

## NOTES ON HEGEL

My theme: the time-binding “Parasite.” The “Software.” The “ghost” that rides its mortal hosts, our ephemeral bodies of course.

From Hegel’s lectures on the history of philosophy:

...since the progress of development is equivalent to further determination, and this means further immersion in, and a fuller grasp of the Idea itself—that the latest, most modern and newest philosophy is the most developed, richest and deepest. In that philosophy everything which at first seems to be past and gone must be preserved and retained, and it must itself be a mirror of the whole history. The original philosophy is the most abstract, because it is the original and has not as yet made any movement forward; the last, which proceeds from this forward and impelling influence, is the most concrete. This, as may at once be remarked, is no mere pride in the philosophy of our time, because it is in the nature of the whole process that the more developed philosophy of a later time is really the result of the previous operations of the thinking mind; and that it, pressed forwards and onwards from the earlier standpoints, has not grown up on its own account or in a state of isolation.

Ontology is a torch relay race. The Torch, which burns unlike an ordinary torch brighter and brighter, is the “parasite,” the time-binding “ghost.” It is personified Ontology as an evolving rational tradition.

The more developed philosophy is that carried and elaborated by later racers, who owe their brighter torch to runners who now, in terms of their flesh, are dust. The “souls” of these runners are preserved in the Torch, though assimilated in a larger “soul” — transcended but included.

Now, as in the logical system of thought each of its forms has its own place in which alone it suffices, and this form becomes, by means of ever-progressing development, reduced to a subordinate element, each philosophy is, in the third place, a particular stage in the development of the whole process and has its definite place where it finds its true value and significance. Its special character is really to be conceived of in accordance with this determination, and it is to be considered with respect to this position in order that full justice may be done to it.

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This process *needs time*. This process “is” time in an important sense. Ontology is the logical essence of the world. Conceptual movement makes time “significant.” Generations of beavers building the same dams for centuries are passing the time in a “carbon dating” sense, but the beaver’s “essence,” with its lifeworld, is static. Humans are also animals, but they live largely in an evolving cultural realm —and an evolving technological realm. The dialectical updating of the best

beliefs of a rational tradition isn't instantaneous. Indeed, the world changes as one tries to articulate its essence, which itself drives further change.

[E]very philosophy belongs to its own time and is restricted by its own limitations, just because it is the manifestation of a particular stage in development. The individual is the offspring of his people, of his world, whose constitution and attributes are alone manifested in his form; he may spread himself out as he will, he cannot escape out of his time any more than out of his skin, for he belongs to the one universal Mind which is his substance and his own existence. ...

This “one universal Mind” is of course the Parasite, the Torch, the relatively immortal “ghost” or “software” that leaps from disposable meat as “thin client” to another host, without losing its progress so far.

The Parasite metaphor is a nod to Schopenhauer, who pointed out that the practical interest of the host is often sacrificed in order to advance science or art. The philosopher or artist “should” be accumulating wealth or offspring, but he or she is instead “wasting time” on, for instance, high-minded but “useless” ontology.

An empirical linguistic ego, as Heidegger also emphasized, is thrown into an interpretation of the world — into the latest version of the “Software.” The ontologist (or novelist or sculptor) gets absorbed in the universal content of their time-binding tradition, its living futural history.

T. S. Eliot also understood this.

The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the whole existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. [...] But the difference between the present and the past is that the conscious present is an awareness of the past in a way and to an extent which the past's awareness of itself cannot show. Some one said: "The dead writers are remote from us because we know so much more than they did." Precisely, and they are that which we know.

[...] He must be quite aware of the obvious fact that art never improves, but that the material of art is never quite the same. He must be aware that the mind of Europe—the mind of his own country—a mind which he learns in time to be much more important than his own private mind—is a mind which changes, and that this change is a development which abandons nothing en route, which does not superannuate either Shakespeare, or Homer, or the

rock drawing of the Magdalenian draughtsmen. [...] Shakespeare acquired more essential history from Plutarch than most men could from the whole British Museum. What is to be insisted upon is that the poet must develop or procure the consciousness of the past and that he should continue to develop this consciousness throughout his career. [...] What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality. [...] Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality. But, of course, only those who have personality and emotions know what it means to want to escape from these things. [...] The emotion of art is impersonal. And the poet cannot reach this impersonality without surrendering himself wholly to the work to be done. And he is not likely to know what is to be done unless he lives in what is not merely the present, but the present moment of the past, unless he is conscious, not of what is dead, but of what is already living.