

#### **4. FREEDOM AND NECESSITY. AND MUSIC**

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Hegel's idealism holds that even though much of our daily life consists in limited thought and coping behaviors, in reflection on what we are doing, we are logically pushed to think ourselves in terms of how we fit into a larger whole, and that the whole can only be grasped in thought. Yet he also held in a characteristically post-Kantian way that there are ways of grasping that whole in a kind of thought that are not on their surface particularly conceptual. One of those ways is art.<sup>1</sup>

Art is a possible practice because self-conscious primates are also self-interpreting primates, and they thus have an essential interest in determining what they are and what is possible for them. One way of carrying out that project is obviously that of thinking about things and about themselves. However, the basic unity of concept and intuition in such primates provides them with another possibility which art alone actualizes. They may reflect on themselves by constructing an object that embodies a meaning without there being a rule – a fully explicit concept – that is guiding the construction or the apprehension of the object. As substances, we act in ways that are meaningful but which are not carried out according to rules, and as reflective beings, as subjects, we can construct objects that embody a meaning that can be

articulated in a potentially infinite set of ways. The very human practice of constructing works of art makes that possibility actual. In the practice of constructing such works and appreciating them, thought is, as Hegel puts it, “embodied in the beauty of art.”<sup>2</sup>

Hegel’s philosophy of art more or less stands or falls on that supposition, namely, that we can be presented with such meaningful objects whose meaning calls for various interpretations, and whose meaning cannot be exhausted by applying a set of rules. That idea is not new with Hegel. However, what is new is how Hegel relates that conception to his conception of organic self-distancing life.

The interest in constructing such objects is that of constructing individual objects to be sensuously apprehended as having a meaning that in turn calls out for its own explication. Ultimately, what is to be explicated is the meaning of what it is to be an embodied being in time, aware of its own finitude and therefore of its own limits. For the human subject, this has to do with her own subjectivity, of what it means to have an “inner” life expressed in an “outer” form, and thus the basic question animating art is that of what it means to inhabit such a self-conscious life and what it means to lead such a life in way rather than another.

The object that is constructed in art is thus something whose apprehension speaks to this meaning, and the work itself thus has a double role: It expresses the inner in the outer, and what is expressed calls out for an

interpretation of what it is that has been or is being expressed. It seeks to put the inner on view such that it can form an appropriate object of reflection. In putting the “inner” on view in the “outer,” the work of art does not merely put on display, say, feelings and aspirations. It may in fact also do that, but in putting such things on display, it raises the issue of what authority these aspects of life may have and what entitlements we might have in deploying that authority in one way or another.

Works of art, as Hegel notes, can be challenging, entertaining, or even relaxing, but what crucially distinguishes, say, entertainment from art that also entertains is that only the latter raises any issues of meaning (or raises any deep issue about such matters). In particular, art is driven by the need on the part of self-conscious primates to provide themselves with a kind of vehicle for self-recognition, for seeing ourselves as we are, and perhaps also as we might be or even ought to be. Like philosophy, art seeks the unconditional truth about what it is to have a self-conscious subjective life in the natural world – what it is to be such a self-conscious primate – and what kinds of oppositions appear as crucial to the subjective life such that they seem at least to call for some kind of resolution. In Hegel’s own jargon, art, like philosophy, seeks the “infinite,” that is, it seeks what it might mean to aspire to a comprehension of ourselves and the world that ultimately does not rest on givens or immediacies that themselves can no longer be comprehended. Finite agents who are deeply embedded in a natural and

social world want to know where they stand in it and whether they can make any sense of where they are standing.

That art attempts to provide a type of self-knowledge only raises the stakes, since it is a matter of great conflict as to what such “self-knowledge” would be. In particular, art by its way of providing “embodied thought” implicitly asks about the basic issues confronting the kind of self-conscious lives we have.<sup>3</sup>

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If art is a vehicle for self-knowledge of a particular sort, namely, a knowledge of our deepest concerns and where we stand as self-conscious agents in a natural and social world, then music should also offer that kind of self-knowledge. However, music seems unsuited to that task. It is more clearly non-representational than other arts, and it yet it is also linked to emotion and feeling generally, more strongly (or at least as strongly) as are the other arts.

However, music is also distinctive in another sense. In his lectures on music, Hegel makes reference to the fact that going into the details of music also requires going into highly technical matters having to do with scales, harmonies, and so forth, a knowledge of which, he candidly admits, he lacks. However, this turns out to be part of the centrality of music itself and not just

part of Hegel's own self-admitted ignorance on these points. Music, oddly enough, turns out to be one of the most emotionally immediate of all the arts and yet also the art that lends itself most readily to purely intellectual considerations.

