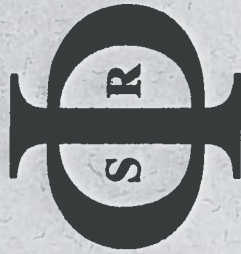


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HEGEL, HARDING, AND OBJECTIVITY

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Feminism and Hegel

The relationship between feminist theory and Hegel has been characterized by antagonism. Many feminist theorists have correctly pointed out that Hegel places women in a subordinate role to men, usually in discussions of moral theory and ethics. Londa Schiebinger addresses the issue in her book *The Mind Has No Sex? Women In The Origins of Modern Science* (1989), noting that Hegel's ethics typically assigns women to the family and home, reserving the public sphere for men. Schiebinger's account is representative of much of the literature by feminist theorists on Hegel. When Hegel's theory of knowledge is discussed, it is often dealt with fleetingly or misunderstood. For example, Schiebinger describes Hegel's discussion of phrenology in the fifth chapter of the *Phenomenology* on Reason, but mischaracterizes Hegel's critique of that science:

Nineteenth-century anatomists claimed that women's development had been arrested at a lower stage of evolution, citing sexual differences again as evidence. As in the eighteenth century, attention remained focused on the skull and pelvis as indices of human development. Craniologists believed that the skull provided an objective measure of intelligence or natural reason. G. W. F. Hegel, following F. J. Gall, held that the brain 'molded the skull—here pressing it out, there widening or flattening it.' Craniologists analyzed the skulls of men and women, whites and blacks, hoping to measure more exactly the intellectual capacities of each of these groups. (Schiebinger 1989, 206)

Schiebinger quotes Hegel in general from the *Phenomenology*, without reference to any specific section; but does give a specific citation from his *Werke* (ed. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Michel, Frankfurt, 1969-1971, vol. 3, pp. 248). However, her description of his view stands in marked contradiction to his criticism of phrenology in the *Phenomenology*, where he states that "in fact, from whatever side we look at the matter, there is no necessary reciprocal relation at all between them (the propensities and capacities of the mind and the skull as physical object), nor any direct indication of such a relation. If, all the same, the relation is still to exist, what remains and is necessary to form it is an *irrational*, free, pre-established harmony of the corresponding determination of the two aspects; for one of the two aspects is to be a non-spiritual reality, a mere thing" (Hegel 1807, section 335, my parentheses). Hegel goes on to state that "a particular

determinateness of Spirit is indifferent to a particular formation of the skull" (Hegel 1807, section 335).

These quotations show that Hegel was not the unquestioning phrenologist Schiebinger characterized him as; rather, Hegel did criticize phrenology, specifically on grounds of reason. The first quotation above illustrates this point, as Hegel argues that the phrenologists' position is an inherently irrational one. The phrenologists' claim that a harmonious relation exists between human character (its modes or determinatenesses of Spirit) and the physical shape of the skull would, on Hegel's account, have to be an *irrational* relation. The next section will describe Hegel's description of the rational in terms of relations between subject and object, and between subjects. This discussion will in turn clarify his theory of knowledge and its underacknowledged value for feminist theory.

Hegel's Theory of Knowledge: *Aufhebung* to Objectivity

The question of the irrational and the rational brings up the role of reason in Hegel's theory of knowledge and philosophy of science. To understand what Hegel means by Reason, one must understand that for Hegel Reason is a stage or step in the progress of consciousness towards absolute knowledge. This progress occurs because of supersession, or *Aufhebung*. The verb *aufheben* itself means three separate things, and all of them apply as Hegel uses the term: to raise or pick up, to negate or cancel, and to keep or preserve. The usual translation, which attempts to capture all of these senses, is supersession. The endpoint of consciousness' development, absolute knowledge, is only reached after a long process of this "supersession," in which misled forms and/or beliefs of consciousness are said to be superseded by new and improved forms of consciousness. Supersession is a process which puts two forms of consciousness into conflict, a conflict which exposes both of their misunderstandings about reality or their place in the world. The two forms of consciousness are superseded by a third, new form that retains the progress towards truth which had been achieved by the two earlier forms, their "good attributes," but that also replaces their misled attributes and misunderstandings (i.e. the confrontation between A and B exposes how each is misled and opens the way for a new and better C). Fichte later gave specific names to the three parties involved, thesis, antithesis and synthesis.

