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Hegel's Truth: A Property of Things?

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Abstract:

In his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel affirms that truth is ‘usually’ understood as the agreement of thought with the object, but that in the ‘deeper, i.e. philosophical sense’, truth is the agreement of a content with itself or of an object with its concept. Hegel then provides illustrations of this second sort of truth: a ‘true friend’, a ‘true state’, a ‘true work of art’. Robert Stern has argued that Hegel’s ‘deeper’ or ‘philosophical’ truth is close to what Heidegger labelled ‘material’ truth, namely a property attributed to a thing on the basis of the accordance of that thing with its essence. It has since been common to think of Hegel’s concept of ‘philosophical’ truth as ‘ontological’, ‘objective’ or ‘material’ in contrast to ‘epistemological’ or ‘propositional’ definitions. In this paper, I wish to add an important nuance to the existing literature on this subject: even though things have a truth-value for Hegel, the latter is always negative. I argue that Hegel’s criterion of ‘philosophical’ truth, which is best formulated as ‘agreement with self’, is first and foremost intended to examine the truth-value of thought-determinations. I then argue that even though this criterion may also be applied to examine the truth-value of things (namely, even though things have a truth-value), things never fall under this definition. After reviewing several of Hegel’s explicit remarks on the matter, I provide an alternative explanation to those features of Hegel’s ‘philosophical’ truth which have led scholars to view it as a truth in things. Especially, I argue that what are generally seen as Hegel’s examples (‘true friend’, ‘true state’, ‘true work of art’) are not intended as examples but only as imperfect illustrations of ‘philosophical’ truth.

In his *Encyclopaedia Logic*, Hegel affirms that truth is ‘usually’ understood as the agreement of thought with the object, but that in the ‘deeper, i.e. philosophical sense’, truth is the agreement of a content with itself or of an object with its concept. He then provides illustrations of this second sort of truth: a ‘true friend’, a ‘true state’, a ‘true work of art’ (*EL*: §24A, 62; §172A, 246–47; §213R, 283; §213A, 284).¹ In an article which has become influential, Robert Stern (1993) argues

¹ Abbreviations used:

that when speaking of ‘truth in the deeper sense’, Hegel’s concept of truth does not conform to the way we use this concept in modern theories of truth. He adds that Hegel’s ‘philosophical’ truth is close to what Heidegger labelled ‘material’ truth, namely a property attributed to a thing on the basis of the accordance of that thing with its essence.²

It has since become common to conceptualize the specific difference and interest of Hegel’s notion of truth in referring to Hegel’s ‘philosophical’ truth as ‘ontological’, ‘objective’ or ‘material’, marking the difference from more common ‘epistemological’ or ‘propositional’ definitions.³ This interpretation can also be found in prominent scholarly treatments of the question of truth in the history of philosophy in general, such as Wolfgang Kühne’s *Conceptions of Truth*. For Kühne, Hegel’s concept of ‘philosophical’ truth represents an attempt at ‘breathing new life’ into the ‘moribund’ Aquinian notion of *veritas in rebus* (truth in things) (Kühne 2003: 105).

In this paper, I make the following point: even though things have a truth-value for Hegel, the latter is always negative. That is, I disagree with Stern and Kühne’s suggestion that truth (or ‘material’ truth) is a property that Hegel attributes to things. However, I share a thesis that is implicit in this suggestion, namely that, for Hegel, things have a truth-value.

After making several preliminary remarks on Hegel’s definition of ‘philosophical’ truth in general, I will show that the latter is introduced in Hegel’s *Encyclopaedia* in order to settle ‘the question concerning the truth of the thought-determinations’ (i.e. the categories of Hegel’s *Logic*) (*EL*: §24A, 61). I will accordingly argue that Hegel’s criterion of ‘philosophical’ truth, which is best formulated as ‘agreement with self’, is first and foremost intended to examine the truth-value of thought-determinations. I will then argue that even though this criterion may also be applied to

EL = Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

PhG = Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).

SL = Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/*Wissenschaft der Logik* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1981, 1985, 2 vols.).