Now, to be a self-conscious life is to live not only in time but have the awareness of one's temporality and one's finitude as the structure of one's entire life. So Hegel notes: "The I is in time, and time is the being of the subject himself," and in its being the expression of this being-in-time, we find "the essential reason for the elemental might of music."<sup>4</sup>

What is it for music to express our being-in-time as a mode of self-knowledge and how does this account for the "elemental might" of music? For an agent to be a free agent is to be subject to a law that the agent experiences as a law of her own. As a living being, the agent must do something to maintain itself as an organism. As an organism acts, it acts in terms of its own law, that is, in terms of what is required of it as the organism it is. It acts completely in terms of the form of life it is. However, for a self-conscious organism, what counts as its own law is already an issue for it. Although to be an agent is to locate oneself and to occupy a position in social space, once having become an agent, one can imagine oneself differently in the future even if one cannot in fact be different. Abstractly put, as Hegel formulates it in speaking about music, "the actual I... is nothing but this empty movement of positing itself as other and then sublating this alteration, i.e., maintaining

itself in this activity as the I and only the I as such.”<sup>5</sup> Correspondingly, at first glance, music, at least so it seems, would have to present us with an expression of empty movement that just means what it means. It would be just the movement of positing itself and sublating this positing.

This capacity to abstract oneself out of one’s concrete context – to imaginatively think of oneself as something not quite identical with what one is – is an “abstract” capacity of agency. The “I” can see itself as distinct from any of its actualizations in action or thought, that is, it can see itself merely as the pure subject of experience and action, and for a pure subject, the future is a set of possibilities opening up before it.<sup>6</sup> What fork it takes on its future path will determine once more who and what the agent is, and which of the forking paths is actually open to the agent depends on the specific context and on the very determinate set of dispositions and habits that make up her second nature.<sup>7</sup> This forms a partial, incomplete experience of a type of freedom.

The experience of freedom with regard to these possibilities has to do with how the agent can understand her actions to be proceeding not merely from her character but from a character that makes sense to her – which is a more abstract way of saying which actions can be seen to be guided a law of her own nature and not by forces, internal or external, that seem to be outside of that law. How much in any given action is actually up to the agent is always a matter of contention, but it is also a matter of the utmost importance to an agent.

This kind of characterization remains only abstract. The future is before each agent as a set of forking alternatives, but one never was nor can become or remain such an abstract agent. Whatever it is that one does or does not do, one has both been determined and has determined oneself, and has become something consistent or inconsistent with what one was. One cannot do that as an “abstract” subject. One acts as the “substance” one is – in terms of one’s own second nature and one’s own idiosyncrasies and talents. What one does (even if that amounts to standing pat) thus involves more than the intellectual consideration of forking possibilities. It also involves at least potentially the full emotional life of the individual, of things mattering to her in often profound ways.

The “elemental might” of music is its phrasing in sound of this most basic feature of subjectivity. Music is the art that expresses the pure inwardness of subjectivity and the logic of its motion in time. Now, how exactly music does that is not Hegel’s question. (There is obviously a link between brain physiology and the perception of structured sound as music, but that is not a matter for the philosophy of art.) Although sculpture, painting or literature also deal with this aspect of subjectivity, music focuses more exclusively with what it is to be an agent making sense of herself as being-in-time.

Music is thus also paradigmatically the unity of the abstract and the concrete. It expresses the unity of the subject as a creature holding itself together in time but in such a way that various emotions are called up in

doing so.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, it expresses that form of the inward life as it must express itself externally, in the progress of sounds structured in a certain way. In a musical piece, one experiences a structuring of time that puts on display the kind of structure of time that an abstract subject faces as she stands before a series of forks leading out into the future. With each passing note, a thickness to that flowing life is built up so that at the end of the piece, various forks have been taken, and the music has a shape to it that expresses the shape a subject has as he or she progresses through time. However, how that progress is charted makes a big difference. Is the subject compelled by forces, as it were, outside of her, or is the subject making its own way through the music?

The building blocks of the classical musical art of Hegel's time were the familiar matters of timbre, melody, harmony, rhythm, etc. Each may be used to construct the sense of forward movement, or, at first what might seem odd, to present the inherently forward temporal movement of music as a way of expressing a sense of time stopping or circling in on itself, as in musical works that exploit harmonic means to create a sense of reverie. These are fairly common moves in European music since at least the Renaissance, however difficult they are to execute and however much only the more gifted can actually do them successfully.

In 1810, E.T.A. Hoffman famously claimed that the subject matter of music was "the infinite." Whether or not Hegel was aware of Hoffman's piece, he



would have had to agree, since for Hegel, the subject matter of all art (as also of religion and philosophy) is “the infinite,” that which is unconditionally authoritative for us and which does not demand that we stop at something immediate, “given.” What music presents us with is a reflection on one of the most basic antinomies in human life: that between our being compelled to do something and our having some sway over our futures. Hegel puts it starkly enough:

“... rigorous (*gründliche*) music runs up to the limits of the non-harmonic and breaches that limit, but does so in a way so that from this breach one can return. In the unity of harmony and of melody lies the secret of deep compositions, which calls forth the deepest oppositions of harmony and then pulls back from them. – It is, as it were, the struggle of freedom and necessity which is displayed to us here.”<sup>9</sup>

