

**A MODERN COMPOSITION OF HEGEL IN  
BLUE, YELLOW, AND BLACK: A STUDY  
OF HEGEL'S AESTHETICS**

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Many philosophers have struggled with Hegel's ideas since his death in 1831. Although difficult, Hegel's ideas are of great value and relevance to current social, political, aesthetic, theological, and philosophical discussions. Few commentators have paid much attention to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, though they present some of his clearest ideas.<sup>1</sup> It is the purpose of this paper to explore the claim that Hegel makes in the lectures — that the highest function of art is dead, whether his overall view is adequate, and what the implications of his view are for contemporary society. Ultimately, this study of Hegel's aesthetics will lead us to an understanding not only of art, but of ourselves. In that respect, this study of Hegel's aesthetics is inspired by Hegel's own thoughts about what art can and should do.

Hegel begins his aesthetics by refuting objections to a philosophy of art. It is this part of his aesthetics which will be most significant for our purposes. Hegel does not wish to consider art which is "servile" such as that art which "can be employed as a fleeting pastime, to serve the ends of pleasure and entertainment" — the art which Plato denounces in the *Republic*. Rather, he wishes to consider art which is "free." Art cannot be free until it liberates itself from serving other aims such as decorating and entertainment.<sup>2</sup> Hegel believes that art must free itself from these functions to become a medium for truth. He claims that:

Fine art is not real art until it is in this sense free, and only achieves its highest task when it has taken its

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place in the same sphere with religion and philosophy, and has become simply a mode of revealing to consciousness and bringing to utterance the Divine Nature, the deepest interests of humanity, and the most comprehensive truths of the mind. It is in works of art that nations have deposited the profoundest intuitions and ideas of their hearts; and fine art is frequently the key — with many nations there is no other — to the understanding of their wisdom and of their religion.<sup>3</sup>

An understanding of this claim will provide the key for understanding Hegel's philosophy of art. We must ask several questions of Hegel at this point: What is meant by truth? What sorts of truth are referred to? What are the "deepest interests of humanity?" If art occupies the same sphere as religion and philosophy how are we to picture this relationship, given the differences between artistic and philosophical argument? Where and how do we see art performing its highest function? It is necessary to answer these questions before we can understand the broader implications of Hegel's view for contemporary society and in particular, its implications for art in our own historical culture.

For Hegel truth is the manifestation of the absolute. The absolute can be abstractly described as dialectically revealed truth, emerging and alive throughout history in various ways. Truth for Hegel, is not just the object of some scientific inquiry, but the goal of every human endeavor. Most importantly, truth is realized in and throughout history. The dialectic is the process of knowing the truth — of coming to an adequate conception of the world in and throughout history. In this examination of art, we will see that the absolute is best conceived in terms of freedom. The absolute as portrayed in a period of history reflects the freedom of the human spirit in that period. With each age, humans have become more free and increasingly self-determining. This is evident in the art work of each culture. Others have struggled with understanding the content of the absolute. *But, we can gain an understanding of the*

*absolute if we understand freedom as its content.*

We can only see the absolute in the products and activities of a culture. Objective mind manifests itself in the world through art, religion, and philosophy.<sup>4</sup> Stephen Houlgate, understanding the absolute as character, writes that "Hegel thinks that in all the manifold events and interactions in a civilization's history the basic character of that civilization can be discerned, and it is that character which interests him."<sup>5</sup> In order to determine the character of a people we must examine how it lives and what it does. If we are to grasp the nature of the absolute for a given age, we must examine its practical activity. We must examine its art.

Art performs its "highest function" by revealing the absolute, the freedom attained in a period of history. Art functioning in this way reflects man's view of the world — what he conceives of as truth.<sup>6</sup> (However, if it is only one man's conception of truth, then it is not the absolute. Here lies a problem with Hegel's conception of the absolute. However, it is not the purpose of this paper to come to a definitive understanding of the absolute, although a more clear understanding may be revealed through art.) Through art man recognizes himself.