PM = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

LFA = Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, 2 vols., trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Calderon Press, 1975)/*Ästhetik*, 3 vols. (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

² Compare: ‘let me first introduce a distinction used by Heidegger between propositional truth and material truth (1977, pp. 118–22). Truth is propositional when it is attributed to statements, judgements or propositions on the basis of their accordance with the way things are. Truth is material when it is attributed to something on the basis of the accordance of the thing with its essence. [...] Hegel’s remark concerns material truth, and that it is a mistake to equate the two’. (Stern 1993: 645). See also Stern 2009: 78.

³ Here are several relatively recent examples of scholars using the epistemological/ontological truth duality: Schnädelbach 1998, 802ff; Halbig 2003: 40; Puntel 2005: 213ff; Martin 2012: 517ff; Bowman 2013: 216; Pippin 2018: 95, 153ff.

examine the truth-value of things (namely, even though things have a truth-value), things never fall under this definition. After reviewing several of Hegel's explicit remarks on the matter, I will proceed to provide an alternative explanation to those features in Hegel's 'philosophical' truth which have led scholars to view it as a truth in things. Especially, I will argue that what are generally seen as Hegel's examples ('true friend', 'true state', 'true work of art') are not intended as examples but only as imperfect illustrations of 'philosophical' truth.

I. Remarks on terminology and sources.

It should first be noted that the question of Hegel's definition of 'philosophical' truth is complicated by the fact that many of Hegel's discussions of truth in the 'deeper, i.e. philosophical sense' appear most explicitly in the Additions to the *Encyclopaedia* (*EL*: §24A, 62; §172A, 246–247; §213A, 284), that are usually considered to be less authoritative texts since they originate in notes taken by his students. Nevertheless, the secondary literature on this question has been very much focused on these Additions as they contain Hegel's most explicit discussions of 'philosophical' truth. Hegel's illustrations ('true friend', 'true state', 'true work of art'), for instance, appear solely in the Additions. It may almost be said that without the latter, there would be no question of interpreting Hegel's definition of 'philosophical' truth as defining a truth in things. Regardless of the authenticity of the Additions, analysing them is thus required in order to discuss and eventually refute this interpretation.

A second issue involves a definition. This article inquires whether, for Hegel, truth is a property of things. By 'thing', I mean an individual phenomenon. This definition includes natural ('material') as well as social phenomena ('states', for instance) but not individual concepts, categories and propositions. This is how I understand Hegel's use of the term 'object' in the relevant passages. I add that this definition appears to conform to Stern's use of the term 'thing', since only 'worldly' objects have essences with which they can be in accordance. This is also the meaning of the term 'thing' within the Aquinian expression *veritas in rebus* used by Künne.

A third issue is that in speaking of truth in the 'deeper, i.e. philosophical sense', Hegel takes considerable liberties in terms of vocabulary and phrasing. In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, in particular, we may find 'philosophical' truth defined as 'the agreement of a content with itself' (*EL*: §24A, 62); as 'the agreement with itself' (*EL*: §24A, 62); as 'the agreement of the concept with reality' (*EL*: §24A, 62); as 'the agreement of the object with itself, i.e. with its concept' (*EL*:

§172A, 246); and as a situation where objectivity ‘corresponds to the concept’ (*EL*: §213R, 283) or where it ‘is identical with the concept’ (*EL*: §213A, 284). It is tempting to resort to terminological differences in commenting on these different formulations, especially since some of the above-mentioned terms have different and at times antithetical meanings as Hegelian *termini technici* (e.g. object, objectivity and reality). But the fact that this ‘deeper’ sort of truth is regularly opposed to a ‘usual’ sort—namely to the classical definition of truth as the correspondence of the intellect to a thing—and that this latter definition is also formulated in many similar but distinct ways,⁴ leads to the conclusion that the different formulations found both in the ‘Greater’ and ‘Lesser’ *Logic* are indeed only different formulations of one and the same definition of truth in the ‘deeper, i.e. philosophical sense’.

But what is this definition exactly? Many scholars, as has already been stated, have taken ‘agreement of the object with its concept’ as an authoritative formulation. Among other reasons, this is due to the fact that this formulation best fits Hegel’s illustrations of ‘philosophical’ truth: ‘true friend’, ‘true state’, ‘true work of art’. In the next pages, I will argue that this formulation is misleading and that another formulation, namely the more general ‘agreement with self’, captures Hegel’s concept of ‘philosophical’ truth far better.

