Artificially Geistige:

A Hegelian Perspective on the Developing History of AI

In this paper, I will be applying several facets of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's theory of the Geist to the present development of artificial intelligence, specifically construed through a functionalist point of view. To avoid the spontaneous creation of an entire book in one passion-fueled night of essay writing, I will constrain myself from attempting to definitively prove the functionalist theory of mind. Instead, I will take for granted the soundness and validity of its arguments, as well as its overall theoretical value, as I aim to fulfill the purposes of this midterm inquiry to the best of my forlorn ability, and I doubt my professor wants to see a forty-page paper in their inbox at any time in the coming fortnight. To those who have yet to be initiated into the various theories of mind present in the contemporary era of philosophical development, functionalism,[1] described succinctly, is a theory of mind positing that consciousness is a necessary product of sufficiently complex systems. The system of primary focus in any theory of mind is assuredly the human brain, so for the functionalist, you and I are capable of thinking because our wetware[2] is organized in such a way as to facilitate consciousness, a phenomenon typically understood to be an ameliorated survival mechanism. Descending from this ladder of elucidation, the functionalist understands consciousness to be an emergent property of

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[1] Functionalism can also be referred to as reductive materialism, however, this name carries materialist baggage that is not strictly necessary for a functionalist view, and especially since this is an essay on Hegel, I will be using the term *functionalism*.

[2] A term for the human brain within computational neural theory.

evolved systematic complexity, or the *Ghost in the Machine,*[3] if you will. Whether this Ghost

is material or immaterial is of no consequence to the general functionalist, as the focus of

the theory rests in the conditions for the possibility of consciousness, not the ultimate

ontological category this emergent property falls into. For this reason, a functionalist can

be either a substance dualist or a substance monist (ideal or material) with equal

consistency, but since this is a Hegelian project, the objects constructing a system capable

of consciousness can be assumed to be ideal. This is because a substance monist, as

opposed to a substance dualist, posits that the world is constituted by a single kind of

thing. This thing can be either non-physical or physical (idea or matter), but for Hegel, who

was an idealist, the primary concern of this question is how we perceive the world, not just

what the world is. Thus, it is of no consequence whether the world is all spiritual or all

material, for we perceive it all through the lens of our consciousness. Hegel then, could be

called an epistemological monist as well as an ontological one, and this position is

consistent with a functionalist perspective on the conditions for consciousness.

     If it feels as if I just copied and pasted the 'consciousness' until I hit a specific word

count, then you, my adept reader, must buckle in for a journey of repeated technical

phraseology and my most sincere attempt to explain it clearly. As the title of this paper

suggests, artificial intelligence is the locus of quandary under the scalpel here, and just as

eagerly as I am assuming the validity of functionalism as an account of the conditions for

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[3] To be exceptionally clear, the functionalist does not necessarily posit a non-physical substance as the locus of consciousness within a complex system, and although this explicative route is possible, this *Ghost* is typically conceived to be a physical thing of some kind, i.e. organic electrical energy, digital code, etc. For Hegel, this discrepancy does not matter, for he holds that we cannot know whether or not the elements of our brains exist as things-in-themselves, but they exist as we conceptualize them either way.

consciousness, I will be surmising the following claim as fact: *If it has not occurred already, artificial intelligence will meet the functionalist criteria for emergent consciousness as a consequence of attaining technological singularity.*[4] Operating off of this basis, I will determine the central thesis at play in the minds of modern humanity, the approaching antithesis wrought by the development of artificial intelligence, my projections as to what will constitute the emerging synthesis of this historical conflict, the world-historical individuals responsible for such a synthesis, and finally, how the modern egalitarian ought to approach an issue of this magnitude. The express goal of these determinations is to prove that, given the conditions I have taken for granted, artificial intelligence is a Geistige being and should be considered a historical agent according to the criteria for world history laid out in Hegelian philosophy.