Music thus presents us with an experience of being-in-time, starting at some contingently chosen point (a particular note, a chord, a mere sound) and developing from that into a piece, in which (in the classical form with which Hegel was familiar) it came to a conclusion that was partly set by the

beginning and the piece as a whole (for example, by its key or by its genre) and in having the necessity of the conclusion compatible with the freedom that the music takes along the various forking paths it follows out. Some of the greatest music gives us an expression, or perhaps the imaginative experience, of what a reconciliation of the opposites of freedom and necessity would be like. It is like the necessity of acting in terms of one's second nature – for example, one's character – yet as always having that character as an object before oneself on which one can act and as experiencing the unfolding of events as following one's own law. Music puts on display in a way suffused with emotion the otherwise abstract idea of freedom as rational necessity being equivalent to freedom as compulsion by rational character (and second nature). The best music, that is, takes us through the experience of both the tension and the unity between “substance” and “subject” in way that demands a kind of reflective thought about the tension and the unity.

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In his lectures, Hegel does not discuss in any real detail a particular piece of music.<sup>10</sup> There is, however, one place where he does discuss an important piece of music without mentioning its name, namely in the section of the *Phenomenology* titled, “Pleasure and Necessity.” There the focus of his discussion is Mozart's opera, *Don Giovanni*, which he saw in concert in 1797 in

Frankfurt.<sup>11</sup> It comes at a point in the book where Hegel is discussing the conditions under which modern agents try to develop the capacity for a certain kind of individualist freedom and the internal problems with such a development.

At the end of the first paragraph, Hegel gives a slightly mangled quote from Goethe's *Faust: A Fragment* (of 1790).<sup>12</sup> The mangling seems to be intentional. In Goethe's version, Mephistopheles says that those who despise reason and science are easy prey for wonder-workers and liars, such that (conditionally put) even if they had not already surrendered to the devil, they are in any event as good as gone. Hegel on the other hand has Mephistopheles speaking of despising intellect and science, and he drops the subjunctive – for Hegel, those who despise intellect and science already have given themselves over to the devil and are necessarily doomed.

It almost goes without saying that there are great differences between the fate of Don Giovanni and Faust. In Goethe's final version, which Hegel could not have known at that time (since it was not yet written), Faust is ultimately "saved" because of his "striving" nature. However, at the end of Mozart's opera, Giovanni is dispatched into hell. Hegel's deliberate mangling of the quotation indicates that he is not speaking of Faust at all in the section but of somebody else: Don Giovanni. The mangling is therefore not a misquote. It is a self-conscious alteration. He is drawing a lesson from Goethe's *Faust* about a different character.

Hegel was not the first to see an affinity between the myths of Faust and those surrounding the figure of Don Juan (Don Giovanni).<sup>13</sup> Both began around the same time (the beginning of the sixteenth century), and both were originally intended as morality tales, offering a kind of warning about excess. In Faust's case, that excess consisted in trying to know too much, and in Don Juan's case, the excess was obviously erotic. The figures appear, that is, at a time when the older certainties about the Aristotelian virtues as being a mean that lies between excess and deficiency were themselves beginning to lose their hold on people's imaginations. (At the end of that line of development lies Kant's complete dismissal of the Aristotelian doctrine of the mean as utterly useless.<sup>14</sup>) The emerging figure of "the individual" in this period of development as claiming an authority both for ranking his own needs and projects above those of others and for putting priority on discovering his own "authentic" needs suddenly makes such excess seem perhaps heroic, rather than something against which we are to be warned. The underlying unease with such figures have to do with the rather inchoate feeling at the time that perhaps excess and deficit are no longer the right categories to express the energy unleashed by individualism. Both epistemic and erotic potential were on the horizon.

"Self-consciousness is desire," so Hegel says at the beginning of the section on self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology*. Desire is the feeling of a lack in an organism (such as hunger expressing a lack of nourishment). However, a

self-conscious organism, who participates in the practices of giving and asking for reasons and who seeks a rational sense for the course of his life, feels a lack in an additional sense and of a different sort. What he lacks is a sense of the intelligibility of his life and his world, or perhaps a dissatisfaction with reasons that run out or culminate in some kind of immediacy, a justification that “just is” and cannot itself be further justified. Hegel calls this object of the feeling of a lack, “infinity.” Ultimately, the “infinite” would be a self-authorizing space of reasons and would be self-limiting. In particular, the feeling of such a lack is brought on not by the immediacy of the kind of intelligibility (or limits to intelligibility) with which an agent lives but by the way in which what counts as ultimate comes into conflict with itself and undermines itself and thus makes being the kind of person oriented by such an “absolute” into an uninhabitable status.

