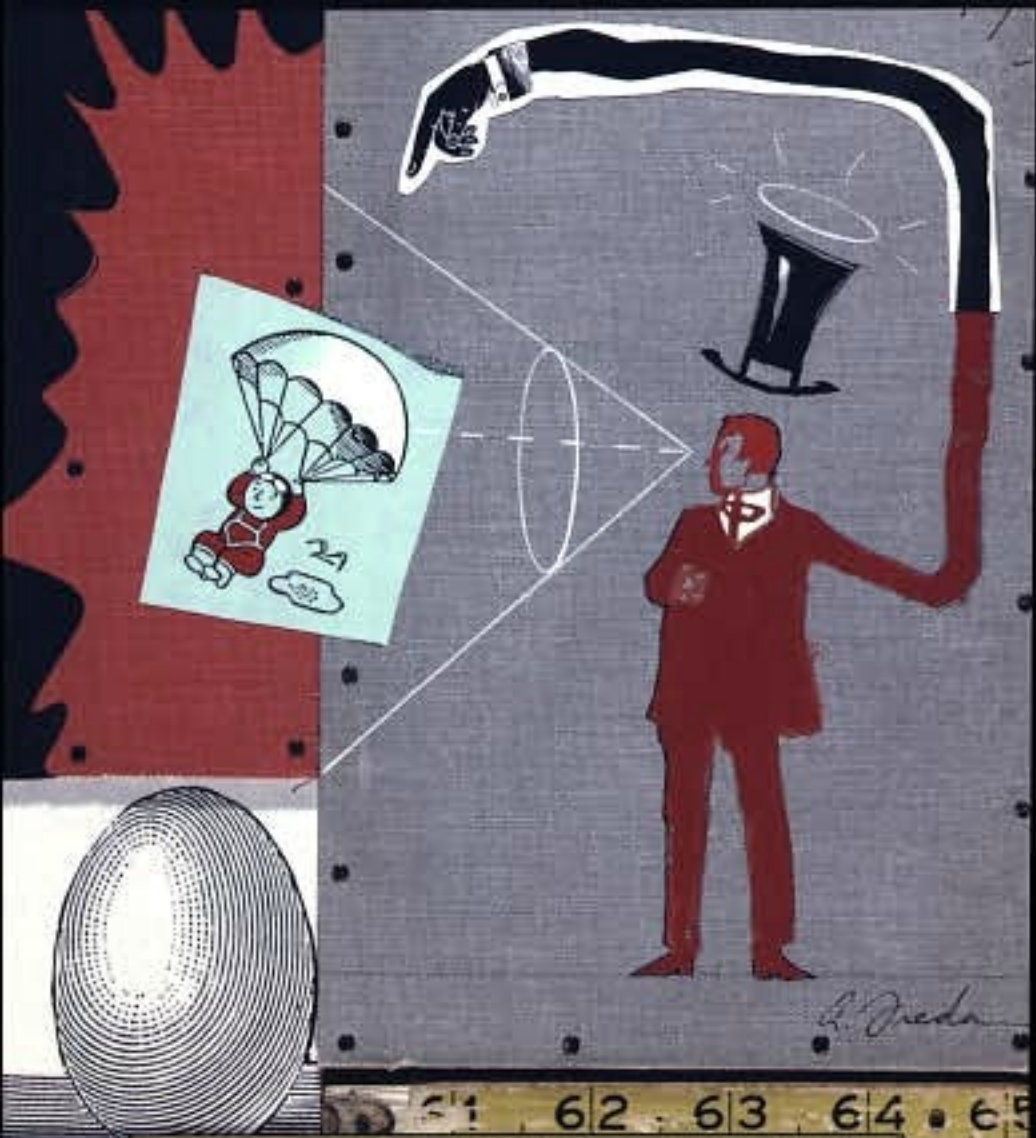


# THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

G. W. F. HEGEL

TRANSLATED BY WILLIAM HASTIE  
WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY CHRISTA DAVIS ACAMPORA



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PHILOSOPHY

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART

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We have reached the end of art, states Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel in *The Philosophy of Art*. Hegel charts the progression of aesthetics in order to show how it reached its full and final development. But that does not mean that fine art is dead to us—far from it. Hegel argues for the significance of the philosophy of aesthetics, which for him ranks higher than the study of nature in terms of aiding our understanding of reality. Accompanying Hegel's thesis are a laudatory introduction by the prominent nineteenth-century scholar and translator W. Hastie, and an extensive elaboration of Hegel's ideas by his student C. L. Michelet.

