

Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards, eds.
The Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel.
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It is a formidable task to review any collection authored by twenty people, divided into six core sections (Hegel's path to the system, the system of philosophy, substantive and interpretive questions, Hegel's forms of argument, Hegel's philosophical influences, and chronologies), and comprising thirty-three chapters all in all. Allegra de Laurentiis and Jeffrey Edwards's *Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel* takes its place alongside Beiser's earlier companion (Cambridge University Press 1993, 2008) and the recent Houlgate/Baur companion (Blackwell 2011). Unlike Stern's fresh guidebook (Routledge 2013) the *Bloomsbury Companion* is not exactly a guide, because it does not guide a reader through Hegel's work. Nor is it a *Lehrbuch* or textbook: rather, it is a sophisticated, probing, and at times demanding collection of separate essays.

The result of the Companion's three-year germination period is 'an intellectually sober overview of Hegel's mature philosophy' (1) that begins with Hegel's early years in Tübingen, Bern, and Frankfurt, where Hegel developed as 'a solitary intellectual' in the philosophical shadow of Schelling (11). It was during this time that Hegel became an outspoken advocate of the French Revolution of 1789 (12). Being trapped in the religious backwardness of German midget-states [*Kleinstaaten*] Hegel was 'eager to break up petrified relations yearning for life and change' (17). Perhaps Hegel's years in Jena, 1801–1806, formed the single most fruitful period in his life: these saw Hegel develop his *System der Sittlichkeit* (22). At the time Fichte's influence on Hegel was noticeable – for example, Hegel took on Fichte's concept of recognition (on which see Anderson, *Hegel's Theory of Recognition*, Continuum 2009).

As Hegel's philosophy grows into a system, his philosophy stands for itself, it exists so that 'through it, we may learn to live... Hegel will never renounce this position' (28). Another position that Hegel will not renounce is that 'true knowing can be achieved only on the basis of a dialectical movement' (26). This conviction leads Hegel to insist that the 'spirit not only affirms nature but also the liberation from nature' (31). The force of Hegel's dialectical philosophy can easily be detected in his *Sittlichkeit*, in which he sees three spheres somewhat dissimilar to Habermas's lifeworld. Hegel sees family, civil society (economy), and the state, while Habermas separates market economies as systems from the lifeworld. Hegel's societal philosophy of *Sittlichkeit* is also designed as a rejection of Kant's individualistic and formal morality. While recognising Kant's importance, one of Hegel's key terms of *Sittlichkeit* remains 'recognition'. In recognition's asymmetrical form it leads to the relationship of lordship and bondage. Hegel develops this 'first in the *System der Sittlichkeit* and later in the *Phenomenology*' (34).

Critical to any understanding of Hegel's 'System der Sittlichkeit' is that 'Hegel has already been where we still need to go. For example, rather than debating which is more basic, individuals or social groups, Hegel argues that both options are mistaken because individuals and their societies are mutually interdependent for their existence and their characteristics: neither is

“more basic” than the other’ (39). Equally – and this might be an interesting project for Hegelian environmental ethics – ‘human agents are not independent of nature because they cannot renounce their (natural) claim to happiness, and their happiness requires the cooperation of nature’ (49). The way we ‘think and experience, for example, nature, is seen by Hegel as distinguishing thought from experience by referring to an old belief, the belief that in order to know the true constitution of an object we must think it over (*darüber nachdenken*). We think over or reflect on what appears immediately to consciousness in order to expose what is essential, important, the truth of the matter’ (56). Hence, ‘Hegel plans his science as a comprehensive “system of pure reason”’ (78).

On the other side of Hegel’s understanding of nature is, most surprisingly, the fact that ‘some 30 years before the publication of Darwin’s *On the Origin of Species*, Hegel rejects the idea of natural evolution’ (111). Hegel nonetheless ‘claims that philosophy comprehends nature as externalisation of thought... Hegel presents the subjective mind/spirit as still immersed in natural corporeality’. But ‘Hegel warns not to take nature as the original prius, making spirit into something derived from nature... its true shape (*wahre Gestalt*) originally integrates spirit that is only in itself (as in logic) together with spirit that is only external to itself (as in nature)’ (128). ‘The animal has not yet free will, that is, the capacity for autonomous self-determination independent of excitement, sensation or singular circumstances’ (131). ‘In Hegel’s philosophy, nature’s goal is to attain a higher form of existence by consuming its own immediacy and sensuous being’ (132).

Such a human being is not ‘someone who cannot feel moral indignation or does not feel a gut-wrenching sensation when betrayed’. Such a person ‘may be able to think about morality, but is not a moral person, not someone whose very being is informed by morality’ (140). Transferred to Hegel’s master-slave dialectics, this means that ‘the master remains in thrall of his own natural impulses; the servant learns to control his. This is the beginning of human freedom. The servant controls his natural impulses, at this point, only for the sake of the single, contingent will of the master, not yet for the sake of a truly universal rational will; but the ability to subordinate oneself to another will is an essential part of full recognition. This is a lesson the master must also somehow learn. This lesson, once learned, makes possible the transition to universal self-consciousness’ (147).

Hence for the slave more than for the master, ‘justice and ethics are closely linked: one of our foremost ethical duties, as guides to individual action, is to abide by the dictates of justice’ (157). Linking Hegel’s master-slave dialectics to Rawls (*Justice as Fairness*, Belknap Press 2001) is still an outstanding project. For Hegel, meanwhile, ‘slavery is absolutely unjust... for the right to freedom of will is inalienable’ (168). Hegelian ethics opposes slavery, serfdom, and poverty. ‘Hegel regards poverty as an evil because it produces wretched living conditions and because it systematically excludes the poor from participation in society’ (174). Hegel discusses the poor and the working poor under the heading of rubble or ‘*Pöbel*’.

