THE IDEA OF DEEP HISTORY: KANT AND HEGEL ON WAR AND NATURAL HISTORY

by Attay Kremer*

Abstract. *Recent research in the historical sciences, dubbed 'deep history', seeks to undermine the division between human culture and nature, and to present humanity's evolution as part of natural history. That goal brings in some conceptual difficulties regarding the relation of nature to history, which in the German philosophical tradition tend to be conceptualized as opposites. This paper looks to sketch the conceptual frame of deep history, relying on Kant and Hegel's understanding of war. Kant's thinking about human history – especially the notion and guarantee of a perpetual peace – is predicated on the purposiveness of nature, as developed in the third* Critique*. And so, there is a sense in which war is a particularly important manifestation of the natural in the human. Turning to Hegel, we argue that his criticism of the idea of a natural history in the* Philosophy of Nature*, may be overcome if we take war into consideration as a structuring notion of history. It is argued that death and conflict provide common conceptual ground in the formation of a natural history of the human bring.*

Keywords. *Kant; Hegel; War; Anthropocene; Natural History; Perpetual Peace*

1. *The Task of Deep History*

> The mind seemed to grow giddy by looking so far into the abyss of time.
> John Playfair

> πόλεμος πάντων μὲν πατήρ ἐστι.
> Heraclitus

In 2015, at the Sima de los Huesos site in northern Spain, archaeologists recovered and reconstructed 52 fragments of what had

* Yale University – Tel Aviv University

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eventually turned out to be a near-complete human skull. What that reconstructive effort uncovered is the first murder on record: Two devastating, bone shattering strikes followed by a plummet down the shaft of a cave system[1]. Familiar manners of forensic investigation, heightened by the demands of that near-unimaginable abyss of time, revealed a primal human activity – that of the warring subjects – not as an event in human history, but as a fossilized remnant of nature's past. A violent encounter recorded in the dirt and the mud, and in time, in geological strata. There, a fragment of human history – a murder – was recorded by nature itself. It is not uncommon: Accounts of ancient history, and even more so, accounts of prehistory, rely on the natural circumstances that allows for material and archaeological records of human activity. One can develop no (empirically grounded) idea of prehistory without the participation of nature in that history – in the materials used and the environmental conditions that preserve those materials. The notion that there could be a history outside of the written record is inconceivable without nature's capacity to internalize, to hold on to and recall, the events it witnesses.

Deep history, an emerging branch of the historical sciences, aims to bring out exactly that. For the 'deep historian', there ought to be no clear-cut difference between human activities recorded in writing and the communal habits of early human species, attested to by the fossil record. Both are indispensable for the task of history, construed broadly as making sense of the development of the human form of life. The idea of deep history is a reframing of historical narrative to deny, in concrete practice, the idea that there is a pre-history – a period of human activity that is, in some sense, before the historical period. It therefore stands contrary to recounting history as the human mastery over nature, which allows one a fantasy of early humans that are merely part of nature, and humans distinct from it[2]. This idea

[1] S. Knapton, *Was this the World's First Murder Victim?*, «The Telegraph», 27th May 2015 (https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/environment/archaeology/11633455/Was-this-the-worlds-first-murder-victim.html).

[2] A mission statement of deep history, as an attitude in historical research, is given in A. Shryock and D. L. Smail, *Deep History: The Architecture of Past and Present*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2011, pp. IX-XII.

is developed, in various ways, already in Enlightenment thought. For example, Kant writes in the *Conjectural Beginnings*: «[T]he first human being could therefore *stand* and *walk*; he could *speak* and indeed *talk* – i.e., speak with the help of coherent concepts – and consequently *think*» and «[t]hese human beings [the conjectured first humans] must also be *fully developed*»[3].

The project of deep history is intimately related with a need to respond, within the humanities, to the climate crisis. As a cluster of disciplines that are, perhaps, most interested in the ins and outs of the human animal, the humanities are called upon by a change in our understanding of ourselves. No longer a foreground of history against a backdrop of nature – or natural history – but historical actors in a natural history. Looking to reconfigure our understanding of the human being in the age of its influence on nature, deep history aims to make continuous our thinking about human and natural history. Chakrabarty most explicitly takes on a renewed task of history in the Anthropocene and proposes a history that accounts for planetary considerations and the new agency that we have with respect to the ecosphere. In that he is joined by Latour, from a more philosophical perspective[4]. Curiously, Chakrabarty's introduction begins immediately with Hegel. He writes:

> If Hegel [...] were alive to plumb the depths of our sense of the present, he would notice something imperceptibly and but inexorably seeping into the everyday of historical consciousness of those who consume their daily diet of new: an awareness of the planet and of its geobiological history[5].

[3] I. Kant, *Mutmaßlicher Anfang der Menschengeschichte*, in *Gesammelte Schriften*, ed. by Königlichen Preußischen (later Deutschen) Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1900- (henceforth AA, followed by the number of the volume), Berlin, Reimer (later, De Gruyter), vol. 8, pp. 110; trans. by H. Siegbert Ross, *Political Writings*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 222.

[4] See B. Latour, *Facing Gaia: Eight Lectures on the New Climactic Regime*, New York, John Wiley & Sons, 2017.

[5] D. Chakrabarty, *The Climate of History in a Planetary Age*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2021, p. 1.

We would surely like to believe that Hegel's acute awareness of the timeliness of thinking – both its need and capacity to capture an age – would clue him into this change. But what would Hegel actually make of that change? Doubtless, he is in many respects a thinker of his time, and so more on the side of what I had quoted from Kant than on Chakrabarty's. Hegel sticks to a sharp, but non-trivial, distinction between nature and history. History, for him, is «spirit relinquished into time»[6], where spirit is understood to be sheer internality, and nature sheer externality (*Außereinanderseins*), «the form of otherness»[7]. He writes that

> this externality is characteristic of nature: differences are allowed to fall apart and to appear as existences indifferent to each other; and the dialectical concept, which leads the stages further, is the interior which emerges only in the spirit[8].

