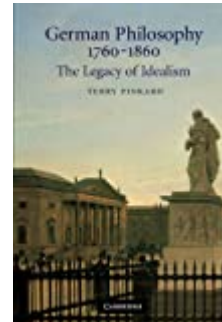




**Terry Pinkard.** *German Philosophy 1760-1860: The Legacy of Idealism.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. x + 382 pp. \$65.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-521-66381-6.



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## Twice-Told Tales

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Terry Pinkard, recent and notable biographer of Hegel, has written a useful, readable, frustrating book.[1] It proposes to present a hundred years of German philosophy in the Idealist tradition, from Kant through Hegel and beyond, and to do so by putting major philosophers into historical context. The result is a readable compendium that presents individual philosophers from Kant (including those reacting to him), through the second half of the nineteenth century, by placing them in the historical setting in which they wrote. <p> The book starts from a historical moment, 1763, in the midst of what Pinkard calls the “first world war” (p. 1), thus starting off a stirring tale of German thought emerging into the light out of the political chaos and disorganization that was the German-speaking territories in the Seven Years War. The narrative he wants his readers to follow is the arc of history guiding the evolution of philosophy, as history leads contemporaries to contemplate the dyad of what will be the new era, “freedom and reason” (p. 366). <p> The on-going political and social instabilities across the Protestant-Catholic di-

vide of Europe, as Pinkard introduces them, were particularly significant for German-speaking regions, since, by 1800 at least, Germany would be able to claim an emerging culture of reading, leading individuals toward education, new attitudes, and jobs outside of court. No wonder then that Pinkard casts Johann Wolfgang von Goethe’s *Werther* as the prototype of the era’s hero, thus explaining the popularity of <cite>The Passions of Young Werther</cite> (1774); the book’s title is usually translated as <cite>Sorrows</cite>, a commonplace that Pinkard challenges. <p> Pinkard’s narrative, however, tells a tale of rebirth on a Hegelian pattern, favoring progress as his road markers—a tale that requires clear heroes and villains, and a clear set of conflict rather than an era of general and continuing social and political disruptions. The data for that clear narrative he finds in philosophy itself. “After Kant, nothing would be the same again” (p. 15). Thus Pinkard’s new era must start cleanly, and so he sets the start of the new era philosophically, rather than with respect to historical forces. The new dawn is 1784’s “What is Enlightenment,” which introduces three chapters (the whole of part 1) dedicated to Kant, moving from this short essay



through the <cite>Critiques</cite>. Kant's work, as he reads it, is intended to be a corrective to the era's "immaturity," taking philosophy into a new, robust era. <p> The story that Pinkard tells is robust and emerges with clear lines. Part 1 retells Kant's program in a diplomatic version that brings together the best of today's readings of specific concepts, placing it within a somewhat broader context of the history of philosophy. Some precursors to Kant (most notably, Hume and the Scottish Enlightenment) emerge as early protests against the exhaustion of rationalism, as in the Wolffian paradigm. Pithy, well-formulated discussions of principle concepts and themes of Kant's work form the bulk of the chapters, including items like freedom, determinism, and the primacy of reason. <p> The second part of the volume presents post-Kantian philosophy, taking it as an evolution of intellectual history in the wake of the French Revolution. First, the author takes up figures from the 1780s, in a discussion centered around the rise of the new university in Jena. Pinkard paints Kant as offering individuals a view of freedom and reason, a counter to what he considers an essentially conservative political environment. As Pinkard portrays the situation, Kant's popularity led to resistance from conservative forces who dared to resist change by adhering to older models of thought. Thus Pinkard structures his chapters around public rejections to Kant's work. First, Friedrich Heinrich Jacobi, who emerged as important around 1785, is introduced as a skeptic who doubted the universal use of reason as sufficient proof. Pinkard sets Jacobi into the context of his intellectual network, including figures from criticism and literature, like Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. Solid accounts of similar reactions follow, including those by Karl Leonhard Reinhold, an ordained priest who left the church, and Johann Gottlieb Fichte, in the various incarnations of his <cite>Science of Knowledge</cite> (<cite>Wissenschaftslehre</cite>), starting in the 1790s. In all cases, Pinkard provides lucid accounts of debates about central premises or concepts. <p> Yet despite these strengths, <cite>German Philosophy 1760-1860</cite> begins to unravel under its own narrative weight, in no small part because of its unrealized desire to focus on philosophy in history, while actually writing a history of philosophy from today's perspective. By the time of the French Revolution and Napoleon's subsequent expansionism, reactions to Kant were found in many more mediated forms and at widely scattered sites through the world of germanophone intellectuals, not necessarily in the kind of scholar-to-scholar debate that one found in earlier generations, but also as adaptations by creative writers and theorists in many

