



## Nature, Spirit, and Revolution: Situating Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

Kirill Chepurin<sup>a,b</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia; <sup>b</sup>Department of Theology, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany



### ABSTRACT

This paper ties together several anthropological and *naturphilosophische* themes in Hegel in order to re-examine the place of the philosophy of nature in the *Encyclopedia*. By taking Hegel's anthropology as a starting point, I argue that his philosophy of nature has for its subject not nature "as such," but nature as cognized by *Geist*, so that the identity of these two natures is only constructed by spirit itself retroactively. I trace the origin of this difference to the revolutionary event that institutes Hegel's anthropology – which is not a transition from nature to spirit, but a pure break or new beginning, culminating in the creation of the conceptual world of nature as "we" (philosophers of nature) know it. As a result, the philosophy of nature does not precede, but follows from, the anthropology and the philosophy of spirit; the natural foundation is retroactively replaced by the philosopher with the anthropological one.

### KEYWORDS

Hegel; *Naturphilosophie*;  
philosophy of nature;  
anthropology

Where does Hegel's philosophy of nature begin? This paper is an attempt at an analysis of that apparently very simple question by means of an anthropological "reverse engineering" of the philosophy of nature's place in Hegel's system. As we will see, the question of the beginning of the philosophy of nature and, as a consequence, its place within the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* leads to a significant recognition: whereas in Schelling, *Naturphilosophie* has to do directly with the real, Hegel's philosophy of nature has for its subject not nature "as such," but rather a new, "spiritual" nature, nature as cognized by *Geist*; the narrative of the identity of these two natures is not something given, but something constructed by spirit itself, retroactively. The origin of this difference between nature-as-it-is and nature-as-spirit can be traced, I will argue, to the revolutionary event that takes place at the very outset of the philosophy of spirit and institutes Hegel's anthropology, namely, his doctrine of the human soul and its exposition in the first section of the philosophy of spirit, which at once fills and maintains the gap between the real and the spiritual. The anthropology culminates for Hegel in the birth of consciousness and the creation of a philosophical "nature," first as an "external" world of objects and then as the conceptual world of nature as "we" (that is, philosophers of nature) know it. The philosophy of nature's "nature"

**CONTACT** Kirill Chepurin  [kchepurin@hse.ru](mailto:kchepurin@hse.ru)  National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, Russia

is essentially *human* nature, whereas nature-as-the-real remains, as a consequence, a non-place relegated to the margins of Hegel's *Naturphilosophie*, which the philosopher replaces instead with an anthropological foundation. The human is revolutionary for Hegel, but nature as such is not – rather the human revolutionizes, among other things, the natural status quo itself. The philosophy of nature is also a product of this revolution.

## Revolution

There is, I believe, a tension in Hegel's system between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit, leading to two possible readings of their relationship, a "prospective" one and a "retrospective" one. The "prospective" reading has been the standard since Hegel himself placed the *Philosophy of Nature* as the second volume of the *Encyclopedia*, coming after the *Logic* and before the *Philosophy of Spirit*. In this reading, there is a continuous logical progression from inorganic matter through the animal to the human soul and then consciousness, so that between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit, the former is (onto)logically prior and transitions seamlessly into the latter, and philosophically grounds it. Some have even, on the basis of such an assumption, spoken of Hegel's "materialism" with regard to the anthropology's alleged origin in the philosophy of nature (Žižek 2009, 107). Here, I'd like to question that logic by exploring the possibility of the second, "retrospective" kind of reading, to suggest that perhaps we should read Hegel's *Encyclopedia* "backwards," so we can see implications and assumptions inherent in his *Naturphilosophie* that might otherwise remain unnoticed. In such a reading, the philosophy of nature does not precede, but rather follows the anthropology, and the latter's transition into the phenomenology within the philosophy of subjective spirit, taking its impetus *from within* the philosophy of spirit. Accordingly, the "prospective" narrative itself, implied in Hegel's placement of the *Philosophy of Nature* in the middle of the system, is not the originary or absolute one, but a retroactive product of spirit and philosophical knowledge; and if there is a "materialism" to Hegel's thought of nature and spirit, it is either materialism-as-embodiment or an implicit materialism of the real that remains in the margins of the system, a philosophical non-place that allows the Hegelian speculative idealism to unfold.

