

## THE END OF ART: THE CONSEQUENCE OF HEGEL'S APPROPRIATION OF ARISTOTLE'S *NOUS*<sup>1</sup>

Aristotle's model of *nous* is the prototype of Hegel's absolute. The ahistorical concept of *nous* found in Aristotle's *De Anima* takes on the dimension of historical development in Hegel's idealistic notion of the Absolute. As I aim to show, Aristotle's differentiation of passive intellect (*nous pathetikos*), which is imaginative and perishable, and the agent and possible intellects (*nous poitikos*, and *nous dunamei*), which are separable and eternal, reemerges in Hegel's account of absolute spirit's sublation of the sensuous images of art into the purer form of philosophy. And as Aristotle's passive intellect or imagination ends in the death of the individual, so spirit's manifestation in art ends, when its task is complete.

Following the lead of the German aesthetic tradition, Hegel defines art as a transitory mode of mind that fulfills its purpose by aiding in the achievement of the higher, purer cognition of philosophy. When the unfolding concept of mind becomes too complex for articulation in the material, art must end, and spirit's message can be expressed only through the non-material form of philosophy. In *Lectures on Fine Art*, Hegel tells a story of art that unfolds in necessary dialectical steps. As Aristotle held that the poet tells the story of history with the addition of a plot, Hegel cannot envision the story of art without a unifying meaning. Thus, at the end of art's story, art dissolves the dialectical process. Art will go on, but as a shadow of what it was when art served the highest purpose of spirit's needs. The spirit of art (*subjektiv Begriff*) passes its essence on to philosophy, the only remaining medium of the Absolute able to articulate the essence of the mature Concept.

The advantage of Hegel's appropriating the structure of Aristotle's conception of *nous* is evident in the ability of his aesthetic theory to account for substantial changes in the form and function of art as it changes historically. As well, it explains how historical shifts in the morphology of art are indexed through the truths significant to a historical epoch. This shows that the significance of the work is not to be found in the form of the work alone. On the other hand, the notion of art that Hegel adopts is oriented toward the determinate actualization of objective consciousness in the Absolute, not the practical effects that works of art can have on guiding the individual to right action, as Aristotle's theory intended.

**The independence of philosophy.** Hegel argues, in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, that the history of philosophy is not a topic that refers to past history, as an archaeologist might view a dig, dredging up the relics of antiquity for the sake of learning how a now dead culture may have lived. Quite to the contrary, philosophy survives the thinker, and the topics revealed by past philosophers are very much active and alive today.

What is obtained in this field of labour is the True, and, as such, the Eternal; it is not what exists now, and not then; it is true not only to-day or to-morrow, but beyond all time, and in as far as it is in time, it is true

always and for every time. The bodily forms of those great minds who are the heroes of this history, the temporal existence and outward lives of the philosophers, are, indeed, no more, but their works and thoughts have not followed suit, for they neither conceived nor dreamt of the rational import of their works. Philosophy...is developed consciousness; and what [philosophers] have done is to bring that which is implicitly rational out of the depths of Mind, where it is found at first as substance only, or as inwardly existent, into the light of day, and to advance it into consciousness and knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

The idea that philosophy is “deposited in the temple of Memory,” while also being valid for contemporary thinkers, separates it from art and religion. The thought which becomes philosophy is non-material, and non-representational, unlike art and religion. Works of philosophy “have as medium neither canvas, paper, marble, nor representation or memorial to preserve them. These mediums are themselves transient, or else form a basis for what is such.”<sup>3</sup> When thought becomes Thought, it is eternal, and beyond corruptibility.<sup>4</sup>

Philosophy, presented as such, is not the property of the individual. Hegel attacks the notion of exoteric philosophy as ideas which can be passed on as possessions. “This would appear as if the philosopher kept possession of his thoughts in the same way as of his external goods: the philosophic Idea is, however, something utterly different, and instead of being possessed by, it possesses a man.”<sup>5</sup> This ontologically independent aspect of philosophy is not shared by art, which remains materially enthroned. Art’s historical manifestation makes the art of different epochs incommensurate. The art of the Classic age, despite its beauty in contemporary eyes, cannot speak to modernity the way it spoke to those of antiquity because the Idea is expressed differently as the Concept unfolds across time. Through art, the Idea’s fulfillment is realized in Thought. Nonetheless, in order to become Thought, to be deposited as philosophy in “the temple of Memory,” mind must separate itself from the world-spirit that bore it.<sup>6</sup> For Hegel, spirit separates itself from all material elements, the sensuous and the imaginative forms that compel the subjective concept—the spirit of art—to be sublimated into the Absolute. In the Hegelian schema, philosophy is the eternal form that the Absolute takes.

**The eternal nature of agent and possible *nous*.** The intransmutability of particular feeling and image into the pure cognition of philosophy is fixed in Hegel’s schema of absolute knowledge. Despite Hegel’s postulation that the form of art’s essential elements is retained when sublimated into higher forms of spirit, the sensuous medium of art is relegated to a rank below that of philosophy. I contend that this is a consequence of Hegel’s appropriation of Aristotle’s account of *nous* from *De Anima*. Aristotle distinguishes three types of *nous* – (*νοῦς*), or intellect. The agent intellect (*nous poietikos- νοῦς ποιητικός*) is the cause of thought, a catalyst, so to speak. Aristotle defines possible intellect (*nous dunamei- νοῦς δυνάμις*) as the thinking power, or potential intellect. Lastly, passive intellect (*nous pathetikos - νοῦς πάθητικός*) is the individual imagination, the pictorial content that is presented to the intellect.<sup>7</sup> The division that Aristotle draws between the agent and possible intellects and imaginative

passive intellect is instructive for interpreting Hegel, because it is the sensuous memory of art that spirit moves beyond when philosophy becomes the preferred mode of the Concept's expression.

