

# A Philosophy That Found Logic in History

HEGEL: Reinterpretation, Texts and Commentary. By Walter Kaufmann. 504 pp. New York: Doubleday & Co. \$6.95.

By SIDNEY HOOK

LIKE a colossus the figure of Hegel (1770-1831), philosopher of the Prussian Establishment, still bestrides the cultural and historical horizons of our time. His philosophy, which found sense and logic in history where others saw only caprice and heartbreak, has inspired aspects of diverse social movements in many countries. As in his own century, so in ours, right-wing and left-wing thinkers have nurtured themselves on his works, e.g.: Giovanni Gentile, the philosopher of Italian Fascism, and Lenin, the father of Bolshevism. Although this fact suggests something of the ambiguity and Janus-faced character of Hegel's ideas, it is false to attribute to him responsibility for Nazism whose ideological ancestry is quite different. Hegel was a complex conservative, not a racist or totalitarian.

In circles of academic philosophy Hegel's thought has long been in eclipse. He is regarded as a colossus of clay from feet to head. Nonetheless it would be difficult to overestimate his influence on the intellectual history of our era. The emphasis upon the categories of process and development, the organic and systematic, on the cultural determinants of mind and personality and the historical dimensions of culture, in large measure stems from him.

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There are some small signs that we may be in for a Hegel Renaissance even in the academy. Some of his expositors have proclaimed, on the basis of his early writings, that he is the precursor, not the arch-foe of existentialism. And an English philosopher with apparent sobriety now claims that Hegel was darkly hinting at the current revolution in philosophy—a revolution which holds philosophy's perennial problems are the result of stubborn errors in philosophical grammar requiring linguistic therapy for their resolution. This would make Hegel kin both to Kierkegaard and Wittgenstein!

There will never be complete agreement on "the real" Hegel, or any other thinker who is not all of a piece, yet unless words can mean anything in any context, it should be possible to distinguish between reasonable and arbitrary interpretations of a philosopher's thought. To those who seek to do this, Walter Kaufmann's book on Hegel will be a boon. It is unquestionably the most interesting as well as the most informative study of Hegel in English. It has many virtues and a few shortcomings. It contains an excellent summary of Hegel's early writings with one strange omission, his criticism of the German Constitution which seems of prime importance in understanding the genesis and animus of Hegel's philosophy. It presents more biographical details about Hegel than any other volume in English, but these details leave unaffected the portrait of Hegel as an essentially timid and not very colorful personality who at most sowed only one wild oat. His scandalous behavior toward

J. F. Fries, a windy sentimental "liberal" philosopher, is not mentioned. Hegel egged the police on to persecute Fries because of philosophical differences with him. Kaufmann relates Hegel to his predecessors and contemporaries and tracks down not only references to Kant, Fichte and Schelling in Hegel's writings but to Schiller, Lessing and others. This is exceedingly valuable and shows that Hegel kept well abreast of developments in most fields.

Finally it contains large chunks of fresh translations from Hegel's works including the entire preface, with informative annotations, of the remarkable "Phenomenology of the Spirit." The English rendering is as intelligible as any one is likely to offer us, even though here and there Kaufmann's choice of the proper English idiom may seem dubious. (Despite what he says, "objective mind" for "Der objektive Geist" is better in English than "objective spirit," which suggests something ghostly, because the reference is primarily to institutions, practices and traditions).

MR. KAUFMANN, professor of philosophy at Princeton, writes sympathetically of Hegel even when he disagrees with him, and takes obvious pleasure in setting down Hegel's denigrating critics from Schopenhauer to Karl Popper, who have characterized Hegel as a pretentious and impious fraud. And he successfully rebuts many specific charges against Hegel: that he sought to deduce the world of nature and history by logic rather than to explain them; that his thought is constricted by the straitjacket of the dialectical triad of thesis, antithesis and synthesis; that he believed that all history ended with him and his system.

