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Art and Philosophy as Redemption: A Reading of Hegel's *Aesthetics*

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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by

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Hegel is often interpreted as undertaking two independent projects. Hegel is praised for his insight into the connection between the theory, artwork, religion, and concrete way of life of various cultures. However, Hegel is condemned for constructing an "Absolute" system of knowing that selectively focuses on his own culture's theory, ethical attitudes, and way of life. Hegel is often interpreted as understanding his Absolute as the pinnacle of human knowledge that reconciles all normative and theoretical conflicts within past cultural worldviews and ways of life. This bi-furcation is especially pronounced in scholarship on Hegel's *Lecture on Aesthetics*. Many scholars suggest we ignore Hegel's discussions of the Absolute and attend only to his discussion of particular artistic works and movements.

In this dissertation, I first provide an alternative reading of Hegel's Absolute. For Hegel, any articulation of the Absolute is also an act of reconciliation (*versöhnung*). Reconciliation aspires to redeem theoretical and normative conflict by reframing natural laws and ethical principles as synchronized with the concrete reality of particular

peoples, social institutions, and empirical observations. In this way, reconciliation grounds individuals in universal principles that orient them towards harmony within themselves, with each other, and with nature. For Hegel, any conception of the Absolute is justified through its presentation of universal principles that can systematically unify a community's observations of nature and history into a comprehensive theory, and properly normatively orient that community within that understanding of history and the cosmos.

Using this hermeneutic, I will also illustrate how we can read Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* as a unified work. On the one hand, Hegel's local cultural insights arise from his understanding of art as a way of expressing the Absolute that produces a proper reconciliation for the historical moment in question. On the other hand, Hegel traces the causes of his own culture's forms of conflict and alienation as gradually developing throughout the history of art. Thus, Hegel's theory of the Absolute is integral to his local cultural insights, and the history of those cultures is essential to understanding the purpose of his presentation of the Absolute.

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Introduction

History and Eternity in Hegel's "Absolute"

This dissertation aims at two connected interventions. First, I will argue that with his concept of the Absolute, Hegel offers us an understanding of truth that functions in many of the ways we assume the notion of truth should function but avoids many of the philosophical puzzles that arise from the way truth is often understood by philosophers, scientists, and your average person. Second, I will argue that if we use this understanding of the Absolute as a hermeneutic through which to read Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, it will help us both to illuminate the systematic structure of the work as a whole and to understand how the historical narrative of this text can be read as a justification of this very conception of truth or the Absolute. (I will also be drawing on passages from other later works of Hegel such as the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* and the *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*). I will begin this introduction by diving right into the first aim, which will naturally lead us to the way an interpretation of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* can act as both a result and support of that first argument. I will end the introduction by explaining where I see the location of these interventions in the current literature on Hegel.

One common assumption we can expect the trained philosopher or scientist to share with the everyday citizen about the nature of truth is that truth is singular. Whether one is searching for the origins of the universe, the laws that govern nature, or the nature of the human mind, the search for truth is very often predicated on the assumption that our search will only come to an end when we arrive at an understanding

that is conclusive and exclusive. One may find it hard to imagine why one would even begin a search for truth if their search led them to only one of many different and equally valid perspectives. That being said, if we analyze this commitment to the singularity of truth, we find that it is not as innocent as it initially seems. If we unpack the commitment to the singularity and exclusivity of any particular truth claim we are immediately led to two philosophical concerns. First, we have the problem of epistemological justification. As Hegel points out in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to *search* for truth presumes that we do not yet have the truth. As such, the search presumes there is some gap between our current knowledge and the objective truth we are seeking. Given that there is a gap, we would need some kind of medium or tool to reach across the gap and access the truth. However, as Hegel points out in these same introductory passages, if we do not yet have the truth at the outset, how can we know if our medium or tool is the right one?[1] Without access to the truth, we do not yet have a legitimate standard by which we could check what kind of tool would be the best to work with. How do we know if we should rely on pure logic, empirical evidence, or faith? From Meno's Paradox in the Platonic dialogues to Descartes' skeptical concerns in the *Meditations*, and now to the growing popularity of "simulation theory" as popularized by Nick Bostrom, thinkers have been challenged with this epistemological concern throughout the history of Western philosophy.

If we look at this same commitment to a final and singular truth from a cultural and historical standpoint we find another concern that is possibly even more relevant in today's cultural landscape. If we look at the vastness of history we find a rich diversity of models of the nature of the human being, human purpose, and the cosmos. To commit

[1] Hegel Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 46-47.

ourselves to the singularity and exclusivity of the truth claims of one culture or community implies a condemnation of many incompatible cultural points of view as rooted in confusion and misunderstanding. Or to be more specific, if we take the tools of modern, Western rationality and the scientific experimental method as the correct tools that will finally uncover the light of truth, we necessarily frame the remainder of history as shrouded in darkness. Hegel's work is often interpreted as a justification and defense of *both* of these commitments. A common interpretation of Hegel paints him as committed to a singular, exclusive truth, which he refers to as the Absolute, that can only be cognized within modern European modes of knowing. One of the most well-known interpretive trends in Hegel's scholarship is the notion that Hegel takes himself to be at the "end of history." The originator of this interpretation, Alexandre Kojeve writes that Hegel himself created the "last World at the end of history" when he provided his own conception of the nature of the human being, morality, history, and the cosmos.[2] Kojeve interprets Hegel as claiming that the forms of knowledge that he arrived at within his modern European context correspond to a final, and singular Absolute truth and thus, with his own philosophical work, Hegel declared that the age-old pursuit of truth had finally come to an end. If Hegel truly did think his works had brought an "end to history" by providing a final conception of the human, nature, and normativity then Hegel's own view would also be challenged by both of these philosophical concerns that any conclusive and exclusive claim to truth must answer to. This end-of-history interpretation of Hegel is no mere trend in an old tradition of scholarship. It is common for scholarly interventions today to simply refer to Hegel as the 'father' of this "end of history" mode of thinking in a way that takes for granted this interpretation of Hegel as the correct one.

[2] Kojeve, Alexander. *Introduction to a Reading of Hegel*. (Cornell University Press, 2012), 32.

For example, Francis Fukuyama, while articulating his own “end of history” thesis about the finality of liberal democracy after the Cold War in his 1989 paper *The End of History* writes that “the concept of history as a dialectical process with a beginning, a middle, and an end was borrowed by Marx from his great German predecessor, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel” and that “Hegel believed that history culminated in an absolute moment - a moment in which a final, rational form of society and state became victorious.”[3] As we will see shortly, in my reading, most Hegel scholarship, past and present, is influenced and committed to some version of this end-of-history reading and as such frames Hegel’s understanding of the Absolute as a conclusive and exclusive conception of the cosmos, society, and the human being that is finally arrived in his modern European context.

In this dissertation, I will argue for a contrary interpretation of Hegel and his understanding of the Absolute. It is common to judge the truth or falsity of any truth claim based on how accurately the object, set of objects, laws, or structure it describes corresponds to the way that phenomena exists independently of human perception and our historically conditioned conceptual categories. Many would think that to deny this possibility of correspondence with a realm independent of our culturally and historically conditioned conceptual categories and perception is to fall into a relativism about truth, leaving us with no way to justify the legitimacy of one truth claim over the other. I will argue that Hegel’s notion of the Absolute provides us with an alternative in which we can still take our aspiration towards one truth seriously, but also avoid the concerns of cultural exclusivity and skepticism that arise when we understand a truth claim to gain its legitimacy through its correspondence with a realm independent of human history. In my

[3] Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History?* (The National Interest, 1989), 2.

reading, for Hegel, a claim to ultimate truth, or the Absolute, gains its legitimacy through its ability to comprehensively and systematically unify all the empirical information concerning the laws that govern nature and the normative needs that a particular community has access to into unified vision of the cosmos that contains an integral place for the normative principles that drive the human individual and the human community. The mark of truth is not the model's correspondence to an ahistorical realm of objects, laws, or concepts but its systematicity and comprehensiveness, its ability to incorporate all the needs, values, and motivations of the community and the information about nature that they have access to from their historically situated perspective into a unified and integrated worldview.

Throughout this dissertation I will argue that Hegel understands any claim to Absolute truth, including the ones he himself makes, to contain this structure of genesis and verification. On the one hand, the model must be taken to be eternal, timeless, and final due to its comprehensiveness. Since the model aspires to articulate a vision of nature, morality, society, and the human being which integrates *all* available information and possible perspectives, the principles upon which the model is based are taken to be the eternal, timeless principles that govern nature and all realms of human activity. However, on the other hand, Hegel is aware that one teases out these timeless, universal principles from the empirical information concerning the workings of nature and what matters to human beings that they have access to from within a particular historically situated perspective in time and space. In this sense, the perspective from which one arrives at those timeless principles, and the phenomena which those principles will end up reframing and reinterpreting, will always be situated within a particular cultural and historical time period and as such be affected by the vantage point

of those within that time period. For Hegel, neither the historical element of the Absolute nor the eternal element acts as the grounding mechanism through which the other side is verified as legitimate. Rather, both are continually conditioning each other within a mutually reciprocal relationship. One always starts with a particular view of human beings and nature that is conditioned by their cultural and historical position in space and time. If one aspires to make an Absolute truth claim, one aspires to build a comprehensive vision of laws of nature and of normativity that is more appropriate and comprehensive than the one they have inherited by re-articulating the timeless, fundamental principles in which these laws are rooted in a more rigorous and inclusive way, thus generating a new horizon of meaning in which their community will make sense of their experience.

When perceived from our local context our aspiration towards a final, exclusive truth is perfectly appropriate and does have an endpoint in the sense that we are aspiring towards the most comprehensive vision and integrated vision of the information we have access to. However, Hegel also encourages us to understand that from a wider point of view, this aspiration towards the Absolute is a never-ending process, in the sense that this comprehensive vision will always re-define the nature of the laws that determine and orient human subjects and the changing tides of experience will roll on within this new context of meaning until a new, more appropriate vision of the Absolute is demanded. In this way, what underlies the one truth from Hegel's point of view is not its correspondence with a realm independent of the tides of human history, but rather the historical process of human reason itself; the process of using the faculties we have available to us to do our best to articulate and rearticulate who we are, the nature of the cosmos, and the relationship between them from within the limitation of our finite point of

view. From this perspective, one only arrives at an entirely ahistorical and exclusive conception of truth when one abstracts the theoretical models arrived at in this act of systematic synthesis from the activity of synthesis itself and the way it orients the normative way of life and theoretical understanding of the particular community undertaking it. This dual nature of any Absolute truth claim; that on the one hand, it presents timeless comprehensive laws and principles that provide the fundamental horizon of meaning for a whole way of life, and on the other hand that its concrete origins and consequences lie in a particular historical and cultural context, provide us with a first approximation of Hegel's conception of Absolute truth that helps to avoid the skeptical and exclusivity problems which arise when truth is justified truth through its correspondence with a realm independent of human history.

The Bi-Furcation of History and Eternity in Hegel Scholarship

Although there is an acknowledgment of this dual aspect of Hegel's work, there has not been a warm reception to the possibility of the unification of the eternal and the historical which I have begun to sketch. For example, in his book, *In the Spirit of Hegel,* Robert Solomon articulates these two elements of Hegel's work as an irreconcilable distinction that we must see as two separate projects. He writes that Hegel's entire corpus is haunted by "two Hegels." The first Hegel, Solomon writes, is "a philosopher of change" and a "phenomenologist of forms;" a Hegel who analyzes the artwork, political structures, and moral, religious, and philosophical ideals of cultures throughout history and the way these have constituted different modes of subjectivity and objectivity,

different conceptions of human normativity and cosmological structure.[4] The second Hegel is a “philosopher of the absolute" who attempts to provide us with an “eternal view of a unified cosmos,” or a final, comprehensive, and exclusive understanding of the nature of history, the human being, and the cosmos. Solomon suggests that throughout the history of Hegel scholarship, these projects have been understood to be incompatible, leading to difficulty in synthesizing these two elements of Hegel’s work into one overall, consistent philosophical view.

Solomon is concerned that on the one hand, Hegel seems interested in analyzing the way different philosophical systems, religious ideas, works of art, and cultural practices have constituted and reconstituted our sense of world and sense of self. However, on the other hand, Hegel seems interested in presenting an Absolute vision of the trajectory and purpose of history, our sense of world, and our sense of self that is not open to further alteration or re-constitution. To get a concrete sense of why Solomon is tempted to suggest there exists a bifurcation of these two aspects of Hegel’s work, we can turn briefly to the structure of Hegel’s *Lectures on Aesthetics*, the text we will be primarily using to justify and apply this conception of the Absolute. On the one hand, Hegel conducts an analysis of specific works of art and genres of art and how they have been used to reflect on and re-constitute the worldviews and forms of normativity of the cultures in which they are constructed. In this sense, the text seems to be committed to a historically relative understanding of the Absolute, in which each culture has its own worldview and form of normativity and Hegel is simply commenting on these various forms of life and the role of art in constituting them. However, on the other hand, if we look at the overall structure of the text, we find Hegel weaving this historical narrative of

[4] Robert C. Solomon, *In the Spirit of Hegel a Study of G. W. F. Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 15.

the rise and fall of worldviews and the way they are reflected in works and genres of art into a progressive and teleologically oriented history of art that articulates how each subsequent culture's art brings humankind one step closer to the "end of art" which occurs with the rise of Christianity and modern European culture. This "end of art" marks a time in human history when art was discovered as inadequate for articulating the human being and the world in which they lived and was left aside for Christianity and, eventually, philosophy to articulate a more sophisticated understanding of the human being, the world, and their relationship. Thus, when we look at the overall structure of the work, it seems Hegel is not merely analyzing the way different cultures have perceived the Absolute truth but is committed to an exclusive Absolute truth claim about the trajectory, purpose, and nature of history, the history of art, and human culture.

When confronted with a slew of interesting historical observations about art, history, and culture systematically unified together into a progressive historical narrative toward a superior form of knowledge captured by philosophy rather than art in modern Europe, most scholars simply reject the systematic structure of the work thinking they can preserve the "historical" side of Hegel's work while rejecting the "Absolute" claims concerning the nature and purpose of history. For example, German scholar Gethmann-Siefert writes of a common trend in scholarship on Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, "The general view is that Hegel's strength lies in judgments about art that are refreshing and unerring in a revolutionary way. The systematic structure of his *Aesthetics* takes a back seat to the vitality of these discussions."[5] It is understandable why many scholars might be tempted to bi-furcate these two elements of Hegel's work and dispose

[5] Annemarie Gethmann-Seifert, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Art: The Hotho Transcript of the 1823 Berlin lectures Introduction* (2013), 13.

of the systematic, Absolute project; as Hegel seems to straightforwardly claim that the philosophical comprehension of the Absolute that becomes possible after the "end of art" in his modern European context is a "deeper comprehension of truth."[6] Comments that imply the superiority of the modes of knowing and being of modern Europe and Hegel himself are littered throughout not only the *Lectures on Aesthetics* but all of Hegel's work. Passages such as these do *seem* to straightforwardly suggest that even if Hegel sees past cultures' worldviews and expressions of truth as nodes in a historical process that reinterpret and recontextualize the nature of the human being, society, and the laws of nature, his expression of the Absolute does finally correspond to some kind of truth of the way history, nature or human beings are independent of this dynamic process of historical and cultural constitution. If we read Hegel in this way, it is understandable and fair why we would simply want to dispose of these Eurocentric commitments.

Absolute Spirit as the Mediation of History and Eternity

Contrary to this common thread of interpretation, one of the main aims of the dissertation will be to make use of the dual understanding of the Absolute mentioned above to re-interpret Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* as a holistic and systematic work in which the narrative of the true purpose history as leading towards the end of art and Hegel's historical observations concerning the role of art in various cultural milieus are two sides of the same analysis that mutually support, justify, and ground each other. In other words, I hope to show that we *cannot* dispose of the systematic structure while preserving the historical and cultural observations because they are both aspects of one

[6] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*. Translated by T M Knox, (Clarendon Press, 2010), 11.

analysis that rely on each other for grounding and justification. Further, given that nearly all of Hegel's works are structured similarly, with him suggesting that European religious, ethical, political, and philosophical achievements, understood and explicated in his philosophical works represent the culmination of a historical process towards a more sophisticated cognition of the Absolute, I hope this can be a hermeneutic that can be helpful for reading Hegel more generally as well.

As I see it, such a reading allows us to learn from Hegel's systematic, structural claims concerning this teleological direction of history without committing ourselves to claims about the final triumphalism of European philosophical modes of knowing. If we understand properly the role of what Hegel calls Absolute Spirit as mediating between these historical and eternal dimensions of Hegel's work we can begin to understand how such a reading that takes all aspects of Hegel's work seriously while avoiding his seeming Eurocentric commitments to an exclusive Absolute. For Hegel, any expression or understanding of the Absolute truth cannot reside in internal intellectual or mental reflections but rather must be articulated in a concrete external form. As Hegel claims it is only when one articulates the truth in an external form that their whole community will engage with that they present a worldview based on principles that are fundamental to the entire community and the world that community lives in. Hegel points out three different concrete forms human beings have used to externalize their understanding of the Absolute in this way throughout history: art, religion, and philosophy. In these different mediums, the systematic unity and comprehensiveness which is a necessary mark of truth for Hegel appears in different ways. For example, in art, it appears as harmony and beauty, where all parts come together to create a beautiful whole, while in philosophy it appears as conceptual coherence and systematicity.

I will argue throughout this dissertation that *any* work of Absolute Spirit, a category in which I include Hegel's work, presents a unified and systematically comprehensive worldview precisely by mediating between dualities and contradictions that appear in the way of life and theoretical understanding of the community. Further, this mediation is accomplished not by dissolving the contradictions but by re-interpreting the two sides of the duality in a way that reframes their interplay and tension as necessary to the dynamic functioning and homeostasis of the entire way of life and worldview. As we will see in detail in the first chapter, this process is what Hegel refers to as reconciliation. He explains this as the aim of philosophy in the introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics* writing,

> Philosophy affords a reflective insight into the essence of the opposition only insofar as it shows how truth is just the dissolving of opposition and, at that, not in the sense, as may be supposed, that the opposition and its two sides do not exist at all, but that they exist reconciled[7]

This reconciliation of dualities that the Absolute Spirit undertakes includes concrete oppositions that we all confront in our daily lives, such as the conflict between our emotions and our desires or our personal aims in life and the social expectations of our family or the state. However, this also includes seemingly more abstract dualities such as the distinction between the historical and the eternal; between eternal, fundamental principles and those principles' concrete manifestation in and as entities located in a particular time and space. In a paper titled *Missed Exit*: *How the Hegel of 1802 Almost Became a Chinese Philosopher* Brook Ziporyn, suggests that it is easy to miss this element in Hegel's thought because this commitment to the *act of mediation* which re-contextualizes and re-interprets each pole of the duality as fundamental rather than

[7] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 55.

one of the sides of the duality is not common in the history of western philosophy, which he suggests usually emphasizes either the historical or the eternal as the true ground.[8] Ziporyn, who argues this phenomenon of mediation which he refers to as the "Middle" is fundamental to Chinese thought, suggests that in Hegel's writing, there was a "brief moment in European thought…when there too the Middle became the ultimate category of a total system of philosophical speculation.[9] ZIporyn writes of the Middle that " it denotes the inclusiveness of all opposites as well as the subsuming field that unifies them all. It is thus the ground of the being of all the entities it subsumes, the center of gravity that brings them into relationships with each other that determines their identities."[10] As we will see in the first chapter in detail, this is exactly how Absolute Spirit functions in Hegel's system; the work of art, religion, or philosophy articulates nature, society, and human morality to all be grounded in a fundamental set of principles that subsume, incorporate, and integrate all aspects of human life under the umbrella of one worldview which contains an integrated normative role for human beings and human society. Thus, through recontextualizing contradictions and dualities, and in the process the nature of the entities that live out those dual forces, as all serving one normative orientation and existing within the context of one systematic cosmological structure,

[8] Ziporyn suggests that the "Middle" was only explicitly fundamental to Hegel's thought in early works such as *Faith and Knowledge* and the *Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*. As I am arguing here and throughout the dissertation, I read Hegel's notion of Absolute Spirit, a concept central to his later works as acting as this "Middle term" throughout his career.

[9] Brook Ziporyn, "Missed Exit: How the Hegel of 1802 Almost Became a Chinese Philosopher," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 44, no. 3–4 (March 3, 2017): 127–53, https://doi.org/10.1163/15406253-0440304005, 129.

[10] Brook Ziporyn, *Emptiness and Omnipresence: An Essential Introduction to Tiantai Buddhism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016), 153.

Absolute Spirit acts as the "ground of the being of the entities it subsumes."[11] The entire work of Absolute Spirit ultimately mediates between even the duality of the eternal and the historical. On the one hand, the work itself presents organizing principles that are taken to be the comprehensive, timeless principles that ground and subsume all elements of reality. However, on the other hand, these principles have no existence independently of the way they provide a new ground for the concrete motivations, aspirations, and theoretical understanding of human beings located in time and space, and through this concrete embodiment, these timeless principles are released back into the realm of historical change and contingency.

In his paper *Freedom and the Ends of Architectonic*, Pierre Keller points out an important consequence and implication of this reading of the nature of the Absolute that will also act as one of the main interpretive threads throughout this dissertation. Keller writes "Platonic Ideas exist for Hegel only in and through their normative contribution to the way in which we relate to our world as agents…there is a necessary illusion involved in our temptation to take these normative standards for ultimately real objects of theory."[12] If the timeless principles that act as the organizing principles of a conception of the Absolute, what Keller refers to here as "Platonic Ideas," only have concrete existence insofar as they are embodied by particular human beings and social institutions, then we cannot pry apart these principles from their concrete effect in redirecting and reorienting a normative way of life. We cannot treat them as "real objects

[11] Ziporyn also explicitly notes, as I have suggested and will continue to suggest throughout this dissertation, that taking this Middle term as fundamental allows us to posit an Absolute truth without abstracting that truth from its concrete historical context. He writes The Middle gives us "a way of talking about Absoluteness without positing a transcendental realm that is ontologically distinct from the plane of immanence" (Ziporyn, *Missed Exit*, 128).
[12]1. Pierre Keller, "Ideas, Freedom, and the Ends of Architectonic," *Freiheit / Freedom*, May 17, 2013, 51–78, https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110283747.51, 70-71.

of theory" independently of what they are *doing* in a concrete historical context. Keller points out that a commitment to these principles as existing independently of a particular way of life is only a "necessary illusion" for a community to share a stable worldview, and that the truth of those particular principles is grounded in their functional role in our way of life, and will necessarily change and evolve along as humanity's way of life evolves. Ziporyn and Keller help us to see that it is a bit of an oversimplification to say that Hegel is simply committed to a dual understanding of truth, to the claim that truth has both an eternal and a historical dimension. Rather, we could say that in a certain sense, Hegel is committed to a *tri* understanding of truth. Any notion of the Absolute does have both a historical and an eternal dimension but these two dimensions are mediated and provided content through an *activity of synthesis* embodied in a work of Absolute Spirit.[13] If we understand all works of Absolute Spirit to be performing this mediating, re-orienting function, and acknowledge that Hegel's own works are works of Absolute Spirit, we can read Hegel's claims to the "superiority" of his conception of Absolute in a different light. Although Hegel does indeed have a triumphalist attitude towards the cultural accomplishments of modern Europe, I will argue this bias does not stem from a commitment that his own work in the context of Europe has reached a final, unsurpassable truth that corresponds with some timeless structure of history or the

[13] In addition to Ziporyn and Keller, Angelica Nuzzo articulates a similar understanding of Absolute Spirit as performing a mediating function that reconciles and redefines dualities within a particular historical community. She writes that Absolute spirit negotiates the "tension between particularity and universality, between knowledge and reality" and in the process creates a "double" of an understanding of world history in which contradictions and divisions are redeemed as necessary elements of a new worldview. That being said, I am not confident Nuzzo sees Absolute Spirit as having the function of comprehensively re orienting a normative way of life in a concrete way like Keller does. Referring to Absolute Spirit as a "double" seems to suggest there is a "real" series of historical events independent of this process of human explanation. She also writes For example she writes that this transition to Absolute Spirit takes place "in knowledge and thinking and not yet in reality." (Nuzzo, *Memory, History, Justice*, 134-135). For the entire discussion see Chapter 5: World History and the Memory of Absolute Spirit from her book *Memory, History, Justice.*

human being. Instead, Hegel is performing this immanent act of synthesis and normative re-orientation that was performed by religious and artistic works of the past, and as such his claims to the Absolute are rooted in an attempt to reveal a comprehensive way of life and theoretical model that is appropriate in his historical context.

When we read Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* with this hermeneutic that I suggest is Hegel's own, we find that this Absolute narrative concerning the purpose of history and historical, local observations are both mediated and simultaneously determined by the activity of systematic synthesis that is the *Lectures on Aesthetics* itself. We cannot pry apart the philosophical conclusions Hegel draws concerning the nature and purpose of history, the human being, philosophy, and art from the way those conclusions arise out of the history of art and religion. Neither, can we make sense of Hegel's history of art independently of the way the philosophical and systematic principles and conclusions of the work orient and organize that history. More specifically, we will find in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* that Hegel makes use of this tri-understanding of truth to reinterpret past artistic articulations of the Absolute as not only singular expressions of an exclusive cosmological truth for the local community but also these mediating *activities* of synthesis and reorientation that steered human life and history in a new direction by presenting a novel understanding of the cosmos and of the purpose of human beings residing in that cosmos. However, Hegel also sees this very principle of a tri-understanding of truth as indebted to and arising out of the history of art and religion. In this sense, as we read the *Lectures on Aesthetics* through the lens of this hermeneutic, we will find that Hegel's history of art also acts as a justification for the possibility and necessity of this very hermeneutic and conception of truth.

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I did not arrive at this tri-understanding of truth that is central to Hegel's presentation of the Absolute myself. In addition to Pierre Keller and Brook Ziporyn, who have been a great aid in both seeing and learning to articulate this understanding, the seeds of this understanding were also watered by my engagement with some of the leading Hegel scholars today: specifically Robert Brandom, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Pippin. All of these scholars offer great insight into the way the fundamental principles we are committed to co-arise and are semantically dependent upon a historical community's situated way of life and perspective, and have been specifically helpful in illustrating how this process works in concrete historical contexts. That being said, it is in this scholarly milieu that I also think my work would be of benefit. Although all these scholars have a sophisticated understanding of the mechanism by which this tri-understanding of the Absolute moves throughout history, they also all in their own way suggest that such a reading can only be partially applied to Hegel's work and that ultimately Hegel aspires to arrive an understanding of the Absolute that is final, eternal, and unsurpassable. I will argue that we can take these insights concerning the tri-understanding of truth and run them through all of Hegel's work, pointing out where it has not been fully applied. Here I will give a brief overview of what I take to be each of their general hermeneutic for interpreting Hegel's understanding of the Absolute and its relationship to history, we will explore the details of their views in the chapters. First, we can turn to Robert Brandom's discussion of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in his recent work *A Spirit of Trust.* Although I will not be focusing on the *Phenomenology* in the dissertation itself, the interpretive interventions concerning Hegel's understanding of the

Absolute Brandom made in this book are very closely related to my interventions concerning *Lectures on Aesthetics* and Hegel's later work more generally.

In the conclusion of *A Spirit of Trust* Brandom acknowledges this unique aspect of Hegel's work, referring to it as "Conceptual Idealism." Brandom writes

> Hegel takes there to be an explanatory asymmetry in that the semantic relations between those discursive practices and the objective relations they know about and exploit practically are instituted by the discursive practices that both articulate the subjective realm of thought and establish its relations to the objective realm of being. This asymmetry claim privileging specifically recollective discursive practices over semantic representational relations in understanding the intentional nexus between subjectivity and objectivity is the thesis of conceptual idealism[14]

Here Brandom invokes Hegel's conception of what he calls the "subjective realm of thought" or the way we make sense of our experience in a particular cultural context, and the "objective realm of being" which is taken to exist independent of history, culture, and human perception, and explains their relationship. Brandom explains Hegel's conception of objectivity, writing that for Hegel, "phenomenal appearances point beyond themselves in virtue of their relation to one another."[15] What Brandom means is that any determinate phenomenon that appears in our experience gains its significance within a systematic structure of relations that is implicitly invoked when cognizing the phenomena. For example, we cognize a cup against the background of its implied use as a drinking vessel and its difference from similar objects, like water bottles or mugs. The cup gains its significance within this culturally situated enterprise of drinking and all associated practices and objects, including its contrast with things that are *not* drinking vessels; as to know what the cup *is* we have to know what things are like the cup but are not quite a

[14] Brandom, Robert *A Spirit of Trust*. (Harvard University Press, 2019), 672.

[15] Brandom, *Trust,* 667.

cup, such as a storage jar. This is also the case with values or motivations. For example, we understand the ethical injunction to get a job in the context of our status as members of society with a responsibility to serve that society and in contrast to those irresponsible citizens who do not get jobs. Further, for Hegel and Brandom, it is not only the case that phenomena gain their determinacy from their location within this implicit, local conceptual system, what Hegel refers to as a "concept," but also that each of these local conceptual systems gains its significance from its relationship with all other conceptual systems that are pragmatically relevant in our cognition and practical way of life. This entire system of concepts encompassing our whole way of life is the Absolute, what Brandom refers to in this quote as the "objective relations" or the "objective realm of being." For example, the whole conceptual structure of drinking water and the way it shows up in our experiences gains its significance within the context of our survival needs as biological animals as well as the social conditions that provide us access to or bar our access to clean water. This alone, that for Hegel objects, values, motivations, essentially any determinate phenomena, gain their determinacy from their place within a systematic structure of meaning that is implicitly invoked in every act of cognition, is a great insight into Hegel's philosophical contributions as it shows that he sees phenomena as gaining their significance only within a comprehensive structure of relations that link all possible phenomena of experience, not as free-floating independently existing entities. As we will see in the first chapter, the presentation of this systematic, interconnected structure through which all phenomena gain their determinacy is exactly the aim of Absolute Spirit.