But there is also a tension in Hegel, between what in him is so of his time and what is nevertheless so open to the future, and to radical change. It is a profound tension that arguably structures his philosophy. In these contexts, we should, as I will do here, stress his future-facing-side as much as possible. More broadly, it is certainly true that the German philosophical tradition has had a profound and on-going engagement with the philosophy of history. And so, the demands of our current situation, where history and ecology seem to require a unification, and where that unification has been treated extensively in the historical literature, leaves us with philosophical or historical-philosophical concern. What are the philosophical implications of deep history? How are we now to understand not the methodology of history but the logic and

[6] G.W.F. Hegel, *Werke in 20 Bänden*, (henceforth cited as TW, followed by the number of the respective volume) ed. by K. M. Michel and E. Moldenhauer, Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 1970, vol. 3, p. 590; trans. by T. Pinkard, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2018, p. 466.

[7] TW 9, § 192, trans. by A.V. Miller, *Philosophy of Nature*, Oxford, The Claredon Press, 2004, § 192.

[8] Ivi, § 194.

metaphysics of its underlying concepts? And so too, have the concepts of nature and history developed in the German tradition been undercut, or do they still hold the potential to enlighten our understanding of this new historical age? In what follows, I will take up these questions in one of their manifestations in Kant and Hegel. What I would like to convince the interested reader of, is that the question of war is of particular interest in investigating these questions. It is, I hope, already hinted at in the opening paragraph. Along these lines, I will propose a reading of Kant and Hegel's views on the role of war in human history that insists on the role of nature in war.

As I indicated right at the outset, the key claim that I take to be required of these thinkers – as representatives of this German historical-philosophical tradition – is the incorporation of war, or catastrophic violence writ large, into our notion of nature. The sense in which one can take the fossil record to be a historical record is intimately tied to its resulting from the earth's internalization of death. Such an internalization, as I will develop, touches exactly on both Kant and Hegel's conception of a concept crucial for history: war. Natural history, as I will sketch it out here, relies on a communion between natural catastrophe and war, in how both indicate a historicality that is internal to nature and imposed on it. What the earth recalls, a writing that precedes writing, is precisely ossified remains[9]. With both Kant and Hegel, we find that history's belonging to nature is expressed in its odd modality, the reflective ought of the perpetual peace first, and war's cutting across the distinction of necessary and contingent in the second. This legacy invites one to think of nature and history continuously as modes of internalization and transmutation of the modality of phenomena.

Although obviously later, Adorno's 1932 *Kant-Gesellschaft* address, *The Idea of Natural-History*, provides an excellent introduction to the task of natural, and so also deep, history[10].

[9] As we shall see, ossification is crucial to Hegel's understanding of war.

[10] On the philosophical context and historiographical details of that text, see S. Buck-Morss, *The Origin of Negative Dialectics: Theodor W. Adorno, Walter Benjamin and the Frankfurt Institute*, London, The Free Press, 1977, pp. 52-7. For a discussion of Adorno's later account of these themes, in his lectures *History and*

There, Adorno seeks to undermine the nature-history distinction: to flesh out the need for a concept of history that is natural, and a concept of nature that is historical. The challenge put forward in the idea of natural history is that of creating an intimacy between the history of nature and the nature of history. He writes that «[t]he problem of historical contingency can not be mastered by the category of historicity»[11] and therefore, that the:

> the question of the relation of nature and history is [...] to comprehend historical being in its most extreme historical determinacy, where it is most historical, as natural being, or if it were possible to comprehend nature as an historical being where it seems to rest most deeply in itself as nature[12].

On this view – as I see it, shared by Kant and Hegel – the task of a deep or natural history is one of thinking together necessity and contingency, not as opposites, but mutually grounding and interdependent concepts. In Kant, this takes the form of the peculiar modality that is involved in the necessity of regulative principles, that are always and only applied to empirical, and so contingent matters. On the historical stage, this is a matter of the technique by which nature might guarantee perpetual peace. For Hegel, the dichotomy between nature and history, or externality and internality, is thematized – though it is not quite possible to pin down – along the lines of contingency and necessity respectively. In the next section I will explicate what I take to be Kant's view on the influence of nature on human history, in his *Perpetual Peace* (Zum ewigen Frieden) and the themes from the third *Critique* on which they rely. In the section after, I will explore Hegel's view on the ahistorical character of nature and will offer a somewhat unorthodox view by comparison with his account of the necessity of war. With Kant's view of war, we establish that human history's relationship to war is

Freedom, see D. Cook, *Adorno on Nature*, London and New York, Routledge, 2014, pp. 7-34.

[11] T.W. Adorno, *The Idea of Natural History*, «Telos», LX, 1984, pp. 111-124, p. 114.

[12] *Ibidem*.

an expression of nature, or that by mediation of war, human history is natural. With Hegel, I argue that the concept of war may imply that nature is historical, also in the human – *geistlich* – sense.

2. *'The Great Artist Nature Herself'*

Taking up questions regarding history in Kant's thought is much like taking up questions regarding anthropology: we cannot do so rigorously without attending to the ground of these questions in the critical project. Both kinds of questions are partial expressions of the '*Was ist der Mensch?*' – which we are to understand is a crowning achieved of the critical philosophy, and therefore significantly presupposes it[13]. So, to find an appropriate point of entry into the philosophical sketch of the perpetual peace, we should recall something of the system of critical philosophy. Most of the *Perpetual Peace* is dedicated to a political-philosophical outline of the kind of perpetual peace that may be hoped for. But what is truly of interest in the essay, and indeed what anyone with a reasonable shred of scepticism will find themselves wondering is what justifies *any* kind of perpetual peace in the first place. Kant's answer to this question explicitly brings nature into the discussion. He writes:

> Perpetual peace is *guaranteed* by no less an authority than the great artist [*Künstlerin*] *Nature* herself (*natura daedala rerum*). The mechanical process of nature exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men, even against their will and indeed by means of their very discord. This design, if we regard it as a compelling cause whose laws of operation are unknown to us, is called *fate*. If we consider its purposive function within the world's development [...] we call it *providence*[14].

