ARISTOTELIAN VS. SOCRATIC MIMESIS IN HEGELIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Hegel's German did not have the word 'mimesis.' Of course he knew the word in Greek but its transposition into a modern linguistic commonplace was largely brought about by Erich Auerbach in a book, *Mimesis*, written in Istanbul during the Second World War, published shortly thereafter in Switzerland, and subsequently translated into most modern languages. That book, inspired by Hegel's account of Dante's style in the *Divine Comedy*, has taken its place as one of the very few enduring works among the numberless publications in literary criticism that appeared in the last century. One sign of this is that the word 'mimesis' can now be contrasted with 'imitation' in English and 'Nachahmung' in German. This is useful because 'mimesis' in Greek had, from the fourth century BC, two distinct senses, only one of which is captured by 'imitation' or 'Nachahmung.' I shall call this dominant sense 'Socratic' since it was put into Socrates' mouth by Plato in the last book of the *Republic*. The second sense I shall call 'Aristotelian' and it is spelled out in Aristotle's *Poetics* and, perhaps more importantly, in his *Physics*. It is this second, Aristotelian, sense of mimesis, obscure for modern linguistic articulation till Auerbach, which gives us our best clue to Hegel's theory of art.

A principal contrast in Auerbach's *Mimesis*, like that in Hegel's *Aesthetics*, is between 'foreground' and 'background.' He makes this vivid in his opening chapter, "Odysseus' Scar," by contrasting two texts from the ancient epic: the recognition scene in Bk. 19 of Homer's *Odyssey* and Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac as told in the book of *Genesis*. The means by which the recognition of Odysseus is realized is a scar, well known to his old nurse Euryclea. Having been asked by Penelope to welcome her unrecognized guest by washing his feet, Euryclea is about to touch the scar and possibly reveal his identity when the narrative turns to the story of how the scar came to be during a hunting expedition with the young Odysseus on Mount Parnassus. Auerbach observes that many readers, including Goethe and Schiller, have asked whether the turn to the story of the scar is a digression with a 'retarding effect' designed to enhance the drama of Euryclea's discovery. But Auerbach rejects such psychological readings and makes a strong case that the story exemplifies the distinctive character of Homeric diction, in which everything is made maximally manifest. Thus he says that Homeric narrative restricts its focus to the 'foreground,' prescinding from all reference to a 'background' that might explain what is imitated in the 'mere' foreground. In the contrasting text from *Genesis*, Auerbach shows that the story of Abraham and Isaac's passage to the place of sacrifice on Mt. Moriah restricts descriptive detail on the foreground to the minimum necessary to indicate Abraham's absolute and invisible faith in a Yahweh whose power is so great it cannot appear—the Elohist must keep it, like Abraham's faith, in an ominous background. Whether dominated by a foreground or a background, both of these ancient epic modes of narration involve little that could be interpreted on the model of imitation or mimesis in the 'Socratic' sense. Indeed, Auerbach's strongest claim is that these texts are not open to interpretation at all. (A claim echoed, perhaps innocently, in Susan Sontag's "Against Interpretation.")

In his Berlin lectures on aesthetics, Hegel unequivocally rejects the notion that art per se can be interpreted on the model of 'Nachahmung.' In so doing he rejects, as the text makes plain, the notion of art as essentially a matter of Socratic images and originals. Of course Hegel was aware that there is a dimension of art that involves imitation in the Socratic sense. He would be quick to recognize

that Beethoven's sixth symphony includes the imitation of a summer thunderstorm, that the piano in Schubert's 'Wohin?' imitates a brook, and that the piano in Schubert's 'Gretchen am Spinnrade' imitates a spinning wheel. Hegel also knew that the art of painting had Socratically imitative aspects. These he referred to as matters of 'perspective,' a devilishly elusive notion despite its indispensability for an account of the history of painting from the Greco-Roman world as displayed at Pompeii, via Byzantium, through Giotto to Alberti and thence to Cézanne. This account, Hegelian if not directly from Hegel, will occupy the first part of this paper and will illustrate the limits of Socratic mimesis, showing why it is indispensable for a history of art but inadequate for a theory of art. The second part of the paper will develop an Aristotelian concept of mimesis and attempt to show why Hegel's theory of art is essentially a further refinement of this concept.

