He gives important Kantian/idealism/romantic background to each of Hegel's ideas and generally gives a very short prompt when ideas already explained are referenced later on. I didn't find myself lost at any point, even when I couldn't wrap my head around a few of the most difficult ideas.

The ideas themselves are fascinating and presented in a way that I was interested even when I thought they were total bollocks. Hegel's ideas about the perfect state are kind of amusing, but also interesting in the ways they prefigure social democrat policies. His dialectic and unity/identity/unity-in-identity path are surprisingly compelling.

Raully says

A very good introduction to Hegel for outsiders, which defends the great philosopher from the stereotypes that surround him

Sarah (Gutierrez) Myers says

Not being much of a Hegel scholar myself, I can't critique Beiser's interpretation of and engagement with other interpretations of Hegel, but the book came to me highly recommended as a clear and careful introduction to Hegel. It did not disappoint.

For anyone trying to read Hegel without much knowledge of Hegel's intellectual world (neo-Kantianism, German romanticism, Spinoza, and more), Beiser's work will be just the thing to provide the necessary background to Hegel. Many of the central difficulties that Hegel (and others of the time) were trying to navigate at the time are set forward with clear and almost analytic precision, yet the book does not seem to sacrifice careful and nuanced interpretation to simplicity of style. The book also seems quite comprehensive, even including a chapter on Hegel's aesthetics.

Highly recommended for anyone struggling to get a grip on Hegel or anyone who just wants a one volume overview of him.

ZaRi says

Renxiang Liu says

This book claims to be an introduction to Hegel's thought, but is well beyond that. Within limited space, Beiser managed to cover several pivotal points for any substantial understanding of Hegel.

The greatest virtue of the book is that it not only tries to single out ideas in Hegel that are relevant to our interests nowadays, but also situates them in their original conceptual and historical context, i.e. the post-enlightenment, early-romanticist era in Germany. By what Beiser calls a historical and hermeneutic approach, he was able to show that some of the ideas we usually attribute to Hegel's originality were actually quite common to a whole generation. In this way, Beiser not only brings to life an entire movement that is largely ignored, showing the great dynamicity of thought in it, but also creates the opportunity to locate more precisely Hegel's unique breakthrough. It is only against the background of his contemporaries, such as Fichte, Jacobi and Schelling, that Hegel's genuine greatness becomes manifest.

Specifically, Hegel's breakthrough must be assessed in comparison with the crisis of enlightenment rationalism, Kant and Fichte's subjectivist turn in response, and Jacobi and Schelling's charge that abstract understanding could never come to terms with the infinite - the subject *par excellence* of philosophy - which must be accessed through feelings or intuition. Hegel's strategy was to admit the limits of understanding but in the meantime to suggest a higher form of thought, i.e. speculative reason. The key difference is that, while understanding confines itself to finite concepts, speculative reason is able to adopt the same concepts and yet to allow them pass over into the infinite. Intuitivists like Schelling failed to see this possibility, because they deflated thought to just conceptual understanding. The intuition they championed, on the other hand, reveals

only an inchoate and underdeveloped image of the infinite. Left on its own, it is unable to disclose in great concreteness every implication of the infinite. Speculative reason, however, has the patience to let the inchoate concept "go astray" in its various determination, as well as the tolerance to again incorporate all these determinations, albeit flawed in their own ways, back into itself. The result is a more concretely developed concept of the infinite, and philosophy is precisely this endless development.

Implied in this methodology is Hegel's unique idea of the identity of identity and non-identity. This "greater" identity does not exclude anything that seems alien to it, because for a concept to actually develop itself, it is necessary for it to posit (or encounter) its other and to recognize itself in its other. Moreover, it will become manifest that the other is not so much an absolute other than something whose otherness results only from limits of the context, or what Hegel calls abstraction. As soon as those limits are removed in speculative thought, the other ceases to be an absolute other and is reconciled into a greater whole.

This is the metaphysical principle Beiser finds in Hegel. He then argues that metaphysics is everywhere relevant in Hegel's system, for otherwise some of his claims on ethics or aesthetics would become incomprehensible. In each case, Beiser would first present the apparently opposing positions, then give evidences for / against interpreting Hegel toward either of the positions, and finally show how Hegel's metaphysical ground enables him to hold both while lifting their abstractness.