[13] This is an oft-quoted part of the *Jäsche Logic*. See AA 9, p. 25; trans. by J.M. Young, *Lectures on Logic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 538. And for an account of the fourth question and its relation to the critical project in general, see R.P. Frierson, *What is the Human Being?*, London and New York, Routledge, 2013.

[14] AA 8, pp. 343-386; trans. p. 108.

The notion brought up here of an art (*Kunst*) of nature, implies a reliance on ideas developed in the third *Critique*, namely that of a technique of nature whereby empirical forms are fit into a system of nature. So, in accounting for the justification of the perpetual peace, it seems rather pertinent that we first give some account of the view of nature in that *Critique*, as well as of the tension that it aims to address. The third *Critique* opens with a bird's-eye view of the critical project, from which the first two *Critique*s appear to constitute a tension, an «incalculable gulf [*Kluft*]»[15], between freedom and nature. It is a tension between the realm of the unconditioned, where the will posits purposes, and the realm of determinate, sensate objects of experience, subject to mechanical causality. In simplified form, it may be understood along the lines of the is-ought distinction: Freedom involves always a consideration of what ought to be, while determinate, mechanical nature is only ever what is, and has no normative dimension. (That last assertion is undercut in the third *Critique*).

That gulf poses a problem for the systematic nature of the critical philosophy, and indeed to the unity of human subjectivity, both of which would otherwise be left split, 'half' free and 'half' natural, so to speak[16]. After all, if there are aspects of human cognition and indeed human life – the capacity of experience and that of moral thought – so foreign to one another so as to constitute an antinome, there can be no unified notion of the human subject, nor any unified system of philosophy. What is at stake then is to find a common precondition of the possibility of these capacities. Both the theoretical and practical faculties are determinative: both act given a rule or

[15] AA 5, p. 176; trans. by P. Guyer and E. Matthews, *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000, p. 63.

[16] For commentaries on the tension between nature and freedom in Kant's philosophy see P. Guyer, *Kant's System of Nature and Freedom*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 2005 and L. Ostaric, *The* Critique of Judgment *and the Unity of Kant's Critical System*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Guyer's account retains some polemical points, especially regarding the primacy of practical philosophy, and so emphasizes the split, while Ostaric's is focused more on reflection and so aims to express the unity awarded in said reflection.

concept and determine a particular in accordance with it. In the theoretical philosophy, this determination takes the form of schematization, whereby the sensible object and the discursive concept are mediated so that the latter may be applied to the former[17]. In the practical philosophy, it is a matter of making, by acting on the sensible world, an instance of the purely formal categorical imperative[18].

Kant's insight, most explicit in the *First Introduction* to the third *Critique*, is that there is a kind of judgement that precedes – ontologically rather than temporally – the determinative mode of judgement. The capacity to determine a particular according to a universal is predicated on the capacity for the reflection that is required for that universal to begin with. Suppose we wish to say of one and the same thing that it is at the same time entirely green and entirely red. As far as a determinative use of judgement is concerned, there can be no problem in that, as each use is separate. To realize that the two are incommensurable – to understand the principle of non-contradiction – we would have to compare the concepts 'green' and 'red'. To compare concepts, one must reflect on the relationship between concepts, with no reference to a determinative use-case[19]. The verity of the determinative use of judgement is in this way relies on the reflective use.

On Kant's view, the transcendental principle of reflective judgement is purposiveness. It demands that concepts be so interconnected under a regulative, subjective principle, that they constitute a system, rather than a mere aggregate. Again, simplifying

[17] For commentary, see B. Longuenesse, *Kant and the Capacity to Judge*, trans. by C.T. Wolfe, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000, pp. 243-290. This is perhaps the most influential reading of the operation of schematization. For the moral law, compare the typic in the second *Critique*, AA 5, pp. 67-72.

[18] See S. Engstrom, *Introduction*, in I. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, trans. by W.S. Pluhar, Indianapolis, Hackett, 2002, pp. xv-liv.

[19] This is given in section V of the *First Introduction* to the *Critique of Judgement*. See AA 20, pp. 211-217. And considerably less explicitly in the published introduction, AA 5, pp. 179-581. See also, H. Allison, *Custom and Reason in Hume: A Kantian Reading of the First Book of the Treatise*, Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 2008, pp. 135-160, pp. 259-282.

somewhat, purposiveness is a principle that requires us to understand the interrelations of a concept with other concepts in a system as a *precondition for its existence*. It must fit in with the cluster of concepts with which it should constitute a system of the world. As Kant puts it,

> absolute purposiveness of natural forms such an external shape as well as inner structure that are so constituted that their possibility must be grounded in an idea of them in our power of judgement [in its reflective mode][20].

And so, in taking up the third *Critique*, what was arguably most important for the fate of his philosophy was Kant's capacity to offer a unified account of the two sides. What Kant argued in order to bridge this gulf in the third *Critique*, may be sketched out as follows: our understanding of nature, and importantly, our understanding of human nature as something that belongs to a system of nature (a hierarchy of genera and species)[21], is itself grounded in or predicated on certain normative principles. Such normative principles ground our capacity to make any sense of natural phenomena as a logical system (presumably, the goal of empirical science).[22] The systematic principles at work in nature, what brings out its fitness for our cognitive capacities as a purposive whole, Kant calls the technique of nature [*Technik der Natur*][23], and in the *First Introduction* he insists repeatedly that under the reflective mode of judgement, nature is understood to work artistically rather than mechanically[24].

