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# **The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art**

**Bernard Bosanquet**



*Routledge Revivals*

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## The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Fine Art

Originally published in 1905, Bosanquet's translation of Hegel's *Philosophy of Fine Art* brings Hegel's commentary and analysis of what constitutes beauty and fine art to an English audience as well as presenting his own viewpoints on the work and what is at the heart of true philosophical theory. This title will be of interest to students of philosophy and art.

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# The Introduction to Hegel's Philosophy of Art

Bernard Bosanquet



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THE INTRODUCTION TO  
HEGEL'S PHILOSOPHY  
OF FINE ART

TRANSLATED FROM THE GERMAN, WITH  
NOTES AND PREFATORY ESSAY, BY

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## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE

HEGEL'S "*Æsthetik*," or "Philosophy of Fine Art," is a work which should no longer be inaccessible to the English reading public, but the reproduction of which, in its complete form of 1600 pages, is a task not to be lightly undertaken. I know of three partial reproductions of the "*Æsthetik*" in English, viz. Mr. Bryant's translation of Part II.,\* Mr. Kedney's short analysis of the entire work,† and Mr. Hastie's translation of Michelet's short "Philosophy of Art,"‡ prefaced by Hegel's Introduction, partly translated and partly analysed.

I wholly disapprove of analyses (among which may be reckoned Michelet's summary above mentioned) as representations of Hegel's writing, which is attractive chiefly by the force and freshness of

\* New York, Appleton and Co.

† Chicago, Griggs and Co., 1885.

‡ Edinburgh, Oliver and Boyd, 1886.



its detail. I am convinced that Hegel should be allowed to speak for himself, and that failing the translation of the whole "*Æsthetik*," or of very copious selections, the best course is that which I have adopted in the present volume, viz. to translate the entire Introduction, including the chapter entitled, "Division of the Subject." This Introduction is in Hegel's best manner—so far as he can be said to have literary manner at all, especially in a work which has been produced by editors from lecture-notes,—and is tolerably complete in itself. It is not contained as a whole in any of the above-mentioned works. I ought to say, however, that Mr. Hastie's translation is excellent in style; but after the first thirty-four pages it also becomes an analysis. Nor is it wholly free from serious mistakes. I have hoped that the present volume may be of interest to many who, without being students of philosophy, are intelligent lovers of art. I have therefore done my best to *interpret* philosophical expressions, instead of merely furnishing their technical equivalents. I have also added a few short notes, either to explain literary allusions, or to complete the interpretation of technical terms. The prefatory essay

was written with a similar intention, not as original speculation, but as an assistance to general readers in apprehending the point of view from which Fine Art is regarded by Hegel and kindred writers.

I have broken up the "*Einleitung*," or Introduction proper, which is continuous in the original, into four chapters,\* hoping that the arrangement of the discussion may be thus rendered easier to follow. The "*Eintheilung*," which forms my Chapter V., is a separate chapter in the original. The table of contents is translated from the original, excepting those portions of it which are enclosed in square brackets, [ ].

My literary notes are entirely borrowed from the late Mrs. F. C. Conybeare's translation of Scherer's "History of German Literature"; a work invaluable to the English student, whose gratitude must for long be saddened by the untimely death of the translator.

\* Of these, Chapter III. is subdivided into two Parts, because of the disproportionate length of the division in the original to which it corresponds.

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# PREFATORY ESSAY

BY THE TRANSLATOR

## ON THE TRUE CONCEPTION OF ANOTHER WORLD

"With such barren forms of thought, that are always in a world beyond, Philosophy has nothing to do. Its object is always something concrete, and in the highest sense present."  
—HEGEL'S *Logic*, Wallace's translation, p. 150.

IT will surprise many readers to be told that the words which I have quoted above embody the very essence of Hegelian thought. The Infinite, the supra-sensuous, the divine, are so connected in our minds with futile rackings of the imagination about remote matters which only distract us from our duties, that a philosophy which designates its problems by such terms as these seems self-condemned as cloudy and inane. But, all appearance to the contrary notwithstanding, Hegel is faithful to the present and the concrete. In the study of his philosophy we are always dealing with human experience. "My stress lay," says Mr. Browning,\* on the incidents in the

\* Preface to "Sordello."



development of a soul; little else is worth study." For "a soul" read "the mind," and you have the subject-matter to which Hegel's eighteen close-printed volumes are devoted. The present introductory remarks are meant to insist on this neglected point of view. I wish to point out, in two or three salient instances, the transformation undergone by speculative notions when sedulously applied to life, and restrained from generating an empty "beyond." By so doing I hope to pave the way for a due appreciation of Hegel's philosophy of fine art. That the world of mind, or the world above sense, exists as an actual and organized whole, is a truth most easily realized in the study of the beautiful. And to grasp this principle as Hegel applies it is nothing less than to acquire a new contact with spiritual life. The spiritual world, which is present, actual, and concrete, contains much besides beauty. But to apprehend one element of such a whole constitutes and presupposes a long step towards apprehending the rest. It is for this reason that I propose, in the first place, to explain, by prominent examples, the conception of a spiritual world which is present and actual, and then to let Hegel speak for himself on the particular sphere of art. So closely connected indeed are all the embodiments of mind, that the Introduction to the "Philosophy of Fine Art" is almost a microcosm of his entire system.

