

Modern Freedom

Hegel's Legal, Moral, and Political Philosophy

'O ~{oc; ~paxuc; ~ OE 't£XVII ~a1(pft (Hippokrates) That life is short needs no proof when we are engaged in ambitious projects. When I began this book, almost forty years ago, I did not foresee that its completion would take such a long time, although I was well aware that some of Hegel's texts stubbornly resist a thorough deciphering of their meaning and argumentation. Having written a dissertation on the young Hegel's moral, political, and religious philosophy (Lejeune Hegel et la vision morale du monde, 1960'), I was asked to teach ethics, social philosophy, and philosophy of law at various universities of The Netherlands. While studying and teaching the classics of ethics and politics, I began to focus on the textbook that Hegel had written for his courses on practical philosophy: Elements of the Philosophy of Right (1820). The first result of my research was a study of the historical and philosophical context of this text (Philosophy and Politics: A Commentary on the Preface to Hegel's Philosophy of Right, 1981/1987), but the interpretation of its content proceeded slowly. While conferences and colloquia occasioned fragments whose traces can be found in the following pages, the ramifications of Hegel's thought and the overwhelming amount of secondary literature demanded a great deal of time and attention and other interests continued to interrupt the project.

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320,99 €

299,99 € (zzgl. MwSt.)

Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9781402002885

Medium: Buch

ISBN: 978-1-4020-0288-5

Verlag: Springer Netherlands

Erscheinungstermin: 30.11.2001

Sprache(n): Englisch

Auflage: 2001

Serie: Studies in German Idealism

Produktform: Kartoniert

Gewicht: 1042 g

Seiten: 675

Format (B x H): 155 x 233 mm