[20] AA 20, p. 217; trans. p. 20.

[21] Ido Geiger presents a fascinating, rigorous and remarkably complete interpretation along these lines, originating from the need to create a unified system of empirical rules. My reading here differs from his significantly, especially concerning the significance of the normative force of reflection and therefore also of aesthetic judgement. See I. Geiger, *Kant and the Claims of the Empirical World*, Cambridge – New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022.

[22] This is the key claim of Ginsborg's reading of the third Critique. See H. Ginsborg, *The Normativity of Nature: Essays on Kant's* Critique of Judgement, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2015.

[23] See AA 20, pp. 219-922, pp. 237-242; AA 5, pp. 244-247.

[24] AA 20, pp. 207-209 and p. 214. This theme is also more commonly treated with Kant's remarks on beautiful art and nature in §§ 44-45, AA 5, pp. 305-308. See E.

Thus, there is for Kant an important sense in which we can only understand nature to the extent that we can take it to constitute a systematic whole, to understand it as directed – as having a purposive orientation. The coherence of natural phenomena, of the various forms of life, is predicated on a normative demand of reflection, that one view the world not as a mechanism, merely lawfully, but at the same time as an art, something exhibiting the unity of design (though crucially, of course, no designer may be postulated therein). The sense of nature as a whole, the extent to which it appears meaningful, or that one may find meaning in it (scientific sense at the very least), is a sense of the artful conjunction of forms and kinds – we understand nature in light of the artistry that reflection finds in it. It is the art of nature that gives us the sense that forms *ought to be* in a particular way, e.g., that eyes *should* see[25].

There is then something indicated in nature, in its appearing to be directed, orchestrated toward an indeterminate goal. For the human being, for reflective, discursive cognition, nature's systematic fitness to it lies in nature's aiming at it. On Kant's view[26], the purpose that ties together purposes for the human subject is the actualization of humanity's capacity to posit purposes. Nature aims at our exercise of our capacity to aim. This is, for Kant, manifest in the moral and cultural development of humanity, by which an innate ability that might go unused is trained and insisted on[27]. To the extent that one may conceive of the purposiveness of existence, one

Friedlander, *Expressions of Judgment: An Essay on Kant's Aesthetics*, Cambridge (MA)-London, Harvard University Press, 2015, pp. 60-78.

[25] AA 20, p. 240. I agree here with Ginsborg, who argues that reflection carries a normativity that is reflected both in aesthetics and teleology. See Ginsborg, *Normativity of Nature*, pp. 307-345.

[26] AA 5, pp. 425-430.

[27] Pogge analyses the relationship between final and ultimate end, present an account of Kant's view of the ethical task of the human being by way of and in light of the human being's biological position in the tree of species. See T.W. Pogge, *Kant on Ends and the Meaning of Life*, in *Reclaiming the History of Ethics: Essays for John Rawls*, ed. by R. Andrews, B. Herman and C.M. Korsgaard, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 361-387.

is on the same account also permitted in conceiving of purpose positing as *the* purpose of nature. It is, for this reason, that the final purpose (*Endzweck*) of nature is purpose positing, by the human being, which in being able to think ends at all, is called the ultimate purpose (*letzter Zweck*); the latter making the former possible. To pass judgements about nature that would take it to be a systematic whole, is at the same time to judge *as if* humanity is the ultimate purpose of nature. One *must* stipulate that ultimate goal without positing it.

What we find in these formulations of the third *Critique* is, as the opening quote shows, metaphysical justification for a certain promise for human history, granted by nature in its artfulness. The key idea is that the unity of nature as a purposive system for reflection justifies not only nature's fitness for our cognitive capacities, but its fitness for our purposes – for the human being the purpose of nature, what grounds its unity, is enabling its own purposes and capacities. The fitness of nature is, as reflective judgement has it, not merely theoretical but practical, and so concerns not only the possibility of science, but the possibility – and regulative actuality – of the most liberating forms of government – the realization of the kingdom of ends on earth[28]. Now, a critical part of enabling human beings to act as and on their own purposes is, at the very least for Kant, the liberties of Enlightened civil society. Meaning, a society that is also liberated from the demands of war. The systematic character of nature, demanded by the transcendental principle of reflective judgement, justifies the movement of human history towards the eradication of war. When Kant, in the paragraph quoted at the beginning of this section, says that perpetual peace is guaranteed by the artistry of nature, what he means is that war stands in the way of the fulfilment of the purpose-positing capacities of the human race, and that so, to the extent that we judge nature to be a system aimed at purposes, we cannot but stipulate a *promise* of

[28] Allison argues convincingly that the gulf between nature and freedom is mediated not only by reflection, but at the same time by the hope for perpetual peace, which he understands to be the possibility of the kingdom of ends on earth. See Allison, *Essays on Kant*, pp. 217-228.

peace, promised by nature herself, on the behalf of the power of judgement[29].

In this sense, we may say that Kant's conception of human history is intrinsically natural: *all history is natural history*. The principles that govern human history are natural principles – regulative principles that guide reflection on nature *in toto*. Here war plays a special part. It is made possible by the human ends, by our working towards goals, but at the same time undercuts the infrastructure – the concrete conditions – that enable us to pursue our purposes. Put a little facetiously: dead people don't hope. War is then internal to the human animal to the extent that it may posit ends, war is within the space of ends, but if nature should be understood to strive and possibly attain the fullest exercise of this end-positing capacity, war must be eliminated in the course of a history beholden to nature. The perpetual peace is not a moral demand, it does not reduce to the simple claim that we should strive, as individual agents and states, for peace. Nor is it that war presents a contradiction, or a violation of natural law. Rather, in conceiving of nature as a whole, in reflecting on it as a system of purposes – relative and internal – we are at the same time committing ourselves, for Kant, to the demand that nature play a role in allowing us to fulfil our purposes, and so to eradicate war. It will be by way of war, as a mode of destructive purpose-positing, that concord and enabling, liberal government, may be achieved. In that sense: «The mechanical process of nature exhibits the purposive plan of producing concord among men [...] by means of their very discord»[30].