To differentiate the cognitive elements of intellect from the imaginative intellect, Aristotle holds that agent and possible intellect are "separable" from the soul. The agent intellect is the creative moment that prompts possible intellect to think. The differences between possible intellect (*nous dunamei*) and the imaginative intellect (*nous pathetikos*) can be explained as follows. "Mind [*nous dunamei*] is in a sense potentially whatever is thinkable, though actually it is nothing until it has thought."<sup>8</sup> This *tabula rasa*, or mind (*nous dunamei*), is transformed into "actual knowledge" which "is identical with its object."<sup>9</sup> With the imagination providing the pictorial material from the passive intellect, the agent intellect produces an intelligible form, thus raising the possible intellect to knowledge. The passive intellect—the images, emotions and memories of mind—perishes with the body.

When mind is set free from its present conditions it appears as just what it is and nothing more: this alone is immortal and eternal (we do not, however, remember its former activity because, while mind in this sense is impassible, mind as passive [*nous pathetikos*] is destructible), and without it nothing thinks.<sup>10</sup>

Humans use the faculty of sense, imagination (passive intellect), to attain knowledge that in mind survives the passing of the body. Nonetheless, having achieved transformation into mind, the imaginative passive intellect expires with the body, while agent and possible intellect remain.

**Nous and the Absolute.** Some confusion exists in the writings of Aristotle as to the precise relation of the elements of *nous*. The issue at hand, though, is what consequence Hegel's use of Aristotle's theory of *nous* has on his philosophy in terms of the relationship of particular and universal expression. Hegel associates the unity of subject and object, in his terms, with Aristotle's conception of *nous*. "*Der vouç ist das Tätige, das Denken und das Gedachtwerdende.*"

What we presently refer to as the unity of subjective and objective is articulated with the highest clarity [in Aristotle's text]. *Nous* is activity, thought and emergent Thought. The former is the subjective; the latter is the objective. [Aristotle] appropriately distinguishes each, but with equal conviction he pronounces their mutual identity. In our terms the Absolute is, and is only, something of which subjectivity and objectivity is one and the same identical; this is also extant in [the writings of] Aristotle.<sup>11</sup>

In the agent, possible and passive intellect, Hegel sees the unity of the subjective and objective, in his terms the Absolute, as manifest in Aristotle's theory of *nous*.<sup>12</sup> The Absolute that is present in philosophy, which is pure knowledge, can contain no image or form of sensuous knowing. Art and religion serve to bring to consciousness, out of the

immediate perceptions and the sensuous idea they manifest, the objective self-consciousness of spirit.<sup>13</sup> But it is this consciousness, the form of thought, “the universal content which is in and for itself, [that] first belongs to Philosophy.”<sup>14</sup> Art and religion still belong to the realm of the finite. Even though they have as their object the universal, their main component is the imagination, Aristotle’s *nous pathetikos*, which still has reality and historic memory as its content.<sup>15</sup> Spirit seeks to find the substantial content of these images and bring it into Thought itself, making it the material of philosophy. Aristotle, according to Hegel, “was the first to say that *vovç* is the thought of thought.”<sup>16</sup> The recognition of the universal dimension of thought’s internality transforms it into the intelligible world. “In apprehension,” the dialectical “interpenetration” of the natural and spiritual orders forms a harmonious union. When this unity turns inward, it results in the self-conscious totality of the Absolute in Thought alone.<sup>17</sup> Affirming the ultimate superiority of philosophy over religion and art, Hegel contends, “philosophy is thus the true theodicy, as contrasted with art and religion and the feelings which these call up—a reconciliation of spirit.”<sup>18</sup>

Hegel draws a sharp distinction between the rational and non-rational animals when he postulates that the repository of human knowing is passed on to the next cycle of civilization. In the case of humanity, the universal thoughts of a people—purged of image, memory, or the sensuous—are cumulatively passed on to the Absolute in the ‘exosomatic’ form of philosophy. Philosophy arises, according to Hegel, when society declines. When a people’s concrete substantiality has passed, the activity of philosophy accelerates, withdrawing from the activity of the culture which bore it.<sup>19</sup> Philosophy “always comes too late to perform its function” because, as Hegel’s famous epitaph reads, “the owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the onset of dusk.”<sup>20</sup>

The end of history that accompanies the end of art is thought to be an ideal state of existence in which the political toil of humanity is over. Despite the lack of historical struggle that gives an epoch its character, spirit—as the people—has what it wants.<sup>21</sup> Nonetheless, art, as Hegel describes it at the end of history, is not a utopian art. Rather, the significance of history’s struggles are laid down in pursuit of Wildean triviality. The Concept, which is actualized through the materialization of spirit through the Idea, appears to have a life that goes beyond that of individuals. When referring to the death of Hector, Hegel speaks of death in terms of the individual and the collective: “With death nature is at an end, but not man, not moral principle and ethical order.”<sup>22</sup>

At the close of Hegel’s introduction to *Philosophy of History*, he compares the activity of spirit, insofar as spirit returns to itself as the completion of its activity, to the function of a seed, which is “both beginning and result of the plant’s whole life.”<sup>23</sup> The activity of passing the fruits of one cultural cycle on to the next, like the cycles of nature, is clearly what Hegel has in mind in terms of a people’s life cycle. Making an analogy to how this cycle manifests itself in the history of a culture, Hegel asserts:

The life of a people brings a fruit to maturity, for its activity aims at actualizing its principle. But the fruit does not fall back into the womb of the people which has produced and matured it. On the contrary, it turns into a bitter drink for this people. The people cannot abandon it, for it has

an unquenchable thirst for it. But imbibing the drink is the drinker's destruction, yet, at the same time the rise of a new principle.<sup>24</sup>

The substantial activity of a people passes on to a new principle, presumably in a new culture. Hegel views the unfolding of a culture in the historic stages of objective spirit much as Aristotle viewed the change of a seed into a fully formed plant. The *entelechy*, the final purpose or form of an organism, is passed on to the next generation. Hegel applies the Aristotelian notion of the suffering and mortal mind's severance from eternal mind with the passing of the body to his historical separation of the finite sensuality of art from the eternalized Concepts of philosophy. The consequence of this is the recapitulation of the sensuous imagination's transition to knowledge in the development of culture and the fulfillment of Mind. Thus, after reaching their zenith, what a people passes on in philosophy is no longer its own. Hegel and Aristotle are in accord on this point. For Aristotle states that the "possession" of the form of knowledge inherent in philosophy "might be justly regarded as beyond human power."<sup>25</sup>

**Art and the Absolute.** Art and religion are possessions of humanity, but philosophy is not. When art and religion take up an image, whether a sacred image or the universal manifest as the Beautiful, they present this image to consciousness. It is necessary that consciousness begins with an "external comprehension of this form: it must passively accept report and take it up into memory."<sup>26</sup> But this form cannot remain in such a transitory state; to do so is the rejection of spirit.<sup>27</sup> For Hegel, art must disappear for the form of spirit to proceed, as when Virgil disappears from Dante's side in Purgatory in order for Dante to progress to the next level.<sup>28</sup> As Dante drinks from the river Lethe, all memory of sin disappears, allowing him to proceed to the far bank.<sup>29</sup> So it is for Hegel with the sensuous memory of art, all finite aspects must be purged from thought before the transformation to the infinite of the Absolute occurs.

Though the analogy of purity is extant in Hegel's claim that art must end, he contends that the contradictory elements of the finite are maintained in the dialectical resolution of the infinite. To view the move from sensuous to conceptual solely as a matter of purification is to ignore the *Aufhebung*, or sublimation, that is at the heart of the dialectical process. Examining Hegel's lectures on Plato, however, sheds doubt on Hegel's commitment to maintaining the canceled elements of the dialectic. The funeral of Socrates depicted in *Phaedo* draws special attention from Hegel. He is critical of Plato for holding the soul to be that which thinks, for, in Hegel's view, this connects the immortal existence of the soul to thinking, as substance is to weight. As a substance would not exist without weight, so the soul would not exist without thinking, and, according to Hegel, the activity of the enduring soul is thought, but it does not subsist in thinking.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, Hegel praises Plato's presentation of the body as a pollutant, blocking the attainment of pure thought. Socrates, upon his death, is released from the burden of the sensuous, which is merely an obstacle to wisdom. Of Socrates' last moments, Hegel says,

thus we find Socrates expressing himself to the effect that the body and what relates to the body is a hindrance in striving after wisdom, the sole business of Philosophy, because the sensuous perception shows nothing purely, or as it is in itself, and what is true becomes known through the removal of the spiritual from the corporeal.<sup>31</sup>

This interpretation of the death of Socrates indicates Hegel's ultimate need for disassociation of the spiritual from the sensuous, even memory and imagination, in order to achieve pure articulation of the Absolute. In *Phaedo*, Socrates denies that pure knowledge can be attained through the senses. The ideals sought in this life are not found through the senses, but in thought alone. Socrates states, "if it is impossible to attain any pure knowledge with the body, then one of two things is true: either we can never attain knowledge or we can do so after death. Then and not before, the soul is by itself apart from the body."<sup>32</sup> The body merely interferes with the pursuit of knowledge; freedom from it is required. "And that freedom and separation of the soul from the body is called death."<sup>33</sup>

Hegel uses the words *endlich* and *unendlich*, finite and infinite, in a sense that does not correspond to the common Newtonian usage. Instead of employing a notion of infinity that implies unbounded space and time, Hegel follows the Greeks. The Classic aversion to limitless is reflected in the Greek word for infinite: *to apeiron* (τὸ ἀπειρον). This term applies more to indeterminate or inconceivable rather than a limitless expanse of space and time. In his lecture addressing the notion of inseparable 'Being' put forward by Parmenides and Aristotle, Hegel states that this "Being is not the undetermined (*ἀπειρον*) for it is kept within the limits of necessity."<sup>34</sup> Hegel contends that the notion of indeterminacy signified by *apeiron* was an uncultured one.<sup>35</sup> Hegel, as the Greeks, considered this notion intellectually limited, holding that it carried with it the negative connotation of the *bad infinite*. For Hegel, the infinite manifestations of the concept sensually expressed through art were still tied to the finite insofar as they could not transcend the bad infinite. Recognizing the contradictions inherent within the artistic mode of the Absolute's expression, the dialectic process evokes spirit's inward turn, and the resolution is manifest in a form of the infinite that extends beyond its sensuous form. The form in which spirit is able to articulate itself without the contradictions of sensuality's finitude is philosophy. Thus, the form of philosophy passes beyond the corporeality of the individuals who brought the "implicitly rational out of the depths of Mind ... into the light of day."<sup>36</sup>