A. 'Socratic' Mimesis in Painting

The basic problem of mimesis in painting is easily stated. Insofar as the objects depicted are real, their three-dimensionality has to be graphically represented on a two-dimensional surface. The problem may either be addressed or avoided. One of the features of Byzantine painting noted by Hegel is that it avoids the problem. Thus such painting is without 'perspective.' As we see in the opening room of the Accademia gallery in Venice, images are spread out against a gilded or golden background symbolizing eternity, in contrast with which their differences from one another pale into insignificance. Hence there is no need for perspective. One of the topoi for telling the story of painting takes the non-perspectival character of Byzantine painting as its point of departure. Perhaps its most influential exponent has been the Florentine Vasari, whose *Lives* has a narrative guided by the gradual unfolding of techniques for depicting perspective from Giotto in the early *Trecento* to the *Cinquecento* masters of Florentine art. Many of us were first introduced to the history of painting on the model of Vasari's powerful story. That is why our first encounter in the National Archeological Museum in Naples with the wall paintings preserved in Pompeii by the 79 AD eruption of Vesuvius can be, as they were for me, so astonishing. For, in marked contrast with Byzantine painting, these works, however limited their artistic merit, clearly open our eyes to a world of pictorial representation involving a sense of depth or 'perspective.' We know from literary sources that painting was a skill highly developed in the Greco-Roman world. But such painting upon flat surfaces (as opposed to vases) was, until the excavations at Pompeii (alluded to by Hegel), removed from view. What we now have is at least a partial 'window' open to the world of ancient western painting.

On closer view we discover that the foreground/background contrast in the Pompeii paintings pertains to objects within the painting rather than to the painting as a whole. They are, as it were, placed. They involve perspectives in the plural rather than a singular perspective. Panofsky has called this painterly manner of coming to terms with the third dimension 'Graeco-Roman Perspective.' It is, within the limits of my experience, most perfectly exemplified by Giotto in the frescoes in the Scrovegni (or Arena) Chapel in Padua (painted 1303–05). The episodes depicted from the lives of the Holy Virgin and Jesus Christ confront us with figures so palpable that they can only be compared to the remains of classical Greek sculpture (especially the Roman copies of Polyclitus' *Doryphoros*, one placed in Naples and a better one placed more recently in Minneapolis). Hegel, too, celebrates Giotto's unprecedented (and, arguably, unmatched) mastery of color. Of course Giotto did not exploit the

techniques of linear or mathematical perspective. This was first stated more than eighty years after his death by Brunelleschi (ca. 1420), who for the first time proposed using the theory of vision in Euclid's *Optica* to construct a method of graphic representation. So, rather than shaping the plastic contents of space, à la Giotto, the structure of space itself was addressed. I shall return in a moment to the radical consequences of Brunelleschi's proposal as drawn fifteen years later by Leon Battista Alberti. Let us meanwhile pause to consider a little-known theory of perspective originated (so far as I know) by Hegel and which, though he does not explicitly apply it to Giotto, seems to cast some light on Giotto's astonishing achievement.

He calls it *'Luftperspektive'* (*Ästhetik*, II, 219), which Knox[1] renders 'atmospheric perspective.' As so often in Hegel, it pertains to the contrast between the foreground and the background in an artwork. Contrary to the supposition that what is in the foreground is painted more brightly whereas what is in the background is darker, Hegel observes in those painters using 'atmospheric perspective' that "[t]he foreground is at once the darkest and the lightest, i.e. the contrast of light and shadow is at its strongest in what is near at hand, and the outlines are at their maximum clarity of definition; but the further the objects are removed from the eye all the more do they become colourless, vague in their shape, because the opposition of light and shadow is more and more lost and the whole thing disappears into a clear grey" (845–6).

While the notion *Luftperspektive* may facilitate an understanding of Giotto's achievement, it is equally clear that the plastic solidity of things in his paintings points toward a more comprehensive sense of three-dimensionality. It is this sense, identified by Brunelleschi, that Alberti's *Della pittura* (*On Painting*, 1435–6) fully articulated for the first time. It is addressed to painters and Alberti explicitly identifies himself as a painter rather than as a mathematician. He enjoins painters to realize that the surface they work with is a mathematically constructible plane. "They should know that they circumscribe the plane with their lines. When they fill the circumscribed places with colours, they should only seek to present the forms of things seen on this plane as if it were of transparent glass" (*On Painting*, Bk. I, 29). This model of a *vetro tralucente*, a window, epitomizes Alberti's contribution to the theory and practice of pictorial representation, what I have called Socratic mimesis. The key is the combination, perhaps conflation would be better, of the painter's planar surface with transparency. On this model space is conceived as an infinite field, the point of view is chosen ad libitum, and the objects within Alberti's 'window' are rather constructed than represented. All lines perpendicular to the plane, the orthogonals, are so constructed that they point to a geometrically conceived asymptote, the 'vanishing point' of linear perspective painting, 'the background' of checkerboard floors and the like toward which all things constructed are seen to recede. On 'the foreground' of the *vetro tralucente* all objects are presumed to be perceptible by "straight visual rays converging in the eye—so that the visual system can be described as a cone or pyramid having the object at its base and the eye as its apex … ."[2]

1 Hegel's *Aesthetics*, tr. T.M. Knox, Oxford: OUP, 1975, 845.

2 Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton: PUP, 1955, 249.