Charles Taylor, in his book Hegel (1975), gives a clear description of supersession as it relates to reason. Hegel "claims to have his cake and eat it through his new concept of reason. This is founded on the ontological thesis that these oppositions themselves proceed from and return to identity,

so that the thought which marks the clearest distinction is also that which unites. The opposition itself, pushed to the limit, goes over into identity. Man separates from nature in the course of realizing his vocation as a rational being. But this is just this vocation fully realized, just the full development of rationality which shows him to himself as the vehicle of *Geist* and thus reconciles the opposition." (Taylor 1975, 118-9) "*Aufhebung*...is Hegel's term for the dialectical transition in which a lower stage is both annulled and preserved in a higher one. The German word *aufheben* can in fact carry either of these meanings. Hegel combined them to make his term of art...because the unity does not just abolish the distinction, Hegel often speaks of the resolution as a 'reconciliation' (*Versöhnung*); this word implies that the two terms remain, but that their opposition is overcome." (Taylor 1975, 119)

The process of *aufhebung* can occur with regard to various states of consciousness as well as specific beliefs held by consciousness. In the *Phenomenology* Hegel shows how "ordinary consciousness, carefully examined, breaks down in contradiction and itself posits beyond itself to a more adequate form...the method then is to start in ordinary consciousness, not import anything from outside, and make an 'immanent critique'...it is important to stress here that Hegel is not proposing the use of a dialectical 'method' or 'approach'...for his aim is simply to follow the movement in his object of study." (Taylor 1975, 129) In other words, Hegel is not advocating or prescribing a dialectical method for doing epistemology, rather Hegel argues that the progression towards knowledge simply is of a dialectical nature.

The dialectical progression of consciousness will also have implications for the role of subject and object, as well as objectivity. "Hegel's aim is not just to take us through the various forms of knowing consciousness (*Bewußtsein* in the narrow sense); he must also trace the developing forms of consciousness as subject of action and desire, the subject as it sees itself or as it strives to become (what Hegel calls self-consciousness—*Selbstbewußtsein*). And this is essential to his purpose, for in taking us from a view of the subject as an isolated consciousness to one which sees him as a vehicle of the self-knowledge of *Geist*, he has to do more than alter our conception of knowledge, he must also make us change our notion of self. But some of the crucial transitions which bring about this transformation are not powered by contradictions in our manner of knowing, but rather by those which arise in the claims we make about the world, others and ourselves as agents." (Taylor 1975, 137)

Here Taylor points to the reconceptualization of the self-other, and self-

object dichotomies that are present throughout Hegel's system, and that will figure prominently in the commonality between Hegel and feminist theorists. These relationships are also reflected in what Taylor calls the dialectic of 'self-consciousness,' and which happens alongside the dialectic of consciousness described above. "Man strives for an eternal embodiment which expresses him, and is frustrated in this aim when the realities on which he depends in order to be, reflect something alien to him. Certainty of self is the confidence that everything on which we depend is not alien, that we are 'at home' (*bei sich*) in it. One might think of it as our definition of our integrity in the broadest sense. But since we are beings who live in continuous relation with external reality, and rely on it to be...any notion of self-certainty makes certain claims on this reality; certain things are required of the surrounding world if this self-certainty is to be fulfilled. This men struggle to bring about." (Taylor 1975, 137) Thus our notion of ourselves, our subjectivity, is described by Hegel as inextricably related to and dependent upon the objects around us.⁵

