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# Hegel

## Volume II

*Edited by*

**David Lamb**

**Ashgate**

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## Hegel on saying and showing

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Knowledge for Hegel is "holistic," in the sense that it's something grasped, not in isolation, but in relation to the ordinary, sensuous modes of cognition out of which it emerges in the long historical process leading natural consciousness to conceptual knowledge, as represented by the progression of shapes of consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's discussion of classical Greek art and religion raises a crucial issue concerning the *Aufhebung*<sup>1</sup> that sensuous thought undergoes in relation to conceptual thought. On the positive side of the *Aufhebung*, Hegel locates our first intuition of Spirit in early Greek religious art and mythology, whose pre-rational, deeper, archaic nature enabled the Greeks to represent to themselves truths about Spirit (God or the "Absolute") in imaginative and poetic terms that transcended conceptual articulation. And with an eye to distilling the speculative content of this intuitive, "immediate" form of knowledge, Science articulates, with systematicity and rigor, the *same* truths which the Greeks had grasped enigmatically and obscurely in their religious mythology. On the negative side of the *Aufhebung*, their grasp of these truths was so unreflective and inarticulate as to make it necessary to be *superseded* in form by the clearer conceptual type of thought exemplified in Hegel's philosophy. Both the preservation and supersession of these truths are absolutely fundamental to Hegel's philosophy, and they cannot, I maintain, be rightly understood or appreciated in isolation from the aesthetic-mythic-religious-historical context from which they originated.

My first task is to point out an apparent contradiction implicit in Hegel's claim on the positive side that this mode of sensuous cognition yields knowledge. My strategy for bringing out this incoherence is to draw a sharp contrast between artistically-embodied truths of the Greek variety and propositional truths of the linguistic variety that Hegel puts such a premium on. I conclude, provisionally, that when artistic cognition is essentially defined in terms of a contrast with propositional knowledge and held to a standard appropriate for propositional knowledge, this invidious contrast

points to a contradiction in calling artistic cognition "knowledge," as Hegel does. My aim, ultimately, is to use this purely negative conclusion as the means to accomplish a positive end.

My second task is to argue, sympathetically, that this contradiction within artistic-religious cognition was not a symptom of a confused or split-mind, but was one of which Hegel was well aware and which he purposely generated. Far from undermining his claims about artistic cognition, I argue that what makes it possible for artistic cognition to undergo the negative and positive sides of the *Aufhebung* are these contradictory aspects. There is a tendency among commentators, however, to emphasize onesidedly the perfection or defects of artistic cognition, or to force these contradictory aspects together in disregard of the fact that their meanings are intended to exclude one another. But Hegel's affinity for the Greeks makes his characterization of their artistic-religious cognition as both "perfect" and defective a prime manifestation of a shape of consciousness containing a balance of truths and defects, which makes it a better suited candidate than, say, Sense Certainty, for bringing out both positive and negative sides of the *Aufhebung*. At the end of this essay, I speculate as to the deeper motivation driving Hegel to accomplish the positive and negative sides at the same time, in particular, the negative task of superseding this aesthetic ideal for which he had a strong affinity. I argue that his motivations can only be rightly understood by connecting them to tensions inherent in the historicist-interpretive practice in which he is engaged.

Hegel's views on the truth content of artistic representation remain remarkably intact across his corpus as a whole. The pre-Phenomenological Jena writings emphasize language, especially oral speech, as the highest medium for self-conscious expression. The *Phenomenology* retains this emphasis on the superiority of signs over symbols in the remarks on the relation of language to pictorial, religious expression in the Religion chapter.<sup>2</sup> These remarks represent Hegel's mature reflections on art and provide the basis for my interpretation. Whatever evolution occurred in his views in the later works, it only amounts to clarifying and expanding the cryptic and extremely compressed aphorisms in the Religion chapter, some of which are abbreviated nearly beyond the point of comprehension. I'll draw on corresponding passages from the *Lectures on Fine Art*,<sup>3</sup> the *Encyclopaedia*,<sup>4</sup> and the two preceding chapters in the *Phenomenology* to generate supplementary material to fill out the remarks.<sup>5</sup> Admittedly, there's a notable shift in emphasis away from language toward reflectivity in the later *Lectures*, but this shouldn't be regarded as a fundamental shift in attitude or a sign that Hegel later discredited what he wrote in the *Phenomenology*. His account in the *Lectures* remains faithful in spirit to his original insights in the *Phenomenology*, and the implicit connection

between reflectivity and language is restored in the passages on language and the ineffable in the *Encyclopaedia*. My remarks in this essay focus exclusively on the *non-linguistic*, plastic artforms referred to in the "Artificer" moment of Natural Religion (PhG §§691–698), and in connection with the most abstract artforms in "Art Religion" (PhG §§699–709). By "representations" of classical art, I'll be primarily referring to sculpture of the human body, but Hegel applies the term more broadly to deeds, events, actions, and human feelings as they are rendered in poetry and art in general. My use of "representation" is not to be confused with "Vorstellung" or religious *Vorstellung* because Hegel speaks of art, not as "Vorstellung" (representation), but as, "Darstellung" (presentation) or "Scheinen," as in, "das sinnliche Scheinen der Idee."