In the quote describing Hegel's "Conceptual Idealism,", Brandom takes this insight even one step further and explains how this whole objective systematic structure

of relations that undergirds our cognition and way of life is “instituted by the discursive practices” of a particular historical community and that these discursive practices articulate the “subjective realm of thought and establish its relations to the objective realm of being.” Here we see Brandom approaching the tri-understanding of the Absolute mentioned above. Brandom suggests that a “set of discursive practices,” or the tools and methods a community uses to grasp and articulate the laws and principles that govern the world, simultaneously determine the nature of the “objective realm of being” and the “subjective realm of thought” by articulating the relationship and connection between the two. Although Brandom does not discuss Absolute Spirit as the mediating term in the way I do, we can see here the same structure of understanding; that a community’s *act* of grasping the objective truth using their practices articulates a worldview that simultaneously expresses the nature of the “objective realm of being,” or the timeless truth and the nature of the “subjective realm of thought,” or our culturally conditioned conceptual categories, and their semantic mutual interdependence, the way the mutually ground each other. Further, Brandom points out that the core claim of “Conceptual Idealism” is the privileging of these “discursive practices” over “semantic representational relations.” In other words, the significance, meaning, and structure of the content of the “objective realm of being,” the “subjective realm of thought” and how they mutually justify and ground each other cannot be abstracted from the historically situated practices of analysis that the community uses to arrive at that understanding. In the same way, Ziporyn suggests “the Middle” is fundamental to Hegel’s thought rather than either side of a duality which it mediates between, Brandom seems here to suggest that neither the objective realm of being nor the subjective realm of thought can be fully

abstracted from the discursive practices of analysis and explanation which mediate between these elements of experience and provide them with their content.

In his outlining of Hegel's commitment to "Conceptual Idealism," Brandom provides a model of the tri-understanding of truth that my reading is indebted to. However, if we look at the entirety of Brandom's interpretation, he seems to back away from thoroughly committing to this interpretation. Brandom claims that in addition to his commitment to Conceptual Idealism Hegel is also committed to Conceptual Realism. He writes of Conceptual Realism,

> The thesis is not that there would be no laws, facts, objects, or properties if there were no activities of inferring and explaining, stating and judging, referring and classifying. (The converse is uncontroversially true.) The claim is that one cannot understand what one is talking about in talking about laws and facts and objects with properties unless one also understands what one is doing in inferring and explaining, stating and judging, referring and classifying[16]

Conceptual Idealism claims that "laws, facts, objects, and properties" that make up our understanding of the objective realm of being are semantically contingent upon the discursive practices through which we arrive at that understanding and the way that understanding is put in relation to our subjective experience and ways of thinking through those practices. Here Brandom claims that Hegel is *also* committed to Conceptual Realism, which asserts the opposite. Conceptual Realism implies that the entities that make up the objective realm of being, the "laws, facts, objects, and properties," can have structure, determinacy, and significance independent of the cultural practices that are used to arrive at that determinacy and significance. This commitment to Conceptual Realism suggests that we can detach the conceptual principles that ground our systematic grip on phenomena from the pragmatic cultural practices that we use to arrive at this systematic structure.

[16] Brandom, *Trust*, 669-670.

Brandom's Conceptual Idealism begins a thread of interpretation which I intend to take up and continue with this dissertation. However, his, in my opinion, contradictory commitment to Conceptual Realism, and resulting detachment of an "Absolute" systematic and objective structure from any grounding in the concrete practices, conceptual schemes, and aspirations of a historically situated community, still commits him to a fundamental bi-furcation of Soloman's "two Hegels." In other words, from my point of view, it seems Hegel's commitment to Conceptual Idealism would be the "historical" Hegel's project while his commitment to Conceptual Realism would be the "Absolute" Hegel's project, and as far as I can understand Brandom does not seem to offer a way to reconcile these two seemingly contradictory commitments. Although it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss Brandom's reading of the *Phenomenology* in-depth, his bi-furcation of Hegel as committed to both Conceptual Idealism and Conceptual Realism makes explicit what I find to be a common tendency in the scholars I will primarily be engaging within this dissertation.

The two scholars I will be primarily engaging with in this dissertation are Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard, and although they of course each have their own unique interpretive nuances, they both apply a similar hermeneutic as Brandom to Hegel's later works which I will be discussing in the dissertation. Similarly to Brandom, Pinkard approaches this tri-understanding of truth by suggesting that our sense of who we are as a subject and our sense of the objective world in which we live, or our grip on our own immediate experience and our grip eternal principles that undergird and determine the nature of that experience, gain their significance and meaning within the context of one unified explanation and understanding. In his book *Does History Make Sense?* Pinkard explains that for Hegel to be a subject is to stand "within a shape of life" or "a concrete

order of thoughts."[17] A subject, by its nature, understands its own will, motivation, and self-comprehension in principles that have authority and legitimacy not only for them but for other individuals and communities as well. In other words, for Pinkard's Hegel we can only *be* a subject by bringing ourselves under principles we take to be objective for our entire community. Pinkard also takes this one step further, bringing it up to par with Brandom's Conceptual Idealism, suggesting that for Hegel, "the philosophical comprehension of history is a comprehension of how historically the metaphysics of subjectivity itself and not merely our conception of the metaphysics of subjectivity—has changed."[18] Pinkard, like Brandom, points out that that as different cultures and communities articulate and re-articulate the nature of the subject and the objective world using different tools, mediums, and practices, the very metaphysical nature of what the subject is changes; thus also suggesting that these different cultures' fundamental understanding of who they are is the mediating term of human activity through which the subject and the world in which the subject lives gain their significance.

We can also find a similar commitment to a form of Conceptual Idealism in Robert Pippin's work. Pippin explains that for Hegel the "need for art springs from the need of human subjects to be able to "externalize themselves" in the public world and so to be able to recognize themselves in the world, in objects, and in other humans who confront any subject."[19] If we expand Pippin's discussion of art in this essay to all forms of Absolute Spirit, we again find an understanding that is similar in structure to Brandom's Conceptual Idealism. Pinkard suggests that when one creates one of these

[17] Terry P. Pinkard, *Does History Make Sense?: Hegel on the Historical Shapes of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 39.
[18] Pinkard, *History,* 3-4.

[19] Robert B. Pippin, *Philosophy by Other Means: The Arts in Philosophy and Philosophy in the Arts* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2021). 59.

works they “externalize” their nature by articulating that nature as rooted in the very same norms and principles that are found to ground objects, other human beings, and the world as a whole. Thus, we see that these three scholars do have great insight into the tri-understanding of truth articulated above, in which our understanding of who we are and what matters to us, and the world in which we live, are both constituted and mediated by a work of art, religion, or philosophy. That being said, like Brandom, although Pinkard and Pippin offer great interpretive insights in this area, they suggest that when it comes to Hegel’s philosophical works we can detach the systematic and eternal understanding of the purpose and structure of history, the human being, and the cosmos from its grounding in the historical and cultural details and the way those details are synthesized together into that systematic narrative through the act of creating the work itself.

Pinkard and Pippin suggest that this thoroughly historical, dynamic, and pragmatically grounded conception of truth is the case only of those forms of Absolute Spirit that “fail” to capture the “true” and “final” structure of history, the cosmos, and the human being that corresponds with the “true” nature and purpose of humanity and therefore will never need to be altered. For example, Robert Pippin interprets Hegel as claiming that after he completes his work there will be no “world-historical developments” in philosophy, religion, or even in social and political organization, implying that the understanding of philosophy, religion, and social and political structure and policy which Hegel himself puts forth all have a finality that will never need to be improved upon.[20] Similarly, Pinkard writes of Hegel’s conception of the appropriate principles upon which to base a society that modern Europe has “reached a point at which there is nothing in

[20] Robert B. Pippin, *After the Beautiful: Hegel and the Philosophy of Pictorial Modernism* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 36.

principle left to be worked out. The modern constitutional state with its market societies and its familial structure has worked out a fully rational and coherent set of self-understandings that in principle cannot be improved upon."[21] In these quotations we see that both Pippin and Pinkard make sense of Hegel's commitments to an unsurpassable knowledge arrived at in modern Europe by, like Brandom, suggesting that we can detach the set of principles Hegel himself arrives at from his intra-historical act of synthesis with that aims at a normative intervention within his time period. In invoking Hegel's work as the culmination of a long historical process that finally brings an end to the continual transformation of humanity's understanding of the world and its place in it through the mediating process of human reason and explanation, Pinkard, Pippin, and Brandom invoke, at least implicitly, the "end of history" interpretation of Hegel: suggesting that there is a final and "correct" understanding of the world, the human, and normativity, which all cultures have failed to embody until Hegel himself expresses them in the context of modern Europe.[22]

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[21] Pinkard, Terry. "The Successor to Metaphysics: Absolute Idea and Absolute Spirit." *Monist* 74, no. 3 (1991): 295–328. https://doi.org/10.5840/monist199174323, 318.

[22] I do want to acknowledge that Pinkard explicitly claims his interpretation eludes the end of history problem. For example, he writes in the paper *Successor to Metaphysics*,

> But what about the Hegelian thesis concerning the "End of History"? Is that not some metaphysical, quasi-eschatological thesis? Again, no metaphysics is implied. Rather, we have the bold thesis that as far as the conceptualization of freedom is concerned, we have reached a point at which there is nothing in principle left to be worked out. The modern constitutional state with its market societies and its familial structure has worked out a fully rational and coherent set of self-understandings that in principle cannot be improved upon" (Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 318)

The reason I still attribute the "end of history" reading to Pinkard is because I think the reading he presents here is a straw man of the end of history reading. Kojeve, probably the most famous of those who explicitly attribute an end of history theory to Hegel, does not put forth a "quasi eschatological thesis" but attributes to Hegel something very similar to what Pinkard does here; that the communal "world," in Kojeve's words, Hegel himself creates with his work is the last world, or order of thoughts, that humans will need to create. I hope to show that we need not even attribute this to Hegel.

Of course, there is much more complexity to these scholar's interpretations and they each have their own unique way of filling out their perspective, which will be explored in the dissertation itself. My hope here is to have provided an initial sense of my reading of Hegel's Absolute, how that reading is inspired by these scholars, and how we can develop these scholars' insights further. I will argue that if we refrain from posting an ahistorical, objective systematic structure or subject, but rather follow Hegel's own historical hermeneutic in which our most fundamental theoretical grip on the world and the way that grip grounds a way of life cannot be separated from the way they mutually arise within a work of Absolute Spirit, which Hegel's works themselves are examples of. Personally, it seems to me that if we take this conception of truth or the Absolute seriously, we will find that Hegel has articulated a conception of ultimate truth that only enriches our understanding of ourselves, the world, and our place in it.

Chapter Plan

Each chapter will discuss these themes from two angles. On the one hand, each chapter focuses on a widely discussed theme in the literature on Hegel and explains how that theme would be re-interpreted through this tri understanding of truth I argue Hegel holds. On the other hand, each chapter will also act as a step in an extended argument that explains Hegel's tri-conception of truth in depth and shows the *Lectures on Aesthetics* can be read as a systematically unified work that is both an application and justification of this conception of truth or the Absolute. The first chapter addresses the "end of history" interpretation of Hegel head-on by contrasting it with my interpretation of the conception of the Absolute which Hegel presents in his works. Here, I will argue that Hegel's claim that the aim of philosophy is "reconciliation" (Versöhnung)

is incompatible with any Kojeve-style end-of-history reading of Hegel which attempts to detach Hegel's conception of the Absolute from its normative effect within his historical context. Reconciliation for Hegel refers to a comprehensive view of the cosmos that integrates the various cultural, natural, political, and social forces at play in one's historical context into a unified worldview by organizing them under a set of principles that underpin the workings of nature and orient the community's way of life. In this way, the first chapter sets the methodological and hermeneutical ground for the remainder of the dissertation by providing an in-depth explanation of my reading of Hegel's notion of the Absolute and what it means for a work of art or philosophy to express the Absolute. into how The second two chapters turn to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, and some passages from Hegel's other later works to address how Hegel arrives at and justifies this conception of philosophy and the Absolute by situating his philosophical interventions as a continuation, transcendence, and completion of the long history of artistic and religious attempts to articulate the nature of the cosmos and the human being. The second paper addresses Hegel's "end of art" thesis: his claim that following Greece, philosophy takes over this reconciliatory task from art. This chapter clarifies and historically situates Hegel's philosophical grip on the Absolute by articulating how philosophy simultaneously continues, completes, and transcends the long historical tradition of artistic expressions of the nature of the cosmos and the human being. Finally, the third chapter addresses Hegel's understanding of the "death of God," which he controversially sees as central to Christian theology. While the second chapter focuses mainly on the limitations of classical Greek art in art in producing a "reconciliation" appropriate for Hegel's time, an analysis of the death of God reveals the limitations of Christian art and religion and will illustrate how and why the medium of philosophy can

transcend those limitations in a way that is necessary for Hegel's historical time. This paper also suggests how we can reinterpret the well-known claim that history has a teleological structure in the context of this new understanding of Hegel's philosophical methodology.

Chapter 1: Hegel's Theory of the Absolute: The End of History and Reconciliation

Introduction

There is a well-known trope in Hegel interpretation that Hegel takes himself to be at the "end of history" and that he sees nineteenth-century Europe as the "final " stage in history. The most well-known advocate of this interpretation is Alexander Kojeve who argues that through his works Hegel himself creates the "last world at the End of History,' or articulates the ultimate nature and purpose of the cosmos, the human being, history, and the proper normative principles for human beings to follow once and for all.[23] Kojeve's legacy has also been carried on by recent scholars such as Francis Fukayama who imply that such an interpretation of Hegel is simply an accepted fact. For example, in his paper *The End of History* Fukuyama writes, "the concept of history as a dialectical process with a beginning, a middle, and an end was borrowed by Marx from his great German predecessor, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel" and that "Hegel believed that history culminated in an absolute moment - a moment in which a final, rational form of society and state became victorious."[24] Although it is sometimes more and sometimes less explicit, I would suggest that this trend of simply assuming that Hegel takes himself to be at the "end of history" undergirds a larger majority of scholarship on Hegel, both past and present. This interpretation sees Hegel as claiming that the modes of knowing and being that developed in nineteenth-century Europe, such as Christianity, modern philosophy, the free individual, democracy, and a free market, amongst others, have

[23] Kojeve, *Hegel*, 32.

[24] Fukuyama, *The End of History?*, 2.

amended the moral injustices and theoretical confusions of past cultures and thus have set the historical stage for Hegel to use these tools to articulate the best possible understanding of social/political structures, history, religion, morality, and the universe as a whole.

One familiar with Hegel's work may understand the motivation for such a reading; the structure of most of Hegel's work does seem to present history as a path that traverses across many different cultural conceptions of the self, the community, morality, and the cosmos ultimately culminating in Hegel's conception, the true "Absolute." Many interpretations of Hegel's work suggest this structural aspects of Hegel's work as a claim that Hegel himself has finally cognized the true nature and purpose of history as a path of failed attempts to understand the Absolute which has value only insofar as each of these failed attempts brought human understanding one step closer to the final understanding of the Absolute which Hegel himself can finally express making use of these European modes of knowing and being.

In this essay, I will be suggesting an alternative interpretation of Hegel's conception of the Absolute that avoids this end-of-history interpretation, or at least recontextualizes it in a way that allows us to avoid its undesirable and even seemingly ludicrous implications; such as the Eurocentric claim that only European modes of knowing have the capability of cognizing the true Absolute, or the absurd claim that after Hegel humankind will no longer make any substantial developments in their understanding of nature, morality, or the proper way of organizing a society.[25] My reading

[25] Those who take on the End of History interpretation do, in fact, interpret Hegel as committed to this claim. For example, as we will see shortly, both Pippin and Pinkard at times imply that Hegel believed after his own interventions there would be no more "world-historical developments," to use Pippin's words in philosophy, religion, history, or social policy. We can find the same suggestion in scholars from other contexts such as Arthur Danto who writes of a post Hegelian life or "post historical life" that it would leave us "nothing left for us to do-but in the words of our adolescents-hang out" (Danto, *End of Art*, 113).

is both indebted to modern work on this theme and also aspires to argue that we can take the insights in this recent work further. Namely, the scholarship of Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin, among others,[26] have illustrated great insight into the nature of the historical path that Hegel lays out in his work as leading to his interventions. For example, Terry Pinkard writes,

> His general claim is that world history is best understood as a story about how different forms of cooperative social life succeeded each other in time. He goes further to claim that the self-understandings involved in each form of cooperative social life forms a set of inferential connections with each other, and this set generally involves some types of contradictions or incoherences. The only way to resolve this incoherence is the construction of another set of self-understandings that preserves the essentials of the proceeding set but constructs a new set of concepts (that is, inferential, connections) that manages to avoid the old incoherences[27]

Here Pinkard articulates a reading of Hegel in which history is best understood as a progression of different forms of "cooperative social life," each rooted in a different culture. In such a reading each form responds to and improves on past forms. Pinkard contrasts this reading with a way in which Hegel's historical narrative has been read as a pathway "for a kind of grand Spirit (God) who is gradually coming to awareness;" that, "uses people as instruments for His coming to self-consciousness until finally (around 1820 or thereabouts) he succeeds somewhere in Berlin."[28] [29] By pointing to the internal

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[26]The work of Pierre Keller, Brooke ZIporyn, Angelica Nuzzo, and Stephen Houlgate, some who I will reference in the paper, have also been invaluable in arriving at these conclusions. I am focusing on Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin primarily because I think my intervention would have the most obvious and substantial impact within this scholarly context.

[27] Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 315-316.

[28] Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 296.

[29] We do find something like this reading Pinkard outlines in much historical scholarship. For example, in his book *Hegel: A Reexamination,* Findlay explains Hegel's historical progression by personifying "spirit" and suggesting it had to enter into finite history to traverse this historical path and eventually realize itself in Hegel's own work writing "Spirit *is* infinite, but it must pretend to

coherence, or incoherence, of certain worldviews and social and political structures in the way mentioned above as the "engine" driving this progression of different historical worldviews, Pinkard allows us to avoid posting obscure metaphysical entities to make sense of Hegel's historical interests. Instead, Pinkard, in my opinion rightly, suggests that Hegel is primarily interested in how humans as a collective have made sense of themselves and the world in which they live throughout history and how the history of that making sense is related to Hegel's own possibilities of making sense of self and world in his own present. That being said, even though I see this shift in focus to be very much on the right track, I argue that the specific details of how Pinkard and his fellow scholar Pippin work out their view still fall prey to Kojeve's end-of-history reading in its own way.

Although these scholars do not make sense of the suggestion that Hegel is at the "end of history by viewing Hegel's form of life in 1820 Germany as some kind of social and political configuration that allows a "Spirit-God" to come to "full self-consciousness;" they also, like Kojeve and Fukayama, understand Hegel as claiming that the social, political, religious, and philosophical structures of his time period allowed for a level of human flourishing that was lacking in the religion, philosophy, and political structures of all of human history which preceded this time period. Based on this interpretation, these scholars suggest that the conception of the ideal social structure,

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itself to be finite.. to become fully aware of its own infinity. Spirit is the only reality, but it must confront itself with something seemingly alien, in order to see through its own self-deception, to become aware that it *is* the only reality (Findlay, *Hegel: A Reexamination*, 38). We find similar language in Charles Taylor's book *Hegel*. Taylor writes, "The articulation of the universe in space and time can be deduced from the requirements of a cosmic spirit which must be embodied and expressed in it" (Taylor, *Hegel*, 91). To be fair both these scholars also have passages suggesting other interpretations of history, and Hegel's concept of Spirit (*Geist)* but at the very least, Pinkard is right to point out that many scholars seem to lean towards such an interpretation in a significant aspect of their work.

philosophical understanding, and historical narrative that Hegel provides through his philosophical analysis can be "detached" from its relevance to his time period and projected into the future as the "correct" way of understanding these domains for all time. For example, Pinkard interprets the nature of Hegel's suggestions in his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* for how to organize a society and a political state, writing,

> We have the bold thesis that as far as the conceptualization of freedom is concerned, that we have reached a point at which there is nothing in principle left to be worked out. The modern constitutional state with its market societies and its familial structure has worked out a fully rational and coherent set of self-understandings that in principle cannot be improved upon[30]

Similarly, in his book *After the Beautiful* fellow scholar Robert Pippin articulates not only modern social and political structures as the "final" ones for Hegel but all aspects of Hegel's own cultural and historical context writing,

Hegel also did not believe that there was any world-historical work for philosophy to do; its content was also its past, and now understood in the right way within a comprehensive philosophical system. And there are to be no world-historical developments in religion either beyond the doctrinally thin, humanist Protestantism Hegel preferred. And the institutions of modern "ethical life", the distinction between the state and civil society, and the basic structures of modern civil society, all also represent for him the achievement of reconciled relations of genuinely mutual recognitional status[31]

As we can see neither of these passages mentions a "Spirit God." However, they do refer to the social and political institutions, as well as the philosophical and religious traditions, of Hegel's time in history as some sort of superior, final set of institutions and traditions that can be deemed appropriate for all future human culture, and thus bring an "end" to the history of humans development of their fundamental understanding of themselves, nature, and normativity.

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[30] Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 318.

[31] Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 36.

In the spirit of Kojeve, Pippin, and Pinkard establish an asymmetry between the forms of knowledge and sociality that Hegel himself arrives at in the context of modern Europe and the forms articulated by past cultures. Namely, they suggest that Hegel believes that the cognition of the Absolute he expresses can be treated as ahistorical truth with a stability that can be fully detached from its origins and effects within its local time period, while past forms only have local and therefore temporary usefulness in the context of their time period. I see this scholarly context as a ripe opportunity to make an intervention concerning Hegel's fundamental conception of truth, or what he calls the Absolute. I suggest that if we take Pinkard and Pippin's initial insights into Hegel's interests in the way human beings throughout history make sense of themselves and the world and how that affects our own making sense in the present, and determine how we can apply those very insights to Hegel's seemingly exclusive claims concerning his presentation of the Absolute and its superiority, we will arrive at understanding of Hegel's conception of the Absolute that both a valuable philosophical intervention in its own right and can act as a hermeneutic that will help to make sense of this seemingly progressive structure of Hegel's works.

More specifically, I will argue that Pinkad and Pippin's commitment to the finality of Hegel's project conceals the open and fundamentally pragmatic and normative nature of Hegel's conception of the role of philosophy, art, and religion throughout human history. Hegel refers to philosophy, art, and religion as the forms of Absolute Spirit, as he sees them as the mediums that humans have used throughout history to articulate the nature of the Absolute or a fundamental and comprehensive conception of the cosmos with an integral place for the human being and human community. I hope to illustrate that for Hegel the activity of constructing a work of Absolute spirit, a category in which I

include his philosophical works, is always equally a normative and creative act that participates in history, just as much as it is a disinterested analysis of the nature of truth, the human being, and the cosmos. In other words, I will suggest the *act* of creating the work of Absolute Spirit itself or the act of articulating the nature of the Absolute, simultaneously determines the nature of both the eternal principles and laws in our understanding of the human being, the cosmos, and normativity is rooted, and recontextualizes the nature of the particular, historically situated entities and subjects which are the concrete embodiment of those laws and norms. In this way, I hope to show that no expression of the Absolute can be fully detached from its concrete act of re-defining and re-orientating particular entities within a historical context. I will flesh this argument out and provide it with textual support by focusing on Hegel's concept of "reconciliation" (*Versöhnung*), which he claims is the ultimate aim of philosophy, art, and religion. Hegel speaks of reconciliation as a way of using the mediums of philosophy, art, or religion to present a vision of life that can redeem, justify, and in a certain sense, amend, the conflict, strife, and suffering that is endemic to human existence. An understanding of the specific aims, structure, and philosophical implications of reconciliation will show us that even though there is one sense in which any act of reconciliation, and thus any philosophical analysis, *must* take itself to be at the "end of history," for Hegel it is equally true that our aspiration towards a comprehensive knowledge of ourselves and the cosmos is an infinite aspiration that has its horizons of possibility being continually rewritten and redefined by each new expression of the Absolute.

Hegel's Notion of Reconciliation

Our first task will be to unpack Hegel's notion of reconciliation in detail, with a specific eye on how this reconciliation functions through the philosophical medium. A nuanced understanding of Hegel's notion of reconciliation will reveal how any form of Absolute Spirit simultaneously bestows significance upon subjective, historically situated points of view and ways of life by systematically articulating them as manifestations of certain objective laws and principles, even as those laws and principles gain their authority from the way they can make sense of and systematically unify the totality of our historically situated experience of ourselves, community, history, and nature. I will argue it is impossible to detach Hegel's conception of history, the cosmos, and the principles in which they are rooted from the way a work of Absolute Spirit, in his case his philosophical work, invokes those principles to ground a way of life that is appropriate for his historical context. In the introduction to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel writes,

> To recognize reason as the rose in the cross of the present, and thereby to delight in the present - this rational insight is the reconciliation with actuality which philosophy grants to those who have received the inner call to comprehend, to preserve their subjective freedom in the realm of the substantial, and at the same time to stand with their subjective freedom, not in a particular and contingent situation, but in what has being in and for itself[32]

This metaphor of the "rose in the cross of the present " provides a rich and complete understanding of the innermost essence of Hegel's vision of reconciliation. For this

[32] Hegel Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 22.

reason, breaking down the elements of this metaphor step by step will allow us to grasp the nature of reconciliation as Hegel understands it.

Hegel likely has in mind the crucifixion when using the image of the cross; as the crucifixion of Jesus is meant to symbolize the suffering of all humanity. The cross symbolizes that it is this suffering that reconciliation attempts to respond to or to redeem. Hegel articulates the nature and ultimate cause of this suffering in a very general way in the introduction to his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel speaks of two conflicting aspects of human life. Hegel explains how on the one hand the human being is "imprisoned in the common world of reality and earthly temporality enmeshed in matter, sensuous ends and their enjoyment, mastered and carried away by natural impulses and passions." Yet on the other hand this same human "lifts himself to eternal ideas to a realm of thought and freedom, gives to himself as will, universal laws and prescriptions, strips the world of its enlivened and flowering reality and dissolves it into abstractions."[33] Here, Hegel notes two competing forces in human life. On the one hand, we have what we could think of as the "objective" realm of experience; we are subject to natural forces that seem to be beyond our control. These include the exterior forces of nature and the will of other human beings or society that sometimes pose a threat to our security and happiness; threaten our security or happiness, and also inner forces such as appetite, desire, and lust that seem to occur within us involuntarily and influence us to act in ways we often do not wish to. On the other hand, however, it seems that from a "subjective" point of view, we can act and think in ways that seem to give us mastery over these natural and often uncontrollable forces and impulses. The sciences, both natural and social, allow us to gain and make use of knowledge of laws that govern the natural and social worlds. We

[33] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 54.

also construct communities and nations that allow individuals to flourish by participating within a larger society that is predicated on respect for and protection of one another's rights. Lastly, we articulate moral laws that encourage us to act in line with a good that is thought to be higher than our selfish desires.

The above description is not meant to be an exhaustive account of these two aspects of human life but merely an attempt to give a sense of an opposition within life that can and has taken on many different forms throughout history. As Hegel himself writes, such a conflict cannot be captured in one particular manifestation but has "always preoccupied and troubled the human consciousness" in "numerous forms."[34] [35] In different cultures, different time periods, and different individuals, such a conflict manifests in different ways. The individual's aspiration for physical security through food or shelter may come in conflict with the laws of nature that lead to drought, famine, or sickness. Desires may conflict with the dictates of morality, or even one's moral values may come in conflict with those of the nation-state or of the dominant religion. These are just a few examples of the types of alienation that Hegel is concerned with. The universal form running through all of these is the feeling of isolation, alienation, and subsequent grief and suffering; the sense that a particular set of values, desires, aspirations, or life

[34] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 54.

[35] There has been a recent trend to interpret Hegel as claiming that this conflict in human life, what some refer to as the "amphibian problem" has only become a problem in modern times. For example Terry Pinkard and JM Bernstein both suggest that this conflict is generated by Kant's philosophy (Pinkard, Art, 3) (Bernstein, Our Amphibian Problem, 193) Similarly but less specifically, Robert Pippin interprets Hegel as claiming that the "modern intellect" has "produced" this amphibian problem. (Pippin, *After the Beautiful* 46). Although it is true that Hegel writes that modernity has worked out this duality to the "peak of its harshest contradiction" these passages illustrate he sees this as a universal human phenomenon (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 54). In my opinion, because it makes such a stark contrast between the modern and the pre modern world, such an interpretation is one of the causes that leads these scholars to interpret Hegel as committed to a strong asymmetry between the nature of his own understanding of the Absolute and the understanding of of past cultures.

goals that one identifies with, that one takes as essential to oneself, is either in conflict with or met with indifference by nature or by other people. In the story of the crucifixion, Jesus cries out on the cross “My God why have you forsaken me?” It is this feeling of being forsaken by an alien and uncaring world that is indifferent and even opposed to the particular set of desires, values, or projects that we identify with that the cross is meant to invoke for Hegel.

