

Margolis, Historicism, and the History of Aesthetics

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Abstract This paper examines the manner in which Joseph Margolis’s philosophical commitment to historicism informed his reading of the history of philosophy focusing specifically on his engagement with the history of aesthetics. For Margolis, a historicised history of philosophy involves offering a reading of the great thinkers of the past with an eye towards marking their best contributions to the philosophical problems of the present. As such, the task of the history of philosophy is not to solely construct a narrative of the successive views of philosophers of the past, nor to merely accurately reconstruct what philosophers thought, but rather to recover the thought of those philosopher as a means to construct of own best philosophical discoveries.

Keywords Hegel. Historicism. History of aesthetics. Intentionality. Joseph Margolis. Pragmatism. Relativism.

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1 Introduction

In some of the memorial notices for Joseph Margolis that began to appear after his passing in June 2021 it was common theme to note that, although Margolis had written on nearly every area of philosophical debate over the course of his long and productive career, he was best known for his contributions in the philosophy of art. In aesthetics Margolis notably defended a robust relativism as the only adequate theory of interpretation suitable to the variances of the cultural world. This makes him, perhaps, the ablest defender of a coherent relativism in the entire history of Western philosophy. In support of his relativistic model of interpretation, Margolis developed a non-reductive ontology of art grounded in his guiding insight philosophical insight regarding human personhood. On this account, a human person is a hybrid entity, artificialised in the very same way as cultural products which are functions of our utterances, and thereby susceptible to the same strictures of (relativistic) interpretation. Of course, all this is true by way of summary of Joseph Margolis's towering philosophical accomplishments in aesthetics and the philosophy of art. Yet, perhaps due to the originality of his own thought, much less explicit attention has been paid to the ways in which Margolis engaged with the history of philosophy. Be that as it may, Margolis's writing is replete with sustained analysis of the canonical figures in the history of Western philosophy. These historical discussions often aim to animate the contemporary philosophical views he favours or disfavours by reconstructing current theoretical commitments in terms of the contingent historical trajectories of philosophical thought which have led to them. As such, it becomes immediately clear from almost any page in his extensive oeuvre that Margolis's knowledge of the history of Western philosophy was immense. And while he did not *explicitly* take up the history of philosophy or its historiography on its own accord as one of his main areas of philosophical focus, it is essential in order to fully grasp his own complex philosophical commitments to view them as correctives for the theoretical inadequacies of the towering figures of the Canon for the conceptual resources required for our own age. This, at any rate, is the spirit in which Margolis often offered his own philosophical musings. Therefore, it is difficult to fully understand Margolis's mature pragmatism and all its entailments in more local philosophical debates in the philosophy of art unless one understands them as emerging from Margolis's reading of the various dead ends (as he would have it) at which Western philosophy has arrived over the preceding 2,500 years. For example, the earliest Platonic rejection of relativism is a wrong turn from which, in Margolis's point of view, philosophy has still never fully recovered (despite his own very best efforts).

Due to his overarching commitment to historicism, Margolis's own readings of the history of philosophy (and subsequently his grappling with the canonical figures of the Western philosophical tradition)¹ are more often a reflection of what, due to their own location in the history of philosophy, those figures necessarily lacked in terms of an adequate philosophy of the human, the arts, the sciences and entire domain of culture. At least from Margolis's particular, likewise historicised, philosophical vantage.

In order to get at some of the ways in which Margolis's historicism can be gleaned from his engagement with the history of philosophy, in this paper I shall primarily examine parts of *On Aesthetics: An Unforgiving Introduction*. *On Aesthetics* is a curious text in that it is ostensibly intended as an introduction to the history of Western philosophical aesthetics suitable for use in an undergraduate philosophy course. In that regard, I suggest, the text is unsuccessful. As might also be reasonably asserted of William James's *Some Problems of Philosophy*, the purpose of a supposedly introductory text can be seen as in tension with the elaboration of one's own philosophical system, especially if an introductory text is meant to be a statement of the canonical problems and figures in the history of a given subfield of philosophy. Thus, although *On Aesthetics* would likely leave an undergraduate mostly uninformed about the history and development of philosophical aesthetics, a careful reader already in possession of a general understanding of the trajectory of philosophical aesthetics from Aristotle to Kant and Hegel could leave an encounter with the book understanding something about Margolis's own aesthetics. Especially as it pertains to the failure of those earlier thinkers to provide sufficient philosophical grounds to account for their purported subject matter - the arts.