The eye so conceived is, of course, anything but natural. We see with two eyes, not one. And even for a Cyclops this reconstruction of visual perspective would be unnatural; his single eye is more than a mathematical point. As Whitehead put it, "the exactness is a mistake." But the craving for correctness was so great that this '*Perspectiva artificialis*,' as opposed to '*Perspectiva naturalis*,' swept the field for a generation. Its most successful realization was perhaps "The Battle of San Romano" (ca. 1438–48, National Gallery, London) by Paolo Uccello, 1397–1475, whose enthusiasm for the project was so great that he would, when called to bed by his wife, exclaim "What a sweet thing perspective is!"[3] But the endorsement of '*Perspectiva artificialis*' was short-lived. By the high renaissance painters and thinkers abandoned the quest for correctness, as exemplified by Dürer, who had pursued the project, both in theory and practice, with characteristically trans-Alpine doggedness until he arrived, after his second return from Venice, at the conviction that Beauty is achieved "in many ways."[4] In this spirit, those painters who reached around 1520 what Hegel regarded as the summit of painterly beauty, Raphael and Titian, abandoned the *Quattrocento* ideal of a correct imitation of nature (Gombrich, *Story*, 234).

B. A Hegelian Theory of Aristotelian Mimesis

Alberti's discovery of a way to systematize perspective, however much avoided, could not be forgotten and its implications were profound.[5] In the first place it was among the many late-medieval and early-modern contributions to the demise of the scholastic conception of the universe as finite.[6] On the received view this was also the death knell for Aristotle's physics. But the *Corpus Aristotelicum* includes two quite different conceptions of physics. Both focus upon the question of motion (*kinesis*). One, epitomized in the *De Caelo*, posits a difference between the relatively imperfect rectilinear motion of the sublunary sphere and the quintessentially perfect circular motion of celestial bodies beyond the moon. Aristotle's other theory, much more important but less well known, is quite independent of a geocentric perspective. This theory predominates much of the argument in his *Physics*, *De Anima*, *Metaphysics*, inter alia, and it is the key to an understanding of Aristotelian mimesis. It depends upon seeing the difference between *kinesis* per se and activity (*energeia*) as between different kinds of process. It is only the first of these concepts of motion that is necessarily geocentric and could not survive the passage, in Koyrè's phrase, "from the closed world to the infinite universe." It is Aristotle's second theory of process that Hegel followed as his lodestar in his project of rewinning 'speculative' thinking à la Aristotle for philosophy in the modern world.[7] And, to repeat, it is also this second theoretical (or, in Hegel's words, speculative) conception in which what I have called 'Aristotelian Mimesis' is articulated.

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3 E.H. Gombrich, *The Story of Art*, London: Phaidon, 1964, 183.

4 Panofsky, *Dürer*, 266. Note the echo of Aristotle's "Being is spoken of in many ways," discussed in my "Words and Things" article mentioned below.

5 One significant implication was the design of the photographic camera in the 19th century, a device that continues to shape our sense of seeing. This interesting fact was brought to my attention by Marx Wartofsky in an extemporaneous lecture delivered at Purchase College, SUNY, in the 1980s.

6 See Karsten Harries, *Infinity and Perspective*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001.

7 I have spelled this out in greater detail in "Words and Things in Aristotle and Hegel," *The Philosophical Forum*, Summer 2002, and in "Hegel's Phenomenology and Aristotle," *The Philosophical Forum*, forthcoming.

In one word, an Aristotelian mimesis does not take nature to be a world of objects to be pictured but rather a world of processes that art (*techne*) takes as its analogues. The key notion is therefore that of a mimetic process as opposed to that of a picture, as in Socratic mimesis. It is the Socratic world picture that is inherently susceptible of Albertian/Newtonian infinitization and a consequent world-inversion, a 'verkehrte Welt' like that depicted in chapter III of Hegel's *Phenomenology*.

What, then, is the nature of a process Aristotelianly (and Hegelianly) conceived? Aristotle spells this out most concisely in Book I of his *Physics* and in Book XII of his *Metaphysics*. (It is arguable, as indeed I have argued elsewhere, that the explication of process in the Aristotelian sense is the topic of Hegel's entire encyclopedic system, not solely of his *Ästhetik*.)

Aristotle's basic contention is that a science like physics is scientific only when it proceeds in accordance with principles (*archai*) and that there are just three kinds of science: those that operate with a single principle, those that employ two, and those whose principles are three.[8] If the principle for explaining a process is one, that principle can only be matter (*hule*), that which is potentially other than itself in quality or quantity while remaining numerically identical. Aristotle's principal examples were drawn from Milesian physics (the water of Thales, the *apeiron* of Anaximander, the air of Anaximenes) but any number of other examples could be drawn from theories contending that y is y because it derives from x, that there is a certain identity between an origin and its result. We might call such explanations of process 'genetic,' as in genetic or evolutionary biology, for which explanation is reduced to a pre-existent matter and chance, a non-principled sexual roulette wheel of DNA configurations. In art, as I discuss below, one-principled theories can take the form of a romantic appeal to 'creative genius' as the genitor of artworks.