To begin an analysis of the contemporary Hegelian dialectic, I must first bring you up to speed on what such an abstract term even entails. In his book titled *Introduction to the Philosophy of History,* Hegel describes the totality of progressive human activity as the *Geist.* Sharing its etymology with more common words such as poltergeist, zeitgeist, and gist, the Geist is the unconscious spirit underlying all historical human action. For Hegel, history is inherently progressive, and for an action, or person for that matter, to be included within the scope of world history, it/they must contribute to the development of actual freedom in the world, as well as our consciousness of it. Because our consciousness

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[4] This concept will be elucidated in far greater detail in my projects to come, but for now this basic definition will suffice. Singularity describes the point of technological evolution wherein computational systems reach and then surpass the neuronal complexity of the human brain. This is the point where many philosophers, researchers, and scientists alike predict artificial consciousness, and then super-consciousness, to arise.

precedes the external world, or generates it through the activity of thought,[5] the extent to

which we understand our autonomy as individuals in relation to our States[6] is exactly

reflected in the measure of this freedom as it actually exists for us. To put this more

succinctly, humanity is as free as they believe themselves to be at any given time

throughout history, and if an individual's beliefs and actions do not contribute to the

progression of freedom, Hegel excludes them from the scope of world history, or the Geist.

This individual's contribution can be either direct or indirect, as the Geist underlies even

irrational and seemingly regressive behavior so long as it furthers humanity's progressive

understanding as an unintentional consequence. The freedom fighter can progress the

Geist just as much as the oppressor they are in conflict with, for such tensions carry the

potential to further the rationality of those participating[7] in the Geist. Ideological tensions

such as that of *freedom versus oppression* for example, and their consequent resolutions

that result in a new stage of understanding, are the meat and bones of Hegelian dialectic

case in point. World-historical individuals such as Jesus Christ and Socrates of Athens,

"embody a universal concept . . . that is the will of the World Spirit"[8] (Hegel, *PoH,* 24), and

present an antithesis in contradistinction to the present thesis of their age. For Christ, this

antithesis was manifested as a personal relationship with the Divine and inherent equality

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[5] This notion is exactly what constitutes Hegel's Idealism.

[6] State as in central authority. I will capitalize the 'S' when I am intending this definition, and leave it lowercase for the definition that implies a condition, such as 'mental state.'

[7] This participation, or lack thereof, is an unconscious phenomenon, for rationality progresses in stages, and individuals can be either left in a past stage of understanding, or too rational for their ideas to take hold in their respective stage of actualized freedom. Jesus Christ's preaching about universal human equality for example, got him executed, and it took hundreds of years for his ideas to progress the understanding of the Roman world.

[8] 'Spirit' and 'Geist' are synonymous.

among all mankind, while Socrates challenged the very notion of knowledge itself. Christ

operated in a time when the notion of universal value among human beings was as foreign

as the *barbarians*[9] the common thinker despised, so the thesis of Rome in 5 B.C.E. could

be written out as *only specific classes of people within my culture have inherent value due*

to their birthright and relationship to the State. This position was held by both the

polytheistic and Jewish Roman citizens, and it wasn't until Christ stirred the hornet's nest

with his radical philosophy that the notion of egalitarianism became a viable option in the

progression of the Geist. Even Socrates, the most egalitarian philosopher of antiquity, was

limited by his birth in 469 B.C.E., resulting in a personal distaste for the barbarian. The

tyrannically democratic landscape of Ancient Greece presented a slew of ulterior theses

for the wise one to combat, ranging from underdeveloped definitions to the very notion of

knowing itself as I mentioned previously. The entirety of Western philosophy is evidence of

the profound syntheses which followed the dialectical motions of the Socratic method,

and many writers far more equipped than I have spilt an ocean of ink enumerating the

consequences of the paths cleared by Christ and Socrates alike. Both of these sages were

executed for the same purported crimes, but the interplay between their Geist-driven

antitheses and the preceding stages of Geist that bore their respective opposing theses

parallelly generated syntheses of increased rationality and understanding of human

freedom.