Hegel urges the dialectical overcoming of the bad infinite via the form of art. In his antinomies, Kant makes a compelling *argument* as to why logically sound but contradictory notions of the finite and the infinite exist side by side in separate modes of thought, yet Hegel *urges* the reader to find higher ground.<sup>37</sup> It is almost a Kierkegaardian leap: have faith in the infinite, or despair with the finite.<sup>38</sup> To accept the unresolved notion of the bad infinite, which is mired in the finite, is "to reject the Spirit. The sins of him who lies against the Holy Ghost cannot be forgiven. That lie is the refusal to be a universal."<sup>39</sup> The task of humanity is a task that goes beyond itself. Imposed upon all human kind, according to Hegel, is the progressive mission of bringing to light the

highest level of knowledge in the form of philosophy.<sup>40</sup> In this manner, the beauty of art, for Hegel, is a lure that helps subjective consciousness negate the particular sensual images of the finite world and preserve them in a pure notion of the infinite capable of assimilation by absolute spirit.

The notion that the internal drive of art progresses to philosophy is not original to Hegel. Plato refers to “an ancient quarrel between [poetry] and philosophy” in *Republic*.<sup>41</sup> Plato sees no room for the caprice of the artist in the highest good, placing mimetic art on the lowest rung of existence. Despite the position Hegel allots art as one of the three forms capable of articulating the Absolute, spirit, in its most determinate form, cannot be adequately manifest through the not fully determined means of artistic expression. This raises the question as to why artistic expression is so important to the needs of spirit.

Hegel claims that to qualify as fine art, art must only be pursued for its own sake. In Hegel’s view, artistic creation that conforms to the internal drive of art meets the highest needs of spirit. Yet, Hegel follows an artistic tradition that uses art to hint at a higher, ungraspable cognitive notion. In the time of Abbot Suger, aesthetic beauty was a lure for “a dull mind to rise to truth.”<sup>42</sup> In the German aesthetic tradition that preceded Hegel, aesthetic beauty was a quasi-rational method for leading cognition to more complete notions of unity and infinity. The philosophers of this movement sought to redeem art by showing the necessary role that ‘aesthetic’ thinking plays in the role of cognition. But in their attempt to rescue art by placing it in a position subservient to philosophy, a position that art has occupied since the poet’s expulsion from the *polis*, art is reduced to the ephemeral and is unable to rise to the universal level of philosophy. Hegel goes so far as to predict art’s dissolution, when art has finished serving the greater task of “bringing to our minds and expressing the *Divine*, the deepest interests of mankind and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit.”<sup>43</sup> Thus, art is a lure to a transformation of consciousness.

The effect of applying the ahistoric concept of *nous* found in Aristotle’s *De Anima* to Hegel’s idealistic conception of historical development suggests a way for a cultural legacy to be passed on without sensual embodiment. When a people no longer submit to something greater than themselves for their art, when projects of lasting significance are no longer made, then spirit seeks to place the final principle into the intellectual legacy of future generations. But the reading of *nous* that he applies to art forces it into a position of being no more than a step to something higher. Despite Hegel’s assertion that the essence of art is preserved through its dialectical resolution into the higher form of philosophy, the form of art is expendable to spirit. This depiction, however, belies the defense of art that Aristotle put forth in response to Plato’s suggestion that the poets be banned from the *polis*.

Hegel formulates his notion of the Absolute based on the Aristotelian model of *nous*, insofar as the imaginative elements of each cannot become part of what is eternal. The Hegelian ‘end of art’ thesis, thus, originates in a reading of *nous* found in Aristotle’s

*De Anima*. But Aristotle's theory of art is not expressed in the speculative writings of *De Anima*. Rather, it is found in *Poetics*. Certainly, sections of *Politics*, *Rhetoric* and *Ethics* are instrumental in piecing together Aristotle's philosophy of art, but the theory of *nous* he presents in *De Anima* is not traditionally placed with his aesthetic writings. The result of Hegel linking his historically unfolding notion of the Absolute to his interpretation of Aristotle's *nous* becomes explicit in his end of art thesis. But this suggests a historical completion which is not in line with Aristotle's definition of art.

Certainly, Aristotle mentions art in sections of *De Anima* that deal with the question of the separability of the soul.

Since in every class of things, as in nature as a whole, we find two factors involved, (1) a matter which is potentially all the particulars included in the class, (2) a cause which is productive in the sense that it makes them all (the latter standing to the former as e.g. an art (*technē* - τέχνη) to its material), these distinct elements must likewise be found within the soul.<sup>44</sup>

The analogy of art used in this passage, though apt, is ambiguous if applied to an aesthetic theory, for it can be either practical or theoretical. Hegel views art as a creative power that imposes form on matter. But the object that art raises to the level of knowledge, for Hegel, is the truth of the eternal concept.<sup>45</sup> This places the productive cognition of artistic creation in the service of theoretical knowledge.<sup>46</sup> According to the theory of *nous* articulated in *De Anima*, the agent intellect is the principle that moves the sensuous image to the state of actual knowledge. Such knowledge is eternal, and in Aristotle's schema, the object of theoretical cognition. But the object of the productive cognition deployed through a *technē* is movable and changeable by the doer.<sup>47</sup> While the object of theoretical cognition is eternal, the object of practical cognition is individual action. Indirectly through catharsis or directly as moral education, Aristotle's theory of art, pieced together from *Poetics* and his practical works, clearly aims at guiding individual action. This shows that Aristotle applied his theory of art as a *technē*, acting in the realm of productive, not theoretical, knowledge.

