

The Beginning of Spirit As We Know It: Hegel's Mother

FRANK RUDA

Senior Fellow, International Center for Research into Cultural Technologies and Media Philosophy (IKKM), Bauhaus University Weimar. Address: Cranachstr. 47, 99423 Weimar, Germany. E-mail: frankruda@hotmail.com

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Abstract: Contemporary anthropological discourses are struggling and striving more than ever before. This may come as a surprise, given the longtime intimate connection anthropology has had with metaphysics. This article investigates how and why Hegel's anthropology, the first part of his philosophy of subjective spirit and his philosophy of spirit as a whole, is a means of overcoming a substantialist characterization of the human.

To that end, the article turns to Hegel's conception of habit in order to raise the problem of the human spirit's beginning in Hegel's anthropology and the relationship between habit as "second" nature and the "first" nature that habit transforms. In doing this, we come across the issue of inheritance in Hegel: if there is nothing that is a given, then how can we conceive that which spirit somehow inherits? Hegel refers to this presence of spirit in the mode of absence as "nature." Spirit presupposes nature, i. e. its own absence. There are, furthermore, two important aspects to the natural disposition of spirit in Hegel, analyzed here: the concept of "genius" and the role of another subject. The author defends the idea that Hegel's anthropology may be regarded as overcoming substantialism, because for Hegel the human being cannot but be confronted with the fact that there is no (m)other.

1. Human Life Discourses

ONCE upon a time, philosophical anthropology was a wasteland. Nearly all endeavors within its terrain were subjected to harsh and fundamental criticisms, far-reaching de(con)structions of different kinds, or even worse, blunt repudiations. How did this peculiar situation come about? In expounding the internal structure, logic and / or (of the) natural constitution of human beings as such, philosophical anthropology did not only seem to constitutively rely on an objective and objectifying conception of the human, but produced and postulated a concept of the human being and human life that had highly problematic implications. In part, this was because it provided the ground for the (first widely ignored and then, after a transitory and affirmative period, widely rejected and allegedly idealist) *Weltanschauung* of humanism. Humanism politically, and at least supposedly, enabled criticism of existing social conditions by emphasizing their opposition to, or contradiction with, the true end(s) of human nature. Humanism thereby was always a closet Aristotelianism. The humanist perspective may have encouraged criticism of social and political circumstances, but only by paying the high price of returning to a metaphysical conception of human nature. Because of humanism, i.e. Aristotelianism, philosophical anthropology was led into a proper Scylla or Charybdis situation. If human nature is the basis for changing or at least critically evaluating the existing worldly conditions, then we rely on a stable basis for performing the very act of criticism. And even if this basis allows us to change or criticize the world, we thereby implicitly acknowledge that we will never be able to change what allows us to change the world, namely our own nature. Philosophical anthropology tending towards humanism aristotelianized itself and thus immediately became a substantialist human-nature-and-life-metaphysics.

A slightly different phrasing of the same conceptual concatenation, which is often identified or associated with the work of early Marx¹, emphasizes that human beings are the only ones that constantly transform their own nature, so that any society that is fixated has to rely on a fiction / fixation of what human beings are.² Such a fiction / fixation may allow for the constitution of a certain—say, capitalist—form of society, but as human life constitutively and constantly re-determines itself, any fixation of human nature turns out to be nothing but an inhuman fiction alienating society from its own subjective life-impulse and therefore from its natural basis. Human nature, in this depiction, is different from that of all other beings because it can only properly realize itself within a self-transforming and self-transformative practice. With this conceptual move—the definition of human nature as essentially unfixable—history or historical transformation is turned into the proper nature of mankind. It implies that “history is human nature.”³ As a consequence, as long as society is alienated from its substantial subjective ground, we are still living in “the prehistory of human society.”⁴ Even if one seeks to claim that humans do not have any pre-given nature but only are what they are through a historical process of self-transformation, i.e. through their own practice, one thereby cannot but again naturalize history. Saying that history is human nature, and therefore the human being has no other nature than a self-transforming one, implies not just a normative, but also a fundamentally substantialist assumption. The essential instability of human nature turns out, as a result, to be a surprisingly stable condition. Critical or (self-proclaimed) emancipatory anthropology inferred from this, *inter alia*, that the present state of (capitalist) affairs must be criticized because it fixates, and thereby oppresses, the true realization of human nature, hindering actual human life and practice.

Both of these ‘left-wing’ anthropologies of human nature turned out, however, to be highly problematic with regard to their concepts

1. Erich Fromm was one of the most prominent proponents of a humanist Marx. See, Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (London/New York: Continuum, 2004). For a cognitive map of different reactions to humanism, see Frank Ruda, “Humanism Reconsidered, or: Life living Life”, in: *Filozofski Vestnik*, Ljubljana, Vol. XXX, No. 2, 2009, 175-197.
2. The term fixation with an ‚x‘ was introduced by Jacques Lacan. See, Jacques Lacan, “L'etourdit”, in: *Autres écrits* (Paris: Seuil, 2001), 483.
3. Robert B. Brandom, *A Spirit of Trust: A Semantic Reading of Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit* (unpublished typescript, available at: http://www.pitt.edu/~brandom/spirit_of_trust_2014.html).
4. Karl Marx, “Preface to a Critique of Political Economy”, in: *Selected Works*, Vol. I (Moscow: Foreign Language Publishing House, 1955), 364.

of history and historicity. Either one ended up with an ahistorical and invariable human nature grounding all social or political change and thus history (nature as turned into the basis of history, and history as thereby essentially naturalized);—or one ended up with a supposedly historical and transformative nature of the agent of history (the human being), claimed to be so fundamentally historical that it implied the abolishment of any substantial kind of human nature.⁵ However—in an apparently paradoxical way—this very abolishment proved to be a renewed re-inscription of a substantialist kind of nature. Why? Because the only thing that could not or was not supposed to change, according to the normative consequence of this doctrine's principal idea, was the constantly changing human nature itself.