Failed Reconciliation: Superficial Philosophy

The cross is not only a symbol of suffering but also a symbol of redemption; the crucifixion is also the vehicle of Jesus’s rebirth. The way Hegel articulates this redemptive power of the cross is through pointing to the “rose” that is in the cross of the present. To understand the essence and the structure of this rose, it will be helpful to first see what Hegel argues is *not* true reconciliation; what the forms of philosophy are that only reinforce and propagate further alienation and suffering.

One place where Hegel discusses this contrast between forms of philosophy that are not “reconciliatory” and those that are is in the introduction to his *Elements of the Philosophy of Right.* There are two elements of what Hegel calls “superficial philosophy” which are important to identify for our purposes. The first is the primary aim of superficial philosophy. According to Hegel, superficial philosophy has the aim of looking at several possible views on a topic and determining which aspects of these views are correct and which are incorrect. Hegel writes that this kind of philosopher,

> May well encounter the supposed difficulty of how to distinguish and discover among the *infinite variety of opinions*, what is universally acknowledged and valid in them, and this perplexity may easily be taken for a just and genuine concern

> with the matter itself. But in fact, those who pride themselves on this perplexity are in the position of not being able to see the wood for the trees[36]

Most philosophers are probably familiar with the way of doing philosophy Hegel describes here; of taking the various points of view on the topic in question as a starting point, and using philosophical scrutiny to determine which elements amongst these views are "universally acknowledged and valid" and which are disposable. Here Hegel critiques this as a starting point for philosophy. For Hegel starting with several *particular* points of view and trying to determine what amongst them are right and wrong is already to turn away from the possibility of reconciliation.

For Hegel, to start with a variety of particular points of view on a philosophical topic is to start with a fragmented and alienated way of understanding human life or nature which the philosophical topic is attempting to make sense of. This approach to philosophy makes it seem as if it is necessary to choose one way of looking at a topic at the expense of another; necessarily leading to the alienation of the point of view that is not chosen. Hegel writes, "The chief tendency of this superficial philosophy is to base science...on immediate perception and contingent imagination."[37] Here Hegel criticizes superficial philosophy for deriving its view from "immediate perception and contingent imagination." The essence of his concern is that such particular views are constructed from the vantage point of an alienated individual, isolated to a particular way of looking at and understanding the domain of analysis in question, to their own "immediate perception" or point of view. Due to identification with a particular set of desires, values, or truth claims, philosophers construct arguments to justify those particular desires, values, or truths. Essentially, Hegel is concerned that superficial philosophy acts to

[36] Hegel, *Right*, 11-12
[37] Hegel, *Right*, 15-16.

justify one side of one of the dualities we mentioned above at the expense of the other, it justifies one point of view and condemns the other. For example, superficial philosophy might act to justify the authority of individual autonomy as superseding the mandates of a nation-state and the values of a community. On the other hand, another philosopher may see communal harmony as more important than individual desires and argue for the authority of that point of view. In this way, these “superficial” philosophical views are merely “contingent.” These views aim to justify one possible point of view on a topic over another rather than to systematically make sense of the entire context and all points of view that are relevant to it. For example, a philosophical view that argues for the rights of the individual over the laws and values of a nation-state or a community would only take seriously the claims of the individual and ignore the role the community, with its social and political institutions, already plays in informing the cares and aims of that individual. Instead of aiming at comprehensive understanding, superficial philosophy aims at justifying one limited, and Hegel would argue an incomplete, point of view over another. Such an approach cannot end the alienation that results from the perceived conflict between one’s “subjective” perspective and the various “objective” forces that one is confronted with; they can only validate the claims of one perspective over those of another perspective. From the point of view of superficial philosophy, regardless of the forces that one has managed to incorporate into one’s orientation in life, there will always be further forces that confront one as alien obstacles. Thus, as opposed to reaching for reconciliation, these particular views can only lead to what Hegel himself calls the “battle” between these different spheres and aspects of human life.

Reconciliation as Self-Knowledge

In summary, what Hegel calls “superficial” philosophy stays loyal to one sphere or domain of life, one point of view among many, and attempts to justify the priority and precedence of that point of view against others. Hegel sees that such a way of doing philosophy can never lead to reconciliation, and can never end the battle between the different forces that influence our day-to-day lives; whether those be natural urges, social norms, personal values, etc. For Hegel, the only way to truly redeem the suffering and isolation that comes from this conflict is to understand that this fundamental division and conflict between the different aspects and spheres of life, even as a starting point, is confused. The “rose” in the cross of the present is a symbol of the systematic unity and mutual necessity of all these different aspects of life; the way in which these different spheres in life do not only complement each other but, in fact, gain their highest and most efficient nature and their function in our daily lives only when we hold them together in a way in which they compliment each other. It may initially seem very unintuitive that aspects of life that are often in contradiction; the individual and the community, desire and morality, or religious faith and scientific inquiry, cannot only complement each other but can in fact be understood to each gain their original and true significance only in the way they are connected; but this is exactly the reconciliatory aspiration of philosophical analysis according to Hegel. For Hegel, such a vision of unity is not only practically desirable because it can redeem our alienation, but is also simply a more accurate way to understand our experience.

In the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel writes of this original systematic unity which reconciliatory philosophy would have us perceive as the underpinning of all different domains of life,

> If we glance over the whole field of our existence, we find already in our ordinary way of looking at things an awareness of the greatest multiplicity of interests and their satisfaction. First, the wide system of physical needs for which the great spheres of business work in their broad operation and connection, e.g. trade, shipping, and technologies; then higher is the world of jurisprudence, law, family life, class divisions, the whole comprehensive scope of the State; next the need of religion which every heart feels and which finds its contentment in the life of the church, finally, the variously divided and complicated activity of science, the entirety of observation and knowledge, which comprehends everything...But, according to the demands of science, the matter at issue is insight into their essential inner connection and their reciprocal necessity. For they do not stand only, as might be supposed, in a relation of mere utility to one another; on the contrary they complement one another because in one sphere there are higher modes of activity than there are in the other. Consequently, the subordinate one presses on above itself, and now, by the deeper satisfaction of wider-ranging interests, what in an earlier province can find no termination is supplemented. This alone provides the necessity of an inner connection[38]

It will be easiest to understand the unity Hegel is discussing here if we place it in contrast with the superficial philosophy described earlier. Superficial philosophy starts from the vantage point of a particular sphere or domain of life and aims to justify the superiority of the aims or values inherent in that sphere. For example, superficial philosophy may argue that the claims of a nation-state are more important than the individual, or that the claims of a certain religion or ethical tradition are more important than individual, sensual desires. In this passage, Hegel aims to give a vision of human life that makes division between these different spheres, even as a starting point, impossible. In this quote, Hegel clearly states the aim of philosophy (the word Hegel uses, science, is translated from *wissenschaft* which has a connotation of systematic knowledge that includes but is not limited to the natural sciences) is to comprehend these different domains of human

[38] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 95.

activity as not disconnected and distinct from each other but as containing some form of "inner connection and reciprocal necessity." We can first see Hegel write that these spheres contain an "essential" inner connection and a reciprocal "necessity." In calling the inner connection *essential* and the reciprocal connection a *necessity*, Hegel implies that the very essence of each of these spheres stems not from its independent nature but from the way it relates to all other spheres of human life. In other words, the nature of each sphere only arises through the way it is related to the other spheres within this interconnected unity; and to understand these spheres as pluralistic and opposed or indifferent to each other is to be in ignorance concerning the nature and purpose of each of these spheres as constituents and aspects of a larger whole. In the last few sentences, Hegel begins to provide us with a sense of what this unity or larger whole looks like; and what exactly it means to say that these various spheres of life gain their initial purpose and essence through their interconnection. What is important here to focus on is first, that the systematic structure is *hierarchical*, in the sense that there "are higher modes of activity" in some spheres; and second, that the nature of the hierarchical connection consists in the lower spheres only finding "satisfaction" in a higher sphere, and not in themselves.

We can begin to understand what this hierarchical inner connection of spheres will look like by focusing on how Hegel uses the term "satisfaction" in this context. We could define satisfaction as, in Hegel's own words, "the demand to carry through into objectivity what at first was there only subjectively and inwardly, and then alone to find itself satisfied in this complete existence."[39] Hegel is pointing to something very close to our everyday way of thinking of satisfaction; the project of making our goals, whatever

[39] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 96.

they be, a reality in the objective world. To give a simple example, if we are hungry and have a goal of getting food, we would carry this inward aim through “into objectivity” by bringing about a situation in which we are eating food. By bringing about a situation in which hunger is satisfied we have “transcended” the initial opposition between the subjective, or the inward aim, and the objective, or the actual state of the world; the objective world now reflects this subjective aim. Hegel writes of this form of behavior, “Such an opposition between the subjective and the objective contrasted with it, as well as the fact that it ought to be transcended, is simply a universal characteristic running through everything.”[40] In other words, this is the structure that runs through each sphere or domain of human life; each domain of life contains certain aims and also contains the goal of making such aims a reality; of satisfying those aims in the objective world. This illustrates that this inner connection will consist of the lower spheres of life needing to participate within the higher spheres for the aims of the lower spheres to truly become concretely realized and manifested in the world.

To more fully comprehend how this systematic and unified understanding of the spheres of our lives would work in practice, we can turn to some passages from Stephen Houlgate’s book *Hegel, Nietzsche, and the Critique of Metaphysics.* In these passages, Houlgate articulates what he sees to be Hegel’s reinterpretation of the relationship between a subject and its predicate. For Hegel lower spheres are composed of the interests, aims, and desires of individual entities; while higher spheres are composed of the relational principles which determine how those entities relate to each other within a communal, social, political, or cosmological context. In this way the relationship between a lower and higher sphere has the same form as the relationship between a subject and

[40] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 96.

its predicate; between a concrete entity and the relational principles that determine how it interacts and is understood within the environment in which it lives. We could look to an example of a "lower" sphere and one "higher" sphere which Hegel himself discusses in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*; the relationship between the determinate entity of the personal will and the relational principles of the law which at least partially determine how that entity exists and interacts within its environment. [41] [42]

Houlgate first explains the "common sense" or "non-Hegelian" understanding of the relationship between a subject and its predicate. Houlgate writes,

> In an ordinary judgment that subject term refers to a given subject-say, a rose-and the predicate characterizes that given subject in one way or another-say as red, small, pretty, and so on...the explicit form of the judgment presents the subject as a "passive subject" inherently supporting the accidents and thus holds the subject and predicate apart. In a sentence such as "the rose is red" therefore we begin with a given subject to which predicates can be referred to and which the sentence can be "about."[43]

Although Houlgate discusses the relationship between a rose and its attributes, I will convert this to the example of the relationship between a personal will and the law. In the "common sense" understanding, the subject with their personal will, aims, and desires, would be understood as existing prior to any laws or social structure that bestow that subject with certain rights and duties within its social context. This kind of subject is the "passive subject" Houlgate refers to here; a "given" subject that exists substantially prior to the law or any social structure providing it with any rights, duties, or

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[41] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 98-99.

[42] I say "partially" here because, as we all know, there are many forces that influence how humans interact within a society other than the law. As we have already seen for Hegel we cannot understand any sphere except in the way it exists within a mutually reciprocal connection with *all* other spheres. However, the aim here is not to articulate the true significance of the sphere of the personal will or the law, but rather to use this isolated example in order to get a sense of what this mutually reciprocal connection looks like.

[43] Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel, Nietzsche and the Criticism of Metaphysics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 146-147.

responsibilities. Since such a subject is understood to exist substantially independent of it entering into a social, communal, and relational context, the rights and duties that the law attributes to the subject are understood as predicates that are "added on" to the subject when it enters into society. Although this might allow the subject to live harmoniously in society to a certain extent, the subject still exists prior to and independent of the predicate; or as Houlgate writes, the subject and predicate are "held apart." Thus, if we hold to this view of a relationship between a subject and its predicates, or of a lower and higher sphere, there will forever exist the possibility of conflict and alienation; the possibility that this substantial subject and its desires will come into conflict with this "predicate" of laws and duties that has been added onto it. To put it in another way, the subject will always stand as a substantial, independent entity outside of the relationships it enters into, and thus never able to truly be at home within those relationships; will never be able to find true "satisfaction" within them.

The main point we can take away from this discussion is that the common way of understanding the relationship between a concrete subject and its qualities which Houlgate articulates necessarily leads to the kind of alienation which Hegel is concerned with and the impossibility of true satisfaction for the personal will. Of Hegel's conception of this relationship Houlgate writes,

> The distance between the subject and the predicate disappears. What is expressed in the grammatical predicate is thus no longer one of the many given qualities of a given subject, but rather "the substance, the essence and the concept of what is under discussion" The subject and the predicate are thus *absolutely* identical because the predicate states what the essence of the subject is. The difference between them, therefore, is not that they are distinguished conceptually as particular and universal terms, but that one universal term-the predicate-identifies and constitutes the intrinsic character of another universal term-the subject-which that subject-term itself does not express and which is not started until the predicate is uttered[44]

[44] Houlgate, *Criticism of Metaphysics*, 147.

When Houlgate in the first part of this quote writes that the predicate determines the "essence" of the subject, rather than one of its qualities, he expresses what we have been referring to as the "inner connection" between different spheres of life. The way this relationship would manifest In the context of the example of the personal will and the law is that the lawful principles of whatever community that subject resides in originally constitute the "intrinsic character" of that subject by positing as a node in a set of principled relationships with other subjects. In providing subjects with certain rights, duties, and responsibilities that are compatible with the practical co-existence of the rights, duties, and responsibilities of other subjects living within that community, these lawful principles constitute the original nature of those subjects. In such a view, to claim that the subject exists independently of these principled relationships of mutual recognition and respect is to take an entity or individual that gains its original significance, essence, and content through a relational context to exist outside of that context. Such an act would strip the subject of any true content, of any essence or qualities, and leave us with a mere empty concept of an individual.

Even this isolated example of the union of two particular spheres of life already begins to reveal the significance of what reconciliation is for Hegel; already we start to see the attraction, possibility, and even necessity of understanding the entire complexity of life in a way that does not lead to opposition and alienation between these spheres. In this case, we see that for an individual to find satisfaction in their personal will they cannot possibly remain identified only with the aims relevant to that particular sphere of the personal will, as this will doom them to endless conflict both with other personal wills and the laws of the state. Instead, the personal will can only be "satisfied" when its motivations and cares are grounded in lawful principles that are constituted with the

intention of producing a lifestyle of harmony between many personal wills; namely the laws of the state. More generally, we could say that the entities that make up “lower” spheres of life must become aware of their grounding in more comprehensive, unifying principles that link them with other entities in their environment in order to be able to move about that environment in a harmonious way. That being said, this does not imply that reconciliation is possible if we simply deny the needs of lower, more individualistic spheres of life; the answer is not just to suppress our own needs and desires and follow the law at all costs in the context of this example. Rather, reconciliation stems from the recognition of the fact that the aims or desires of that individual can only truly be “satisfied” or “brought into objectivity” when that individual takes seriously the fact that the flourishing of *their* particular desires or aims is, and always has been, linked up with the flourishing and respect of the desires and aims of other individuals. Even further, this orientation is by no means a “repression” or ignoring of one’s own desires but a turning towards the relational comprehensive principles that originally constitute one’s own self as a free, but also integrated aspect of a larger community or world.

In his paper *Ideas, Freedoms and the Ends of Architectonic*, Pierre Keller articulates this “mutually reciprocal” aspect of Hegel's notion of reconciliation that prohibits us from simply dissolving the demands of any sphere of life any other sphere, writing, “Each normative context is constituted by a comprehensive standard governing the norms in that context. These different normative contexts are systematically connected in a comprehensive whole that exists only as their relationship to the standpoint of the agent.[45] Although it can be helpful to speak of the sphere of the normative principles that govern the sphere of the law as “higher” because any

[45] Keller, *Freedom*, 53.

individual's practical will must gain its significance from its embedding within this more comprehensive sphere, this does not imply that the sphere of the law is more “real” more “fundamental,” or less “artificial” than that of the personal will. As Keller, writes here, even though each “higher” context contains an independent normative principle that aims to transcend any individual’s particular standpoint and generate comprehensive principles for a community of individuals, that normative principle only has actual existence insofar as it is manifested in action from the standpoint of a concrete agent or group of agents.

Of course, the example provided was not by any means an attempt to construct a complete reconciliation. This would require an inclusion of all domains of life relevant to the historical time period and culture one is concerned with. For example, there may be fundamental ethical commitments that underpin the mandates of the law, and religious or philosophical sentiments concerning the nature of reality itself which bestow fundamental grounding to these ethical commitments. In an entire reconciliatory project, each higher sphere becomes more and more comprehensive, with the highest sphere expressing the laws and principles which govern the cosmos itself; laws that the community, society, or nation state aims to be in harmony with by integrating them into all lower spheres. For Hegel, this highest sphere that expresses the fundamental laws and nature of the cosmos can be articulated through art, philosophy, or religion, what he refers to as the forms of Absolute Spirit due to their ability to present a comprehensive vision of the Absolute containing an integral place for all spheres of life. The act of creating a work of philosophy, art, or religion is the activity by which humanity brings together these various contradictions and oppositions in our lives. Absolute Spirit is the mediating force that is able to illustrate the original unity of the objective and universal principles which govern

the more comprehensive aspects of our lives such as nature and morality, and the seemingly more fragmented and fleeting particular desires, motivations, and nature of individual entities in a particular time and place. This possibility of perceiving and articulating a comprehensive and integrated picture of the entire cosmos and the place of the human being within it is the “rose” in the cross of the present. From this perspective of reconciliation, the meaning and the significance of the present moment as it immediately manifests to us is rooted in these comprehensive principles that organize the hierarchy and interconnected structure of the different aspects of our lives; we always find ourselves engaged in a project or orientation towards the world which has meaning not only for ourselves but also for our wider community. Further, since, as we have just seen, none of these spheres or networks of relationality can be understood in independence, in order to fully understand the significance of the present moment we must understand the entire hierarchical system through which the particular sphere or spheres which are most directly relevant to that moment gain their significance. One of the primary aims of reconciliation, and therefore of philosophy, is to understand this entire “background” implicit in the significance of the present moment for a particular point of time in history. This aspiration is accomplished by undertaking an analysis of historical, scientific, cultural, and political forces one sees at play from one’s point of view in history and teasing out the fundamental, relational principles in which these forces are rooted. In this sense, reconciliation can be understood as an activity aimed at *self-knowledge* that due to Hegel’s understanding of the nature of the self as gaining its significance through these more comprehensive relational contexts, must also articulate knowledge of the wider world in which that self lives and acts.

Reconciliation as Self-Constitution

This all being true, to understand reconciliation merely as an *uncovering* of the integrated nature of the self, wider community, and world would be to only emphasize one aspect of reconciliation. As I mentioned in the introduction, Pippin and Pinkard have done a great service to Hegel scholarship by illuminating his fundamental interest in human identity and understanding as it appears in different historical, social, and cultural contexts. In this vein, they can help us to make explicit another aspect of reconciliation that is implicit in the description above. Pippin writes in his work, *After the Beautiful, "*in the case of individual self-knowledge, this knowledge is inherently first and not third person and it self-constitutes; it cannot be a mere self-discovery or self-report."[46] Here, Pippin emphasizes that this self-knowledge which reconciliation aims at "cannot be a mere self-discovery or self-report." The understanding we just emphasized of reconciliation as an "uncovering" of the different relational contexts that constitute the nature of the self in any historical time only illuminates one aspect of reconciliation. Here Pippin emphasizes that reconciliation must also be understood as an act of *self-constitution* that is always undertaken from the first-person perspective*;* implying that this action of articulating our self-understanding itself enacts and generates that self-understanding.

In a quote further down in the same discussion Pippin points to an element of this act of self-constitution which emphasizes that he has in mind something at least akin to

[46] Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 41-42.

the reconciliation we have been discussing. He writes "any such individually self-constituting identity is not possible except within a continuing effort at a commonly achieved self-knowledge and so self-realization. It is the very broadest of such projects aimed at commonly realized self-knowledge." We have seen that for Hegel we understand ourselves by seeing the way we gain our cares, motivations, and aspirations through the way we are embedded in the universal, relational principles embodied in our social institutions and religious and philosophical ideals; principles that apply not only to ourselves but to our entire community and the cosmos as a whole. In this second quotation Pippin, similarly, illustrates that an act of self-constitution is only a true act of self-constitution when that self is represented as gaining its significance and meaning within "commonly realized self-knowledge." Although Pippin does not give the details of the mutual reciprocal connection between the individual of the lower spheres and the principles of the higher spheres, we can see that he, at the very least, approximates a similar way of understanding how an individual is always constituted within a larger communal context. Pinkard, also speaks of reconciliation in a similar way, writing that our desire for a "reconciled world" leads humans to understand "what they are by falling under an order of thoughts, which they fall under by virtue of bringing themselves under it."[47] Pinkard refers to these relational, communal structures as an "order of thoughts" and also expresses the fact that an act of reconciliation is the process by which we articulate our identity through the process of bringing ourselves under this order of thoughts; understanding ourselves to be a manifestation of the relational principles inherent within these more comprehensive domains or spheres.

[47] Pinkard, *History,* 45.

In these quotations, Pippin and Pinkard illuminate another important aspect of Hegel's vision of reconciliation. Namely, they show us that reconciliation is not merely an activity aimed at self-knowledge but that reconciliation is also an act of *self-constitution,* in the sense that the alignment of the individual self, the communal spheres of life, and the laws governing the cosmos that reconciliation aims at is also a re-imagination of the principles which underpin and govern the activity of all these different spheres. For example, in the case of the personal will and the law, the law is not something that is only discovered; we also create the law in response to our particular values, needs, and aims at a certain time in history; and through this act, we also create the duties, rights, and responsibilities that constitute our personal will. Reconciliation simultaneously constitutes the self, the communal domains and projects to which they aspire, and the larger cosmos in which they reside, as all embodying the same fundamental principles. This is why Pinkard writes that "history is best understood as a story about how different cooperative forms of social life succeeded each other over time."[48] In aiming at self-knowledge an act of reconciliation cannot help but also imagine a new vision of the self and the wider context in which it lives which responds to and builds on previous historically conditioned understandings of self and world. By focusing on how reconciliation is also an act of self-constitution, an act that changes the nature of the self and the world, Pippin and Pinkard can show us that for Hegel, the process of history is largely determined by how different cultures, through these "reconciliatory" acts of Absolute Spirit, construct and continually reconstruct holistic and objective views of the fundamental purpose and aims of human life by integrating and systematically unifying all relevant spheres of life to that culture within a singular worldview in a way that

[48] Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 315-316.

redefines and reorients the entities within those spheres to this new normative aim in purpose. In this way, the *act* of systematic unification and reconciliation mediates between and simultaneously provides determinate content to two seemingly paradoxical but equally essential elements of any true reconciliation: (1) the nature of the principles upon which the worldview is based as eternal principles, in the sense that this systematic worldview comprehensively determines the significance and nature of all entities, institutions, and forces within that worldview and (2) the fact that this Absolute worldview only has any concrete manifestation in those historically situated entities and subjects which are determined by it, and only has validity in the sense that it unifies forces and aspects of life that are relevant to that particular historical community.[49]

Self Knowledge, Self Constitution, and The End of History

With these quotations, Pippin and Pinkard illuminate profound aspects of Hegel's views on reconciliation, human identity, history, and their semantic interconnectedness. However, Pippin and Pinkard take this vision of a historical, codependent evolution of our subjective, local way of life and our objective models of the cosmos, fueled by the engine of the reconciliatory visions of various cultures, as coming to an end in Hegel's own time. Hegel's philosophical works, which imagine a vision of life possible within his

[49] I mentioned earlier that all art, philosophy, and religion, all have this reconciliatory aim. This is true but for Hegel only a philosophical understanding has the power to explicitly articulate the way a historically situated act of systematic unification mediates between and determines these two aspects of any Absolute worldview. Hegel suggests that, although from our philosophical perspective we must look back on religion and art and see them as performing this task of systematic unification, mediation, and determination, the way in which a worldview and its concrete manifestations arises out of the *act* of unification is impossible to cognize clearly in a culture that uses art or religion as the primary mode of reconciliation. I explore this asymmetry between the forms of Absolute Spirit and the way in which art and religion pave the way for philosophy's capabilities in my later chapters, *The End of Art and the Historicity of Agency in Hegel's Aesthetics* and *The Death of God and Hegel's Philosophy of History*.

time period, are understood as the "final" act of self-constitution that will occur in history; or we could say the only true act of self and world understanding. Pinkard writes,

> Hegel's ultimate thesis is that history manifests a human need for such reconciliation—a need for making sense—and, so he argues, it turns out that something like an order of thoughts about "justice as based on freedom"—as the proper unity of principle and psychology—is the only order that can possess the proper legitimation, and that this comes about very late in the development of shapes of life by way of the very determinate failures of earlier and other orders of thoughts[50]

In this quote Pinkard articulates that the only "order of thoughts," that truly meets the reconciliatory aims of all these past attempts is the one that has the principle of "justice as based on freedom" at its heart; and that this is an order of thoughts which comes "very late in the development of shapes of life." Pinkard suggests that Hegel's own attempts at reconciliation, or his own philosophical project, which orients all spheres of life towards the core principle of human freedom is not just one more attempt at reconciliation that is responsive to Hegel's particular time period; but rather is a final reconciliatory "success," a true grasp of the timeless and ahistorical nature of the human subject and the proper normative laws which orient that subject.[51]

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[50] Pinkard, *History*, 43.

[51] The recent and ambitious work of Robert Brandom on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit, A Spirit of Trust*, contains a very similar reading of Hegel. Like Pinkard and Pippin, Brandom interprets the process of arriving at objective knowledge in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* to consist in a dynamic conversation between our subjective, immediate experience and our objective models of knowledge. For Brandom, we continually test our models of objective knowledge against our immediate experience and improve them when we find inconsistencies. However, also like Pinkard and Pippin, Brandom suggests that Hegel's ultimate goal is to "complete" this process and arrive at the correct and "successful" objective model which can be detached from its relevance to the particular historical time frame in which it was constructed. Brandom refers to this as "Conceptual Realism" which he describes as a "non psychological conception of the conceptual " truth that does not "require anyone to think or believe anything" for a certain objective conceptual structure to be true. (Brandom,*Trust*, 54-55). Although this paper does not focus on *Phenomenology* but on the way the notion of reconciliation manifests in Hegel's later work, I mention Brandom in order to show how this way of understanding the aims of Hegel's philosophical work is common in current Hegel scholarship.

This understanding of Hegel's reconciliatory project as a "final success" comes across even more clearly in another paper of Pinkard's in which he writes that for Hegel,

> We have reached a point at which there is nothing in principle left to be worked out. The modern constitutional state with its market societies and its familial structure has worked out a fully rational and coherent set of self-understandings that in principle cannot be improved upon[52]

In his *Elements of Philosophy of Right* Hegel argues that the interconnected, hierarchical whole of the spheres of the "modern constitutional state," the "market society," and the "family structure" make concrete a unique set of relational principles. These relational principles are unique in that the flourishing of these spheres is predicated on how the individuals who participate within them can recognize each other as equally free. Pinkard interprets Hegel as reporting this is a final accomplishment; one that has been strived for throughout all of human history. The story Pinkard reports goes as follows: The various "reconciled" worldviews of past cultures failed to articulate a set of institutions and traditions that could both maintain their own structural integrity and stability and also maintain the freedom of each individual who participates in those traditions and institutions; this attempt to correct for the incoherences and failures of freedom or stability within these past forms of life is what has driven the process of history. However, Hegel finally sees that this process of failed reconciliations as coming to an end. Hegel's work reports the final harmony between individual freedom and social and political stability that is achieved by the modern age. This harmony is also what Pippin is referring to when he writes that 'the institutions of modern "ethical life", the distinction between the state and civil society and the basic structures of modern civil society, all

[52] Pinkard, *Metaphysics*, 318.

also represent for him the achievement of reconciled relations of genuinely mutual recognitional status."[53]

These quotations illustrate that Pippin and Pinkard set up an asymmetry in Hegel's conception of history; they see an act of reconciliation as either failed or successful, as either participating in the process of history in a way that will ultimately be usurped by future cultures or bringing an "end to history;" or at least an end to the further development of social institutions, political structures, religious and philosophical traditions, and the core values which these are based on. To put it simply, all acts of reconciliation undertaken by past cultures are understood as only useful within the context of their own historical time period while Hegel's is understood as an achievement that can be detached from its relevance in his own local context and applied to all future human communities' aspirations towards knowledge and social harmony. In other words, they see the objective principles that undergird Hegel's own work of Absolute Spirit to have significance independent of the way they systematically unify and redefine historically situated forces, institutions, and entities. However, if we turn back to our earlier articulation of the structure and purpose of reconciliation we find that although Pinkard and Pippin clearly have insight into the comprehensive and systematic aspirations of philosophy, their lack of an in-depth analysis of the features of that systematic structure produces these misunderstandings. For Hegel, philosophy's aim is nothing less and nothing more than to provide a unifying normative orientation and theoretical worldview to a people through the act of teasing out fundamental normative principles that can unify, and reorient within the context of this unification, the various spheres, domains, and interests of human life and of nature at a particular time in

[53] Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 36.

history. Further, we have seen that this entire systematic worldview has a “mutually reciprocal” structure; we can neither take the objective principles as an independent “foundation” through which we build up the various lower spheres that contain concrete subjects and entities, nor can we these various subjects and entities on their own to ground the system since they do not embody and illustrating the truth of these objective principles prior to the analysis of the philosopher. Rather, for Hegel it is the act of philosophical analysis and synthesis itself that simultaneously mediates between and determines the content of these more comprehensive principles and these concrete, historically situated entities by ascertaining a novel but appropriate set of unifying principles through in-depth study of the forces and entities “on the ground.” In this sense, both the more comprehensive principles through which the entities or subjects gain their determinacy and structure and the entities and subjects which act as concrete manifestations of these principles are mutually grounded in the systematic unity of the philosophical analysis itself and the role it plays in constructing a pragmatic way of life and orientation for a community. If we understand the reconciliatory aims of philosophy in this comprehensive way we find that it is impossible to detach any systematic worldview from its grounding in this historically situated analysis with the aim of a pragmatic, normative reorientation for a people; as the reconciliatory vision aims to include all points of view and information one has access to *from one’s historical point of view*, not from a timeless point of view that can also perceive what will happen in the future.