G. W. F. HEGEL

Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, the son of an official in the government of Württemberg, was born in Stuttgart on August 27, 1770. While at seminary in Tübingen, he met German poet Holderlin and Friedrich Schelling, who would have a profound influence on Hegel's philosophy. He published his first major work, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, in 1807. On November 14, 1831, Hegel died of cholera in Berlin, a year after being elected rector of the University of Berlin and four months after having been decorated by Friedrich Wilhelm III of Prussia.

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G. W. F. HEGEL

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EDITED BY HEINRICH GUSTAV HOTH

INTRODUCTION BY  
CHRISTA DAVIS ACAMPORA

**BARNES & NOBLE**  
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## INTRODUCTION

*THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART* CONTAINS THE MOST CONCISE STATEMENT OF Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's shocking thesis, still debated today: that we have reached the end of art. Hegel charts the progression of art in order to show how it reached its full and final development. But that does not mean that art is dead to us—far from it. Hegel argues for the significance of the philosophy of art, which for him ranks higher than the study of nature in terms of aiding our understanding of reality. Accompanying Hegel's overview of his science of aesthetics are a laudatory introduction by the prominent nineteenth-century scholar and translator W. Hastie and an extensive elaboration of Hegel's ideas by his student C. L. Michelet.

Born to a family with prominent ties to the government, Hegel (1770–1831) lived during a momentous time—revolution, revolt, and resistance swept across Europe and throughout many of the European colonies. His interests in human progress and freedom were indubitably influenced by these events. We consider Hegel to be a German philosopher, but his birthplace, Stuttgart, was the capital of the duchy Württemberg, a Swabian region that did not become part of Germany until after the Austro-German war of 1871. He entered the famous Theological Institute at Tübingen in 1788. This early education in theology is evident of his high regard for religion even after he left it behind for philosophy. He wrote one of his most famous works, *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (1807), while at the University of Jena, where he taught until occupation by

Napoleon's troops in 1806 forced the closure of the university. Thereafter, he worked as a newspaper editor, and a high-school headmaster and philosophy teacher until earning appointments at the University of Heidelberg in 1816 and then the University of Berlin in 1818. In Berlin, Hegel was an academic superstar; the position he held there was the most prestigious in philosophy in the German-speaking world.

Hegel's other works include the *Science of Logic* (1812–1816), *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1816), and *Elements of the Philosophy of Right* (1821). At the time of his death, Hegel had a literary estate including thousands of pages of notes and lecture manuscripts on topics ranging from religion to aesthetics. Hegel's "Introduction to the Philosophy of Art as the Science of Aesthetics," which forms the basis of this volume, is part of that material eventually published as *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik* (*Lectures on Aesthetics*), published in three volumes in 1835, 1837, and 1838.

Hegel was one of the defining figures of German Idealism, an intellectual movement spanning the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that rejected the strict empiricism of early modern philosophy and argued for the possibility of rational knowledge of absolute existence. The Idealists were not simply *idealistic* in the ordinary sense of the term; rather, they thought that it was possible to ascertain the ultimate nature of *reality* by going beyond mere sensory experiences. In other words, the Idealists believed that the rational human mind was capable of forming true ideas beyond merely what the eye could see. We do not *see*, for example, laws of nature, but we do glimpse them by the "mind's eye," so to speak.

Hegel's writings influenced, both positively and negatively, many thinkers who followed him, including Marx, who adopted Hegel's interest in the historical development of consciousness; Kierkegaard, who reacted strongly against Hegel's rationalism; twentieth-century schools of philosophical analysis, which opposed Hegel's metaphysical views; and the Frankfurt school (a group of twentieth-century philosophers, sociologists, and literary theorists who developed what is known as critical theory to be used in cultural criticism), which revived Hegel's historicism.

Central to Hegel's writings are the nature of subjectivity and the character of human consciousness, which have their roots in the critical philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724–1804). Denis Diderot's (1713–1784) *Encyclopédie* (1772), which sought to systematically survey all of contemporary knowledge, particularly the development of science and the mechanical arts, inspired Hegel to consider how the status of knowledge at a particular stage influences how one sees its development. Finally, Hegel shares with early Romantic figures the idea of knowledge having a systematic organic unity, and he is sympathetic to their emphasis on the arts' contribution to genuine knowledge and understanding. In his lectures on art, Hegel claims that art develops along historical lines that correspond with the development of human consciousness; art provides extraordinary insight into the nature of our subjectivity, its needs, and its creative capacities.