II. The truth-value of thought-determinations.

Reading the second Addition to §24 of the *Encyclopaedia* will help shed light on the matter. In this Addition, Hegel introduces his notion of truth in the ‘deeper, i.e. philosophical sense’. As he puts it shortly beforehand, Hegel is preoccupied there with ‘the question concerning the truth of the thought-determinations’ (*EL*: §24A, 61). But what is at stake in this question?

Thought-determinations are the categories of Hegel’s *Logic*. They are not things, nor are they propositions.⁵ For Hegel, they are ‘*objective* thoughts’ (*EL*: §24, 58), which are also the basic

⁴ In the *Science of Logic*, the *adaequatio*—sometimes labelled ‘correctness’—is formulated as ‘the agreement of thought with the object’ (*SL*: 24/I: 28); as ‘the agreement of cognition with its object’ (*SL*: 523/II: 26); as ‘the agreement of the concept and reality’ (*SL*: 557/II: 60); or as ‘the agreement of representation with the object’ (*SL*: 562/II: 65). In the *Encyclopaedia Logic*, we can find it to be ‘the agreement of an object and our representation of it’ (*EL*: §24A, 62) but also ‘the formal agreement of our representation with its content’ (*EL*: §172A, 246–47). Later passages also read that ‘usual’ truth—that Hegel also labels correctness—is ‘that external things correspond to my representations’ (*EL*: §213R, 283) or that ‘by truth one understands at first that I know how something is’ (*EL*: §213A, 284).

⁵ By proposition, I mean the predication of a subject. The predicate ‘white’ is not a proposition, nor is the category ‘quality’ of which ‘white’ is a kind. This is still true even if, as it is the case for Hegel, both ‘white’ and ‘quality’ are thoughts.

forms of his ontology.⁶ Thought-determinations may thus be compared, *mutatis mutandis*, to Plato's Forms or Aristotle's or Kant's categories. Providing any detailed account of the role thought-determinations play in Hegel's metaphysics would take us far afield here. However, it is imperative to note that in stark contrast to his idealist predecessors, Hegel holds that categories can be true or false. For Kant, to give just one example, specific judgements have truth-values but not the category of 'causality'. For Hegel, on the contrary, the category of 'causality' (but also those of 'quality', 'quantity', etc.) has a truth-value.

For Hegel, accordingly, the set of the basic forms of ontology is composed both of true and of false categories, in such a way that false or finite categories still enjoy a constitutive status. They function, as Brady Bowman rightly notes, as forms of finitude (Bowman 2013, 125).⁷ Given this unique feature of his *Logic*, the 'business of logic', as Hegel puts it, is not restricted to the exposition of the categories (as is the case for instance in Aristotle's *Categories*); nor does it supplement this exposition only with their deduction (as is the case in Kant's transcendental deduction). For Hegel, the 'business of logic' is the examination of the truth-value of the thought-determinations. In his terms, it aims at 'finding out which are the forms of the infinite and which of the finite' (*EL*: §24A, 62).

The 'question concerning the truth of the thought-determinations' is thus the question of how to proceed and examine their truth-values. And its answer is far from being self-evident. In the *Phenomenology*, for example, the philosophical examination consists in 'seeing whether the concept corresponds to the object' (*PhG*: §85, 57). In other words, it consists in seeing whether the various certainties of consciousness agree with experience. But this makes no sense in the *Logic*. It would make no sense to see whether a thought-determination corresponds to a given state of affairs, since in the *Logic* the reader already knows that thought-determinations are constitutive of things. In this sense, the adoption of idealism—being the result of Hegel's *Phenomenology*—implies the rejection of the method of examination Hegel employed in the *Phenomenology* and the adoption of a new criterion for the sort of truth which is intended to capture the truth of thought-determinations. In the *Logic*, Hegel suggests in the second Addition to §24, we examine thought-determinations by letting them 'count for themselves'. In other words, we examine thought-determinations by applying to them Hegel's criterion for 'philosophical' truth—'agreement with

⁶ Compare: Düsing 2009, 317ff.

⁷ Similar points can also be found in Bowman 2017: 237–41.

self’.⁸ Hegel makes the same point later in the same Addition when he states that ‘truth considered in the sense explained here, namely as agreement-with-self, constitutes the proper concern of logic’ (*EL*: §24A, 62).