Let us begin with the observation that, in a certain "Cartesian" sense which Hegel inherits, the philosophy of nature, as any philosophy, can only be done – within the Hegelian framework – by spirit, be it absolute or finite (no matter how we understand the two, whether theologically or purely anthropologically), so that the possibility of a *Naturphilosophie* presupposes a certain pneumatology, or a "philosophy of spirit." Indeed, a philosophy of nature is, as part of philosophy *in toto*, a human endeavour; consider philosophy's place in the philosophy of absolute spirit, the crowning section of the *Encyclopedia*, which has to do with the highest manifestations of human spiritual activity. However, for a philosopher to think nature, to arrive at conceptual thinking at all, she must first, as an individual, do so by means of a certain self-transformation; the path of this transformation is that which the anthropology traces. As such, the philosophy of nature is as yet logically impossible at the beginning of the anthropology, and remains so right until the human individual becomes the thinking I of the phenomenology; Hegel refers to this event of thinking as, at the same time, a "creation" of the cognizable natural world (Hegel 1994,

137).<sup>1</sup> It comes as no surprise, then, that Hegel tends to emphasize that it is *Geist* who cognizes *Natur*, and moreover, that a “true” philosophy of nature, which we can, I believe, identify with Hegel’s own philosophy of nature, can only begin when “we” approach nature “geistig liebend” (Hegel 2007, 3), that is, “in a spiritually loving way” or “with spiritual love.” This “love” is “spiritual” since it proceeds immanently *from* spirit and culminates in a unity (that is, the philosophy of nature) that is spiritual and therefore immanent *to* spirit. We can take this “pneumatology” from which the philosophy of nature begins to mean either a theology (in which case we get nature as cognized by the absolute spirit) or an anthropology (nature as cognized by the finite spirit); for Hegel, however, these two options are essentially one and the same, because not only does the philosophy of subjective spirit logically evolve into the philosophy of absolute spirit, but the former also has its *beginning* in the absolute spirit’s activity so that *Geist* closes in on itself. Furthermore, for Hegel the anthropology (as “spiritual”) is made logically possible by the Incarnation; it is in the Christ-event that, as Hegel says, “the definition of spirit as this one” becomes possible (Hegel 1970, 12:393). Thus the Incarnation becomes foundational for the entire anthropology – to say that the philosophy of nature presupposes a theology, but not an anthropology, could only mean that it is written from the standpoint of the pre-Incarnational God, which is to say from the standpoint of the past. There is, however, as we shall see, a very important reason that this kind of statement is highly problematic in the systemic context of the *Encyclopedia* and the kind of theology that it implies.

As we can see by opening the third volume of the *Encyclopedia*, the philosophy of spirit takes its beginning from the anthropology, from Hegel’s examination of the individual human soul, which seems to pick up right where the philosophy of nature has ended. Hegel’s own emphasis at the beginning of the anthropology, however, is inconsistent with that kind of logic of continuity, insofar as he regards the anthropology as a *new* beginning and not an evolution of that which ostensibly precedes it. The anthropology begins, like almost everything in Hegel, with a negation. There are, of course, many ways in which Hegel uses the term “negation,” but the one we encounter at the outset of the anthropology is possibly the most radical and even revolutionary of them all. It is, as Hegel puts it, the “absolute negativity” (§§381–382), an emergence that takes place when an individual human body emerges from the body of the world, and when an individual soul – individual power of sensation – is born, still “captivated” (§387Z.; compare with §385Z.) by the sheer power of the world that Hegel calls the “world soul” (§391), still “asleep” (§389), and yet already defined by an opposition to it. In fact, the world soul does not for Hegel *actually* exist – it is only there as a virtual “common substance” (§391); it is an excess of power that is “immaterial” (§389) only insofar as it is virtual (thereby Hegel breaks away from any traditional notion of immateriality), and “substantial” only insofar as it is foundational for any actual, singular soul-body. It is a common virtuality from which every human soul is born. “Just as light shatters into a countless multitude of stars, so the universal soul of nature, too,” states Hegel (§390Z), “shatters into a countless multitude of individual souls – with the distinction that, while light appears to have a persistent existence independent from the stars, the

<sup>1</sup>Most references to Hegel in this paper are either to the 3rd edition of the *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1830) (Hegel 1970), designated by a paragraph number occasionally followed by “A.” to indicate an *Anmerkung* (note) or “Z.” to indicate a *Zusatz* (addition) to the cited paragraph, as is standard in Hegel scholarship, or to Hegel’s *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie des Geistes* (Hegel 1994). Translations are mine.

universal soul of nature comes into actuality solely in the singular souls.” This virtual “common substance,” continues Hegel in the next paragraph, “has its actual truth only as *singularity (Einzelheit)*” (§391). Furthermore, since the soul is the first form of *Geist* and since it cannot exist actually as the world soul, but only as a multitude of singular soul-bodies, that means that *Geist*, too, has its first actual existence only as an anthropological multitude of embodied individualities, all born from within the world body. As the first and most fundamental (“substantial”) form of spirit, the mode of its emergence as an individual’s body, the anthropology is the embodied pre-reflectivity of *Geist*. These anthropological points are pre-reflective and at the same time belong in the absolute; self-reflection is *not*, in Hegel, an inextricable property of the absolute *qua* the absolute beginning. This starting point is blind to itself and yet it is already *Geist*. And this is precisely the paradox: that spirituality is introduced by Hegel as a blind spot, an individual blind spot belonging in the absolute, and therefore a blind spot *of* the absolute. In this, Hegel goes beyond the Cartesian transparency of self-reflection.