As with subject-object relations, our subjectivity or self-notion is also dependent upon the human or moral community in which we live. The "much richer dialectic, that of Spirit" occurs after both the dialectic of consciousness and self-consciousness in the chapter on reason: "In the Phenomenology, this meant what later is called 'objective spirit', and we have here a notion of the self no longer as that of isolated individuals, but rather as inhering in the human community. This turn makes possible the passage to absolute spirit in the form of religion (chapter VII), in which we prepare the transition to a notion of consciousness as the self-consciousness of *Geist*. In both these cases, the dialectic can no longer be seen as simply one of knowledge or one of certainty and truth, but integrates the two." (Taylor 1975, 138)

Thus Hegel has two important reconceptualizations at play when he describes the progress of consciousness towards absolute knowledge or absolute spirit. First, knowledge necessarily entails an acknowledgement of the reciprocal relationship between subject and object in the achievement of knowledge or truth—in other words, subject and object equally bring something to the overall phenomenological experience between subject and object. This is an insight attained from the perspective of self-consciousness, the reflective position taken by consciousness as it reflects upon its own experience. Second, our notion of self or objective spirit involves an acknowledgement of the self as located within a community, specifically a moral community. This insight is necessary for the transition to consciousness as the self-consciousness of *Geist*, the acknowledgement that each

consciousness is an instantiation of *Geist* or Spirit itself. Each of these two reconceptualizations has much in common with Allan Megill's notion of dialectical objectivity and Sandra Harding's notion of strong objectivity, as will be shown in the next sections.

Four Senses of Objectivity

Allan Megill describes four senses of objectivity, noting that there is no such thing as "the objectivity question," since there really is no one way to understand objectivity or the objective criteria for knowledge. The first sense of objectivity Megill describes is a "an *absolute sense* of objectivity which derives from, (although it is not identical with) the idea of 'representing things as they really are'...it aspires to a knowledge so faithful to reality as to suffer no distortion, and toward which all inquirers of good will be destined to converge." (Megill 1991, 301) The second sense of objectivity is a *disciplinary sense*, "which no longer assumes a wholesale convergence and instead takes consensus among the members of particular research communities as its standard of objectivity." (Megill 1991, 301) The third sense of objectivity is an interactional or *dialectical sense*, "which holds that objects are constituted as objects in the course of an interplay between subject and object; thus, unlike the absolute and disciplinary senses, the dialectical sense of objectivity leaves room for the subjectivity of the knower." (Megill 1991, 301) Finally, the fourth sense of objectivity is a *procedural sense*, "which aims at the practice of an impersonal method of investigation or administration." (Megill 1991, 301)

I would argue that for both Hegel and feminist epistemology, the third or dialectical sense of objectivity is the most relevant. It is important to reiterate how Hegel and Harding both reflect a deep reconceptualization of the more traditional, absolute sense of objectivity; which is usually the type of objectivity people mean when they speak colloquially of "being objective." More specifically, absolute objectivity is "less a single notion than a set of loosely related notions...one should first of all note the twofold character of the project of 'representing things as they really are': ontological (things 'as they really are'), and epistemological (since we seek 'to represent' these things, and can go nowhere without that representation)." (Megill 1991, 302) The epistemological half of this two part concern has undergone a subtle shift in much of late twentieth century philosophy, where objectivity is presented as less a matter of 'representing things as they really are' than as a matter of arriving at *criteria for judging claims to have represented things as they really are*.⁶ While the absolute sense of objectivity sees individual subjectivity as an unnecessary bias that misleads our

representations of things, the dialectal sense of objectivity has positive attitude towards subjectivity, and its defining feature is the claim that subjectivity is indispensable to the constituting of objects. Associated with this feature is a preference for 'doing' over 'viewing.' (Megill 1991, 308) This 'doing' involves two central kinds of interaction: interaction between subjects and objects, and interactions between more than one subject.⁷ Similarly, the case for interaction between subjects is made using the ethnographic research of Johannes Fabian, who argued that objectivity is the result of a process, the process of knowledge production, and that this process necessitates a "communicative interaction" between researchers. (Megill 1991, 308-9)⁸ Thus Megill argues that dialectical objectivity only results from interaction between subject and object, and between a plurality of subjects.