The eradication of war is thus the product of a purposive plan of nature in its fitness to the power of judgement, whereby it engenders a hope for the liberty of a universal civil society, predicated on the unity of nature as the object of scientific inquiry. Briefly, if we

[29] For discussion of the question of history in Kant, see Y. Yovel, *Kant and the Philosophy of History*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980. For discussion of the relationship between history and the questions of ethics and the highest good, see E. Friedlander, *On Different Ways to the Highest Good*, «Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal», ILII (2), 2021, pp. 373-391.

[30] AA 8, pp. 343-386; trans. p.108.

agree that the world might make sense, we agree also that it might make sense in such a way that our goals are achievable. Perpetual peace is not a scientific hypothesis, but nevertheless in our time, it is becoming increasingly more difficult to maintain a sense of the cohesion of nature and its tendency to aid us. If we are really to take seriously the idea that history is natural, that our historical self-comprehension is inextricable from our concept of nature, are we not in the realm of deep history? Have not thereby demanded a continuity between whatever principles drive the formation of natural life and those of human history? And if so, we are beholden to some post-Enlightenment pessimism about war. A decentering of the human subject from the architecture of nature – thinking in a decisively non-anthropocentric way – undercuts the edifice on which Kant's perpetual peace stands. It seems the hope for perpetual peace has gone, as Kant's account would have it, the way of the metaphysics that places human ends as the ends of creation.

Let us say it polemically: in a new age of war, in Ukraine and Russian, in Israel/Palestine, an age also of climate crisis, of fundamental shifts to our sense of place in nature, there is little room for Kant's hope for perpetual peace, as a result of the systematicity of nature, and its fitness for us in particular. For Kant, the relation between nature and history rests wholly on this systematic fitness. Can we still maintain that history is natural history, outside of the promise of the eradication of war, on the centrality of the human race for creation in general? This question I now address to Hegel, with whom the relation to war changes, although it retains a unique necessity – rather than a necessary eradication – and so allows for a different, perhaps more promising continuity between nature and history.

3. *Necessary Contingencies*

While Kant's approach to history invokes explicitly the authority of nature's art, Hegel tends more forcefully to divorce the two. The nature-history dichotomy is framed by and analogized with other dichotomies: necessary-contingent, time-space. David Kolb, who has been a recent advocate of Hegel as a thinker of natural history, has framed the opposition between nature and history as

between external contingency and internal necessity[31]. On Kolb's reading, in nature, the distinctions between things show themselves spatially, they stand outside one another and so become unrelated in their distinction. In history, the distinctions between things show themselves temporally, they are manifest as they unfurl in time, and so are generated by one another or follow from each other in a way that allows no clear distinction – or are related internally[32]. Such a reading means that no history, in the true, philosophical sense, of nature is possible because that would involve an account that is internal and necessary of something that is external and contingent. Hegel's own description of the matter is this:

> [i]n [nature's] externality the determinations of the concept have the appearance of an indifferent subsistence and isolation in regards to each other. The concept therefore exists as an inward entity. Hence nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only necessity and contingency[33].

Meaning, that nature's externality is expressed in the dichotomy between contingency and necessity, a dichotomy that is overcome in the spirit's internalization (*Erinnerung*). Natural things are either necessitated by law or merely accidental. That an apple falls, as all things on earth do, at 9.8m/s/s is inevitable, but that just that apple falls at just that time, is entirely contingent. Spirit, however, is characterized by a movement of internalization, or recollection (*Erinnerung*)[34]. What is made inward is what appears at first to be contingent, merely there, but shows itself to be intimately related and necessary. Think, for example, of how a contingent illness can, by killing the right person at the right time, alter the course

[31] D. Kolb, *Outside and In: Hegel on Natural History*, «Poligrafi», XVI (61-62), 2011, pp. 27-43; Id., *Darwin Rocks Hegel: Does Nature Have a History?*, «Hegel Bulletin», XXIX (1-2), 2008, pp. 97-117.

[32] Interestingly, this discussion corresponds well to Hegel's discussion of necessity in the preface to the phenomenology, where it is contradistinguished from mathematical necessity. See TW 3, pp. 42-43; trans. pp. 25-26.

[33] TW 9, § 248 *Anmerkung*, p. 27; trans. Remark to § 248.

[34] Ivi, § 399.

of history. And of how historians would thereafter show that what followed that death was in some why already indicated, necessitated perhaps, by the preceding movement. The dichotomy between nature and history is between what substantiates the clear distinction between the necessary and the contingent, and what does not[35].

Nature's inability to make what is contingent necessary or what is necessary contingent is what makes the earth «only implicitly organism»[36]. For Hegel, the earth is a self-external system, where the different processes of the past – the formative movements that make the earth as a system of living things what it is – are simply laid together and made into self-subsistent things. The many variable forms of life are situated simultaneously and, as it were, side by side. They do not belong together, as the internalizing tendencies of spirit would have, but are simply juxtaposed, cohabitating. Hegel points out that a common mistake of natural history is exactly to make these spatial relationships between genera and species into temporal relations, where one brings others about. He writes:

> Nature is to be regarded as a *system of stages*, one arising necessarily from the other and being the proximate truth of the stage from which it results: but it is not generated *naturally* out of the other[37].