In what follows, I shall discuss some of the more interesting parts of *On Aesthetics* from the point of view of trying to develop, from that text, a sense of how Margolis reads the history of philosophy with a further eye towards picking out the often-well-grounded complaints that Margolis levels against earlier aesthetic theories. Next, I shall sketch Margolis's formulation of historicism to show how historicism informs his treatment of figures in the history of philosophy. Finally, I shall provisionally suggest some ways in which reading Margolis reading the history of philosophy (here focused narrowly on the history of aesthetics) is helpful in unpacking his guiding philosophical insight - the single idea that if one were to reject would amount to the rejection of Margolis's entire philosophical project - namely, his

1 In a late, semi-autobiographical piece, Margolis confessed his regret that he possessed only the faintest familiarity with the rich philosophical traditions of Asia (Margolis 2021, 2).

theory of the human person. Although it will lie outside the scope of this modest paper to fully explicate the myriad ways in which Margolis's theory of personhood informs his philosophy as a whole, it is hoped that the suggestions offered here will point the way towards a more sustained investigation into how Margolis used the history of philosophy in the articulation of his own thought, and as a consequence, how to best understand Margolis's own place in that history.

2 **Historicism as a Methodological Constraint on Doing the History of Philosophy**

As Joseph Margolis is widely associated within the field of philosophical aesthetics with the defence of a relativistic model of interpretation, a philosopher opposed to relativism in the interpretation of the history of philosophy (that is one convinced that there is a single correct reading of the meaning and contributions of past philosophers) might reasonably be concerned about the ways in which that relativism would inform Margolis's reading and interpretations of said history. It is important to note here at the outset however that Margolis's relativism was never of the 'anything goes' variety as his theory of interpretation is primarily focused on articulating the conditions which would make a statement *apt* (rather than bivalently true or false) to the object of interpretation (whether it be an artwork, a philosophical text, the actions of a human person, or our collective histories). This worry might especially obtain for "universalist" philosophers because, as Margolis has noted, in his paper "Historicism, Universalism, and the Threat of Relativism" historicism entails relativism and pluralism (even though the opposite entailments do not hold). That is, as Margolis puts it, "within an historicised or praxicalised inquiry, the loss of universalism must doom us also to skepticism and relativism." However, this fear, in Margolis's view, will ultimately be philosophical insignificant because, he continues, "if relativism and pluralism need neither be incoherently formulated nor threaten whatever general cognitive regularities the practices of science can otherwise legitimately claim, there is no additional need to resist (or to fear) the implications of adopting those doctrines" (Margolis 1984, 317). As such, since for Margolis historicism entails relativism, developing a clear understanding of what is meant by that former doctrine is essential in understanding his broader defence of relativism and pluralism. Although this paper will not be able to fully articulate and defend the complete extent of the relationship between these two aspects of Margolis's thought, it shall provide a necessary pro-paedeutic for that larger study by examining some of the salient details of Margolis's theory of historicism. One constructive method of coming to an understanding of how historicism informs Margolis's

philosophy is to examine the ways in which it is made manifest in his treatment of thinkers from the history of philosophy. In that regard a particularly fruitful text, because it is meant in part as a historical introduction to philosophical aesthetics (whether or not it fully succeeds in that task), is Margolis's book *On Aesthetics*.

Although Margolis does not explicitly address questions of methodology in doing the history of philosophy in detail in *On Aesthetics*, it is possible to discern some of his commitments on the proper uses of the history of philosophy from that text. First, considering the subtitle of that text – an *unforgiving* introduction – it is clear that Margolis is not interested in presenting a purely 'objective' account of the meaning of the various historical philosophers he discusses since, on his view, no such accounting would, strictly speaking, be possible. A commitment to historicism has decided implications for one's further views of history (and vice versa) and how to do the history of philosophy. One such statement of Margolis's commitment to a historicised method of doing the history of philosophy can be found in the brief preface of *On Aesthetics*.