I would argue that based on this analysis of Hegel’s concept of reconciliation and its relationship to his conception of the Absolute, the only sense in which Hegel sees his philosophical aspiration toward reconciliation as different from the aspirations of past

cultures is in its appropriateness and responsiveness to the conditions of his historical time. I suggest there is no indication in his texts that Hegel thinks we can detach the worldview and the normative principles in which it is grounded from its pragmatic relevance to his historical and cultural context. In the introduction to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* Hegel straightforwardly explains why it is the case that even though his works can make legitimate claims to "Absolute" knowledge, what we have called self-knowledge, this does not imply that we can detach that knowledge from its historical, functional, and pragmatic grounding in a particular way of life. He writes,

> To comprehend *what is* is the task of philosophy for *what is* is reason. As far as the individual is concerned, each individual is a child of his own time, thus philosophy too, is its own time comprehended in thoughts. It is just as foolish to imagine that philosophy can transcend its contemporary world as that an individual can overleap his own time or leap over Rhodes.[54]

Here Hegel first explains how the aim of reconciliation is nothing less than to capture, "*what is.*" As we have seen, "what is" is the hierarchical context of principled relations within which individual entities originally gain their personal views, projects, and desires which manifests concretely as the present moment as it appears to a particular individual. The sense in which reconciliation always aims at "what is" or "what has been in and for itself," is the sense in which reconciliation always aims at the eternal; at a final knowledge of the nature of the cosmos and the place and purpose of the human being within that cosmos. As we have seen, in order to provide any contentful and determinate understanding of what a human being's nature or purpose is, that nature and purpose must be described as not only gaining significance within a set of communal and social aims but also within the context of the very laws which govern the cosmos itself. In order to do this, a vision of the cosmos and all its constituents must be given that is

[54] Hegel, *Right*, 21-22.

exhaustive, in the sense that it articulates a set of principles that a community of individuals can act out together in concrete ways as they engage with each other within the context of different social and political projects and institutions; and which also govern the laws of nature and the cosmos themselves. If the vision was not comprehensive; this vision would not truly be a reconciliation, as there would still be a lingering sphere of life or aspect of nature with which the individual could come into conflict. In this sense, for reconciliation to aim at self-knowledge or the Absolute in the way Hegel understands, it must aspire to give a final, exhaustive, and comprehensive vision of the cosmos; it must, in a sense, take itself to be at the "end of history."

That being said, in the second part of the quote Hegel points out that even as philosophy provides us with such a comprehensive and exhaustive image of "what is," it would still be "foolish" to "imagine that philosophy can transcend its contemporary world." Here, Hegel reminds us that even though these reconciled visions of life do, in one sense, have to *take* themselves to be at the end of history in order to give a fully comprehensive and integrated picture of the cosmos and of the role of the human within that cosmos; it would be "foolish" to think that such a vision is not itself rooted in a synthesis of the particular historical, cultural, political, and natural forces which are at play at that time in history. For example, from such a point of view, Hegel's triumphalist vision of the market society, the modern state, and the family is not a final "successful" reconciliation, but a practical vision that suggests the way in which the specifically modern ethic of the freedom of the individual can be integrated into the existing social structure of the time.[55] In this sense, the act of reconciliation is just as much a practical,

[55] In fact, for Hegel, this notion of the freedom of the individual is not even present within human thought until after Christinatiy. Thus, it would not make sense to say that past reconciliations are "failures" to integrate the freedom of the individual unless we add the caveat that this is only the case from Hegel's own historically conditioned point of view.

normative, and creative activity as it is a “discovering” of the truth of a particular community's worldview, social structures, and conception of the cosmos. The sense in which Hegel’s philosophical works come at the “end of history” is the same sense in which every other culture’s great works of art, religion, and philosophy also come to the “end of history” from their own vantage point.[56]

Conclusion

Pinkard and Pippin do a great service to Hegel scholarship by illuminating the fact that Hegel sees history itself as driven by these acts of “reconciliation,” these historically conditioned acts of self and world constitution. In this way, they illustrate that Hegel has a deep interest in the way in which natural, historical, cultural, social, and natural forces condition the concrete lives of individuals and the way in which these individuals have understood themselves through an attempt to grasp the nature of these larger forces and their place within them. Pippin and Pinkard are also not wrong in seeing that there is a sense in which Hegel takes himself and his own efforts at reconciliation to be at the “end of history.” However, what their reading conceals is that a dichotomy between a “successful” reconciliation that brings an end to the development

[56] It is possible that the discrepancy between mine and Pippin and Pinkard’s reading of Hegel’s conception of the Absolute at least partially revolves around this point of comprehensiveness. When Pippin and Pinkard describe the nature of the different communal spheres in which entities within a community gain their determinacy and significance, they always point to the activities and institutions of the community and not the laws governing nature and the cosmos as a whole. For example, Pinkard refers to these different cultural forms of life as different “metaphysics of subjectivity,” without mentioning the place of objectivity at all (Pinkard, *History,* 3-4). Similarly, as we have seen in some quotations already, both Pinkard and Pippin often refer to these forms of life as “self understandings” or forms of “cooperative social life.” Such statements make no mention of the objective laws of nature and the cosmos in which these social, communal, and political institutions are understood to be embedded in a reconciled picture of the world. If they do understand these past presentations of the Absolute to be only social in nature, this could very well be why they do not see that any work of the Absolute Spirit has to take itself to be at the “end of history.” For this requirement comes from the fact that any work of Absolute Spirit, in its aspiration towards reconciliation, necessarily takes itself to once and for all set forth the norms, laws, and principles that comprehensively govern the cosmos and all its constituents.

of history, and an “unsuccessful” reconciliation that constitutes a new knowledge of the self and the world, influences the course of history, and is later usurped by new cultural developments, is a false dichotomy for Hegel. Although Hegel thinks it reasonable to refer to a careful and well-worked-out articulation of the nature of the cosmos, society, and the human as “Absolute” because it exhaustively articulates one’s theoretical and practical grip on the world to the best of its ability, this does not imply we can then detach that model from the functional role it plays to stabilize a way of life for a certain community.

Rather, for Hegel the “Absolute” always must involve three elements all of which are equally semantically interdependent: the *act* of systematic unification undertaken through a work of Absolute Spirit, the timeless principles of the more comprehensive spheres of the worldview presented which systematically organize and determine the nature and horizons of possible action for the entities which make up the lower spheres, and the way in which these principles have both their origin and their consequence only in the historically situated concrete entities which act as their embodiment. In this way, Hegel presents an understanding of the Absolute that is radically anti-foundational, in which we cannot separate either the act of unification, the eternal vision of the cosmos, or that vision's origins and effects in a concrete historical context, from one another. With this understanding of the Absolute in the background, I argue that the only sense in which Hegel takes himself to be at the “end of history” is the way in which every work of Absolute Spirit, in presenting a comprehensive vision of the cosmos, must take itself to be at the end of history. The significance of the Absolute which Hegel presents in his own philosophical works, just like the artistic and religious presentations of the past, cannot be pried apart from the way it gains its significance and authority as a concrete

normative intervention he himself is making through the act of philosophical synthesis within his own historical context.

Chapter 2: The Redemptive Role of the End of Art Hegel's *Aesthetics*

Introduction

Hegel's announcement of the "end of art" in his *Lectures on Aesthetics* has become one of the most well-known and infamous statements of his career. This end of art thesis claims, in Hegel's own words, that art "considered in its highest vocation...remains for us a thing of the past."[57] Hegel asserts that his time period marks a historical transition in the significance of art to human culture; that art has lost its ability to play a fundamental role in presenting a comprehensive vision of the cosmos as a whole and the place of the human being and human community in that cosmos; what Hegel refers to as the "Absolute." In a paper surveying the history of scholarship on Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, the work in which Hegel makes this claim, Annemarie Gethmann Siefert documents the unpopularity of his thesis, writing,

> Not for the first time today, but already in Hegel's day, his disciples, like the critics, were of the opinion that the thesis of 'the end of art' in particular is incompatible with the illuminating analysis of the historical significance of art; that this thesis is definitely incompatible with Hegel's art criticism and his characterizations of individual instances, which many today take to be hardly surpassable in their brilliance[58]

[57] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11

[58] Gethmann-Seifert, *Hotho Transcript*, 13.

In the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel both undertakes an analysis of the function, meaning and cultural significance of particular works and genres of art, including the way they presented an understanding of the "Absolute" nature of self and world in their local context, and weaves a long narrative of the history of art which he frames as a progression towards his own philosophical comprehension Absolute. Gethmann-Siefert points out that although there has been widespread praise for Hegel's insight into the function, meaning, and local historical significance of various works and genres of art; there is much less for the way he frames the entire history of art as culminating in the end of art, and therefore justifying his own philosophical articulation of the Absolute.

Trends such as the one Gethmann-Siefert describes are common throughout the history of scholarship on Hegel's *Lecture on Aesthetics*. Often Hegel's insights into the function and significance of various historical works of art within their local context are praised but his more systematic and wide-reaching claims about the history of art and its culmination in the end of art and the philosophical modes of knowing of Hegel's day are rejected. Gethmann Seifert seems to support this general trend suggesting that "it is natural indeed to see from the text of the *Aesthetics*, that the actual accomplishment of Hegel is the philosophical illumination of the historicality of art," implying that we can simply reject the systematic elements without question.[59] This casual and assumed rejection of Hegel's systematic commitments concerning the nature of the Absolute is common in Hegel scholarship. In recent times, scholars such as Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin have begun to alter this trend by taking the more systematic aspects of Hegel's works more seriously. One example of this is how Pinkard and Pippin defend

[59] Gethmann-Seifert, *Hotho Transcript*, 13.

Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* as not only containing valuable insights into individual artworks and eras of art but also contributing to our understanding of how the production of art is intimately related to the evolution of human culture and the trajectory of world history. However, even with this sophisticated reading of the central function art plays in the evolution of human culture, I would suggest that both Pippin and Pinkard misunderstand the central role of the end of art in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Pippin specifically goes as far as suggesting that the end of art is inessential and ultimately extraneous. For example, in his book *After the Beautiful,* Pippin argues that Hegel's insightful and systematic account of the relationship between art, history, and human identity does not necessarily imply this ending of art, that it is possible to preserve Hegel's insights even if we leave aside his end of art thesis. Pippin writes that Hegel's announcement of the end of art "is not motivated by anything essential in Hegel's account and represents a misstep, not an inference consistent with Hegel's overall project."[60]

In this paper, I will argue that we must take the end of art thesis seriously if we want to understand the purpose and function of Hegel's progressive framing of the history of art towards his comprehension of the Absolute *and* if we want to fully understand the significance of his comments on the function of particular artworks in their cultural contexts in all their complexity and nuance. Although scholarship has a tendency to divide Hegel's historical and cultural interests from his justifications of his own notion of the Absolute, I will suggest that Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* is, in fact, one unified analysis and that these cultural and more systematic ambitions arise as two aspects of a singular, unified philosophical analysis of the relationship between art, the

[60] Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 23.

history of human culture, and the significance of that history to Hegel's current time.[61] As such, I will argue that we can only understand the true significance of both of these elements of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* when we understand how they arise as two layers of this singular analysis, and further that one of the keys to understanding the way this unified analysis functions is to understand the central role of the end of art in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*.

More specifically, I will argue that Hegel's progressive history of art culminating in the end of art acts as an explanation and justification of the philosophical methodology that he makes use of to structure the entirety of the *Lectures on Aesthetics.* Hegel understands art and philosophy to have different and unique capabilities in their ability to present the Absolute. More specifically, Hegel thinks that philosophy is more sophisticated in its expressive capacities and thus can express an understanding of the world as a whole and its relationship to the human and the human community with greater complexity and nuance than art. If we read Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* as a unified whole, we will find that the methodology Hegel uses to structure the work is a philosophical methodology and that Hegel justifies this methodology by suggesting that it is able to reconcile the theoretical and normative conflicts in his concrete cultural context that arise of the limitations of the past cultures who expressed the Absolute artistically and the historical forces these forms of life set in motion. From this point of view, we will find that the very structure of the *Aesthetics* contains a redemptive and participatory

[61] In his book, *In the Spirit of Hegel*, Robert Solomon points out how this tendency to bi-furcate Hegel's work into two incompatible projects, one focused on cultural observations another on a justification of his conception of the Absolute, is common to scholarship on all Hegel's work. Solomon claims that for most, Hegel has appeared to be both a "philosopher of change" and a "philosopher of the Absolute " and that these two projects seem incompatible (Solomon, *Spirit of Hegel*, 15). I hope my suggestion of how to bring these two sides of Hegel together can act as a suggestion for how to read not only the *Lectures on Aesthetics* but to read Hegel's philosophical methodology more generally as well.

intention. Understood in this light, we will find that even as Hegel aspires to give a comprehensive picture of history that accounts for the empirical data concerning particular artworks and their cultural function, it is also the case that the very methodology he uses to interpret this data is applied with a historically specific, redemptive purpose and function in mind. Once we take the end of art seriously, we find that Hegel does not have a "neutral" methodology that articulates the function of local artworks or the overall trajectory of the history of art in a fully disinterested way. Hegel is not under the illusion that he is articulating the meaning of works of art or art history in the way they "really are" independently of his own interests and attempts to redeem the conflicts in his cultural context. Rather, once we understand the way in which Hegel's philosophical methodology is invoked not as a mere neutral report of the trajectory of art history but also as a participatory creative response to the limitations of cultures rooted in artistic expressions of the Absolute and the conflicts they produced that produced in his cultural context, we will find that this entire narrative of the history of art is just as much an attempt to redeem and reconcile these conflicts by reframing and reconstituting our understanding of art history and its trajectory towards the present day as it is an attempt to simply define the trajectory of history in a neutral way.[62] Further, I will suggest that once we nuance Hegel's philosophical methodology in this way, we will find that the way he analyzes particular works of art in their cultural context is dependent on this philosophical methodology. Specifically, he reads the significance of artworks through

[62] For Hegel these two acts, a neutral disinterested analysis and a participatory, redemptive re-interpretation, can never be separated but always occur simultaneously in any act of comprehensive analysis. Thus, as I understand Hegel, claiming that his analysis is grounded in a normative interest does not make that analysis relative or contingent, because from his point of view *all* analysis is grounded in some normative interest. Further, Hegel still understands his analysis to truly express the Absolute, as he thinks the model he provides acts as the comprehensive ground of a way of life for a particular people. I will touch on this dual nature of analysis later in the chapter but I argue for it extensively in my first chapter, *Hegel's Theory of the Absolute: The End of History and Reconciliation.*

this *philosophical* lens, which has different expressive and methodological capabilities than art itself. In this way, I hope to show that the end of art thesis and the historical explanation Hegel provides for that end of art thesis acts as the ground that justifies and provides significance to *both* his historical narrative of the history of art and that history's culmination in his own grip on the Absolute, *and* the meaning and function of particular works of art that are embedded in this history.

As Hegel himself writes in the introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, "the philosophical concept of the beautiful…must contain, reconciled within itself…metaphysical universality and the precision of real particularity."[63] In the *Lectures* as a whole Hegel aspires to build a vision of art, the history of art, and its relationship to the present day that is both responsive to the "particularity" of historical information about works of art in their local context and presents a "universal" Absolute vision of the significance of beauty and art to human history and to his present day. In order to illustrate this argument through the paper we will need to cover three main points: (1) The way Hegel understands art to present the nature of the Absolute throughout human history (2) The way in which philosophy is able to present a more sophisticated understanding of the Absolute, and (3) Why Hegel thinks the limitations of art become incapable of meeting the needs of his own culture, and how his presentation of the history of art and its culmination in philosophy must be understood as both a creative solution to this cultural demand and a comprehensive picture of the history of art. Once we understand these three pieces we will be able to see how all elements of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, both Hegel's systematic ambitions towards understanding history and the Absolute and his cultural observations, are working together to justify and

[63] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 22.

enact Hegel's own philosophical interventions concerning the nature of the human being, history, and art.

The Role of Art in Human History

As mentioned, one of Terry Pinkard and Robert Pippin's contributions to scholarship on Hegel's *Aesthetics* is the way in which they communicate Hegel's insights concerning the central role art plays in the historical development of human identity and understanding throughout human history. Robert Pippin and Terry Pinkard accomplish this task by clarifying a claim of Hegel's that has caused a fair amount of confusion and misunderstanding throughout the history of Hegel scholarship; the claim that art is a form of "Absolute Spirit;" one of the fundamental ways in which "Spirit" (*Geist)* is fully articulated throughout history.[64] For Hegel, religion, philosophy, and art all have the potential to be forms of "Absolute Spirit." Hegel explains that the function of a work of Absolute Spirit is to express "the divine, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of spirit."[65] In his essay, *The Absence of Aesthetics in Hegel's*

[64] Throughout the history of Hegel scholarship many scholars have struggled with this kind of terminology, often suggesting that Hegel has a metaphysical commitment to the existence of some mysterious entity called "spirit." On such a reading, as Pinkard writes, this spirit uses "people," "for his coming to self-consciousness" (Pinkard, *Metaphysics* 296). As we will see, Pinkard and Pippin dismiss this understanding of "Spirit" or "Absolute Spirit" and instead give what they call an "anti-metaphysical" reading of spirit. They read Hegel as making use of this language as a way of articulating the way in which the human agent and community continually transforms through the way they constantly re-interpret the social, ethical, religious, and cosmological in which they are embedded.

[65] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 7.

Aesthetics, Pippin works out this claim by explaining that "the production of art" is "a form of agency" for Hegel.[66] By referring to art as a "form of agency" Pippin emphasizes that for Hegel, each culture uses one of these mediums of "Absolute Spirit" in order to articulate to itself the very nature of what an agent is; what aims, projects, and cares that agent has that constitute its fundamental nature. Further elaborating on how art accomplishes this aim in another of his works, *After the Beautiful*, Pippin writes, "any such individually self-constituting identity is not possible except within a continuing effort at a commonly achieved self-knowledge and so self-realization. It is the very broadest of such projects aimed at commonly realized self-knowledge."[67] Here Pippin points out that when art, or any form of Absolute Spirit, determines or "constitutes" the nature or "identity" of an agent in a particular cultural and historical context, it must do so by situating that subject within "projects aimed at commonly realized self-knowledge." In other words, for Hegel, an agent or subject's goals, aims, and cares gain their determinacy through the way they have significance in the context of a project that the agent pursues with other members of their community; art presents the nature of the agent by illustrating the communal way of life shared with other agents in which that agent is embedded and through which they gain their sense of self.

At times, Pippin suggests that these ethical and social norms of behavior shared by a community are the most comprehensive norms and laws that art articulates; suggesting that we can fully understand a form of agency by understanding the particular normative commitments and social practices in which the agent is embedded. In his paper, *Aesthetic Freedom*, Pierre Keller, in my opinion rightfully, extends the scope

[66] Pippin, *Philosophy by Other Means,* 72.

[67] Pippin, *Beautiful,* 42.

of art for Hegel. Keller suggests that art does not only articulate the nature of the agent by embedding the agent within a set of social norms but also contextualizes those social norms by embedding the cares of the community within the laws that govern morality and the cosmos itself. Keller writes, “The idea of the beautiful can express a comprehensive freedom and truth for Hegel because it constitutes a systematic pattern of normative conceptual relations of which spatiotemporal objects are mere appearances.”[68] Here Keller explains that works of art, along with all other works of Absolute Spirit, do not only embody and express normative principles that underpin a particular community’s way of life but aspire further toward a “comprehensive” expression of truth by articulating those principles which underpin and govern all that appears within space and time, the laws which govern the cosmos itself. Keller helps us build on Pippin’s suggestion of the role of art for Hegel by pointing out how art is not only used to reflect on and articulate the norms underpinning a communal way of life, but also aims further at a comprehensive vision of the entire cosmos that contains an integral place for all the people, communities, and objects which inhabit that cosmos. Keller’s expansion of the functional role art plays in human culture illustrates how art’s ultimate aim is what Hegel calls reconciliation (*Versöhnung*). Hegel explains this notion of reconciliation in the introduction of his *Lectures on Aesthetics* as an attempt to unify the various oppositions that often seem to lead to distress and suffering in our lives into a systematic vision of the world that illustrates the possibility of a way of living that unifies and synthesizes the opposition within these contradictions even while respecting the claims of both sides. These could include, just to give a few examples, the conflict between the personal will of an individual and the laws of the state in which they live, the

[68] Pierre Keller. *Aesthetic Freedom*. [Unpublished manuscript], 1.

survival needs of a community and the harshness of nature, or a conflict between one's desires and perceived moral duties. Hegel writes that Absolute Spirit aims to show "how truth is just the dissolving of this opposition, and at that, not in the sense, as may be supposed, that the opposition and its two sides *do not exist at all*, but that they exist reconciled."[69]

The first thing to understand is that these oppositions are not simply theoretical oppositions for Hegel, they are ways in which aspects of the world appear alien, hostile, or unknowable within the context of the lived experience of human beings. For example, an individual struggling with the social role they have been boxed into may feel as if their community's social norms are indifferent or hostile to their own inner life. Or a community going through a famine or drought may feel as if the laws of nature are indifferent and hostile to human life as a whole. Different specific oppositions will be relevant in different cultural and historical contexts although, as we will see shortly, Hegel does think there are general forms that these oppositions take which are universal to most cultures. A work of Absolute Spirit "reconciles" the oppositions in a way that is appropriate for the culture at the time by articulating and presenting these different spheres of human life that often come into conflict as grounded in a consistent set of principles and laws that can be embodied within the concrete lives of individual human beings and their communities.

Let's look at one example from Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* to see how this would work with a particular work of art*:* the pyramids of Egypt. One opposition that Hegel suggests most cultures confront in different forms is what he refers to as the opposition between "nature and spirit;" between that which initially seems concrete,

[69] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 55.

physical, and given such as the natural, physical world, that which initially seems immaterial and ontologically ambiguous, such as thought, the mind, or the soul. In Egypt, Hegel suggests that one of the primary ways this opposition manifested was between life and death, in the contrast between a concrete, tangible realm of the living and a more ambiguously structured realm of the dead which existed in some distinct, other place. That being said, although there is still this opposition between nature and spirit, which in this case takes this particular form of these two realms, Hegel suggests that by positing the idea of the immortal soul Egyptian culture took a significant step towards the reconciliation of this opposition. Hegel thinks Egyptian culture was the first time in history in which we see "the self comprehended as withdrawn from the naturalness of life and resting on itself."[70] Hegel argues that the Egyptians are the first to posit an aspect of the concrete, inner life of the human being that transcends the ephemerality and transitoriness that governs the natural, physical world. Although, in one sense this positing of the immortal soul still preserves a strong contrast between life and death Hegel suggests that there is a significant step towards reconciliation here. He writes that this is a "higher way" of "understanding the separation between nature and spirit since it is not merely the natural which acquires independence for itself," and that "the dead acquires the content of the living itself."[71] In other words, even though the Egyptian metaphysical picture still contains some division between life and death, there is a reconciliation consisting of the fact that the immaterial souls are understood to have many of the concrete qualities of the living, embodied agents who house them during life; they are individual, determinate, and have a realm in which they can move about like

[70] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 355.

[71] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 355.

they do while they are living. In this sense, Egyptian metaphysics represents at least a partial reconciliation of this opposition between nature and spirit or life and death.

Although I am of course articulating this Egyptian metaphysical picture in writing, Hegel suggests that we find this articulation of the immortality of the soul not primarily in Egyptian writing or philosophy but in art. The pyramids, for example, are full of hieroglyphs that articulate the nature of the soul's journey through the afterlife and act as a physical structure that houses the soul of the pharaoh, preparing his soul for their journey into the realm of the dead. In this way the pyramids themselves, among other Egyptian works of art that Hegel discusses, act as the fundamental vision of the reconciliation of this opposition, they are the primary concrete articulation of the structure of this realm of the dead which the soul travels. Further, with the new metaphysical structure of the cosmos which the pyramids present comes a new normative orientation for human beings, as human beings now must live in a way that secures that their soul is fit to make this journey into the afterlife. In this way art, as a work of Absolute Spirit simultaneously situates a human community in a wider world and through this act of recontextualizing the human agent in that world, bestows a new significance and orientation to human life. As Keller writes in the same paper, "Relative to more local interests one is free, but relative to wider interests one is not. In a certain sense, the experience of beauty in art provides a kind of experience that can both express and transcend the fundamental oppositions that beset culture."[72] In the context of Egypt, we could say that from the "local" standpoint of the physical body one was free, but from the "wider" standpoint of that body's death in the future, one was not free. This looming death appears as an alien force that threatens the human's identification with the other

[72] Keller, *Aesthetic Freedom*, 4.

side of this opposition, life. By “transcending the fundamental opposition” between life and death, at least to some extent, through the act of reimagining the cosmos as containing a realm of the dead to which the human soul travels, the Egyptian pyramids expressed a more comprehensive sense of freedom for the Egyptian agent. Like the pyramids, Hegel sees many cultures throughout history making use of art to confront conflicts and oppositions and reconcile them through a re-imagination of the nature of the cosmos and the place of the human being in the cosmos. In this sense, Hegel sees art as fundamental and indispensable for our understanding of the way different cultures have understood themselves, their highest ideals, and the cosmos and their place in it. As Hegel writes himself, “in works of art the nations have deposited their richest inner intuitions and ideas, and art is often the key, and in many nations the sole key, to understanding their philosophy and religion.”[73]

Art. and The Philosophy of Art

That being said, our understanding of art, or any form of Absolute Spirit, as a “form of agency” and as a reimagination of the cosmological context in which that agent lives, would be incomplete if we miss the fact that Hegel sees such an understanding or art to only be possible within the context of a *philosophical* understanding of art; once philosophy has become the primary way through which humans understand themselves, history, and the cosmos. Following this explanation of reconciliation in his introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel writes,

So this point of view is not only the reawakening of philosophy in general, but also the reawakening of the science of art; indeed it is this reawakening alone that aesthetics

[73] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 7.

proper, as a science, has really to thank for its genuine origin, and art for its higher estimation[74]

We can start to unpack this quote by understanding what Hegel means when he refers to the "science of art." (the German word translated as science is *wissenschaft* which we could instead translate as systematic knowledge that includes but is not limited to the natural sciences) Once we understand great works of art to represent new and unique articulations of the nature of the human being and the social and cosmological worlds in which that human being lives and acts, an intimate relationship is revealed between certain works of art and the way the human agent and their context is understood in different ways throughout history. For Hegel, our most fundamental understanding of who we are and what the world is changes when we articulate anew the wider political, social, cultural, and cosmological structures in which the human being gains its significance; and one of the primary ways this reinterpretation has been undertaken is through making art. In the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel underpins his analysis of the function of singular works of art within their cultural contexts with a "science of art" by systematically connecting the expressions of the Absolute articulated by singular works of art into a historical story that traces the development of human beings' understanding of themselves and the world extending as far back as ancient Babylon up to his present day. However this "science of art," is not *itself* a work of art; it is a philosophical and historical narrative documenting how human beings throughout history developed their understanding of themselves and the world using art. Thus, by simply drawing our attention to the methodology and underlying framework Hegel uses to make sense of different artworks throughout history, we find that the end of art is already invoked as a

[74] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 56.

necessary precondition of the analysis. For Hegel something important “ends” concerning art’s task and function once art is understood through the lens of philosophy, once art’s role in human history, culture, and self-understanding is interpreted through the lens of another medium of Absolute Spirit. We understand the role of art in human history much differently when we perceive its function through this philosophical narrative or “science of art” than when art itself was the primary way of articulating the nature of the human being, history, and the way they are situated in the larger world. We can start to understand the differences between the expressive capabilities of a philosophical grasp of the significance of art and of art itself by looking back at our example of the pyramids of Egypt.

From the point of view of one living in Egypt, the pyramids would not have been understood precisely in the way discussed above. Those living in Egypt would not have seen the primary motivation for building pyramids as a unification of a culturally relevant opposition that produces a new normative orientation for human beings by recontextualizing them within a new model of the cosmos. Neither would they understand this notion of the human soul to be only a partial reconciliation between nature and spirit, or life and death. Rather, they would have seen the pyramids as expressing and mirroring the eternal structure of the cosmos in which this realm of the dead had *always and already* existed, even if they were the first to notice it. Egyptians would have seen the act of building the pyramids as both as expressing a realm of the dead that had always existed, and as orienting human beings in a proper normative way by living in a way that prepares them for this realm of the dead. Hegel’s own *philosophical* analysis of the significance of the pyramids adds a third element to this understanding. Namely, the way the creative *act* of building the pyramids, and other

relevant works of Egyptian art, immanently and simultaneously *produced* this worldview and its corresponding conception of the normative orientation of the human agent in a way that responded to oppositions received from past cultural worldviews and paved the way for future cultural worldviews.

