

War in Philosophy

1. Immanuel Kant

When Immanuel Kant turned his attention to the causes of war he came to the conclusion that war was an expression of nature's will for humanity. Kant held the position that nature's will was expressed through war: war catalyzed the development of civilized man. The resulting dispersion and diversification of peoples fleeing war makes possible a shared "unknown natural end".¹ Although war is not the only consequence of nature's will it is one of primary importance in Kant's eyes. Consequently, Kant applies his rational capacities to the establishment of "perpetual peace". For Kant it is primarily the fight against war that leads humanity towards its perfection.

For Kant the objective of the philosopher is to reveal nature's hidden agenda. Kant believed that through rationality the philosopher could "produce a history of creatures who proceed without a plan of their own but in conformity with some definite plan of nature's".² In pursuit of this end, Kant comes to several conclusions that he outlines in the form of theses in his "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent". Kant's first thesis is the "teleological theory of nature" by which he means that "all of a creature's natural capacities are destined to develop completely and in conformity with their end". Without the teleological theory of nature as a basic assumption "we no longer have a lawful but an aimlessly playing nature and hopeless chance takes the place of reason's guiding thread". Although humanity may follow a

¹ "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent", pg 17 (according to standard edition page numbers)

² "Idea for a Universal History", 18

teleology, this development is experienced on a species, rather than individual, level. It is the cumulative experience of a culture that fuels societal development. Reason “requires trial, practice, and instruction in order gradually to progress from one stage of insight to another”. Reason is expressed over the course of generations and in response to events outside of the control of the individual. It is only through an “incalculable sequence of generations, each passing its enlightenment on to the next” that reason through interaction with nature’s will is able to realize our species’ potential. The primary problem that nature presents to humanity’s reason is “the inherent antagonism among them in society”.³ It is this social antagonism, often expressed as war, that fuels the dispersion and perfection of humanity.

Hence it is war that serves as the primary means for civilization to progress. War perfects humanity’s reason and makes capable the installation of pure rationality in the form of perpetual peace. How exactly does nature use war to advance humanity toward perpetual peace? First, nature willed that humanity would be instilled with a social antagonism. Kant explains that when nature wills something it does not accomplish its desire by obligating humanity to do it for “her”, but instead does it her self: “When I say of nature that she *wills* that this or that happen, that does not mean that she sets it out as a duty that we do it (because only practical reason, which is free of constraint, can do that); rather, she does it herself, whether or not we will it.”⁴ Through war nature dispersed humanity to enable them to form rationally governed civil societies.⁵ Humanity’s application of rationality resulted in individuals fleeing from antagonism into a law-

³ Idea, 20

⁴ “Perpetual Peace”, 123

⁵ “Perpetual Peace”, 122

governed society. “The state of peace among men living in close proximity is not the natural state; instead the natural state is a one of war, which does not just consist in open hostilities, but also in the constant and enduring threat of them”.⁶ Although Kant talks of this social antagonism as a universal, he imagines that a lack of this social antagonism would result in a situation similar to the “Arcadian shepherds” who live “in perfect concord, contentment, and mutual love, and all talents would lie eternally dormant in their seed”.⁷

Kant’s description of the Arcadian shepherds clarifies that for Kant perpetual peace is not concord but is instead the expression of rationality – the ultimate objective of humanity. Peace is something that is installed upon discord, not the absence of discord. Further, peace requires the agreement of two or more rational beings, either individuals or nations. Without this rational agreement the individual is free to treat their neighbor as the enemy. “The state of peace must therefore be *established* for the suspension of hostilities does not provide the security of peace, and unless this security is pledged by one neighbor to another (which can happen only in a state of *lawfulness*), the latter, from whom such security has been requested, can treat the former as an enemy.”⁸ The response of nations is analogous to that of individuals:

One commonwealth must anticipate from others the same evil that oppressed individual men, forcing them into a law-governed civil state. Nature has thus once more used human quarrelsomeness, men’s inevitable *antagonism*, even in the large societies and political bodies that are created through it, as a means for discovering a state of calm and security.⁹

⁶ “Perpetual Peace”, 111

⁷ “Universal History”, 21

⁸ “Perpetual Peace”, 111

⁹ “Universal History”, 24

This “state of calm and security” is accomplished through a federation of states that establishes a rational world order through “a united might” and “united will in accord with laws”.¹⁰ In this way, nature is the cause of war because war enables humanity’s construction of a rational world order. War has a symbiotic relation with reason because war is the grist upon which reason works to fulfill the natural end of humanity.

2. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel

Hegel addresses Kant’s position on the cause of war at several points in “Elements of the Philosophy of Right”. While Hegel agrees with Kant’s position that war catalyzes the development of humanity he offers a critique of Kant’s aspirations of perpetual peace. For Hegel war is a byproduct of the state and will always exist. War serves the function of revitalizing the state. Further, Hegel believed that if perpetual peace were to be accomplished it would only lead to the state becoming “rigid and ossified” ultimately leading to its death.¹¹

The state is of primary importance for Hegel because it is the highest expression of rationality. The state is the harmonious construction of rational thought applied to questions of the right and ethics. Hegel describes the state as a structure in which “through the strict proportions in which every pillar, arch, and buttress is held together, produces the strength of the whole from the harmony of its parts”.¹² Unlike Kant, Hegel does not argue that the individual was compelled to join the state in order to rationally conquer social antagonism. Instead, Hegel argues that the individual does not have

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¹² Preface, pg 16

access to meaning without the state. Because the state is the expression of thought and the universal “it is only through being a member of the state that the individual himself has objectivity, truth, and ethical life”.¹³ It is through the state that the spirit underlying world history is expressed and moves towards its end.

In Hegel’s view, a consequence of the individual access to “objectivity, truth, and ethical life” through active membership in the state is that individuals are also given access to a “higher form” of action. The movement of the individual into the universal, ie the state, is akin to the formation of a many. In the case of valour, for example, Hegel notes, “the true valour of civilized nations is their readiness for sacrifice in the service of the state, so that the individual merely counts as one among many”.¹⁴ Further, “not personal courage but integration with the universal is the important factor here”.¹⁵ This “integration with the universal” requires a “total obedience and renunciation of personal opinion and reasoning”.¹⁶ Through service to the state the individual becomes a member of the whole. Their action is therefore elevated to a higher level in which their opponent is also a universal. Valour when expressed in its higher form is deed directed “not against individual persons, but against a hostile whole in general”.¹⁷ This explains why modern warfare has increasingly been directed against populations. Hegel saw the development of the gun as an expression of thought that has “turned the purely personal form of valour into a more abstract form”.¹⁸ This position complicates any discussion of the cause of war because it suggests that the state must create, and kill, its enemy at each

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stage of its development. For example, we can imagine that a given country invaded the same neighboring country at several different points in its history. As the invader country progressed it would experience its enemy in different ways and would use different methods of killing at each stage of this movement from the personal to the abstract.

Under Hegel's view, it is a duty for the individual to defend the state: "in so far as the state as such and its independence are at risk, duty requires all citizens to rally to its defence".¹⁹ Even if it weren't a duty, the formation of the "military estate" that carries out these wars on behalf of the state is a necessary consequence of the state's existence:

The fact that the armed power of the state becomes a *standing army* and that the vocation for the particular task of defending it becomes an *estate* is [a result of] the same necessity whereby its particular moments, interests and functions become estates such as those of marriage, trade and industry, the civil service, business, etc.²⁰

If the formation of the military estate is a necessary consequence of the state, is the creation of an enemy also inevitable? Hegel argues yes. Addressing Kant's prescription for perpetual peace, Hegel argues that "the state is an individual, and negation is an essential component of individuality. Thus, even if a number of states join together as a family, this league, in its individuality, must generate opposition and create an enemy".²¹

The inevitability of war plays a positive role in the development of the state because it acts to revitalize thought and society. While Kant held the position that peace was something imposed through rational thought, Hegel argues that this imposition would lead to stagnation:

In peace, the bounds of civil life are extended, all its spheres become firmly established, and in the long run, people become stuck in their ways. Their particular characteristics become increasingly rigid and ossified. But the unity of

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the body is essential to the health, and if its parts grow internally hard, the result is death.

The state is not morally culpable for using war to revitalize itself because states are individuals and interact as “independent units which make mutual stipulations but at the same time stand above these stipulations”.²² Further, there is no higher power than that of the state which is the expression of rationality and the universal: “the nation state is the spirit in its substantial rationality and immediate actuality, and is therefore the absolute power on *earth*; each state is consequently a sovereign and independent entity in relation to others”.²³ Ultimately, the state’s individuality makes war the only way of solving disputes: “if no agreement can be reached between particular wills, conflicts between states can be settled only by *war*”.²⁴ Thus, for Hegel, war is a necessary, and sometimes positive, consequence of the progression of world history.

3. My Opinion

In my own view, war is the result of philosophies that attempt to impose a rational, uniform order on the world. I agree with Hegel’s assessment that the state will always create an enemy. However, I think that Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari draw attention to a way to exist outside of the state in “A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia”. Deleuze and Guattari term this way of life as nomadic and attribute the cause war to the interaction between the fluidity of the nomad with the rigidity of the state’s rational order. They believe that the state’s existence insures the perpetuation of nomadic thought and that nomadic thought is appropriated by the state to create war. For

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Deleuze and Guattari the question is whether thought can be separated from the state for doing so would cultivate a new way of existing.