We may begin our analysis by generating an apparent tension between Hegel's two primary claims about art and artistic cognition, namely, that it was both "perfect" and "limited." On the surface, the tension is already built into the fact that the very meanings of the terms exclude each other. Classical art was "perfect" or "ideal" in the sense that it expressed, in inchoate form, deep speculative truths about Spirit, to which subjects had an "immediate" and "certain" access. As Hegel writes of this form of artistic knowledge, "[Self-Consciousness], in the work, comes to know itself *as it is in its truth*" (PhG §693). The Greeks represented themselves in their anthropomorphized Gods, and portrayed the Gods as intimate and interactive with mortals and intelligible to them by virtue of their anthropomorphized traits. Through their human and mythical exemplars, the Greeks came to know the comforting truth that the Gods *just are* what is immanent in humanity's own inner impulses, passions, and powers.<sup>6</sup> Hegel exalts early Greek art, and culture in general, as a period of "beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium,"<sup>7</sup> during which religious art flowered and reached its highest moment of perfection. For the Greeks, religious art was a vehicle for disclosing to them this *knowledge* ("a truth that is a knowing," PhG §720) that the divine and human are one.

Yet, what makes this naïve form of cognition "limited" is that the Greeks were expressing in their work, at the level of high culture, ideas that they were incapable of expressing at the lower level of ordinary language. Hegel writes, "the work at first constitutes only the abstract aspect of the activity of Spirit, *which does not yet know the content of this activity within itself*, but in its work, which is a Thing" (PhG §693). These were speculative ideas that they had never learned or reflected on, and which they could not, even, *in principle*, articulate. Although the Greeks had the concepts, "God," "human," and the "is" of identity, nevertheless, they couldn't articulate the truth, "The divine and human are one," because undergoing the dialectical process of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* is essential to stating this

truth. This truth only "appears trivial to the progressively developing self-consciousness" (PhG §711), but wasn't a simple one to them. To render in richer detail the kind of unreflectivity Hegel has in mind, we will have to nail down the historical referent corresponding to this mode of cognition.<sup>8</sup> Hegel draws a parallel in the *Lectures on Fine Art*, in a passage which I'll quote in full, between the defects of artistic cognition and the conceptual limitations of the interlocutors in Plato's early Socratic dialogues:

Thus this [artistic] activity ... can be compared with the characteristic mentality of a man experienced in life, or even of a man of quick wit and ingenuity, who, although he knows perfectly well what matters in life, what in substance holds men together, what moves them, what power dominates them, *nevertheless has neither himself grasped this knowledge in general rules nor expounded it to others in general reflections. What fills his mind he just makes clear to himself and others in particular cases always, real or invented, in adequate examples, and so forth.* (AT, Intro., p. 40; my emphasis)

The naïve, pre-reflective persons' mistake was to cite particular examples, instead of giving an overarching, general, theoretical definition. They couldn't articulate in propositional terms what they know because their knowledge was "preverbal," not in the sense that they lacked the gift of language. Rather, they could only "point to" (using words) examples that captured their meaning sensuously and nonconceptually. Socrates' interlocutors generally met his requests for a unitary, essential definition with blank incomprehension because the altogether different form of language he demanded to repair their conceptual limitations, one capable of expressing higher essences, was different from the prosaic language with which they were accustomed to describing their ordinary thoughts and actions in everyday life.

But unlike Socrates, Hegel doesn't deny that persons possessing this kind of practical wisdom have knowledge, only true belief. He maintains only that they lacked the conceptual resources needed to formulate, expound, and explain what they know in a form which will satisfy Socrates' requests for a general, theoretical definition in his "What is X?" questions. Just like practical, intuitive persons who *know* practical truths that matter in life, our artistic, intuitive type of persons are said to *know* implicitly and immediately some important truths. But their overall world-view precluded them from possessing the necessary concepts and higher conceptual language to expound what they know in a general, propositional form. And if unreflectivity and conceptual clarity are evils, as they are for Hegel, then this artistic cognition that fosters in an individual only a dim, obscure, inarticulate intuition of the truth ("a truth that is a knowing") is not quite knowledge ("still not the truth that is known"), as in: "That essence ...

which is immediately united with the self is in itself Spirit and the truth that is a knowing, though still not the truth that is known, or the truth that knows itself in the depths of its nature" (PhG §720; cf. AT, p. 104). In a reversal of our expectations, Hegel demotes this ideal form of artistic knowledge to something defective falling short of knowledge, and takes back with one hand what he gives with the other.

This paradoxical construal of representational truth raises a difficulty. Subjects are said to "know" in an intuitive sense something which they do not yet know in a discursive sense. This raises about artistic cognition the same vexing concerns that were raised about Sense Certainty, the form of consciousness that similarly related thought and discursive thinking in a mutually exclusive way. If we followed the logic of Hegel's refutation of Sense Certainty, then we were led to the conclusion that such an immediate, non-propositional form of cognition is not knowledge. This conclusion should generalize to all cognitive claims associated with non-discursive meanings, including those of artistic cognition. I argue in what follows that the thrust of Hegel's own argument should force him to embrace the conclusion that knowledge claims associated with artistic cognition are vulnerable to a similar style of refutation.