It is useful to know how Hegel thinks about the nature of reality, our ability to know it, and the development of mind or spirit that facilitates such understanding. Hegel's term for "spirit" is *Geist*. It is not necessarily a religious idea in the strict sense; rather *Geist* refers to mind, broadly conceived—what we might mean when we refer to "the human spirit." In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel endeavors to provide a description of our most primitive and naïve grasp of the Absolute (beginning with *myth*) to our most comprehensive and penetrating (*philosophy*). We pass through stages along the way—each appearing, at least for a time, to be the definitive way of knowing existence and understanding our place within it. Since such understanding provides the basis for our moral, social, and political relations, it provides the organizational framework for whole forms of life—cultural patterns, intercultural relations, family and kinship structures, and religious practices.

Because each of the stages along the way is incomplete, consciousness eventually encounters what we might call a breakdown of that worldview. There is something that it cannot explain, that it cannot adequately take into account: its *antithesis*. When this happens on a grand or fundamental scale, the very underpinnings of human society and knowledge are shaken. This marks the birth

of a new stage of development: a *synthesis* that preserves elements of both the old view and its counterpoint. For Hegel, history is the working out of these patterns and the transition from one overarching form of thinking to another. In other words, history is the development of spirit as it moves toward absolute knowing (and once that is achieved, at least on this theoretical level, history *ends*). Art is the third stage from the end of the development of spirit, according to Hegel, prior to religion and ultimately philosophy. In the "Introduction to Philosophy of Art" that appears here, Hegel effectively locates the end of art—which is to say the time when art achieves its fullest possible expression of the Absolute and confronts its disappointment or failure to achieve completeness—in romantic poetry.

Hegel thinks that human beings are both conscious and capable of self-reflection—that is to say, we not only have minds, but also have the ability to reflect upon the very nature of mind. We can make *thinking itself* an object of thought. Such reflective activity is, for Hegel, "the inmost essential quality of the mind." Art is a product of human thinking, and this gives it its *spiritual* (or, put another way, *mindly*) quality. Insofar as art is itself a product of mind, it is actually closer to us (*more real* in a sense) than what we ordinarily describe as "nature." Thus Hegel makes the provocative claim that *art is higher than Nature*.

Hegel's main task here is to establish a basis for what he calls the scientific study of aesthetics and its significance. In so doing, he criticizes preceding views of aesthetics that regard art as entertainment, recreation, distraction, or mere mediation between sense and reason. For Hegel, all human beings have a desire to connect themselves with whatever they take to be the ultimate reality or the divine. Art once satisfied this spiritual striving; in it "universal principles are not apprehended merely as laws and maxims, but [. . .] are realized as operating in immediate oneness with the feelings of the heart and soul." The *fantasy* of art conjured concrete images of the height of existence, which we now strive to grasp conceptually through lawful scientific study and universal reasoning. Our connection to what is ultimately real is now explored

and expressed abstractly, whereas art had done this in concrete terms. We now connect with the Absolute by means of concepts rather than by means of representations of sensual experiences.

The logical development of art itself brought about its own end. During the time when art was at its height, it satisfied the basic need that all human beings have to fully understand themselves, the nature of their own existence and its relation to others. But art developed beyond the point at which it could satisfy this need by its own distinctive means. As art increasingly expanded its range of possibilities and means of expression, it became increasingly conceptual. Once this became its chief form of operation, other forms of conceptualization, including religion and later philosophy were able to render concepts with greater precision, clarity, and complexity. Art was still produced, but it was largely conceptual, and once it reached that point it was no longer art but rather religion taking the form of art or, later, philosophy with art's aspect.

The idea that art has reached its end because it has become conceptual is the thesis of contemporary philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto. But Danto is clear that his thesis differs from Hegel's insofar as Hegel thinks there is a necessary logic to the development of art and that development itself has a logical place in the overall development of human consciousness. Danto denies that there is some natural pinnacle of art that has been attained, but he does think that developments of art in the 1960s ultimately brought art to the point that it could go off in so many different directions that there was no longer a single course of development that could be charted. It is the end of there being some discernible *course* (and not that the course of art finally realized its true course and destiny) that seems to mark the end of art for Danto. Some interesting consequences follow from this. For Danto, art is relevant today even after its end because the end of art marks the end of its need for a philosophical agenda—it is freed to pursue a plurality of ends. For Hegel, art is more important than ever before because he thinks a scientific understanding of art will illuminate some of the fundamental structures of mind as such and thus lead us to knowledge of ourselves that is greater than has ever been possible

before. For Hegel, art captures an “essential movement of ideas” whose means of expressing them can be scientifically approached. Thus, there is a “rational necessity to its formations.” Articulating this rational necessity still remains to be done, and Hegel thinks it may satisfy us as deeply as the more naïve appreciation of art did for people in the past.