Hegel's description of how consciousness progresses towards absolute knowledge has many similarities with Megill's discussion of dialectical objectivity. For Hegel, this progress was also said to necessarily include an acknowledgement of the role played by both subject and object in the progress towards knowledge: it is the interaction of subjectivity and the phenomenological reality around us that informs our experience and makes the supersession of sense-certainty possible. Similarly, the progress towards absolute knowledge must involve an acknowledgement of the subject as situated within a community; a community that would engage in something much like Fabian's description of "communicative interaction." Taking part in this type of community allows a further move towards absolute knowledge and Spirit in the form of religion.

Sandra Harding's description of strong objectivity in the context of feminist epistemology, like Hegel's theory of knowledge described earlier, shares a commonality with Megill's notion of dialectical objectivity. As will be shown in the next sections, the common ground of dialectical objectivity will prove to be a promising starting point for a new dialogue between feminist theorists and Hegel in the context of epistemology rather than politics.

Harding, Strong Objectivity, and Dialectical Objectivity

Sandra Harding describes a new sense of objectivity in her book *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?* (1991) which she calls "strong objectivity." Harding's strong objectivity shares many of the characteristics of dialectical objectivity, and Hegel's theory of knowledge.

Harding describes strong objectivity as a way to "maximize objectivity" by bringing to the foreground certain background assumptions and beliefs

(such as cultural and social influences) that more traditional notions of objectivity (like Megill's absolute objectivity) have claimed to be irrelevant. "In an important sense, our cultures have agendas and make assumptions that we as individuals cannot easily detect. Theoretically unmediated experience, that aspect of a group's or an individual's experience in which cultural influences cannot be detected, functions as part of the evidence for scientific claims. Cultural agendas and assumptions are part of the background assumptions and auxiliary hypotheses that philosophers have identified. If the goal is to make available for critical scrutiny *all* the evidence marshaled for or against a scientific hypothesis, then this evidence too requires critical examination within scientific research processes. In other words, we can think of strong objectivity as extending the notion of scientific research to include systematic examination of such powerful background beliefs. It must do so to be competent at maximizing objectivity." (Harding 1991, 149, Harding's italics)

Like Megill's dialectical sense of objectivity, and like Hegel, Harding's strong objectivity also sees dialogue and acknowledgement of relations between subject and object as important sources of knowledge. As Harding notes, gender difference is a scientific resource because it "starts research in the lives not just of strangers or outsiders but of 'outsiders within,' from which the relationship between outside and inside, margin and center, can more easily be detected. It starts thought in the perspective from the life of the Other, allowing the other to gaze back 'shamelessly' at the self who had reserved for himself the right to gaze 'anonymously' at whomsoever he chooses. It starts thought in the lives of people who are unlikely to permit the denial of the interpretive core of all knowledge claims." (Harding 1991, 150-1) Thus strong objectivity, by including cultural presuppositions such as those surrounding gender difference opens up new avenues for research, research that will include insights gleaned from various dialectical relationships: self-other, subject-object, those on the margins of culture and those around whom the culture centers. Strong objectivity's focus on these dialectical sources of knowledge, and appreciation of culturally located subjectivity, both lead me to conclude that strong objectivity does fit Megill's dialectical sense of objectivity.

I would also argue that Harding's strong objectivity fits Megill's dialectical sense of objectivity because Harding explicitly describes how it differs from the absolute sense of objectivity (what Harding calls "weak objectivity").⁹ Like Megill, Harding shows how strong objectivity moves beyond its predecessor 'weak' or absolute objectivity. Weak or absolute objectivity would take no account of the subject's influence or role in the

cultural locations of subjectivity that Harding would attempt to delineate; here Hegel and Harding make the same point, that the social and cultural location of the individual subject has relevance for its claims to knowledge.