This purpose he achieves by the modification of external things upon which he impresses the seal of his inner being, and then finds repeated in them his own characteristics . . . Even the child's first impulse involves this practical modification of external things. A boy throws stones into the river, and then stands, admiring the circles that trace themselves on the water, as an effect in which he attains the sight of something that is his own doing. This need traverses the most manifold phenomena, up to the mold of self-production in the medium of external things as it is known to us in the work of art.<sup>7</sup>

The boy who throws the stones in the river recognizes his relationship to the world and his place in it. By means of art

man recognizes the Other, the external world to which he stands in opposition. The very fact that art tells us "we know a limitation is evidence that we are beyond it, evidence of our freedom from limitation... we make ourselves finite by receiving an Other into our consciousness; but in the very fact of our knowing this Other we have transcended this limitation" and realize our freedom.<sup>8</sup>

Although art, religion, and philosophy have as their content the absolute, art differs from religion and philosophy in that its medium is a sensuous one and not a conceptual one. Michael Inwood explains this difference:

... the content and purpose of art and philosophy, specified in one way, are the same: their content is the absolute, and their purpose is to reveal it. But, specified in another way, they differ: the content of art is a sensory vision of the absolute, and its purpose is to express such a vision, while the content of philosophy is a conceptual account of the absolute and its purpose is to give such an account. Thus art and philosophy may be said to have the same content, since both reveal the absolute; but art is an irreplaceable end in itself, since, unlike philosophy, it expresses a sensory vision of the absolute . . . On this account art is both important, in that it reveals the absolute, and unique, in that it reveals it in a sensory way. But art is in a precarious position, once philosophy (or a religion independent of art) has found its strength.<sup>9</sup>

Having determined that art is a sensuous medium for the absolute and philosophy a conceptual one, we must consider what the possible implications of such a difference may be. For Hegel, the highest activity which human beings are capable of is reason. Hegel believes that only the mind can comprehend the structure of the phenomenal world.<sup>10</sup> Philosophy employs concepts in order to grasp the absolute. Art by contrast, employs the senses. As mind develops throughout history, Hegel

believes that humanity will be less dependent on the senses (and therefore on art) as a medium for reflecting the absolute. In order to understand this, we might think of humanity as ascending out of Plato's Cave, the allegory whereby Plato demonstrates that philosophical contemplation is superior to sense perception for understanding the Forms. Hegel believes that as humanity proceeds dialectically through history, philosophy and not art provides the best medium for comprehending the absolute.

Because philosophy has become superior to art for revealing the absolute, Hegel believes that:

... it certainly is the case that art no longer affords that satisfaction of spiritual want which earlier epochs and peoples have sought therein, and have found therein only; a satisfaction which, at all events on the religious side, was most intimately and profoundly connected with art. The beautiful days of Greek art, and the golden time of the later middle ages are gone by. The reflective culture of our life today, makes it a necessity for us, in respect of our will no less than of our judgement, to adhere to general points of view, and to regulate particular matters according to them, so that general forms, laws, duties, rights, maxims, are what have validity as grounds of determination and are the chief regulative force . . . Therefore, our present condition is not favourable to art . . . in all these respects art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past.<sup>11</sup>

Again, we are presented with a passage which is rich in content and provocative. Clearly, then, there are many questions we must ask of this passage. First, we must examine whether or not it was actually the case that "earlier epochs and peoples" were able to find "spiritual satisfaction" in their works of art. By examining works "from the beautiful days of Greek art and from the golden time of the later middle ages," we will consider whether Hegel is right in asserting that art did reveal the absolute at one time. Secondly, we must understand what Hegel means by "reflective culture." This will allow us to see

whether or not our present condition is in fact unfavorable to art. Lastly, we will be able to see if art is "dead" as Hegel claims, meaning that it can no longer perform its highest function, or whether he has incorrectly diagnosed the condition of art. Hegel is either a) right about art's highest function but wrong about its no longer being able to reveal the absolute b) wrong about art's highest function and necessarily wrong about art no longer being able to do that, or c) perhaps Hegel is right on both accounts. The answer to these questions *will* allow us to evaluate not only the condition of art in our culture, but also our own modern condition.

The classical art of the Greeks was inextricably bound with the way in which they viewed the world. The Greeks used their art as a means for self-expression and social understanding — as a way of expressing the absolute. Through the art of the Greeks, we see that they viewed the world as ordered, logical, and proportioned. Consider for example, three Greek artworks which are representative of the ideals of the Greek culture: the Parthenon, a vase, and a sculpture.