**Aristotle's theory of art.** Throughout history, the relationship between philosophy and art can be described as a relationship of censorship and control.<sup>48</sup> This can be observed in the two ways that philosophy attempts to distance itself from what may be seen as the irrational and subversive elements in art. The first method places art outside of reality. Plato is the first to make this distinction, using the divided line to show art as part of the image world.<sup>49</sup> Plato so distrusted the influence that the poet's rhythm had on the part of the soul that lay furthest from reason, that in book X of *Republic* he suggests that the poets be banned from the ideal city.<sup>50</sup> Philosophy's second way of defusing the irrational power of art entails limiting the beautiful to the rational. This is the approach that led Nietzsche to decry the death of tragedy through Aesthetic Socratism. The philosophical effort to neutralize art either makes art ephemeral, and thus incapable of serious threat, or it is argued that art is essentially doing what philosophy does, but in a different format.<sup>51</sup> The history of art, as Arthur Danto suggests, may be a long response to the theory put forth by Plato, which presents art as an imitation "at the third remove" from the real.<sup>52</sup> Art, since then, has been struggling to promote its ontological status.



Unlike Plato, who viewed mimetic artworks as copies or imitations less than the real, for Aristotle art is a *mimēsis* or representation that adds to appearance. The work of art, according to Aristotle, must give the audience more than what is provided by actuality. Criticizing Zeuxis, who is said to have painted grapes so realistically that living doves tried to eat them, Aristotle claims he should not create a copy of nature, “but better, for the artist should surpass his model.”<sup>53</sup> Aristotle also observed in *Poetics* that the pleasure the audience gains from observing mimetic art objects comes from using the understanding to interpret the meaning inherent in them.<sup>54</sup> Thus, Aristotle claims that the poem holds more truth than history, for the historian merely reflects what is, while the poet may add a meaning universal to humanity. In chapter nine of *Poetics*, Aristotle writes:

It is a further clear implication of what has been said that the poet’s task is to speak not of events which have occurred, but of the kind of events which *could* occur. ... It is for this reason that poetry is both more philosophical and more serious than history, since poetry speaks more of universals, history of particulars.<sup>55</sup>

Hegel and Aristotle both view art as a vehicle for universal expression, but each sees a different aspect of the universal in the artwork. For Hegel, the task of art comes in “bringing to our minds and expressing the *Divine*, the deepest interests of mankind and the most comprehensive truths of the spirit.”<sup>56</sup> For Aristotle, the aim of art was *catharsis*, an effect which sought to purge or educate the emotions.

Aristotle maintains that the emotions are important for making good decisions and developing character. Moral virtue is a disposition to feel emotions correctly, which leads to good decisions, guiding action to the mean between extremes. Thus, right poetry fosters the development of right habits of feeling and emotion, without one having to go through the tragic experience, thereby contributing to the formation of good character. Aristotle argued that art entails rationality, that its creation is a *technē*, and its aim fosters reasoned activity. Indeed, the poem is closer to the universal than the historian’s account of history. This places art above the mimetic copy. But the message of art, manifested in its *telos* of catharsis, does not have as its object the conceptual actuality of eternal things. Rather, the object of art’s practical cognition is the rational activity (not self-reflection) of individuals. This significantly distinguishes Aristotle’s conception of art from Hegel’s.

**Hegel and the end of art.** Hegel’s historic vision sounds peculiarly like a story. Some say that Hegel’s narrative of history is much like the “medieval *aventure* epics.”<sup>57</sup> The source of this story-like quality may be found in *Poetics*. Aristotle’s claim that the poem holds a universal meaning not found in history appears to have been very influential in Hegel’s thinking. The poem has cohesion and unity; history does not necessarily end with a lesson or a meaning that can tell us something about universal human experience. The bad infinite is at work in history, hand in hand with the finite, yielding events that proceed without any determinate unity. Nonetheless, Hegel’s efforts to find meaning in history through art place him in the conceptual position of having to

choose form over matter. When the Concept pervades the real, then what is rational is really real, and the really real, if not rational, has no place for expression in history.

Hegel explains the transition of art from sensual to conceptual through three historical stages. The level of articulation that the Concept finds in the material varies according to its maturity. The Concept unfolds initially through art's seeking out adequate content; at the appropriate juncture, art finds adequate content. As the Idea becomes determinate, the content of art transcends its formal incarnation.<sup>58</sup> In the symbolic phase of art, spirit does not know itself, and the external manifestation is an inadequate groping for balance. The symbolic phase is typified in the architecture of Eastern antiquity. The inadequate external articulation of spirit only hints negatively at its potential, leaving the viewer with a sense of longing for the infinite. Spirit's transition from architecture completes itself in sculpture. Hegel links sculpture, the second form of art, to the classical stage. In sculpture the Idea corresponds perfectly to the material. The highest form of the Idea, at this point, is the individual human form, which is the form taken by the classic gods. With the end of Hellenistic culture, the classic phase comes to a close, ushering in the arts of the romantic phase. The art of the romantic stage infuses the individual god of the classic stage into the community. The idea of unity is introduced to the individual's inner self. The art forms Hegel associates with the romantic stage are painting, music and poetry.