Another Possible Focus for the Discussion: Implications in Philosophy of Science

Another area in which Hegel and Harding have a commonality is in the more general implications of their views for the work of philosophy, and perhaps philosophy of science. Both Harding and Hegel regard their work as philosophers as helping to describe a better way to get at objectivity, a better way to try and create a 'true' depiction of things in so far as we may understand them. For Harding, strong objectivity will allow science to maximize its objectivity by realizing and explicating all of the forces and factors that are relevant to the production of knowledge. Thus Harding describes a better method for science, and for philosophy of science. Similarly, Hegel claims in the Preface to the *Phenomenology* that his work will also help to bring us closer to absolute knowledge: "the true shape in which truth exists can only be the scientific system of truth. To help bring philosophy closer to the form of science—to the goal where it can lay aside the title *love of knowing* and be *actual knowing*—is what I have set myself to do." (Hegel 1807, section 5) Thus, although Hegel is not doing epistemology and not explicitly prescribing an epistemology, he does give a theory of knowledge and an account of how knowledge happens, and an account meant to provide insight and direction. The insights Hegel provides in the *Phenomenology* have a special harmony with feminist epistemology.

I have argued that Hegel's theory of knowledge, and the progress he describes towards absolute knowledge, has much in common with recent feminist epistemology and philosophy of science. A central implication of this conclusion is that feminist theorists would do well to regard Hegel not merely *politically*, as an example of a philosopher who participated in the oppression of women; but also epistemologically, as a possible ally in the creation of better theories of knowledge. I have argued for this conclusion in two ways: I attempted to illustrate how Hegel conceptualizes the relationship between subject-object, and subject-substance. Interactions between these relations, and the theory of objectivity that results, has much in common with the notion of "dialectical objectivity," following Allan Megill's delineation of four senses of objectivity. This reading of Hegelian subject-object relations and objectivity was also compared to Sandra Harding's concept of "strong objectivity." Strong objectivity was also shown to be another type of dialectical objectivity, and stands as an excellent

creation of knowledge. Megill describes the subject of absolute objectivity through a borrowing from Nagel: the subject of absolute objectivity ideally has a culturally disengaged 'view from nowhere.' In contrast, the subject in strong objectivity or dialectical objectivity is culturally located, and objectified itself, so that its own cultural presuppositions and their effect on knowledge production can be as fully accounted as possible.

It would be incongruous and inconsistent with Hegel's moral theory to claim that Hegel would have been concerned with exposing the androcentric biases of certain types of science research, as Harding is. But Harding and Hegel share many key points, so much so that I would argue that if Hegel had carried out the implications of his system to the fullest extent and included women as rational beings of the same type as men, rather than as essentially different from men by nature and so controlled by a different ethic, his view would be very close to Harding's.¹⁰ Thus I propose a cross-reading of the two, and a focus on the similarities between Harding and Hegel, rather than their differences.

The first similarity I have argued for is the notion that both Hegel's theory of knowledge and Harding's strong objectivity necessarily require the same type of objectivity, Megill's dialectical sense of objectivity. This is related to the fact that both Harding and Hegel require that the relationship between subject and object, rather than simply the object alone or the subject alone, is central to the acquisition of knowledge. For both Hegel and Harding, one can say that both subject and object have effect on how we have phenomenological experience. Similarly, both Hegel and Harding consider it vital to a proper understanding of the acquisition of knowledge that the subject be located within a community. For Hegel, this community is necessarily a moral community, in which each member participates in or instantiates ethical substance. For Harding, the social and cultural location of the knowing subject must be made explicit so that their social, cultural place and its implications for their research or their knowledge claim can be brought out into the open, and clearly expressed to maximize the objectivity of the work. It is plausible to argue that had Hegel thought of communities in this culturally specific sense, rather than in the broad sense of moral communities akin to Plato and Aristotle's polis, then Hegel would have asserted that the cultural and societal contingencies of the subject would be an important factor to highlight in discussion of their knowledge claims (or their place in the progression to absolute knowledge). Arguably, Hegel already does this in his discussions of stoics and sceptics, the French Revolution, and the unhappy consciousness of early Christianity. Each of these sections of the relies upon a discussion of the same type of social and

formulated certain arguments—specifically along the lines of a critique of metaphysics and absolutism in philosophy—which can and should be of interest to philosophers today. (Maker 1993, 259)