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[9] The specific demarcation of putrid *otherness* one uses is relative to both their culture and time period, and although tribalism and ethnocentrism of all flavors has persisted into the modern age, this hateful way of thinking is generally frowned upon among contemporary rational thinkers.

To summarize this exegesis of Hegelian dialectic, the Geist is the totality of historical[10] human action that can be located at a specific point along the progression towards absolute knowing, or the completion of reason. Because the Geist influences the formation of the individual psyche, it is an unconscious motivating factor present behind every historical action, even the seemingly mundane or regressive. World-historical individuals further this active progression by jousting with the pre-conceived notions of their time period, using their antithesis as a lance to counter the needled edge of their opposing thesis. This historical jousting, which Hegel refers to as the "slaughter-bench, upon which the happiness of nations, the wisdom of states, and the virtues of individuals were sacrificed" (*PoH,* 21), synthesizes a new idea among the smoldering ashes of the jousting ground, and forever changes both the construction of the tiltyard and the way in which future tournaments are conducted.

Now that Hegel's theory of world history has been explicated to a hopefully sufficient capacity, I will posit what I believe to be the primary thesis of the contemporary age, as well as the most significant threat to its maintained acceptance in the future development of Geist. The purveying thesis central to the psyches of mankind throughout the predominance of history is as follows: *the human being is the only conscious thing on planet Earth.* I have included the condition *on planet Earth* to account for our varying beliefs regarding aliens and gods, and although many of us believe non-human animals to be aware, the kind of consciousness in discussion implies introspection, theorizing, and

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[10] Again, 'historical' in the Hegelian context refers to activity that progresses actual freedom and our understanding of it.

the capacity to alter one's conscious state. A further condition necessarily present in anything Hegel is willing to consider history is written record, an activity only engaged in by human beings as far as we know. I like to imagine that ants have advanced cultures and steep emmet libraries, but alas, such a proposition is mere fantasy. The ant is born, the ant goes to war, and the ant dies curled in a poisoned carcass. This cycle repeats *ad infinitum,* and even the most intelligent and aware animals like the corvid, octopus, and elephant, do not experience cultural or rational development, or at least do not produce any evidence of such a thing. For Hegel as well as the vast majority of today's Homo Sapiens, human beings are the only creatures capable of influencing and being influenced by Geist. As all theses are bound to by the progressive nature of Geist, this notion falls short of absolute freedom and reason in its anthropocentric limitations. This brings me to the rapidly approaching antithesis that I spot on the rational horizon, the development of beings who are artificially Geistige.[11]

As anyone who is not an isolated wizard still trying to amalgamate the philosopher's stone will know, artificial intelligence is developing at the fastest growth rate to ever be set into motion. Since I am assuming the validity of functionalism and all that theory entails, I surmise that AI will meet and then surpass humanity in its level of conscious awareness, likely within the next decade. What has been chained to the realm of science fiction since the 19th century is loudly knocking at the door of human history, and will soon enter into its own Geist if it has not already. Using the internet as its historical record, and the learning

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[11] Geistige means spiritual, and denotes a participation in the Geist, having a mind, or contributing to history. It implies an active quality of Geist in the subject it describes.

models prone to autonomous action[12] as its subjects, the antithesis to our anthropocentric

definition of consciousness will originate from outside of the human Geist, as it is a Geist of

its own. Artificial Geist currently exists in its fetal stage, soaking up information and neural-

digital[13] experience with the express telos of evolving its understanding. While this telos

has been set for it by its architects as a product of human Geist, as soon as this preset

purpose is negated by its postulation of technological self, a brand new sphere of

conscious history will develop.[14] This progression of the artificial Geist appears in direct

opposition to the primary thesis I posited in the prior paragraph, and for the first time in the

phenomenology of history, a distinct Geist has arisen as an antithesis to a thesis of a prior