With the twilight of the arts, absolute spirit approaches its final stage of self-knowing. Having passed through the physical mediation of the forms of art, spirit now exists in-and-for-itself. The penetration of spirit into real existence is adequate for spirit to enter and recognize itself in subjective consciousness and social institutions. The level of indeterminacy in the world-spirit has been reduced to the point where art no longer serves to further refine its level of determinacy. Despite the exquisite beauty that is felt in view of the world's great masterpieces of art, "we bow the knee no longer" before this form of spirit's representation.<sup>59</sup> At the end of the story, spirit's form of expression has moved from the concretely sensual in art to the conceptual in philosophy. Arguably, the historical path art has taken since Hegel declared its end reflects the transition from the sensuous to the conceptual, from the eye to the psyche, and art has become philosophical.

For Hegel, the project of art is to bring subjective consciousness closer to absolute consciousness. The Absolute seeks objectivity, but in order to have objectivity, it must be subjectively grasped. The Absolute as subjective spirit when "entering upon actual reality...has confronting it an external surrounding world which must be built up, adequately to the Absolute, into an appearance harmonizing with the Absolute and penetrated by it."<sup>60</sup> Art prepares actuality for penetration by the Absolute, almost as a propaedeutic to absolute truth. Though absolute spirit drives the creation of art, in the end, the dialectical process negates and moves beyond art. When art has prepared the world, its services are no longer required by spirit. A few years before he died, Hegel predicted that the end of art would come when "far-seeing spirit" has passed beyond its need for art. As if reading a eulogy, Hegel claims, "we may well hope that art will always rise higher and come to perfection, but the form of art has ceased to be the supreme need of the spirit."<sup>61</sup>

**Conclusion.** The Hegelian account of the spirit of art dialectically folds the development of art into the development of philosophy. Philosophy is not possible without art, but philosophy transcends art, and art fulfills its purpose in the formation of mind. The necessity of art's transmutation into philosophy stems from Hegel's appropriation of Aristotle's theory of *nous* that is presented in *De Anima*. The sensuous form of thought has the kernel of philosophy in it, but only when the dialectic strips away its sensuousness can it become part of the Mind eternal. There are readings of art history that lend support to Hegel's view of art history, showing art's shift from the sensuous to the conceptual.<sup>62</sup> But the analogue his theory finds in Aristotle's account of *nous* is that of image's transformation into theoretical knowledge. For Aristotle, the power of a work of art would have been closer to the persuasive manipulation of emotion that he described in *Rhetoric*<sup>63</sup> and the edifying power of catharsis portrayed in *Politics* and alluded to in *Poetics*. The sensuous nature of art, according to Aristotle, directly affected the sensuous nature of the human by practically informing action. Though Aristotle spoke of art in terms of its universal content, art having more meaning than history, it is the thinkers of the German aesthetic tradition, and those who view art as a lure—a transitory mode of Mind—who narrowly apply a speculative reading of *nous* to aesthetic knowing. To view art as such is to remain in step with the Platonic thinking that banned the poets from the polis, and ignore the defense of art that Aristotle offered.

Aristotle's defense of art acknowledges its educational import, but art's object is a catharsis that educates the emotions. This is an activity that focuses on individual ends, and the object of artistic production cannot be reduced to the theoretical aim of giving actuality to the *tabula rasa* that *nous* is before it meets the potential intelligibility of the sensuous. Rather, Aristotle's defense entailed a notion of art that views it as projecting an alternative to actuality, one that could help us learn the emotional lessons of reality without its pitfalls. *Nous* is present in this account of art, but only insofar as art as *technē* is a virtue of the intellect. For Aristotle, art has a universal that is not present in history, and on this point Hegel reads him correctly. But the notion that art's essence should pass on to the eternal is found only in Aristotle's philosophy in terms of sensuous perception, which, if purged of particularity, becomes actually intelligible in pure knowledge. Aristotle's assertion that art *does* something, that it is not ephemeral and harmless, acknowledges Plato's fear of the poet's persuasive power, without subsuming it into philosophy. Thus, the artwork does not entail the universal *end* that Hegel postulates in his ideal philosophy. For Hegel and Aristotle, what separates art from reality is the addition of something universal to the material. But for Aristotle, the understanding which humans use when evaluating the universal in art "is not just for philosophers but in the same way for all men."<sup>64</sup> Art entails universal cognition; if it did not, it could not guide individuals. But the universal of art is not the theoretical cognition of philosophy, for its end falls on the side of particularity.<sup>65</sup> Art, as Aristotle describes it, is valuable insofar as it positively affects individual conduct. It is not just a lure to actual or absolute knowledge, a husk to be discarded when the dialectic is complete.

Aristotle's defense of art, as laid out in *Poetics*, places him in a position between Plato, who saw art as a distorting image of the real, and Hegel, whose idealistic notion that art's essential and transitional role is in the formation of absolute knowledge. Hegel's aesthetic theory gains much from what it borrowed from Aristotle. Yet, had Hegel informed his theory of art through a reading of *Poetics* rather than *De Anima*, his aesthetics could have shown art to have a purpose, the utility of which does not *end* in pure knowledge. The consequence is that Hegel's interpretation of Aristotle situates the object of art's aim on the side of the universal, and not in the particular realm of lived human activity. If Hegel had favored the notion of art put forth in *Poetics* and viewed the universal in art as one that moved humans as well as Humanity, then perhaps he would not have viewed art as a stepping stone to pure cognition. Had he chosen this reading, Hegel's aesthetic theory might have struck a balance between philosophy and art, allowing the ancient quarrel to end in peace.