fields outside philosophy. <p> Pinkard is capable of great elegance, particularly in his prose on Kant and Hegel, but he can also fall into tendentious summary judgments, if not blatantly inaccurate statements about the very historical and intellectual contexts that he purports to bring to bear on his philosophers. As an example, he reduces to conservative reaction the shifting, often vibrant intellectual climate of continuing Protestant Reformation in the region (a climate that produced, for example, the Tuebinger Stift at the University, a theological unit that incubated Schelling, Hegel, and Hoelderlin). "However, growing legions of Pietists, old style evangelical believers in the literal truth of the Bible, and conservative theologians were increasingly on the attack against the importation of Enlightenment ideas" (p. 89). <p> Such statements create drama, making his heroes seem properly brave and forward-looking in their attempts to break through this wave of conservatism. Yet to call Pietists "old style evangelical believers" is to injure the reputation of a very complex social and political force with many faces.[2] Pinkard seems to be tarring them with the brush of subsequent evangelical Christianity (such as the Methodists and Shakers who are discussed in the context of the Great Awakening, often as charismatics and hence as unpolitical), when today's historians are recovering their significance as forces in social change and part of the continuing evolution of Protestant Dissent through Europe and the Americas. The irony of Pinkard's statement emerges even more crucially when one realizes that his author-hero, Goethe, offers in <cite>Wilhelm Meister's Apprenticeship</cite> (<cite>Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre</cite>, [1795-96]) a more than favorable account of Pietist "plainness" in the figure of the "Beautiful Soul" ("die schoene Seele") based on the notable Frankfurt Pietist Susanne von Klettenberg. <p> Pinkard's hero-and-opposition narrative continues through part 2 of the volume, which turns to Romantic receptions of Kantianism in Jena and beyond, many of which were spurred by Fichte's Kant as much as by Kant's own work. Here, again, he offers brief but salient discussions of the contributions of the poets Friedrich Hoelderlin and Novalis (Friedrich von Hardenberg), the aesthetician-author Friedrich von Schlegel, and philosophers Friedrich Schleiermacher and Friedrich W. J. Schelling. All are considered as bridges in the overriding movement of philosophical thought between Kant and Hegel, including various "Post-Kantians" such as Jacob Friedrich Fries; this group is discussed in chapter 8. <p> The bridge narratives in part 2 present solid thumbnails of the thinkers involved but, again, they can slip badly when actual history or literary history intrude.



Perhaps the most egregious of these is his assessment of Mme. de Stael, her *De l'Allemagne* (1810), and August Wilhelm von Schlegel. He says "she launches the idea that Germany was a land of poets and philosophers, not doers, and that this was because there was not political life available to Germans, which required those who would otherwise be its movers and doers to retreat from the political world into an ethereal world of thought" (p. 164), casting August Wilhelm von Schlegel as a "friend" and her son's tutor. Schlegel, however, was a major aesthete in his own right, who has been acknowledged as her conduit into German thought. And de Stael's work was framed to be an attack on the French, who persisted in considering their culture the navel of the universe (and Germany the home of peasants), even after twenty years of cultural disruption. 

This may not be a major error in itself (or an error at all, but rather a scholarly judgment), but similar shadings occur throughout the chapters in part 2, clearly gauged to bring Hegel into higher relief as a "savior" to Germanophone thought. They add up, in this reviewer's estimation, to a not insignificant misrepresentation of these figures' impact on European thought. Thus, for example, Friedrich von Schiller's first-generation reception of Kant is scarcely mentioned, despite his critical role as a bridge to Romantic aesthetics, not only in Germany, but particularly in England; August Wilhelm von Schlegel's *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (originally published 1809-10) had long-lasting impact in translation in England; and Fichte was influential as a conduit to Kant for English intellectuals. Such omissions might be understandable as concessions to brevity, or as outside the purview of a book on philosophy rather than applied aesthetics, yet Pinkard includes Novalis and Hölderlin, who are generally considered to be less significant in aesthetics than the Schlegels and Schiller. 