Life itself is of course fundamentally limited by birth and death, but agents seek the “infinite” within it to see if there is any fundamental intelligibility to the finite lives they lead. (A few chapters after “Pleasure and Necessity,” Hegel notes that this desire for “infinity” ends up alienating itself and becomes self-defeating when the desire is supposed to be mediated by the kind of reflective judgment that involves “stepping back” from and “standing above” one’s desires and taking that capability as itself “absolute.”<sup>15</sup>)

What agents seek now is some way to come to terms with this desire and with their own dissatisfaction which will actualize this status of

“individuality.” Even if the older order has not yet given way to the authority of individuality, the demands for a more intense personal experience have come to be at work in it. To this end, the figure of Don Giovanni (Don Juan) exercised both attraction and repulsion for the moderns who were so taken by the myth. What the character seeks is not a self-sacrifice of his other more mundane desires for some religious conception of the “infinite” but a way of carrying out an unconditional program of self-realization as a free, desiring agent. He seeks, as Hegel puts it, the “actualization of rational self-consciousness through himself.”<sup>16</sup>

Behind this lies the historical experience of an ancient failure. That failure lay in the idea that a self-conscious agent could be self-authorizing simply as an organism in the world by acting essentially on the desire to be a master who sets the terms of entitlement for all his servants and who rules over them by force. The failure and the breakdown of the slave-owning societies of antiquity were the existential realization of the incipient conceptual failure of all such forms of mastery and servitude. Yet despite the obvious historical and conceptual failures of such attempts at mastery, the psychological desire on the part of some individuals to exercise such mastery over others never completely went away and probably never goes away. Its conceptual bankruptcy has never eliminated its psychological attraction.

Hegel takes up the modern figure of a “master” – an aristocrat – seeking not just mastery but self-realization as the only way to make freedom real (that is,

actual) in the chapter on “Pleasure and Necessity” in the *Phenomenology*. In essence, the figure of the self-realizing individual at that point in Hegel’s narrative is an individual agent (a “self-consciousness”) who takes himself to be “the essence”, that is, who takes himself and the world to be fully intelligible to his own rational powers, in the sense that for such an agent, there is no longer supposed to be any metaphysical mystery to the world even if there is still much to be discovered about it. A world of physical and social limits but no metaphysically mysterious limits is a world open to the free play of somebody whose conception of himself is that he is to become free, that is, to obey only a law of his own nature as a self-conscious individual and to know that law as an unconditional reason for action.

In such a circumstance, to seek “infinity” requires recognition from another agent. This is not the recognition that the master demands of the slave since such recognition of mastery is compelled, and all compelled recognition must fail to possess the authority that would make the recognition real. (The master always fails because he demands as a condition of his mastery recognition from an other, who, by the very terms the master has set, cannot in principle possess the authority to bestow such recognition.) Moreover, the recognition he seeks is not that attaching to a social office or function that would be mediated by shared social norms. Such recognition as inhabiting a position that one has not chosen for oneself could not count as completely free self-realization, since it would be constrained by more or less external

principles. (Once again, it is crucial to the opera's progression that Don Giovanni rejects the older idea that there is a metaphysically organic natural order that delimits the social structure to which everyone belongs.) Don Giovanni therefore must, as an individual, seek recognition that is freely given, and thus he is a character who must rely on seduction, not compulsion. He must seduce – by playing on the vulnerabilities of the other, bring the other to a point of view at which she gives her consent.

The figure of Don Giovanni thus approximates to what Jean-Paul Sartre later argued are the only three ontological possibilities for that kind of agency (which Sartre identified with agency *per se*.) Either one is doing the determining, and the other is determined, or one is determined and the other is determining, or each is mutually determining and being determined. Sartre called these respectively the stances of sadism, masochism, and love. (To put it in Sartre's version of the Hegelian jargon: One is either subject to another's object, or is object to another's subject, or each is reciprocally subject and object.) The third possibility, love, is deemed by Sartre to be ontologically impossible. For him, just as for Hegel's conception of the "individual" agent seeking the realization of rational self-consciousness through itself, there cannot be any higher standpoint from which one can be both subject and object. Such an agent is one or the other.

Adopting this standpoint, Don Giovanni is therefore a rebel against the mores of his age with their strict duties of class and estates, but he is by no



means a revolutionary. He accepts the social order of the time, but he makes an exception for himself as seeking the expression of true individuality. (In the last act, he even sings an aria praising freedom itself, "liberta.") There is therefore an element of bad faith in Don Giovanni's approach to life. On the one hand, he eschews the metaphysical order that grants him his status as aristocrat, but he sees no problem in occupying that status and demanding obedience from his servant, Leporello. (In turn, Leporello opens the opera with a witty aria deploring the fact that Giovanni is the master and he is the servant, but not expressing any dissatisfaction with a world based on such domination. In the aria, Leporello makes it clear that that he would simply prefer to be the master himself and have others subordinate to him.)