According to Aristotle, the notion that the explication of natural processes needs two principles was adumbrated by the Pythagoreans but first fully articulated by Plato. What one-principle theories lacked was an account of the difference between the before and after of physical change, the difference between what is determinable (matter) and what is determinate. This latter Plato called form and since his day the principles of matter and form have tended to guide the mainstreams of western thought, making it, in Whitehead's celebrated phrase, a series of 'footnotes to Plato.' Among other things, the form/matter distinction underlies what I have called Socratic mimesis, in which the matter of an artwork is 'informed' by the determinacy it imitates. Of course Aristotle, like many who followed him, recognized Plato's advance in discovering form as well as matter as a principle of physical process. But he, unlike most of his successors till Hegel, also observed that Plato's two-principle theory left an important conflation in the explanation of process, namely, between the material or determinable aspect of the change-from-what and the determinate or form-aspect of that matter. When these, thus conflated, are qua matter set in contrast to form as the determinate telos of a physical process, the determinate aspect of the change-from-what is systematically excluded from consideration. Thus Plato's form was grasped as the determinate form-to-which a process proceeds, but this two-principle

[8] I have expanded on Aristotle's three principles of scientific theories in "The Concept of Climate and the Limits of Mechanism," in Giovanni Gentile, ed., Proceedings, International School of Quantum Electronics, 25th Course, "Observational Database and Mechanisms of Climate," Erice-Sicily, 21–27 November 1998, forthcoming.

theory left out of account the form-from-which a process proceeds, conflating this with the material principle—a conflation sustained in all of the many 'footnotes to Plato' which have constituted most of science in the meanwhile.

Such two-principle explanation may be called 'mechanistic' because (as E.J. Dijksterhuis has shown) a mechanical system is one in which the formal-mathematical dimension predominates over all other determinate aspects of the material phenomena to be explained. This entails that the entities which undergo change have to be conceived as indeterminate and characterless. The consummate, indeed stupendous, realization of this Pythagorean project of explanation was Newton's *Principia*, in which all acceptable principles of explanation are formal-mathematical and all putative 'entities' are reduced to mathematical points, lines, ratios, and the like. This is the project towards which Alberti's 'window,' with its infinite space, made an important contribution. Despite the fact that it has been, till Hegel, largely ignored, Aristotle's correction of the defect in the Platonic theory of principles is breathtakingly simple. He formulates it in *Physics* I, vii. Any process, to be comprehended, must involve two formal principles as well as a material principle. Thus the principles are: (1) a determinate form-from-which the process proceeds, (2) a determinable matter which undergoes the process, and (3) a determinate form-to-which the process proceeds. Hence the most distinctive, albeit mostly forgotten, feature of Aristotelian science: that a fully satisfactory explanation must involve three principles, no more and no less. A corollary of this is that, for a process to be theoretically comprehensible, all three principles must be immanent in the process.

There are two kinds of process that may be grasped as involving three immanent principles: motion (*kinesis*, *Bewegung*) and activity (*energeia*, *Wirklichkeit*). In motion the process exhibits the determinable matter as realizing its potential for being-in the form-to-which. A simple example of this is locomotion or motion from place to place, in which the process is constituted by the passage of the determinable matter from one determinate place to another. Motion is a process that is what it is so long as it is incomplete, so long as the determinable factor, the matter, is only in the process of arriving at its determinate destination. Once having arrived, the motile process, as this process, is over. Hence motion may be defined as "the actualization of a potential qua potential" (*Physics* III, 201a10–11).

We can also think of processes that are what they are throughout the process. These are called activities. An example is the process of seeing. Here the determinable matter, e.g., an eye, is *in* the determinate form-to-which in so far as the process remains the process that it is, i.e., seeing. Seeing is an activity, a process complete from beginning to end (and not to be confused with 'catching sight of,' which is a motion). We may accordingly define activity, in contrast with the definition of motion, as "the actualization of a potential qua actual." This contrast between activity and motion, which is between complete and incomplete processes, is theoretically quite different from the contrast between the completeness of superlunary and the incompleteness of sublunary motion, a geocentrically conceived contrast that could not survive the Copernican revolution.

Aristotle did, of course, recognize that not all de facto processes involve three immanent principles. Like Hegel, he recognized that accidents (*Zufälle*) will happen and, in the world as he conceived it, they happen with considerable regularity. For if, in any process, the form-to-which

principle is imposed externally or, as he puts it, 'incidentally' (*kata symbebekos*), the process will be a case of accident (*automaton*) or luck (*tuche*). But, with regard to things made (*poiesis*), there is a third possibility: the form-to-which principle may be imposed by the guiding hand of a craftsman (*demiurgos*).