[35] Another presentation, one more concerned with universal history as such, and not specifically with the task of a continuous transition from nature to history, makes use of a different dichotomy, namely between necessity and freedom. Such a reading is at times – though I would argue crucially inconsistently – indicated in Adorno's *World Spirit and Natural History*. See T.W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, London, Continuum, 2007, pp. 300-360. Regarding these dichotomies it should be borne in mind that we are considering two different stages of modal antithesis. The first, concerns the natural, formal distinction between contingency and necessity, which is overcome in the notion of freedom – which is not simply opposed to necessity. The second, in the question of universal freedom, is between the necessary march of history – this is a necessity that comes after and results from the process of internalization mentioned here – and the freedom of human beings. Note also, that Adorno's concern with the appearance of nature *in* history, most prominent in that text, is also an aside as far as the question of the *continuity* of nature and history is concerned, one that is demanded by the latest in historical and ecological inquiry.

[36] TW 9, § 249 *Zusatz*, pp. 32-34.

[37] *Ibidem*.

This juxtaposition, which is not generation but aggregation, is well-exemplified by the image of the geological record, not as a history, but exactly as a record: a series of clearly distinct layers of different kinds of sedimentation. In making sense of that, we clue ourselves into a development, where each epoch is associated with a layer, and layers are built one atop the other. But still, the transformative powers that may be attributable to the earth, what would be the active agents in that history, are revealed to us as past, by laying externally one next to the other. Thus, the sense in which geological history shows us a system of the past is a static one.

Natural or geological history is a history with no movement, a purely aggregative history. And so too, the earth is a system, because all those moments (epochs) are kept together and unified, but it is not a living (or mediate), and therefore not a necessary, unity, because it is unified spatially as things that stand *nebeneinander*, rather than by the movement of spirit, standing *nacheinander*. He writes: «its [the earth's] existence it owes solely to this permanent togetherness [*Zusammenhang*] of its moments; if one of these were lacking, the earth would cease to be what it is». And the earth, as such a dead system, is only formally or implicitly an organism. Yes, it is an organized system of kinds and species, it unifies and holds together kinds and varieties, and records their powers and processes. But that unification is not ensouled, unmoving, «[t]he earth appears as the dead product; but it is preserved by all these conditions which constitute a single chain, one whole»[38].

As I have so far put it, Hegel seems to be something of a vitalist, taking history to be something that belongs purely to the living. The earth being merely organized – or merely implicitly organic – does not merit something like history or life. But that would, I believe, be something of a naïve presentation of his thought. While the notion of life is absolutely crucial for Hegel, death – as he calls it, the «absolute lord and master»[39] – is also supremely significant[40]. The

[38] Ivi, § 339 *Zusatz* 1.

[39] TW 3, 438; trans. p. 345.

[40] A recent, thorough and rigorous account of the role of life in Hegel's thought is K. Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2020. Regarding

Ljubljana school has done much to emphasize the significance of negativity in Hegel's thought in many ways[41]. Enumerating them would be inappropriate, but we may still insist with them that life cannot be treated as uncritically valued in Hegel. Rather, ensouled movement is inseparable from a kind of negativity, at times symbolized by death. In fact, what Hegel identifies as the missing element in the merely implicitly organic character of the earth is precisely a kind of negativity. What is to be achieved overall in the dialectic of nature is that «the ideality of nature [...] is fulfilled, and as self-related *negative* unity, has essentially developed the nature of *self* and become *subjective*»[42].

What we are therefore in search of, concerning the transition from the merely aggregational organization of the earth, into the subjective, self-related and negative organization of nature qua subject is, crucially, a notion of death that may be natural and still cut across the clear division of contingency and necessity. As we have said, nature's externality is characterized by that clear division, and what is at stake is a mediation of the two by a negativity. In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel transitions to a discussion of plant life, that does not address this conceptual challenge. He is concerned with the system of nature, which in the end should express it as self and subjectivity. But what we are interested in here is expressing the history of nature, as reflected in the geological and fossil record, as self or subjectivity – as what can have a history in and of itself, without positing the human being as its ultimate purpose. Kolb points us in the right direction. He points out that Hegel's distinction of the internal and the external in the matters of nature accompanies a differentiation between a movement that is merely chronological (external) and one that opens a certain logical order, hierarchy or

death – its role in Hegel's practical philosophy is well thematized in R. Pippin, *Hegel on Self-consciousness: Desire and Death in the Phenomenology of Spirit*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

[41] See, for instance, M. Dolar, *Foreword: Hegel or Spinoza? Yes, Please!*, in *Hegel and Spinoza: Substance and Negativity*, ed. by G. Moder, Evanston (Ill.), Northwestern University Press, 2017, pp. IX–XII.

[42] TW 9, § 337, p. 337; trans. § 337.

space[43]. So, to conceive of a deep or natural history is to conceive of a movement of nature which is not mere chronology or genealogy but organized as a gesture of reason. Hegel writes:

> The Notion [*Begriff*] timelessly and in a universal manner posits all particularity in existence. It is a completely empty thought to represent species as developing successively, one after the other, in time. Chronological difference has no interest whatever for thought... [A conceptual organization of natural historical forms] is preferable to jumbling them together, a procedure which would be somewhat repellent to an intelligence which had an inkling of the Notion. But it must not be imagined that such a dry series is made dynamic or philosophical, or more intelligible, or whatever you like to say, by representing each term as producing each other[44].

What Kolb suggests is that if we pay attention not to the geological strata, but to the fossil record, we open a door to a new conception of Hegelian natural history. The way in which the fossil record keeps earlier stages is not self-conscious, but still, for Kolb, a history comparable to the non-history that Hegel attributes to tribes. In pointing that out, what Kolb holds to be the analogue in the philosophy of history to nature is the tribe. I would like, however, to suggest a slightly different line. The problem with Kolb's approach is, at least to my mind, that he does not attempt to produce a genuine history of nature but is satisfied with a non-history of an *Unselbstbewusstsein*, as it were. This is because the analogue that he finds for himself is the tribe – which although acknowledged in his paper, still carries some conceptual and empirical problems of its own. In its stead, let us propose war as a different analogue. War too, for Hegel, bridges the gap between the contingent and the necessary. *It is a necessary contingent*. So we return to the theme of death and combat.