A caveat about modelling an analysis of artistic cognition on the dialectics of saying and pointing in Sense Certainty: at first glance, this undertaking is fraught with hazards because Sense Certainty and artistic cognition do not invite comparison in almost all respects. Clearly, Sense Certainty, being the most primitive form of consciousness, doesn't have the complex structure of artistic cognition, which is a more developed shape of consciousness, corresponding to "Force and the Understanding." However, the analogy will be a useful tool for understanding the particular aspect of artistic cognition that we are focusing on, though, of course, it is not expected to capture every aspect of the complex structure of artistic cognition. Not every aspect of an analogy can be expected to carry over coherently to the thing needing illumination; every analogy must break down at some point. But since Hegel's System is a cumulative one, we can understand certain elements of later shapes in terms of elements of earlier ones because nothing of the contents of the earlier shapes are lost (PhG §167). This justification isn't, by itself, sufficient to press home the analogy of artistic cognition with Sense Certainty, because it isn't specific to artistic cognition. Certainly I do not intend a reduction of all the shapes of consciousness to Sense Certainty. The relevant aspect of Sense Certainty that is applicable to artistic cognition is its defect of indiscursivity. Although the Greeks had language, they used their artworks to express what they could not express in language. This, together with the cumulative principle that every shape of consciousness has preserved in it *all* the residual elements of

the previous shapes, makes it methodologically sound to trace back this defect of inarticulability in artistic cognition to an original kinship with its distant relative, its cruder cousin, Sense Certainty, in whom the trait of indiscursivity is most salient.

The chapter that opens the *Phenomenology* is structured around a dual perspective in which Philosophical Consciousness is "testing" Ordinary Consciousness's claims to knowledge by invoking an ordinary, common-sense criterion of knowledge which will be familiar to, and derived from, ordinary cognition. Philosophical Consciousness undertakes to refute the interlocutor, Sense Certainty, in terms it must accept since the standard for evaluating its claims is not something alien imported from the outside (PhG §82, §84). This criterion involves the presupposition that for something to count as knowledge, the content of this knowledge must be able to be formulated or stated independently in propositional terms (in general concepts or descriptive expressions "spoken" or "written down," see the first dialectic of "saying": §§95–102), about which it makes sense to apply the terms, "true" and "false." Or if the object of knowledge is a purely contextual one, then the interlocutor must be able to point to (using demonstratives, or ostensive expressions, or literally with gestures; cf. dialectic of "pointing": §§105ff) what its experience is "of" or "about." In other words, the standard requires Sense Certainty to formulate the content of its claim in terms that might lend credence to its claim to have a cognitive relation to objects which yields the richest form of knowledge.

Now Philosophical Consciousness employs this linguistic standard to run a *reductio ad absurdum* style of argument against Sense Certainty's claim that a greater degree of certainty attaches to its judgments because they are based on an immediate, primordial mode of cognition which makes it receptive to a pure, unique, absolutely singular, and unmediated experience. Philosophical Consciousness doesn't deny that these singular objects and experiences exist, only that it can reduce *ad absurdum* Sense Certainty's claim that such objects can be known through this primordial form of cognition. Now Sense Certainty fails this standard when it tries to name its object or experience or determinately to refer to its singular, absolutely individualized experience with expressions like, "this," "here," and "now." Even when it uses the most minimal demonstratives, it is using conceptually-loaded universals (§§95–102) that implicitly introduce concepts, conceptual distinctions, and an element of mediation that aren't supposed to be involved in its pure, unmediated experience (§§95–102). Similarly, the dialectic of "pointing" shows that there can be no publicly accessible means of determinately referring to the object that Sense Certainty posits.

While Nietzsche concludes from this that language can't reach this

unique, original, absolutely individualized, "unrepeatable x," that all language and thought-forms falsify experience, to Hegel, on the contrary, language is the "truer," for such sensuous objects beyond the reach of language have no truth (PhG §110). This discrepancy between Sense Certainty's knowledge claims and its criterion for evaluating such claims entails the skeptical conclusion that, if our mode of knowing were of the kind that Sense Certainty claims it to be, there would be no knowledge. Hegel doesn't intend to lead us to such a skeptical conclusion. Instead, the absurdity of such a conclusion requires that the subject's form of cognition undergo the appropriate revision to remove the offending impurity that led to self-contradiction in the first place. Language gestures in the direction that such a revision should take by indicating that the real object Sense Certainty experiences is not something immediate, but something with the structure of a universal (PhG §97).