⁴ In setting the public sphere of the professions against the private sphere of the home, complementarians envisioned two distinct ways of living: each sphere had its own logic, ethic, and *modus operandi*. The purposes and activities of the public realm differed essentially from those of the home. As one complementarian put it, in the state, everything originates in abstraction, in concepts; while in the home everything originates in the physical needs of heart and soul. A natural fit was also thought to exist between man and the public ethic, on the one hand, and between woman and the private ethic on the other. As Hegel wrote, family piety, or the law of inner life, was the law of woman. This law, based on subjectivity and feeling, stood opposed to the universal character of the public law of the state. This opposition between family and public law Hegel defined as the supreme opposition in ethics. (Hegel 1807, sections 446-476) The complementarity theory was designed to remove men and women from competition in the public sphere, by removing women from participation in that sphere. (Schiebinger 1989, 235)

⁵ This same point about the importance of the interaction of subject and object in the creation of knowledge is reiterated by Robert Pippin in a discussion of Otto Pöggeler's work on Hegel: "Once Hegel had demonstrated that our cognitive relation to the world could not be wholly passive or dependent, that the ways we take up the world were at least partly due to us, as well as to the world (in Hegel's language, once a 'relation to an object' was understood to be a 'self-relation in relation to an object'), the earlier planned 'science of the experience of consciousness' was in effect already over. The subject of such a 'relation to an other' was now already 'spirit,' determining collectively 'for itself' its relation to others and objects. This suggestion by Pöggeler is one of the most philosophically valuable to come out of the long scholarly controversy." (Pippin 1993, 56)

⁶ These criteria of truth would then help us to advance toward knowledge-claims sufficiently authoritative that no rational person, after due investigation, would call them into doubt. Moreover, the criteria themselves ought to evoke a like universal rational assent. The knowledge produced would at least move us in the direction of the Cartesian (and Baconian) 'absolute conception of reality'. Of course, we may never actually arrive at such a view, but as rational human beings we can be expected to converge toward an approximation of it. Absolute objectivity, then, presents itself as absolute not in its certitude or infallibility, but rather in the hold that it ought to have on us as rational human beings. (Megill 1991, 303)

⁷ Megill quotes Heidegger's *Being and Time* to make the first point, as Heidegger argues that "objects first become known to us in the course of our action in the world, not through theoretical contemplation." (Megill 1991, 308; Heidegger's *Being and Time*, section 15)

⁸ Here Megill cites Johannes Fabian's "Language, History and Anthropology," *Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, vol. 1, 1971, pp. 19-47.

⁹ The notion of strong objectivity welds together the strengths of weak objectivity and those of the 'weak subjectivity' that is its correlate, but excludes the features that make them only weak. To enact or operationalize the directive of strong

example of current feminist epistemology and standpoint theory. From this similarity, I argued that Hegelian and feminist epistemology have much more in common than previously thought, and that the two can be read together as allies in the attempt to improve our theories of knowledge and our means to achieve truth.

Notes

¹ This paper focuses specifically on what I consider the *epistemological* virtues of Hegel, rather than the undoubtedly nasty consequences his *political* views have for women. While some might argue that Hegelian epistemology cannot be separated from Hegelian politics (as my commentator does), I prefer to see the situation in stronger Hegelian terms: Hegel's politics has certain misled implications, but I refuse to throw out the possibility for epistemological progress inherent in the Hegelian corpus along with what I take to be his aberrant and mistaken political shaming and separating of women. In the sense of the dialectic, we should see Hegel's politics on women as a misled form of consciousness which can and must be superseded while retaining the epistemological progress and hope for objectivity inherent in his work. In this sense, then, this paper seeks to sift out the wheat from the chaff, or the baby from the bathwater; thus political readings of Hegel by feminists are not my main concern (especially when founded on what I take to be serious misreadings of Hegelian epistemology through his ethics, or on mistaken assumptions about his views on science, as in the phrenology example discussed later). Even so, it is important work to explain and critique Hegel's politics and ethics as many feminists do. For those interested in such works I suggest (as does my commentator) the collection *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel*, edited by Patricia Jagentowicz Mills; University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1996. However, for those who seek arguments about epistemology and objectivity that superseed the misled forms of Hegelian political consciousness, look to the *Phenomenology* as I do here, and also Hegel's "Lesser Logic" (an excellent recent translation can be found in *The Encyclopedia of Logic: Part I of the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusatz*, translated by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 1991).