So the arts, and the sciences as well, are, once again, profoundly historied and (I daresay) only thus rightly understood. There's a paradox there that will prove to be benign, because the seeming claim in favour of historicity is not itself a necessary or changeless of universalist doctrine. It's no more than a *faute de mieux* proposal regarding the whole of our humanly intelligible world. The analysis that follows draws its entire rationale from the double conviction that we shall understand aesthetics best (and ourselves and philosophy in the bargain) if we trace their careers from their historical origins and, continuingly, in historicised terms. That, apparently, is a heterodox idea – except when actually stated: we proceed by constructing our discoveries. (Margolis 2009, vii)

There is much that is instructive in this passage in understanding how Margolis approached his treatment of the history of philosophy in, at least nominally, a historical introduction to philosophical aesthetics. First, the best possible understanding of the history of aesthetics (and philosophy) is one that takes as its methodological starting point a commitment to historicism. I shall explore the details of Margolis's historicism in more detail in what follows, but for now it can be noted that for Margolis historicism does not merely mean that thinking has a history, or that it is bounded by a particular historical context of horizon, but more strongly that thinking is a history. As Joanne Waugh has noted in commenting on Margolis's thought "the history of philosophy is, in a fundamental sense, the history of thinking that is a history" (Waugh 2005, 579). Further, Margolis makes a distinction in the passage above between tracing

the historical origins of aesthetics in order to best understand it and doing this historical work in historicised terms. It is important not to conflate these closely related points. For Margolis, a commitment to historicism is not exhausted merely by asserting that aesthetics must be understood through an examination of its history. Later in *On Aesthetics* Margolis states that “the historicised conception of history” is to see “history as more than a temporally deployed story” (2009, 57). So, it is not enough to provide a historicised history of aesthetics to construct a cohesive narrative that presents aesthetics as having a story that can be told convincingly as the recounting of who thought what and when. What more might be required still remains to be seen. Secondly, returning now to the long passage quoted above, the historicised understanding of the history of philosophy has to be understood merely as (in one of Margolis’s favourite expressions *faute de mieux*) being preferable only because of the absence of anything better. This argumentative strategy is central to Margolis’s treatment of the history of philosophy – his attempts to show the inadequacies of the classical aesthetic theories of the Ancient and Modern periods in philosophy (periodisation, of course, being itself a central question in the historiography of philosophy) are intended to show that there really is an absence of anything better (than his own preferred theoretical gambits) in the history of aesthetics that could offer a plausible explanation of the complexities of the cultural, that is the human, world. So even if historicity is itself merely a provisional and fallible proposal, until something theoretically better comes along (if it ever does), it still must be conceived in a way, as must relativism, that avoids the obvious self-refuting paradox. Especially if that is taken as meaning that *no* coherent version of historicism or relativism could be constructed. This is why Margolis, at least as early as 1984’s “Historicism, Universalism, and the Threat of Relativism” quoted above, claims that historicity is itself never presented as an invariant, universalist philosophical thesis (as this would be a self-refuting version of that doctrine). This is what, in Margolis’s estimation, makes his defence of these views heterodox – but only against the backdrop of the conventions of the broader context of the dominant world of late Anglo-Analytic philosophy in which he worked, thought, and wrote. This context, of course, is also only properly understood if it is taken as itself a temporal part of the historicised history of philosophy!

There is a further instructive passage from *On Aesthetics* about how to read the history of philosophy that will be useful to explore before progressing to a fuller account of Margolis’s meaning of historicism itself. In the context of providing a tally of his own commit-

ments for an adequate metaphysics of art² as a means to robustly account for historicity and the reality of culture (against, for example, figures like Arthur Danto who, Margolis argues, cannot account for either given the theoretical commitments of his admittedly better-known philosophy of art)³ Margolis suggests the following as a way to reconcile his account with Hegel.

I take them to cohere as the best way to read Hegel's contribution even if it goes against his own convictions. I am not sure what Hegel's best conviction is; I'm not sure anyone knows for certain. But I'm convinced we must read the great philosophers with a scruple that does not flinch at "correcting" them for the sake of their "own best use" – always, for trivial reasons, said to accord with our own best lights. There's room, then, for the correction of our corrections. It will always be thus; the "best" views are always designated in the present. (Margolis 2009, 135)

An uncharitable critic might accuse Margolis of committing the fallacy of claiming that the entire history of philosophy (aesthetics) leads to his own thought. However, a close reading of this passage belies such an interpretation. Rather, Margolis is suggesting a strong com-

2 Margolis is perhaps the greatest list-maker in the recent history of Western philosophy. The list referred to here and in the block quote below consists of the following claims comprising Margolis's "meta-metaphysical" generalisations required for an adequate metaphysics of art:

1. Metaphysics should be treated as a construction or proposal without invoking any claims to cognitive privilege or universality.
2. Any viable metaphysics things in the cultural world are to be grouped together on the basis of their sharing "Intentional" properties which cannot be rightly ascribed to mere material objects.
3. Intentional things are distinctive in that they instantiate Intentional properties and emerge from the world of mere material things.
4. 1-3 preclude any reduction of the Intentional (cultural) world to the things of the (merely) material world (contra Danto).
5. The emergence of the Intentional world likewise implicates the penetration of the material world by enculturating powers (primarily for Margolis the process of language acquisition)
6. Intentional objects and properties are ontological hybrids which are effected by the primary transformation of members of *Homo Sapiens* to encultured persons or selves (a process which Margolis captures by his use of the term *Bildung*)
7. Intentional properties are determinable but not determinate (in the way that physical properties are) such that the logic of interpretation of Intentional properties is consistent with historicism and relativism (Margolis 2009, 133-5).

Here, in this footnote, are almost the entirety of Margolis's major philosophical commitments. Keep in mind that as presented in the original context they were merely employed as a way in which to frame a suggestion about how to read Hegel's own philosophical contribution!

3 For a fuller accounting of Margolis's argument with Danto, a recurring theme of *On Aesthetics* see Pryba 2015.

mitment to fallibilism in our “best” readings of figures from the history of philosophy. So, we must read the great philosophers without hesitating to “correct” them where their thinking might be fruitfully viewed as contributing to our own best philosophical intuitions, even when this reading might otherwise count as going against that philosopher’s own convictions when circumscribed within their own understanding of their own place within the history of philosophy (as they understood it). Of course, thinkers from the past were bounded, just as we are, by their own historical horizon. This means that we likewise cannot determine what contributions we may make towards the best philosophical convictions of the future when we are viewed from that future vantage. But, since as Margolis asserts “the ‘best’ views are always designated in the present” our best reading of the history of philosophy will be supplanted by the reading of whatever future generations of philosophers take to be our best contributions to *their* conception of philosophical problems whether or not that reading would be consistent with the way that we might currently conceive of our strongest philosophical convictions. Margolis, if we take him at his word, would have no problem if the philosophy of the future should deign to read him as he suggests we should read Hegel.

The suggestion that we read the history of philosophy with an eye towards its best uses for our own philosophical projects, despite what we might otherwise consider to be that philosopher’s own historically grounded philosophical convictions, might bring to mind Richard Rorty’s own postmodern suggestions as to how to use the history of philosophy. For Rorty, any “strong” philosopher can be interpreted in such a way as to make them an ally of contemporary (postmodern) philosophical projects. Rorty’s uses of Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger come to mind as illustrations of the kind of interpretive freedom that Rorty advocates (Rorty 1979). For Margolis, however, there is a significant difference between Rorty’s and his own procedures in reading and employing the history of philosophy for contemporary philosophical usages. For Margolis, although we must understand the contributions of the great thinkers from the history of philosophy in a historicised way, and this means that their best philosophical insights are to be considered against the most promising views of the present, this does not amount to a “presentism” in the history of philosophy or a revisionist historical approach writ large. Margolis’s problem with Rorty’s looser interpretative strictures is that “too many rightly admired contributions were too easily dismissed by the barest appeal to Rorty’s notion of philosophical work, so that his advice (and personal example) proved utterly ill-advised. It produced chaos and bad philosophy rather than the clean surgery intended” (Margolis 2009, 2). And yet, Margolis does not hesitate to assert on the next page that Kant’s *Critique of Judgment*, if taken as a guide for philosophical aesthetics, would be “to render our own views as nearly

indefensible and irrelevant as is humanly possible" (2009, 3). There is perhaps no more forceful example of what Margolis intends by his scruple to read the history of aesthetics (philosophy) by framing that reading with our own best understanding of what that discipline requires. This is one suggestion for how to conceive of reading the history of philosophy philosophically rather than merely historically. If one were to follow Kant's inquiries in aesthetics merely because it is a "canonical" text in field, then one would have learned nothing from the history of philosophy about why Kant's own inquiries in that domain are doomed to fail as a foundation for what an adequate aesthetics, when viewed by our own 'best lights,' actually requires.