The kind of negation that is the birth of a human soul is described by Hegel as a “saltus” (1994, 52), a leap from *Natur* to *Geist*, rather than a seamless continuity – a leap to the “immediate spirit” (§387; 1994, 30) that “must be grasped as spirit” (1994, 11; compare with 1994, 3, 20, 30). In fact, the dividing line in the *Encyclopedia* between the *Philosophy of Nature* and the *Philosophy of Spirit* is not really a transition – which is the traditional way of viewing it – but rather a pure difference, a hiatus between nature and *Geist*, between the seemingly unchangeable status quo of nature and the possibility of new life and knowledge. It is as if, in Hegel, the generative gap between the philosophy of nature and the philosophy of spirit acted to suspend the natural order so as to inaugurate the radically new “spiritual” one, related to the former as an “absolute negativity.” Even the most basic foundation of human individuality, the “natural soul” (not to be confused with the “world soul” as the “soul of nature”), has already left the original realm of nature “behind”; nature-as-origin now “lies behind” it, says Hegel (§391; §391Z.). The soul has, of course, inherited some of the natural changes and qualities, even as it has decisively broken away from the world body, but those are now incorporated into a radically new whole where they acquire, as Hegel puts it, a “spiritual meaning” (1994, 42, 45). The soul, that is, revolts against their givenness, their “immediacy,” and aims to “idealize” (assimilate and transform) them. Spirit, says Hegel in his lectures on the philosophy of history, can only begin “from spirit”;<sup>2</sup> as soon as a soul-as-body arises from nature, it ceases to be of nature, becoming *Geist*, a materiality that is “spirit.” There is a striving, dubbed by Hegel “a play of the absolute spirit with itself” (1994, 31) (to emphasize its independent, objective character), on the part of an aspect of the world body to break away from its host – *Geist* operating from within the real but not as part of it, bodily yet in revolt against the world body. The absolute spirit thereby replaces nature as the real *par excellence*, the new radically real, and Hegel’s anthropology becomes, in an important sense, a theory of revolution, in which *Geist* determines itself as being-otherwise, an (unconscious) will towards the new, a striving to be the “absolute negativity” and absolute newness against the “natural” status quo.<sup>3</sup> It is in this revolutionary act, for Hegel, that “spirit as this one” –

<sup>2</sup>Cited in Stederth (2001, 106).

<sup>3</sup>This kind of anthropological revolution – as a new beginning as well as a revolt against or break from the natural status quo – also invites comparison to Hegel’s account of revolution in his other works, from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to the *Philosophy of Right* and Hegel’s lectures on the philosophy of history. Here, too, the “new spirit” (Hegel 1970, 12:528)

spirit as bodily singular – is born and shaped, and the locus of this struggle is precisely the stratum of the human, the anthropological. Such is, incidentally, the (orthodoxly Hegelian) truth of all Left Hegelianism.

This revolution also has important consequences for Hegel's philosophy of nature. In particular, one should not be misled by his characterization of nature as "pointing towards" or "bearing witness" to *Geist* (see, for example, §381Z.). Any such "pointing" is only done *retroactively* by spirit itself which constructs a narrative – a "philosophy of nature" – after the revolution has already taken place. *Geist's* antagonistic relationship to the totality of the real that it originally proceeds from may, however, seem hard to reconcile with the injunction to approach nature "geistig liebend." How do we build a true philosophy of nature if nature is other to spirit and the latter emerges in a revolutionary break from the former? How do we link together, on Hegel's own terms, nature's otherness and its immanence to spirit? One possible way of doing that hinges precisely on reading the *Encyclopedia* in reverse, so that Hegel's emphasis on nature's "otherness" to spirit (and the apparent dualism implied in that) finds its resolution in the fact that it is only spirit who can philosophize about nature and unearth the concept hidden within it, yet completely concealed from nature itself. Nature-as-it-is is wholly other, but this otherness gets sublated as spirit gets to know and "idealize" the primordial world body, to the point of mastering it completely and replacing the first nature with the second, retroactively establishing their identity (in spirit). Hegel's remark in §381 that *Geist* is "the absolutely first" with regard to nature means exactly that, and it is in this important sense that the philosophy of spirit is prior to the philosophy of nature, even though the former follows the latter within the architectonic of Hegel's system. In order to trace this different kind of path – not from nature to spirit, but from spirit to nature – we need to consider, briefly, the underlying mechanism of the anthropology itself, which establishes spirit's birthright vis-à-vis nature. This mechanism is that which Hegel terms "idealization," creating not one but rather two "natures" – nature-as-the-real (from which spirit revolts) and nature-as-spirit (which spirit freely cognizes).