Once the problem of poverty is solved – and, lest we forget, Hegelian ethics offers no real solution to it – ‘liberation from the cares of everyday life frees the human being for the pursuit of science... [but] only where civil freedom blossomed could philosophy make its appearance’ (198). This carries universal connotations, because ‘the spirit of the world (*Weltgeist*) is the agent

of universal history (*Weltgeschichte*), which, in turn, develops within the sphere of *Sittlichkeit*' (209). For this to happen, *Geist* needs to be developed as reflective *Geist*, given that 'everything human is human only as a result of thinking, and thinking is responsible for the humanity of all that is human' (226). Here, one needs to remember that for Hegel 'thought's path is neither linear nor predetermined, but a dialectical progression; we discover it as we go along, learning from our failures' (228).

It is because of philosophical concepts like these that 'Hegel rejects Kant's unknown thing in itself as mere fiction' (236). For Hegel there can be no thing in itself because of 'the objective spirit: the shared spirit of a social group embodied in its customs, laws and institutions, and pervading the character and consciousness of the member of the group' (239). As such, the spirit that informs and shapes science is always 'the spirit of world spirit (*Weltgeist*), a people spirit (*Volkgeist*), and the spirit of the age (*Geist der Zeit*); the shared mentality, social life and cultural products of the times... individuals are imbued with this spirit and cannot leap beyond their time' (240). Thus also 'according to Hegel, one cannot determine an object per se without thereby also positioning it within a context that transcends it' (254). This is a consequence of 'Hegel's principle that all things are in themselves contradictory [and that a] contradiction expresses the truth of things' (261).

As we have seen above, to realise a philosophical truth of things one needs the freedom to engage in science and philosophy. Necessarily, 'concepts of human will and freedom lay at the heart of Hegelian philosophy. Freedom is the worthiest and most sacred possession of man' (265). As long as human freedom stands in contradiction to today's society, true emancipation and Enlightenment remain unfulfilled projects. At present, therefore, Hegel's dictum still stands: 'contradiction is the rule of what is true; non-contradiction, the rule of what is false' (279). In other words, those who claim there are no contradictions are wrong; it is still a 'fundamental insight that negativity is an immanent moment of both thinking and reality' (281). In short, 'more thoroughly than any other philosopher, Hegel probed the character, scope, and prospects for rational justification in non-formal domains, including both empirical knowledge and moral philosophy (ethics and theory of justice)' (291).

Hegelian philosophy, as outlined above, has been followed up after Hegel's death in 1831. Among his followers have been, for example, Eduard Gans and Eduard Bauer. Bauer's 'anti-Semitic nationalism from an anti-Christian basis is sometimes understood as an immediate predecessor of national socialist ideology' (306). Another Young Hegelian, Ludwig Feuerbach, 'was dismissed after it became known that he was the author of an anonymous work that described Christianity as an inhuman religion'; still, for some, Feuerbach contributed 'to the destruction of classical German Idealism' (307).

Feuerbach remains known today mainly thanks to Marx's eleventh thesis, according to which 'philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it'. The *Bloomsbury Companion* is brilliant on the first part but a comprehensive failure on the second, as it lacks any guide for the emancipation of those living in oppressive structures. The *Bloomsbury Companion* does record Marx's own description of his early relationship to Hegel, 'I therefore openly avowed myself the pupil of that mighty thinker' (329). The

Companion concludes that ‘Marx was working on the same construction site as Hegel, and there were direct lines of communication between their respective workshops’ (334).

There is no need here to outline the complex relationship between Hegel, Marx, and Engels. Let it just be said that Hegel’s influence on the Frankfurt School of critical theory ranges from Adorno’s studies on Hegel to Habermas and more recently Schmidt am Busch’s “Legacy of Hegelian Philosophy and the Future of Critical Theory” (in Smith and Deranty’s *New Philosophies of Labour*, Brill 2011) and Axel Honneth’s *The I in We: Studies in the Theory of Recognition* (Polity Press 2012). Hegel’s legacy can also be traced through the troubled history that 19th-century German philosophy has shared with analytical philosophy (313).

Finally, there is Hegel’s reception in France, which began during Hegel’s lifetime with Victor Cousin, who met Hegel in Heidelberg (321). Instructive is Merleau-Ponty’s appreciative statement, according to which ‘all the great philosophical ideas of the past century – the philosophies of Marx and Nietzsche, phenomenology, German existentialism, and psychoanalysis – had their beginnings in Hegel’ (324). On the other side we have ‘Foucault’s inaugural talk at the College de France [noting that] this entire period, as concerns logic or epistemology, or again Marx or Nietzsche, is trying to escape from Hegel’ (325). But Hegel’s key link to France remains connected to one name: Alexandre Kojève (232). It was Kojève who remarked that ‘the *Phenomenology of Spirit* is a description of human existence’ (325).

In sum, the *Bloomsbury Companion to Hegel* might not exactly be a handbook – it is not particularly handy, nor does it fit in one’s hand – and it might not be an introductory text either. It is, however, an exquisitely compiled collection of intellectually challenging essays on Hegelian philosophy. It is a thoroughgoing overview of a difficult author, one that may be enjoyed more by those familiar with Hegelian philosophy than those who seek an entry point to Hegel.

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