Sitting atop the Acropolis, the Parthenon, a temple dedicated to Athena, is perhaps the most telling of all Greek works. Its perfectly proportioned columns and carefully measured geometric shapes denote the rationality of the Greek culture. As a temple it expresses the importance of religion in their culture. Within the temple, gifts and offerings were made to the gods and goddesses. Furthermore, its height, width, columns, mass, open space, and relation to its surroundings express a sense of order and peace.<sup>12</sup> The Greeks built the Parthenon in accordance with the way in which they viewed the world — as rational and balanced. Therefore, we see that the absolute "character" of the Greeks, was revealed through the architecture of the Parthenon.

Examining a Greek sculpture, we can see the attention to detail with which the sculptors portrayed the human body.<sup>13</sup> Each figure was perfectly proportioned, symmetrical and balanced. The sculptures portray warriors and athletes, a testament to the significance of both war and athletics in Greek

culture (areas in which humans could excel). In examining the sculpture of the Greeks, one can easily understand that man recognizes himself in the world by manipulating and shaping material objects. They saw themselves as warriors and athletes, and as proportioned, ordered, and reasonable people.

Another outstanding form of Greek art is pottery. Vase painting expressed almost the whole range of stories and images that interested the Greeks. Images of men and gods, of violence and happiness, of games and war are among the many subjects the Greeks could contemplate as they ate, drank or participated in religious rituals. Much of our knowledge of Greek civilization and myth comes from these pots.<sup>14</sup> Studying Greek pottery, one is reminded of many scenes from Greek myth. The Greeks explained everything about themselves through the myths. The myths explain their gods, origins, heroes, and values. The Greeks revealed the absolute on a vase.

In their vases and their statues, the Greeks achieved "spiritual freedom." Through their art, the Greeks came to recognize themselves through the modification of the external world. The Greeks created art "in order as *free* subjects to strip the outer world of its stubborn foreignness, and to enjoy in the shape and fashion of things a mere external reality of himself." Like the boy who throws stones into the river, the Greeks saw in their art something of their own doing and, thus came to recognize themselves and their relationship to the world.<sup>15</sup> Their art allowed them to be at home in the "Other." Their recognition of this limitation affirmed their freedom. Eventually the Greek civilization came to an end, but its *spirit* lives on in the work of its artists. These works of art "correspond to the stage of development attained by the human spirit" in the age of the Greeks — to the freedom that they achieved.

The replacement of the Greeks by the Romans, and afterwards the birth of Christianity, represent the dialectical movement which is at the heart of Hegel's system. The dialectic is the immanent transcending in which the one-sidedness and restrictedness of the determinations of the understanding displays itself as what it is i.e., as their negation.<sup>16</sup> The Christian

man necessarily pushes beyond the Greek world view and comes to recognize a Divine Other. Consistent with Hegel's Logic, the Greek world view is sublated in the more advanced concept of Christianity — in God's sending forth Jesus into the world who compels man to recognize the Divine Other. God is still a concrete personality, but in the mode of pure spiritual existence. Christian man has outgrown the Greek view of the world, and is proceeding up Plato's divided line, searching for a higher stage of freedom. We see now that the view of the world which the Greeks possessed is relatively false, not because it is an inaccurate account of man and world at the time, but because at that time man and world were not fully developed.<sup>17</sup> Thus, in a time such as the "later middle ages" during which Christianity was the focal point of one's existence, the Greek view is "false."

During the Medieval period, Hegel believes that art is still capable of revealing the absolute, though it is less suited to expression in art than it was during the time of the Greeks. As a medium for expression in the Medieval period, art falls short of fully addressing the content of the absolute. That is, the absolute has been developed to such a position that art, a sensuous medium, is no longer fully capable of conveying it because truth has become more conceptual. Hegel explains this divergence between form and content:

... the Greek God is not abstract but individual, and is closely akin to the natural human shape; the Christian God is equally a concrete personality, but in the mode of pure spiritual existence, and is to be known as mind and in the mind. This medium of existence is therefore essentially inward knowledge and not external form, by means of which He can only be represented imperfectly, and not in the whole depth of his idea.<sup>18</sup>

The Greek God is essentially material substance because he is "closely akin to the natural human shape." By contrast, the Christian God is only to be known "as mind and in the mind."