However, as his seductive powers seem to be falling short, and after he has not succeeded in obtaining the recognition for which he strives – as has often been noted, this famous seducer fails in the entire opera to seduce anybody – he turns to raw compulsion to set the stage for his attempted seduction of Zerlina by ordering her husband to leave the scene and ordering Leporello to make sure the husband does not intrude. With that element of compulsion figuring in the background, Giovanni turns to his attempted seduction of Zerlina, which is successful but interrupted by a contingency. The piece that he sings to Zerlina and which they finally sing together is one of the most famous parts Mozart wrote, and it lets us see Giovanni in action. Musically expressed, Giovanni offers a convincing story as there could be for why one

should be doing as he bids, that is, of how he moves somebody from knowing the better but doing the worse to coming to believe the worse is indeed the better. Compulsion moves to what seems – in the Hegelian sense of Schein – to be free choice.<sup>17</sup> He makes a lie seem like the pure truth. His seduction of Zerlina (although thwarted) turns out by the force of Mozart's music to be the seduction of us, the audience.<sup>18</sup> The problematic status of freedom as free choice comes to be front and center of the opera.

From the Hegelian point of view, there is an obvious problem with Don Giovanni's project. He seeks the infinite in the unconditional vocation that he experiences as calling on him to realize his own individuality, and to do this, he must by the seduction of others have those others freely recognize him as being the free individual he feels he is called to be. Nobody else in the opera has such an unconditional calling. The others are to one degree or another limited by each other, their social standing or by their own way of compromising with the way of the world. Only Don Giovanni pursues an unconditional end – his own self-realization as free. Don Giovanni radiates energy against the fixed baroque world around him, even though the energy comes also clouded by his bad faith. (As Bernard Williams has argued, the others may even hold him in contempt, but they are boring without him.) Yet as Leporello's famous aria in which he reads the catalogue of Don Giovanni's former lovers to Donna Elvira, Don Giovanni pursues, as it were, only the bad infinite. The recognition he demands is one that once given cannot be given

again, since that would slowly put limitations on his project, which is to seduce (or “convince”) an infinite number of others. The “bad infinite” is unsatisfactory, since it proceeds only infinitely from one limitation to another. It never achieves a full self-authorization. It merely achieves at best the postulation of some mythical future point in time in which the task will have been completed.

What rules Giovanni are abstractions.<sup>19</sup> Being ruled by such abstractions is incompatible with the idea of a pure, almost Sartrean unencumbered freedom, in which that freedom demands a free but nonetheless deceived recognition from others. Thus, Don Giovanni cannot on his own terms secure the recognition he needs, but instead can only stage-manage it. He must order Masetto out of the room, promise to change Zerlina’s social status, lie to Donna Elvira, blame Masetto for his own misdeeds, and so on. That he does this with otherwise admirable bravado and courage does not undermine its stage-managed character. Like the master of the master/slave dialectic, he pursues self-sufficiency on terms that necessarily undermine it. He is as Hegel puts it, “pure individuality confronting empty universality.”<sup>20</sup> The empty universality at issue is Don Giovanni’s pathos, the deep current of feeling that swirls through his life that defines the character he is: Called to be free as the determinate individual he is, he discovers that there is and can be no content to that conception of freedom. Rather than being or becoming the self-moving, self-sufficient agent Don Giovanni feels he is destined to be, he

instead finds himself progressively hemmed in on all sides by the consequences of choices he has made. As the recognition he demands is progressively removed from him, he more and more resorts to swagger, bluff, threats, deception and sheer bluster to hold off such withdrawal of recognition and to hold onto what little is left of it.<sup>21</sup> (Tellingly, although he is the main character of the piece, he has no reflective arias.<sup>22</sup>) In putting his own concept of himself into practice, he becomes what his concept always was “in itself.” He becomes simply empty freedom seeking empty recognition, one after another, and what looked like freedom turns into necessity. The pursuit of “the bad infinite” cannot lead to satisfaction. If nothing else, it yields finally to recklessness and self-destruction.

The end of the opera has always presented problems, possibly even for Mozart and Da Ponte themselves. Don Giovanni is consigned to hell in the key of D minor (with which the opera begins and to which it continually returns).<sup>23</sup> That is followed by the appearance of a sextet composed of the characters who have been wronged by Giovanni who sing in the sunnier key of D major.<sup>24</sup> They espouse the normalizing values of the world around them and more or less sing of how they are and will be all better off without Don Giovanni’s presence. Shortly after the first performances, that final sextet was almost immediately dropped from the performances, since it was felt to be “false” to the actual world. It seemed far too moralistic and conventional for the very conventional world in which it was staged. The musical force and

musical vitality of Don Giovanni's character throughout the opera seems to put the lie to the sunny "so shall the evildoers be punished" sentiment of the finale.

Giovanni's commitment to the realization of freedom is unconditional. His own character stays focused on what he is (B flat and D major). To be sure, when he is pushed to deception, he changes his music to suit the circumstances (adopting the style of the other, always the tactic of a shrewd flatterer), but he always comes back around to himself.<sup>25</sup> Even at the end, when the stone guest is draining his power away from him and proceeding to cast him into hellish oblivion, Giovanni returns to one of his basic keys (B flat), even as his usual D major is being challenged and upended by the D minor of the stone guest. It is, as Bernard Williams has argued, Giovanni's refusal to be intimidated against fate.<sup>26</sup> Even a supernatural stone guest and the threat of eternal damnation cannot undermine that kind of unconditional commitment.<sup>27</sup>

The moralistic interpretation of the opera, which the final sextet not merely encourages but more or less explicitly lays out, would have one understand Giovanni's unconditional quest for freedom as failure incarnate, even perhaps as a warning to avoid excess and return to the world of the Aristotelian virtues.