As it stands the book is extremely valuable to any student of Hegel, and it would seem to be ungrateful to expect more. Nonetheless, it is a pity that Mr. Kaufmann did not devote the many pages he consumes in listing the table of contents of Hegel's works and in manicuring Hegel's texts, to discussing at greater length Hegel's philosophy, and what makes it significant. For his book is really written around Hegel and his works rather than about his philosophical arguments. Actually Kaufmann seems to regard Hegel's achievement as more comparable to that of Dante, Shakespeare and Goethe than to that of the great classical philosophers. As for that, Goethe's remarks about one of Hegel's disciples applies equally well to most of Hegel himself: "What are the English and French to think of the language of our philosophers when we Germans do not understand it ourselves?" And Hegel had prided himself on teaching philosophy to speak German!

Since Kaufmann's reinterpretation is primarily intended "to help those who want to read Hegel," his main task should have been to make Hegel's philosophical ideas intelligible, and evaluate them. What is needed is not a flashlight to illuminate a point here and there in the cavernous depths of Hegel's work but flood lights to reveal the seams of gold and silver, if any, running through the rock. In chiding Hegel, Mr. Kaufmann has himself stated excellently, and in italics, too, the demands of rational procedure in philosophy: "Confronted with propositions or views, we should ask what precisely they mean: what considerations, evidence and arguments support them; what speaks against them; what alternatives are available; and which of these is most probable."

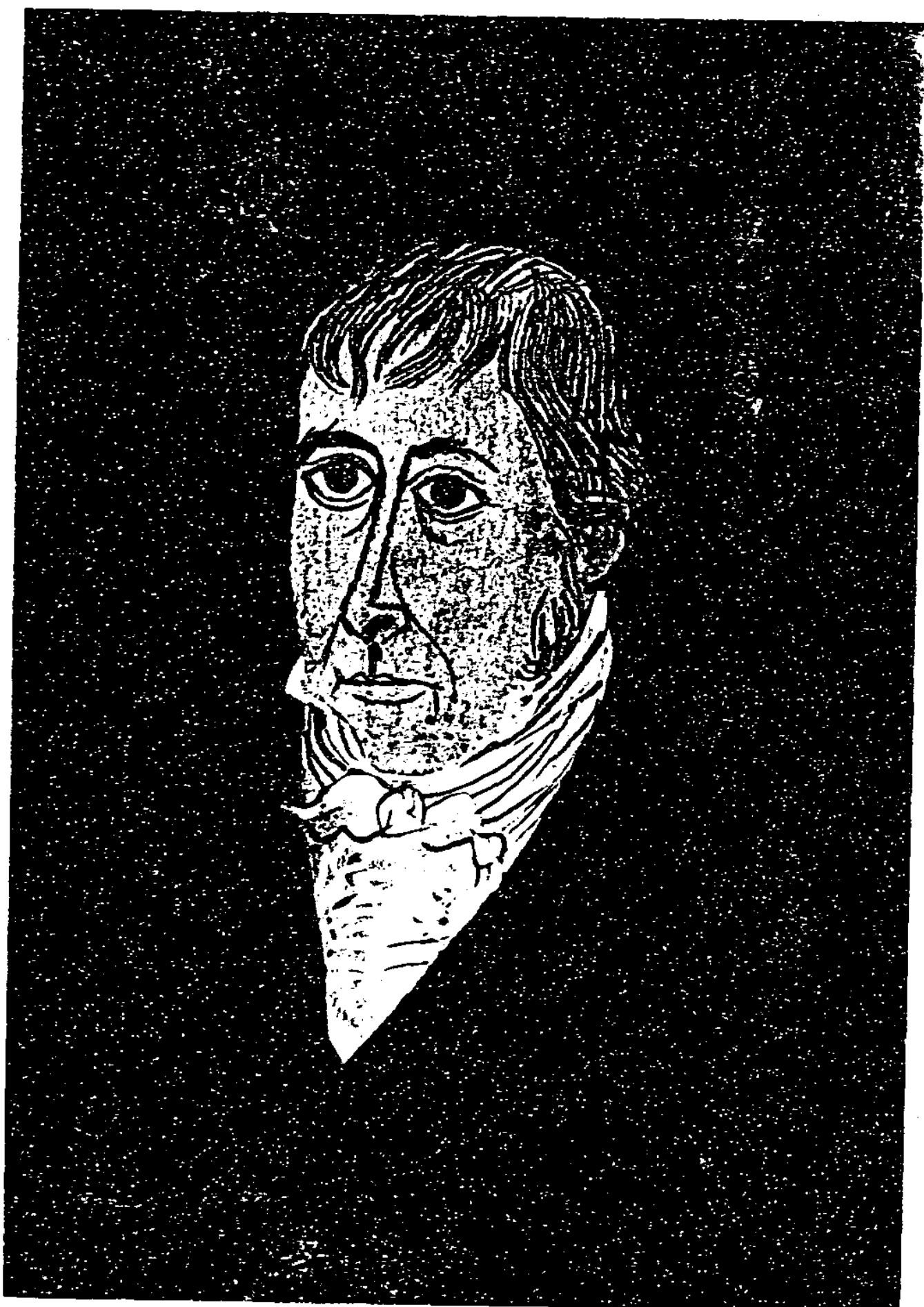
Had the author followed his own advice, he would have confronted Hegel's attack on abstractions with the achievements of scientific knowledge, whose method is essentially one of abstraction, and explained why this didn't reduce the Hegelian system to absurdity. And instead of telling readers that "there is no dearth of books about [Hegel's Logic]," he would have helped them immensely by grappling with and clarifying its difficulties which begin with the very notions of logic, identity and predication and do not end with "the absolute Idea." As it stands there is a great danger that readers will wonder what all the shooting is about: why anyone, including Kaufmann, regards Hegel as a great philosopher; why his thought has proved so influential especially in the social disciplines; and why they should subject themselves to a jargon that seems to some, as John Findlay says, in his recent study of Hegel, "a sort of philosophical Buchenwald with a new form of intellectual torment crowded into each instant." Kaufmann has tried to convey "the range, the depth and the passion of Hegel." Only Hegel's range comes through.