For example, In the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel explains how Egypt is building on the Indian conception of the relationship between nature and spirit writing,

> The Indian rises only to the emptiest abstraction and therefore the abstraction which is likewise negative in contrast to everything concrete. Such an Indian process of becoming Brahma does not occur in Egypt; on the contrary, the invisible has a deeper meaning for the Egyptians; the dead acquires the content of the living itself.[75]

In Hegel's interpretation, Indian culture posits an absolute divide between the realm of the natural and the realm of the spirit or the immaterial. Although Indian religion contains a vast pantheon of gods and vibrant stories documenting their activities, Hegel suggests that all these stories consist of only a quantitative exaggeration of "sensuous appearance" or of the natural concrete world, and do not suggest that this concrete, physical world in which the gods and human beings live contains any features or elements of the truly spiritual or immaterial. Similarly, on the other side, Hegel suggests that the Indian divine principle, Brahma, is a "spiritual abstraction," that likewise contains no concrete feature of the sensuous, natural world but rather is only reached by a complete denial or negation of all aspects of the concrete natural world. [76] [77] From a

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[75] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 355.
[76] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 346.

[77] I feel it would be irresponsible here to not note Hegel's obvious Eurocentrism. As we see in his discussion of India, Hegel has a tendency to interpret all non western religion and philosophy in an uncharitable way, very possibly so he can then portray Greek and European religion and philosophy as superior, as presenting the "full" reconciliation of nature and spirit. To see an argument that even Hegel suspected that Indian philosophy is much more sophisticated than he is willing to admit at times, see *Hegel's India: A Re interpretation* by Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra. That being said, I would suggest that Hegel's underlying methodology gives

philosophical lens the Egyptian pyramids are understood to be an immanent act of reinterpretation and partial reconciliation of this opposition that Hegel sees as completely divided in India which generates, rather than just represents or reflects, this new vision of the cosmos and new agential orientation. Similarly, from this philosophical point of view, Egyptian art is also understood to transmit its theoretical model and pragmatic orientation forwards to future cultures which can bring further sophistication to this opposition and the way it manifests in their context through their acts of reimagination and reconciliation. It is from this point of view, as representing the beginnings of a reconciliation that later will gain greater sophistication, that Hegel terms Egyptian art as a form of "symbolic art." Hegel writes of works of symbolic art that they are "not meant to display themselves alone but are meant to hint at meanings deeper and more comprehensive."[78] A work of symbolic art uses a concrete physical form, in this case the Egyptian pyramids themselves, to gesture towards the structure of a deeper, more fundamental immaterial realm, in this case, the realm of the dead. This possibility requires *some* reconciliation as this immaterial realm must be structured in a way similar to the physical, concrete world to be symbolized in any meaningful way by a physical work of art. However, when looked at from this philosophical point of view that contrasts symbolic art with later developments, this symbolic reconciliation is also limited, as the structure of the realm or meaning being expressed still lies beyond the full grasp of the work of art. Since the structure of the immaterial or spiritual realm still in some sense

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us the means to re-interpret these cultures in a way that is more charitable. As we will see later, I read Hegel as suggesting that the history being provided here is the most responsible history he can give from his historically situated point of view. Whether or not he actually lived up to that promise, his methodology encourages us to look at these cultures anew from our unique point of view, which includes taking into account what we have learned about the injustices of colonialism since Hegel's time.

[78] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 351.

overflows its concrete articulation, there is still some division between nature and spirit. As we will see shortly when we discuss Greek art or what Hegel calls “Classical” art, Hegel takes Greece to “perfect” art by constructing a work of art that does not merely symbolize its spiritual meaning but comprehensively manifests and displays that meaning through the physicality work itself, thus illustrating a complete unification of the physical realm of nature and the immaterial realm of spirit.

Hegel’s philosophical methodology provides us with a rich, complex interpretive lens that asks us to integrate two seemingly divergent truths about art throughout human history. On the one hand, these cultures made use of art in order to express a view of the cosmos and the human agent which was fundamental and totally comprehensive from their own point of view and thus acted as the fundamental horizon of meaning, both theoretically and practically, through which their lives played out. However, on the other hand, from Hegel’s later point of view, he cannot help but understand these works of art as immanent acts of reconciliation and reorientation that responded to the oppositions and conflicts they inherited from past cultures and also paved the way forward for future innovations. In this way, Hegel is not under any illusions that his understanding of the role of artworks in local cultural contexts can be pried apart from the way they are embedded in the trajectory of the history of art, a progressive history that is itself part of a *philosophical* analysis of the significance of art. Hegel does not mean to deny that we always have and always will attempt to understand the true structure of the cosmos independently of our own relationship to it. However, I argue that he does think that from a philosophical lens, we are able to see any work of expression of the Absolute, and in this category, I include his own, *both* as a transcendent vision that expresses the universal and eternal truth of the cosmos *and* as an immanent innovation that

re-articulates the nature of the cosmos and recontextualizes the significance and nature of the beings within that cosmos in a way that is relevant for that particular historical time period. Thus, Hegel suggests that it is only from this latter philosophical point of view after the end of art that we can "re-awaken" and redeem art by understanding particular works of art not only as expressions of the nature of the cosmos that turned out to be false but as intra historical, creative restructurings of our understanding of the world and the agent that we continue to develop and draw upon and be influenced by to this very day.

The Limitation of Art

Now to return to our main theme, the end of art: for Hegel, it is not arbitrary that this creative, reconstitutive dimension of the way art functions throughout history is incorporated into our analysis once the medium of Absolute Spirit shifts from art to philosophy. He writes in the introduction to his *Lectures on Aesthetics,*

> In order to be a genuine content for art, such truth must in virtue of its own specific character be able to go forth into [the sphere of] sense and remain adequate to itself there. This is the case, for example, with the gods of Greece. On the other hand, there is a deeper comprehension of truth which is no longer so akin and friendly to sense as to be capable of appropriate adoption and expression in this medium[79]

Here Hegel points out that art as a medium is limited in the sense that it can only represent one form of "truth;" pointing out that there is a "deeper comprehension" of truth that cannot be expressed through art. As we have seen, one element of this deeper comprehension of truth is that philosophy is able to emphasize the way in which any work of Absolute Spirit is just as much a creative act of normative re-orientation and

[79] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 11.

recontextualization of the human being and their sense of world as it is an expression of the ultimate truth of self and world. If this is correct, this means art *must* end for Hegel to undertake his pluralistic and dynamic analysis of the history of art which treats works of art in this way. If we look at what Hegel sees as the limitations of art as a medium of Absolute Spirit, the limitations of a medium that goes "forth into sense and remain adequate to itself there," we will find that Hegel suggests that due to its very physical medium art is incapable of expressing this underlying active and creative element which philosophy takes to underpin any work of Absolute Spirit. Once we understand the way the historical causes of Hegel's philosophical analysis lie in art coming against its limitations, we will also be able to comprehend the true purpose of Hegel's analysis of the history of art in a more complete way.

Hegel argues that Greece was the last culture that made use of art to articulate its highest truths. The downfall of the Greek way of life, or the Greek form of truth, reveals the constraints of a form of truth that can be articulated through art. Hegel traces a trajectory within the history of Greek art that gradually leads towards this emphasis on the active, normative, and creative dimension of a work of Absolute Spirit which philosophy must ultimately express as mirrored by a growing emphasis on the freedom of the human individual. He writes of this trajectory,

> At one end, the ideal inclines still to the loftiness and severity which does not begrudge the individual his living stir and movement but yet keeps him still firmly under the domination of the universal: while at the other end, the universal is gradually more and more lost in the individual[80]

[80] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 787-788.

As we have seen with the Egyptian pyramids, before Greek art in the realm of symbolic art, the closest human beings came to a reconciliation between the natural and the spiritual was to create concrete, physical works of art that symbolized or approximated the structure of an immaterial realm or sense of divinity that existed independently of that natural realm yet still could be understood as having some concrete structure. In these symbolic cultures, Hegel would suggest that the individual is “firmly under the domination of the universal,” as the “universal” spiritual structure of the cosmos was taken to simply be a given which the individual must live in alignment with. The Egyptians would have simply taken the realm of the dead to be a given aspect of the cosmos and had to live in a way that admits them access to this realm. For Hegel, this general historical trend begins to shift with Greek art. In Greek art, the emphasis begins to shift away from the primacy of this independent, given spiritual order of the universe and toward the role the individual and the community play in the construction of that order. This process traverses several stages, each embodied in a different form of Greek art, but reaches its ultimate expression in sculpture. We could look at sculpture as the “middle point” of the trajectory described above; a point at which the individual is not dominated by the universal, nor is the universal dominated by the individual; but both come together in an embodied, synchronous expression of the truth through the very body of the individual. Greek sculptures depict the bodies of various Greek gods and goddesses, bodies that are meant to express virtues such as intelligence, strength, and courage through their very physicality. The virtues that these sculptures express were not first grasped as concepts or ideas through the intellect and subsequently built into a sculpture. Rather, these virtues are expressed solely and fundamentally in the demeanor and body of an individual god or goddess. According to Hegel, the sculpted body of the god or goddess

was itself the exhaustive and ultimate expression of such values; the stance, the facial expression, the anatomy, every feature in its particularity and in its relationship to the whole sculpture, was an expression of such virtues and ideals. It is in this way that Greek art is the epitome of the expressive possibilities of art for Hegel, or as Hegel writes, Greek sculpture is "the consummation of the realm of the beautiful."[81] The physical work of art does not point to a spiritual meaning or reality that is independent of its physicality like the Egyptian pyramids did with the realm of the dead, but rather imminently manifests that meaning through its physicality. This is why, for Hegel, Greek sculpture, and the Greek cultural way of life which provided the conditions for these sculptures to be made, fulfills the highest calling of art; it represents a truth that can fully be captured and articulated through sensuous means. As a physical work that fully embodies and manifests the highest spiritual values and truths of Greek culture, sculpture acts as a union of the spiritual and the natural. Further, as the image of an individual body that fully embodies these universal values, sculpture also reconciles the individual and the universal.

Although this accomplishment of Greek culture represents the highest potentiality of art, for Hegel this reconciliation accomplished by Greek sculpture still has its limitations. Sculpture is a form of art that expresses the Greek way of life in its most fundamental form. However, it is an expression frozen in the static, solid medium of sculpture, and as such does not convey how this form of agency plays out in the concrete situations of individuals living together within a community. Hegel refers to Greek tragedy, rather than sculpture, as the Greek form of art that illustrates this truth, or this understanding of the Divine, not "as the object of religious consciousness as such

[81] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 518.

but as it enters the world and individual action."[82] Greek tragedy provides us with some of the concrete implications of the Greek ideal expressed in sculpture; illustrating why this seemingly perfect union between the individual and the universal and the natural and the spiritual, must continue past this perfect harmony towards a prioritization of the inner life of the individual over the universal to resolve contradictions that arise from this particular configuration. Hegel writes of the characters of tragedy, "they are simply the *one* power dominating their own specific character; for, in accordance with their own individuality, they have inseparably identified themselves with some single particular aspect of those solid interests we have enumerated above."[83] Greek sculpture illustrates how the human agent's subjectivity is a direct expression of certain virtues that are fundamentally realized through the expression of the physical body. In this passage, Hegel suggests that the way this form of agency based in a direct union between individual and universal manifests concretely in Greek life is that the agent gains its cares, personal values, and aims from its identification with what is understood to be objective or universal in Greek social and political life; the "concrete ethical orders" that give fundamental structure to communal and social life in Greece. Some ethical orders that Hegel refers to are the commitment to one's family, the commitment to the gods, and the commitment to the political state. The character of a tragic play, and by extension the ideal Greek agent, does not understand themselves to be a free rational thinker who exists independently of these various concrete ethical orders and chooses which to act on in different situations. Rather, as Hegel writes here it is one of these "powers" that "dominates their own specific character." Just as the entirety of the

[82] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 1195.

[83] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1195.

personality and character is formed out of the "objective" bronze or marble sculpture, the entirety of the Greek agent is formed out of the way they embed themselves within one particular "objective" ethical order which at least partially defines the communal world in which they live.

As we are aware, Greek tragedies do not have happy endings. Hegel contends that these tragic endings stem out of a certain limitation or lack of sophistication of this form of truth and agency. For example, in the Greek tragedy, *Antigone* Creon and Antigone are each committed to their own "concrete ethical orders." Antigone's brother was a rebel who was killed in battle fighting against Creon. For this reason, Creon ushers a decree that this rebel will be shamed for not receiving a burial. Creon's decree is a concrete manifestation of the *political* ethical order which constitutes Creon's identity. Antigone, on the other hand, cannot accept this decree based on her commitment to the ethical order of the *family.* In her commitment to bury her brother, Antigone is committed to a familial ethical order. This conflict of the ethical orders which Creon and Antigone are each respectively committed results in a conflict and tragedy; Antigone, Creon's wife, and Creon's son all ultimately commit suicide. One important aspect to understand concerning Greek agency and Greek tragedy is that, as Hegel writes, "within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification."[84] For Hegel, Creon's commitment to political order and stability, and Antigone's commitment to familial honor and love are both perfectly legitimate and dignified motivations. Both familial commitment and political commitment are integral to the stability of the social structure. Even so, the play still results in tragic conflict and despair.

[84] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 1196.

Greek Tragedy illustrates the limitations and dangers inherent in a reconciliation which is constituted by a direct union between the human agent and the highest spiritual ideal they are committed to. Hegel writes of what we can learn from this tragedy,

> The substance of ethical life, as a concrete unity, is an ensemble of different relations and powers which only in a situation of inactivity, like that of the blessed gods, accomplish the work of the spirit in the enjoyment of an undisturbed life. But the very nature of this ensemble implies its transfer from its at first purely abstract ideality into its actualization in reality and its appearance in the mundane sphere. Owing to the nature of the real world, the mere difference of the constituents of this ensemble becomes perverted into opposition and collision, once individual characters seize upon them on the territory of specific circumstances[85]

The limitation of this simple unity between the agent and the concrete, objective ethical order is that, when it comes to the way these individuals live their lives with others in a social space, there is no resource at hand for dealing with conflicts *between* these various ethical orders. As we saw with Creon and Antigone, If an individual simply identifies with the ethical order closest to their heart, there is no precedent of or even possibility for compromise when that particular order comes into conflict with another legitimate ethical order. This union with a noble ethical order may seem dignified and glorified in a "situation of inactivity" like Greek sculpture, but Greek tragedy shows us that such a form of agency contains the seeds of "opposition and collision" when it gains "actualization in reality and appearance in the mundane sphere." However, Hegel points the way forward from this tragic conflict, writing, "This whole sphere of subjective life is excluded *eo ipso* from sculpture which belongs solely to the objective side of the spirit."[86] For Hegel, a form of life that could "heal" tragic Greek conflict must be able to perceive and maintain unity and harmony between these different ethical and relational spheres

[85] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 1196.

[86] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 711.

despite their inherent contradictory nature. Thus, in Greek Tragedy we find the relevant opposition which Hegel sees as still demanding reconciliation in his historical context. We could look at Greek Tragedy as outlining Hegel's perceived task. The form of life and worldview that would consist in this reconciliation cannot possibly be fully identified with and constituted out of the principles of one such sphere; as an agent whose fundamental aims and cares in life are constituted through one set of duties and responsibilities will see another set as a challenge to its own duties, even if both have an independent legitimacy. The solution to this conflict is, as Hegel writes here, to include an aspect of "subjective life," in the human agent; to begin privileging the freedom of the inner life of the individual as opposed to simply identifying the individual with the concrete ethical order or universal worldview.

Hegel documents a long development in the history of art which reflects the incorporation of the inner life of the subject into the fundamental normative principles of human culture and agency. This period begins with the latter stages of Greek art and reaches its maturity in what Hegel refers to as "romantic art" which spans from Christian art, through the Middle Ages, and into the Renaissance. This phase of art for Hegel expresses an increasingly greater sophistication to the individual subject and their inner life. For example, this period of romantic art begins with Christian art which glorifies Jesus' journey of bodily sacrifice in the story of the crucifixion; thus holding up an ideal of subjectivity in which an individual subject can find God in their inner life only if they renounce their relationship to their community, their family, and their own body like Jesus did. Hegel then sees the dramatic poetry of the Middle Ages, which places the central normative orientation of the individual in their sense of honor, as a way to incorporate "concrete content of human relations, characters, passions, and real existence," or the

elements of family, social, and political life, into the inner life of the individual, thus giving the individual more and more agency over how they relate to the various aspects of their lives.[87] This is just one small snapshot of this further development and sophistication of the inner life subject through romantic art. We see here that even after the epitome of artistic expression in Greece, Hegel does see art as articulating and embodying key agential and cultural developments which gradually lead towards the sophisticated and robust notion of the individual we have today. However, even though Hegel understands romantic art to play a necessary role in this development of the independent subject, no form of art for Hegel has the capability of fully ending the alienation that grows out of the divide between the individual and the universal social, moral, or natural principles and norms in which they are embedded; which is why Hegel sees his own task to as making use of philosophy to reconcile this opposition which have continued to plague humanity in various forms since coming to the forefront in Greek culture.

An agent with a rich subjective life gains its motivations and cares both from its embedding within these universal orders or principles but also from its separation from all these more comprehensive relational spheres. Greek art, through its harmony of sensuous individual shape and universal meaning, can represent the unity of these two aspects of the human agent. Late Greek art and Romantic art on the other hand, through their presentation of a subject who can choose their own normative orientation even if it comes into conflict with others or the community, is able to embody the separation of the two. However, neither has the capability to illustrate an agent that is simultaneously constituted out of *both* its unity with and its separation from universal principles. On the one hand, this subject must have the ability to separate themselves from all these

[87] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 672.

different universal spheres of life and use their own rational capacities to determine when the seeds of conflict and alienation between these various principles and spheres begin to arise and then rework and reframe those principles in a way that once again bestows a systematic unity amongst them in a way that can manifest as a concrete, harmonious way of living. On the other hand, this ability to stand back and reshape does not imply that the subject is a mere disinterested observer who is completely removed from the worldview and way of life they work to shape; the individual is creating a sense of world and corresponding normative orientation which they will be a manifestation of, which they will be "unified" with.[88] The limitation of art as a sensuous medium for Hegel is that it cannot put forth a vision of the world in which human beings are both unified and separate from these more comprehensive and universal spheres of life, in which they both participate in these principles as concrete manifestations of those principles *and* have the freedom to stand back from those principles and alter them. Once this more sophisticated understanding of the subject and its relationship to others, the community and nature become necessary, art begins to fail to meet our "highest needs;" which is how Hegel himself describes what has come to be known as the "end of art."[89] Looking back from this point we find that at its epitome in Greece, art can only show the union of the individual with a universal ethical order or worldview but will always fail to

[88] One scholar who has helped me see this is Lydia Moland, who in her book *Hegel's Aesthetics* writes that any work of Absolute Spirit for Hegel presents the "unity of unity and division" and that this presentation allows us "to no longer see the world as given, but instead recognize "the way we transform the world and are transformed by it." (Moland, *Hegel's Aesthetics*, 52). In other words, Absolute Spirit reminds us of our constitutive role in the world by showing us how we ourselves constitute the different structures and principles in which we live by separating ourselves from them, even as we must also understand ourselves as unified with them in the sense that they give fundamental structure and orientation to who we are. What I hope to have added to Moland's discussion here is that only a philosophical cognition of art can re-interpret art as having this purpose.

[89] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 10.

show the separation which emphasizes our ability to stand back from these ethical orders and reshape them in a way that reconciles them with other aspects of our life. Following Greece, art still does have a role to play but this role in expressing and developing our sense of self and world, but it is no longer capable of presenting a comprehensive and reconciled vision of agent, community, and nature, of expressing a fundamental vision of the Absolute.[90] In this way, the very possibility of Hegel's observations concerning the way different artworks throughout history have had the function of reimagining human beings' understanding of themselves and the world is grounded upon Hegel's use of the philosophical medium in his analysis of art history, which he sees as having the capability of producing a reconciliation of the division that arises out of the inherent limitations of a fundamentally artistic presentation of truth.[91]

Pinkard and Pippin on the End of Art

Although I am indebted to Pippin and Pinkard's work to a large extent, looking at Pinkard and Pippin's rejection of the end of art thesis and the way it corresponds with

[90] Some scholars have suggested that for Hegel human beings no longer use art to reflect on their understanding of themselves, the world, or their purpose after the end of art. For example JM Bernstein suggests that after the end of art art becomes "isolated into a separate sphere…than truth or goodness." (Bernstein, *Fate of Art*, 5) Arthur Danto more specifically suggests that after the end of art, art "lacks historical importance and meaning" because it "theorizes only about itself, rather than our more fundamental individual and collective understandings" (Danto, *End of Art*, 31). Although Danto and Bernstein are not entirely wrong, as Hegel does suggest that art does start being used to articulate more particular and contingent aspects of life, based on my reading, art is still used to reflect the nature of the world and our purpose in it even after the end of art. What has "ended" is not the use of art for self and world reflection as such, but the use of art to present a fundamental and comprehensive picture of the world which the entire culture accepts and lives by. Instead this is now the task of philosophy or the intellect. In this sense, this reading lines up with what Jean Luc-Nancy writes in his book *The Muses*, that the end of art only brings an end to the role of "aesthetic religion" in self reflection, not art as such. (Nancy, *Muses*, 41)

[91] How and why philosophy is able to illustrate this more sophisticated reconciliation and understanding of the agent is a topic that requires its own chapter and will be the central theme of the next chapter, *The Death of God and Hegel's Philosophy Of History*.

other interpretive commitments will help us get a grasp on what I would suggest are misunderstandings that are likely to arise when we we interpret Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* without taking the end of art thesis seriously, the primary one being a misunderstanding of the intention behind Hegel's articulation of the purpose of the history of art and its culmination in his grasp of the Absolute. Although Pippin and Pinkard do understand some of the complexity surrounding the differences Hegel sees in cultures that primarily used art as a form of Absolute Spirit and his philosophical articulation of the reading of art, as has already been mentioned, I would argue that both scholars have some misunderstandings concerning the end of art itself and its central role in this work. In his book *After the Beautiful*, Pippin articulates the strongest hesitation writing, that the "inference" of the end of art "represents a misstep" in Hegel's work. Pippin cites two primary reasons for his rejection of the end of art. First, he writes

> When Hegel notes that in our age, "art invites us to intellectual consideration and that not for the purpose of creating art again, but for knowing philosophically what art is" (*A*, 1:11)... he also could easily be taken to be introducing the possibility of a different *sort of art*, capable of meeting this new expectation, an art of the explicitly self-reflexive and exploratory sort one begins to see with Manet, an art requiring from the beholder interpretive interrogation of a new sort[92]

Pippin's first complaint concerning the end of art thesis is that Hegel is too hasty in his passing of the torch from art to philosophy. Initially, this seems like a fair critique; as what Pippin says here is actually true, art *does* come to be something quite novel under the historical conditions of modernity in a way that does not "end" the tradition of art but carries it in a new direction, toward a form of art that is "explicitly self-reflexive." However, contrary to what Pippin suggests, the development of modernist art is not incompatible with Hegel's statements concerning the end of art. Hegel does not claim

[92] Pippin, *After the Beautiful,* 42.

that art has lost its ability to help us clarify, understand, and constitute ourselves in new ways. Rather, he makes the more specific claim that art has lost its ability to do this in a *fundamental* way; or in Hegel's own words that art no longer fills our "highest needs."[93] As we have seen in our exploration of Greek art, what it means for art to capture our sense of self and world in a fundamental way is for that work of art on its own must be able to express the fundamental purpose of human life and the world in which they live. The only form of truth that can be presented fundamentally through art for Hegel is a kind that lends itself to the presentation through physical, sensuous means; a kind of truth that can only be worked out in the sensuous form of art. As we have seen, the Greek form of life was suited to art because the direct union between the individual and the universal ethical norms of the Greek polis was mirrored in the way the sculptured body of the god acted as the fundamental and exhaustive means through which the Greeks' highest values were articulated and expressed.

Thus, when Hegel speaks of a new kind of art that "invites us to intellectual consideration" or requires intellectual reflection to be understood, he is referring to a form of art that *must* come after the end of art; a form of art that has its meaning inherently tied to thinking about art. I do not mean to imply that Hegel denies that Greek artists ever reflected on the meaning of their art. However, Pippin is pointing to a type of art that requires intellectual reflection if we are to ascertain its meaning; which according to Hegel was not the case with Greek art, or any art "before the end of art." In a certain sense, this first reason Pippin gives for rejecting the end of art thesis is based on a simple misunderstanding concerning how Hegel is using the word "art" when he declares it to be at an end; as he seems to agree with Hegel that after Greece, art's meaning will

[93] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 10.

be more intertwined with intellectual reflection. From this point of view, it seems possible that Pippin is simply misunderstanding what Hegel has built into his “end of art” thesis; that he thinks Hegel is devaluing modern art, when Hegel is making a historical point about the limitations of the sensuous medium of art to, on its own, exhaustively capture the spirit of the modern age and its emphasis on the free individual.

That being said, even though the misunderstanding seems somewhat innocent on the one hand, Pippin’s *willingness* to reject the end of art thesis also betrays a misunderstanding of the centrality of the claim itself to Hegel’s understanding of history and his philosophical interventions. As we have seen, Hegel’s understanding of works of art throughout history as normative, creative interventions undertaken by human beings with the purpose of reimagining the principles upon which agent, society, and cosmos are rooted is only possible within the context of a *philosophical* understanding of the agent, the world, and their relationship. Such an understanding cannot possibly be articulated through art alone, as the sensuous nature of art does not have the capability of incorporating an independent individual that stands apart from these principles and re-interprets them. At best, the individual can be seen as a concrete expression of the fundamental laws and principles which govern morality and the cosmos as was the case in Greek art and culture. Pippin seems to take Hegel’s ability to root his understanding of human history in this free, creative capacity of human individuals and their community to reshape their worldview through works of Absolute Spirit for granted; he does not see the way in which the historical forces culminating in and leading beyond the end of art are what make this very understanding of history possible and necessary.

One implication of taking Hegel’s philosophical way of understanding history, the human, and the world for granted is that it creates a temptation to reify his conclusions

concerning history and human nature as *eternally true*; barring us from understanding the way Hegel's philosophical analysis and interventions are intimately linked to their aspiration to bring reconciliation to the forces set into play in the wake of the fall of Greek culture and the end of art. Even though Hegel intends his intervention to act as a fundamental model of history and the human being within his communal context, that model cannot be pried apart from its aspiration to reconcile the divergence between an individual with a robust inner life and the more universal principles which underlie the social and natural order in which that individual resides; a divergence that has its origins within a historical development that begins with the end of art. If one misunderstands the way Hegel's philosophical interventions are an attempt to bring reconciliation to the historical and cultural forces that have developed in the wake of the end of art, it can be tempting to reify those interventions as eternally and ahistorically true, rather than as gaining their authority within the context of the normative and theoretical reorientation that arises out of that act of reconciliation. We see this temptation towards reification in Pinkard and Pippin's work. For example, Pinkard writes, "art seeks to offer us a kind of "reconciliation," but in fact, "points to the way religion and philosophy, if not art itself, can perform that healing function."[94] Pinkard understands Hegel's end of art thesis to assert that the visions of life of cultures' past that were embodied in works of art were, in fact, "failures" at a true reconciliation; there was a certain deficiency in these understandings that can only be remedied through a philosophical medium. Pippin expresses a similar sentiment writing,

> But Hegel also, repeating in a different register what I am saying is his cardinal error, now insists...that philosophy (and only philosophy) has succeeded in

[94] Terry Pinkard, "Symbolic, Classical, and Romantic Art (Northwestern University Press, 2007), 4.

> overcoming this tension, and it is under that assumption that he ascribes to art the task that leaves so little room for much with any life or interest in it[95]

There is one sense in which Pippin and Pinkard are correct in interpreting Hegel as pointing to his own philosophical grip on the human agent, the human community, the cosmos, and the history of all three as the final and eternal "truth." Hegel reinterprets the history of art not as a history of cultures erecting testaments to singular metaphysical truths but as a process by which humans have interpreted and continually reinterpreted the nature of the human agent, community, and the cosmos in a way that responds to the conflicts within their historical way of life. Such a reinterpretation allows us to redeem the value of artworks that from another point of view could only be understood to express failed or incorrect visions of the human being and the cosmos. For example, instead of seeing the Greek way of life and its lack of space for the inner life of the individual as an inherently unstable and incorrect understanding of the nature of the human agent, we can understand it to be an appropriate worldview and way of life for its own time period that paved the and set the conditions for Hegel's own articulation of the reconciliation between the inner life of the individual and universal principles. In this way, Hegel's philosophical articulation of history, and specifically art history does aspire to present a holistic vision that can make sense of and explain each element of that history, including Hegel's present, in a more appropriate and inclusive way than was ever possible before the end of art.

That being said, as I mentioned earlier, this does not imply we can detach Hegel's own philosophical conception of history and the human agent from the way it is also intended as a pragmatic and normative re-orientation of human life within the

[95] Pippin, *After the Beautiful*, 47.

context of the particular historical conditions he finds himself in. In other words, the fact that Hegel does aspire to articulate an as comprehensive and truthful vision of history as possible from his own point of view does not imply we can take the expressions of the work of Absolute Spirit he himself constructs, namely the *Lectures on Aesthetics* themselves, as "true" independent of the way they function to reconcile particular cultural oppositions with the aim of grounding a new pragmatic way of life and corresponding theoretical understanding for a particular community. Hegel does see the principles of human freedom which ground his view of the human, history, and the world as comprehensive and exhaustive but they are comprehensive and exhaustive in the sense that they provide a comprehensive, unified systematic account of the forces and conditions Hegel is working with from his historically situated point of view. Although we can take Hegel's claims towards discovering the most Absolute, comprehensive truth he can possibly arrive it from his own standpoint seriously, this does not mean that this truth can be separated from its intention to provide a vision of the possibility of a theoretical and pragmatic harmony between individuals with a rich inner life and the principles which govern the community and natural world in which they reside; a project that only became relevant after the end of art. If we take seriously the way Hegel's philosophical interventions are grounded in the end of art and the historical story in which it is situated, it will encourage us to acknowledge this immanent, normative, and participatory aspect of Hegel's interventions and not reify his claims to the nature of the Absolute, the history of art, or the even the function of particular historical artworks as existing independently of that more participatory intention.