Part 3 returns to much sounder ground, as Pinkard devotes three chapters to Hegel, very similar to those on Kant. Finally, part 4, "The Revolution in Question," covering 1830 to 1855, takes up idealism after Hegel's death in 1831, offering a brief sketch of the factionalization of the young Hegelian movement and taking his tale into the era of Marx, including the fate of Schelling as Hegel's replacement in Berlin as well as discussions of Schopenhauer and Kierkegaard. The volume's conclusion reaches past the 1860s, when he returns to his heroic narrative of Idealism as the instigator of the emergence of "freedom and reason" in European thought (p. 366), as philosophy was gradually relieved from its pre-rational state. 

Pinkard's work is an admirably accessible account of the internal history

of Idealist philosophy without the thick web of jargon that theory-oriented discussions of Idealism are prone to, since Derrida. In addition, it will provide clear guidelines for readers in philosophy on how to think about the historical canon of their own discipline, for example, where Pinkard has decided that Wolff is always "dry" and rationalism "exhausted," no matter their echoes in analytic philosophy. The many virtues of Pinkard's book will doubtlessly lead it to be widely read among those who are not specialized in Idealism and by those seeking an overview to complement readily-available anthologies of Idealist philosophy and criticism in translation, including collections by Lawrence S. Stepelevich, Timothy J. Chamberlain, and A. Leslie Willson (the latter two in Continuum's *German Library*).[3] By accident or design, these anthologies present substantial text excerpts from almost all of the authors Pinkard discusses (an unusual correspondence of texts and commentary in what otherwise seem to be independent sources). 

Despite these virtues, however, this reviewer cannot avoid the fact that Pinkard's book has largely poured old wine into a not-so-new bottle. The canon of work in philosophy, theory, and aesthetics by the German Classicists and Romantics, among which Schiller, Hölderlin, Novalis and the Schlegels can be counted, long ago was written up in the form of a straightforward narrative account, by the literary scholar and intellectual historian Rene Wellek, in his *History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950*, especially the first two volumes.[4] And the politics affecting the philosophers and their work has been given much more sensitive historical treatment in various works by Frederick C. Beiser, who does a superior job in taking historical context seriously in outlining the evolution of Idealism in this turbulent historical era.[5] 

Nonetheless, Pinkard's book will find resonance within the segment of the philosophy community that believes that the history of philosophy is a concept identical to the history of ideas. Pinkard has done what is possible to do within this model of historiography and the result will expand the horizons of many readers, by introducing a variety of texts and philosophers who are not ordinarily in the philosophy curriculum. 

The history of philosophy, however, is beginning to be written somewhat differently than Pinkard's style, under the influence of Post-Structuralism and New Historicism, which take philosophy as more than a battle of concepts. Beiser has provided the most recent models in the area encompassed by Pinkard, but the theoretical case for a new history of philosophy—as well as substantial examples of what such approaches can achieve—are found, most notably,



in the work of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari.[6] In *What is Philosophy*, Deleuze and Guattari speak of how the concepts of any intellectual system create not only a world of understanding, but also a set of “conceptual personae,” a set of actors empowered to act in its pattern of knowledge. This approach makes the philosophers and the institutions in which they engage equal documentation of the epistemological systems in which they work—to provide an account of individual concepts, rather than of philosophical rhetorics, texts, and institutions, necessarily constitutes an incomplete account of a philosophical system. Pinkard’s achievement is nonetheless to be saluted as one of the best in a familiar vein of the history of philosophy. Notes: [1]. Terry Pinkard, *Hegel: A Biography* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000). [2]. For a more nuanced version of the Pietists’ social engagement, see Lucinda Martin, *Women’s Religious Speech and Activism in German Pietism*,

Diss. University of Texas, 2002. [3]. Lawrence S. Stepelevich, *The Young Hegelians: An Anthology* (Cambridge: University Press, 1983); Timothy J. Chamberlain, ed., *Eighteenth-Century German Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1992); and A. Leslie Willson, ed., *German Romantic Criticism* (New York: Continuum, 1982). [4]. Rene Wellek, *History of Modern Criticism: 1750-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955-). [5]. Frederick C. Beiser, *The Fate of Reason: German Philosophy from Kant to Fichte* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987); and *Enlightenment, Revolution, and Romanticism: The Genesis of German Political Thought 1790-1900* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).

[6]. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

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