We know, to our cost, the popular conception of the supra-sensuous world. Whatever that world is, it is, as commonly thought of, not here and not now. That is to say, if here and now, it is so by a sort of miracle, at which we are called upon to wonder, as when angels are said to be near us, or the dead to know what we do. Again, it is a counterpart of our present world, and rather imperceptible to *our* senses, than in its nature beyond contact with sense as such. It is peopled by persons, who live eternally, which means through endless ages, and to whose actual communion with us, as also to our own with God, we look forward in the future. It even perhaps contains a supra-sensuous original corresponding to every thing and movement in this world of ours. And it does *not* necessarily deepen our conception of life, but only reduplicates it.

Such a world, whatever we may think about its actual existence, is *not* the "other world" of philosophy. The "things not seen" of Plato or of Hegel are not a double or a projection of the existing world. Plato, indeed, wavered between the two conceptions in a way that should have warned his interpreters of the divergence in his track of thought. But in Hegel, at least, there is no ambiguity. The world of spirits with him is no world of ghosts. When we study the embodiments of mind or spirit in his pages, and read of law, property, and national

unity ; of fine art, the religious community, and the intellect that has attained scientific self-consciousness, we may miss our other world with its obscure "beyond," but we at any rate feel ourselves to be dealing with something real, and with the deepest concerns of life. We may deny to such matters the titles which philosophy bestows upon them ; we may say that this is no "other world," no realm of spirits, nothing infinite or divine : but this matters little so long as we know what we are talking about, and are talking about the best we know. And what we discuss when Hegel is our guide, will *always* be some great achievement or essential attribute of the human mind. He never asks, "Is it?" but always "What is it?" and therefore has instruction, drawn from experience, even for those to whom the titles of his inquiries seem fraudulent or bombastic.

These few remarks are not directed to maintaining any thesis about the reality of nature and of sense. Their object is to enforce a distinction which falls *within* the world which we know, and not *between* the world we know and another which we do not know. This distinction is real, and governs life. I am not denying any other distinction, but I am insisting on this. No really great philosopher, nor religious teacher,—neither Plato, nor Kant, nor St. Paul—can be understood unless we grasp this antithesis in the right way. All of these teachers

have pointed men to another world. All of them, perhaps, were led at times by the very force and reality of their own thought into the fatal separation that cancels its meaning. So strong was their sense of the gulf between the trifles and the realities of life, that they gave occasion to the indolent imagination—in themselves and in others—to transmute this gulf from a measure of moral effort into an inaccessibility that defies apprehension. But their purpose was to overcome this inaccessibility, not to heighten it.

The hardest of all lessons in interpretation is to believe that great men mean what they say. We are below their level, and what they actually say seems impossible to us, till we have adulterated it to suit our own imbecility. Especially when they speak of the highest realities, we attach *our* notion of reality to what *they* pronounce to be real. And thus we baffle every attempt to deepen our ideas of the world in which we live. The work of intelligence is hard; that of the sensuous fancy is easy; and so we substitute the latter for the former. We are told, for instance, by Plato, that goodness, beauty, and truth are realities, but not visible or tangible. Instead of responding to the call so made on our intelligence by scrutinizing the nature and conditions of these intellectual facts—though we know well how tardily they are produced by the culture of ages—we

apply forthwith our idea of reality as something separate in space and time, and so "refute" Plato with ease, and remain as wise as we were before. And it is true that Plato, handling ideas of vast import with the mind and language of his day, sometimes by a similar error refutes himself.\* He makes, for instance, the disembodied soul see the invisible ideas. Thus he travesties his things of the mind as though they were things of sense, only not of *our* sense—thereby destroying the deeper difference of kind that alone enables them to find a place in our world. That his doctrine of ideas was really rooted, not in mysticism, but in scientific enthusiasm, is a truth that is veiled from us partly by his inconsistencies, but far more by our own erroneous preconceptions.†

There is, however, a genuine distinction between "this" world and the "other" world, which is merely parodied by the vulgar antitheses between natural and supernatural, finite and infinite, phenomenal and noumenal. We sometimes hear it said, "The

\* "Endless duration makes good no better, nor white any whiter," is one of Aristotle's comments on Plato's "eternal" ideas, and is just, unless "eternal" conveys a difference of kind.

† Whewell, I think, misinterprets Plato's language about astronomy in this sense. Plato is not decrying observation, but demanding a theoretical treatment of the laws of motion,—a remarkable anticipation of modern ideas.

world is quite changed to me since I knew such a person," or "studied such a subject," or "had suggested to me such an idea." The expression may be literally true; and we do not commonly exaggerate, but vastly underrate its import. We read, for instance, in a good authority, "These twenty kinds of birds (which Virgil mentions) do not correspond so much to our species as to our genera; for the Greeks and Romans, I need hardly say, had only very rough-and-ready methods of classification, just as is the case with uneducated people at the present day."\* Any one may verify the same fact as regards the observation of flowers. Every yellow ranunculus is called a "butter-cup," every large white umbellifer a "hemlock." These, with hundreds of other differences of perception, affect the surroundings in which men consciously live, at least as much as a considerable degree of deafness or blindness. It is no metaphor, but literal fact, to say that man's whole environment is transformed by the training even of his mere apprehension of natural objects. But there is more in the matter than this. Without going into metaphysics, which I wish to avoid, I cannot, indeed, maintain that mind "makes" natural objects, although by enabling us to perceive them it unquestionably makes our immediate conscious world. My individual consciousness does not make or create the differences

\* "A Year with the Birds," by an Oxford Tutor.