Anthropology in these two versions ended up conceptually eliminating history, which means it ended up in nature. From this one can see why it may not be too surprising, after all, that both of these anthropological visions could be easily converted and incorporated into the opposite, namely into conservative political orientation. The first version—the invariantly unchanging human nature—became quite prominent with the (still) repeated claims about human nature as essentially self-seeking and egotist (one may here think of Hobbes and many others), and therefore only fit for a competitive surrounding best represented by the capitalist mode of social organization.⁶ If human nature has substantial characteristic traits, one could argue that it is precisely these traits, determining as they are for all human conduct and interaction, that counteract any demand to transform society in a fundamental way. Human nature, in this conservative anthropological articulation, serves not as the unchangeable foundation allowing for transformation, but as the unchanging natural ground preventing any change from happening.⁷ The given state of society is what it is because of hu-

5. One version of this kind of anthropological claim is that there is no pre-given nature of mankind, since human nature is essentially indeterminate. Yet contending the indeterminateness of human nature ultimately means either that human nature is what humans make of it or that it will always be essentially indeterminate. The former leads to the consequences depicted above, the latter substantializes indeterminacy (one may here think of Sartre).

6. On this, see the by now classical study: C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism. Hobbes to Locke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 9-159.

7. This is why, for example, Max Horkheimer remarked, opposing such claims, that „the discourse raised since eternity that opposes necessary historical transformation because of human nature should finally hush.” Max Horkheimer, „Bemerkungen zur philosophischen Anthropologie,” in *Kritische Theorie*, ed. by Alfred Schmidt, Vol. 2 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968), 227. One should

man nature, and those who dream of another state of the world either dream unnatural (and often violent) dreams or have the wrong idea of human nature and need to be reminded of the correct one.

The second version, that of the constantly changing nature of the human being, reappeared in two different conservative stances. The first contends that any kind of social construction that is not as dynamic as human nature necessarily hinders productive transformative potential at the heart of human life and activity. Therefore, for the social and political organization to function properly, it must adopt the internal transformative dynamics of human nature as its normative standard. This normative standard is then presented as the necessity for a society and its members to be constantly dynamic, moving, and flexible. Societies can only survive if they admit of self-transformation and are constantly self-transforming. At the same time, the laws of this self-transformation are not freely decided upon by those subjected to them, but are rather regarded as themselves natural (one such 'natural environment' is, for example, the market and its specific laws).⁸ The second possible option of integrating the self-transforming human nature into an often (although not necessarily) conservative framework, is to emphasize that human beings are deficient by nature. Human nature is weak and malfunctioning, and therefore we have to rely on strong social institutions that operate in the compensatory way, allowing the human society to function.⁹ Human nature is so weak that it cannot help relying on a constant socio-cultural process of prosthetization, which in its turn constantly transforms human nature—precisely because there was no functional human nature before its institutional transformation, education, and formation in the first place. Human nature has thus been unable to determine the society humans live in, because it needed the society it was formed by to function. In this way society and culture present themselves as the natural destiny of the weak human nature, which enables the latter to overcome its weakness. In these conservative articulations, the end result is either human nature which naturally determines the given form of society, or the kind of human nature that is unable to decide upon its own laws of transformation, whereby these laws are naturalized.

also mention that Stalin's idea of creating the new man is, in a way, a determinately negative conceptual consequence of this definition of human nature.

8. For an analysis of flexibility against what is called "plasticity", see Catherine Malabou, *What Should We Do With Our Brain?* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008).

9. One may here think e.g. of Arnold Gehlen.

Philosophical anthropology became a conceptual wasteland because all these—conservative as well as emancipatory—versions remained, in one way or another, imprisoned in a metaphysical, substantializing account of (human) nature. The discourse of the human being and human nature became an uninhabitable terrain due to its own naturalizing tendency, which ultimately elided any historicity proper. Anthropology became a wasteland because in its kingdom nature ruled and history withered away. The struggles that were fought between the conservatives and the emancipators on this deserted battleground turned out, more often than not, to be struggles about (the) ahistorical nature (of human beings). Among other things, the aftermath of these battles did a lot of collateral damage to any further attempts at any discourse with even the slightest anthropological timbre—which is one of the reasons why, for example, psychoanalysis in general and Freud’s theory of the drives in particular were criticized for turning “historical accidents into biological necessities”¹⁰ (some of Freud’s critics also contended that one could infer from his theory the general mechanism of naturalization, and hence ideology¹¹). Once upon a time, philosophical anthropology was a wasteland because it stank of substantialism and metaphysics, or more precisely: of a metaphysics of (human) nature. It naturalized human nature, and history became its anathema—an anathema it nonetheless constantly talked about and referred to. At the same time, the naturalizing tendency led to issues that exceeded even the conflict between the emancipatory and the conservative position. The reason for that is conceptual, since substantialism cannot but turn into an exclusivism—the inheritance of a certain underlying Aristotelianism¹²—and to exclude some people not only from the social and political sphere, but also from the sphere of humanity as such proved politically (and historically) more than disastrous. As a result, any discourse that sought to substantially define the human (being) became a highly forbidden and justifiably avoided territory. The dangers were too many: substantializing nature, naturalizing substance, both at the same time, both at the same time by way of trying to avoid them both at the same time, political and ontological exclusivism, etc.

10. Herbert Marcuse, *Triebstruktur und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1955), 17.

11. “The unhistorical character of Freud’s concepts ... entails...its opposite.” Ibid, 34.