## Idealization

Hegel defines *Geist* as, among other possible descriptions, an activity of "ideality," *Idealität*, or "idealization," *Idealisierung* (see, for example, §381Z. or 1994, 30). Anthropologically, it is this definition that, according to Hegel himself, matters the most (§403A.), so that the entire logic of the anthropology, from the "world soul" and "natural soul" to the "actual soul" and the transition to consciousness, turns out to be a logic of idealization. When we hear the word "idealization," we tend to associate it with something abstract or incorporeal – however, that would be the opposite of what Hegel means by the term. For him, idealization begins as soon as there is a

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begins as an "absolute negativity," or absolutely "negative" freedom (*Philosophy of Right* §5A.), over and against the old regime. There are, however, no explicit connotations of death here – not until the beginning of the phenomenology, where the abstract world of *Verstand* is described as that of "death" (Hegel 1994, 139). The anthropological revolution is not abstract; it is, by contrast, a revolution of *life*. Similarly, the individual "spheres" that are destroyed by the French Revolution (Hegel 1970, 3:433) are here, on the contrary, first constructed and defined (Hegel 1994, 55–58). A comparative analysis of these accounts goes beyond the scope of this paper, but could, I believe, be illuminating.

body (singled out from the flesh of the world – *negation*, as seen above), continues to operate around (in the milieu of – *assimilation*), from within (*Verleiblichung*), and into the body (*Erinnerung*), and leads to an individual embodied world (*individuation*), a spiritually structured body that is for Hegel the anthropological subject (*subjectivation*). At the culmination of this logic stands the notion of habit, or “second nature,” logically followed by the birth of consciousness and the “external” nature which spirit begins to cognize. This will prove instrumental in the anthropology’s significance for *Naturphilosophie* in Hegel.

A full explication of this anthropological logic would stray too far from the argument of this paper, so let us only consider it briefly. For our purposes here, it is the assimilatory aspect of idealization that is the most important. Idealization as spirit’s revolt against the immobility of the earth is at the same time a transformation of the earth. All idealization begins as a *saltus*, an emergence on the surface of the world body which immediately starts assimilating the area that surrounds it, constructing itself as it attempts to retain itself (so as not to get lost within the flesh of the world again) and even place itself at the centre. It is in this sense that Hegel speaks of “idealization, or assimilation” (“Idealisierung oder Assimilation,” §381Z.). This is not, however, an assimilation to anything pre-determined; rather, it is a transformation that determines the form as well as the content of its operative agent itself, a construction (of a new world) that is simultaneously a self-formation (towards a new kind of subjectivity). Nor is it a purely “metaphorical” assimilation; it is, on the contrary, the agent’s body and its material power that allows it to appropriate and construct its surroundings. Whatever a newborn soul touches becomes part of itself, and vice versa: it defines its “individuality” by the “totality,” *Totalität*, of the things it touches or digests, the things it “fills” itself with (*Erfüllung* made actual, “posited” as a process of “subjectivity” – “Es ist darum zu tun, daß es seine Substantialität, die nur *an sich* seiende Erfüllung als Subjektivität *setzt*,” §403). The soul does not simply consume what it is offered; it is always in the process of re-producing its own world (the “positing of nature as its [that is, *Geist*’s] own world,” as Hegel defines it in §384). Ripped out of the world body, a soul has to build for itself an “individual world,” “individuelle Welt” (§402Z.; §407A.; 1994, 66), by means of the double movement of idealization, in which it appropriates and assembles itself from just as it gives itself away to and imposes itself on the surroundings. In this manner, idealization as assimilation defines itself for Hegel as sensation, *Empfindung*.

Idealization is, in Hegel, an exchange between the soul-body and its environment, in which an “inner” space of the “individual world” is being constructed and the “exteriority” of the originary real is being “sublated” (§381Z. “sublation” here being another term for “assimilation”). This exchange goes both ways – from within the soul-body as well as towards and into it, designated by Hegel in §401 as *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung* respectively. On the one hand, the soul can reach out to and “idealize” (that is, negate or retain) a particular “immediate” (that is, given) sensation, relate it to itself and “make it internal” (“innerlich gemacht,” §401), place it inside itself (*Erinnerung*) as yet another building block of its inner world.<sup>4</sup> On the other, the soul can reach inside its *Fürsichsein* (the

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<sup>4</sup>Hegel plays here on the German word *Erinnerung* (usually translated as “recollection”), breaking it down into *Er-innerung*, “internalization.” In this *Er-innerung*, the particular sensation in question is negated so that, according to the way Hegel