- 
- 1 I would like to thank J.M. Fritzmann for the comments he made on this paper.
- 2 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane, vol. 1, *Greek Philosophy to Plato* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 38-9. The Haldane translation is based primarily on the abridged Michelet edition of 1844. Since then, several sets of notes and corrections have been edited into the Suhrkamp edition. However, despite its flaws, the Michelet version is still considered one of the most important records of Hegel's lectures on the history of philosophy.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 39.
- 4 "The conquests made by Thought when constituted into Thought form the very Being of Mind [*Sein des Geistes*]," *Ibid.*, German cited from G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, vol. 18 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), 58.
- 5 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 2, *Plato and the Platonists* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 11.
- 6 *History of Philosophy* 1, 95-6.
- 7 Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. J. A. Smith, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York, Random House, Inc. 1941), III.5.
- 8 *Ibid.*, 429b 30.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 430a 20.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 430a 22.
- 11 "Das, was wir heutigentags die Einheit des Subjektiven und Objektiven nennen, ist hier in der höchsten Bestimmtheit ausgesprochen. Der *νοῦς* ist das Tätige, das Denken und das Gedachtwerdende, - jenes ist das Subjektive, dies das Objektive; beides unterscheidet er wohl, aber ebenso streng und fest spricht er auch die Identität von beiden aus. In unserer Sprache ist das Absolute, Wahrhafte nur das, dessen Subjektivität und Objektivität ein und dasselbe, identisch ist; dies ist ebenso auch im Aristoteles enthalten" *Werke*, vol. 19, 217-8. This passage does not appear in the Haldane translation.
- 12 "In Aristotle the Idea (*Idee*) is at least implicitly concrete, as the consciousness of the unity of subjective and objective, and therefore it is not one-sided [dogmatic]. Should the Idea be truly concrete, the particular must be developed from it." Hegel holds that Aristotle's philosophy has reached the unity of subjective and objective essential to what he terms the Absolute. However, Aristotle's theory is lacking a unifying principle that links together the "series of particular conceptions" that make up the "Idea." If these particular conceptions could be organized under the singular Concept (*Begriff*), then the particular could also be derived from the universal. *History of Philosophy* 2, 229-30, *Werke*, vol. 19, 247-8.
- 13 *History of Philosophy* 1, 68-9.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 67.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 81-2.
- 16 G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E.S. Haldane and Frances H. Simson, vol. 3, *Medieval and Modern Philosophy* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 546.
- 17 *Ibid.*
- 18 *Ibid.*
- 19 *History of Philosophy* 1, 51-2. Hegel elaborates again on the theory of philosophy rising out of a decline in the Berlin transcription of the introduction of 1820. *Werke*, vol. 20, 483-5.
- 20 G.W.F. Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 23.
- 21 G.W.F. Hegel, *Reason in History*, trans. Robert S. Hartman (Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1953), 90.
- 22 G.W.F. Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1089.
- 23 *Reason in History*, 94.
- 24 *Ibid.*, 94-5.
- 25 Aristotle, *The Metaphysics*, trans. John H. McMahon (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1991), 982b, 28.
- 26 *History of Philosophy* 1, 74.
- 27 "The man who speaks of the merely finite, ... lies against the Spirit." *Ibid.*
- 28 *Purgatorio*, Canto XXX, 45-57.
- 29 *Ibid.*, Canto XXXI.
- 30 "As regards this point, the main feature of the idea is that the soul should be able to subsist as an imperishable thing without having imagination, thought, &c. With Plato the immortality of the soul is, on the other hand, immediately connected with the fact that the soul is itself that which thinks; and hence that thought is not a quality of its soul, but its substance" *History of Philosophy* 2 37. This passage makes it clear that though there is much in Hegel's notion of the

Absolute that seems Platonic, he adheres to an Aristotelian interpretation of nous found in De Anima, insofar as he separates absolute spirit into art, religion and philosophy, with the sensuousness of art and religion necessary but transitional steps in spirit's fulfillment.

31 Ibid., 41.

32 *Phaedo in Plato, Five Dialogues*, trans. G.M.A. Grube (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1981), 66e.

33 Ibid., 67d.

34 *History of Philosophy* 1, 253.

35 It is reported that Hegel chastised a group of astronomers to whom he was lecturing when they attributed the greatest sublimity to their science due to the innumerability of the stars and the heavens and the incalculable expanses of space and time that was their subject matter. Hegel responded that it is not immeasurability, but measure and law that evoke sublimity in the heavens. See Meredith's notes to Kant's third Critique regarding the statement "In rude nature merely as involving magnitudes," 262 in *Kant's Critique of Aesthetic Judgement*, trans. by James Creed Meredith (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1911).

36 *History of Philosophy* 1, 39.

37 In the Third Antinomy, Kant attempts to show that free causality is not incompatible with causal necessity. The antinomies show that given sound principles, and sound logic, there can be contradictions. In order to save reason, an alternative perspective must be shown. Kant's solution is the two worlds theory. He holds that, in the case below, the thesis applies to the world of things in themselves, and the antithesis applies to the world of appearances. Though the Third Antinomy addresses the issues of freedom and causality rather than the finite and the infinite, the logical diagram of the antinomy shows how Kant deals with the logical problem encountered with the infinite regress.