Because the notion of the Christian God depends on “essentially inward knowledge,” God can only be represented imperfectly through the external medium of art. Nevertheless, art is capable of unifying spirit and matter to a degree, as Hegel suggests was achieved by those peoples in the “latter middle ages.” The art of the later middle ages forces us to recognize the presence of the Divine Other in the world. As with the Greeks, the limitation posited by the Other helps us to recognize our freedom — our unlimitedness.

One of the most significant aspects of the art of the middle ages is lighting. The artists knew that their medium was imperfect for representing God. Therefore, they sought to represent a divine presence through a somewhat mysterious element — light. One of the characteristic art forms of the middle ages was stained glass. Bruce Cole and Adelheid Gealt explain the effect that stained glass may have had on someone in the middle ages — “like huge softly glowing kaleidoscopes, the hundreds of tiny points of light and color seem to hover mysteriously above the onlooker, who stands dwarfed by the soaring architecture of the church, splashed all in red and blue by the magical light emanating from the windows. To stand in a cathedral illuminated by such light is to feel something of the age of spirituality that brought this art into being.” The element of light was also used in paintings of the time, in order to express the presence of a divine power. Such paintings as *Christ at the Column* by Giampietrino use light in order to symbolize that which is “inward knowledge and not external form.” Light is mysterious and without form. Therefore, it proved to be a useful tool for conveying the equally mysterious and formless divine presence.

Influenced by the writings of St. Francis, the artists in the period of 1200-1400 directed much of their attention to expressing the human side of divinity, primarily through Jesus and the Virgin Mary. Artists such as Giotto created works in which Christ had become more like the worshippers. Like the worshippers, Christ is a human being who has lived and died, but who will be reborn. Giotto's *Ognissanti Madonna*, *Lamentation Over Christ*, and the *Arena Chapel* in Padua all portray stories

that relate directly to the observer and to his world. Giotto was creating paintings that aided the observer in attaining a certain view of Christianity — that Christ be seen as human. Through his painting, Giotto presents the stage of the absolute attained by the Medievals — the human aspect of Christianity.

The age of the Greeks and the golden time of the later middle ages were favorable to the highest function of art — that art which revealed the absolute. However, Hegel believes that the “reflective” nature of our culture today is not favorable to art serving its highest function because the concepts of today’s society have outgrown the sensuous medium of art. There is a divergence between form and content. The absolute has become the property of the mind and, thus, Hegel contends that the art of today can no longer reveal the absolute — it is “dead.” He says, “art is, and remains for us, on the side of its highest destiny, a thing of the past.”<sup>19</sup> What does Hegel mean when he says that our culture is a reflective one?

... this justification consists generally in reclaiming the content of this present world in all its determinacy for our thinking cognition — instead of letting the matter end simply with the abstract faith that God created and governs the world. Man has realized the finitude of abstract faith. Thus, man necessarily begins to ask the question “why?” that the religious consciousness does not recognize.<sup>20</sup>

Our culture is reflective because it is one that critically questions. In the reflective age, man has come to recognize “the finitude of abstract faith.” The recognition of this limit forces man to overcome it by *necessarily* asking the question “why?” — the foundation of philosophical thought. Reflective man “adheres to general points of view, and regulates particular matters according to them, so that general forms, laws, duties, rights, and maxims are what have validity as grounds of determination and are the chief regulative force.” One such example is Kant’s “categorical imperative.” The categorical imperative, *developed out of a free and self - determining reason,*

provides a "regulative force" for action. Through the asking of "why?" reflective man asserts his own self-determination and freedom. Houlgate correctly points out that "the basic character of the modern age is thus determined by the modern claim to freedom." This independence is what distinguishes us from the Greeks and those in the latter middle ages.