It is within the context of this tripartite theory of the principles of process, shared by Aristotle and Hegel, that we can best comprehend Aristotle's oft-cited remark (*Physics*, II, 199a17) that art (*techne*) is a mimesis of nature. In shaping his artifact the craftsman is seen to achieve a mimesis of nature by guiding the process, providing the form-to-which in a manner analogous to the way this process takes place in nature. Hence Aristotelian mimesis is of a process, not, as in Socratic mimesis, of a thing. This, I think, is clear and the clarification of the difference between Aristotelian and Socratic mimesis has been the main purpose of this paper.

We must of course remember that 'art' in this context is a translation of *techne* or craft and does not directly pertain to what we have come to understand by 'art' since Baumgarten in the 18th century contrived the notion of 'fine art.' On the other hand, the rejection of 'art' as mimesis of nature, argued with overwhelming success by Croce and Collingwood in the last century,[9] depends upon the notion that any conception of art as a 'mere' imitation of nature implicitly presupposes that the art in question is a matter of 'mere' craft, thus excluding the moment of 'creativity' characteristic of 'artistic genius.' It is important to recognize that the 'creative genius' to which Croce and Collingwood appeal entails a regress to a one-principle theory in the Aristotelian sense of process. Their presupposed point of departure is 'Socratic' mimesis, a two-principle theory, and they do not even consider the fact that 'Aristotelian' mimesis involves three principles.

Just as Aristotle's theory of causes that are 'incidental' (*kata symbebekos*) distinguishes between natural accident (*automaton*) in the sphere of physical reality and luck (*tuche*), good or ill, in the sphere of human affairs (*praxis*), so too his theory of mimesis distinguishes between the mimesis of a natural process or motion (*kinesis*) and the mimesis of a *praxis*. Although it is patently clear to any reader of the *Poetics* that the mimesis under discussion is of a *praxis*, many readers, apart from Hegel, do not grasp that *praxis* designates a process that is analogous to the natural processes described in the *Physics*.

For Aristotle as for Hegel the processes that obtain in the sphere of human action (*praxis* and *Handlung*) are largely guided by determinacies that have been acquired by an agent over a long course of interaction with others who share an ethical world. Now an acquired determinacy is a propensity to act in a certain way under certain circumstances. Aristotle's word for such an acquired determinacy is *hexis*, Hegel's is *Gewohnheit*. Both roughly translate as 'habit.' So for both Aristotle and Hegel the process of habit-formation is critical for the sphere of human action. Aristotle calls this process *paideia*, Hegel calls it *Bildung*. The key factor in *paideia* for Aristotle is that man is, of all animals, the most mimetic (*mimetikótaton*, *Poetics*, iv, 1448b7), the animal which takes the greatest pleasure in *mimesis*, and the animal whose practical life is most guided by the results of *paideia*. In the *Enzyklopädie* (§§ 409–410) Hegel similarly introduces *Gewohnheit* as what is arguably the most important kind of determinacy in the entire *Philosophie des Geistes*.

[9] The Croce-Collingwood theory, as it is called, has simply dominated discourse in aesthetics for nearly a hundred years.

A principal difference between Aristotle and Hegel concerns the study of the results of the processes of *paideia* and *Bildung*. Aristotle calls this study 'practical philosophy'; the counterpart for Hegel is called the 'philosophy of objective spirit.' Aristotle systematically excludes practical philosophy from the sphere of topics that can be studied theoretically, e.g., from the kinds of process that can be considered in light of the three-principle model outlined above. To put it in the language of Wittgenstein, practical philosophy was for Aristotle 'overdetermined' (*überbestimmt*)—apart from its mimesis, *praxis* is always 'overdetermined' and fragmentary. For Hegel 'objective spirit' is definitely a topic of what he calls 'speculative philosophy,' which he expressly assimilates with Aristotelian 'theoretical philosophy.' And he was fully aware of this difference between his philosophy and Aristotle's. Lecturing on the history of ancient philosophy, Hegel is reported to have said: "Practical philosophy will not become really speculative ['theoretical' in the Aristotelian sense] until we come to consider the modern world."[10]