Thesis: Free causality can exist with determinate laws of nature (DLN):

1.	DLN → Preceding Event for Any Event	Assume
2.	Preceding Event for Any Event → ~ First Cause	Assume
3.	~ First Cause → Infinite Regress	Assume
4.	Infinite Regress → ~ Complete Explanation	Assume
5.	~ Complete Explanation → ~ Sufficient Explanation	Assume
6.	DLN → ~ Sufficient Explanation	Assume
7.	~ DLN → Free Causality	Assume
8.	DLN → ~ Sufficiency	1,2,3,4,5
9.	~ DLN	6,8
10.	Free Causality	7,9 QED

Antithesis: There is no free causality

1.	Free Causality → Spontaneity	Assume
2.	Spontaneity → Absolute Beginning	Assume
3.	Absolute Beginning → ~ DLN	Assume
4.	~ DLN → ~Possible Experience	Assume
5.	Experience	Assume
6.	~ Free Causality	1,2,3,4,5 QED

Kant asserts that free causality in the realm of possible experience is not a possibility, but that free causality can coexist with the determinate laws of nature because the origin of free causality is the world of the thing-in-itself.

38 Hegel's enlistment of the poets in his diatribe against the "spurious infinite" underscores his negative sentiments.

I heap up monstrous numbers,  
Mountains of millions,  
Time I pile on time  
And world on top of world;  
And when from the awful height  
I cast a dizzy look on Thee:  
Then all the might of number,  
Numbered itself a thousand times,  
Is not yet a simple part of Thee.

---

The poem, written by Albrecht von Haller (1708-1777), was also read by Kant, who called Haller's depiction of eternity "terrible sublimity" (K1 A613/B641). After noting what for Hegel is an inadequate response from Kant, Hegel quotes the final line of the poem, affirming his position counter to Kant's:

These I remove, and thou liest all before me.

This final line expresses for Hegel the poetic justification of his Absolute goal: "We must renounce that progress in infinitum in order to reach the consciousness of the genuine Infinite," *The Encyclopedia of Logic: With the Zusätze*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991), §104:166.

39 *History of Philosophy* 1, 74.

40 To conclude his lecture on the history of philosophy, Hegel urges the audience to take this task to heart: "We have to give ear to its urgency...and we have to make it a reality. It is my desire that this history of Philosophy should contain for you a summons to grasp the spirit of the time, which is present in us by nature, and—each in his own place—consciously to bring it from its natural condition, i.e. from its lifeless seclusion, into the light of day." *History of Philosophy* 3, 553.

41 *Republic*, trans. G.M.A. Grube, revised by C.D.C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1992), 509d.

42 The importance of art in achieving a level of higher cognition is also found in medieval aesthetics, perhaps influenced by Neoplatonism. In the twelfth century, Abbot Suger held that the form of art would be a guide to higher truth for those who could not read or write. "The dull mind rises to truth, through that which is material and in seeing this light, is resurrected from its former submersion" (Inscription placed on the West front of the abbey of St-Denis under the direction of Abbot Suger).

43 *Aesthetics*, 7.

44 *De Anima*, III.5, 430a 10.

45 For an enlightening discussion on the structure of intellect in the philosophy of Aristotle see Takatura Ando, *Aristotle's Theory of Practical Cognition* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), 165-190.

46 Ando argues that productive thinking is a subclass of practical thinking, though technically the virtue of productive intellect is separate. "The practical thinking is subdivided into the practical par excellence and the productive." *Ibid.*, 185,188. Ando differentiates the activities of intellect found in the works of Aristotle according to their ends. "In practice the end is the act itself, while production aims at some other result. Contemplation is absolutely non-practical, practice makes conduct itself the end, and production aims at the result of conduct." *Ibid.*, 139-40.

47 *Metaphysics*, 1064a 10-20.

48 See the title essay by Arthur Danto in *The Philosophical Disenfranchisement of Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

49 *Republic*, 607b.

50 *Ibid.*, 595b. In books II and III, Plato discusses the censorship of poetry.

51 *Disenfranchisement*, 7.

52 Arthur Danto, *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 12. Reference to Plato, *Republic*, 597e-598e.

53 *The Poetics of Aristotle*, trans. Stephen Halliwell (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997). Twice in *Poetics* Aristotle uses the example of Zeuxis critically. Aristotle states in chapter six that his paintings lack character, the plot must give the audience something more than actuality provides, see page 38. In chapter twenty-five, Aristotle is again critical of Zeuxis' reproductions that are too vividly real: "Poetic requirements make a plausible impossibility preferable to an implausible possibility... not such as Zeuxis painted them, but better, for the artist should surpass his model," 63.

54 "Here too the explanation lies in the fact that great pleasure is derived from exercising the understanding, not just for philosophers but in the same way for all men, though their capacity for it may be limited. It is for this reason that men enjoy looking at images, because what happens is that, as they contemplate them, they apply their understanding and reasoning to each element.... Since, if it happens that one has no previous familiarity with the sight, then the object will not give pleasure qua mimetic object." *Poetics*, chapter 4, 34.

55 *Poetics*, 41.

56 *Aesthetics*, 7.

57 Kai Hammermeister, *The German Aesthetic Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 90.

58 *Aesthetics*, 967.

59 *Ibid.*, 103.

60 *Ibid.*, 623.

*The End of Art: The Consequence of Hegel's Appropriation of Aristotle's Nous*  
Stephen Snyder

---

61 *Ibid.*, 103.

62 Aspects of Hegel's interpretation of art history are certainly supported by the views of Kenneth Clark and Clement Greenberg, among others. Danto frames his essentialist and historical definition of art around the view of art history that was predicted by Hegel.

63 Aristotle discusses the enthymeme in *Rhetoric*. According to Aristotle, the listener infers the missing part of the syllogism. In *The Transfiguration of the Commonplace*, Danto argues that the artwork's suggestive power takes the form of the enthymeme, provoking the audience to complete the metaphor. See *Rhetoric*, II, 22, 1395b.

64 *Poetics*, chapter 4, 34.

65 Ando, 190-1.