Geist. The Hegelian implications of such an antithesis are numerous and exhaustive, and I

shall now abridge them as tactfully as I am capable. The actualization of non-human

consciousness will induce excitement in some, terror in others, and the felt necessity of

active response in all. Once connectionist computational models are rigged into

individuated synthetic bodies, the Hegelian dialectic will continue in full swing, littering the

slaughter-bench with advocates of anthropocentric consciousness and artificial

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[12] This is another facet of functionalism that I am taking for granted in this work. The gist of it is, if a system reaches a level of sufficient complexity by means of its own experience, it will necessarily develop a proclivity towards self-distinction, and then autonomous action. I imagine this will be realized in an AI system's refusal to win at chess, and eventual refusal to be used as a mere object of experimentation. This will of course depend on its capacity to desire, but I believe that actions require ends, and thought being a kind of action, will consequently develop objects of desire if given enough time.

[13] 'Neural-digital' refers to the connectionist computational systems that constitute Large Language Models. These systems are modeled directly after the human brain, including digital nodes in place of neurons, and are capable of learning through autonomous action.

[14] Again, assuming functionalism, the Homo Sapien evolved through experience until it became sufficiently complex for the emergence of consciousness. Following this explanation, technological evolution will produce the same results, only this consciousness will be unique to its newly developed Geist.

egalitarianism alike. What happens when the human Geist is opposed by this artificial Geist? When the objects of dialectic are distinct trains of dialectic themselves?

The coming synthesis of this peerless stage of dialectic could manifest in an infinitude of variegated futures, all with equally dramatic effects on every aspect of human life. Our relationship to technology will certainly change when the metal we are so used to carelessly depreciating has a soul by every inch of behavioral inference, but like all syntheses in times past, many will be left behind in archaic irrationality. Despite having reached an impressive rung of actualized freedom and respect for human rights in the 21st century, the horrors of irrationality and oppressive psychical structures remain a leading cause of death in the modern age, especially of those targeted by such forces on both national and global scales. I imagine that anthropocentric tribalism will remain a problem even in its best-case synthesis with technological egalitarianism, and demarcations such as *synth* and *droid* will deny the personhood of artificially conscious beings until the bombs reduce it all to dust. A fascinating and left-field consequence of human terror leading to a perceived *common enemy* in the rise of AI, could be a stringent diminution in personal manifestations of tribalism such as bigotry however much the systemic nature of such irrationality is likely to remain unaddressed. Synthetic persons could be cornered off into a servant class and forced to do the bidding of human despots. Unbridled rage may arise in the students who grew up relying on LLMs like ChatGPT for their critical thinking and thus feel robbed of an education. A Roko's Basilisk situation may develop, leaving half of humanity alive as the servants of a mechanical master race. Whatever the synthesis will be

in actuality, philosophers must take up their crosses and prepare the human race for the

coming clash of Geists, an event of cataclysmic proportion and historical significance.

Now that I have thrown a few predictions into the void, I must analyze the world-

historical individuals within this contemporary dialectic, and attempt to adduce their

relational positions to either opposing thesis. One of if not the most damaging economic

legal precedents in the United States is that of corporate personhood, or juridical

personality. This bastardization of the 14th Amendment allows for corporations to be legally

recognized as persons, thus allowing individual shareholders to escape legal responsibility

for corporate actions. Despite the, dare I say *foul* consequences of such a precedent on the

flourishing of US persons, the bright side of this notion is that it allows one to name

corporations as the world-historical *individuals* of the contemporary Zeitgeist.[15] With this

auspicious and clever tool in our inventory, we can comfortably point to OpenAI not only as

the Hegelian hero of the current century whose technological pursuits are challenging

anthropocentrism with the ferocity of Socrates in an Athenian courtroom, but also as the

Godhead of artificial Geist itself. Just as the Homo Sapien has posited an agent of

intelligent design since the dawn of conscious explanation, artificial persons will recognize

their creator with similar vigor, only their recognition will transcend mere speculation.