² Alison Jagger describes these three concerns as characteristic of a feminist perspective on *ethics*. (Jagger 1988) The three major aims of feminist ethics are said to be (1) the articulation of moral critiques of actions and practices that perpetuate women's subordination, (2) the prescription of ways of resisting such actions and practices, and (3) the envisioning of morally desirable alternatives that will promote women's emancipation. (Tong 1993, 10-11) Similar aims of general feminist perspectives have also been outlined. Characteristically, feminist perspectives typically share three features: (1) a recognition that women have been and are oppressed, (2) an account of the source or sources of that oppression, and (3) suggestions for how the oppression of women can be overcome. (Callahan 1994, 3)

³ This conclusion will make a point similar to recent arguments by William Maker: "what I would like to offer is the unusual suggestion that Hegel has

objectivity is to value the Other's perspective and to pass over in thought into the social condition that creates it—not in order to stay there, to 'go native' or merge the self with the Other, but in order to look back at the self in all its cultural particularity from a more distant, critical, objectifying location...strong objectivity requires that we investigate the relation between subject and object rather than deny the existence of, or seek unilateral control over, this relation. (Harding 1991, 151-2)

¹⁰ Hegel's description of two ethical realms delineated by gender strikes me as ironically like Carol Gilligan's two ethical voices described in *In A Different Voice: Psychological theory and women's development* (1983, Cambridge: Harvard University Press). Not surprisingly, many have levied the same charge of essentialism against both Gilligan and Hegel.

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HEGEL AND THE CONCEPT OF "TRAGIC IRONY"

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For Friedrich Schlegel *irony* characterizes the basic human condition, exemplified by and most essentially expressed in the artist as absolute creator of value in the work of art and master of both subject and object. While Hegel seems to have adopted some aspects of romantic subjectivism into his own method, his polemics against this position in his Berlin period would serve as caution against looking to the romantics for help in understanding Hegel's late system. And those who emphasize that Hegel "proclaimed the mortality, nay the very death of art" would be reluctant to associate Hegel's mature thought with the romantic school.¹ Hegel's view that art saw its highest form in the Greek world and, as a form of apprehending the absolute, has since been surpassed, first by religion and then by philosophy, is certainly contrary to the romantic view of the artist as the paradigm and highest expression of the human spirit.² But, again, why shouldn't it be fruitful to understand Hegel from his reaction to that concept which he considered, in the words of Ernst Behler, "the greatest challenge to his own position."³ In the present paper, following this approach, it will be seen that, Hegel's reaction to the romantic concept of irony and his positive reception of *tragic irony* provide crucial elements for understanding the relation between the infinite and the finite in Hegel's mature thought. Whereas romantic irony is based on absolute subjectivity, *tragic irony* is constituted by the self-destruction of an historical subject in whose downfall a *higher objective value* is revealed. This tragic irony is most evident in the concept of "devotion" on the "Sunday of life," e.g., in the "devotion" of ancient tragedy, where the audience is elevated to the divine in the experience of the tragic downfall of the characters. But in the workaday world of everyday cultural institutions—family, love, virtue, law—the "infinite" and "divine," what gives objective value to the world, does *not* occur in the disappearance of institutions, but is manifest precisely in the survival of the state and the whole of culture of which it is a part. Hence, with the state, irony takes another form than it does in drama.

In this paper the concept of tragic irony will be developed in reference to Hegel's discussions of four figures whom he saw as contributing to this philosophical concept: a) Socrates, b) Johann Gottlieb Fichte, c) Friedrich Schlegel, and d) Karl Solger.⁴