



Hegel, G(eorg) W(ilhelm) F(riedrich) (1770-1831), German idealist philosopher, who became prominent in the 19th century. Hegel was born in Stuttgart on August 27, 1770, the son of a reverend. He was brought up in an atmosphere of Protestant Pietism and became thoroughly acquainted with philosophy by studying at the Stuttgart gymnasium (preparatory school). Encouraged by his father to enter a theological seminary at the University of Tübingen in 1788. There he developed friendships with the philosopher Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling. Having completed a course of study in philosophy, he decided not to enter the ministry, Hegel became (1793) a private tutor in Berne, Switzerland. In 1797 he held a similar position in Frankfurt. Two years later his father died, leaving a financial legacy that

In 1801 Hegel went to the University of Jena, where he studied, wrote, and eventually published his most important work, *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1807; trans. 1910). He remained in Jena when the city was taken by the French and he was forced to flee. Having exhausted the 1808-1809, he became editor of the *Bamberger Zeitung* in Bavaria. He disliked journalism, however, and in 1810 he worked for eight years as headmaster of a Gymnasium. During the Nuremberg years Hegel met and married his wife, and children were born to the Hegels, a daughter, who died soon after birth, and two sons, Hegel had fathered an illegitimate son, Ludwig, who eventually came to live with the Hegels. He published over a period of several years *The Science of Logic* (1812, 1813, 1816; trans. 1829). He held a professorship in philosophy at the University of Heidelberg. Soon after, he published his entire philosophy entitled *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline* (1817). He was invited to teach at the University of Berlin, where he was to remain. He died in Berlin in 1831, of an epidemic.

The last full-length work published by Hegel was *The Philosophy of Right* (1821; trans. 1841). His lecture notes, supplemented by students' notes, were published after his death. Published lectures include *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1833-36; trans. 1892-96), *Lectures on the History of the Philosophy of Language* (1832; trans. 1895), and *Lectures on the Philosophy of History* (1837; trans. 1858). Hegel also read the works of the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza, the French writer Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and the German philosophers Immanuel Kant, Johann Gottlieb Fichte, and Schelling. Although he often denied their influence is evident in his writings.

### Philosophical Aims

Hegel's aim was to set forth a philosophical system so comprehensive that it would encompass all of reality and create a conceptual framework in terms of which both the past and future could be understood. This would require nothing short of a full account of reality itself. Thus, Hegel conceived of reality as a whole. This reality, or the total developmental process of everything that is, he called the Absolute. According to Hegel, the task of philosophy is to chart the development of Absolute Spirit through (1) demonstrating the internal rational structure of the Absolute; (2) demonstrating the manner in which the Absolute develops through human history; and (3) explicating the teleological nature of the Absolute, that is, showing that the development of the Absolute is directed.

### Dialectic

Concerning the rational structure of the Absolute, Hegel, following the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, held that what is rational is real and what is real is rational. This must be understood in terms of the Absolute. The Absolute ultimately be regarded as pure Thought, or Spirit, or Mind, in the process of self-development. The process that governs this developmental process is dialectic. The dialectical method involves the development of reality through progress, is the result of the conflict of opposites. Traditionally, this dimension of reality is understood in terms of the categories of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis. Although Hegel tended to avoid the traditional terminology of the dialectic. The thesis, then, might be an idea or a historical movement within itself incompleteness that gives rise to opposition, or an antithesis, a conflict. From the conflict a third point of view arises, a synthesis, which overcomes the conflict by reconciling both the thesis and antithesis. This synthesis becomes a new thesis that generates another synthesis, and in such a fashion the process of intellectual or historical development continues. The Absolute Spirit itself (which is to say, the sum total of reality) develops in this dialectical fashion. For Hegel, therefore, reality is understood as the Absolute unfolding dialectically in history. The Absolute undergoes this development, it manifests itself both in nature and in human history. The Absolute objectifies itself in material form. Finite minds and human history are the process

which is most kin to itself, namely, spirit or consciousness. In *The Phenomenology of Mind*, Hegel's development of the Absolute proceeds from the simplest level of consciousness, through self-consciousness, to

### Self-Knowledge of the Absolute

The goal of the dialectical cosmic process can be most clearly understood at the level of self-consciousness. In the process of understanding, the Absolute progresses toward full self-knowledge. Indeed, the Absolute is the human mind's increased understanding of reality, or the Absolute. Hegel analyzed this process in terms of three levels: art, religion, and philosophy. Art grasps the Absolute in material and sensible forms of beauty. Art is conceptually superseded by religion, which grasps the Absolute through symbols. The highest religion for Hegel is Christianity, for in Christianity the truth is symbolically reflected in the incarnation. Philosophy, however, is conceptually supreme. Once this has been achieved, the Absolute has arrived at full self-consciousness, and its goal. Only at this point did Hegel identify the Absolute with God. "God is God," Hegel

### Philosophy of History

In the process of analyzing the nature of Absolute Spirit, Hegel made significant contributions, including the philosophy of history and social ethics. With respect to history, his two main points were that freedom is the only thought, and that the only freedom is that which Philosophy brings to the content of Reason; that Reason is the Sovereign of the world, that the history of the world is a rational process. As a rational process, history is a record of the development of human progress from less freedom to greater freedom.

### Ethics and Politics

Hegel's social and political views emerge most clearly in his discussion of morality. At the level of morality, right and wrong is a matter of individual conscience. One must, however, understand that social ethics, for duty, according to Hegel, is not essentially the product of individual conscience in the midst of social relationships; thus, the only context in which duty can truly exist is the state, one of the individual's highest duties. Ideally, the state is the manifest expression of the ethical spirit. Obedience to this general will is the act of a free citizen, but he should not be interpreted as sanctioning totalitarianism, for he is by actual state is morally unacceptable.

### Influence

At the time of Hegel's death, he was the most prominent philosopher in Germany. His views were highly regarded. His followers soon divided into right-wing and left-wing Hegelianism. Right-wing Hegelians offered a conservative interpretation of his work. They emphasized religion, philosophy and Christianity. Politically, they were orthodox. The left-wing Hegelians, in politics, many of them became revolutionaries. This historically important left-wing group included Georg Wilhelm Hegel, Friedrich Engels, and Karl Marx. Engels and Marx were particularly influenced by Hegel's ideas, but they replaced Hegel's philosophical idealism with materialism. Hegel's impact on 19th-century and early 20th-century British philosophy, notably that of Francis Bacon, philosophers as Josiah Royce, and on Italian philosophy through Benedetto Croce. Hegel's impact on the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. Phenomenology has been influenced by Hegel's extensive and diverse impact of Hegel's ideas on subsequent philosophy is evidence of the extraordinary depth of his thought.