Although there is a nice summary in this chapter of parts of *The Prose of the World*, far more of the chapter is devoted to that work than to *The Visible and the Invisible*, although the latter work unquestionably is more consequential for contemporary philosophy. Indeed, Matthews might have achieved his goal more effectively (the goal of showing the relevance of Merleau-Ponty’s thought today) by making more of the connections between contemporary French thinkers whose ideas emerge from Merleau-Ponty’s innovative work.

All in all, this work does much of what it sets out to do. It will be very useful to help students appreciate the important but difficult works of Merleau-Ponty.

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*Hegel: A Biography*  
TERRY PINKARD  

Philosophers, with rare exceptions, lead uninteresting lives. The bare bones of Hegel’s sixty-one years are a case in point: birth in Stuttgart; education at Tübingen; a short-lived position as lecturer at Jena (and romantic dalliance); nine years of nonacademic work as newspaper editor and highschool principal; marriage and children; eventual achievement of longed-for university posts, first in Heidelberg and then in Berlin; sudden death of suspected cholera—nothing very dramatic, and all fitting a pattern typical of the modern academic life.

Hegel the intellectual figure, on the other hand, offers a wealth of material for the scholar: his oeuvre is large and wide-ranging; his *Phenomenology of Spirit* is one of the most abstruse works in the philosophical canon; his influence is as enormous as it is controversial. It is no surprise that most literature neglects Hegel-the-man in favor of Hegel-the-figure; this has long been the philosophical norm. What is surprising is the emergence of a new genre, the “intellectual biography,” which attempts to combine the two. Terry Pinkard’s contribution to this body of literature meets this challenge with limited success.

The book has obvious strengths, of which Pinkard’s authority is the most important. Having published an excellent work on Hegel’s *Phenomenology in 1996*, and with an account of German philosophy of the same general period (1760–1860) published this year (both by Cambridge University Press), he knows his material well. Further, Pinkard possesses that all too rare gift of being able to examine difficult philosophical ideas in accessible language and to provide novel and thought-provoking interpretations of unresolved textual problems while doing so.

Pinkard acknowledges from the outset the difficulty this type of volume presents and attempts to resolve it by breaking the book into sections that will appeal to different readers. Chapters 4, 5, 8, 11, and 14 are what Pinkard calls
“purely ‘philosophical’ chapters” which are of “primary interest mostly to Hegel scholars” (xvi); these presumably can be skipped by the more general reader—if any there be—without loss to the narrative structure of the whole. The text thus appears as three volumes in one: the scholarly work, the biographical story, and the I-want-it-all study of Hegel’s life and work (although, of the third, Pinkard apologizes for its various omissions, claiming that a fully comprehensive story would be a “multi-volume affair” [xvii]).

Let me briefly review these three texts in one, beginning with the scholarly work. While Pinkard offers, in the eighty-five pages of Chapter 4, a detailed and enlightening discussion of the various philosophical trends that influenced Hegel’s Phenomenology (and truly so, as Pinkard debunks the myth of the singularity of Hegel’s thought), his following chapter on the text itself numbers only eighteen pages and reads as a summary of the systematization of those influences. The scholar would be better off with Pinkard’s extensive study of this work. Similarly, the twenty pages on the Logic and the twenty-five pages on Hegel’s Philosophy of Right (Chapters 8 and 11), written as they are in accessible language, lack the detail and depth expected of a good critical study, even given the consistent quality of Pinkard’s writing. This is not an unfair criticism to make of an intellectual biography: why include these “skippable” chapters if they do not satisfy scholarly interest yet need not be consumed by the general reader? They comprise roughly 130 pages of an already lengthy volume, and are both less than the scholar needs and, as Pinkard himself acknowledges, probably more than the reader of a biography wants (xvi).

Of Hegel the biography proper, Pinkard tries to make up for the lack of drama in Hegel’s life by situating it within the upheaval of the times: the birth and death of German Romanticism (Hegel knew all of the principal figures); the emergence of the German nation from a collection of principalities (the political uncertainties of which affected Hegel’s life decisions); and the contribution of the French, American, and industrial revolutions to the development of modernity, with Hegel as the first truly modern thinker. Here again, Pinkard’s research and authority shine through, and his depiction of the intellectual climate at Jena in Chapter 3 is (philosophically) riveting. But the general reader, looking for an engaging narrative, quickly becomes bogged down in the minutiae of accounts of the administration of a university, the political structure of a small principality, or the foundation and role of a newspaper to maintain interest. These sections read more as cultural and political history than biography. The two are not opposed, but a skilled biographer weaves them more seamlessly together than is evidenced here. The clarifying subheadings Pinkard provides within the chapters (seventeen of them in Chapter 10) add to this general feel of reading history rather than biography, and the relevance of these details becomes questionable and detracts from the narrative tension a good biography requires.

When these two partial texts are put together and the book is read as a whole, a problem of repetition occurs with three different results. The first is simple redundancy: page 109 (a “biographical” page) announces the details of the
publication of Hegel's first book; page 153 (a "philosophical" page) repeats these details almost verbatim before discussing its content in more depth. This irritating redundancy recurs throughout the text. Second, within a purely "philosophical" chapter, Pinkard will drop a personal detail (such as the birth of Hegel's illegitimate son, page 192) with which the biography has not yet dealt, thus spoiling any drama the subsequent biographical chapter may hold. Pinkard, for all his abilities, is not a skilled storyteller. Third, while a biographical chapter will discuss the influence of, say, Kantian or Schellingian thought on Hegel's development, it will not say what this thought was: the philosophical content is either missing or greatly reduced, only to be reprised in a later "skippable" philosophical chapter, with the attendant redundancy already noted. But if we are to read an intellectual biography, surely the intellectual content ought to be foremost; given Pinkard's ability to convey these ideas clearly, it is mystifying that he would choose to separate his historical and philosophical accounts. What can be gathered from the text as a whole is that the intellectual milieu in which Hegel lived was vitally important to the development of his system: would any reader want to miss this?

Significant rearrangement of the volume to make these sections cohere would have resulted in a text of more approachable length, eliminate needless repetition, maintain dramatic thrust, and move the philosophical material to the forefront where it belongs. Terry Pinkard surely has the skill to pull this off. In the meantime, I eagerly await his next philosophical volume.

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Continental Philosophy: A Very Short Introduction
SIMON CRITCHLEY

Continental philosophy, regarded in some analytic circles as an indulgence in what Stanley Rosen calls "wool-gathering and bathos," has often had a bad rap. In the respectable, if somewhat analytic, Oxford Companion to Philosophy, we learn that existentialism, structuralism, and critical theory all "rely on dramatic, if not melodramatic, utterance rather than sustained, rational argument" (161), and that structuralism in particular has shot off "into intellectual outer space" with Derrida, whose deconstruction amounts to nothing less than "a reductio ad absurdum of philosophy" (162). The entry concludes that "there is really no perceptible convergence between the two philosophical worlds" (161), and intimates that this is all for the best.

In the face of such dismissal, it would be unsurprising if an English-language introduction to continental thought were to begin with a "set the record straight"