Since Mr. Kaufmann is so much at home in the German philosophical tradition and is familiar with the techniques of Anglo-American philosophical analysis, he is qualified to perform this task. All the more so because he writes not as an apologist for Hegel but as a critic who seeks to do him justice. Nonetheless on some key issues, Kaufmann's interpretation seems to me to be too indulgent; on others, radically mistaken. He recognizes that Hegel is a conservative by temperament, but he does not adequately convey the essentially conservative character of Hegel's substantive social, political and ethical thought. He asserts it is misleading to regard Hegel's philosophy as optimistic. It is more misleading to deny it.

Hegel's philosophy is both optimistic and heartless. Its optimism is on a stupendous cosmic scale, for what Hegel offers us is a secular substitute for theodicy. "The Good," he says in his "En- (Continued on Page 24)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel.

Jacket drawing by Ben Shahn for "Hegel."



# A Philosophy

*(Continued from Page 6)*

cyclopedia," "and absolutely good, is eternally accomplishing itself in the world: and the result is that it need not wait upon us, but is already by implication, as well as in full actuality, accomplished." To be sure Hegel is not concerned with merely human happiness. He is rather scornful of it, prepared to accept any amount of suffering as necessary to the progressive development of "the good," in some non-empirical sense. Hegel is therefore optimistic to a point of immoralism. Marx saw truly when he said that Hegel's system was a speculative expression of Germanic-Christianity which glorified the patterns of history as the tracks of Divinity. What he did not see was how much of Hegel's immoralism seeped into some aspects of his own conception of the historical process.

Despite these criticisms, Kaufmann's "Hegel" will prove a very helpful work not only to philosophers but to the ever growing number of students in different fields who by virtue of recent developments in social criticism have become curious about Hegel's ideas.

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