In their “Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine”, Deleuze and Guattari ask, “is there a way to extricate thought from the State model?”²⁵ The problem, they explain, is that “thought as such is already in conformity with a model that it borrows from the State apparatus, and which defines for it goals and paths, conduits, channels, organs, an entire *organon*.”²⁶ Deleuze and Guattari’s position is that thought, and consequently, thinking strengthen the State because they strengthen the acceptance of a form of thought that the State needs in order to exist. Hegel would have agreed with this position because he saw his philosophical mission as a strengthening of the state’s rational order. Deleuze and Guattari place the emphasis on dissecting the “image of thought” which correspond to thinking that is beneficial to the state: “There is thus an image of thought covering all of thought; it is the special object of 'noology' and is like the State-form developed in thought.”²⁷ The problem encourages them to develop a particular line of inquiry that they call noology and define: “noology, which is distinct from ideology, is precisely the study of images of thought, and their historicity”.²⁸

By “image of thought” Deleuze and Guattari can be understood to mean that the way we think is influenced by how we visualize thought. For example:

Paul Virilio shows that after the Greek city-state, the Roman Empire imposes a geometrical or *linear reason of State* including a general outline of camps and fortifications, a universal art of 'marking boundaries by lines,' a laying-out of territories, a substitution of space for places and territorialities, and a

²⁵ A Thousand Plateaus, 374

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transformation of the world into the city; in short, an increasingly rigid segmentarity.²⁹

In other words, the Greeks imposed straight lines on the mundane world at the same time as they adopted a form of reason premised on straight, parallel lines. Consequently, a fluid reason would have been a direct challenge to the Greek state.

Why does thought so readily borrow the State's model? For Deleuze and Guattari thought gains “a gravity it would never have on its own, a center that makes everything, including the State, appear to exist by its own efficacy or on its own sanction.”³⁰ Thought adopts, structures itself by, the model of the abstract State so that it can elevate the real State to the level of a universal and enter a form of self-perpetuating logic. The State has everything to gain: “only thought is capable of inventing the fiction of a State that is universal by right, of elevating the State to the level of *de jure* universality.”³¹ This explains why the State needs thought, as well as why thought needs the State. “If it is advantageous for thought to prop itself up with the State, it is no less advantageous for the State to extend itself in thought, and to be sanctioned by it as the unique, universal form.”³² The extent to which the State has integrated itself into thought can be seen in philosophies that have adopted a juridical understanding of the State. “In so-called modern philosophy, and in the so-called modern or rational State, everything revolves around the legislator and the subject.” Philosophy's desire to order the world rationally has been used by the State to justify its existence. “Ever since philosophy assigned itself the role of ground it has been giving the established powers its blessing, and tracing its

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doctrine of faculties onto the organs of State power.”³³ If thought is to not strengthen the state it must be freed from the state’s way of thought. In doing so, thought would embrace the nomad whose presence was at the fringes of both Kant and Hegel. For Hegel the nomadic was brought up in the context of existing outside the nation-state: “In the case of a nomadic people, for example, or any people at a low level of culture, the question even arises of how far this people can be regarded as a state”.³⁴

In speaking about the nomad, Deleuze and Guattari complicate Nietzsche’s story given in “On the Genealogy of Morals”. Their analysis connects the abstract idea of the nomad with a historical actor who was experienced by the various western empires as flows of state-less people. Hegel’s description of the nomadic makes them appear marginal or without significant power. However, as Deleuze and Guattari point out the nomadic is both powerful and destructive. The State functions by putting everything in its place – the appearance of a formless, foreign other throws this into disarray. Rationality and the State’s resistance to fluidity is evidenced on every level – from physical to conceptual. Not only did the State seek to destroy the nomad but they did so through channeling the fluidity of nomad thought.

In science, for example, when the State encountered the hydraulic sciences the State appropriated them by “subordinat[ing] hydraulic force to conduits, pipes, embankments, which prevent turbulence, which constrain movement to go from one point to another, and space itself to be striated and measured, which makes the fluid depend on the solid, and flows proceed by parallel, laminar layers.”³⁵ In other words,

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hydraulics was turned against itself to strengthen rigidity. A similar process occurred when the nomadic people encountered the early State.

