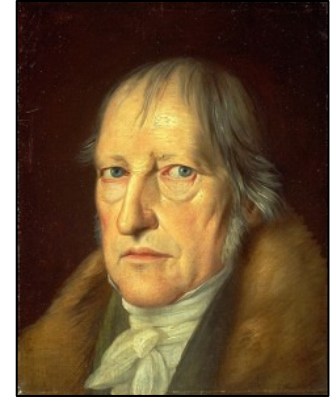




## Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770 – 1831)

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel was born on August 27, 1770 in Stuttgart and had a Protestant upbringing. He studied at the Stuttgart gymnasium where he became familiar with Greek and Roman classics. Hegel's father wished him to be a clergyman, and so from 1788 to 1793 he studied theology at the seminary at the University of Tübingen. It was here that he first formed important friendships with Friedrich Hölderlin and Friedrich W.J. von Schelling.



After Hegel graduated from Tübingen he went Bern and then Frankfurt to work as a private tutor. At this time, it seems that his work was in the area of educational reform but in 1800 his work took a turn and he became interested in the “critical” philosophy of Immanuel Kant. In 1801, Hegel moved to join his friend Friedrich W.J. von Schelling at the University of Jena, where the two of them edited the *Critical Journal of Philosophy*. This same year Hegel published his first philosophical essay entitled *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, in which he argues for Friedrich W.J. von Schelling success and Fichte's failure in the project of completing Immanuel Kant's transcendental idealism.

Hegel wrote a number of essays during his stay at Jena. In *On the Scientific Modes of Treatment of Natural Law-Its Place in Practical Philosophy and Its Relationship to the Positive Science of Law*, often referred to as the essay on Natural Law, he criticized both British empirical and Kantian formal approaches to natural law. His argument was that empiricism forms conclusions that are limited by its contexts and materials, therefore it is unable to form propositions that are universally valid regarding the concepts of reflective consciousness to social and political experience or the concepts of social and political institutions. Hegel felt philosophical science had the responsibility to definitively link the development of the rational powers of the human mind to lived experience.

In 1807 Hegel published *Die Phänomenologie des Geistes* (*The Phenomenology of Spirit*), his first major work. Written in the context of epistemological, anthropological, and cultural themes of human history, this text is an account of the development of consciousness and self-consciousness, or the development of spirit as Hegel referred to it. Hegel traced the development of the mind in relation to experience, concentrating on questions regarding the meaning of cognitive activities like perceiving and knowing, and the nature of reality and reason. The fundamental characteristic of human awareness, according to Hegel, is the relationship between self and otherness.



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Hegel worked as an editor of a newspaper in Bamberg, and then from 1808-1815 he taught philosophy at a gymnasium in Nuremberg, where he became headmaster. During these seven years, Hegel married and wrote *Science of Logic*. In 1816 he was appointed to chair of philosophy at the University of Heidelberg where he later published the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* in which appears an abbreviated version of *Science of Logic* and an application of its principles to the Philosophy of Nature and Philosophy of Spirit. In 1818, Hegel took the prestigious position of chair of philosophy at the University of Berlin, and in 1821 published *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* grounded on the section of the *Encyclopaedia* exploring the “objective spirit”. In this major work in political philosophy Hegel gives an account of the nature of philosophy, setting out his approach to the nature and limits of human cognition.

Hegel published other versions of the *Encyclopaedia* over the next ten years, enjoying great recognition in Berlin. After his death in 1831 versions of his lectures were published on the history of philosophy and the philosophy of religion, history and aesthetics.

Hegel’s goal was to form a comprehensive philosophical system in which both the history and future of philosophy might be included and understood. He saw the main subject of philosophy to be reality, and understood the necessity of conceiving of a full account of reality, or the developmental process of everything that is. He referred to this as the Absolute, or Absolute Spirit, and felt that philosophy’s task was to chart its development. This charting involved the clarification of the Absolute’s internal rational structure, the demonstration its manifestation in nature and human history, and the explication of its teleological nature, or revealing its end purpose.

In his political work, Hegel describes three types of government: tyranny, found in underdeveloped states; democracy, found in states where there is no distinction between the public and private individual; and hereditary monarchy, found where a central government is combined with indirect representation through Estates. He felt hereditary monarchy to be the most appropriate form of political authority for the modern world. In this regard, he saw the role of the State as expressing the Spirit of a society, as a realization of God in the world. His view was that any true religion would support this kind of kingdom of God on earth, so a religion’s position could never be in opposition or dominance to the state.

Hegel followed the Greek philosopher Parmenides in believing that what is rational is real, and what is real is rational. This is his rational structure of the Absolute, and must be regarded in conjunction with his idea that the Absolute must be seen as pure Thought, Spirit, or Mind, in a process of self-development, governed by the logic of dialectic. The dialectical method is the notion that the conflict of opposites creates movement or progress. The dialectical method is often studied in terms of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, although Hegel seldom used this terminology. The thesis is a primary idea, whose incompleteness gives rise to an opposite or



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conflicting idea, or antithesis. The synthesis is a third term which arises from the conflict between the first two, overcoming the opposition by reconciling the truth found in both the thesis and antithesis. This synthesis becomes a new thesis, inspiring a new antithesis and synthesis, and continuing an evolution of intellectual or historical development. Hegel argues that this dialectical development describes the movement of Absolute Spirit toward an ultimate goal. Reality is the Absolute in a process of dialectical unfolding, manifesting itself in nature and history as it develops. In *The Phenomenology of Mind* Hegel traces the manifestation of the Absolute through the stages of consciousness, self-consciousness, and reason.

Hegel is counted among the most influential philosophers in Western philosophical and political history.

Source: Adapted from the *European Graduate School (EGS)* Library holdings ([www.egs.edu/library/](http://www.egs.edu/library/))



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