Hegel's at times suspicious attraction to combat scenes is well-recorded. Perhaps the most memorable part of his *Bildungsroman* is a fight to the death. His thinking and writing are littered with

[43] Kolb, *Outside and In*.

[44] TW, 9, p. 32; trans. § 249 *Zusatz*.

varieties of violence. As Brecht's refugee physicist says of the *Science of Logic*,

> [i]t is about the customs of the concepts, these slippery, unstable, irresponsible existences; how they insult and fight each other with knives and then sit down together for supper, as if nothing happened[45].

In fact, Hegel's more militaristic tendencies have brought about a slew of accusations – for historically understandable reasons – of proto-fascism. Among those who armed themselves in his defense, Avineri's is most insightful and thorough. His principal point is that while Hegel affirms the necessity of war – and so criticizes rather vehemently those who would argue that war should be done away with – he does not do so for moral considerations, and instead holds a perhaps unorthodox position, according to which war is an ill that both cannot and should not be done away with.

Hegel's thematization of war takes place, in *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, in explaining the transition from an individual state to its self-assertion on the international stage. There he makes two points: First, that a state must posit itself qua subject in the same way that self-consciousness does, namely by fighting its double. Second, that these wars cannot go away, and make room for a perpetual peace, because that peace would inevitably be a kind of death. As he describes it, without war, civil society «ossifies [*Verknöchern*]»[46]. What civil society needs to prevent it from stratifying and ossifying is something to shake it up, to mix up its ranks. That is, something to make unavoidable the transience of its material basis. In war,

[45] B. Brecht, *Refugee Conversations*, trans. by R. Fursland, ed. by T. Kuhn, London-New York, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2020, p. 63. There is some fascinating literature relating humor to Hegel's logic. See, for instance: K. Vieweg, *The Idealism of Freedom: For a Hegelian Turn in Philosophy*, Leiden-Boston, Brill, 2020; G. Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 63-76; A. Zupančič, *The Odd One In: On Comedy*, Cambridge M.A – London, The MIT Press, 2008, pp. 11-60.

[46] TW 7, pp. 491-493; trans. by H. B. Nisbet, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, § 324.

supply is scarce, and people lose their place in the world, either to fighting or simply to death. Social hierarchies are transformed.

For Avineri, Hegel's view of war is best thought of as a kind of disease, that plays a role in strengthening the immune system – and presumably its absence would make the body quite fragile – but in order to do so must always pass away. A chronic illness does not strengthen a body. Avineri writes:

> [I]t is Hegel's argument that war as such is no more than what a disease is to a body: only when attacked by disease can one form judgement of whether a particular body is healthy or not. War is not *the* health of the state – *in* it a state's health is put to the test[47].

On this reading, what war does, in putting the health, durability or life of a state to the test, is to manifest that health. A state that is strong enough, flexible enough and prepared, can face the challenges of war, the changes that it may require of the structure and material conditions of society, the hardships that it fosters. And so, it can survive. A state that is too inflexible, that has lost its range of motion and, most crucially, whose social structure fails to rise to the challenges of war will not survive. To the extent that the state is an entity, a finite thing defined by its interrelations with others of its kind, such tests are necessary for it, they ensure a kind of vitality by facing the state consistently with threat of death. Thus, while each war may seem contingent, the notion of war as such cannot be understood to be contingent. Each war is started over contingent circumstances, and we may have the sense that things could have been otherwise, and that war could have been avoided. If only Franz Ferdinand hadn't been assassinated! But Hegel insists: Each war is itself contingent, contingent upon the very particular almost accidental circumstances in which it is started. And yet, war as such, the possibility of a war coming about, is inevitable for a state, which is defined by these violent encounters. For Hegel, very much contra Kant, we should recognize the necessity of the contingent – that it

[47] S. Avineri, *Hegel's Theory of the State*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1972, p. 199.

is necessary that something contingent will be. That is the justification for war. Hegel writes:

> Whatever is by nature contingent is subject to contingencies, and this fate is therefore itself a necessity – just as, in all such cases, philosophy and the concept overcome the point of view of mere contingency and recognize it as a *semblance* whose essence is necessity. It is *necessary* that the finite – such as property and life – should be *posited* as contingent, because contingency is the concept of the finite[48].

War is thus a negative moment, a symbol and vigil for death and the very threat of transience. As such it is a pure contingency, but one that is necessary in its contingency. What we find in Hegel's notion of war is precisely what is missing from his notion of natural history. We said that what was needed was an internalization or recollection (*Erinnerung*), something to take up the contingencies into itself and to make them necessities. In war, it is thought that finds necessitation, seeing in a contingent conflict a reason and cause internal to the state at war, e.g., political corruption, economic crisis, etc. What then could the analogue of war be in natural history? Kolb rightly brings up the fossil record: the earth does not simply juxtapose within it heterogenous geological layers, but in doing so keeps a record of past life forms – it records what could not survive, what was not durable enough to make it through the contingent difficulties of ecological change. That record, much like Hegel's notion of war, allows thinking to view the contingent passing out of this world of various species as necessary, internal to the world which recorded them.

Darwin's principle of the survival of the fittest can be interpretated along the lines of fate or providence[49]. Doubtless, this

[48] TW 7, pp. 491-493; trans. § 324.

[49] I do not mean by this anything resembling – or at least anything I understand to resemble – Social Darwinism, abhorrent as it is. I do not mean that what we find in this suggestion is that war shows which human forms of life are worthy of living and so acts as a kind of providence, God's expressing his will on earth. Rather, in the same sense that Kant speaks of the technique of nature, its work in history, as a providence, as the expression of the purposiveness that is required of a unified system of nature to be conceivable, if unknowable as such, so too can

interpretation would surely not hold the weight of skeptical scrutiny. Still, it shows something of what that necessitation means. Of extinct species, we may say that their survival was not meant to be, of adaptations we may say that things for them could no longer be as they were. After such changes in the space of living forms occur, we view them as being, in a sense, necessary, destined to be. That is, we read the fossil record as we do records of war, trying to make sense of and thereby striving for a necessary, reasoned account of that chronicle. I remarked earlier that Kolb's interpretation of Hegel's natural history as an unconscious non-history is unsatisfactory, because it does not grant natural history its full status as a history, and certainly does not allow one to think of human history as natural history – which is what I take deep history to be aiming for.