Hegel claims that the reflective nature of our culture today makes it impossible for art to serve its highest function, the expression of the absolute. He believes that philosophy has replaced both art and religion as the instrument for revealing the absolute. The sensuous form of art is not capable of adequately revealing the conceptual content of the absolute in today's reflective culture. Art and philosophy no longer occupy the same sphere; philosophy has priority. Furthermore, Hegel believes that the replacement of art by philosophy represents a step toward freedom. What will become of art? Can it progress with the culture? Can art capture "why?" Hegel never says that art *dies*. Rather, he claims that art can no longer have the same status in modern times as it had in the cultures of the Greeks and of the Medievals. Art lives on, but how? Is Hegel right to say that art can no longer reveal the absolute? What is the state of modern art?

Before we begin to examine whether the highest function of art is dead in modern times, we might stop to anticipate the possibilities. If Hegel's claims are valid, then we should expect that the art of our culture will not reveal the absolute. However, if Hegel is wrong — if it is true that art is still capable of performing its highest function — then we should expect that the art of our time not only will reveal the absolute, but will do it in a manner that is more free than the art of both the Greeks and the Medievals.

It is my claim that the art of modern times is about freedom. It is often the case that the artist chooses a medium which would not previously be considered as art. For example, almost any object today can be conceived of as art. Consider Marcel Duchamp's *Fountain* 1917. The "fountain" is simply an upside down urinal. Duchamp's brazen action implied that the artist could be the discoverer, if not necessarily the creator, of

art. He predicted correctly that found objects would become a central form of artistic expression in the twentieth century.<sup>21</sup>

Thus, we see that artists are *free to* choose their medium. Would a Greek or Medieval artist ever consider such a method?

Another example of freedom is a painting by Vasily Kandinsky (Untitled) which depicts geometric shapes such as triangles, reverse question marks, and rhomboids in different colors, red, white, orange, pink, black, and blue. These shapes appear to dangle from imaginary strings and seem to float freely upon the canvas. There is no real depth to the painting. The shapes lie flat on the canvas, accentuating the "free-floating" effect. Moreover, Kandinsky chose his colors freely. A question mark or a triangle need not be assigned a specific color as an apple or an orange must. There are no conceptual rules guiding the selection of one color over another. Kandinsky was *free to* employ whatever color he wanted to paint the question mark.

In Irene Rice Pereira's painting, *Sunrise — Sunset*, there is no sun at all. The title refers to no definitive subject matter. The painting contains numerous overlapping rectangles in different shades of yellow, orange, and blue. As with Kandinsky's painting, the rectangles are very flat. They are immediately presented to the viewer with no restrictions. In the paintings of the Renaissance, one of the technical developments was the "perspectival box" which often took the shape of a rectangle. The perspectival box was a visual technique which forced the viewer to focus in on the subject matter. In Pereira's painting, the subject is the perspectival box. There is no other subject matter other than the shapes and the colors. They are *free to* represent themselves.

In Richard Koppe's *Night Shapes*, the geometric figures seem to dangle from the top of the frame. One gets the feeling that if the wind blew through the room that these shapes would blow away in the breeze. Painted with very distinct lines, the shapes are very "stringy." In paintings of previous eras, the painting of lines was used for drawing — for portraying facial expressions, drapery, and body position. In Koppe's painting the drawn lines simply support the shapes and noth-

ing else. They are not being used as an instrument by the artist, but as the subject matter itself. They are no longer subordinate, but free.

Philip Guston's painting no. 4 is nothing but color and brush strokes. The browns, greens, reds, and oranges are applied thickly in waves like a swirling tide. Guston's work shows that he freely applied the paint to the canvas and was not in the least concerned with portraying anything — not even a geometric shape. The work is also of interest because of its lack of a title. The viewer does not need a title to gain an understanding of this painting as they might with Giampietrino's *Christ at the Column*.

The work of Piet Mondrian is perhaps the most expressive of the modern painters. In *Composition in Blue, Yellow, and Black*, we view the ideas and theories he wrote so extensively about. He believed that all painting is composed of line and color and that they are the essence of painting. Hence they must be freed from their bondage to the imitation of nature and allowed to exist for themselves. Furthermore, painting occupies a flat surface and must not be falsified by imitations of volume. Painters must also strive for universal expression through simplified forms. Lastly, the more appropriate the color, the better it expresses universality.<sup>22</sup> Mondrian is not bound by the imitation of nature. He pushes beyond the inadequacy of representation and creates his own rules which he paints on the canvas. Mondrian believes that these rules are *necessary*. The blue, yellow, and black each have their *place* on the canvas. The painting would not express the universal if these colors were switched around. The colors are "imperative" to the expression of the universal.