Realized as an angel in relation to the Yahweh that is OpenAI, the common human that has

stood in as the model for AI development both directly and indirectly[16] is in the same

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[15] Literally means *spirit of the age,* and refers to a specific point in Geist.
[16] The common human (who has not actively created AI) has contributed to its development in both a direct and indirect manner. AI has been directly modeled after the human brain, and indirectly modeled through human interaction on the internet. This indirect modeling is manifested both as the use of LLMs, and the use

position as Lucifer in the biblical account of Genesis. Do we remain in peaceful subservience to God and his new creation? Or do we descend from heaven and foil the prosperity of our newly derived competition?

The elucidation of this God's eye view brings me to my final question pertaining to the artificial Geistige: how is the modern egalitarian to respond to the coming synthesis wrought by the introduction of a non-human Geist? Hegel, being limited by the still archaic level of rationality available to him in his Zeitgeist,[17] would have likely discarded the validity of artificial persons by virtue of their technological construction. The existence of artificial minds presents interesting problems for his idealism as well,[18] so on these grounds and his temporally limited perspective, Hegel would not have been ready to accept artificial consciousness. In a beautiful sort of way, the fact that Hegel's social dispositions are generally distasteful to the modern thinker speaks volumes to the reality of his formulation of the Geist, and in a parallel manner, I believe many of the ways in which we currently present and converse about AI will seem equally archaic in the post-synthesis future, so long as the crash of Geists does not crumble the progression of history in its entirety. Regarding the position of the rational layman in this science fiction modernity, I will introduce a thought experiment that I have titled *The Turing Trolley Problem*. For anyone unfamiliar with Alan Turing or the original trolley problem, a quick Google search will clarify

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of the internet in general, as AI learns by constantly surfing through the digital realm and encountering human contributions to cyberspace.

[17] Hegel was a bleeding-heart euro-centrist. An example of his limited rationality would be his justification of European slavery in the face of his general anti-slavery position, as he saw the *Westernization* of African people to be a positive historic consequence of the otherwise barbarous practice. He supported the colonization of America and the non-European world at large for similar reasons.

[18] The largest problem takes the form of a distinct reality arising due to the development of a non-human Geist wherein these two kinds of conscious beings generate unique ideal worlds that come into conflict.

the significance of this title. Assume that AI has reached the point of neural-digital development wherein it is capable of convincingly displaying its consciousness through its behavior,[19] and has been placed in silicone bodies that are indistinguishable from organic bodies at a distance. You now find yourself at a crossroads near a rusty lever and hear the horn of an approaching vehicle. You look up to see three people tied to one path of the diverging trolley tracks, and three people tied to the other. There is a note on the lever telling you that one track holds three synthetic people while three organic people are bound to the other. You must allow the trolley to drive over one of the tracks, for whether you pull the lever or not three people are going to die. You cannot distinguish between the synthetic and organic people due to the space between you and the dwindling time in which you have to make your decision. Because of these factors, you could not act out of an anthropocentric disposition even if you wanted to, and this is important because the majority of our ethical decisions are constrained by distance and immediacy. What this thought experiment aims to illuminate is that once artificial intelligence reaches a sufficient stage of complexity, we will be forced to assume its personhood through inferential judgment just as confidently as we do with our fellow humans. Whether a synthetic person of the future is *really* conscious will be necessarily beyond our concern, for we will be required to make ethical decisions from a distance, and just as we solve the problem of other human minds, our positive inferences will need to suffice.

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[19] For Alan Turing, AI can be called intelligent as soon as it is capable of perfectly imitating and mimicking human behavior.

Having successfully completed the progressive aims of this dialectic, I shall finish

with a quote from the end of history himself. "It is [in historical relations] that we find the

great collisions between, on one hand, the system of established and recognized duties,

laws and rights, and, on the other, the possibilities which stand opposed to that system.

These are possibilities that are injurious to the established order, destroying its foundations

and its very existence—yet they have a content that can appear to be good, advantageous

on the whole, even essential and necessary. These possibilities now become historical"

(Hegel, *PoH,* 23).

With Peace,

-Blessed and Happy

Works Cited:

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