With war as a mediator between natural and human history, I suggest the following notion of natural history, following Hegel: it is not a question of whether by itself nature has a true philosophically full history, but only that in looking into nature, it is not only possible but perhaps required of the human being to make nature into history. While the space of past living forms is petrified in the ground, and so shown to the paleontologist as a mutually external juxtaposition, it is also true that we cannot seem to avoid telling ourselves tales that make the earth an agent, one that acts and reacts along with what lives on it. And that these actions and reactions are taken up and recorded, made petrified and necessary in the earth. The fossil record is like a graveyard of combatants. Human and natural history are indistinguishable, in that both are a matter of giving a necessary account of the contingent passing away of living forms[50].

Darwinian *natural* history, can be understood expressing a purposiveness, a historical orientation, if we attune ourselves to the importance of catastrophe and violence – of war. Catastrophic death is a way in which sense and necessity make themselves present on the natural stage, a feature they share with history, on Hegel's view. The Social Darwinist's insistence on something 'right', 'healthy', 'proper', or 'true', being expressed in what remains after catastrophe is both theoretically untenable and practically reprehensible.

[50] Some intimacy shared by this theme with those of the third *Critique* can be found in Hegel's *Encyclopedia*, TW 10, pp. 124-132.

4. *The Burial of the Dead*

What we have been after, in picking at these non-trivially knotted themes in Kant and Hegel, of war, nature, and history, is an intimation of the historical enterprise within which one need mark no sharp cut between the written record of human chronicle, and the fossilized remains of nature's past. While I hope that I have laid down in the course of this paper does well enough to invite the reader in, it is now incumbent upon me to make explicit the particularities of this invitation – what it is that Kant and Hegel share and do not share on this topic, and how it is instructive for future thought. How is it finally that Kant and Hegel view – or allow us to view – war as a mark of human history's intrinsically natural aspect?

First, with Kant, the *Schwerpunkt* of the discussion has been the manifestation of the purposiveness of nature in history. That is, we find in Kant a sense in which human history is expressive of something altogether of the natural order, which thereby undercuts a sharp distinction between written and spoken culture, and a more primal, natural activity. In particular, we find that Kant names the natural purposiveness of history 'the promise of perpetual peace', where that peace marks a point of finality, a state of rest in human history – a rest toward which history strives, toward which it is directed. To the extent that nature is conceivable to us as a system, a whole of purposes and forms with manifest affinities to one another, we view it purposively. That purposiveness is not however merely natural, but points *ultimately* to the human being, and so is expressed too in the history of the human being, wherein what makes humans unique in the realm of purposes is actualized, exercised and expanded. What I argue for in that first section is this: The perpetual peace is the natural finality of human history. Which is to imply, that the question of war is intimately tied with what is historical about the human being, particularly as it concerns ends and finalities – not only purposes but terminal points. What is natural appears in the tendency toward the end[51].

[51] It is no accident that Kant opens the perpetual peace, immediately after the title, with the following: «a Dutch innkeeper once put this satirical inscription on his signboard, along with the picture of a graveyard». AA 8, p. 343; trans. p. 93.

However, Kant's view still retains much of what the contemporary smoothing out of the nature-history distinction undercuts: the unique place of the human being in the natural order. That is, it concerns how history is natural by way of the human being, rather than, say, how the human being is natural by way of its history. Here, a particular and admittedly selective reading of Hegel allows for a different approach. Whatever one makes of Hegel's anthropocentric views, it is still the case that he eschews the need for perpetual peace as a finality of history. Rather, his view of the terminal point of life forms is one enfolded into their development. Civil society, he argues, needs war – and cannot do away with that need – because the negative, destructive moment of war – its catastrophic nature is part of civil, social life. And so, war function not so much as what must go away in the end, thereby marking an end. It is, rather, the necessarily contingent death, or threat of death, without which life and invigoration would be impossible. As I have argued, the internalization of the end into history still makes continuous the natural and the historical, on the condition that we are willing to accept – as Hegel probably would not – that natural catastrophe, just as war is human catastrophe, involves the internalization of contingent circumstance into the necessary features of a form of life. *History is not particularly human, because destruction's reconfiguring power is not particularly human*.

History records the burial of the dead. Only as what is comes to pass from this world can its subsumption and internalization into necessity come to be. A history is a record of death – whether in writing or in dirt, or in geological strata. Death, a negative moment, a shattering, a destruction, opens the way to a construction, a remaking. The historian makes the dead, as dead, part again of the life of a life form. A history is not much different from a charnel house, it is a cumulation of the dead. The difference being, of course, that in the charnel house, bodies are merely collected, aggregated, while history strives to make sense of them – show something of a higher unity in the dead. What I proposed is that this proximity, in death, between history and the dead in the ground, is what allows us a rich notion of natural history – to recognize the historical aspects of nature, in the task of making sense of living forms, precisely in their passing away. Catastrophes, all-encompassing destructions, make

possible a reconfiguring of circumstance and happenstance into a movement of reason – into the shape of a logical space. History is concerned with the afterlife[52].

[52] Friedlander writes most illuminatingly about the notion of the afterlife, in the natural-historical setting, in Benjamin's work. Which, although different in significant respects, still shares crucial affinities with what I argued for here. See E. Friedlander, *Walter Benjamin and the Idea of Natural History*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2024, pp. 45-83.