Freed from the bondage of representational painting, Mondrian and other artists express the absolute reason of reflective man. Many commentators like Karsten Harries have understood this "freedom from" as characteristic of the purely aesthetical function of modern art to which Hegel calls attention. However, these interpretations fail to understand the nature of freedom in modern painting. To understand that modern art portrays the absolute, we must understand the

nature of freedom in modern art. This involves asking the following questions: 1) what are these artists painting? what is the content of their work? and 2) are we as "at home" in these paintings as the Greeks were in theirs?

Recognizing the limitations of the religious consciousness, reflective man increases his freedom and self-determination through the asking of "why?" To understand modern art, is to see it as a manifestation of this "why?" To do so is not to understand modern art as empty formalism; rather, it is to see modern art as expressing the absolute freedom and self-determination of reflective man. Paradoxically, in the prior analysis of modern painting, the lack of subject matter in the painting is the subject matter. The non-representational lines, colors, and shapes are themselves the subject matter. The self-determination of the artist to choose his own medium for expression manifests itself in the seemingly non-representational subject matter of modern painting. For example Mondrian, like Kant, creates his own "laws, duties, rights, and maxims" out of a free and self-determining reason. Mondrian paints the "categorical imperative." These paintings point out that the defining characteristic of our modern age is that we are free to make such laws for ourselves. The divergence between form and content evident in the religious art of the latter middle ages is *overcome* in modern art. Modern art expresses the "universal" through "simple" form.

It is easy to see why some construe the free and self-determining reason in modern painting as negative. But such a view is naive, and reflects an inadequate understanding of Hegel's view of freedom. The freedom expressed in modern art is not "negative freedom." It is not freedom that simply "maximizes individual choice." Modern painters do not practice the unrestricted freedom of choice. Mondrian does not let the paint fall where it may; each color and line is in its necessary place. If the painting is to express the absolute, then each color and line must not stand on its own, but must have a necessary relationship to the *other* colors and lines in the painting. Through these *relationships* of color and line, the paintings express the free will which wills the free will, that which Hegel

conceives of as positive freedom. Through the willing of its own freedom, the free will becomes a truly free will because it wills a content intrinsic to self-determining activity itself. The modern painter expresses the freedom of reflective man as his object.<sup>23</sup> The freedom of the modern painter, then, is not simply doing or choosing what one wishes, but in being a "free will which wills the free will."<sup>24</sup> This is the defining characteristic of modern painting.

Modern man is at home in reason, in philosophy. This is what modern painting expresses. If this is the case, then why does Hegel believe that art is dead? Hegel believes that art is not necessary anymore because philosophy now provides the place where man is at home. It is not because art cannot express the absolute freedom of modern man that it is dead. It is dead because it is performing the same function as philosophy. According to Hegel, art cannot do philosophy better than philosophy can. Therefore, philosophy replaces art. In *Philosophy of Mind*, Hegel makes this clear in the section on "Absolute Mind:"

This science (philosophy) is the unity of Art and Religion. Whereas the vision method of Art, external in point of form, is but subjective production and shivers the substantial content into many separate shapes...Philosophy merely keeps them together to make a totality, but even unifies them into the simple spiritual vision, and then it raises them to self-conscious thought. Such consciousness is thus the intelligible unity (cognized by thought) of art and religion, in which the diverse elements in the content are cognized as necessary, and this necessary as free.<sup>25</sup>

One can see the accord given to philosophy as the unity of art and religion. It unifies the message of art and religion into a "simple spiritual vision." Philosophy raises art to thought. Hegel believes that art cannot stand alone as thought, but that it is "necessary" for philosophy to cognize it. Herein lies the reason that Hegel claims art is dead — it cannot think as well

as philosophy. To prove Hegel's claim inadequate, we must demonstrate that philosophy needs Mondrian.

