



The Philosophy of History by Hegel

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

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From Introduction: "Hegel's Lectures on the Philosophy of History are recognized in Germany as a popular introduction to his system; their form is less rigid than the generality of metaphysical treatises, and the illustrations, which occupy a large proportion of the work, are drawn from a field of observation more familiar perhaps, than any other, to those who have not devoted much time to metaphysical studies. One great value of the work is that it presents the leading facts of history from an altogether novel point of view. And when it is considered that the writings of Hegel have exercised a marked influence on the political movements of Germany, it will be admitted that his theory of the universe, especially that part which bears directly upon politics, deserves attention even from those who are the most exclusive advocates of the "practical." A writer who has established his claim to be regarded as an authority, by the life which he has infused into metaphysical abstractions, has pronounced the work before us, "one of the pleasantest books on the subject he ever read."1 And compared with that of most German writers, even the style may claim to be called vigorous and pointed. If therefore in its English dress the "Philosophy of History" should be found deficient in this respect, the fault must not be attributed to the original. It has been the aim of the translator to present his author to the public in a really English form, even at the cost of a circumlocution which must sometimes do injustice to the merits of the original. A few words however have necessarily been used in a rather unusual sense; and one of them is of very frequent occurrence. The German "Geist," in Hegel's nomenclature, includes both intelligence and will, the latter even more expressly than the former. It embraces in fact man's entire mental and moral being, and a little reflection will make it obvious that no term in our metaphysical vocabulary could have been well substituted for the more theological one, "Spirit," as a fair equivalent. It is indeed only the impersonal and abstract use of the term that is open to objection; an objection which can be met by an appeal to the best classical usage; viz., the rendering of the Hebrew and Greek in the authorized version of the Scriptures. One indisputable instance may suffice in confirmation: "Their horses [i.e., of the Egyptians] are flesh and not spirit." (Isaiah xxxi. 3.) It is pertinent to remark here, that the comparative disuse of this term in English metaphysical literature, is one result of that alienation of theology from philosophy with which continental writers of the most opposite schools agree in taxing the speculative genius of Britain an alienation which mainly accounts for the gulf separating English from German speculation, and which will, it is feared, on other accounts also be the occasion of communicating a somewhat uninviting aspect to the following pages."

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