12. For some implications of this see Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), and for a complication of this reading see Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

2. Habit

Then suddenly, not so long ago, a resurgence of interest in philosophical anthropology took place. Neo- or non-neo-biologisms are in vogue; many forms of philosophical vitalisms encourage a return to anthropological speculations; *Naturphilosophie* came back together with new materialisms that not only re-define matter but, with the same stroke, also revivify the definitions of human nature; finally, theories of second nature have become predominant in many philosophical camps. Given how bad the situation had been for anthropology, how did this happen? The question is easier to answer than may seem at first glance, since the resurgence of anthropology was, in a certain sense, already inscribed into what brought about its very decline. What was needed was a non-substantialist discourse on human nature, and this was brought about precisely by taking seriously the substantialist anthropological claims.¹³ Left with the options of an unchangeable human nature that grounds or prohibits change or a constantly changing nature that allows for or prohibits the same, one can infer that the conflict between these two versions is determinative not only for human nature, but also for anthropology itself. Human nature in anthropology is split between static and dynamic, unchanging and unchangeably changing determinations, so that this split also splits the discourse itself. In this sense, anthropology lost substance because of its substantialism, which in turn made the return to anthropology possible. To make this more comprehensible, here is a highly reductive schema (see next page).

Where does the real struggle reside? Where does the lack of substance occur? Obviously, between the first two and the second two columns: an antagonism running through the definition of human nature and thus through anthropology as its defining discourse, too. The unity of this difference is the structure of anthropology itself, which lost its substantialist character precisely by understanding its own structure (seeing it as a wasteland or battlefield). That is to say, by taking the overdetermined (overdetermined, because it is ultimately determined by an unchangeable factor) contradiction at its heart seriously, anthropology was led to the insight that there is no stable definition of the human

13. It is worth noting that already in 1969 Adorno (a critic of any substantialist anthropology) praised Ulrich Sonnemann's book *Negative Anthropology*. The return to anthropological questions is thus neither overly new nor a proper return, simply because the very historical moment of overcoming anthropology coincided with a return to it (a very Adornian motif). Or, in other words, the moment when the substantialist discourse lost all substance (and became a wasteland) was the moment when this discourse could be taken up again.

	Constantly Changing (de- terminate or indeterminate)	Unchangeable Human Nature	Constantly Changing (de- terminate or indeterminate) Human Nature
Unchangeable Human Nature	Human Nature	Unchangeable Human Nature	Human Nature
Pro Change	Pro Change	Against Change	Against Change

being and life, neither as simply transformative nor simply as resisting transformation. It is, rather, constitutively both, as well as at the same time changing and unchanging. Taking this seriously meant that anthropology lost its inherent substantialist character and had to address its immanent contradiction. And since, as a famous saying goes, it is not enough to address a contradiction only in terms of substance, but also in terms of the subject, it is no wonder that most, if not all, of the current renewals of anthropology start from or at some point turn to Hegel. This goes for both the so-called ‘continental’ and for the more analytic or pragmatist approaches.

For is not Hegel the thinker of contradictions that are at the same time strangely or peculiarly bound together into a unity? That is why it is not a great surprise that the resurgent interest in anthropology co-emerged with the resurgent interest in the Hegelian system—and more specifically in a part of it that had for a long time been neglected, or even considered a wasteland of its own: his philosophy of nature (as well as human nature, or the philosophy of subjective spirit). Hegel’s anthropology is, of course, not a part of his philosophy of nature, except in a certain sense: it is the transition out of nature, which both is itself a part of nature and is not anymore. Hegel’s anthropology is thus in and outside of nature; in other words, it deals with the specificity of human nature.¹⁴

But what can one learn from Hegel’s anthropology that exceeds anthropology’s previous substantialism? It was the achievement of, inter alia, Catherine Malabou¹⁵ and Slavoj Žižek¹⁶ to have brought attention

14. One of the first volumes dealing with Hegel’s philosophy of nature is *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. by Stephen Houlgate (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998). Subjective spirit does not play any significant role in it at all.

15. Catherine Malabou, *The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic*, London/New York: Routledge, 2004.

16. Slavoj Žižek, “Discipline Between Two Freedoms—Madness and Habit in German Idealism,” in: Markus Gabriel and Slavoj Žižek, *Mythology, Madness, and Laughter. Subjectivity in German Idealism* (London/New York: Continuum, 2009), 95-121.

to the centrality of the concept of *habit* in Hegel's philosophy—a concept that provides the answer to the above question. Habit is a concept that is supposed to conceptually circumvent all unchanging substantialist traits of human nature, as well as to be crucial for any kind of human practice. It therefore stands at the heart of the properly human life. Habit is relevant not only for Hegel's account of the formation of subjectivity, or subjective spirit, but also for his treatment of socio-political phenomena (objective spirit). In fact, one may go as far as to assume that it plays a crucial role for the constitution of absolute spirit, too—that is, the spheres of art, religion, and philosophy. It is, furthermore, this concept which occurs in the transition from Hegel's philosophy of nature to his philosophy of mind, in the first part (the “philosophy of subjective spirit”) of the third volume of his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences*—the part in which he deals with the (natural and spiritual) formation of the subject and which begins with the “Anthropology” before moving on to the “Phenomenology” and “Psychology,” and then to objective¹⁷ and absolute spirit.

Habit is an element of what Hegel calls the “feeling soul,”¹⁸ and as has been argued many times before, habit is for him a formational category. By means of habit one is able to transform one's nature into another kind of nature—the second nature. Habit is formational and transformative, because it is through habit that one is not only able to get used to things and activities (from breathing to walking to talking, etc.), but also to make these activities a part of one's own self-feeling (that is to say: one cannot imagine oneself without these capacities). This is why the concept of habit belongs in Hegel to the “feeling soul.” Habitualized things are felt as if they were inscribed into our very nature—precisely because they have been habitualized, becoming our second nature. Yet they are acquired and hence cultural, because this nature is *second* nature. Everything we are is, in an abstract sense, habitualized and hence not naturally inherited. By means of habit one is capable of doing several complex things at once (speaking while walking, smoking and thinking, etc.), too.

It is not my aim here to present a rather poor overview of the Hegelian concept of habit; neither do I seek to explicate the conceptual intri-

17. I also contributed to the long list of Hegelian habit-studies by investigating the role habit plays in objective spirit in: Frank Ruda, *Hegel's Rabble: An Investigation into Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (London: Continuum, 2011), 75–99.