Conclusion

I have demonstrated that Pippin and Pinkard do have the interpretive tools to understand the necessary connection between Hegel's end of art thesis, his systematic commitments concerning the historical role of art, and his justification of his own understanding of the trajectory of art history and its culmination in the end of art and his own philosophical conception of the Absolute. They understand the way in which works of art, as works of Absolute Spirit, are fundamental "doers" of world history. They also understand the way in which the end of art opens up the possibility of understanding human agency as "self-determining," as continually constituting and reconstituting the nature of the human and the world in which they live by means of these reconciliatory works of art, philosophy, and religion. Even so, Pippin still denounces the end of art as unnecessary to Hegel's project; and both Pippin and Pinkard claim that art "fails" at a true reconciliation while philosophy succeeds in a way that will never need to be improved upon, that is true for all historical time periods. In this way, both scholars suggest that the understanding of history the human agent which Hegel proposes can be taken to be "true" independently of the role the functional they play in constituting and grounding a pragmatic way of life that is appropriate within the conditions of Hegel's location in space and time. I hope to have shown that this tendency to read Hegel as reifying his own historical story as true independently of the participatory intervention he is making in his own cultural context, which leads many scholars to think they must reject the systematic aspects of the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, can be solved by taking the end of the art thesis seriously.

If we take seriously how Hegel's interventions are grounded in his philosophical methodology, and how that methodology gains its justification as a response to the historical forces set into play by the end of art, we are encouraged to see how both these

systematic ambitions and the cultural observations in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* are two layers of one unified analysis. This singular philosophical analysis intends to reinterpret both the history of art and the nature of human beings and their relationship to the wider world in a way that redeems the conflicts caused by the limitations of art and cultures that made use of art to express the Absolute. In this sense, Hegel's philosophical analysis has, as Hegel writes, "the same content as art," philosophy takes up the mantle of art's ancient aspirations toward a comprehensive conception of truth that grounds a pragmatic way of life by presenting a comprehensive and reconciled way of living and understanding that is appropriate and comprehensive in his own cultural context.[96] In this way, the end of art thesis is not merely a neutral historical report concerning the limitations of art and cultures that made use of it but Hegel's attempt to, in his own words. "Reawaken…aesthetics proper as a science" by "reawakening philosophy."[97] Hegel sees himself as *redeeming* art in the very act of bringing it to its end, as this allows him to reframe each historical work of art within the framework of a philosophical cognition that allows us to see that work not as embodying a failed way of life and metaphysical model, but as a temporary expression of a reconciled and unified way of life that also acted to contribute something lasting to humans' understanding of themselves and the world. In this sense, once we truly understand the central role of the end of art in Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, we can see the way in which his philosophical analysis, in both its eternal and historical dimensions, is a way of bringing unity and redemption both to the history of art and to Hegel's way of life by illustrating the

[96] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich. *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part 1: Science of Logic*. Translated by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstron, (Cambridge University Press, 2015), 824.

[97] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 56.

reconciliation of the conflicts and oppositions that run through both. If we do not take the end of art seriously and instead take Hegel's philosophical methodology for granted, missing the way it is grounded in this aspiration to reconcile oppositions set into play in history by the end of art, we are likely to miss this participatory and redemptive streak of Hegel's work, thinking that he is either merely reporting on historical and cultural phenomena or expressing a biased and Eurocentric understanding of the purpose of history.

Chapter 3: The Death of God and Hegel's Philosophy of History

Introduction

One of Hegel's most well-known and infamous claims is that history has a "teleological" structure. Nearly all of Hegel's works provide a historical account in which later cultures, and especially modern Europe, are understood to have a more sophisticated understanding of the principles that determine the nature of the human agent, community, and nature than earlier cultures. Within the context of Hegel's progressive account of history, these past cultures are conceived of as stepping stones on a path toward the modern European conception of the world, history, and the human agent. Of course, such a picture of history has strong Eurocentric overtones, and Hegel has often been criticized on these very grounds. In this paper, I hope to show that when Hegel says history is teleological, he does not mean to imply that his historical narrative which frames all past cultures as steps in a progression towards the modes of knowing of modern Europe is a revelation of the true purpose of history once and for all. Rather, when Hegel refers to the "teleological" nature of history he is simply stating that *any* culture cannot help but understand history through the way it has culminated in the present moment; and the story he gives is his best understanding of how history has led to and produced *his* particular present moment, the present of 19th century Germany. Understood in this way, we will find that the strong Eurocentric overtones we do find in

Hegel's work are not a necessary consequence of his notion of the teleological nature of history. In fact, I hope to show that if we understand the nuances of the philosophical framework that Hegel uses to make sense of history, it keeps open space for the *necessity* of continually reassessing our conception of history from the vantage point of the present moment, and thus encourages openness to take alternative historical narratives seriously from our present moment.

One of the key moments in Hegel's historical story is the development of Christianity; as Christianity plants the seeds that will eventually blossom into what Hegel takes as one of the most important cultural and philosophical achievements of his time; a cultural achievement that grounds his entire reading of history. In his book *Does History Make Sense?*, Terry Pinkard explains this cultural achievement which is instigated by Christianity writing,

> Christianity also brought the principle that "all are free" to the forefront. In the idea that God does not play favorites but loves each equally, Christianity began to supply the content for such inwardness—that is, it provided an account that specified the goods by which an individual could comprehend his or her own life as itself being of worth in more than just the terms of whatever "office" they were recognized as holding[98]

Pinkard points to this notion that "all are free" as the "end goal" of Hegel's understanding of the trajectory of history; that which history is moving towards. Pinkard also points out what features of past culture's social structures disallowed them from reaching this end goal. Pinkard notes that in many past cultures, individuals were primarily valued by virtue of their "office," or their role in the community. Although Pinkard is referring specifically to Roman culture here as he is explaining the cultural context to which Christianity was responding, there is a similar theme in Hegel's analysis of all past cultures. The

[98] Pinkard, *History*, 91-92.

commonality that Hegel attributes to all cultures that come before this focus on “all are free” is that the human agent’s goals aims, and cares in life were primarily centered around their role within a larger social, religious, or cosmological order rather than around the emotional life or creative and rational capacities of the individual themselves. The historical progression towards the realization that “all are free” gradually shifts the locus of value from this wider religious, social, or political good to the human individual themselves. This does not mean that Hegel believes that individuals are not oriented towards a higher social or religious good in his time or that there was no sense of individuality in the past. However, Hegel argues that modern social institutions, such as the free market to give one example, provide a space in which the individual human being has more of an ability to contribute to and remold the significance of the social or political good based on what they think is appropriate from their particular standpoint. Since the flourishing of individuality which this teleological history is centered around is exemplified in the Christian religion and the historical and cultural developments surrounding it, this means such an understanding of history which gradually leads towards this individual freedom could not possibly be constructed or cognized before these cultural developments which begin with Christianity. In this way, Pinkard shows us that the Christian idea that God “loves each equally” sets the stage for the possibility of Hegel’s understanding of the trajectory of history.

Pinkard, and his fellow scholar Robert Pippin, who articulates similar views, do a great service to Hegel scholarship by illuminating that his understanding of the structure of history is rooted in a development towards a social organization that makes possible a certain notion of human agency, and that this notion of human agency originates in Christianity. However, along with this insight both Pinkard and Pippin attribute a certain

finality to Hegel's teleological narrative of history that they do not find agreeable. From Pippin and Pinkard's point of view, attributing this finality to Hegel's historical story is the only way to make sense of how Hegel could see history as having an inherent "aim" of leading towards this Christian inspired conception of the free individual. Pinkard explains what he takes to be Hegel's justification of this claim, writing,

> There is an unchanging principled core to subjectivity that underlies the way history developed so as to make it retrospectively true that each subject possesses an inherent standing…it functions a bit like a first principle, except that what follows it is what historically follows in the path-dependent course of events that make up human history[99]

Pinkard explains why *this* particular form of agency is the one that history aims at by appealing to an "unchanging principled core to subjectivity" which "functions a bit like a first principle." Pinkard reasons that if it is the case that humans were in fact always free individuals, then attributing this teleological structure to history would make sense. The underlying but obscured truth that human individuals are *in fact* free would be what drives cultures to progressively attribute more and more worth and freedom to the human individual. The engine driving and justifying Hegel's notion of historical progression would be a progressive uncovering of the truth of what humans truly are.

Pinkard understands Hegel to take his own historical narrative and reify it as a true statement about the nature of history independently of the particular conditions that made this particular cognition of history possible and appropriate. Or to put it in another way, he proposes that Hegel takes his view of history to be appropriate not only for his own culture and historical time period but also for all future historical time periods; to be the "final" truth of the purpose of human history. If we look at a quote from Pippin's book

[99] Pinkard, *History,* 150-151.

After the Beautiful we see him interpret Hegel as committed to this final conception of history as well. Pippin writes, "After all, Hegel also did not believe that there was any world-historical work for philosophy to do; its content was also its past, now understood in the right way within a comprehensive philosophical system."[100] Here Pippin explicitly claims that after Hegel's own philosophical articulation of the nature of history that there is no longer any "world-historical work" for philosophy to do. By this he means that humanity will never again need to generate a new understanding of the nature and purpose of world history; we have finally understood that history's true purpose is this fostering, realization, and social encouragement of the "unchanging core" of human agency, or freedom of the individual. Such a statement implies that the truth and adequacy of Hegel's own understanding is not rooted in its appropriateness for his particular historical perspective; as it claims that Hegel's own articulation has put an end to the need for any further refinement of historical understanding in the future. Of course, Pippin and Pinkard are not exactly thrilled about Hegel's alleged claim that the accomplishments of his own time period reveal the ultimate purpose of history. Pinkard criticizes Hegel for condemning all cultures he discusses other than European cultures to be "failed Europeans;" in the sense that they failed to understand the true "timeless core" of subjectivity that Europeans were finally able to grasp due to their superior culture.[101]

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[100] Pippin, *After the Beautiful,* 36.

[101] Pinkard, *History,* 64.

[102] Pippin also dismisses this claims but for different reasons. Pippin writes, "What could be more obvious than that history is not teleologically progressive and that the modern world cannot be considered, even incipiently and incompletely, the "realization of freedom" (Pippin, *After the Beautiful* 136). Pippin's worry is a bit different than Pinkard's. Instead of focusing on Hegel's dismissal of past cultures, Pippin worries that Hegel's praise of his own time period is misplaced. Namely, that it is not the case that the social and political institutions of modern times provide a context in which free and autonomous individuals can flourish.

Hegel does in one sense commit himself to the claim that this specific picture of history gradually leading towards the sovereignty of the individual is the “true” structure of history from his own point of view. Hegel’s aim is to give an exhaustive picture of the trajectory of history that systematically unifies empirical information concerning past cultures with the social, political, and cultural realities of his own point of view. In this sense, Hegel does see history as the developmental ground in which this awareness of human freedom is slowly but surely developed from culture to culture; he gleans a novel significance to both history and the present through the act of connecting them together within a systematic and comprehensive narrative of human purpose and its development. This being said, I will argue that this is only one dimension of Hegel’s understanding of the teleological nature of history and to focus on only this dimension is to miss the philosophical richness implied in his conception of history.

In my reading, when Hegel points to the “teleological” nature of history he is not claiming that the specific developmental structure he attributes to history is the only correct one but that any historical narrative must be structured teleologically. For Hegel what we focus on as important in history will always reflect our understanding of what history is moving *towards;* which can only be our present moment. Of course, we must always strive to be as objective as possible and stay true to the empirical information we have when constructing our narrative. However, Hegel does not think that a historical story completely removed from our interests in the present is a real possibility. For Hegel, we cannot help but judge the past against our own fundamental values in the present to some degree. This is why Hegel writes in the Introduction to the *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, that “everyone is a child of his own time” and that it is “foolish” to think one could “overleap” their historical situatedness and grasp some ahistorical

objective point of view.[103] From this point of view, we see that although Hegel is committed to coming up with the most appropriate narrative of history for his time period that takes seriously both the empirical information he has access to and what he thinks matters most to humanity, this does not imply that his own historical synthesis is a "final" one that would be appropriate for future cultures and communities as well; as these future communities will have a different point of view, a different present to which they understand history to be teleologically oriented towards. In other words, even though our disinterested, empirical analysis of history should clarify our understanding of the present, it is also the case that what matters in the present will inevitably participate in our analysis and frame how we make sense of the past, and for Hegel the best we can do when it comes to historical analysis is to integrate these two movements of analysis together into a comprehensive understanding of how the past has gradually lead to the conditions, values, and cares of the present.

Further, and what I aim to focus on mainly in this paper, Hegel suggests that this teleological narrative of history which results from a joining together of these disinterested and participatory aspects of analysis is only possible when we read history through a *philosophical* lens. When I say philosophical I mean this in a very specific way, as for Hegel philosophy is a mode of understanding and interpreting the self, the world, and history at a level of sophistication that he claims only becomes possible by taking up the Christian notion that "all are free" and working it out in a philosophical way. For Hegel, the religious notion that "all are free" which begins with Christianity begins to shed light on this more participatory element of analysis and understanding, and this element is only finally fully explicated and integrated into human understanding in a philosophical

[103] Hegel, *Right*, 21-22.

mode of analysis. Contrary to the suggestion that Hegel's historical account can be detached from its function within his local, cultural point of view and treated as timelessly true, I will argue that the philosophical comprehension of history he articulates is predicated upon the realization that *any* comprehensive conception of the human agent, history, and the world is grounded in the free activity of human agents as they aim to synthesize the particular forces in which they find themselves situated into a systematically unified worldview in a way that is appropriate for their historically situated interests. In order to draw these implications out from Hegel's work we will look primarily at Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics* but also briefly some passages from his *Lectures on Philosophy of Religion* and *Phenomenology of Spirit* to flesh out the discussion of religion in the *Aesthetics*. By drawing on the *Lectures on Aesthetics* and these other texts, we will gain an understanding of how Hegel sees the different mediums cultures use to express the nature of history, the human being, and the cosmos as having different potentialities and capabilities. More specifically we will find that he takes art and religion to be incapable of expressing this participatory aspect of analysis and understanding which, although Christianity begins to point towards, only philosophy can eventually work out in all its richness. By outlining what Hegel sees to be the historical preconditions and causes of his own philosophical mode of interpretation through which he articulates the teleological nature of history, I aim to illustrate (1) That we cannot take Hegel's philosophical way of grasping history as presenting a solely neutral and disinterested picture of history as this philosophical method which arises out of particular historical causes is needed to interpret history in the teleological way he does. (2) Once we understand the nuances and specifics of this philosophical methodology and why it presents history in the way it does, we will see that the methodology itself is grounded in

an awareness that we cannot reify any conception of history, human agency, or the cosmos, even Hegel's own, as true independent of the way it acts to ground and orient a particular cultural way of life.

Absolute Spirit and Teleological History

For Hegel, we can understand much of any human's personal emotional and motivational landscape by understanding the way that particular agent relates to other agents, the community, and the world within the context of their culture's political and social institutions and religious and cosmological understandings. This is not to say that a human is exhaustively defined by the norms and relationships made possible by such institutions and conceptual spaces but rather that these spaces provide the concrete context in which the human agent can actualize their choices and their will and thus do largely define the scope of those choices. Pippin explains this in his book *After the Beautiful* writing, "Any such individually self-constituting identity is not possible except within a continuing effort at a commonly achieved self-knowledge and so self-realization. It is the very broadest of such projects aimed at commonly realized self-knowledge."[104] What Pippin points out here is that when an individual or a community attempts to articulate, or constitute, a conception of their own identity as human agents, they do that within the context of "efforts at a commonly achieved self-knowledge." In other words, we can only truly understand the human agent by understanding the more communal and comprehensive contexts in which that agent moves, relates to others, and acts out its aims, goals, and desires. For example, a human agent in a feudal society would act

[104] Pippin, *After the Beautiful,* 42.

within a social space that places great emphasis on the upkeep of a communal structure that is rooted in relatively strict social roles. Thus, the possibilities and choices available to the individual would be largely defined by whether they are a serf or a noble, for example. On the contrary, a modern social space contains institutions that explicitly allow for social mobility, and thus give the individual more flexibility in acting on their own projects or desires that may or may not be in line with their particular social role. In this second case, the agent's personal cares and desires are still defined by their relationships with others within the context of social institutions and shared understandings of the world. However, unlike the feudal society, the individual has more flexibility in the constitution of their own agency. These are just two examples of the way the nature of the human agent must be understood through its relationship with others within the context of the more comprehensive religious, ethical, or social commitments of the community; as these provide the conceptual and practical spaces in which the agent moves and lives their life. In Hegel's work, especially his Lecture series, he documents the contexts in which human agency gains its significance in many different cultures throughout world history.

In the same discussion, Pippin also points to another commitment of Hegel's concerning human agency. He writes, "We don't know, in any determinate or "living" detail, who we actually take ourselves to be except *in* such externalization."[105] For Hegel, we cannot understand our own agency or the structures in which that agency gains its determinacy simply by reflection or introspection. Instead, we must "externalize" our understanding. We must make use of a particular medium in order to articulate the principles and norms upon which our social institutions, moral values, or religious

[105] Pippin, *Beautiful,* 41.

understandings are based, and in doing so articulate the principles that underpin the structure of our own agency. Hegel claims that there are certain mediums that cultures make use of that undertake this task in a comprehensive way; comprehensive in the sense that they aim to articulate not only the norms of a particular culture but also show how that particular culture's social structure and ethical norms are rooted in the very laws and norms that govern morality and the cosmos. Hegel refers to artifacts that undertake this task as works of "Absolute Spirit." Hegel explains the function of Absolute Spirit as aspiring to illustrate "the divine, the deepest interests of mankind, and the most comprehensive truths of spirit;" to articulate those most fundamental principles by which we orient our lives.[106] Hegel claims that the mediums that have been used throughout history to undertake such a task are art, religion, and philosophy.

From this perspective, our agency and the context in which that agency gains its determinacy is not only something that we uncover, it is also, to use Pippin's word, something we *constitute.* When an artist, philosopher, or religious contemplative attempts to articulate the ultimate principles of morality and the universe, and the possibility of the human agent and community acting in line with those principles, they never simply imitate past articulations. For example, when Jesus gave sermons on the nature of God and the way human beings can act in line with God's will, he drew on aspects of the God of the Hebrew Bible but also included new developments that reimagined the nature of God and his relationship to human beings. One major reinterpretation of the nature of God was Jesus' message that God loves all humans equally (We will explore the significance of this particular development for Hegel in detail later). Thus, because Absolute Spirit functions not only to "reveal" the nature of the

[106] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 6.

universe and the human agent but also to reconstitute the nature of the human agent in a way more suited to the current historical, cultural, and social realities; it becomes possible to understand each new form of Absolute Spirit as responding to and in a sense, "building" on the previous. Terry Pinkard explains the implications of this understanding of Absolute Spirit as not only uncovering human agency but also reconstituting and renewing human agency continually, writing, "Most crucially for Hegel, the philosophical comprehension of history is a comprehension of how historically the metaphysics of subjectivity itself and not merely our conception of the metaphysics of subjectivity—has changed."[107] (I would argue that referring to these various structures of agency as different "metaphysics of subjectivity" is a bit misleading, for as we have seen any agent only gains its significance within the context of what was taken to be *objective* for that culture; not only their social, political, and moral ideals but also their most comprehensive religious and cosmological model. However, if we keep this in mind, this quote of Pinkard's can be helpful for understanding the relationship between Absolute Spirit and Hegel's teleological history) In this quote Pinkard helps us see the way in which these works of Absolute Spirit not only uncover but also restructure and reconstitute human agency in a way that lays the ground for Hegel's understanding of history as teleological. History can only be understood as progressive or teleological if we are able to understand each new work of Absolute Spirit, each new vision of the truth of the human, history, and the cosmos, as not only drawing but also reformulating the principles of the past expressions upon which our agency is rooted.

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[107] Pinkard, *History,* 3-4.

If we look closer at this progressive picture of history that Hegel develops we can start to ascertain why it is *necessarily* grounded in the principle of human freedom. Pinkard writes,

> Once that possibility of moral life became a real possibility, it was now also possible to project it retrospectively back across time and understand the earlier failures of shapes of life as having failed for not having made that possibility actual[108]

Here Pinkard is referring to the "moral life" that was preached by Jesus in which all human beings are loved equally by God and all are free as individuals.[109] Looking back on history from within this understanding of the nature of the human being we cannot help but see the way in which humans freely constituted and contributed to the wider social, political, and cosmological structures in which they gained their function and purpose in life. We cannot help but see and emphasize the hand of human freedom, creativity, and ingenuity in the various works of art, philosophy, and religion that lay claim to the fundamental nature of the world and humans' place in that world. It is Hegel's claim that, at the time of their construction, such works were taken to mirror moral ideals, cosmologies, or religious truths that had a sense of being or authority independent of the actions of humans. Although a sense of eternal truth will never completely disappear from our notions of cosmology, morality, or history, Hegel suggests that as we look back from our point of view, we cannot help but place a stronger emphasis on the hand human freedom played and still does play in *any* articulation of the nature of the human being, the world, or history. From this point of view, we can see why Pinkard and Pippin

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[108] Pinkard, *History,* 93-94.

[109] As we have mentioned and will see in more detail later, for Hegel Christianity represents only the first step towards a worldview that places the freedom of the individual front and center. This movement culminates in philosophy. Pinkard does not acknowledge this nuance in Hegel's discussion of the relationship between Christniaty and freedom.

conclude that Hegel's teleological picture of history is a final understanding of history. Hegel's historical narrative points to the "timeless core," to use Pinkard's own words, of human agency as freedom from every direction. In this understanding of history, the significance of the past and present are simultaneously constituted through the way they are topologically structured around this principle of the freedom of the human agent; Hegel's empirical study of the way of life of past cultures reveals a gradual fostering of the very freedom that he finds so prized in his social space and worldview. This mutual interdependence of past, present, and the normative ground of both, results in the impossibility of finding an "outside" to Hegel's systematic historical picture, as each moment gains its significance from its connection to other past and future moments of the history within the context of a teleological progression towards freedom. Thus, we can understand why Pinkard and Pippin are right, in a certain sense, to point to this teleological narrative as final, exhaustive, and complete for Hegel.

However, this still does not imply that Hegel thinks his own understanding of history can be detached from its local, pragmatic significance and be treated as the truth for all future cultures and historical points of view. Hegel's commitment to the teleological nature of history suggests that the past and the present must be understood as mutually interdependent; the past is seen as leading to the present just as the present is a culmination of past developments. Although any historical narrative must be as comprehensive as possible, as history progresses and what matters to humans in the present changes that historical narrative will inevitably shift, as it will be understood as oriented towards a different endpoint. In the introduction we saw Pippin explicitly claim that Hegel's commitment to the truth of his historical narrative implies that there is no longer any "world-historical" work for philosophy to do; that philosophy will never again

need to construct a narrative of nature and purpose of history again. In other words, Pippin reads Hegel as committed to a mutual exclusivity between the claim that there is one true account of the trajectory and purpose of history and the claim that the very same historical truth acts as a conduit that synthesizes particular historical, cultural, and social forces into a new normative direction, leaving the future open for further philosophical and historical explanation. Here we can see Pinkard interpret Hegel as committed to a similar mutual exclusivity when he writes of Hegel's notion of history,

> It is more than simply an interpretative claim that from the standpoint we now occupy in the temporal river, we can make a plausible case that this is what it has all been about. It is the more audacious claim that a certain kind of "absolute" has come into view, and that is the view of the infinite end at work in all human life and in history itself[110]

As we have seen in the last few paragraphs, the second part of this quotation does describe an essential aspect of Hegel's project: to use all the empirical information and theoretical tools available to him to do the best of his ability to understand the "absolute" end or purpose that has been at work in all of human history. However, Pinkard's commitment to Hegel's historical finality is betrayed when he contrasts this project of grasping the "Absolute" with the project of trying to make sense of ourselves, history, and the world from "the standpoint we occupy in the temporal river;" implying that the two projects are necessarily in opposition.

I aim to illustrate that, for Hegel, these two projects are, in fact, two different layers of *any* aspiration to grasp the "truth" of history, the human, or the cosmos through a work of Absolute Spirit and that an understanding of Hegel's philosophical methodology and his justification of that methodology will demonstrate that this is the

[110] Pinkard, *History*, 163.

case. When Pinkard writes that earlier shapes of life are seen as “failures" to concretely manifest the truth of human freedom, there is, as we have explained already, a very real sense in which this is the truth from Hegel’s own point of view. However, it is also the case that Hegel’s act of giving a historical interpretation does not only “reveal” these shapes as failures but also *originally constitutes* them as failures from within the perspective of the fundamental normative principles of his own present that act to orient his sense of the teleological orientation of history. Further, as I will articulate in the following section, for Hegel this multi-layered nature of our aspiration towards universal truth only becomes fully explicit in a philosophical grip on that truth. In other words, the very possibility of doing philosophy is predicated upon a full realization that any “objective” conception of history, the human, or the world, gains its justification from the functional role it plays in the unification of certain historical forces and grounding of a pragmatic way of life for a *particular* community.

“Form is Content:” The Forms of Absolute Spirit

In the first part of his *Encyclopedia Logic*, and more extensively in his *Science of Logic*, Hegel articulates the basic conceptual structure in which he takes human experience to be rooted. One such conceptual relationship that he takes as fundamental to any articulation of the nature of human experience is an identity relationship between what he calls “form” and “content.” Hegel writes,

> The relation of the appearance to itself is thus completely determined, has the form in itself, and because [it is] in this identity, has that form as its essential subsistence. Thus the form is content and, in keeping with its developed determinacy, it is the law of the appearance[111]

[111] Hegel, *Encyclopedia,* 33.

In this paper, I do not aspire to explain exhaustively the significance of these terms as they function in the context of his project in the *Science of Logic*. However, one context in which an identity between form and content shows up that is directly relevant to our purposes is in the relationship between a particular "form" of absolute spirit and the "content" it expresses. We can understand "form" in this case to be the structure of the medium of Absolute Spirit in which a particular culture articulates the nature of the universe and the way human experience is situated within that wider universe. We can understand "content" to be the specific structure of the principles and laws upon which that universe and the human agent and social institutions that inhabit that universe are based. Given that Absolute Spirit can take the shape of a work of art, religion, or philosophy, its forms can be vastly different; a work of architecture is very different in form than a musical composition, not to speak of a religious or philosophical text. What Hegel points to here is that the "content" of this appearance cannot be separated from its "form," as that form is its "essential subsistence" and the "law of the appearance." This implies that one vital clue to understanding the worldview and way of life of a particular culture is to investigate the expressive possibilities of the medium they used to express their most fundamental understanding of the world and the human agent's place in that world. In other words, the nature, structure, and content of the principles and laws upon which a culture's understanding of the world, history, and the human agent is based, are constrained and conditioned by a particular medium of expression. As a concrete example of this relationship between form and content in the context of absolute spirit, we can look briefly at Hegel's discussion of architecture in his *Lectures on Aesthetics*. Hegel speaks of architecture as one of the first mediums of Absolute Spirit used by

ancient cultures such as Egypt, India, and Babolyn to exhaustively express their conception of the cosmos and the place of the agent within it.

Hegel's discussion of architecture in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* is vast and nuanced. Hegel analyzes the contributions to conceptions of human agency of many specific architectural structures throughout history; explaining the small steps they each took in moving the locus of value and truth away from an impersonal entity or cosmic law and into the human individual and community. Although architecture eventually ends up being used for a functional purpose, such as housing the statues of the gods in Greece, Hegel sees early cultures using what he refers to as "independent architecture" to express their fundamental worldviews. Since our purpose is to understand the way in which a particular form of Absolute Spirit constraints and conditions the nature of the content or "appearance" of that culture's fundamental conception of agency, community, and world we will focus on what Hegel has to say about these independent architectural structures that did serve the function of expressing a fundamental worldview.

We can begin by looking at the way Hegel describes architecture. He writes of the task of architecture,

> We can see that the first task of art consists in giving shape to what is objective in itself, i.e. the physical world of nature, the external environment of the spirit, and so to build into what has no inner life of its own a meaning and form which remain external to it because this meaning and form are not immanent in the objective world itself[112]

Hegel Hegel suggests that architecture attempts to express a meaning that remains "external" to it to some extent, that is not fully expressed in the work itself but is rather symbolized by the work of architecture. Hegel understands this means of expressing

[112] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 631.

meaning to be a function of the materiality of the work of architecture itself. He writes that the material used to construct architecture is “shapeable only according to the laws of gravity ...bound together regularly and symmetrically to be a purely external reflection of spirit.”[113] Hegel suggests that the material pieces that constitute the work itself must be placed together in relationships that respect these laws of gravity and weight rather than being fully determined by the cosmological meaning that the work is intended to express. The consequence is that the physical shape of the work does not only serve the purpose of expressing the meaning but also of respecting these laws of gravity; resulting in a lack of harmony and direct correspondence between what Hegel calls the work’s “shape,” the physical work itself, and the work’s “meaning,” what it is meant to express in its cultural context. Of course, there are indeed material aspects of the physical shape of the architectural structure that do correspond to its meaning or purpose. However, due to the reasons expressed above, the medium of architecture is materially limited to expressing a meaning that is at least partially external to or in excess of the physical and sensuous reality of the work; there will be aspects of the physical work that have a functional role not related to the intended meaning.