Deleuze and Guattari suggest that the origin of war is not in the State:

There are many reasons to believe that the war machine is of a different origin, is a different assemblage, than the State apparatus. It is of nomadic origin and is direct against the State apparatus. One of the fundamental problems of the State is to appropriate this war machine that is foreign to it and make it a piece in its apparatus, in the form of a stable military institution; and the State has always encountered major difficulties in this.³⁶

Deleuze and Guattari separate war from the “abstract machine” that creates war. To say that the war machine is nomadic in origin is to separate the force behind war from the State’s use of war. They argue that this analysis is attested to in a whole range of ways – including a demonstration of the reoccurring poles of deterritorialization (nomads) and reterritorialization (the State) whose presence can be discerned in science, history, and philosophy. War is the result of attempts by those outside the State’s rationality to ward off the rigidity of the State. “It should not be concluded that war is a state of nature, but rather that it is the mode of a social state that wards off and prevents the State”.³⁷

The formation of a military is the origin of the State's use of war, but not of war: “What we call a military institution, or army, is not all the war machine in itself, but the form under which it is appropriated by the State.”³⁸ In their mind war, the force which dissolves, deterritorializes the rigidity of the State was at first outside of the State and in competition against the State. The State's response was to use the force behind war, the conceptual machine of war, in a totally different way against the nomadic by

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appropriating the war machine, “that is, constitute one for itself, in conformity with its size, its domination, and its aims”. To appropriate is to change, and the State's creation is war turned into an abstract in Hegel. This type of (modern) war privileges the abstraction of violence so that it is done on a population scale. This occurs when “the war machine takes war as its object, and that war becomes subordinated to the aims of the State.”³⁹

Although war originated with the nomads, it is a byproduct and not the principle aim of the deterritorializing flows of the nomadic pole. At base, the war machine creates deterritorialization which finds expression not just as war but as creativity and innovation. This is where Deleuze and Guattari see the possibility of overcoming the “highly discouraging” situation of a growing war machine under State control. “The very conditions that make the State or World war machine possible [...] continually recreate unexpected possibilities for counterattack, unforeseen initiatives determining revolutionary, popular, minority, mutant machines.”⁴⁰ The ultimate point here for Deleuze and Guattari is that the war machine can be expressed by any group. Although the State may appropriate the war machine for total destruction, it is within our ability to appropriate the war machine for innovative creation that dissolves the State.

I believe some skepticism is needed of Deleuze and Guattari’s position. A close reading of Deleuze and Guattari’s reworking of Nietzsche’s origin of the state myth presented in 2.17 of “On the Genealogy of Morals” reveals that Deleuze and Guattari have mistranslated Nietzsche’s story. Nietzsche's "oldest state" was a "fearful tyranny".⁴¹ It was a state founded through violence - a pack of blond beasts of prey employed

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military principles to oppress a formless, nomadic many. The occupation turned the mass of "raw material of people and semi-animals" into a living organization. It did something else as well; this occupation originated the inner world of humanity. Because of the "tremendous quantity of freedom" that was "expelled from the world" our inner mental world developed out of our inability to act instinctually.⁴² "The entire inner world, originally as thin as if it were stretched between two membranes, expanded and extended itself, acquired depth, breadth, and height, in the same measure as outward discharge was *inhibited*."⁴³ And what about the governors of this first State?

They were oligarchs desiring to be tyrant. "The whole of history teaches that every oligarchy conceals the lust for tyranny; every oligarchy constantly trembles with the tension each member feels in maintaining control over this lust."⁴⁴ The force behind the governors was like that of "fate". They appeared "without reason, consideration, or pretext".⁴⁵ Thus, they were also pure. Outside of everything, "without guilt, responsibility, or consideration", they gave meaning to the formless. They both assigned meaning to concepts and created the structure in which these concepts were related. The nobles named themselves good, and were therefore good. They were meaning makers and dominators.

But in rehabilitating Nietzsche, Deleuze elides that he is embracing these blond beasts and not who Nietzsche called the nomad – the pre-State foreign many who were colonized. This is done for valid reasons, including that Deleuze consistently identifies the nomad with flows of people moving onto cities and this characterize the actors in

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Nietzsche's genealogy. However, I think that nomadic thought exists in opposition to colonization and that what is remarkable about nomadic thought is that it is able to devise new tactics of attacking the State. This mistranslation is found explicitly in Dialogues II when Claire Parinet, a philosopher who had engaged in seminars with Deleuze, misquotes Nietzsche on nomads. She writes: "Nomads have no history, they only have geography. Nietzsche: 'They come like destiny, without cause, without reason, without consideration, without pretext'.⁴⁶ This slip should give pause because it suggests that Deleuze has not radically broken from Nietzsche's myth.

⁴⁶ "A Conversation: What is it? What is it for?", 31