18. The concept of habit occurs in § 409, after Hegel has given an account of “self-feeling” and the “feeling soul in its immediacy.” See: *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind. Translated from the Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984), 39ff.

cacies inscribed into it. Rather, the present return to anthropology (and more specifically to Hegel's anthropology) raises one simple question, thereby raising the stakes as well: if there is always only a transformed, second nature, determined as it is by the very practice that habitualizes the subject, then what is the nature that is transformed? This question becomes even more pertinent if one takes into account that Hegel's anthropology does not start with habit, but with something else to which I will return in an instant. So, what is the nature that is transformed through the practice of spirit? Differently put: does spirit inherit anything from nature? Is there anything that naturally determines spirit? Or again in different terms: is there any first nature? Is there—and can there be—a theory of inheritance in Hegel, or does his theory of habit systematically preclude such a theory?¹⁹

The immediate answer seems to be a straightforward “no”: there is no inheritance whatsoever that would not be fundamentally an inheritance of spirit to spirit. Of course, habit contributes to the formation of culture and the inheritance of cultural practices, but there seems to be no natural element of inheritance involved in that (even though some claim that second nature is simply another kind of nature, and therefore spirit never leaves behind that from which it tries to liberate itself).²⁰ If, in the philosophy of subjective spirit, spirit begins to form itself by forming a second nature, one can see why Hegel can explicitly state that “spirit does not naturally emerge from nature.”²¹ If spirit does not naturally emerge from nature, this is simply because it always is “its own result.” Thus, nature cannot be “the absolutely immediate, first, originary positing,” but merely a precondition that spirit “makes for itself.”²² Since spirit in the beginning cannot but (among other things)

19. Obviously, Hegel has a legal theory of inheritance that he develops in his *Philosophy of Right*, concerning family relations. I am here focusing solely on the ‘biological’ or ‘natural’ meaning of inheritance. For the legal theory see: G.W.F. Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 176ff.

20. One may here think of the work of Hubert L. Dreyfus. One may also recall that for Hegel even breathing is something that a human child first has to learn when it is born, and then becomes immediately habitualized to it. Yet the fact that human bodies need to breathe and that there is air and an atmosphere cannot be said to be merely an effect of culture (although the atmosphere is, of course, a cultural concept).

21. Here and in the following I cite the German edition, since it includes a critical edition of the additions (*Zusätze*) to the paragraphs, compiled by Hegel's pupils, that are often Hegelian in spirit and highly instructive: G.W.F. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, Dritter Teil*, in: *Werke*, Vol. 10 (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983), 25.

22. *Ibid.*, 24.

naturalize itself, the emergence of spirit is fundamentally spiritual. This is the seemingly paradoxical move: spirit naturalizes itself—it takes nature for its precondition—yet this naturalization is an act of spirit.

Could one therefore not simply assume that the only thing that spirit inherits is the product of spirit, determined by spirit to be inherited by itself? One could, but what precisely does this mean? Given Hegel's claim that "as it is by nature or immediately, humanity is what it ought not to be, and that, as spirit, humanity has instead the vocation to become for itself what in its natural state it still is only in itself,"²³ it seems that the only thing making humanity into humanity, spirit into spirit, is the very act of transforming that which seems to have the status of an immediate natural givenness. One of the means to do so—perhaps the most crucial one—is habit, i.e. the formation of a second nature. Furthermore, everything that appears to be an immediate natural given is in truth posited by spirit in an act of naturalization. Does it therefore not simply seem useless to inquire into a Hegelian conception of inheritance? One can, however, complicate the matter by asking the following question: what does spirit inherit as that which it needs to transform, so that it is that which spirit posited as that which it needs to transform? If there is nothing given in Hegel, not even nothing, how does one conceive of that which is less than nothing that we somehow inherit?

Before introducing the concept of habit in his anthropology, Hegel unfolds a concept that, at least at first sight, seems to provide a possible ground for a Hegelian conception of inheritance. This concept is what he calls "Naturell,"²⁴ which can be translated as *disposition*. In German the reference to nature is obvious. Moreover, it is an aspect of this concept that can provide the answer to the question I raised—namely, the notion of genius, on which I will elaborate in what follows. To approach the concept of "Naturell", one should take note, first, of Hegel's methodology when he says that "one... cannot begin with spirit as such, but must begin with its inadequate reality. Spirit *is* already spirit in the beginning, but it does not know that it is spirit."²⁵ Spirit thus begins inadequately. Its beginning is a failed beginning. This inadequate reality of spirit is what Hegel refers to as nature.²⁶ Thus, nature is spirit in an

23. G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy, Vol. III* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 25.

24. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Dritter Teil*, 71.

25. *Ibid.*, 33.

26. Obviously, this is a very reductive way of elaborating the concept of nature in Hegel, which is far more complex. Yet, here it is only important to note that nature is what is there if there is an inadequacy of spirit.

inadequate form—that is to say, in the beginning spirit is natural simply because it is not (yet) spirit. It is spirit that is not spirit, because it does not know what it is and therefore is not what it is. This inadequacy is measured and articulated by Hegel in terms of knowledge. Spirit is there in the beginning, but it does not know that it is there and therefore it *is not-there* in the beginning.²⁷ It is a spirit that does not know where, what, or even that it is. In its beginning spirit is disoriented. And it will only slowly start to sense that it is and what it is (i.e. the feeling soul). Spirit arises from its own inadequacy, which is why it will ultimately be its own result. And it arises from its own inadequacy because spirit cannot simply begin with itself as such, emerging instead from its own failure to grasp itself. In this sense, one may say that spirit begins even before its beginning; it is there before it is properly there. Given that “spirit is essentially only what it knows about itself”²⁸ and that spirit does not know it is spirit, spirit is not spirit at the beginning of spirit. Spirit begins before it begins, yet this beginning is not the beginning, because the spirit that begins before spirit begins is not yet spirit. Spirit is there before being there, but only as the *absence* of spirit and therefore as its own failed anticipation. The name for this presence of spirit in the mode of absence is *nature*. Why nature? Because nature is for Hegel the other of spirit, the positive (in both the trivial and the Hegelian sense of the term) notion of the absence of spirit. But how does spirit emerge from its own absence?

