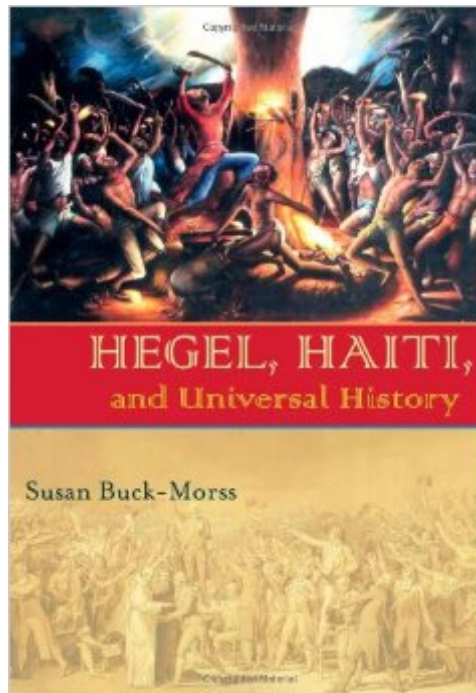


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Hegel, Haiti, And Universal History (Pitt Illuminations)



Synopsis

In this path-breaking work, Susan Buck-Morss draws new connections between history, inequality, social conflict, and human emancipation. *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History* offers a fundamental reinterpretation of Hegel's master-slave dialectic and points to a way forward to free critical theoretical practice from the prison-house of its own debates. Historicizing the thought of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and the actions taken in the Haitian Revolution, Buck-Morss examines the startling connections between the two and challenges us to widen the boundaries of our historical imagination. She finds that it is in the discontinuities of historical flow, the edges of human experience, and the unexpected linkages between cultures that the possibility to transcend limits is discovered. It is these flashes of clarity that open the potential for understanding in spite of cultural differences. What Buck-Morss proposes amounts to a "new humanism" • one that goes beyond the usual ideological implications of such a phrase to embrace a radical neutrality that insists on the permeability of the space between opposing sides and as it reaches for a common humanity.

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Customer Reviews

I came to this book having vigorously debated within a Hegel reading group alternate approaches to reading the *Phenomenology*: either by decoding the abstract language for concrete historical references (with guides such as Kojève's) or by allowing the language to remain formal and transcendental in character. Unfortunately Hegel's style invites readers inclined to remain in

theoretical abstraction to overlook and lazily avoid the investigation of concrete history (which brings philosophy truly to life). Susan Buck-Morss here seems to share my view that Hegel was hedging for metaphysical appeal, while the substantial referents of his terms are a radical array of historical circumstances more numerous than has even been supposed so far. Buck-Morss puts forth a convincing argument that Hegel's master-slave dialectic was inspired and written not only by consideration of ancient Greek slavery (as is conventionally understood) but also by the contemporary event of the Haitian revolution, which Hegel understood to follow from colonial domination by early Western capitalism. Buck-Morss examines Hegel's critical reading of Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* as particularly important for shaping his general critique of modernity in the modern economy's instrumentalizing of people. One might suspect that this too-conveniently pulls Hegel into Left post-colonial studies, but actually a reading in good faith will prove her right: Hegel studies heretofore (especially by philosophy specialists) have been woefully neglectful of a contemporary historical event - the Haitian revolution - whose significance Hegel couldn't (nor wouldn't) have overlooked as an avid reader of all the news being published and available to him.

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