soul's innerness, always under construction) for a particular feeling – a memory of or a reaction to a sensation (including such reactions as “anger, shame, laughter or tears,” [Hegel 1994, 84]) – that it produces and enacts in its body or surroundings (*Verleiblichung*). “Pure corporeality is not sensation; it must *erinnern* itself, and vice versa, the purely inner must *verleiblichen* itself” (1994, 86; compare with 1994, 131). Whatever comes from within the soul, Hegel insists, must be *verleiblicht* so that the soul can sense or “discover” it (“in order to be sensed, this content must be *verleiblicht*,” (1994, 84) – it must become a part of the soul-body and its surroundings that are thereby influenced and transformed. This transformation goes both ways since not just *Verleiblichung* but *Erinnerung*, too, involves an “appropriation” of the “natural” aspect of the soul’s environment, so that the inner becomes the outer and the outer becomes the inner in a circular dynamic of their mutual constitution. In the double movement of *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung*, the “natural” is “idealized” towards the “posited totality of its [that is, the soul’s] particular world” (§403A.) that includes both the “inner” world of the soul’s being-for-itself (*Fürsichsein*) and, more importantly for us, the “outer” world of its surroundings, so that the soul, as Hegel indicates, does not distinguish what rises from within itself and what comes to it from without (“so that,” says Hegel, “we have the unity of the inner and the outer, i.e. sensation,” (1994, 131; compare with 1994, 71, 88). Both belong equally to the world that spirit feels is its own. The movement of constant repetition and reaffirmation of the soul, the reciprocal constitution of the “individual world,” does not yet create a distinction between subject and object, between the inner world and the external world of nature, which first appears in consciousness (“It should be noted” says Hegel, “that there is yet no distinction between subject and object in sensation, which first has its place in consciousness,” [1994, 74]). At most, it may be said to draw a conceptual line between the “form” of the soul’s activity (as “subjectivity of sensation,” §403) and the “content” of the individual world that this activity constructs – which, however, bodily coincide (the activity in question is, after all, the process of sensation or feeling, which can only be bodily) and co-constitute each other.

The radical move on Hegel’s part is to identify, within the logic of the anthropological idealization that he advances, the constitution of individuality and the constitution of subjectivity. As we have seen, the idealization at work in Hegel’s anthropology creates, by virtue of its very structure, an individual world to which the soul-body relates as to its own. Anthropologically, then, idealization is at the same time individuation that starts at the very beginning of the anthropology – it is our body that makes us individual right from the outset, even logically prior to the activity of sensation (1994, 31–32) – and unfolds until its very end (up to the “actual soul” as “das bei sich festgewordene Individuum”; 1994, 133). It is only through such an individuation, for Hegel, that *Geist* becomes “for itself” (§385Z.) and the originary real becomes “idealized,” and it is this process that he has in mind when speaking of the soul as a “microcosm” into which the “macrocosm” of nature is “contracted” (“compressed,” *zusammendrängt*), thereby losing its “exteriority” (§391Z.). By virtue of this “contraction,” performed by the activity of sensation, a soul appropriates the nature that surrounds it into its own individual world.

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wants us to understand negation in the note to §403, it is “virtually preserved *even if it does not exist*” (emphasis mine). It is “virtually preserved” in the sense that there is always a “virtual” possibility that it might be produced again; it has become assimilated and therefore no longer exists (independently) except “inside” the soul or, on the contrary, it is yet to exist, to be brought forth from within the soul.

At the same time, the cycle of idealization as *Verleiblichung* and *Erinnerung* also leads in Hegel to the emergence of a distinct type of subjectivity proper to this anthropological individuality – the “Subjektivität des Empfindens” that Hegel speaks of in §403 or, as he further defines it starting from §407, the subjectivity of “self-feeling.” The more a soul-body – initially just a singular area of the world body, a (non)-natural body captivated by the natural world – appropriates its environment and bodily operations, the more it at once gathers itself, focusing itself into a simple point from which it can reach the entire circumference of its individual world and which contains, in a “wrapped up” (*eingehüllte*, 1994, 68) or “virtual” (§403A.) manner, “as the subject and central point (*Mittelpunkt*) of all determinations of content” (§402Z.), the totality of the world that it has sensed and thereby idealized.<sup>5</sup> It is this subjectivity that transforms the dark primordial flesh of the world, or the elusive nature-as-it-is, into something structured and “spiritual.” At the same time, idealization is also a progress of the subject’s *power* over the world body, and therefore the continuation of the original revolutionary struggle. “The individual,” explains Hegel in the lectures, “takes his sensation back to himself,” gathers it into himself as the “point” of “self-feeling” which exists “in itself” and in every singular sensation alike (1994, 107–108).

Being a subjectivity, self-feeling must also have a form of knowledge appropriate to itself; this form of knowledge is, of course, sensation. *Geist* for Hegel is knowledge in all its various forms, and the soul is a form of *Geist*. And indeed, in sensation, the soul for Hegel “advances to the actual singularity that is for itself (*für sich*)” (§390Z.); that is, in sensation, the soul advances to knowledge, which is for Hegel the foundation of all further, conscious knowledge. The soul “is and will remain individuality throughout the entire determination and mediation of consciousness which will be later posited within it” (§403A.). Of course, this knowledge is not yet *Wissen* (scientific knowledge), and the kind of familiarity with nature that it gives is not yet conceptually structured. However, it is important that the knowledge produced by sensation is already mediated, not immediate,<sup>6</sup> as well as that, as a subjectivity, the soul feels not only the individual but also “the universal,” that is, the unified totality of the idealized world. “It seems,” says Hegel, “to be a contradiction that the universal can be *sensed*”; this contradiction is, however, resolved by the fact that this kind of felt universal has “the kind of content that has not yet been developed [by the subject] to the point of division between the universal and the singular, the subjective and the objective. From this standpoint, I *am* what I sense, and I sense what I am” (§400Z.). Already at this point, nature is indistinguishable from spirit. Understanding sensation as an active and not just passive form of knowledge with a distinct kind of structure and a distinct kind of subjectivity is not just another radical anthropological move on Hegel’s part; it also proves important for the possibility of *Naturphilosophie*. Namely, it makes evident that even the first form of spirit’s knowledge, that is, sensation, produces not knowledge of nature as it is but nature as cognized by (this pre-reflective form of) spirit. Even in sensation, which already implies a structured

<sup>5</sup>See also Hegel (1994, 74, 88, 131).