As a result, Beiser's interpretation of Hegel is balanced and uncompromising. Whenever he can, Beiser would rather make the best out of Hegel rather than dismiss his ideas as outdated, naïve, reactionary, or simply mistaken. This virtue comes mainly from Beiser's comprehensive grasp of the currents of German idealism.

There are, to be sure, points in the book that seem to render Hegel too systematic, as if he has an answer to every question or criticism. This scenario is plausible, yet if we consider Hegel's relation to his time, we are likely to feel that his major concern was not to systematize, but instead to question every system for its purported systematicity. His own system is unique and indefinitely inspiring, not because of its success and perfection, but because it is a *failing* one, which neither triumphs once and for all, nor fails completely. The dynamicity and openness of Hegel's thought consists precisely in this failing process as a process.

Mike says

Beiser's book fulfills the aim of the Routledge series of providing contextually informed introductions to the great philosophers (it does this better than the books on Kant and Schopenhauer). In situating Hegel so well in his intellectual context, an approach which is of course fitting considering the importance of wider culture and society to Hegel's thought, he helps the reader have some sympathy with the ideas. I didn't agree with all of Hegel's speculations, but Beiser succeeds in making them never seem pointless.

Beiser sets up his detailed discussion of Hegel's arguments very well with the introductory chapters. Beiser, like most Hegel scholars, describes Hegel's motivation as the attempt to overcome the frustrations of Kantian thinking and the disappointments of the Enlightenment. Beiser does this better than most by showing how interlinked these two concerns were in the mind of a young Hegel first turning to philosophy. Hegel first aimed to be a pamphleteer for Enlightenment, Kantian values, but in the face of events like the Revolutionary Terror thought that Kant left much philosophical work undone.

The subsequent chapters fill out this programme, with Beiser always grounding the grand speculations in the

concerns of Hegel's time. Beiser even makes the vaulting ideas about Geist less daunting and alien. Apparently he first developed the concept when discussing the mindset of lovers: like Geist they go outside themselves and realise themselves in another.

Beiser's excellent study is itself a persuasive case for his way of writing commentary, namely part intellectual history, part exposition of the arguments. Philosophy students will need to go on to more focussed books (Houlgate is good for the next level), but this is a rich, interesting study that you'll wish other scholars emulated.

arbuz says

One of the best immersions in Hegel's philosophy you can get. Clear and systematic.

the gift says

this is the best introduction to hegel i have read, only of three, but i suspect it is about as clear, structured, accessible, as you get with hegel. it is argued that much of hegel can only be understood if you reach an understanding with underlying metaphysics, hence this intro begins even before there...

after some bio, some context, this is actually most of my limited knowledge of hegel. i did not know how much of what we consider identifying with hegel was actually in the air, how the political actions of the french revolution and prussian enlightenment had established the ethical conversation. this seems to suggest his work was not, however much he might protest, independent of his time and place. he popularized the ideals of historical progress as realization of freedom...

shows with the expiration of enlightenment ideals and against rise of romanticism, hegel becomes a proponent of idealism, that he takes onboard and critically engages kantian thought, insisting that we see spirit manifesting itself through history. or at least rationalism. the idea that the rational is the real the real is the rational. the idea that there is progress for realizing freedom from one, to some, to all. this book is structured to parts, moving from early ideals and context, to metaphysics, to epistemology, to social/political, to culture. but it is finally metaphysics that is key to his thought. his guiding includes the absolute, the object-subject identity, the dialectic, the organicism of world, the realm of the spirit, the use of philosophy surpassing art etc. this book mentions hegel's errors in thought re. evolution etc, but as an intro text does not explore them. there is some mention of right to left spectrum of hegel. some mention of mistaken totalitarianism...

very good book. almost makes me want to read more. almost. not as great as the one in this series on kant, but i think i understood it a bit, and it is helpful to read this in knowing what existentialist/phenomenologists came up against...

Mohammad says

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Enoch Kuo says

A clear, concise overview of Hegel's thought focusing on its historical context. Does not really engage with contemporary retrievals of Hegel, however.