Hegel explains that cultures that primarily use architecture as a form of Absolute Spirit reside in what he calls a “symbolic” worldview. In such a worldview, the structure of the cosmos and its constituents is understood as “measureless and not freely determined in itself...and therefore it cannot find in concrete appearance any specific form corresponding completely with this abstraction and universality.” What is characteristic of any symbolic worldview is that the conception of the cosmological order which structures the universe and which underpins the way of life of that time period is of

[113] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 701.

an indeterminate nature; as Hegel writes above it is “measureless;” always exceeding full articulation in humans’ medium of expression and understanding. Hegel elaborates on this notion of a measureless or indeterminate worldview writing that it “cannot find in concrete appearance any specific form.”[114] Although Absolute Spirit, which at this point in history takes the form of art and specifically architecture, does its best to express the worldview, the indeterminacy of the worldview makes it impossible to fully and concretely express; thus leaving us with a work of art that is understood as a “symbol” which points towards the truth of the cosmos. As examples of this type of worldview, we can think of cultures that take elemental forces of nature or deities that are beyond human comprehension to be the true nature of reality; forces that contain an element of ineffability or mystery and cannot be fully articulated through human means. In this way, we can see how Hegel understands there to be a correspondence between the physical capabilities of the form of expression and the content of the worldview expressed. In Hegel’s analysis, the physical capabilities of architecture are suited to this worldview that understands the source of reality to lie in an indeterminate beyond, as the work of architecture is suited to symbolizing the meaning of this beyond without fully expressing it concretely.

In a worldview where fundamental principles are understood to be written into the structure of the cosmos, unable to be fully grasped or changed by human beings, there is little room for an understanding of the human agent as having the ability to understand, mold, and constitute the nature of the principles which govern the cosmos, morality, and social life. Of course, as Pinkard has previously mentioned, from the point of view of Hegel’s particular narrative of history, it does seem as if these cultures did

[114] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 303.

express and constitute their own understanding of the cosmos when they built architectural structures that expressed and constituted their worldview. From this retrospective perspective, it seems as if these past cultures did contain free humans who attempted to understand, contribute to, and even constitute their understanding of the cosmos through glorious works of art, but were not able to see their true nature, the "timeless" core of their agency. Although this claim of Pinkard's does have truth to it, for Hegel it illustrates the way in which these cultures appear from his own historical vantage point, not the truth from their own point of view.

If we look at Hegel's best attempts to understand how this culture related to and understood the world on their terms, from their point of view, we find a different picture of what it was like to live *within* a symbolic worldview. Hegel writes

> The peoples, poets, and priests did not in fact have before their minds in this form of universality the universal thoughts lying at the root of their mythological ideas; and only if they had had them in this way could they have then intentionally veiled them in a symbolic form…the peoples at the time when they composed their myths lived in purely poetical conditions and so brought their inmost and deepest convictions before their minds not in the form of thought but in shapes devised by imagination without separating the universal abstract ideas from the concrete picture[115]

For Hegel, the builders, and artists of these past cultures did not hold their most fundamental religious truths and "deepest needs" in their minds as "universal thoughts," or conceptual explanations, and then take the step of working these thoughts and concepts into "symbolic form" through their representation in an architectural structure or some other concrete artifact. Rather, Hegel explains that the people of these cultures "lived in purely poetical conditions" by which he means that their most fundamental

[115] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 311.

notions of human agency and moral and natural law were for the most part understood through artistic, or what he refers to here as mythological, expression. Although we may look back at these past cultures' works of architecture and distill a conceptually expressed philosophical understanding or a moral lesson, according to Hegel this concept based interpretive step was not taken by these people. In such cultures, artistic expression was itself the most fundamental way of understanding these laws that govern the cosmos and the human being. In the case of architecture, the very act of building was these artists' most fundamental way of expressing and grasping these truths. The "content" of these cultures' form of agency and understanding of the cosmos cannot be separated from the "form" through which they are expressed. Hegel's outline of the possibilities and limitations of the material medium and form of architecture itself corresponds to the very horizons and limits of the possible ways in which they could perceive themselves, their community, the cosmos, and the relationship between the three.

In the context of Hegel's teleological view of history, what is essential to understand about this relationship between the form of Absolute Spirit and its content is that it applies just as much to Hegel's own philosophically articulated conception of the nature of the human, history, and the world as it does to these cultures who made use of architecture and other mediums. Just as the material form of architecture generates the very horizons of possibility for understanding agent, community, history, and cosmos in these past cultures; philosophy, and the Christian religious doctrine in which Hegel claims it is rooted, generate the very horizons of possibility for his own understanding of history. According to Hegel, the understanding of the human agent as a free individual is only possible when the structure of that agent is expressed within a philosophical form.

Although this philosophical articulation generates the very horizons of historical cognition and understanding for Hegel's own time, to claim that such a historical narrative can be reified independently of that time period is not possible. As for Hegel the historical, social, and political forces at play in different time periods require not only different unifying principles through which they can be synthesized and harnessed into a singular normative orientation and theoretical worldview but also fundamentally different mediums through which that synthesis can be expressed; and only one of these mediums according to Hegel can properly and fully articulate freedom as that orienting principle.

From this point of view, we see that it is not fruitful to inquire into whether or not Hegel's teleological narrative is the "correct" narrative of history in the final sense that Pinkard and Pippin suggest; as it is meant to be an exhaustive comprehension of the truth *of his own time period*. Hegel himself writes that philosophy is "its own time comprehended in thoughts."[116] From our current point of view, it will be more fruitful to analyze the form of Absolute Spirit which Hegel himself uses to articulate his teleological history and the historical conditions which make the transition to that form possible. Such an analysis will not provide us with an understanding of how Hegel's narrative of history can be reified as "true" independently of his own historically situated point of view, even Hegel himself would think this impossible. However, it can provide us with a grip on some of the implications of Hegel's normative intervention concerning the nature of history and agency; one of which is, contrary to Pinkard and Pippin's interpretation, a call to finally let go of *any* final notion of history or the human agent and instead focus on the most comprehensive and objective vision we can provide from our point of view. To fully

[116] Hegel, *Right*, 21.

understand Hegel's conception of philosophy it will be necessary to take a brief tour through what he interprets as the historical causes that culminate in its possibility and its necessity; namely its origins in Greek culture and Christianity.

The Death of God in Art and Religion

Hegel sees the beginnings of the seeds that will grow into a full consciousness and social encouragement of individual freedom in humanity's very first attempts to articulate the nature of a world independent of their own desires and cares. However, Hegel claims such seeds begin to explicitly take root within the primary normative principles of ancient Greek culture. Hegel writes of Greek art, the cultural phase which he takes to directly precede and culminate in this modern emphasis on the individual,

> At one end, the ideal inclines still to the loftiness and severity which does not begrudge the individual his living stir and movement but yet keeps him still firmly under the domination of the universal: while at the other end the universal is gradually more and more lost in the individual, with the result that it is deprived of its depth, and this loss can be repaired only by substituting the development of the individual and sensuous aspect of the object, so that the ideal passes over from loftiness to what is pleasing and delicate, to cheerfulness and a coaxing gracefulness[117]

From Hegel's point of view, Greek culture can be understood as a breeding ground for this emphasis on individual freedom. Before Greece, as we saw in our discussion of architecture, the human individual largely understood themselves as participating in a given natural order which humans cannot fully grasp let alone mold or constitute themselves. Hegel explains how in Greece the individual begins to overcome this "domination of the universal," and the locus of value for human culture becomes "gradually more and more lost in the individual." As historical evidence for the beginnings

[117] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 787-788.

of such a transition, Hegel points to works of art and social practices that are rooted in a degradation of nature and a veneration of human cultural and social activity. Some examples he points to are stories that emphasize humans metamorphosing into animals as punishments, stories that glorify hunting and animal sacrifices, and artworks depicting the subjugation of old gods, representing elemental forces of nature, by new gods, which are understood as the embodiment of social activities such as agriculture.[118] Hegel sees an individual's free actions finally become central to the Greek worldview and way of life in a particular period of antiquity in which sculpture is used as the main way to articulate that way of life. Unlike architecture, sculpture consists of a union and harmony between material medium and the meaning expressed; the bronze or marble used does not need to satisfy external laws of gravity but can be sculpted into a thorough embodiment of the intended meaning. For Hegel, this form of agency rooted in the unity of meaning and individual physical form has its concrete manifestation in the unity between the individual Greek agent and the social good of the state. The social good of the state is the "meaning" that those concrete individual agents aspire to embody. Hegel writes

> The absolute spiritual destiny of man was accomplished in the phenomenal world as a real actuality (the state] with the substance and universality of which the individual demanded to be in harmony. This supreme end in Greece was the life of the state, the body of the citizens, and their ethical life and living patriotism. Beyond this interest, there was none higher or truer[119]

In Hegel's analysis, in this period of Greek cultural development, an ethical and mature Greek citizen was not likely to be tempted by desires or motivations that came in contrast with the social good of the state. The ideal of the individual thinker who follows

[118] Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 445.

[119] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 510.

their own reason even when in opposition with the norms and values of their community was not yet a major aspect of Greek life as it would be with the cultural changes that the Sophist movement and Socrates brought about. Instead, we find Greek citizens acting freely mainly within the context of institutions that uphold the social stability of public life such as the family and the political arena. Unlike architecture, sculpture and the way of life it depicts do not posit a separation between the activity of the human agent and the principles upon which the highest good is based. Rather, the free actions of the human agent in the context of their role in the polis are nothing but an expression of such principles.

Following this period of harmony between the "universal" and the "individual" expressed in sculpture and embodied in the Greek citizen's commitment to the social good, the balance begins to tip away from perfect harmony and towards the pole of the individual at the expense of the universal. This manifests as a de-emphasis on the good of the state as the ground of the individuals' motivations gradually shift to the inner cares and aims of the individual themselves, even if those cares are oppositional to the flourishing of the public good. As Hegel writes in the earlier quote this results in the principle that orients the individual becoming "deprived of its depth." Hegel attributes the cause of this shift in normative orientation to the corruption of the Greek state. This corruption naturally leads to the fostering of a rich inner life of rational capacities and emotional textures in which the individual is able to take refuge from, as well as critique, the corruption of the state and public life.[120] To find empirical evidence of such a development we need look no further than Socrates; an individual who finds ultimate value in his own reasoning capacities that often come into conflict with the norms and

[120] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 510-511.

values of the state and shared religion. This arising of the independent individual, however, creates a new problem. There is now a possibility of alienation and conflict both within the state and within the human individuals themselves. Due to the fact that the individual can withdraw from the community based, moral, social, and religious principles which constituted many of their own inner motivations, the human agent can now come into conflict both with that community and with certain values and aims within themselves.[121]

In the wake of this growing salience of the individual's inner life, we are left with a troubled relationship between the individual's inner life and the more comprehensive communal principles, institutions, and laws in which that individual lives and is embedded. Hegel sees Christian theology, particularly what he refers to as "the death of God "embodied in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ, as representing the beginning of a solution to this problem. However, Hegel asserts, such a solution is not fully worked out until we arrive at his own philosophical conception of history and of the human agent. In other words, from Hegel's point of view, it takes a long period of cultural development, the time spanning from the birth of Jesus in Rome, all the way through the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, and up to 19th century Germany in which Hegel lived to work out a

[121] I do not want to be mistaken with the view that this alienation as such only arises within the context of this particular conflict between the individual and their social world that JM Bernstein, Terry Pinkard, and Robert Pippin have all expressed. (Pippin, *Beautiful*, 46) (Bernstein, *Our Amphibian Problem*, 201) (Pinkard, *Art*, 3). In the introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel clearly states of these kinds of oppositions that "in numerous forms, they have always preoccupied and troubled the human consciousness" (Hegel *Aesthetics* 54). For example, Greek tragedy illustrates a different kind of opposition that produces a different kind of alienation. In *Antigone*, Antigone, who is motivated by familial commitment, comes into conflict with Creon, who is motivated by his commitment to the laws of the state. Here the individual is not in conflict with the social world but rather two different ethical norms that co-exist within one social world come into conflict with each other. That being said, Hegel does think that this alienation has become more pronounced due to the arising of this independent individual, writing, "It is modern culture that has first worked them out and driven them out most sharply and to the peak of their harshest contradiction" (Hegel, *Aesthetics,* 54).

comprehensive solution to this conflict and opposition plaguing human culture. One of the primary reasons Hegel thinks that this opposition is not fully reconciled until he expresses his own philosophical account of the human being and history is due to the inseparability of the "form" and "content" of a form of Absolute Spirit we discussed earlier. Hegel sees the mediums of religion and art, which during this period of cultural development are the most prevalent forms of Absolute Spirit, as incapable of illustrating a truly comprehensive vision of reconciliation between the individual and universal principles. That being said, Hegel does see the beginning promise of such a reconciliation arise in the person of Jesus.

The reason Jesus embodies the first promise of a union or reconciliation of these two alienated aspects of human life is because Jesus is *both* fully human and fully God. Jesus performed miracles and announced the good news but also was tempted, wept, and doubted. The fact that Jesus is not only God's son but is also *God himself*, shows that the Christian God is a God that "has become flesh, born, lived, suffered, and died."[122] Although the Greek gods perfectly embody virtue, Hegel writes this "blessed response" of the Greek good also led to "an air of lifelessness," and "aloofness from feeling."[123] The Christian God, on the other hand, illustrates the possibility and the reality of a union and harmony between universal principles and virtues that reflect only the best of humanity and the *entirety* of the inner life of the human being. This is why Pinkard locates the origins of individual freedom for Hegel in the teachings of Christ. In Hegel's interpretation, Christ's teachings tell us that each individual, with all their flaws and imperfections, is wholly divine. Although Pinkard is correct to locate the origin of this

[122] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 505.

[123] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 503.

conception of freedom in Christianity, from Hegel's point of view there is much ground that history has to traverse before arriving at a truly integrated and reconciled vision of human freedom, which from his point of view can only be captured through philosophy.

Hegel points to the life of Jesus, which traverses several distinct stages, as a microcosmic representation of the macrocosmic historical journey towards the end of this alienation and the birth of true freedom that will play out long after Jesus dies on the cross. Hegel explains this journey as it is encapsulated in Jesus' life writing,

> This history of the spirit, consummated in one individual, contains nothing except what we have already touched on above, namely that the individual man casts aside his individuality of body and spirit, i.e. that he yet even so is essentially truly God only as Spirit in his Church[124]

If we follow the life story of Jesus we find a trajectory by which Jesus sheds his humanity, or his "individuality of body and spirit" through the crucifixion in order to be fully united with God. Further, only after Jesus dies on the cross does the Holy Spirit descend upon humanity. The "Church" that represents the Christian community in this quote is a prototype for this universal dispensation of the Holy Spirit. Eventually, this Holy Spirit is understood to descend upon not only the church but "is broadened into all human consciousness which is reconciled with God, in short into mankind which exists as a plurality of individuals"[125] Hegel interprets this death of God's immediate, individual form on the cross and the descending of the Holy Spirit to all of humanity as an allegorical representation and promise of a reconciliation between these two alienated elements of human life. Jesus' very existence as the human incarnation of God illustrates that the comprehensive principles and laws (which is what we can understand God to represent

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[124] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 545-535.

[125] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 543.

in this allegory) by which we orient our lives can be embodied in a full, complete human being with a rich inner life. When Jesus sacrifices himself on the cross Hegel suggests he brings this reconciliation further by suggesting that these divine principles are not only embodied in one particular human being but are, in fact, embodied by all human beings. Thus, Hegel interprets the crucifixion and the subsequent universal dispensation of the Holy Spirit as the death of an abstract God that is independent of humanity itself in all its richness.

That being said, although Hegel sees the life of Jesus Christ as promising us the reconciliation of this opposition, Hegel does not think that the mediums of religion and art which Roman culture uses to express this story are sophisticated enough to fully work out the implications and significance of the death of God. Even after God gave up his human body through the death of his son in the crucifixion, the people of Rome attempted to recreate the "appearance of God," in an "actual individual shape" through works of art, primarily paintings of the life of Jesus that could act as a "perpetual renewal" of this individual and immediate embodiment of God.[126] However, this renewal of God in an immediate, sensuous, and individual shape through painting recreates the very abstract, distant conception of God which Jesus intended to free us from with his sacrifice on the cross. Hegel writes,

> But the means at the disposal of painting, the human figure and its colour, the flash and glance of the eye, are insufficient in themselves to give perfect expression to what is implicit in Christ in situations like these…In particular, the Resurrection, Transfiguration, and Ascension, and in general all the scenes in the life of Christ when, after the Crucifixion and his death, he has withdrawn from immediate existence as simply this individual man and is on the way to return to his Father, demand in Christ himself a higher expression of Divinity than painting is completely able to give to him; for its proper means for portraying him, namely

[126] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 536.

> human individuality and its external form, it should expunge here and glorify him in a purer light[127]

Hegel explains how painting is incapable of expressing the significance of the phases of Jesus' life that come after the crucifixion, and thus is incapable of illustrating what Christ was trying to teach humanity through his sacrifice. This is because painting, and art more generally, can only express how God manifests in "immediate existence;" in this case the immediately existing object of the painting itself; thus still leaving us with a notion of God that is separate from us, housed in an external work of art.

The form of religion, according to Hegel, also ultimately fails at transcending the limitations and alienation that come with expressing the divine in one particular determinate form. Hegel sees religion as still committed to a singular and determinate notion of the divine, just one that is expressed as an inner object of faith rather than an external work of art. Hegel writes in his *Phenomenology of Spirit* that this object of faith is only "dipped superficially in the element of thought" because it is "preserved in it (thought) as a sensuous mode and not made one with thought itself"[128] Although the object of faith is more personal than the work of art and thus does correspond with a growing cultural emphasis on the inner life of the individual, that object of faith is still a mental representation of a single, determinate expression of the divine. Hegel calls this "picture thinking;" illustrating that we are mentally representing a sensuous image of God or Jesus within our minds. As a result of this "picture thinking" there is still, as Hegel puts it an "unreconciled split between here and beyond;" or a division between humans and the laws, principles, or entities they take to be divine and universal, as this universal is

[127] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 822.

[128] Hegel, *Phenomenology* 462.

represented in an external image separate from the person who has faith in that image.[129] Thus, neither religion nor art is capable of working the full significance and potential of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross; it is only the medium of philosophy or "thought," according to Hegel that will be able to fully work out what is already implicit in these religious and artistic depictions of the later parts of Jesus' life.[130]

The Death of God in Philosophy

The reason philosophy is necessary to illustrate a comprehensive reconciliation between the individual and the universal norms and laws under which they live is because, unlike art and religion which must illustrate this union through one determinate form, philosophy allows these two sides of the individual and the universal to develop independently even as they maintain a semantic dependence upon one another. In other words, philosophy can express the divine or the universal as *both* fully embodied and expressed through particular, individual forms *and* as having a scope that extends beyond any instantiation in a particular determinate form. Philosophy is only able to do

[129] Hegel, *Phenomenology* 463.

[130] Although art ultimately cannot work this reconciliation out in its full comprehensiveness, the development of romantic art does play an essential role in the cultural development of a robust, free, and independent individual that is needed for the final philosophical reconciliation. For example, Hegel explains how Christian art's focus on sacrifice and renunciation ultimately fails to incorporate the "worldly" interests of the human (relationship to family, community, work, etc.) into the budding sense of subjectivity. (Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 552) In the Middle Ages, we find that dramatic poetry, which puts an individual's honor front and center, begins to incorporate elements of the individual's relationship to their family and community into their fundamental sense of who they are (*Aesthetics* 559-560). Although this dramatic poetry, as well as other forms of art that drive the sophistication of the independent subject forward ultimately fail to reconcile the interests of the individual with universal norms and laws, this notion of the individual who takes their immediate relationships and commitments seriously that romantic art develops is a necessary element of the reconciliation that philosophy ultimately does bring. In other words, although art cannot achieve this reconciliation on its own, philosophy would not be able to make its interventions without the cultural developments made by romantic art.

this by inscribing the death of God, or the crucifixion of Jesus, into its very form and methodology. Hegel writes of the crucifixion,

> It must not then be represented merely as the death of this individual, the death of this empirically existing individual. Heretics have interpreted it like that, but what it means is rather that God has died, that God himself is dead. God has died: this is negation, which is accordingly a moment of the divine nature, of God himself. In this death, therefore, God is satisfied. God cannot be satisfied by something else, only by himself. The satisfaction consists in the fact that the first moment, that of immediacy, is negated; only then does God come to be at peace with himself, and only then is spirituality posited[131]

As we have mentioned, for Hegel, the crucifixion of Jesus, the death of the "human" element of God, must also be the death of God himself. This is because the concrete, particular human agent always gains their determinacy, their very possibilities of acting, feeling, and intending, *within* a certain notion of "God;" as a manifestation of a set of universal principles that are taken to govern the human being, society, and nature itself. As soon as a set of organizing principles and laws begin to come into conflict with the concrete needs and aspirations of a particular community of agents, the worldview in which those principles are rooted begins to disintegrate, as these principles and worldview have lost their concrete grounding in the activity of actual human beings. For example, in Greece this disintegration of fundamental principles manifested as the gradual emphasis on the inner life of the individual as the locus of dignity and value rather than the good of the social polis to which the individual was previously oriented. In this way, the end of a worldview always comes with a transformation of both the universal principles on which that worldview was based and the nature of the human agent who once lived within that worldview. This is how Hegel interprets the crucifixion:

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[131] Hegel Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion: One-Volume Edition: The Lectures of 1827*, trans. Peter Crafts Hodgson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 219.

that God and his “son,” the concrete, particular human agent that embodies and manifests those universal principles in a practical way of life, always die together and are reborn together into a new way of living.

From the point of view of any culture that makes use of art or religion as their form of Absolute Spirit, which is only capable of illustrating these divine, universal principles through their embodiment within a concrete individual form, the death of God would be understood only as an ending and a tragedy. As we have seen, in art and religion, the determinate form that expresses the universal and divine principles is understood to simply reflect the true principles and norms that structure the cosmos and the human being. Thus, if these principles crumble, it would seem as if the very fabric of reality is crumbling. However, by actively sacrificing himself on the cross for the good of humanity and then rising from the dead, Jesus suggested that there was another way to see this movement of ending and of death. Jesus’ sacrifice shows us the streak of redemption in God’s demise. From Hegel’s point of view, philosophy is finally able to work out precisely how the death of God can be seen as a redemptive movement. In the introduction to the *Lectures on Aesthetics* Hegel contrasts philosophy with art in a way that will help us understand why philosophy is capable of following through on the redemptive promise of the crucifixion, writing,

> In as much as intelligence goes straight for the universal, the law, the thought and concept of the object; on this account not only does it turn its back on the object in its immediate individuality, but transforms it within; out of something sensuously concrete it makes an abstraction, something thought, and so something essentially other than what that same object was in its sensuous appearance. This artistic interest, in distinction from science, does not do this. Just as the work of art proclaims itself qua external object in its sensuous individuality and immediate determinateness in respect of colour, shape, sound, or qua a single insight, etc., so the consideration of art accepts it like this too,

> without going so far beyond the immediate object confronting it as to endeavor to grasp, as science does, the concept of this object as a universal concept.[132]

Here Hegel is only discussing the limitations of art but the same principle could be applied to the limitations of the "picture thinking" which expresses the Absolute in religious worship. By embodying the universal laws and principles of a worldview within a particular object or image, art and the picture thinking of religion elevate a concrete particular object or image to what Hegel refers to as an "expression of spirit." As we have seen in previous examples, the artistic work of art and religious images of devotion are not perceived as simple objects *in* our world that we can use for our purposes but rather reflect and embody the nature of the larger world in which we exist; reflecting back to us the fundamental principles which underpin the our essence and the essence of the cosmos. Here, however, Hegel points out that the "intellect" or philosophy goes one step further than art and religion. Philosophy takes *anything* that is "sensuously concrete," even the work of art and religious image of devotion, and makes this into "an abstraction, something thought." Philosophy can see every sensuous and particular manifestation in our experience, even a determinate embodiment of the divine in a particular form, as itself a manifestation of a more fundamental order of truth, an order that we grasp through thought. Thus, in philosophy, universal principles are understood to *both* exist independently of any determinate form in the sense that they exceed the scope of any particular manifestation *and* are fully embodied in determinate forms in the sense that they act as their fundamental ground. This simultaneous separation and unity of universal principles and the particular, determinate embodiment of those principles in concrete subjects and objects allows us to understand the *act* of rational explanation and

[132] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 37-38.

synthesis which works out the proper principles for a set of phenomena as an integral, necessary element of any understanding of truth.

Hegel points to this act of synthesis as undergirding our aspirations towards the Absolute truth in the introduction to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which is meant to act as an introduction to his entire system of philosophy. He writes,

> The True is 'the whole.” But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development. Of the Absolute it must be said that it is essentially a result, that only in the end is it what it truly is; and that precisely in this consists its nature, viz. to be actual, subject, the spontaneous becoming of itself[133]

Here Hegel explains that the “Absolute,” our understanding of the universal principles that organize the cosmos and the way those principles are manifest in the concrete forms that populate that cosmos, is understood to be the “result” of a “development.” From this philosophical point of view, this Absolute is not always eternally existing but becomes “actual” through a process of “becoming itself.” To understand Hegel we can simply remind ourselves of the way intellectual disciplines work and how they are different from art and religion. Physicists, sociologists, and mathematicians do not provide us with concrete determinate forms that express and embody the laws of math, biology, society, or physics. Rather, they express independent universal principles in the medium of thought that can systematically explain and organize the domain of phenomena they are studying. These scholars undertake a *process* of systematic empirical study through which they aspire to grasp the principles and laws that comprehensively govern their domain of analysis. They must go through the process of systematically analyzing the nature and behavior of particular phenomena and teasing out the principles that govern their behavior to arrive at the *result* that is understood to

[133] Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 11.

be the Absolute nature of the domain they are studying. Further, even as these universal principles act as the ground that explains the nature of the phenomena in the domain, they are also articulated through the intellect and thus can be expressed independently of the concrete phenomena they explain and ground. This separation between the universal principles and the particular forms they ground leaves room for a continual analysis of the behavior of the particular phenomena to check whether the principles are properly comprehensive and whether they truly govern all movements and features in the domain. Thus, by preserving some distinction between these universal principles and the concrete, particular forms that they aspire to systematically organize, ground, and explain, a space is opened up to understand the *act* of systematic, rational analysis as an integral element of any model of truth. In this sense, philosophy or thought emphasizes a third element at work in our understanding of truth that was "behind the scenes," so to speak, in religious and artistic expression of truth. While a work of art or religious image of worship illustrates the way particular phenomena gain their significance through the way they embody and express comprehensive, universal principles, philosophy contains an awareness of the way these universal principles and the determinate phenomena which are understood as their concrete manifestation are mediated by the *act* of systematic explanation and synthesis. This *act* or *process* of systematic study and synthesis continually reorganizes and recontextualizes the nature of the domain as the behavior of phenomena in the domain diverges from old principles and thus requires a new model of explanation and comprehension.[134]

[134] The inspiration to frame Hegel's understanding of truth as having these three elements comes from Brook Ziporyn's paper *Missed Exist*: *How the Hegel of 1802 almost became a Chinese Philosopher*. In this paper Ziporyn suggests that Hegel includes the concept of the "Middle," which is common to Chinese thought, in his conception of truth. The Middle is that which mediates between but also explains and grounds all dualities and oppositions. Here, I suggest that it is the act of philosophical or rational analysis itself which acts as this "Middle" that unifies,

In this way, the death of God and the philosophical comprehension it makes possible reconciles the opposition between universal principles and independent individuals by allowing us to understand universal principles and the concrete lives of individuals and communities as involved in a mutually interdependent development that takes place through humanity's continual and neverending aspiration to articulate the laws which govern the cosmos. Further, any re-articulation of these universal principles will also always redefine who we are and what fundamentally matters to us as we are integrated into this new conception of the cosmos. In his paper *Dynamic Structuralism: Cassirer and the Method of Culture*, Pierre Keller articulates this new philosophical paradigm by writing,

> The opposition between individual and universal has not been completely eliminated here; rather, it is transformed into a dynamically mediated process (as it is also transformed in Hegel's philosophy and earlier, on the Marburg reading, in Kant's philosophy). An "image-world" emerges in this process, yet it is not a copy of anything outside of culture; it is "the form of its [spirit's] own activity" [die Form seines eigenen Tuns] (PSF I, 45-46 [45]). Overall, what we take to be fixed and identical is not completely independent of the flux of human life and experience; nevertheless, consciousness and human life are not without reference to things that we take to be unchanging either (PSF I, 38ff.; 44-45)[135]

Here Keller is speaking of a shift that occurs in Cassier's, Kant's, and Hegel's thought; in Hegel's thought specifically, it corresponds with this final philosophical comprehension of the death of God. Keller points out that the death of God does not get rid of the notion of a "fixed and identical" understanding of human purpose, God, or history, but rather shows us that whatever fixed universal principles we are committed to in our historical

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mediates between, and determines the content of the duality of universal principles and their particular, concrete manifestations.