<sup>6</sup>The knowledge that corresponds to this (active, not passive) subjectivity is mediated through the structure of sensation as *Verleiblichung-Erinnerung*. Hence Hegel’s insistence that the knowledge proper to the non-subject of *Selbstgefühl* is not dependent “on the immediate sensuous present” (§400Z.). However, in contrast to the knowledge proper to consciousness, the subject of sensation never separates itself from what it feels – it is the kind of knowledge that never loses contact with what it knows, being the “determinacy of my entire *Fürsichsein*” (§400A.). As a consequence, sensation cannot serve as the basis for the philosophy of nature, whereas consciousness can.



subjectivity, we do not have access to the originary nature from which spirit revolts at the beginning of the anthropology. And that is why the anthropology not only fills, but also maintains the revolutionary gap between “nature” and “spirit.”

## Two natures

The anthropological process of idealization culminates for Hegel in two things: habit and consciousness. Habit is its logical conclusion, idealization as developed to the fullest, while consciousness is its *telos*; both are the highest point of spirit’s abstraction from nature, leading in its turn to spirit’s abstraction from itself. Habit, Hegel writes in §409A., is “corporeity reduced to its pure *ideality*.” In habit, “the soul is in possession of its content and contains it within itself in such a way that within these determinations [of content] it does not act as sensing, does not distinguish itself from them in relation to them nor is engulfed in them, but ... moves [freely] within them.” Habit makes the soul indifferent to these determinations and therefore “free” of them (§410), so that the anthropological subject does not get stuck in any particular determination anymore. Just like the subjectivity of *Selbstgefühl*, habit has the structure of a “repetition”; it comes as no surprise, then, that Hegel calls habit “the mechanism of self-feeling” (§410A.). Whereas the repetition characteristic of *Selbstgefühl* consisted in the structured re-production of individuality and the individual world, habit is presented by Hegel as the next step in this anthropological idealization – an *anti-individual* repetition meant to erase all possibility of self-feeling getting lost in anything particular and to open it up to a universal spiritual world. Here, the transformation of the world body into spiritual subjectivity has reached the point of indifference towards the real (in contrast to the initial revolt against it). Instead of “cultivating the real so that it is once more able to enter into a relation of indifference with the ideal” (Whistler 2013, 219), as Schelling does, Hegel chooses to cultivate the *revolutionary ideal* to a point of its becoming indifferent to the originary real – not only in habit, but also in the subject-object structure of consciousness and in the philosophy of nature, which builds upon the former.

Thanks to habit, “the soul is open for further activity and engagement, open for sensation as well as for consciousness” (§410). Paradoxically, for Hegel this universalization goes through the anthropological individualization, both encompassed under the term “idealization” – an assimilation of the world which leads to its spiritualization so that it may be *cognizable*. The highest form of this spiritualization is what Hegel calls the “actual soul,” the fully formed individual subject ready to become the subject of knowledge. In habit, spirit establishes a “second nature” (§410Z.) that has fully separated itself from and against the world body (which we may call the “first nature”) from which the anthropology revolted. This separation of second nature from the first continues in the transition from soul to consciousness, that is, from the anthropology to the phenomenology. The next step, after idealizing the body, is for Hegel to idealize the soul – that is, negate it or abstract from it. In this idealization, consciousness starts relating to the world that the soul has idealized as to something *external*: “the I excludes” the totality of the soul and turns it into an “object” that it relates to as to an “external” world (§412), asserting itself as an “empty” and “pure” subject. “The pure abstract freedom for itself releases its determinacy, the natural life of the soul, as similarly free, as an *independent object*, and it is this object as *external to it* that the I knows in the first place, thereby

becoming consciousness” (§413). In the anthropology, spirit was as one with its world, assimilated it without differentiating between the “inside” and the “outside”; in the phenomenology, spirit separates the anthropologically idealized world from itself, becoming a subject which has the “external” world of nature as its object (§413). Whereas the anthropological logic of idealization was that of internalization, the phenomenology begins, on the contrary, with an act of externalization.