3. Finally: The Life of Spirit

Hegel states that “spirit, *for us*, has its *presupposition in nature*...”²⁹ Does spirit thus inherit anything from and by nature? Nature is the other of spirit, i.e. its absence, or more precisely: spirit not (yet) being spirit, so is there anything that the presence of the absence of spirit hands over to spirit? What is the status of this peculiar presupposition? To elaborate on this, one should recall that Hegel classifies three forms of spirit: spirit immanently relating to itself, spirit relating to something outside of itself, and spirit relating to something outside of itself as (posited by) itself. Subjective, objective, and absolute spirit. It is important to note that spirit from the beginning is part of (absolute) spirit, which is why it is only “for us” (from the perspective of absolute spirit, i.e. philosophy) that it has its presupposition in nature (i.e. in the absence of spir-

27. With an emphasis on both the „not“ and the „there“.

28. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Dritter Teil*, 33.

29. *Ibid.*, 17.

it). But it is also important to note that, ‘as such,’ spirit does not presuppose nature, since there is simply no given and objective nature that is simply there before spirit, which could serve as the latter’s pre-spiritual precondition. Spirit presupposes nature, that is, its own absence, and the name of this presupposition is nature. Yet it does not merely presuppose itself negatively as absent—it presupposes its own absence by determining this absence and assigning (natural) qualities to it. If it is absent, then there is an other that fills this lack—i.e., nature—and nature can be determined.

Spirit assigns to its absence qualities that are marked by the absence of spirit in such a way as to bear the traits of this absence. If spirit is that which is able to determine itself, then the absence of spirit (as spirit’s precondition) is marked by unchangeable laws, natural cycles, and heteronomous determinations. Spirit thereby determines its own absence (we are dealing with the positive aspect of determinate negation). To reiterate, however: spirit at its own beginning, i.e. at the beginning of subjective spirit, does not know that it is spirit; as a result, it appears to itself in the form of (given) natural determinations that determine its absence.³⁰ Spirit appears to itself in the form of something other than itself.³¹ In fact, however, spirit is “not the mere result of nature, but rather truly its own result; it brings itself forth from the presuppositions that it lays itself.”³² This is why nature is not simply a given presupposition, it is posited by spirit as the absence of spirit, so that this very absence—which spirit does not know it posited—starts to determine spirit. Thus, one may say that nature emerges as soon as spirit starts to believe that there are given presuppositions (which it does not acknowledge as having been posited by itself).

As soon as one starts believing in the givenness of the objective presuppositions that one posited, forgetting or ignoring the act of positing itself, these presuppositions begin to externally determine oneself. It is precisely this kind of determination that is at stake at the beginning of

30. Hegel also calls this move “the shift (*Umschlagen*) of the idea into the immediacy of the external and individualized being-there. This shift is the becoming of nature.” *Ibid.*, 30.

31. However, it is important to note that this is only an appearance, since “the emergence of spirit from nature should not be taken as if nature is the absolutely immediate, primary, originally positing, and as if spirit is in contrast only something posited; rather, nature is posited by spirit and the latter is the absolute primary.” *Ibid.*, 24. Spirit is here determined by its own appearance (even though it posited the latter unknowingly in the first place), and the fact that it does not know that it is ultimately determined by itself forces it to take a natural form.

32. *Ibid.*

spirit. Nature turns out then to be the name for the idea that there is something, anything at all, before it has been posited. It is the assumption that there is a 'there is' before any positing. However, this assumption is itself posited, and forgetting that means being determined by something posited as if it were not posited. Nature appears here as a posited myth of the given, whose act of positing has been forgotten. In a certain abstract sense, one may contend here that if there is a natural inheritance at work here, it is 'natural' in precisely the sense delineated above. What one inherits from nature, is inherited because one does not know that one posited that which determines oneself, instead taking it as a given. In other words, it seems that inheritance is only there at the beginning of spirit because spirit has failed to grasp that there is nothing to inherit. In the beginning, spirit cannot help failing to know that there is nothing to inherit—hence, there is natural inheritance.

Natural inheritance thus has its origin in spirit positing a precondition and ignoring the positedness of this precondition. This leads spirit to believe that there is a (natural and objective) ground for its own being. As the positing agent, spirit should have known that the presupposition was posited by spirit, but somehow it does not know what it knows. Such is the way spirit emerges from nature, i.e. from spirit not knowing that it knows something it does not know. Because it does not know what it knows, spirit inherits something from and by nature. To simplify the matter, this means that conceptually there is for Hegel no natural path from nature to spirit (since there is no nature without spirit misconceiving itself³³). The only way of getting from nature to spirit is via spirit, simply because nature is spirit that failed. At the same time, this failure makes the move from nature to spirit look as if there were also natural determination involved.

How can we more precisely account for the move from spirit that does not know what it is, thus appearing as natural determination, to spirit proper? As has been stated, Hegel situates this beginning in subjective spirit, divided into three distinct domains: anthropology, phenomenology, and psychology. Anthropology deals with spirit in itself, which Hegel calls "soul" as well as "natural spirit," or (literally) spirit in nature (*Naturgeist*). Spirit in the beginning is in nature (it is there only by virtue of being not-there). Phenomenology (in the *Encyclopedia*) deals with consciousness, and psychology with spirit as such. Spir-

33. Hegel's point here is highly relevant (e.g. for today's ecological debates): not even nature should be naturalized. Of course, the same holds for spirit, although spirit in the beginning cannot but find itself in nature (thereby constitutively missing itself).

it can therefore be differentiated into three forms: abstract universality (soul), particularity (consciousness), and singularity (spirit for itself). And it is the anthropology that deals with the “groundwork of man.”³⁴ As Catherine Malabou succinctly formulated:

The course of the *Anthropology* as a whole explicates the process whereby originary substance, leaving behind the natural world, progressively differentiates itself until it becomes an individual subject. This movement unfolds in three moments which structure the exposition: self-identity, rupture, return to unity. The meaning of this division organizes itself in the process of the soul’s *singularization* which, from its beginning in the ‘universal’ (understood as ‘the immaterialism of nature’ or ‘simple ideal life’), moves progressively towards self-individuation until it becomes ‘singular self’. From the ‘sleep of spirit’ to the ‘soul as work of art’ the genesis of the individual is accomplished, that individual which, configured as the ‘Man’, finally stands forth in the guise of a statue. If the anthropological development appears to be a progressive illumination, it does produce some abrupt returns to obscurity, some moments of trial and error, some aberrations. ... The unfurling of the process of individuation is the constitution of the ‘Self’ (*Selbst*), the founding instance of subjectivity.³⁵

The course of the anthropology begins with “spirit that is still based in nature, and still related to its embodiment.”³⁶ This is why the primary object of the anthropology is “the soul bound to natural determinations”³⁷ that determine that which appears to be determined by the absence of spirit. These natural determinations of spirit appear to spirit, for example, in the form of racial differences (such as the assumption that the French think differently from the Japanese simply because of different natural—say, geographical—determining factors). As Malabou again states:

The soul’s determinations are in the first instance the ‘natural qualities’ which make up its initial ‘being-there (*Dasein*)’... But what, for the *Anthropology*, are these ‘qualities’? ... [The] first [group of] natural qualities can be classified under the generic term of ‘influences’, in the original sense of that physical and fluid force believed by ancient physics to proceed from the heavens and the stars and act upon men, animals and things. These ‘physical qualities’ determine the soul’s correspondence to ‘cosmic, sidereal, and telluric life’... The second

34. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Dritter Teil*, 40.

35. Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 28.

36. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Dritter Teil*, 40.

37. *Ibid.*

group of ‘natural qualities’ contains those of the specialized ‘nature-governed spirits’ (*Naturgeister*) which constitute the ‘diversity of races’. The third set of ‘qualities’ consists of those which can be called ‘local spirits’ (*Lokalgeister*). These are ‘shown in the outward modes of life (*Lebensart*) and occupation (*Beschäftigung*), bodily structure and disposition (*körperlicher Bildung und Disposition*), but still more in the inner tendency and capacity (*Befähigung*) of the intellectual and moral character of the peoples.’³⁸

The first and therefore most inadequate natural form in which spirit presupposes itself (as being absent, or not yet spirit) is that of the soul. Spirit knows itself as the soul and not yet as spirit. The soul appears as something given, besides the givenness of the absence of spirit. This is an important point, since the soul is natural in the sense that it appears to spirit as a given and not as posited, yet it appears to spirit as its own given presence, whereby the complete (but nonetheless posited) absence of spirit is overcome. Yet since the givenness of the soul still conceptually implies the absence of spirit (since it is not conceived as having been posited), the soul ends up being conceptually determined by physical, natural, and local determinations. The soul is thus spirit taking an always already naturally determined form of itself to be a given. Spirit assumes that it is naturally given to itself in the form of the soul. It is, however, important to note that, starting with the soul, an important differentiation occurs. For the soul is not simply nature, but the immaterial beginning of spirit; Hegel calls it the “immateriality of nature” and “*simple* universality.”³⁹ Spirit posits a determinate presupposition of itself that is separate from nature as such (the pure absence of spirit), and this determination is as general and simple as it can be: there is a givenness of spirit. Spirit assumes itself to be given, not recognizing that there is always an act of positing involved, the positing of itself as its own presupposition. If the unacknowledged positing of a given presupposition leads spirit into nature, the unacknowledged positing of itself as the given presupposition, i.e. of its own givenness, leads spirit to the assumption of a (naturally given) soul that differs from nature due to its immaterial (and yet natural) qualities. That is why Hegel can contend that the soul names “the universal immateriality of na-

38. Malabou, *The Future of Hegel*, 30.

39. Hegel, *Enzyklopädie, Dritter Teil*, 43. One trivialized way of reading this would be to observe that we are usually not inclined to regard ourselves as merely natural beings (such as plants); we believe ourselves to be endowed with something else, too, which is not as material as the rest of our natural constitution. This something—a surplus exceeding the mere bodily constitution—is that which is here named “soul.”

ture... the sleep of spirit... that is *potentially* everything.”⁴⁰ The soul is spirit sleeping, but whoever sleeps also dreams (of oneself).

Spirit posits itself as its own presupposition, and hence as different from nature. At the same time, this difference from nature still appears to be a difference that is given, and therefore natural, not posited. Spirit posits itself as the soul that is different from nature, yet it remains *Naturgeist* (spirit as given and not as its own result). Here one can see how the (seemingly unavoidable) failure of spirit to take its own act of positing into account leads to the assumption that spirit is not only given, but also—due to this very givenness—determined by factors that exceed spirit’s grasp. Spirit sleeps and dreams of itself, but what and how it dreams does not appear to spirit to be its own fabrication (although it is, as later Freud will also clearly expound). Spirit’s dreams seemingly come from a source outside of spirit; as a consequence, spirit seems to inherit its being (or existence) from nature. Spirit inherits its dreams as well as itself. But where from? This question is what awakens spirit.

The soul thus grounds the process of the awakening of spirit (to itself), because it does not appear merely as simple universality, but also as “*singularity*”⁴¹. That is to say, in the ensuing steps of his anthropology, Hegel will start to differentiate and individualize the assumption of the givenness of determinations by differentiating these determinations of givenness themselves. Spirit assumes that it has a given determined nature (the nature of spirit, different from nature as such), which it slowly begins to grasp. This makes a difference, because spirit thereby unknowingly acknowledges that there are different forms of positing a presupposition, so that positing the soul as the form of spirit’s givenness determinately specifies the act (of positing a presupposition) itself. Spirit slowly begins to make a real difference.

