

Obituary

Michael Inwood (1944–2021)

Robert Stern

With the death of Michael Inwood, the world of Hegel scholarship has lost a prolific and important author on Hegel, as well as a skilled translator of his work. Although family commitments in Greece over the summer often prevented him from attending the annual HSGB conference, Inwood contributed regularly to the *Bulletin*, including a conference paper that he gave in 2018 on Hegel, Aristotle and the principle of non-contradiction, which was to be his last publication (2020). He also published reviews in the journal, and a typically learned discussion note ‘Hegel, Alexander, and the Lentils’ (1997), in which his erudition is deployed to track down a reference in Hegel’s aesthetics, displaying the kind of classical scholarship that was often to stand him in good stead in his reading of Hegel. I first came to know Inwood personally when he acted as one of the two examiners for my PhD (alongside Michael Rosen, also then at Oxford). I still remember the twinkly-eyed kindness with which he probed my arguments and responded to my undoubtedly naïve thoughts. We met periodically after that, and although we were never close, I have always felt indebted to his written work, and greatly admired his obvious personal qualities as a scholar, a teacher and a member of the academic community.

Michael James Inwood (or Mike as he was known to friends and family) was born on 2 December 1944 in London, the eldest of three siblings. He was awarded a scholarship to Alleyn’s School in Dulwich and went on to study Classics at University College Oxford. He became a Fellow of Trinity College Oxford in 1967, where he remained throughout his life. Those who knew him speak of his supportiveness as a supervisor of undergraduate and graduate students—and of the legendary messiness of his study, which can be tantalisingly glimpsed in the background of a few photographs of him at work.

Whilst he published and researched more widely (particularly on Heidegger), Inwood will be best known to the Hegel community for his publications on Hegel, and for his edited collections and translations and re-translations, which often included extensive and very useful paragraph-by-paragraph commentaries.

Inwood’s most significant work in the field is his book entitled simply *Hegel*, published in 1983 in the prestigious ‘Arguments of the Philosophers’ series by

Routledge and Kegan Paul. In the spirit of this series, and of Inwood's own philosophical temperament, it concludes by noting: 'This book has concentrated on the arguments to be found, explicitly or implicitly, in Hegel and most of them have been subjected to criticism' (520). But lest that sound rather dismissive, Inwood is also quick to add that this should not exhaust our concern with Hegel. For, he notes, not only may flawed arguments still be of great interest, but there is also more to Hegel than arguments, including both 'system' and the 'tendency to ask what seem to be the right questions', as well as the desire to escape various perennial dualisms, in ways that Inwood obviously found attractive and potentially fruitful.

Inwood's book thus offers a rich appreciation of Hegel at many levels, setting out first a 'Prelude' which characterizes Hegel's conception of thought, experience and the self's relation to the world; a section on 'Problems' which identifies the main difficulties and issues that Hegel aimed to overcome; and finally an account of 'the System' in which that solution is presented. Throughout this long book (which runs to nearly 600 pages), Inwood strives to present Hegel's position clearly and fair-mindedly, while not holding back from critique. On the whole, the text does not attempt to engage with the various ongoing exegetical disputes that have preoccupied others: left vs right Hegelianism, metaphysical vs anti-metaphysical readings, and so on. Rather, this is Inwood's own response to the text, taking us through the material as he sees it, in an honest and open-minded way. Its lack of partisanship may, perhaps, have hindered its impact but the result is a very engaging and endlessly helpful resource.

Prior to the publication of this book, Inwood had published only a couple of articles on Hegel, though one was in an important collection at the time (1982). He is reported to have said that it was only through being commissioned to write the book by Ted Honderich, who was the inaugural editor of the 'Arguments of the Philosophers' series, that he took a serious interest in Hegel. After the book appeared, he was to continue to make Hegel his major focus, while also publishing on Heidegger and topics in ancient philosophy. In 1985, he edited a collection on Hegel in the widely used 'Oxford Readings in Philosophy' series published by Oxford University Press, which included contributions from various leading scholars; and in 1989, he edited a useful selection of Hegel's writings. Then, in 1992, he published *A Hegel Dictionary* in a new series by Blackwell. Inwood made exemplary use of the format for this volume, offering invaluable brief accounts of key Hegelian terms and concepts, which often combined historical erudition, linguistic sensitivity, and systematic and philosophical insight. As before, he was not afraid to be critical. Both specialists and newcomers to Hegel have benefitted from Inwood's guidance here. Interestingly, in the helpful bibliography, Inwood comments on his own earlier book as follows: it '[a]ttempts to combine criticism with sympathy. It stresses the systematic interconnectedness and the ineradicable

ambiguity of Hegel's thought' (321). The following year, in 1993, Inwood edited a reissue by Penguin of a translation by Bernard Bosanquet of Hegel's *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, to which he added an extensive series of notes.

While he continued to publish articles on Hegel, Inwood was to devote most of his subsequent publishing energy to re-translating and translating Hegel, and to providing those translations with detailed commentaries, once again illuminating Hegel's thought both historically and systematically. The first of these works was his 're-translation' of William Wallace and A. V. Miller's version of the third part of Hegel's *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, issued under the title *Philosophy of Mind*, which appeared in 2007 (2007a). Here he and the publisher, Oxford University Press, were too modest, as in effect this was a new translation, given the extensive changes that Inwood made—and necessarily so, as the previous version was no longer adequate. Inwood did a fine job in modernizing the text, while retaining a feel for Hegel's characteristic style. In addition, he added a formidable set of notes on each paragraph—which at 385 pages is over 100 pages longer than Hegel's own contribution, and which was significant enough to be published separately in its own self-standing book form (2007b). He was to adopt a similar approach in his second major translation, this time of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*—surely the Everest for any Hegel translator. Here thankfully and rightly Inwood was given full credit for this 2018 translation by Oxford University Press. Once again, Inwood offers a precise rendering of Hegel into English, which manages to be as readable as possible given the demands of the original; and once again, he also provides an invaluable set of notes that I have often found succeeds brilliantly in shedding light on what otherwise would be darkness. Even though completed after his retirement in 2011, it is still hard to imagine finding the time for the amount of concentrated effort and care that this project required, and it easily holds its own as a translation in what has become a competitive field.

Inwood was married first to the Hellenist Christiane Sourvinou-Inwood, who predeceased him in 2007, and subsequently to Maria Teodorescu in 2017. In his retirement, her children and relatives gave him the enjoyment of being a 'family man' for the first time, and he continued to support his beloved college, as well to develop academic contacts with Heythrop College, and then, when that closed, with the University of Roehampton. He died peacefully at home on Friday 31st December 2021.

At the funeral service held in Trinity College on 24 January 2022, Inwood's brother Stephen quoted intriguingly from an early school report, in which the young schoolboy was counselled by his house master not only to 'take regular exercise', but also that 'individualism can be taken to extremes'; but, as Stephen noted, both pieces of advice were ignored by this most independent-minded philosopher who smoked a pipe throughout his life. Yet, at another level, he also remained

thoroughly collegial, thus perhaps managing to combine the individual with the universal in a way that may be what drew him to be so interested in Hegel in the first place. Whatever the reason for this attraction, we must all be grateful for the major contribution to our understanding and appreciation of Hegel that Mike Inwood has undoubtedly made.

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