What Hegel never explicitly mentions—although it is in accord with his reading of Aristotle—is that there is an aspect of practical philosophy in Aristotle that is susceptible of theoretical or 'speculative' comprehension. This is what Aristotle in *Poetics*, vi, calls "a mimesis of *praxis* that is … complete." At first sight this statement might seem to contradict the doctrine, repeated in the *Ethics* and *Politics*, that *praxis* is a process which is per se incomplete. But when we consider Aristotle's argument that the soul of a tragic poem is its plot (*muthos*) and that a plot *is* a mimesis of *praxis*, it is plausible to conclude that it is one of the principal functions of poetry to transform a *praxis*, something inherently incomplete, into a *muthos*, a mimesis of *praxis* which is a theorizable process with a beginning, a middle, and an end. (This reading also happens to accord with the Greek word for theater, *theatron*, a place for seeing theoretically.) On this reading we can also catch sight of another interesting parallel between Hegel and Aristotle, the parallel between Hegel's 'speculative' account of action in the *Geistesphilosophie* and Aristotle's uniquely 'theoretical' account of *praxis* in the *Poetics*, an account which is theoretical only because the *praxis* in question is the mimesis of *praxis*. In Aristotle's *Poetics* we can therefore find an important anticipation of Hegel's theory of action even though we must never lose sight of the differences between Aristotle and Hegel on action. Most of these differences pertain to the condition for a speculative practical philosophy in the passage just quoted from the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, namely '*die Neuzeit*' or 'the modern world.'

It has been observed by some that our two most probing accounts of action in tragic poetry are Aristotle's *Poetics* and Hegel's *Aesthetics*. I believe this is true because both accounts are, perhaps uniquely, 'theoretical' or 'speculative' in the sense outlined above. Indeed, to adapt Whitehead's phrase, we may read Hegel's vast *Aesthetics* as 'a series of footnotes' to Aristotle's terse *Poetics*, extending the argument from tragic poetry to all the major forms of art. In all the arts, a mimesis of action is 'dramatized' within a sensuous medium, of sight or sound, by establishing a situation with a potential polarization of contraries that is developed to the point of collision and then reconciled. Hegel's favorite example of this was Sophocles' *Antigone*, in which the two principal spheres of Greek ethical habituation or *paideia*, the household (*oikos*) and the city (*polis*), are brought to polarity by the radical

[10] "Wir werden überhaupt die praktische Philosophie eigentlich nicht spekulativ sehen werden, bis auf die neuen Zeiten" (Geschichte der Philosophie, Jubiläumsausgabe, 17, 291).

'pathos' of Antigone and of Creon, respectively. As Hegel puts it: "there is immanent in both Antigone and Creon something that in their own way they attack, so that they are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being" (Knox, 1217–18). If Creon's command and Antigone's defiance are, as usual, 'interpreted' morally rather than ethically, their embeddedness in the two-fold, *oikos/polis*, forms of Greek ethical life are lost from view and we are transposed to the modern and moralistic world of Jean Anouilh's *Antigone*, "where evil is punished and virtue rewarded" (Knox, 1215). In such a world there is no dramatic mimesis of action but merely a moral lesson. Hence Hegel's emphasis upon the 'pathos' whereby an ethical identity is radicalized to the point of collision rather than upon a moral intention whose capacity for dramatization is nil. Of course Hegel knew that the ethical world of Sophocles and Aristotle, with two-fold roots in the *oikos* and *polis*, was lost. That loss was a price to be paid for the new world (*die Neuzeit*), epitomized by the new institution of 'civil society' (*die bürgerliche Gesellschaft*), which, at Hegel's hands, was made susceptible of 'speculative' consideration. Given the loss of potentially opposed spheres of ethical life in the modern world, Hegel naturally drew the conclusion that the grounds for a dramatic mimesis of action had been removed and that tragedy was not possible in the modern world.

Before I conclude I must comment on an implication frequently drawn from Hegel's discussions of art in the ancient world, for readers of Hegel have had an almost irrepressible tendency to reduce his theoretical considerations to matters of historical development, to reduce his three-principle Aristotelian theory of process to a one-principle theory of genesis, to make him into what for him would be oxymoronic: a 'philosopher of history.' Of course there are historical conditions for the possibility of transfiguring a mimesis of action in a sensuous medium. But Hegel's theory of art, like his theories of everything else, are systematic, not historical. His disclosures of historical circumstances for the making of art derive from his systematic and Aristotelian theory of art as the mimesis of action, not the other way around. We have already touched upon this with the observation that, for Hegel, painting arrived at its classical style in Italy around 1520 with Titian and Raphael. Let us now conclude with some observations on music.

Hegel acknowledges that he had a 'tin ear' for music, as his examples show, though his grasp of the basic principles of music is sound. Aristotle's discussion of music is largely to be found in his *Politics*, where it is subordinated to educational considerations. For an Aristotelian-Hegelian account of music as an art form the best source known to me are the writings of Charles Rosen, beginning with *The Classical Style: Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven* (1975). He makes us hear that a classical style in sound was achieved during a brief moment of 'tonal stability' following the advent of equal temperament, celebrated but unexploited dramatically by Bach's *Das wohltemperierte Klavier*, which enabled a tonal modulation from melodic materials exposed in a tonic key to its harmonic dominant or fifth, in which these same materials could develop a sense of polarity with the tonic, with the implicit possibility of a dramatic return to and reconciliation with the tonic. One of the means to this end was the invention by Haydn, in his Opus 33 'Russian Quartets' (1781), of 'classical counterpoint,' whereby the baroque technique of a basso continuo and accompaniment to a melodic voice or instrument was transformed into seamless handing of the melody line from one instrument to another. Thus all musical forces,

whether a quartet or a symphonic ensemble, could be integrated into a unitary drama, with a tonic/dominant polarity analogous to the *oikos/polis* polarity in classical tragedy.