4. Soul-Mates

The soul is for Hegel divided in three forms: the natural soul, the feeling soul, and the actual soul. Thus far I have referred to the natural soul (the assumption of the natural givenness of spirit). The natural soul is not yet individualized in any specific manner. Conceptually, it embodies the assumption that there are general qualitative determinations, “the physical as well as psychical *racial differences* in humanity”⁴²—dif-

40. Ibid.

41. Ibid., 51.

42. Ibid., 50.

ferences that enable the individualization and differentiation of the one simple universal natural soul (a process in which one differentiates and individualizes the presupposition that there is a presupposition).⁴³ This process of differentiation does not only produce external natural differences (of races), but also facilitates the inner differentiation and individualization of human beings. For instance, it generates the assumption that there are unchangeable natural ages, be it of an individual, a race or a state (childhood, youth, adulthood, etc.)—the soul is determined by the natural form of change and so spirit assumes that it, too, cannot but be subjected to these natural determinations. The latter take at first the guise of the (universal) natural soul living a “universal planetary life” determined by “the differences of climates, the changes of the seasons, and the periods of the day.”⁴⁴ The life of spirit in the form of the natural soul is a natural life determined by natural changes. Spirit presupposes itself as given in the form of the soul as something different from nature (the absence of spirit), only to re-introduce nature as the determining instance of its own givenness. However, this determining instance is thereby particularized and individualized so that, in this process of differentiation, we advance from races to the more “local spirits”⁴⁵ (local cultures, ethical communities, etc.). We proceed here from racial to national differences, and this process is the re-assertion of spirit. It is determined by nature, and yet this determination leads spirit to re-determine that which determines it—the process in which spirit is, again and again, led back to naturalizing that which it assumes to be the determining instance.

It should be obvious that this continuous differentiation of different determinations leads to an increasing degree of particularization of what spirit assumes to be a given precondition for itself (such as assuming that being born into the Italian state and thus into certain given customs makes for a different spirit than one born, for example, in Turkey). One moves from the effects of climatic conditions to races to national communities to, ultimately, intrafamilial relations, i.e. the naturally determining impact of mothers on their children. Hegel claims that this particularization appears in the form of the “special temperament, talent, character, physiognomy, or other dispositions and idiosyncrasies of families or singular individuals.”⁴⁶ We thus proceed to individual fam-

43. One can see here that Hegel’s philosophy of subjective spirit is also a fundamental critique of ideology, since ideology always relies on naturalization.

44. *Ibid.*, 52.

45. *Ibid.*, 63.

46. *Ibid.*, 70.

ily life, the life of an individual in a family, and the life of an individual as an individual. This brings us closer to the concept of inheritance. Hegel states that “the peculiarity of an individual has different sides to it. One distinguishes it by means of the determination of the disposition (*Naturell*), temperament, and character.”⁴⁷ What is a “*Naturell*”?

5. *Naturell*

Hegel defines “*Naturell*” in §395 of the *Encyclopedia* as “natural dispositions in contrast to that which a human being has acquired by means of its own activity.”⁴⁸ A natural disposition is thus not a habit (although it is posited, if unknowingly, in the sense elaborated above). This is why this disposition can be characterized as “innate.”⁴⁹ An astonishing claim for (any Hegelian) spirit. Spirit unknowingly presupposes itself as given, i.e. as the soul, yet some part of the determinate character of this givenness (the natural disposition) is, or at least appears to be, innate. This implies two things: 1. Spirit unknowingly presupposes itself in such a way that it is given as different to nature while still possessing the fundamental quality of nature, namely the unchangeability of its constitution (even though the natural disposition is highly individualized here). Spirit presupposes itself as given and takes this to be an unalterable fact. In the beginning of spirit, and for spirit, spirit has no beginning; consequently, its beginning is conceptually and necessary a failed beginning. 2. That also makes clear why spirit cannot but presuppose a natural disposition of itself (which is the sense in which this disposition is “innate”). Spirit—at least subjective spirit, spirit in the beginning, spirit that ignores its beginning—is stuck with the assumption that it has a given ground it cannot alter. Spirit cannot alter the assumption that there is something it cannot alter. That which spirit cannot alter is the assumption of its own givenness, which makes spirit assume an innate ground, or itself in the form of a natural disposition.

What Hegel calls the “talent” and the “genius” are part of spirit’s unalterable, natural disposition. Both terms express a “determined di-

47. *Ibid.*, 71. I will in the following leave aside what Hegel says about the temperament, because it is “the most general form in which an individual is active” (*Ibid.*, 72), and also what he states about the character, determined by “formal energy” and “a universal content of the will” (*Ibid.*, 73). Both are already situated at a point where “natural determination loses the guise of being fixed” (*Ibid.*, 74), and here I am only interested in investigating Hegel’s theory of natural disposition and the question about a theory of natural inheritance in Hegel.

48. *Ibid.*, 71.

49. *Ibid.*, 74.

rection that the individual spirit has received by nature.”⁵⁰ But whereas talent produces something new within a specific given field (one can, for example, be talented in painting), the genius is able to “create a new species (*Gattung*).”⁵¹ Talent is a given, but one that remains within the domain of the given. Genius is a given that alters the given, creating something new. In the unalterable given natural condition of spirit, there is a part that is repetitive and another that is transformative. Spirit differentiates its own presupposition in two different innate parts. At the same time, both talent and genius “have to be cultivated in a universally valid way.”⁵² This cultivation follows a natural logic (since one assumes to simply cultivate, not posit the given), and thus the logic of the ages of life (childhood, youth, adulthood, etc.) as well as educational institutions (kindergarten, school, etc.), which play a crucial role.