With all that kept in mind, it will be helpful to return to Margolis's comments about the best reading of Hegel's contribution quoted above because, despite his protestations to the opposite, Margolis does suggest what Hegel's best conviction, and thereby contribution, to the history of philosophy consists in. It is none other than the master theme of Margolis's own philosophy, and which renders a full recovery of Kant both in aesthetics and in philosophy more broadly impossible: historicity. Consider the following:

Hegel changes philosophy fundamentally by historicising it. It's a genuinely grand feat of an unforeseen kind that, to this day, we have hardly mined. Furthermore, historicity is already widely viewed as ineliminable in philosophy in general (hence, in aesthetics) *and* in any minimal grasp of the fine arts and encultured life. If you read my meaning correctly here (and agree), you realise I've just put forward the astonishing claim that both philosophy (for present purposes, aesthetics) and our discourse about the arts and culture in general (also, our reflexive understanding of ourselves) have always been conceptually deficient – from (say) their Parmenidean beginnings to the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth. (That's to say a span of more than two millennia!) You must consider that philosophy was almost completely deprived of what, to our own thought, comes closest to being the principal clue to everything human. (Margolis 2009, 57)

Rather than asserting the poverty of historicism, Margolis is asserting the poverty of philosophy without historicism! What else is astonishing about this passage is that Margolis is clear that historicism is the key to understanding the entirety of the human, that is cultural, world. One cannot have a theory of art without recognising that art takes the form of an utterance of an encultured self where that person/self is likewise itself a history. This is one important clue to how mining Margolis's interpretation of the history of aesthetics leads to the necessity of his insight of the human person as a physically embodied culturally emergent entity. Further, this insight accounts for,

in part, the inadequacy of any aesthetic theory prior to Hegel's historicising of philosophy. Likewise, Margolis's criticises much of contemporary theory in aesthetics as internally incoherent because of a tendency to treat aesthetic inquiry and the arts in less than thoroughly historicised terms. This is particularly embarrassing, Margolis argues, in Danto's case because the latter professes to be a Hegelian in particular in terms of the end of art thesis and yet his distinction between mere real things and works of art does not heed Hegel's historicist lesson (Margolis 2009, 159). But Danto, Margolis would conjecture, does not provide the best reading of Hegel. Take, as a final piece of evidence of the way in which Margolis's historicism is operative in his reading of the history of philosophy, the following passage from a slightly later essay "The Point of Hegel's Dissatisfaction with Kant" which bears a striking consistency with the way in which Margolis had previously treated the reading of Hegel in *On Aesthetics*.

Put in the most unguarded way, the best reading of Hegel's undertaking (perhaps not always textually perspicuous or interpretively reliable) commits us to the following constraints... that Hegel unconditionally abandons transcendentalism (all a priori assurances of necessity and universality... and that under the constraints of evolving and historied experience, claims of necessity and universality are, wherever pressed, never more than *faute de mieux* contingencies. (Margolis 2012, 9)

That the 'best' reading of Hegel is one that may not always be interpretively reliable as a narrow exegesis of Hegel's thought might strike those with a more conservative approach to the history of philosophy as no different than Rorty's postmodern move. However, a Margolisian reading of Hegel might best capture why Hegel is dissatisfied with Kant (because the latter could not account for experience as both having a history and itself being historied) in a way that a more "faithful" explication of Hegel's texts could not. This is not to suggest that any reading of Hegel (or any other thinker from the history of philosophy) is as good as any other. Interpretations must be adequate to their objects for Margolis even if not restricted to a narrow bivalent logic of interpretation. To deny even an adequational theory of interpretation would be to suggest the sort of facile, self-refuting relativistic interpretation of texts that Margolis was at great pains to show was itself inconsistent with his 'robust relativism'.⁴ Rather, the 'best' reading of the history of philosophy is the one that accords with our own 'best lights'. Having provided something of a sketch of how historicism informed Joseph Margolis's reading and usage of the

⁴ See Margolis 1995, 24-5 for one account of his adequational theory of interpretation.

history of philosophy, the task remains to get clearer on what, exactly, Margolis understood by 'historicism'.