In this way, the second Addition to §24 supports an interpretation that views Hegel’s criterion for ‘philosophical’ truth, ‘agreement with self’, as intended to examine the truth-value of thought-determinations. This conclusion is corroborated by the course of the *Logic* itself. Hegel opens the *Logic* with an examination of the thought-determination ‘being’. Having no specific content, this first thought-determination fails, as Hegel puts it, ‘to hold fast to its purity’. The fact that there is nothing specific about it makes ‘being’ a completely empty concept. Accordingly, Hegel famously concludes that being ‘is in fact nothing, and neither more nor less than nothing’ (*SL*: 59/I: 69).⁹ What interests us here is that ‘being’ is not deemed finite (and hence succeeded by ‘nothing’) because it fails to correspond to some exterior reality, but because it is meant to be one thing but turns out to be another. In simpler terms, it is deemed finite because it is internally incoherent.

In conclusion of this section, it may be said that the method of examination in the *Logic* consists in applying Hegel’s criterion of ‘philosophical’ truth to the various thought-determinations in order to see ‘which are the forms of the infinite and which of the finite’ (*EL*: §24A, 62). This is reason enough to prefer ‘agreement with itself’ or simply ‘agreement with self’ as the authoritative formulation of Hegel’s ‘philosophical’ definition of truth.¹⁰ This is the case since it is the only formulation which does not refer necessarily to things and can hence be reconciled with the methodological role which Hegel’s criterion of ‘philosophical’ truth plays in his *Logic*.¹¹ In consequence, it may be said that a thought-determination is ‘philosophically’ true,

⁸ ‘we [...] let these [thought-]determinations, alive in themselves, count for themselves. The question concerning the truth of the thought-determinations must appear strange to ordinary consciousness for, after all, they seem to obtain their truth only from being applied to given objects. Consequently, it would make no sense to inquire about their truth independently of such an application. This, however, is exactly the point at issue. To be sure, one must first know what is to be understood by truth here. Usually we call truth the agreement of an object with our representation of it. Thus we have an object as a presupposition, and our representation is supposed to conform to it. — In the philosophical sense, by contrast, truth means in general the agreement of a content with itself, to put it abstractly. Consequently, this is a meaning of truth entirely different from the one just mentioned’ (*EL*: §24A, 61–62).

⁹ For a fuller discussion of the transition from ‘being’ to ‘nothing’, see: Houlgate 2006: 263ff.

¹⁰ This is also Pippin’s position, though Pippin has different reasons to prefer this formulation (Pippin 2018: 145n19).

¹¹ It is clear, for instance, that ‘the agreement of the object with itself, i.e. with its concept’ cannot be applied to thought-determinations and could not play the same methodological role.

if it is in ‘agreement with itself’. In other words, a thought-determination is true, if it is internally coherent.

III. The truth-value of things.

After observing that, for Hegel, the criterion for ‘philosophical’ truth serves to examine the truth-value of thought-determinations, we return to the question about the truth-value of things. Hegel’s position on this matter is clear from his statement in the second Addition to §24 that ‘God *alone* is the true agreement of the concept with reality’ (*EL*: §24A, 62). Hegel goes so far as to add that, unlike ‘God’, ‘all finite things have an untruth: they possess a concept and a concrete existence that is, however, inadequate to the concept’ (*EL*: §24A, 62).

In this context, two points are especially worth noting. First, we note that, in Hegel’s words, ‘God’ is a technical term. It does not denote a religious object but rather a thought-determination—the absolute idea.¹² This is evident, among other places, from Hegel’s Remark to §213 of the *Encyclopaedia*, where he states that the absolute idea ‘is the *truth*; for the truth is this, that objectivity corresponds to the concept’ (*EL*: §213R, 283). For this reason, and even though Hegel’s precise words are that ‘all finite things have an untruth’, we should not assume that there are infinite things that are true. Saying that only ‘God’ is true, accompanied with the clarification that ‘God’ is not a thing, is thus equivalent to saying that things are never ‘philosophically’ true. Second, we note that, in the above citation, things are deemed finite or untrue since they fall short of their concepts. This might appear to contradict our conclusion from the last section, namely that Hegel’s criterion for ‘philosophical’ truth is ‘agreement with self’. But for a thing, falling short of its concept is a certain way of disagreeing with itself. Hegel points to this when he speaks of ‘the agreement of the object with itself, i.e. with its concept’ (*EL*: §172A, 246). In this sense, the agreement of the object with its concept is a variant on Hegel’s universal criterion for ‘philosophical’ truth—‘agreement with self’.