The aspect of the analogy with Sense Certainty that carries over to artistic cognition is that holding artistic cognition to this propositional standard leads to a similar refutation of its knowledge claims. Sense Certainty rules out anything that is not propositionally expressible, and artistic knowledge is precisely something that is not linguistically expressible. For the deep connection at this stage of Consciousness's development between a sensuous object embodying a truth and linguistic inexpressibility rules out the possibility that subjects can articulate their knowledge of truths prior to their sensuous embodiment. All there is by way of a meaning is the sensuous expression, and such a meaning is undetachable from the unique, concrete, sensuous form in which that meaning got expressed. Hegel writes, "Hence, the special mode of mental being is 'manifestation.' The spirit is not some one mode or meaning which finds utterance or externality only in a form distinct from *itself*: it does not manifest or reveal *something*, but its very mode and meaning is this revelation" (Enz. §383).

The matter has been left something like this. Normally, if subjects claim to experience a meaning or to judge something in a certain way, then if their cognitive apparatus is sound and they are not trivially mistaken, insincere, or lying, then all there is to evaluate as "true" or "false" is what they say, and we can't penetrate beyond the surface of their words. But since artistic consciousness lacked the concepts and necessary mediation required to formulate its experiences in propositional terms, the truth of a representation can't be constituted by its assessment of its truth. Hence, the attempt to capture the distinction between true and false sensuous content at the level of subjects grasping a meaning that they can represent to themselves in a verbal description, is out of place. It follows that what the Greeks "said" is irrelevant to describing and interpreting artistic meaning. So, insofar as references to what they "said" can't constitute a criterion for meaning and

understanding, a Sense Certainty-style criterion that required that the content of a knowledge claim be "said" fails. Thus, we must attempt to get behind the veil of words by adverting to a non-linguistic criterion.

When we turn to the alternative possibility that artistic cognition can meet the criterion in the dialect of pointing, we also find that merely "pointing to" (literally, with demonstratives, or ostensive expressions) the art object fails to uniquely determine the full meaning or content of the subject's experience. Again, Hegel's invidious contrast between sensuous representation and a linguistic medium points to the deficiencies of artistic representation over speech in communicating this speculative content. What the contrast between a "thing" ("substance") and language (a "subject") points to is the need for the subject to give a clearer rendering of the thing's meaning in speech:

the work [of sculpture] still lacks the shape and outer reality in which the self exists as self; it still does not in its own self proclaim that it includes within it an inner meaning, *it lacks speech*, the element in which the meaning filling it is itself present. (PhG §695)

Plastic art lacks the precision and articulability of language, which is what makes language a better form for capturing the specific speculative truths Hegel is interested in. While certain subtle nuances and shades of meaning find a better articulation in the medium of sculpture than language, for instance, Laocoön's silent, anguished scream is better at expressing his grief than words, the complex propositions and meanings that Hegel is interested in, the kind that will actualize Spirit, require expression in a correspondingly complex, mentalistic medium. Cold, bloodless stone is too coarse to adequately fix one aspect of Spirit's essence: what is embodied in a living, flesh and blood human being with interior experiences and an emerging self-consciousness:

even when it [the soul of the statue in human shape] is wholly purged of the animal element and wears only the shape of self-consciousness, it is still soundless shape which needs the rays of the rising sun in order to have sound, which, generated by light, is even then merely noise and not speech, and reveals only an outer, not the inner, self. (PhG §695; cf. §697)

The anthropomorphic metaphor of a statue deprived of speech goes well beyond making the obvious point that static, inanimate objects lack the marvelous ability to speak. It makes the important point that, in helpless silence, their meanings are only obscurely expressed and await clarification by a self-conscious speaking subject, who can fully articulate them on their behalf. Hegel refers us to language as the only medium specific to capturing

this inner, spiritual content, for as he says, language just is the self-exteriority of thought (PhG §710).

We have come full circle. Hegel's insistence that, inherent to this self-conscious content is that it can *only* be expressed unambiguously in the particular form that he wants to give it, namely, language, brings us back to the point where we began. We began our refutation of artistic cognition by applying the dialectic of "saying" to artistic cognition, and we saw that the content of representational truths can't be "said." When we inquired as to whether this content could be "shown," the dialectic of "pointing" returned us to our starting point. As in Sense Certainty, this claim that artistic cognition is a non-propositional, sensuous form of "knowledge" should lead to a refutation of artistic consciousness's knowledge claims. For this kind of talk cuts against a propositional standard of knowledge that refers to subjects' understanding and explanation as constituting a general norm for determining their meaning and experience. Therefore, the knowledge claims of artistic cognition are shown to be as dubious as those of Sense Certainty, if we take as our standard a propositional one.

