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Review of "Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit"

Book Review | Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit

Malek K. Khazaee

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Hegel's Preface to the Phenomenology of Spirit, translation and running commentary by Yirmiyahu Yovel, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005. 223 pp., Preface ix-xii, Introduction, bibliography, index. \$24.95 (pbk), ISBN 978-0-691-12052-2

The *Phenomenology* is generally considered to be Hegel's first mature work since some of his most influential thoughts evolved through the process of its composition. This Preface, which was written only after the completion of the *Phenomenology* (1807), is therefore not so much an introduction to the book as it is an inauguration of the author's mature system, which gained full expression twenty years later in the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences. Mainly because of this, the Preface, which had at first been incomprehensible to readers, became celebrated (though never completely understood) in the following decades. It is conceivable that Hegel's enthusiasm to publish the Phenomenology without any further delay prevented him from retreating to his desk to revise and conform it to the fresh fruits of this Preface, or conversely, to revise and conform the Preface to fit the confines of the book. Instead of admitting the excess and incoherence of this Preface for this philosophical book, Hegel wastes no time to blame the excessiveness and incoherence of any preface in any philosophical book. It is of course undeniable that no philosophical system can judiciously be prefaced or sufficiently introduced within a few pages. But again, the author's stress on this general fact distracts from the much closer fact that the excessiveness and incoherence of this particular Preface results from his lack of restraint to confine it within the book's limits, or conversely, from his reluctance to delay publication by expanding and redefining new boundaries for the book.

The infinitely more significant issue, however, is that this Preface is probably the most compressed composition ever against all practices of rigid philosophizing, whose most

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