

Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* has a paradoxical reputation as one of the most important and most impenetrable and inconsistent of philosophical works. In *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology of Spirit*, Michael N. Forster advances an original reading of the work which for the first time really penetrates its obscurity. His approach differs from that of previous scholars in two main ways: he reads the work, first, as a whole—not piecemeal, as it has usually been analyzed—and second, within the context of Hegel's broader corpus and the thought of other philosophers. Forster's reading reveals the *Phenomenology of Spirit* as in fact an impressively coherent text containing a rich array of ideas of extraordinary philosophical originality and depth. These ideas include a diagnosis of the ills of modernity in terms of its entanglement in a series of dualisms, and a project for overcoming them; a sweeping naturalism; a deep rethinking of and response to problems of skepticism; subtle arguments for social theories of meaning and truth; and a family of ideas based on the insight that human thought changes in fundamental ways over the course of history. Forster's unique and compelling reading uncovers a marvelous product of the philosophical imagination, unparalleled in the history of philosophy and barely recognized for its riches until now.

MICHAEL N. FORSTER is professor and chairman of the Department of Philosophy at the University of Chicago. He is the author of *Hegel and Skepticism*.

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"There are so many books on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and such different ones, that it is foolhardy to suggest that any one of them is the 'best.' But if I had to pick a single book which seems to me to shed the most light on all the issues that surround Hegel's *Phenomenology*, it would certainly be this one. No doubt Forster's lucid and forthright answers to the many questions at issue will remain controversial. But he presents the most comprehensive, consistent, and cogently argued position on them, and one which ought to set the terms of further debate for a long time."

—ALLEN W. WOOD, author of
Hegel's Ethical Thought

"There are, Hume said, shallow thinkers, who fall short of the truth, and abstruse thinkers, who go beyond it. In this magnificent work, with immense erudition and luminous clarity, Forster unravels the intricacies of the most abstruse of thinkers, without ever reducing him to a shallow thinker."

—MICHAEL INWOOD, author of *Hegel*

"Michael Forster has written a very important study of Hegel's first great book. He treats it as the introduction to Hegel's system, and in that connection his work could not be bettered. He distinguishes eleven introductory functions that Hegel wanted the book to serve, and he discusses them all with copious adequacy and marvelous clarity. It seems to me that he has overlooked nothing."

—H. S. HARRIS, author of
*Hegel's Development: Toward
the Sunlight 1770–1801*

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