For Hegel, consciousness is born as soon as the soul begins to consider the content of sensation as something belonging not to itself, but to a nature that is outside and other to spirit. Previously, *Geist* was blind and incapable of separating itself from its world (“I am what I sense, and I sense what I am,” §400Z.); now it can distance itself from the natural world and can therefore begin to think it through. The natural world it can cognize from this point is not, however, nature-as-it-is, but nature-as-spirit; the phenomenological division proceeds for Hegel from *within* the soul, and therefore from the idealized “spiritual” nature, the “second nature” which has reached its peak in habit. As a for-itself, the anthropological subjectivity, having begun from immediacy and indistinction, now “exists for itself in distinction from other [things that surround it]” (Hegel 1994, 76); it is on this that the phenomenology builds. Metaphorically, Hegel describes this process in terms of the soul “excluding” its own “content,” that is, the felt world of the anthropology, and “positing” it “outside” itself, transforming it into an “external world” and thereby becoming the I of consciousness (1994, 141). Here, cognizability has finally been achieved and now spirit can approach its own world conceptually, which, coincidentally, forms the basis for the philosophy of nature. “[The soul] freely releases its immediacy from within itself ... and this excluded external is in its totality *the world*” (1994, 137; compare with 1994, 141). That is why Hegel calls the transition from the anthropology to the phenomenology an “act of creation” (1994, 137): it creates the “external nature” as cognized by spirit, the “spiritual” nature as distinct from the primordial nature-as-the-real from whose depths the human soul emerged.

“This totality – the soul – is the content of that which is contained in the consciousness of the I” (Hegel 1994, 142). Spirit is capable of immanently loving nature (approaching it “geistig liebend”) because the nature that it loves is already immanently defined by spirit in the course of the anthropology; Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie*, being already grounded in the philosophy of spirit, has the third volume of the *Encyclopedia* for its presupposition. There can be no philosophy of nature prior to that moment; there can, of course, be a nature without the human, but not a *philosophy* of nature. The nature-as-we-know-it is the human soul brought outside itself, so that our relation to nature is, in its origin, our relation to our own soul. The natural, says Hegel, “is external, but on the other hand *I am it*” (1994, 93). In fact, we may say that there are in Hegel not just two, but three “natures.” The first nature is the world body from which spirit revolts; the second one is human nature culminating in habit; and finally, the third nature is the subject matter of the *Philosophy of Nature*, which has its origin in the transition from the anthropology to the phenomenology. The “spiritual” nature, in other words, itself splits in two – into “human nature” and “external nature” (as cognized by consciousness). As the development from habit to consciousness in the philosophy of subjective spirit demonstrates, these two natures are continuous between themselves but not with the nature from which *Geist* proceeds in the revolutionary *saltus*. Nature-as-it-is cannot as such serve as proper subject for the philosophy of nature because the latter deals only with nature-as-

it-is-explicated-by-spirit. That is why, after suggesting that a true philosophy of nature would approach nature “geistig liebend,” Hegel also remarks that “the highest foundation of such a study of nature lies *within* the human” (Hegel 2002, 6).

The philosophy of nature’s “nature” is, in other words, that which consciousness sees (or produces) when it looks back at its own origin. Spirit “loves” nature, however, not as the origin from which it comes, but as the revolutionary reshaping of the origin that it undertakes, so that nature’s “otherness” becomes here its otherness *to itself*, a gap between the two natures – the nature-as-origin and the nature-as-spirit, the latter posited as the “new” world of nature (new “creation”) which displaces the old. Traditionally, nature’s otherness-to-itself in Hegel has been understood to mean its scatteredness and blind contingency. That is, of course, correct, but there is also a deeper meaning to it: nature’s otherness to itself, its alienation from itself points to the gap between nature-as-origin and nature-as-spirit. This otherness is not a “beyond”; it is an immanent attempt by spirit to reconstruct its own origin. Hence the two natures, and not just one; and hence why the relationship between these two natures is not a dualism in the traditional sense – not a dualism *within* the system, at least, and arguably not even a dualism at all. At the same time, since there is no dualism between them is also why the overcoming of the Cartesian subject-object divide in the phenomenology is highly important for the possibility of the true philosophy of nature. The transition from soul to consciousness marks the beginning of *Naturphilosophie*, but at the same time it is *merely* a beginning; the phenomenological consciousness, the I, is at first completely “abstract” (the soul has transformed itself by means of abstracting from itself) and therefore cannot yet approach nature “spiritually” in the full sense. “Consciousness,” writes Hegel, “does not yet know that the object is *in itself* identical to spirit and it is only through a self-division of spirit that it is seen as fully independent” (§414Z.). The “second nature” is born first in habit and then in the transition from the anthropology to the phenomenology, coinciding with the birth of consciousness; but in order for nature’s otherness to be overcome, the subject-object divide must be overcome, too, and the logic of the phenomenology is nothing other than that of spirit’s progressive knowledge of the external world and the latter’s transformation into something “philosophical.” Logically prior to the phenomenology, however, no philosophy of nature is possible. In a certain ontoanthropological sense, for Hegel, the human does not proceed from the natural, but rather, the natural proceeds from the human. There can be no philosophical knowledge of nature-in-the-first-instance, or nature-as-origin, but only nature-in-the-last-instance, or nature-as-spirit.