The cognizing function "which philosophy is, finds itself already accomplished, when at the close it seizes its own notion — i.e. only *looks back* on its knowledge."<sup>26</sup> The goal of philosophy is accomplished when it can look back on history and determine that the absolute is freedom. Philosophy is the cognition of a concrete unity, an understanding of the dialectical stages of freedom throughout history. This is the perspective of Absolute Mind. Hegel claims that this position is attained at the end of history. However, it seems that history does not end, but that the stages of the life of the Spirit continue advancing. If this is true, then a period of development or stage in the freedom of man cannot be understood during its time, but must wait until it is over. Philosophy claims to provide this absolute perspective, but it can do so only at the conclusion of a given stage of development. Hegel explains in the *Philosophy of Right*:

Philosophy in any case always comes on the scene too late to give it. As the thought of the world, it appears only when actuality is already there cut and dried after its process of formation has been completed. The teaching of the concept, which is also history's inescapable lesson, is that it is only when actuality is mature that the ideal first appears over against the real and that the ideal apprehends this same real world in its substance and builds it up for itself into the shape of an intellectual realm. When philosophy paints its grey in grey, then has a shape of life grown old. By philosophy's grey in grey it cannot be rejuvenated but only understood. The owl of Minerva spreads its wings only with the falling of the dusk.<sup>26</sup>

Philosophy provides an absolute perspective "when it paints its grey in grey," at the end of a time. If it is the case that philosophy appears too late to provide the perspective from



which to perceive an age, then how can we understand who we are *during* the "process of formation," before actuality is mature? Philosophy unifies the content of art and religion at the end of time — expressing the absolute perspective. However, if philosophy is able to provide this perspective, it must have art and religion to unify. Art, therefore, is necessary for philosophy to achieve absolute mind. Art is the precursor to philosophy for the expression of the absolute.

We have reached the goal of this discussion — an understanding of ourselves through the philosophy of Hegel. We have *pushed beyond* Hegel's own conception of art's function in modern times. Moreover, this understanding was achieved on Hegel's own terms. That is, Hegel's ideas are *sublated* in this more adequate concept — true to his conception of the dialectic. This very achievement proves that philosophy can only understand an age after it has passed. As evidenced here, philosophy provides the perspective from which to understand modern art. Philosophy is able to achieve this perspective only because the modern age has passed. We are currently in the grips of the post-modern age, which many philosophers like Lyotard are attempting to define. Ultimately, they should realize that a definition cannot be applied "until the falling of the dusk" of the post-modern age. If we want to understand who we are during the "process of formation," then we should let the artist, who stands "at the apex of the triangle," lead the way.<sup>28</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

1 Stephen Houlgate, *Freedom, Truth, and History*: An Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy, (New York: Routledge 1991), p. 4.

2 Georg Wilhelm Hegel, trans. Bernard Bosanquet, *Introductory Lectures on Aesthetics*, (London: Penguin Books 1993) p. 9.

3 Ibid. p. 9.

4 Houlgate p. 27.

5 Ibid p. 16.

6 Ibid p. 26.

- 7 Michael Inwood, from the Introduction to Hegel's *Lectures on Aesthetics*, p. 25.
- 8 Georg Wilhelm Hegel, trans. A.V. Miller, *Philosophy of Mind*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1971), p. 24.
- 9 Inwood p. XXV.
- 10 Ibid., p. XXVII.
- 11 Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, p.12-13.
- 12 Cole, Bruce, and Gealt, *Art of the Western World*, (New York: Summit Books 1989) p. 8.
- 13 Worcester Art Museum
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, p. 36.
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- 17 Inwood p. XXIII.
- 18 Hegel, *Lectures on Aesthetics*, p. 78.
- 19 Ibid., p. 13.
- 20 Hegel, *Logic*, p. 20.
- 21 Cole, Bruce, and Gealt, p. 26.
- 22 John Canaday, *Mainstreams of Modern Art*, (New York: Harcourt brace Jovanovich College Publishers 1981) p. 452.
- 23 Houlgate, p. 83.
- 24 Georg Wilhelm Hegel, trans. T.M. Knox, *Philosophy of Right*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1967) p. 32.
- 25 Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, p. 302.
- 26 Ibid., p. 302.
- 27 Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*, p. 12.
- 28 Wassily Kandinsky, trans. M.T.H. Sadler, *Concerning the Spiritual in Art*, (New York: Dover Publications Inc. 1977) p. 6.