Thus, Hegel appears saddled with a contradiction. The contradiction is between his claim that artistic cognition is a form of knowledge and his propositional criterion for evaluating sensuous forms of cognition. We saw that Sense Certainty's failure to meet this criterion led to a refutation of its knowledge claims. Parallel difficulties in assessing the knowledge claims associated with Sense Certainty and artistic cognition demand that Hegel be even-handed in applying his criterion of knowledge to both forms of sensuous cognition. So to be even-handed in applying to artistic cognition the criterion to which he rigorously held Sense Certainty, Hegel should be led to refute representational truths and to question the authenticity of artistic cognition's mode of grasping such truths. Thus, Hegel is stuck in the strange predicament that such ineffable knowledge does not qualify as knowledge *by his own lights!*

This threat of incoherence is potentially embarrassing, because if Hegel's criterion of knowledge is sound, then his claim that artistic cognition is a case of knowledge lapses into incoherency. But if artistic cognition is genuinely a case of knowledge, then his criterion of knowledge had to fail since it fails to cover all the cases that he wants to count as knowledge. Furthermore, if a propositional standard is an inappropriate one to apply to artistic cognition, then we are left without a criterion for evaluating the correctness, efficacy, or truth of artistic representation. Some other criterion must be invoked, and we would like to know what that other criterion is. This contradiction would seem to point to a deep incoherence in Hegel's thought because it seems to apply with equal force to the mode of cognition underlying the Greeks' ethical actions, as well as finding an application to



their artistic-religious thought. For this form of cognition is perfectly general and also underlies the Greeks' cognitive relation to their ethical and political norms.

This threat of incoherence in artistic cognition poses the following dilemma for Hegel. Either he must dispatch the threat by conceding that artistic cognition is ineffable and so fails to count as knowledge after all. In this case, nothing is wrong with a propositional standard, and it can remain fixed as the appropriate standard for evaluating knowledge. Or he must allow that artistic cognition is genuine knowledge, and that, on occasion, individuals don't quite succeed in expressing all that they mean, and on occasion, even point mysteriously beyond language to unsayables. If so, then our ordinary, propositional criterion requires revision because it fails to cover all the relevant cases.

Clearly Hegel rejects the first horn of the dilemma that denies there are certain truths that transcend conceptual articulation. This doesn't mean he embraced the prevailing Romantic Intuitionism of Jacobi and Schelling, according to which, infinite, divine meanings are conveyed only through immediate feelings and intuitions, and are not teachable to the limited human understanding.<sup>9</sup> Hegel does not think this mismatch between inner experiences and the external expression of them is a sign that language is incapable of expressing all that consciousness grasps or that the truths of artistic-religious thought have the odd property of being utterly subjective, inherently interior, and unlearnable. Rather, he thinks these truths *require* to be expressed. Thus, Hegel's view of the role of language at the level of art is far from a simple interpretation which impales him on the first horn of the dilemma.

Is Hegel's other alternative more promising? The second horn of the dilemma claims that not all knowledge is effable and, therefore, we ought to relax our criterion a bit and not rigidly hold all forms of knowledge to a strict, propositional standard. It's tempting to take this way out of the dilemma. One might argue that we can't identify the criterion introduced by Philosophical Consciousness in Sense Certainty with a standard that Hegel endorses, that is, the absolute standpoint of Science. While Science is supposed to provide such a criterion for testing knowledge claims, at this point Hegel can't help himself to it as a criterion because in the opening chapter of the *Phenomenology* Science still requires proof that it is the sought-after criterion. Moreover, the principle of internal criticism requires that the standard for testing be given in terms accessible to the unregenerated form of consciousness under investigation. So, in fact, it could be argued, what we are getting in Sense Certainty is a standard which is taken from the shape of consciousness under scrutiny, not one that Hegel endorses. Hegel is giving a history of consciousness, and he's describing a

standard of knowledge which covaries with the particular shape of consciousness he is describing at a particular point in history. The standard introduced in Sense Certainty itself requires revision along with Sense Certainty's knowledge claims, and we should expect this standard to change in the process. So it might be argued, we should take an historical understanding of his criterion in Sense Certainty, and we are not getting Hegel's endorsement of what a standard of knowledge, in all cases, ought to be.

But this can't be right. The progression of the shapes of consciousness was written from the standpoint of someone slotted at a later stage in history, at which consciousness has already passed through all of its stages. To such a person, the progression is dynamic and a unitary grasp of all its stages represents a kind of fluid synthesis of his education, the culmination of which can't adequately be expressed neatly in the extremely compressed form of a philosophical theory, but only in the form of a sprawling narrative of the whole history of consciousness. The twofold perspective of the dialogue between ordinary consciousness and Philosophical Consciousness in Sense Certainty was written from this wider-ranging viewpoint: from the point of view of natural consciousness undergoing the process of internal critique, leading it from natural consciousness to the absolute viewpoint, and from the standpoint of one who has already attained the absolute standpoint, who looks on this process and supplies "us" with richer remarks that are not directly available to ordinary consciousness. In this running commentary for "us," Philosophical Consciousness points out the distinction between the claims of Consciousness and what Consciousness is really doing in propounding its claims – and this is reflective activity not available to the Consciousness in question. This activity includes Consciousness tacitly committing itself to a propositional standard for evaluating its claims. Now the fact that this propositional standard is one which is implicit in Consciousness doesn't discredit it in Hegel's eyes because Consciousness is actually a richer entity than it knows itself to be, and its tacit standard for evaluating its knowledge is more than what Consciousness knows it to be. This standard is adoptable by Hegel because, in a sense, ordinary Consciousness's form of knowledge *just is* absolute knowledge. That is, if Science's knowledge is "real," then it has to be identified with the knowledge of actual, existing beings, not imported into his philosophy *ex nihilo*. So if ordinary Consciousness's knowledge claims must be formulated in a linguistic form, then this is also, minimally, a standard for Science. Therefore, Hegel can't dissolve the tension by embracing the second horn of the dilemma, the horn that discards a propositional standard of knowledge.