### Conclusion: a Utopian perspective

Thanks to the anthropological idealization, spirit has its own, assimilated world, or even a multitude of such worlds, just as there are a multitude of individual souls. It is not just that spirit does not need the first nature (the world body) anymore – saying so would simplify the logic that results from this anthropological reading of Hegel’s philosophy of nature. Spirit does need to go “back” to the world body if it wants to have a valid *Naturphilosophie*, but it does so in a rather peculiar way. That is, the Schellingian real becomes redundant for Hegel because the soul splits up from the world body *as part* of the world body; the anthropological idealization revolts against the real by transforming it from the inside (what Hegel calls “freedom from and within the natural,” [1994, 19]). This revolt establishes

the anthropology's significance as both the point of contact with the world body and that of its assimilation by the soul's being-for-itself. As a result, the soul still, in a sense, carries the real "inside" itself even as it revolutionarily transforms it – and most importantly, it is therefore only with *itself*, and not with the originary real, that it feels bound to join back. Even the materiality of nature is only cognizable, in this reading, via the materiality of *Geist*, that is, sensation as property of the soul-body – hence the emphasis on *gnōthi seauton* that we find throughout Hegel's philosophy; and hence also the important *utopian* character of Hegel's philosophy of spirit, and, as a consequence, Hegel's philosophy of nature as well. Namely, the conceptual genesis of the absolute in Hegel's *Encyclopedia* necessitates the reverse movement of the real, from the third volume of the *Encyclopedia* to the second. In an important sense, the philosophy of spirit begins for Hegel, literally, from *nowhere* – nature-as-it-is remains a non-place within the system, one from which the human revolts and which it no longer theorizes as such. The entirety of the anthropology and the phenomenology is, in fact, spirit's attempt to "idealize," or "assimilate," the originary non-place, to come to grips and join back with the real – not the real as it is, but the real as already assimilated by spirit. Catherine Malabou speaks, albeit in a different sense, of spirit's "reduplication" of nature in Hegel's anthropology (Malabou 2005, 26). At stake here is, however, something more than a "reduplication"; it is essentially a joining back as a *replacement*.<sup>7</sup> Or, if we are to talk about this process in terms of a "reduplication," it is not, as per Malabou, spirit that reduplicates nature – it is (the philosophy of nature's) *nature* that is a reduplication of spirit and as spirit. *Geist* strives to replace the first-order utopia of the real with a new, spiritual nature, and to take it under control, but since the first nature remains non-theorizable as such, the gap cannot be fully closed and spirit's revolutionary project itself remains utopian.<sup>8</sup> From this perspective, the philosophy of spirit may be viewed as an attempt to bridge the revolutionary gap by building a spiritual non-place (a second-order utopia) on top of the non-place of the real (the first-order utopia), which begins from the anthropological revolution, the anthropological point – Hegel calls it the "intensive form of individuality" (§405A.) – which is pre-reflective and yet already spiritual. The rupture with the natural which institutes Hegel's Anthropology is already *an event of Geist*, even though it is not yet *the event*, not yet the universal actuality of the kingdom of spirit. The revolutionary power of the origin dictates that the old (that is, nature) proceeds from the new (that is, spirit) and comes after the fact of the new, and not the other way around; at the standpoint of the past there are no conditions for a true philosophy of nature.<sup>9</sup> Nature's past is therefore always written from the standpoint of spirit's future. It is the concrete reality of *Geist* that unfolds back into the philosophy of nature; it is the new – the actuality of the new – which retroactively unfolds into the past. The nature of the philosophy of nature is, as it were,

<sup>7</sup>With regard to the gap between nature and spirit, it should also be noted that, even though the logic of the philosophy of nature presents an attempt to lead up to the human via the animal soul, it never actually achieves that goal. The animal soul is for Hegel completely caught up in the endless digestive-reproductive cycle, the animal's unity with the genus being, according to Hegel, "the highest" that is available to it (Enz §§351Z., 356, 356Z., 369, 369Z.; compare with Hegel 1994, 25–26).

<sup>8</sup>Naturally, this kind of utopian character of Hegel's system also entails important political and theological consequences. These go beyond the scope of this paper, but I hope to explore them in my future work.

<sup>9</sup>This is also why, as pointed out at the beginning of this paper, the philosophy of nature cannot be written as if seen through the eyes of the pre-Incarnational God (that is, before the human and the anthropological) – giving further meaning to Hegel's characterization of nature as "other" to the Logic, that is, to "God the Father" (see O'Regan 1994).

post-thinkable, but never pre-thinkable. This post-thinkability itself, however, only arrives in the wake of the revolution that first makes the immanent construction of the nature-narrative possible, the event of the new that gives birth to a “philosophical” nature.

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## Notes on contributor

*Kirill Chepurin* is Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, Moscow, and Visiting Scholar in the Department of Theology, Humboldt University of Berlin. His current research focuses on German Idealism, Utopian thought, and political theology.

## ORCID

*Kirill Chepurin*  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-0265-7730>

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