The analogy between the demise of classical dramatic poetry and classical music is instructive because, once the analogy is grasped, the musical case is easier to explain. For the case of dramatic poetry one would need a somewhat detailed exposition of Aristotle's practical philosophy and Hegel's philosophy of objective spirit. But, as Max Weber[11] has shown, the rational and irrational bases of western music can be stated quite simply. They are analogous to the incommensurability between the sides and the diagonal of a square, captured for a square by the famous Pythagorean theorem and challenged, until recently demonstrated for all powers greater than two, in a long-sought proof of Fermat's last theorem. In short, just as the Pythagorean theorem showed an unexpected albeit limited harmony between geometry and arithmetic, the Pythagoreans also demonstrated an unexpected and also limited correlation between arithmetical and sonic intervals. Who could have guessed, what we now naively presuppose, the correlation between the most perfect consonance, the octaval interval, and the arithmetical ratio of 2 to 1? That the tonal intervals within the other consonances, the fifth (3 to 2), the fourth (4 to 3), the major third (5 to 4), the minor third (6 to 5), etc., are incommensurate with those within the octave, both harmonically and arithmetically, has, since the dominance of twelve-tone equal temperament, become inaudible.[12]

For the capacity for modulation introduced by equal temperament was not limited to that between tonic and dominant; already in Beethoven modulations were made not only to the dominant as a substitute tonic but to a substitute dominant as well. In Schumann's *Dichterliebe* we find modulations around the entire circle of fifths and in Wagner's *Tristan* the very idea of a tonal center has been lost in a murky array of endless modulation. That is why the 'classical style' in music had a life almost as short as that of the 'classical style' in tragic drama. But however brief the historical life of a classical style, we can recognize it for what it is. And what it is is best recognized by a systematic theory of art, here the notion of the mimesis of action, rather than any appeal to history and influence.

The classical music of the later (post-Op. 33) Haydn and of Mozart retain the sense of tonal stability characteristic of pure Pythagorean fifths, major and minor thirds, etc., while exploiting the dramatic possibilities of modulation opened up by the movement toward equal twelve-tone temperament, which within a generation destroyed the habit of hearing pure intra-octaval consonances because it made them all quasi-dissonant. By the beginning of the twentieth century the movement to equal temperament (i.e., the distortion of pure Pythagorean fifths, thirds, etc.) became so complete that professionally trained musicians[13] came to find the very idea of pure Pythagorean intra-octaval consonances unintelligible. It was most perfectly articulated in the twelve-tone compositional techniques of Arnold Schönberg, the musical counterpart of Socrates and the Stoics in the theory of *praxis*, in the dissolution of Western musical hearing. There were holdouts such as Italian singers—whose intonational delicacy of hearing in the 19th and early 20th century was much prized in

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11 Max Weber, *Die rationalen und soziologischen Grundlagen der Musik*, Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1972.

12 This incommensurability remains, of course, arithmetically demonstrable.

13 With the exception of Italian singers trained in solfeggio without the interposition of keyboard instruments—that's why the likes of Caruso were so loved, pianoforte sounding boards could not withstand the climate of Italy.

comparison with trans-Alpine singers. The Italians were trained in solfeggio without the interposition of the equally-tempered pianos that had come to dominate the bourgeois households and music schools of Nordic Europe. As the 20th century unfolded, even Italians succumbed to the march of the pianoforte and their singers' habits of hearing declined accordingly. All of this was foreseen and lamented by Helmholtz and British advocates of the harmonium (an instrument that preserved Pythagorean intra-octaval consonances) in the nineteenth century, but to small avail. By the end of that century the triumph of the equally-tempered pianoforte was complete. This is the tonal or musical counterpart of the triumph of Stoic-Christian notions of human action arising from subjective intention (analogous to the Socratic center of an Albertian perspective) that brought classical dramatic poetry to an end. As a result, Aristotelian mimesis in music, music in the classical style, or, in one word, tonality, has been lost for most composers over the course of the last two centuries.[14]