3 What, After All, is Margolisian Historicism?

It should be obvious by now that what Joseph Margolis intended to capture by his use of 'historicism' is not the more commonly held version of the thesis that holds that historicism is a form of historical determinism in the interpretation of events. For example, Popper's grouping of historicism with essentialism could not be more in error for Margolis as historicism is a rejection of any claim to an invariant structure in reality that can come to be known through (transcendental) human reason. Additionally, Margolis is not the first thinker in the pragmatist tradition to take a commitment to historicity as central to pragmatism. Colin Koopman has convincingly argued that historicism, often taking the form of a commitment to meliorism, pervades both the classical pragmatists and the neo-pragmatism such that "meliorism... means taking historicity seriously" where historicity is minimally construed as the claim "that pragmatists understand things as historically situated and temporally conditioned" (Koopman 2010, 690-1). While this is a good starting point in understanding the place of both meliorism and historicism in the cluster of concepts that comprise the family resemblances that are often taken as constituting a commitment to pragmatism, Margolis's formulation of historicism is much more radical than the one that Koopman traces through the classical pragmatists and beyond.

For Margolis, the analysis of historicism begins with the doctrine of historical flux, the claim that the "denial of strict invariances of reason or reality, need not be self-defeating" (Margolis 1993, 117). If reality is a flux, then all of our philosophical concepts would need to be reconciled to that flux. This reconciliation of philosophical concepts to the flux of reality, when that is formulated in a non-self-defeating way, are the minimal conditions that Margolis sets out for any version of historicism. To the two conditions outlined above - that 1) reality is a flux and 2) that our philosophical concepts can be reconciled to the flux in coherent ways - Margolis adds two more conditions - namely that "knowledge is an artifact of history" and that "persons or human selves are artifacts of contingent social history" (1993, 118). Put more forcefully, for Margolis persons "have or are only *histories*" (1993, 120). Thus, 1) if human persons are histories rather than possessing invariant essences, and further 2) the entirety of the cultural world is brought into existence by being the utterance of an encultured human self which is in turn embedded in a broader social and cultural history, then 3) the entirety of the cultural world, including the arts and the sciences, can only be proper-

ly understood through the theoretical auspices of a thoroughgoing historicism. This argument, I hope, lays bare the depth of Margolian historicism. There is no aspect of human culture, and thereby all our conceptions of reality, that it does not touch. Further, since the Intentional structure of the cultural world makes it irreducible to mere material or physical things, when applied to history, this implies that historical time and physical time need not, and for Margolis are not, identical. History, Margolis claims “has an Intentional structure” (2021, 152) and is thereby essentially interpretable in the same way in which we interpret art and with the same relativistic logic. When this connection is seen it becomes clear why Margolis resisted physicalism and reductionism in any of the domains of philosophical inquiry where it is to be found. Just as the possession of Intentional properties make artworks irreducible to their physically embodying medium, and human persons or selves irreducible to our physical or biological aspects, historical time too is irreducible to physical time. And while the latter might be causally closed such that one cannot reverse physical time, history, because historicised, remains essentially open and interpretable but always, as Margolis would have it, guiding by what counts as the ‘best lights’ of the present. The full excavation of all the implications of Margolis’s historicised theory of the human person, in both his own thought and the reconstructions that it would necessitate in broader areas of contemporary philosophical research, requires a much more detailed study. It is hoped that this articulation of the historicist argument in Margolis’s thought can prove useful in pointing out the direction, however crudely, that those future studies might take.

4 Conclusion

When Margolis claims that the self is a history, he means more than just that the self is conditioned by history and as such is not a timeless essence that by virtue of its rational nature can transcend the bounds of human history, through the study of philosophy, to come to known reality as it is independent of the merely subjective conditions of human experience. It is also to say more than that the self is just a conditioned series of temporal events, a sequence of changes, a narrative, rather than an eternal substance that bridges those events. Of course, he means to suggest both of those points. But more than that, to say that the self is a history is to say that the self, like history and art, has or is an Intentional structure. One cannot separate Margolis’s theory of the human person, his ontology of culture, and his historicism – they are all unified in his thought. This theoretical unification is due to the same Intentional structures, first realised by the transformation of biological members of *Homo Sapi-*

ens into encultured and enlanguaged human selves, being central in the explanation of all three. Further, this shared Intentionality explains both how persons, culture, and history emerge from, and are embodied in, their underlying basal properties and yet as ontological hybrids cannot be reduced to mere physicalist explanations. If one way to think of pragmatism, as a humanism, is through William James's assertion that the trail of the human serpent is over everything, then we might rightly update and modify this pragmatic slogan in a Margolisian vein and claim that the trail of the Intentional is over everything. This paper has argued that an examination of Margolis's reading of the history of philosophy (aesthetics) is one fruitful avenue by which to understand the central roles that historicism and Intentionality hold in all aspects of his thought.

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