Because art is *spiritual* or *mindful*, the scientific study of art brings about insight that is more than a deepening of knowledge. Hegel describes it as a “bringing . . . back to itself” a part of itself. For those familiar with Hegel’s conception of alienation in *The Phenomenology of Mind* it is interesting to note that aesthetic development moves in a similar way. In the scientific study of art, the mind “thus comprehends itself in this other form of itself, while retransforming again into thought what was estranged, and thus bringing it back to itself.” For Hegel, the death of art results in our self-alienation, because that worldview is dead to us. But the artistic worldview is not alien to the *nature* of consciousness; rather it is part of consciousness. So the scientific understanding of art plays an important role in bringing a part of us back to ourselves by developing an understanding of the *whole* of consciousness. From that standpoint, prior forms are not seen as wholly different, wholly past, or wholly overcome. The scientific study of art brings about the *synthesis* of alienated art and the power and activity it involves.

Through exercise of the powers of imagination and through extensive knowledge of history, the scientific aesthetics Hegel proposes is supposed to be sensitive to the “psychology of the time.” There is a two-part process to bringing about this work, Hegel claims. First, “The function of this method consists in the aesthetic appreciation of particular works of art, with knowledge of the historical circumstances externally conditioning their production. This mode of appreciation, when made with sympathy and insight, and supported by historical information, is the only genuine method of penetrating into the whole individuality of a work of art.” The second stage involves a process of “purely theoretical reflection, which strives out of itself, to apprehend the Beautiful as such, and to fathom the depths of its essential Idea.”

Specific forms of art are considered as they relate to a continuum of the development of the beautiful in its material manifestations in art. At one end of this spectrum lies the “unspiritual,” “mere natural surrounding of the Divine,” that is that which is not spirit, the material of sensation. At the other end of the spectrum lies consciousness, which “represents the Divine as an inner and conscious realization of the mind [. . .] its subject is the Truth embodied as active and living, in the sense, soul, and spirit of individuals.” The *externality* of the one end of the spectrum is juxtaposed with the *internality* of the other. There is a distinction and movement between the *objective* (external, finite) and *subjective* (internal, infinite) at work in this characterization of the poles of Art, which is borne out in the development of other stages, such as the stage of Religion to which Art leads. But it is not simply a movement from outer to inner or from objective to subjective for Hegel—the development does not stop at the inner. As he describes in his analogy to the development of Religion, one moves from the earthly natural, finite existence to the inner contemplation of God, and *finally* to “the devotion of the worshipping assembly, with God living and moving in the religious consciousness.” The infinite is returned to the finite. The overall process can be characterized in terms of movement from an external concrete particular, to universal, and finally to particularity as the live embodiment of universality—that is, to the universal *concretized*, or made concrete.

Hegel’s curious concepts of the internal and external, the objective and subjective are further illuminated in his account of the development of the specific arts, which remains abstract in the lecture printed in this book with details (albeit with deviations from Hegel’s scheme) provided by Michelet, as noted on the following page. Architecture, as an art, lies at the lower or initial end of the spectrum. Its work involves formation of “external inorganic nature.” “Intellectual relations of Symmetry” abide; nonetheless, it is characteristic of “immediate externality, as a mechanical inert mass.” Fundamentally, it is *symbolical*. (Michelet identifies this stage as characteristic of Asian and Egyptian art generally and offers the pyramids as exemplary. Here matter dominates form.)



As architecture develops to the point that it indicates (or “suggests”) “spiritual reality” as “an unseen life of the soul,” (in contrast with the extended materiality of its raw materials) it approaches sculpture. Thus once architecture recognizes its limits and gestures beyond its practical uses of providing shelter and protection from the natural elements, it reaches its end as art and gives rise to the production of a kind of art that retains its material expression (utilizing some of the very same materials as architecture) but freed to some extent of its practical uses and therefore afforded greater possibilities in terms of what it can express. (Michelet describes classical Greek sculpture as illustrative of this development of art.)

In sculpture, soul is given a corporeal form or expression. (Michelet claims that the height of this development gives equal consideration to matter and form.) In an interesting way, individuality plays an important role here. Whereas architecture has a more general purpose and representative power (Hegel’s example is the temple, which provides a house for the Divine), sculpture captures a kind of individuality that is representative of the spiritual; Hegel calls it “spiritual individuality.” In sculpture, we have the “sensible image of Divine existence.” The distinguishing characteristic of human passion and the great variety of ways in which human existence has its particular forms are further expressible in painting, music, and poetry, which are the next arts that push themselves to the fore. What drives their development is the ability to express human “action and event; and the wide domain of human feeling, willing and failing in general.” Color, tone, and words better capture such action and feeling, which is why these arts eventually predominate over sculpture.