[135] Keller, Pierre, "Dynamic Structuralism: Cassirer and the Method of Culture," *Edizioni Ets*, 2021, 49-50.

time period gain their significance through their aspiration to unify and explain the concrete conditions that have arisen from the "flux of human life and experience." This is why in the earlier quote from his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* Hegel wrote that God's death is more specifically the "negation" of God's "immediacy." The death of God does not mark the end of any fixed or universal understanding of ourselves or the world, but the end of a fixed or universal understanding that is not mediated by the concrete changing concerns, cares, and realities of the human community and the world in which they live. Although each culture will continue to commit itself to a conception of the universal aim of history and human life; the death of God helps us to see that it is also the case that as the flux of life, experience, and culture moves forward, new cultures and new communities will generate new notions of universality that are more appropriate to the changing cultural, social, and historical conditions and the kinds of entities they produce. This continual historical process of the death of old ways of life and the erection of new ones from the ashes of the old can be understood to be captured allegorically through the continual death and resurrection of God.

Conclusion

Now that we have a grip on the way the death of God and the philosophical methodology it makes possible allows for a reconciliation between the independent individual and the universal principles in which they are embedded, we can return to our two interpretive aims from the introduction. Both of these aims illustrate, each from a different angle, that Hegel's teleological history cannot be reified as the true purpose of history independent of the way he comes to that understanding from his own situated point of view. First, we have found that the very philosophical methodology Hegel makes

use of to construct his teleological history is rooted in the insight that any conception of the Absolute arises out of an immanent act of synthesis that rearticulates and reorients the way of life and theoretical understanding of a *particular* historical community by grounding that way of life and theoretical model in a new set of universal principles. For example, Hegel's teleological history of art reinterprets past works of art not as singular expressions of metaphysical truths and the nature of the human agent, but as acts of systematic synthesis that attempted to unify and explain all particular phenomena those people perceived by integrating them into a unified worldview and way of life. In this sense, we cannot interpret Hegel's historical story as simply stating "the way things are" independent of Hegel's act of reinterpretation that makes use of the insights of his philosophical methodology. Second, we find that Hegel's articulation of the Absolute and the teleological story of history he paints as leading towards it also reflects this same underlying intention as the artworks and religious views of the past. Like the artworks and religions of the past, Hegel himself also aspires to reconcile particular historical and cultural forces that are at play in his time period by unifying them into a holistic worldview that grounds a new way of living and understanding ourselves. Or to be more specific, through revealing this act of systematic synthesis which grounds, meditates between, and determines the content of both the universal principles on which a worldview is based and the particular phenomena grounded in those principles, Hegel is able to reconcile the opposition between the independent individual and the universal principles which took hold of human culture after the fall of the Greek way of life. Now the independent individual is free to reassess and reanalyze the universal principles in which they are embedded and bring themselves and their community under new principles that synchronize with the realities of their current context.

Since Hegel's narrative of history aspires towards comprehensiveness, exhaustiveness, and a retrospective reinterpretation of all elements of history and human culture within the context of its organizing principles, there is a sense in which Pinkard, Pippin, and Hegel himself are right to attribute a sense of finality and eternal truth to Hegel's account from Hegel's own point of view. However, to emphasize only this aspect of Hegel's teleological account of history and the purpose of human life would be to miss the equally essential immanent, creative, and normative reorienting element of his intervention. Further, since philosophy reveals how any comprehensive understanding of the cosmos, history, and the human being arises as a result of an immanent, creative act of synthesis that aspires to reconcile divergent phenomena and forces in that time period, to overlook this second element is also to overlook what Hegel takes to be the primary insight of philosophy itself. Such an exploration reveals that philosophy comes on the historical scene not because the time is ripe to articulate a timeless truth, but because of the historical and cultural forces that have gradually led to an alienation between the inner life of the individual and the social customs and natural laws in which that individual resides. Once we understand the origins and expressive capabilities of philosophy in this way it becomes clear that even though we always seek a set of principles that is comprehensive and therefore the *one* truth from our point of view, it is also necessarily the case that each community will have to bring themselves under the principles that work to unify the particular forces and conditions that are present to them. We can close with a quote from Hegel that articulates the necessity of this constant renewal of philosophical truth. Hegel writes, in his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy,*

> This is the function of our own and of every age: to grasp the knowledge which is already existing, to make it our own, and in so doing to develop it still further and

to raise it to a higher level. In thus appropriating it to ourselves we make it into something different from what it was before[136]

[136] Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. Robert F Brown and J M Stewart (Oxford Press, 1994), 1.

Conclusion

Reinterpreting Hegel: A Multi-Layered Hegel

Through this interpretation of the underlying purpose and intention of Hegel's articulation of the history of art and its culmination in his philosophical expression of the Absolute in the *Lectures on Aesthetics,* I hope to have accomplished two interrelated aims. First, I hope to have provided an alternative way to read Hegel's conception of truth, what he refers to as the Absolute. Second, I have suggested that this alternative conception of the Absolute provides us with a hermeneutic through which we can interpret the systematic elements of Hegel's work in a more charitable way than has historically been the case. In these concluding remarks, I will briefly summarize these two interventions, then go on to suggest what I take to be the more general philosophical and meta-theoretical lessons we can learn from this reading of Hegel. Lastly, I will address a common critique of Hegel and suggest that this reading can help us see these critiques in a more nuanced light and also point towards further constructive research.

Hegel is often read as a "totalizer" who creates a systematic model of "Absolute knowledge" that includes within it the final and definitive understanding of the purpose of history, nature, the human being, and the proper social institutions and moral norms for human culture. I have suggested that if we understand Hegel's conception of philosophy and how its expressive capabilities differ from art and religion, we find that philosophy's very insight is that we can never detach the function of any conception of the truth of history, the human being, or the cosmos from the historical causes and conditions in which that understanding is constructed or from the cultural and normative way of life it

grounds. I have also suggested that the temptation to interpret Hegel as ossifying his conception of history and the human being as ahistorically true stems from an interpretive methodology that bi-furcates what Robert Soloman refers to as the "two Hegel's." In *The Spirit of Hegel*, Solomon points out a popular trend in Hegel scholarship in which Hegel is seen to be undertaking two separate and incompatible projects. On the one hand, Hegel is understood to be interested in the significance of artwork, philosophy, social norms, moral ideals, etc. within their local, cultural, and historical contexts. On the other hand, Hegel is understood to articulate the final and Absolute truth of the human being, history, and nature independent of cultural and historical context.[137] I have argued that the form of philosophy itself for Hegel is rooted in the insight that even though we always do our best to construct the most comprehensive and integrative understanding of the Absolute truth from our point of view, this conception of the Absolute gains its legitimacy from the way it systematically unifies the information we have available to us from our limited point of view and how that systematic unification grounds a normative orientation for a particular community. Hegel's philosophical methodology is rooted in the commitment that these two projects are always two layers of the same analysis. In the chapters, I have argued that if we understand the history of art and religion and the way philosophy inherits and builds on this history, then the contrast of the expressive capabilities of art and religion with those of philosophy makes it clear that philosophy expresses this normative and contextual conception of the Absolute.

In addition to providing an alternative conception of Hegel's notion of the Absolute, by providing a reading of the structure of Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, I have shown how this understanding of the Absolute can help us to read Hegel's work in

[137] Solomon, *Spirit of Hegel,* 15

a more charitable light. Once this multi-layered conception of the Absolute is taken as a starting point through which to interpret Hegel's work, it is then possible to interpret Hegel's reading of the history of art as a way of enriching and redeeming our understanding of both the past and the present, and not simply as presenting a neutral, Eurocentric account of the progression of human history. Hegel sees in his own culture an alienation between the independent individual and the universal social and moral norms and natural laws which they often feel to be impinging upon their individualistic aspirations. As he writes in the *Lectures on Aesthetics,*

> The modern intellect produces this opposition in man which makes him an amphibious animal because he now has to live in two worlds which contradict one another. The result is that now consciousness wanders about in this contradiction, and, driven from one side to the other, cannot find satisfaction for itself in either the one or the other[138]

If we understand Hegel's aim in constructing a vision of the Absolute to be presenting a reconciliation of these divergent forces that grounds a new normative way of living that is free of this alienation, we can then read his history of art as a way to diagnose the historical causes of this alienation. Further, through this historical diagnosis, Hegel opens a clearing for the remedy. From this perspective, we can read Hegel's "end of art" thesis not primarily as a claim to the inferiority of art and the superiority of modern European rational modes of knowledge, but as his documentation of the historical causes of this particular form of alienation. Hegel suggests that classical art and the Greek cultural way of life it constituted and expressed, at least towards the end of antiquity, allowed an individual to detach their sense of identity as an individual from the universal moral, ethical, and social principles of their culture for the first time in history. This detachment created the possibility of the individual judging and even condemning these principles

[138] Hegel, *Aesthetics*, 54.

from the vantage point of their private, inner life. However, Hegel suggests that art, since it must always take a particular, determinate form, could only express a direct union of universal principles and the particular individual in which those principles manifested, and could not present a way of reconciling these two poles of human life while maintaining some independence for the individual. Thus, Hegel suggests that the limitations of art as a medium of expression are one of the primary causes of the alienation that developed between the individual and the universal principles of their culture.

Hegel points to the person and life of Jesus Christ as embodying the first promise of a reconciliation between the universal and the individual that maintains some independence for the individual. Hegel interprets the death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection as suggesting that there can be a redemptive result that arises from the decay of certain universal principles and the way of life on which they were based. Finally, Hegel uses the form of philosophy to articulate a processual understanding of human beings and their relationship to universal norms and laws in which the human individual or community can articulate and orient themselves to norms and laws that are more suited to current conditions when old norms and laws begin to diverge from the concrete conditions of human beings' lives. It is through this lens that Hegel reinterprets and redeems what from another perspective seems like a history populated by incorrect expressions of the Absolute. Now instead of seeing past cultures as simply failing to understand nature, themselves, and morality in a way that is as sophisticated as modern Europe, we can instead understand the visions of the Absolute of past cultures as a means by which these people synchronized their understanding of themselves, morality, and the cosmos with the concrete conditions of their lives in the context of their particular

moment in history. This philosophical grip on the relationship between the individual and universal principles also allows Hegel to redeem the alienation of his own time by suggesting that the individual should act in line with universal principles which integrate them with their community and with nature, but that they will also always have the ability to reshape these principles through a new act of systematic synthesis when those principles no longer synchronize with current realities.

From one perspective Hegel's teleological narrative of the history of art which culminates in European modes of being and knowing suggests that earlier cultural modes of life and knowing were less sophisticated stepping stones on a path toward the greater sophistication of modern Europe. However, even though Hegel's Eurocentric commitments play a fundamental role in the concrete details of his historical story, if we understand his conception of philosophy in this nuanced way we can see that his philosophical method encourages us to avoid these Eurocentric commitments. Hegel's conception of philosophy reminds us that his historical narrative is not an ahistorical, final statement on the ultimate purpose of human beings, nature, and history but rather a historical diagnosis of a cultural trend of alienation and a solution to that alienation that systematically interprets both the present and the past within the context of that solution. Thus, from Hegel's point of view, no philosophical claim concerning the purpose of humanity, nature, or history has the final say. Rather, it is each culture's responsibility to address the alineations and inconsistencies of past expressions of the Absolute, including even those generated by Hegel's own. I would argue if we keep this redemptive and normative reorienting function of Hegel's work in mind, we will find that it is easier to make sense of the systematic elements of all of Hegel's work in a charitable way.

Reinterpreting Absolute Truth: Metatheoretical Implications

I also intend this dissertation to have implications beyond the interpretation of Hegel's work. If we take this conception of the Absolute seriously, we find a generative and constructive way to understand claims to ultimate truth in any domain. As I mentioned in the introduction, most seekers of truth assume there is *one* truth. However, as I also mentioned in the introduction, if we probe this claim, we start to find certain philosophical issues. Two major issues are a). epistemological skepticism, the concern that we can never be sure the tool we use to grasp the truth is an accurate one, and b). cultural exclusivity, a necessary exclusion of the diverse cultural array of knowledge that humans have articulated throughout history. It can seem to many that the only possible responses to these problems are either to give up our search for the one truth and admit to relativistic pluralism or eternal skepticism or to clamp down on the singularity of one culture's conception of truth. Hegel provides us with an alternative. Hegel's conception of the Absolute respects our aspiration towards the one truth by pointing out that our model of truth gains its grounding from the way it integrates all information we have access to from our limited point of view in an as comprehensive way as possible. In this way, Hegel can preserve this aspiration towards the singularity of truth while avoiding epistemological skepticism and cultural exclusivity by providing an alternative grounding mechanism to our truth claims. Rather than grounding truth claims or models in the common understanding which suggests that our model is true when it corresponds to the way objects, laws, or norms are independent of our historically situated perspective and

interests, Hegel suggests that the true model is the one that most comprehensively and systematically unifies what we have access to from that historically situated perspective.

In addition to providing us with a way to ground truth claims and models that avoid certain philosophical problems, Hegel's work also encourages us to be sensitive to the normative implications of any theory we construct. Hegel's theory of history and the human being, one that is fundamentally grounded in this continual aspiration towards comprehensiveness, integration, and reconciliation, cannot be pried apart from his fundamental normative commitments. Hegel understands that this principle of human freedom which underpins his theoretical account of history is a response to the normative demands of his own time. Specifically, this principle of freedom and the understanding of history rooted in that principle arise from Hegel's attempt to reconcile this opposition between the independent individual and the universal norms within which their cultural way of life is based. I do not think we should read this normative underpinning of Hegel's theoretical enterprise as a contingent factor of his analysis. Rather, from Hegel's point of view, *all* attempts to systematically and comprehensively understand the world cannot help but integrate the human being into that worldview by grounding the human's normative orientation in the principles in which that particular worldview is rooted. I think that if we keep in mind this normative dimension of any theoretical enterprise we undertake, it will help us theorize more consciously and responsibly. Let me give a brief example to illustrate why I think this reflexivity is critical. Whether it be the Christian notion that human beings are made in the image of God or a more secular praise of our superior intellectual and rational faculties, many theoretical models suggest that human beings are superior to non-human animals. A cosmological model which places humans at the top of a hierarchy of being normatively orients the

human being in such a way that suggests humans have dominion *over* nonhuman beings and ecosystems. On the other hand, we find a critique of this hierarchal cosmology in some indigenous cosmologies. For example, indigenous philosopher Viola Cordova writes in her paper on indigenous ethics *The We and the I*,

> The Native American recognizes his dependence on the Earth and the Universe. He recognizes no hierarchy of "higher" and "lower" or "simple" and "complex," and certainly not of "primitive" and "modern." Instead of hierarchies, he sees differences which exist among equal "beings" (mountains, as well as water and air and plants and animals, would be included here) The equality is based on the notion, often unstated, that everything that is, is of one process.[139]

Cordova suggests a cosmology in which humans are understood to be just one community amongst a wider ecosystem that includes plant and animal communities, with all these communities enjoying equal moral and agential status. This worldview normatively orients human beings in a way that prioritizes maintaining the balance of the "one process," which integrates and includes not only human societies but non-human animals and plants as well. This is one simple example of how reflecting on the normative underpinnings of a worldview that we might take for granted can encourage us to reflect on the concrete normative orientation for human beings and human communities which that worldview implies. To give one more brief example, we can find a normative orientation implied within the scientific materialist paradigm which is so popular today. It is not uncommon today to hear laments about the meaninglessness of life because human beings are just a small bundle of atoms in a vast, mostly empty, universe. Although many do not realize it, such a normative orientation and outlook only has significance if we take these modern materialist scientific models and reify them as

[139] Viola Cordova, "The We and The I," essay, in *American Indian Thought: Philosophical Essays* (Wiley, 2003), 173–81. 177.

corresponding to the underlying structure of the cosmos itself. From Hegel's point of view, *any* theoretical enterprise implies certain normative commitments that simultaneously give determinate form to the world as a whole and to the fundamental normative orientation of the subject residing in that world. I would contend that maintaining an awareness of the normative implication of our theories will help us to be more self-reflective and responsible when in our own doing of philosophy, science, history, or creating art, which Hegel encourages us to consider as an equally viable way to reflect on our nature, our normative orientation, and the nature of the cosmos.

Further Research: Hegelian Critiques of Hegel

Although reading Hegel's *Aesthetics* as a whole provides us with valuable meta-theoretical and historical reflections, I would argue that once we have grasped these insights, it is not ethically responsible to allow that work to stand as is without critique. I have argued that Hegel makes use of a method of philosophical inquiry that suggests that any truth claim or model of truth gains its justification and significance from the way it systematically unifies information observed from a particular historical point of view and the way that systematic model grounds a normative way of life. That being said, Hegel does suggest that this multi-layered, philosophical conception of truth only becomes possible within the context of modern Europe, specifically after Christianity. Hegel aspires to justify this claim to the novelty of European culture's insights by analyzing the ways past cultures have articulated the Absolute through art and religion and the ways those within these past cultures have lived out those worldviews. From this analysis, Hegel concludes that no past cultures were able to explicitly see or

articulate this multi-layered nature of the Absolute, but instead always reified some aspect of their models of the human being and the cosmos as timelessly and ahistorically true. Although Hegel aspires to give a fair analysis of past cultures by claiming to draw his conclusions solely from empirical information stemming from that culture (art, religion, philosophy, law, social customs, etc.), it is clear that he ultimately was not able to overcome his own Eurocentric and racist commitments, as he continually and systematically mischaracterizes and oversimplifies the values and theoretical models of past cultures, and especially non-western cultures, so he can view them as stepping stones towards the more sophisticated European culture. As Terry Pinkard aptly writes, "That Hegel is guilty of what we call Orientalism is today a truism" and "When in his lectures on world history in the 1820s, he refers to Africa, China, India, and Persia, he displays a tendency to interpret everything about them in a limited and even hostile way."[140]

By taking a brief look at interpretations of non-western philosophical systems by other scholars we find strong evidence that Hegel oversimplifies these systems for his purposes. For example, Brook Ziporyn compares Tiantai Buddhism's notion of the "Three Truths," articulated by the Chinese Buddhist Monk Zhiyi in the 5th Century to Hegel's theory of the Absolute. ZIporyn concludes that Zhiyi's conception of the Absolute contains just as much, and arguably more, sophistication than Hegel's conception. First articulating the similarity of the two conceptions Ziporyn writes that in the,

> Tiantai Buddhist idea of the Three Truths… every single experienced determinate entity is, precisely because it is determinate, necessarily at every point inseparable from and thereby identical to its own negation, and thus also with the

[140] Pinkard, *History*, 50-51.

> necessarily indeterminate and infinitely redetermining unfinishable whole, which is equally any and every other determinate entity.[141]

Ziporyn suggests that the Tantai Buddhist idea of the Three Truths, like Hegel's own articulation of the Absolute, claims that each determinate entity only gains its significance through its relationship with other entities within the context of a comprehensive whole. Also like Hegel's own articulation of the Absolute, the Three Truths suggests that this comprehensive whole and the principles on which it is based are not something we can ever reify as true for all time, because it is an "infinitely redetermining unfinishable whole." The reason this whole or Absolute is redetermining and unfinishable is because it only has its concrete expression in these determinate entities that embody its principles, and those entities are constantly changing. Similarly to the way Hegel finds Christianity to represent this dynamic reconciliation of the Absolute and its particular manifestations in God's manifestation as Christ, Tantai Buddhism represents this Absolute as Buddhahood and suggests that every particular moment and action of a human being is, in fact, an expression of the activity of Buddhahood and that Buddhahood itself cannot be separated from the activity of human beings aspiring to manifest it in the concrete, interconnected contexts of their lives. Thus, Ziporyn suggests that in Tantai Buddhism we find both Hegel's holistic ideas, that each entity gains significance in contrast to all other possible and actual entities in the context of a holistic understanding, and the dynamic element of this holism which the death of God introduced for Hegel, that as those concrete entities change, the nature of the whole also constantly changes because both gain significance in a continual process of mutual determination.

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[141] Ziporyn, *Missed Exit*, 142.

Further, Ziporyn suggests that Zhiyi's work can reveal biases in the conclusions Hegel draws from this theory of the Absolute. Since every determinate entity has its origin in the "infinitely redetermining whole" (he Absolute) *and* the Absolute only has concrete manifestation through and as determinate entities, Zhiyi suggests that the all-encompassing Absolute, in his case Buddhahood, is equally present and manifest in every particular moment and every particular action. As Ziporyn writes, "Every purpose is precisely the infinite purpose, and there simply is no other infinite purpose, no other infinite End besides these, fulfilled as each of them in each moment. That is the view we find in Tiantai Buddhism."[142] Although Ziporyn acknowledges that Hegel is aware of this omnipresence of the Absolute within all determinate forms and purposes, Ziporyn critiques Hegel for nonetheless emphasizing the "singularity and externality of the Goal of Reason" in emphasis.[143] In other words, even though Hegel is aware, as I have pointed out throughout the dissertation, that every culture, community, or person reaches the Absolute and the "end of history" when they grasp their own historically conditioned point of view from the most comprehensive context they possibly can, he still chooses to frame history as a teleological narrative which builds towards the way he grasps the Absolute in the context of modern Europe. By foregrounding this teleology, Hegel chooses to obscure this omnipresent element of his theory of the Absolute and instead focuses on the triumph of the conception of the Absolute made possible by Greek and European cultural developments. By drawing on Zhiyi's thought, ZIporyn not only points to a pre-modern Buddhist monk who thought with just as much sophistication as Hegel but also turns Hegel's linear teleological assumptions on their head, suggesting that this

[142] Ziporyn, *Missed Exit*, 146.

[143] Ziporyn, *Missed Exit*, 145.

monk who lived thousands of years before Hegel may have the upper hand in terms of philosophical sophistication. By revealing a contrasting case, Zhiyi's work suggests that Hegel's emphasis on teleology in his conception of history is not a necessity that arises from his theoretical commitments but a conscious choice that chooses to present Europe as superior.

We find a similar suggestion that non-Western culture and philosophy were more sophisticated than Hegel is willing to admit in Akash Rathore and Rimina Rohapatra's *Hegel's India*. These scholars suggest that Hegel engaged with Indian thought so frequently because "it represented a sort of nagging twin that he badly needed to shake throughout the development of his own philosophy."[144] Rathore and Rohapatra suggest that Hegel saw a theoretical sophistication in Indian thought that rivaled his own and had to work particularly hard to argue for Indian thought's inferiority and frame it as a stepping stone on a historical path toward his understanding. To give one concrete example of the many the book provides, Rathore and Rohapatra point out that Sri Aurobindo's interpretation of the *Bhagavad Gita* suggests that this seminal Indian text contains an understanding of ethics similar to Hegel's own. The *Bhagavad Gita*'s hero, Arjuna, is advised to use yogic practices to engender a reconciliation between his inner motivations and his duties to his community. In the *Gita,* this reconciled and integrated ethical duty is referred to as one's "Dharma." Rathore and Rohapatra quote Aurobindo elucidating this interpretation, "The central interest of the Gita's philosophy and Yoga is its attempt, the idea with which it sets out, continues and closes, to reconcile and even effect a kind of unity between the inner spiritual truth in its most absolute and integral

[144] Aakash Singh Rathore and Rimina Mohapatra, *Hegel's India: A Reinterpretation, with Texts* (New Delhi, India: Oxford University Press, 2018), 4.

realization and the outer actualities of man's life and action" (Hegel's India 28). Rathore and Rohapatra, following Aurobindo, suggest that the concept of "Dharma" in the Gita is similar to Hegel's concept of *Sittlichkeit*, or Ethical Life, which implies a reconciliation between one's inner motivation and outer duties rather than a submission to outer duties at the expense of one's inner motivations. Thus, we find in this notion of Dharma, and the practices of Yoga which engender the realization of one's Dharma, a project of ethical reconciliation that is hard to distinguish from Hegel's own.

These are just two examples that provide strong evidence that Hegel's interpretation of history, and especially his interpretation of Eastern cultures, was not honest to the texts and works he studied but rather was filtered through pre-existing Eurocentric commitments. This evidence implies that we should be skeptical of the way Hegel organizes his teleological history, that it is Hegel's own biases and racist assumptions that encourage him to paint all pre-Grecian cultures as embedded in and unconsciously propagating oppositions and dualities that he reconciles and unifies. That being said, even though we must remain aware of and protect ourselves against these biases and prejudices, a historical analysis that radically alters Hegel's conception of the trajectory of history is still very much in line with his philosophical spirit. Once we discover that Hegel is in no way committed to structures, objects, or universal principles that exist independently of human being's historically situated interests, but that any truth claim an individual or community makes gains its significance "only in and through its normative contribution to the way in which we relate to our world as agents," in Pierre Keller's words, we find that Hegel's claims concerning the trajectory and purpose of history are not meant to be final or conclusive.[145] Rather, Hegel's claims are justified

[145] Keller, *Freedom* 70-71.

through the way they reconcile culturally relevant oppositions and produce a new, unified, and integrated way of understanding and living for his community. In this way, Hegel's philosophical spirit would encourage us to revise his historical story within the context of what we now know about the oppression and objectification that colonialist and orientalist narratives of nonwestern cultures have caused and articulate a new model of history that reconciles the contradictions, conflicts, and alineations that these biases have produced.

Although Hegel is not responsible in his particular analysis of past cultures, he does suggest that we cannot understand our own time, or construct a theory and way of life that leads to flourishing, if we abstract the conditions of our time from their historical causes and simply ignore the philosophy, art, religion, and ways of living of the past. As Rathore and Rohapatra write in *Hegel's India,*

> As ludicrous as many of Hegel's disparaging and contemptuous pronouncements appear to us nearly two centuries on, we wonder how absurd our own self-righteous hypocrisy might appear to Hegel: for under our watch, at even the best universities in the Anglophone world, students are graduated with degrees in philosophy without ever having heard the names or basic concepts of major philosophers or far-reaching philosophical systems that arose in traditions ostensibly beyond the horizon of their own[146]

Rathore and Rohapatra point out that as much as we are right to critique Hegel for his Eurocentric and racist commitments there is also something important we can learn from Hegel's attitude towards past cultures. Even given these problematic commitments Hegel still engaged in a much more rigorous analysis of Europe's historical and philosophical inheritance than most philosophers do today. Hegel's vision of philosophy suggests that to understand ourselves and our own highest possibilities of normative

[146] Rathore and Rohapatra, *Hegel's India*, 81.

flourishing and theoretical rigor we cannot isolate ourselves from our historical influences. We must take alternative normative and cosmological possibilities seriously as visions of truth and human meaning in their own right, understanding how they have contributed, and still contribute, to the richness of our point of view in the present. Further, Hegel does not only seriously engage with alternative philosophical systems, but respects art and religion as some of the highest expressions of human potential and understanding. Thus, although we must call out Hegel's Eurocentric commitments and the harm they have caused and continue to cause, this does not mean we should ignore what we can learn from Hegel. Hegel's work suggests that a truly comprehensive and rich philosophical grip on ourselves and the world cannot theorize solely within the horizons of our culture's normative and metaphysical commitment abstracted from their historical causes. Rather, like Hegel does throughout the *Lectures on Aesthetics*, we must work to understand those historical causes in a sophisticated way and, through this analysis, enrich our grip on our historical conditions and the normative and theoretical possibilities that those conditions foreclose. Even though Hegel's work admittedly propagates and has even caused much of the Eurocentric and racial bias of the modern philosophical world, a nuanced understanding of his conception of philosophy also points to a way forward by suggesting that it is our responsibility to reconcile the oppositions and injustices that have resulted from this bias and by pointing to the limitations of theorizing within the boundaries of our own culture's philosophical assumptions abstracted from their historical causes.

Concluding Remarks

Before closing, I want to summarize what I take to be a valuable insight we can gather from this study of Hegel and his understanding of philosophy. Hegel writes of humans' aspiration towards truth and knowledge,

> This is the function of our own and of every age: to grasp the knowledge which is already existing, to make it our own, and in so doing, to develop it still further and to raise it to a higher level. In thus appropriating it to ourselves, we make it into something different from what it was before[147]

Here Hegel points out that philosophy is a project that is never finished. If the aim of philosophy is comprehensive understanding rather than singular knowledge, as new information becomes available and humanity and culture develop in new ways, philosophy must aspire to continually incorporate these new developments. From this point of view, the orientation that remains constant in a philosophical project is its aspiration towards systematic unity, not the specific content that constitutes that unity. Philosophy aims towards harmony, towards imagining and reimagining the possibility of the human being and community orienting themselves towards a purpose that is supported by the trajectory of history and the laws of nature themselves. From this perspective, instead of attempting to justify the “truth” of a certain social custom, theoretical understanding, or moral value, we are instead called to focus on the concrete normative implications of any norm or explanation we explicitly advocate for or implicitly embody in our day to day interactions with ourselves, our community, and the world as a whole.

In this way, Hegel reminds us to take responsibility for our actions and to be self-critical concerning what values, norms, and principles each action is implicitly or

[147] Hegel, *History of Philosophy*, 1.

explicitly manifesting in the world. Hegel also reminds us that we need not, and should not, look to some abstract justification or external authority to determine the legitimacy of certain principles over others. Rather, we should look to the realities of the entirety of the current environment in which we live, and ask ourselves which types of actions could realistically contribute to human flourishing in such an environment. Or to be more specific, we ask ourselves which types of actions and principles would contribute to and support the flourishing of *all* different aspects and spheres of our lives and the lives of our communities, rather than strengthening one sphere of our lives at the expense of another. This focus on responsibility, harmony, and a sensitivity to our concrete realities I believe are the most valuable takeaways from Hegel's focus on the normative and unitive nature of any philosophical undertaking.

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