In this light, Hegel’s words in the second Addition to §24 appear as a textual indication that, unlike the absolute, things are never ‘philosophically’ true since they are never in ‘agreement with self’. In his Remark to §213, Hegel makes similar claims: the individual thing (which is the type of thing we are concerned with here¹³) ‘does not correspond to its concept; this limitation of

¹² Sans made this point as well (Sans 2016: 400).

¹³ See endnote 5 above.

its existence constitutes its finitude and its demise' (*EL*: §213R, 283). The adjective 'finite' is, in this context, antonymous with the adjective 'true', given that the latter is used in the strict sense of being 'in agreement with self'. This is consistent with Hegel's words from the *Science of Logic*: 'finite [... that is] unfit to hold the truth' (*SL*: 18/I: 17).

But what is the theory behind this position? This is not the place to go into Hegel's theory of finitude in any sufficient detail.¹⁴ But it is still possible to note at least one sense in which, for Hegel, things inherently fall short of their concepts. Think of a specific animal, say a tiger. For Hegel, any specific tiger falls short of the concept of the tiger, since the universal concept of the tiger covers many cases of particular tigers: Bengal tigers and Siberian tigers, young tigers and old tigers, etc. In other words, things inherently fall short of their concepts since no individual thing can ever fully incarnate the plurality inscribed in a universal. Robert Pippin recently made this observation with the help of an example: 'a particular horse is not "what horseness is"' (Pippin 2018: 96). There are more senses in which things inherently fall short of their concepts, and even more senses in which they inherently disagree with themselves, but we need not address them in this context.¹⁵ From what has preceded, we may already conclude that things fall short of their concepts inherently. In consequence, 'philosophical' truth is never a property of things.

But if things are never true in the 'deeper, i.e. philosophical sense', how are we to understand Hegel's illustrations of a 'true friend' or a 'true work of art'? In order to solve this difficulty, it is necessary to consider these illustrations in greater detail. In the second Addition to §24, Hegel affirms that

Incidentally, the deeper (i.e. philosophical) meaning of truth can already be found to some extent in the ordinary use of language. Thus, for instance, we speak of a true friend and mean by that someone whose way of acting conforms to the concept of friendship. Similarly, we speak of a true work of art. (*EL*: §24A, 62)

¹⁴ For a fuller discussion of this point, see Stern 2009. I note parenthetically that it is hard to reconcile Stern's position that 'material' truth 'is attributed to something on the basis of the accordance of the thing with its essence' (Stern 1993: 645) with his own interpretation of Hegel's idealism of the finite—namely, that finite things lack 'veritable being' (Stern 2009: 62). In my eyes, it appears that saying that finite things lack 'veritable being' is synonymous with saying that things like 'friends', 'states' and 'works of art' cannot be 'materially' true.

¹⁵ Think for example of what Hegel refers to as the 'flawed individuality' of objects, namely that objects are both 'self-subsistent' and determined by their dependence on other objects and concepts. In their 'lack of self-sufficiency, the objects remain equally self-sufficient, resistant, external to one another' (*EL*: §195–96, 270–73).

We note first Hegel's use of the terms 'incidentally' (*übrigens*) and 'to some extent' (*zum Teil*). These words are there to alert us to the fact that Hegel's illustrations are only partially fit to illustrate 'philosophical' truth. In other words, they point to the fact that a 'true friend' or a 'true work of art' are not cases of 'philosophical' truth but only imperfect illustrations of the latter. But what do these illustrations illustrate? In my interpretation, they merely point to the fact that when we think of a 'true friend', we already think of a sort of 'agreement with self'. This is the case since measuring the thing ('friend') as against its concept ('friend') equates to comparing two moments of one and the same thing—the friend. In this manner, Hegel's criterion for the truth of thought-determinations, 'agreement with self', can already be found 'in the ordinary use of language', but only 'to some extent'. Hegel's reserve on this issue is fully comprehensible, since strictly speaking things always fall short of their concept.