This was not how Hegel understood it.<sup>28</sup> Giovanni is a failure, but his failure is not a moral warning. Rather, his failure provokes the thought of rethinking

the way in which unconditional freedom is to be realized. Giovanni's own failure is a determinate negation of the abstraction involved in such a conception of freedom, and what emerges is the pathos of freedom that embeds itself more firmly in the second nature of modern characters. What Mozart did was to display musically that pathos in one of its pure forms and in effect to ask: If Giovanni fails at freedom, how do we succeed? The music is thus not a warning to backpedal on the dangers of freedom. It is to acknowledge its unconditional status for the actualization of self-conscious freedom in the world.<sup>29</sup> Giovanni is not a moral hero – indeed, he is the opposite, even in some cases an abhorrent and swaggering bully – but he is a hero in the progress of the consciousness of freedom. His grand failures set the stage for later success, and for that reason, he continues to be an object of fascination for music-lovers who also seek self-knowledge about the tensions between freedom and necessity in their own lives.<sup>30</sup>

#### §§§§

For Hegel, music presents us with a type of embodied thought in terms of a reflection on human sense-making activity. Although music seems not to be representational at all, it nonetheless makes a claim to truth about the inner life, the subjective as such. Music expresses what is at the core of sense-making activity itself, the idea of a self-conscious life – that is, the life of a

subject and not merely a substance. With music, its form – its pattern of notes arranged with respect to each other as succeeding each other in time – is also its content (the being-in-time of the subjective life as such). Music thus also embodies the contingent fact that it must be experienced in time (unlike watching a play, which contingently must take place over time, but which can be reflectively grasped, say, after a performance as a whole).

Modern music faced a particular difficulty that Hegel began to try to formulate over the eight year period of his lectures on the philosophical significance of the arts. There were enormous social and institutional pressures at work in post-revolutionary European life to think of subjectivity itself as “empty.” In contrast to the idealized ancients, the “abstract principle of the modern world,” as Hegel put it, seems to be the idea of “the other extreme of abstract subjectivity... whether it is still empty or whether to a greater degree it has made itself empty.”<sup>31</sup> Modern life has made itself “empty” in the sense that there is no longer any faith that there is anything essential about its content that purely conceptual thought would be able to articulate. If so, then, so it might seem, modern philosophical thought – the realm of the “purely conceptual” – can at best only make out the most abstract contours of, for example, what it is to be a free agent, to embody a point of view, etc., but it is incapable of providing any more determinate conception of agency or of offering determinate orientation to that life. If so, what then is left to reflection is the purely contingent, the everyday, and likewise what is left to

the individual seems more and more up to the play of circumstances (or to “the gods,” as the Greeks would have put it). If Kant and Hegel were right, and freedom was a form of rational necessity, the problem for modern life was that it seemed to contain very little of rational necessity within itself. Instead, it seemed to be composed more and more of events that, although they may conform to some social scientific laws, are nonetheless, like the laws of nature, both blind to normative concerns and resistant to human attempts to control them. As such, the world of action seems less and less like a field of rational activity and more like a kind of make-do vis-à-vis whatever happens to be coming one’s way.

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G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1969).

<sup>1</sup> Professor Sun Bin's (of Fudan University, Shanghai) comments on an earlier version of this paper gave me reason to rewrite large sections of it.

<sup>2</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics : lectures on fine art*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 60; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik I*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1969), p. 88. ("Dadurch ist im Kunstsönen der Gedanke verkörpert...") Knox translates "*verkörpert*" as "incarnate," which is lovely but gives perhaps too theological a tone to Hegel's phrase.

<sup>3</sup> Hegel notes: "By this, the content of romantic art seems to be narrowed; nature has been de-divinized. Lakes, mountains and valleys, streams and springs, can no longer be interpreted on their own as divine. Also, the great relations of the coming to be of nature, passing away and origination in their universality, the process of all things, has here lost its place. The questions about the "from where," "to where," and "why" of the world have fallen silent and the riddle has been answered." 1823 lectures on philosophy of art, Meiner pp. 182-183. G. W. F. Hegel, H. G. Hotho and A. Gethmann-Siefert, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst : Berlin 1823*, (Hamburg, 1998), p. ccxxiv, 439 p.

<sup>4</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics : lectures on fine art*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 908; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1969), p. 156. ("Ich ist in der Zeit, und die Zeit ist das Sein des Subjekts selber.")

<sup>5</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Aesthetics : lectures on fine art*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 908; G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik II*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1969), p. 156. (“das wirkliche Ich ... nichts ist als diese leere Bewegung, sich als ein Anderes zu setzen und diese Veränderung aufzuheben, d. h. sich selbst, das Ich und nur das Ich als solches darin zu erhalten.”)