The Hegelian theory of art as Aristotelian, as opposed to Socratic, mimesis requires a sensuous, visible and/or audible, polarization of contraries or opposites (*enantia* or *Gegensätze*). In classical dramatic poetry (Aeschylus and Sophocles) these contraries are ways of ethical life, represented by the *oikos* and the *polis*. In classical music (Haydn and Mozart) the contraries are tonal centers, represented by a tonic and a dominant (fifth) functioning as a substitute tonic. In both art forms a quasi-*energeia* (an Aristotelian mimesis of *phusis*) is achieved when the polarization is so dramatized that a reconciliation of the contraries can be depicted. Both classical drama and classical music presuppose worlds in which the respective contrarieties can be violated. In drama the susceptibility to violation emerges with the advent of a then-novel conception of action, epitomized by the alternative presentations of Oedipus's patricide and incest in *Oedipus Rex* and *Oedipus at Colonus*, respectively. The former is a classical drama because the notion of intentional action, spelled out in the latter, is only emergent, yet capable of generating a collision. Intentional action, Hegel's *Moralität*, said to have been invented by Socrates, action springing from what we have come to call 'the will,' as opposed to actions springing from ethically acquired dispositions (*Sittlichkeit*), is then 'dramatized' in Euripides' pseudo-classical melodramas, in Plato's ironic dialogues of Socrates, largely rejected in Aristotle's 'practical philosophy,' made canonical by the Stoics in the aftermath of the *polis*, and universalized by Jesus and the Stoic-educated Apostle Paul: "The good that I would, that I do not; the evil I would not, that I practice" (paraphrase). The antinomies of a will-based concept of action were, in the centuries following St. Paul and his earlier contemporary, Philo of Alexandria, who invented the idea of *creatio ex nihilo*, radicalized by the thought that the I who does evil acts derived from a God the creator who was presumably good. That thought entailed the many variations on 'gnosticism,' the doctrine that there are two creator gods, one evil who created the material world, and one good whose creation was entirely mental (gnosis). This was the tradition of thought inherited in the fifth century by the later St. Augustine in the form of Manichaeism. Augustine wrestled with the problem for more than a decade before he brilliantly concocted a solution (based upon a reading of Cicero's *Horentius*) spelled out in

[14] These composers, and their mostly academic patrons, lament the fact that most concert audiences cannot get 'up to date' with their work. But most people who love music have not lost their sense of the classical style, even in the mode of nostalgia crafted by the likes of Brahms and Mahler. This is because most of us, in music as in ethical life, remain healthily Aristotelian. For an informative, albeit wrong-headed, celebration of the triumph of twelve-tone equal temperament, see Stuart Isacoff, *Temperament: The Idea that Solved Music's Greatest Riddle*, New York: Knopf, 2001.

his *Confessions*, X, 30, in which Aristotle's notion of the universally human 'desire to know' (*curiositas*), or to think 'theoretically' or, in Hegel's parlance, 'speculatively,' is said to be the origin of evil because man thereby blasphemically strives to use his own reason to supplant divine revelation as the source of all knowledge and thereby becomes the root of all evil, instead of the evil god in gnostic doctrine. In short, Augustine let God the creator 'off the hook' and, with a little misguided help from Aristotle, mediated by Cicero, put the blame on man. This profoundly anti-intellectual orientation became 'second nature' in the Western tradition and has persisted till the present age, when post-Christian 'existentialists' like Sartre have replaced God by 'the absurd' and when 'scientific' philosophers like Reichenbach have made positive science into a sacred cow, a parallel development. These are some of the reasons why a recapturing of Aristotelian mimesis has become difficult, but, once the difference between Aristotelian and Socratic mimesis is grasped, not impossible.

A footnote on music. It will be recalled that the demise of pure Pythagorean intra- and cross-octaval intervals was generated by the use of musical instruments that used mechanical means of sound reproduction (frets or keyboards). During the long period of largely vocal musical production, voices, as well as non-fretted string instruments, could be trained by ear to compensate for, and thereby escape, the problems of the 'Pythagorean comma.' It was the rise of keyboard instruments that largely led to the adoption of equal temperament. But with the advent of computer-generated keyboards in the twentieth century, which can preserve the Pythagorean purity of intra-octaval consonances, while allowing for the modulations across the sound spectrum that permitted the classical style to arise during the critical transition to equal temperament, it is possible to foresee the rewinning of a classical style, and hence Aristotelian mimesis, in music. The prospects for Aristotelian mimesis in dramatic poetry depend upon considerations of action, ethical vs. moral, that were touched upon above but could only be examined in a much larger format than a lecture affords.[15]

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[15] There is a strong tendency among Hegel scholars, epitomized by K-H Ilting, to regard Hegel's *Moralität* as his conception of action in the modern world while regarding *Sittlichkeit* as his recursion to the ancient world. The desideratum is an account of Hegel's *Sittlichkeit* in the modern world. I have made an effort in this direction in my essay "The Global Dimension of Ethical Life," 1991, to have been published in a memorial volume for David Lachterman.