Painting, music, and poetry are considered by Hegel to be unified as constituting an independent “third sphere” of art. (Michelet has a somewhat different scheme that links painting with the other “formative arts.” He ties these developments primarily to Christendom, but claims that poetry, as the art of language, belongs to all people at all times. Dramatic poetry from the Romantic period, e.g., Goethe’s *Iphigenia*, constitutes the height of this art and, since it combines all arts, it marks the height of art generally.) As art

becomes increasingly more particularized, in the sense of exploring the broader and more varied range of human forms of existence and their relation to existence generally, it also becomes more idealized *inward*, in the sense of exploring and expressing the spiritual aspects of existence. Music provides a segue to the inwardness of poetry insofar as it further leads toward a reflective concentration on the subjectivity of the mind as such. “Through [. . .] tones [. . .] the soul sounds forth and resounds the whole scale of its feelings and emotions.” It is interesting to note how Hegel thinks about the character of the progression, because it coincides with his conception of the ultimate goal of human consciousness as such—freedom. As art develops, it becomes increasingly free of physical or material limitations on its possibilities for expression. The evolution of the media allows for greater range of possible expression, thereby greater freedom.

Poetry “completes the liberation of Art” in which the tone of the words serves as a *sign* that “represent[s] definite mental ideas.” Poetry allows for the representation of inner space and time, and reflects “the spirit [. . .] free in itself and bound no longer to the external material of sense for its realization. It presents the mind as expatiating in the inner space and inner time of spiritual ideas and feelings.” Once this happens, however, art has brought about its end since this inner spiritual world is more clearly and distinctly characterized in terms of conceptual organization and structures. The point of Hegel’s “science of aesthetics” is to capture the development that constitutes the realization of this end and to understand it in the broader context of human development as such. It is in this light that Hegel’s more familiar discussions of tragedy take on their significance, since Hegel understood tragic poetry as marking a distinctive transition between what he calls the moral stage of human development (in which case morality is determined in accordance with customary practices) and the ethical stage (in which universal reasoning plays a more substantial role).

This particular edition of Hegel’s lecture has several distinctive features. The text was translated by W. Hastie, who made significant contributions to the appreciation of German philosophy by

English-language audiences toward the end of the nineteenth century. His talent for translating texts with difficult terminology and expressions is also manifest in his editions of Kant's writings. Hastie's exuberant introduction to Hegel's aesthetics, while quaint, offers a richer sense of the dominant themes of aesthetics in his day, and it makes an interesting case for the *realism* of Hegel's *idealism*, an idea that is relevant to the notion discussed above in terms of Hegel's ultimate goal of expressing particularity as the live embodiment of universality. Hegel's lecture is preceded by a brief synopsis by Eduard Zeller. Although not widely read these days, Zeller was *the* source for the history of ancient Greek philosophy for nearly a century. And Hegel's lecture is followed by an elaboration of his views by his student C. L. Michelet, who is credited with (and defamed for) the development of Hegelian psychology and the beginnings of comparative sociology and cultural anthropology. For these reasons, this edition is a historical marvel in its own right that, like art, merits study even after it has been surpassed by later interpretations.

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

IN ENGLAND, THE PHILOSOPHY OF ART HAS BEEN THE LEAST successfully cultivated of all the departments of speculative science. The age of the Reformation was too intent upon its immediate tasks, and too completely absorbed in its great creations, to pause reflectively over the modes of its own artistic working. After a period of uncertain movement and decaying power, the acute and versatile understanding of the eighteenth century, in reviewing its inheritance from the past, did not overlook the productive activity of the emotional nature; but the criticism and speculation of the age of Enlightenment could not rise above its own peculiarly negative and analytical interest. Even the elegant refinement of Addison, the careful meditation of Sir Joshua Reynolds, and the youthful ingenuity of Burke, present but little theoretical insight, and still less appreciation of historical research. Their barren efforts had a natural reaction and counterpart in the mere psychological analysis of the Associationalists, which culminated in Scotland in the pragmatic School of Alison and Jeffrey. With the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, there arose, as in contrast, a deeper feeling for elemental and essential Beauty, born of strong ideal strivings and of tender poetic insight into the harmony and vitality of nature. And, in continuation of this new movement, our own age has been shewing a gratifying progress in the deepening and broadening of its speculative interest, with closer regard for scientific precision and completeness, and with marked freedom and independence in its appreciation and criticism of Art.