The conclusion that a 'true friend', a 'true state' or a 'true work of art' are not examples or cases of 'philosophical' truth can be strengthened by taking a closer look at Hegel's discussions of what functions here as an illustration. Here I will confine myself to Hegel's discussion of artworks from the *Encyclopaedia* and from the *Lectures on Fine Art*. Turning to this discussion will help us confirm our hypothesis that artworks are never true in the 'deeper, i.e. philosophical sense', since they are never in 'agreement with self'. The following paragraph, it should be noted explicitly, will not be dedicated exclusively to showing that artworks fall short of their concept, but—more generally—that they disagree with themselves.

Hegel's position on the truth-value of artworks is clearly negative, despite the fact that artworks have their place in Hegel's system as one of the forms of the absolute. In his discussion of art from the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel explicitly refers to the various art forms as cases of 'incongruity between the idea and the figuration' (*PM*: §562, 261). In other words, they are cases of disagreement 'with self'. This is especially clear in Hegel's discussion of symbolic art 'which throws itself in shape after shape, since it cannot find its goal' (*PM*: §561, 261). Hegel's verdict is equally clear with regard to the most advanced art form, romantic art, where the shape stands 'in a contingent relation to its meaning' (*PM*: §562, 261). In his *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel argues even more explicitly that art inherently fails to achieve its purpose and hence to agree with its concept or definition. Art, Hegel declares, 'has no other mission but to bring the truth before sensuous contemplation' (*LFA*: 623/II: 257). But this is an impossible mission in so far as 'the

truth is in fact contaminated and concealed by the immediacy of sense' (*LFA*: 9/I: 23). In other segments from his *Lectures*, Hegel further argues that on account of art's dysfunctionality 'the mode in which artistic forms appear is called a deception in comparison with philosophical thinking and with religious and moral principles' (*LFA*: 9/I: 23). For this reason, Hegel concludes, 'art counts no longer as the highest mode in which truth fashions an existence for itself' (*LFA*: 103/I: 141).

These short remarks are not intended as a thorough discussion of the finitude or untruth of artworks.¹⁶ Their role is simply to confirm our hypothesis that artworks suffer from some sort of internal contradiction and hence disagree with themselves. In like manner, they confirm our hypothesis that when Hegel speaks of a 'true work of art', he does not refer to a case of 'philosophical' truth but rather elucidates the latter with the help of an imperfect illustration that is only valid 'incidentally' and 'to some extent'. This is also the place to note that in so far as the artistic sphere is more developed and hence truer than the social and political spheres, the demonstration that artworks are never 'philosophically' true may be considered valid a fortiori with respect to states, friends, etc.

IV. Conclusion

In my remarks on Hegel's concept of 'philosophical' truth, my argumentation obeyed the following line of reasoning. Since Hegel introduces this concept in order to decide 'the question concerning the truth of the thought-determinations', 'philosophical' truth could not be a property of things alone. Since Hegel explicitly indicates that 'individual things' are 'finite things' that 'have an untruth' and that 'God *alone* is the true agreement of the concept with reality', 'philosophical' truth could not be a property of things at all. Our discussion of Hegel's illustrations of 'philosophical' truth ('true friend', 'true state', 'true work of art'), demonstrating that they are not examples but only imperfect illustrations, strengthened this conclusion.

That things have a truth-value is a distinctive and well-known characteristic of Hegel's theory of truth. Scholars have rightly insisted on this point. But affirming it should not be confused with arguing that 'philosophical' truth, for Hegel, is a property of things. On the contrary, from what has preceded it follows that even though things have a truth-value for Hegel, the latter is

¹⁶ It should be noted that, for Hegel, art plays a significant spiritual role despite (and perhaps on account of) its finitude. For a fuller discussion of this point, see Moland 2017.

always negative. In other words, even though it is possible to apply Hegel's criterion of 'philosophical' truth ('agreement with self') to things, the latter inherently fail to meet it. On a final note, it might be added that even though it was not intended to expose or defend an interpretation which insists on the inherent finitude Hegel attributes to various spheres of reality,¹⁷ this paper may nonetheless prove instrumental in encouraging readers in this direction by weakening a potential objection to it—namely that, for Hegel, 'philosophical' truth is a property of things.

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¹⁷ Bowman already made considerable progress in this direction when he discussed the inherent limitations and imperfections Hegel attributes to nature under the title of the 'underdetermination of the finite sphere' (Bowman 2013: 125–28). It should be noted, however, that the finite sphere is not limited to nature but covers, among other things, the political and artistic spheres.

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