So far, not so good. Can Hegel avoid the charge of internal inconsistency by threading a delicate middle course that jointly captures essential aspects

of both horns, while denying that either one individually captures the whole truth? Certainly, he didn't change or forget his own criterion to which he holds Sense Certainty by the time he wrote the Religion chapter. Certainly, he was explicitly aware of the contradiction in artistic thought, for he himself analyzes art on the model of language in the passages that I cited from "Art Religion," and he locates the specific defect of artistic cognition in how far pictorial, religious "language" falls short of approximating a more adequate speculative language.

The first step to resolving the dilemma is to avoid attributing to Hegel false premises that will entangle him in what he said in Sense Certainty. Notice that in Sense Certainty, Hegel did not commit himself to the dubious premise that, to count as knowledge, propositions have to be fully articulable by *everyone at all times*, even to the persons holding them. Rather, he's committed to the more defensible premise that all knowledge, if it is to count as knowledge, is fully articulable in principle, and eventually, by *someone*.<sup>10</sup> So Hegel was not presupposing that the Greeks possessed knowledge of the high-powered speculative truths they were expressing in their art. He thought that certain truths were inarticulable by the persons posing them, but nevertheless, counted as a kind of weaker knowledge. This is perfectly consistent with Hegel holding that these truths must eventually be fully articulable by those persons who aspire to give them the status of knowledge. The strict, rigorous, linguistic criterion is the standard to which Hegel holds these persons for whom these truths are a kind of stronger knowledge. He deliberately runs artistic cognition up against this standard that it cannot but fail to meet, in order to make the point that when measured against this strict standard, artistic cognition is not knowledge of the highly articulated, conceptual type available to someone at the end of the process. The looser criterion is the standard he employs at the start of the process to show that the Greeks anticipated the speculative content of his System. Nothing is inconsistent in Hegel employing the strict, rigorous, linguistic criterion of knowledge when he is engaged in the task of running artistic cognition hard up against it to show the degrees of falseness in this mode of cognition which require revision. And there is no inconsistency in employing a looser criterion when he is accentuating the elements of truth in this "lesser" knowledge, which were present from the start and that merit preservation in his philosophy.<sup>11</sup> By employing two different criteria to evaluate artistic cognition, a rigorous or looser one, depending on which of these tasks he is engaged in, Hegel is able to accomplish two things at once: one, to interpret Greek artistic culture charitably in order to justify preserving what truth content is in its pre-rational, religious, and mythical materials. And two, to show that this material contained contradictions that require it to be superseded by the clearer, conceptual medium of his

philosophy. To accomplish the first task, the positive one of showing that salvagable truths are to be excavated from the sediment of this ancient culture's non-conceptual materials, Hegel employs a weak, non-propositional concept of knowledge by which this material may be said to yield truths "that are a knowing." To accomplish the second task, the negative one of showing that this material contained fatal contradictions ("truths that are still not yet a knowing"), he employs a stronger, propositional standard.

Hegel's methodology, then, consisting of both negative and positive strategies, allows him to occupy a position which avoids a *bona fide* contradiction. By showing that he gracefully sidesteps the traditional concepts of truth and knowledge that would lead to the incoherence in the first place, our puzzlement over the incoherence is thus removed. Hegel's position is not an ordinary one of claiming that all knowledge rests on subject's abilities to completely articulate, at all times, what the subject knows in a form recognizable as knowledge. This is a criterion we might ascribe to Plato, but it is not one we should attribute to Hegel. Such a criterion is shown to be too strong because it excludes cases that Hegel wants to allow are knowledge. Like Nietzsche, Hegel denies a traditional, bi-valent notion of truth, according to which something is either true or false, fully known or unknown, highly articulated propositional knowledge or not knowledge at all, all or nothing.

My final point is that Hegel's need to accomplish both positive and negative strategies in his approach to classical art is connected to his response to tensions intrinsic to his role as interpreter of history and other cultures. I will employ Harold Bloom's theory concerning the threat of anteriority as a useful framework for trying to make sense of Hegel's dual strategy. Bloom characterizes the struggle of the "strong" poet against the threat of mere emulation and discontinuity from the past, as one in which the poet actively *redefines* the tradition. My application of Bloom's model is intended to serve only as a useful tool for explaining and understanding Hegel's strategy, not as a psycho-biography.