<sup>6</sup> In the beginning of G. W. F. Hegel, *Elements of the philosophy of right*, (Cambridge [England] ; New York, 1991), p. lii, 514 p., §5 (p. 37), Hegel says, “The will contains (a) the element of *pure indeterminacy* or of the I’s pure reflection into itself, in which every limitation, every content, whether present merely through nature, through needs, desires, and drives, or given and determined in some other way, is dissolved; this is the limitless infinity of *absolute abstraction* or universality, the pure thinking of oneself.”

<sup>7</sup> Thus, in §6 of *ibid.*, after having spoken of the way in which the subject can abstract itself out of any of commitments and view itself as a center of normative responsibilities that is not committed to any particular thing, the subject must confront the various ways in which it is limited. “In the same way, 'I' is the transition from undifferentiated indeterminacy to differentiation, determination, and the positing of a determinacy as a content and object. - This content may further be given by nature, or generated by the concept of spirit. Through this positing of itself as something determinate, 'I' steps into existence in general -- the absolute moment of the finitude or particularization of the 'I.'”

<sup>8</sup> This is only a partial explication of the task of music. Some pieces also do more than express a subjective experience. They sometimes offer a critique of that experience and sometimes they simply raise certain issues about it. This is especially obvious in various operas.

<sup>9</sup> “Das Harmonische führt sich auf da Mechanische zurück. Die weiteren Töne bestimmen sich durch andere Zahlenverhältnisse. Die Grundverhältnisse machen die substantielle Grundlage, das Gesetz der Notwendigkeit, aus, welches zugrunde bleiben muß... In der Einheit der Harmonie und der Melodie liegt das Geheimnis der tiefen Komposition, welche die tiefsten Gegensätze der Harmonie hervorrufft und von diesen zurückkehrt. – Es ist gleichsam der Kampf der Freiheit und Notwendigkeit, welcher uns sich hier darstellt. Das Hohe ist das Hervorrufen und Bekämpfen des Gegensatzes.” G. W. F. Hegel and A. Gethmann-Siefert, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Kunst*, (Hamburg, 2003), p. xlvi, 389 p., p. 269.

<sup>10</sup> In contrast, there is at least some discussion in his letters to his wife about what he is hearing in Vienna in 1824.

<sup>11</sup> Like many people, I once took this chapter to be about Goethe's *Faust*, since it begins with a slightly mangled quotation from Faust. T. P. Pinkard, *Hegel's Phenomenology : the sociality of reason*, (Cambridge, 1994), p. vii, 451 p. Likewise, in his lengthy commentary on the *Phenomenology*, W.H. Harris marshaled a lot of evidence to support the Goethean-Faustian reading. H. S. Harris, *Hegel's ladder*, (Indianapolis, 1997). However, the idea that it was about Goethe's Faust was thrown into question by Allen Speight, who showed that there is very good evidence that at least part of the inspiration for this chapter and the two that follow it came from a review of three novels that Hegel read as (or shortly before) he was composing this section. See Allen Speight: A. Speight, *Hegel, literature, and the problem of agency*, (Cambridge ; New York, 2001), p. xii, 154 p. I now think that Hegel's discussion is almost exclusively about the opera, *Don Giovanni*, which he saw in Frankfurt in 1797. In his time in Jena, Hegel may well have also heard from Goethe himself or from one of his acquaintances about how much Goethe himself liked the opera. (Goethe had seen it in 1797 in a production in Weimar.) Hegel was always awed by Goethe, and his opinions would have carried a lot of weight with him. It was also around 1797 that Goethe began working again on *Faust*, the beginnings of which he had published as *Faust: A Fragment* in 1790. (This was the only *Faust* by Goethe Hegel could have read at this time.) For the record: Hegel arrived in Jena in January, 1801.

<sup>12</sup> See the discussion in A. Speight, *Hegel, literature, and the problem of agency*, (Cambridge ; New York, 2001), p. xii, 154 p. Hegel's version: Es verachtet Verstand und Wissenschaft/ des Menschen allerhöchste Gaben – / es hat dem Teufel sich ergeben/ und muß zugrunde gehn. (It despises intellect and science / Man's highest gifts – / It has given itself over to the devil, And must perish.)

Goethe's version: Verachte nur Vernunft und Wissenschaft,/ Des Menschen allerhöchste Kraft,... / Und hätt' er sich auch nicht dem Teufel übergeben,/ Er müßte doch zugrunde gehn! (Despise only reason and science/ Man's highest power... / And even if he had not given himself over to the devil/ He would still have to perish.)