In all that, spirit never ceases to sense that it is not simply given, and yet it takes itself to be given, thereby ending up in natural determinations. That allows Hegel to claim that this very oscillation of spirit represents the natural cycle of spirit’s sleeping and waking. Here, we are still caught up in the domain of natural determination, and so the underlying rhythm of waking and sleeping—the law of when spirit sleeps or is awake—is determined not by spirit, but by nature. It appears to be natural to spirit that it is spirit, but also that it is given without having posited itself. However, only one of the two states (*Zustände*) generates a form of feeling (*Empfindung*) proper to waking life. Only in its waking life does spirit sense that it is spirit, and hence not simply a natural given. This feeling—which turns the natural into the feeling soul—is not natural, but a form of self-relation of spirit.⁵³ It is a “judgment,”⁵⁴ namely the judgment that spirit is there and given. Ignoring the self-positing act of spirit, this judgment posits a relation to that which does not appear to have been posited. But it is an erroneous judgment, a judgment that “is the form of the dull weaving of spirit,”⁵⁵ in which a particular content appears. Spirit feels itself, and it feels itself as being something particular (it does not feel the whole nature, nor its innate disposition, but only something specific). However, feeling is the “worst form of spirit,”⁵⁶ relying as it is on the assumption that the foundation of that feeling is something that is simply given (the soul).

50. *Ibid.*, 71.

51. *Ibid.*

52. *Ibid.*

53. *Ibid.*, 96.

54. *Ibid.*, 97.

55. *Ibid.*

56. *Ibid.*, 100.

Hegel distinguishes two types of feeling—those produced by exterior impulses and those expressing internal ones. This distinction immediately collapses, however, since the soul is something internally external, i.e. assumed to be given, to spirit. In this, we can also see more clearly what the concept of feeling implies for Hegel. 1. The determinations that appear in feeling are transient and singular, although as such they also imply a sense of self.⁵⁷ They do not last, but they are always feelings belonging to the soul. 2. Feeling implies a passivity of the soul. Hegel here toys around with the etymology of “Empfindung”, tracing it back to “finden”, “to find something” (that is given). The soul finds a feeling, thereby relating to something that did not originate in itself. The soul itself does the same thing as spirit does when it assumes there is a soul—it takes something to be simply given and not posited. The soul feels something, and whatever it feels also actualizes the feeling of the soul’s own givenness. This is why feeling is a determining as well as individualizing factor of the soul’s givenness. 3. A feeling can occur even when something is not immediately present at hand (e.g. to the senses). Feeling thus differentiates the concept of givenness: a feeling can emerge from something that is given in a form different from any objective, apparent givenness. At the same time, this helps to explain why feeling always implies self-feeling, since the self, or the soul, is also given in a non-objective way.

Hegel derives from this the concept of the individual soul. And it is here, in §405 of his *Encyclopedia*, that he further specifies the notion of the genius. The soul that feels has a sense of individuality, since it always feels itself. However, it does not have a true sense of self, since what it feels comes to it from something that is as much a given as the soul itself. This is why Hegel can state that “the feeling soul in its immediacy”⁵⁸ is not as itself. The soul feels itself, but it does not feel itself *as* itself—in the same way that spirit does not recognize itself in the soul. But as what does the soul feel itself when it feels itself in such a passive way? Hegel’s answer is: as “another subject.”⁵⁹

6. Imagine There Is No Mother

Hegel’s paradigm for this other subject is the mother. The mother “is the genius of the child.”⁶⁰ Here, Hegel defines “genius” as the “intensive

57. These feelings I have now are always *my* feelings. Hegel claims: „What I feel... is me, and what I am, I feel.” Ibid., 119.

58. Ibid., 124.

59. Ibid.

60. Ibid., 125.

form of individuality.”⁶¹ First of all, this implies that the mother-child relation is in some way similar to the spirit-soul relation. The child cannot avoid taking the mother as a given, simply because it takes itself to be a given (it is given to itself by the mother, which must have been given in order to be able to give a child). But what does the mother give to a child? Hegel’s answer is fourfold: 1. The mother gives to the child the child itself. 2. The mother gives to the child its (the child’s as well as the mother’s) individuality. Thereby, the mother gives itself to the child, and this is the paradigm of givenness for the child (as well as the source of all its feelings—at least before it has been born). 3. It gives to the child the individuality in the form of the genius—as “concentrated individuality,”⁶² condensing the individuality of the child and the mother. Inside the mother’s womb, the child feels what the mother feels. In this way the mother becomes the paradigm of the other subject to which spirit constitutively relates. 4. The mother gives to the child the concept of givenness as such (of the mother, of the genius, and most importantly: of the child itself).

Here, it is important to recall that genius, for Hegel, also defines that which allows for the creation of a new species. The mother thus gives to the child that which she herself is, namely that which makes her into a mother: the act of creating something new.⁶³ What the child thus inherits from the mother is nothing but the possibility—to be distinguished from a capacity—to generate something that exceeds the given coordinates, a possibility that exceeds all capacities, that is not a given, a possibility beyond the possible, an im-possibility. At the same time, Hegel clearly states that the mother is the genius of the child. Does the mother therefore possess genius, in the sense of a capacity transmitted to the child? One can unfold here a simple argument, namely that the mother used to be a child herself and, thus, genius is also something that has been passed on to her. Genius names a possibility that is not — although it is by necessity mistakenly perceived as if it were — a natural disposition. Genius is that which names the quality to posit new presuppositions. And if the mother gives this possibility to the child, can one not conclude that there is no mother of this possibility (not simply because every mother used to be a child but, additionally, because one can never assume this possibility to be

61. *Ibid.*, 126.

62. *Ibid.*, 126.

63. Here one can see how Marx’s infamous saying about a society being pregnant with something new implies, in a specific way, a Hegelian theory of inheritance. See Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, trans. Ben Fowkes (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 916.

a given)? Because of that, any mother has a mother, but there is no Mother of all mothers. Hegel's theory of inheritance leads to the surprising conclusion that *there is no Mother*, not only in the sense that there is ultimately no mother of that which is inherited—no *sujet supposé de l'avoir* — but also that the only thing spirit, reason, and all of us *can* inherit is genius, an im-possibility, *eine Un-Möglichkeit*, to posit new presuppositions.

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