Hegel's remark on classical art are intended as more than just a charitable interpretation that respects conceptual differences between us and the Greeks; they are a *tribute* to Greek art. In this sense, Hegel stands to the Greeks more in an unequal relation of debtor to creditor than in the relation of field anthropologist from an advanced culture to a more primitive culture, presumptuously trying to make sense of its practices. This task of idealizing, praising, and assimilating the classical ideals, requires that he stand in a passive relation to the Greeks. For Hegel is a "latecomer," in the sense that he comes chronologically after the primary artistic event, and as a mere praiser and beneficiary of its accomplishments may be perceived as standing in a secondary and dependent relation to it, just as debtors stand in

an unequal, passive relationship to their creditors. This threat of exclusion from participating in the impressive achievements of a bygone world-historical community – just from the accident of having been born too late – is enhanced by the disturbing possibility that historical and cultural differences make human beings essentially inscrutable to one another, such that a true conception of an ancient culture's art, texts, and historical materials ultimately isn't available to us. This threatens to underscore the radical differences between us and this ancient culture, whose perfection and "beautiful harmony and tranquil equilibrium" stand in contrast to our present world, rife with dualisms that are tearing us apart. For if such perfection is too remote in time and affinity from our actual world, it can offer us precious little comfort.

Hegel overcomes the anxiety that he stands in a secondary relationship to the Greeks by relating his philosophy in a mutually exclusive way to his Greek predecessors' art in the production of *truth*, reminiscent of Plato's preemptive solution in the *Republic* to the long-standing rivalry between philosophers and poets. In confronting and disarming the great rival poets, whom he deeply revered, Plato makes the desperate move of divesting them of any creativity at all by reducing them to people who mindlessly copy appearances like a person holding up a mirror to nature. This is a strategic response to the anxiety he feels toward the strong, creative, precursor poets whom he seeks to usurp. By making the aggressive move of denying the poets any creativity at all, and thus, eliminating them as rivals, Plato is vindicating the importance of philosophers against the suggestion that they are useless.<sup>12</sup> The sense in which Hegel is rivalling the Greeks in his philosophy is much more benign, and we get no such virulent attack on art based on a deliberately philistine misunderstanding of its nature. However, Hegel is prepared to push to aggressive extremes the principle that subjects only learn what they implicitly know subsequent to giving it a representation. He pushes it to the point of divesting the Greeks of any true understanding whatsoever of their own art, maintaining that the high-powered speculative truths that the Greeks embodied and experienced in their art were lost on them, the very consciousnesses producing it, and that we understand the meaning of their work better than the Greeks themselves. Hegel's relationship to the Greeks was akin to his tragic schoolmate, Hölderlin's relationship, in that he reluctantly, and with great strain, concedes that the perfection of classical Greece was a unique and unrepeatable event in the modern world and he did not long to rive its lost artistic, ethical, and political ideals.<sup>13</sup> In showing that Greek art no longer transmits the highest truths that get transmitted through his philosophy, Hegel resists the suggestion that his philosophy stands in a secondary, superfluous relation to the closed perfection of the Greeks' achievements.

At the level of his philosophy, Hegel is as much actively rivalling the Greeks as passively praising them and assimilating their virtues into his philosophy. Well aware of the dangers of presumption, he acknowledges on the positive side of his strategy his profound debt to, and dependence on, them. At the same time, on the negative side, Hegel is concerned to assert his System as providing the vital link in the chain of historical events, by presenting its truths as continuous with and necessary to realizing the Greek ideal.

Now we are in a position to understand why Hegel needed to employ both a loose and strict criterion of knowledge to accomplish both tasks that he seeks to accomplish. From a sociological perspective, certain tensions inherent in the role of historian and interpreter require him to stand in a relation of *dependency* to the perfection of Greek artistic culture and, at the same time, in a relationship of *rivalry* to the art objects of praise. These two tasks of praising and competitively rivalling the Greeks in his own philosophy are connected importantly to the two tasks mentioned above. What motivates him to undertake the first task, the task of using a loose standard to show that early Greek cultural materials contained ideal truths that ought to be preserved and praised, is that Hegel is still beholden to the Greeks; what motivates the second task, one of employing a stricter standard to show that these truths are inferior to the clearer conceptual articulation of them in Science, is Hegel's need to competitively rival their past accomplishments, as a way of ensuring a favorable reception of his present philosophy on the part of his contemporary community. Hegel's competitive remark, that we understand the Greeks' art better than they understand it themselves, is a strategic response to his anxieties that as latecomer he stands in a secondary, dependent position to the objects of praise. Secondly, it's a response to the threat of interpretive problems excluding a proper understanding of the Greeks' achievements (PhG §753). Against this double threat of exclusion, Hegel's act of revision is to deny that objects have an absolute meaning detachable from the history of their reception by interpreters who come after them. An historical object or event is incomplete, even well after the physical process ends. It depends on a more advanced consciousness than the one producing the object to excavate the deeper, hidden, unconscious meanings that were inaccessible even to the Greeks themselves. Far from being born too late, as ideal interpreter and receiver of what has come before, the latecomer is in a position to "reverse consciousness" of the object's old meaning and actively give it a new meaning. Only this later, more advanced standpoint puts Hegel in a position to actively alter and complete its meaning ("complete" it in the sense of bringing Consciousness to a proper reflective knowledge about it which reveals a deeper meaning than it had before it underwent this process). It is

crucial for Hegel that as a result of the "dialectical movement" we get a "reversal of consciousness itself" (PhG §87), and we get a new kind of knowledge and a new "object" to which that knowledge corresponds:

From the present viewpoint ... the new object shows itself to have come about through a *reversal of consciousness itself*. This way of looking at the matter is something contributed by us, by means of which the succession of experiences through which consciousness passes is raised into a scientific progression – but it is not known to the consciousness that we are observing. (PhG §87)

"Seeing the new object arise from the old" is something only an external observer (advanced consciousness) overseeing the whole process through the filter of Science can contribute because it is not accessible to the historical consciousness under scrutiny. Paradoxically, in this sense of actively *un*dering and "completing the meaning" of the art object, the latecomer is in a position to "come before it." Thus, Hegel reverses the priority of the historical artifact over interpretation by recasting the interpreter's subordinate and possibly excluded role in relation to the object into a reciprocal role of mutual dependency. By building into his theory the notion that it required a lengthy historical process to complete the meaning of classical art, he vindicates the superiority of his later, historical perspective against the suggestion that it is a superfluous, secondary event, irrelevant to the perfection and completion of the primary, artistic event. His idealization of Greek culture amounts to more than just servile adulation. The images of passivity, dependence, and servility that encomium, eulogies, and praise call to mind are contradicted by Hegel's insistence, at every turn, on the importance of Science for giving us the correct standpoint from which to interpret the Greeks' achievements. Ending the *Phenomenology* with a pitch for the pre-eminence of science is more than a bit of swaggering, egomaniacal boasting. Hegel provides the only conditions under which we can appreciate and interpret rightly what the Greeks have accomplished, but only on condition that his own philosophy be accepted as integrated with, and indispensable to, interpreting these achievements; hence, linking ancient and modern, foreign and familiar, dead and living, distant and near. And if Hegel failed to show that his contribution is the continuation and crowning achievement of the Greek aesthetic ideal, then that perfection is a closed one and unhappy modern humanity is cut off from its own history's highest moments.<sup>14</sup>

## Notes

1. This is Hegel's term of art, denoting a dialectical transformation, meaning: (1) to lift up, (2) to destroy, and yet (3) to preserve.
2. G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, hereafter cited as [PhG], trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).
3. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on Fine Art*, hereafter cited as [AT], trans. T.M. Knox, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 10–11.
4. G.W.F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia: Part I, The Encyclopaedia Logic*, hereafter cited as [Enz], trans. T.F. Geraets, et. al. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 1991). *Part III, Philosophy of Mind*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
5. Michael Forster has painstakingly argued that there exist exact correspondences among the Consciousness, Spirit, and Religion chapters, and I will be relying on the precise correlations that he has mapped out, *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, forthcoming). On the exact correspondences between the religion of art and ethical spirit, Hegel writes: "The religion of Art belongs to the ethical Spirit which we earlier saw perish in the *condition of right* or law..." (PhG §750). Hegel treats art, not as having a value *sui generis*, but only as a concrete expression of this general mode of cognition underlying all three characteristic features of Greek culture: nature, ethics, and religion. As Hegel writes, "All issue in works of art" (PhG §240).
6. AT, pp. 433–434, 479; cf. pp. 486, 490.
7. PhG §476; cf. also PhG §462, §463, §700.
8. Hegel's reference to this specific period is not merely an *illustration* of the abstract phenomena in question, but rather this historical example *just is* the paradigm he is describing that is driving his argument. Forster, in *Hegel's Idea of a Phenomenology*, identifies the historical referent of the later stages of the Artificer moment with early Greek Culture. Only the later forms of art in the Artificer moment are relevant for my purposes, not the Persian, Indian, and Egyptian artforms in the Religion chapter, which he argues, are "precursors" of the early Greek artforms. From hereon, my references to "artistic cognition" are to be understood to be relativized to this historical epoch, to early Greek culture, and to refer to the Greeks' sensuous mode of cognizing truths about Spirit expressed obscurely in their artistic and mythical representations.
9. PhG §6; cf. Enz. §446, §447 and "Faith and Knowledge," trans. Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris.
10. Michael Forster made this point in discussion.
11. Michael Forster, *Hegel's Idea*, makes a similar series of moves with respect to concept meaning, as I do here with respect to knowledge.
12. Thus, my account diverges from Bloom's in *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975) in that I extend it to include the classical poets, not just modern poets from Milton onwards.
13. In a letter to his friend Böhlendorff on 4 December 1801, Hölderlin wrote: "...it is also so dangerous to deduce the rules of art for oneself exclusively from Greek excellence. I have labored long over this and know by now that, with the exception of what must be the highest for the Greeks and for us – namely, the living relationship and destiny – we must not share anything identical with them." *Essays and Letters on Theory*, trans. Thomas Pfau (New York: State

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University of New York Press, 1988), #236.

14. I thank Raymond Geuss and Daniel Brudney for commenting on earlier drafts of this essay, and I thank Daniel Garber. Most of all, I wish to thank Michael N. Forster for his acute comments and Olympian forbearance.

## Part VI Religion