<sup>13</sup> See Ernst Osterkamp, "Don Juan and Faust: On the Interaction of Two Literary Myths," in L. Goehr and D. A. Herwitz, *The Don Giovanni moment : essays on the legacy of an opera*, (New York, 2006), p. xxii, 238 p., pp. 19-31. Osterkamp misses the Hegelian connection, even though he does note that Heinrich Heine, in seeing the two as different sides of the same coin, must have been influenced by Hegel

<sup>14</sup> As is well known, Kant says that it is useless to define any virtue or vice in terms of degree, and thus Aristotle's conception of the mean is itself utterly useless. The real difference between vice and virtue lies in the objective principle of the maxim. See I. Kant and M. J. Gregor, *The metaphysics of morals*, (Cambridge ; New York, 1996), p. xxxvi, 241 p., p. 228

<sup>15</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, 'Phenomenology of Spirit translated by Terry Pinkard', (2010), ¶494. Instead of the "self-consciousness is desire itself" of ¶167, we have "self-consciousness... is essentially judgment."

<sup>16</sup> This is the title of the section beginning at ¶347, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> The opera does not come down unequivocally on the issue as to how far compulsion enters into his relations with Donna Anna.

<sup>18</sup> This is a point that emerged in a discussion with Paul Kottman. See also B. Hoekner, "'Homage to Adorno's 'Homage to Zerlina'", in L. Goehr and D. A. Herwitz, eds., *The Don Giovanni moment : essays on the legacy of an opera*, (New York, 2006), pp. 211-224.

<sup>19</sup> "The essence for self-consciousness is that it take its pleasure, and what comes to be the object to that self-consciousness is the further dissemination of those empty essentialities, that is, of pure unity, of pure distinction, and of their relation." ¶363, G. W. F. Hegel, 'Phenomenology of Spirit translated by Terry Pinkard', (2010).

<sup>20</sup> ¶381, *ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> "It achieves its purpose, and it then experiences in that achievement what the truth of its purpose is. It comprehends itself as *this individual essence existing-for-itself*. However, the actualization of this purpose is itself the sublation of the purpose, since self-consciousness becomes not an object to itself as *this individual self-consciousness* but to a greater degree as the *unity* of itself and the other self-consciousness, and thereby as a sublated individual, that is, as *universal*." ¶363, *ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> This is a point made by Bernard Williams. A. B. Williams, 'Don Juan as an Idea', in L. Goehr and D. A. Herwitz, eds., *The Don Giovanni moment : essays on the legacy of an opera*, (New York, 2006), pp. 107-118.

<sup>23</sup> See A. Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte operas : the cultural and musical background to Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 273 p. 15 p. of plates.

<sup>24</sup> Specifically: Donna Elvira, Donna Anna, Leporello, Zerlina, Don Octavio and Masetto.

<sup>25</sup> See A. Steptoe, *The Mozart-Da Ponte operas : the cultural and musical background to Le nozze di Figaro, Don Giovanni, and Così fan tutte*, (Oxford, 1988), p. 273 p. 15 p. of plates., esp. pp. 201-203.

<sup>26</sup> See A. B. Williams, 'Don Juan as an Idea', in L. Goehr and D. A. Herwitz, eds., *The Don Giovanni moment : essays on the legacy of an opera*, (New York, 2006), pp. 107-118.

<sup>27</sup> Thus, Hegel notes “in its own eyes, the cards it is dealt are merely those of an empty and alien necessity, a *dead* actuality,” in a reference to Giovanni’s encounter with the Commendatore. ¶363, G. W. F. Hegel, 'Phenomenology of Spirit translated by Terry Pinkard', (2010).

<sup>28</sup> I do not know if the final sextet was even performed in the version Hegel saw in 1797. Since it was missing from the 1788 Vienna libretto, the odds are that it was not. To be sure, it would be better for this interpretation if it were not. Alas, a priori demands do not rule out or rule in the empirical facts about which version was performed.



<sup>29</sup> I take it that something like this is behind Lydia Goehr's otherwise rather abstract insistence at the end of her essay on "Tristan" and "Giovanni" that it offers a transfigurative experience for its audience but that such transfiguration can be both liberating and controlling, depending on other factors. (On her account, she derives this, more or less, from Adorno.) See L. Goehr, 'The curse and promise of the absolutely musical : Tristan und Isolde and Don Giovanni', in L. Goehr and D. A. Herwitz, eds., *The Don Giovanni moment : essays on the legacy of an opera*, (New York, 2006), pp. 137-160.

<sup>30</sup> The final sextet is thus both the accepted, conventional conclusion (for the opera of the day), but its "unreality," or false note, shows that the conventions have no real answer to the problem that Giovanni has in effect raised. The unconvincing nature of the explanations that the members of the sextet sing for us show that although they themselves may still be attached to the conventions, the conventions are dying. In some the specific musical pieces sung there, it could also be argued that this shows that they themselves are of two minds about what they are singing. That is, Mozart's music shows that they don't fully believe what Da Ponte's libretto has them saying.

<sup>31</sup> "Nur aus sich hervorgehen, in sich sein, ist das andere Extrem der abstrakten Subjektivität (der reine Formalismus), wenn sie noch leer ist oder vielmehr sich leer gemacht hat, - das abstrakte Prinzip der modernen Welt." G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, (Frankfurt a. M., 1969), p. 176.