Theories on Conflict: Kant versus Hegel

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Introduction

Today, the term “conflict” is often brought up in informal and formal conversations (Critical Resource). Most people view conflicts as a negative occurrence in group interactions and have concluded that conflict is to be avoided. Additionally, most individuals do not ascribe any intrinsic value to conflicts. They are viewed as processes that only lead to bloodshed and degeneration of the current international order (S&P Global).

These views can be traced back to the momentous events of the twentieth century. From around 1945, when World War II ended, to 2021, nations were focused on the prevention of renewed conflict. The United Nations was formed in 1945, in response to World War II. Other international institutions and non-governmental organizations that aimed to maintain the hard-fought peace were formed as well (Makamson). Just two or three years ago, even with the start of the pandemic and a rise in tension between China and the U.S., the term “conflict”, in the sense of a large-scale war, seemed a distant idea in the developed regions of the globe. In the past seventy-plus years, humanity generally forestalled large-scale conflicts by making carefully considered choices (Harari). However, in late 2021, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin began amassing more than 150,000 troops at Ukraine’s border. The ensuing Russian-Ukrainian War that has lasted to the current day immediately brings the concept of “conflict” in the developed world back into discussion (The Economist).

The Russian-Ukrainian War raises the question whether the modern world has been peaceful since the mid-twentieth century. Even if one looks around the globe today, beyond Ukraine, other countries are embroiled in conflict, one notable example being Yemen (Council on Foreign Relations). The modern world is still intrinsically conflictual.

Historically, the subjects of political science and political philosophy have undertaken the task of interpreting human conflicts. In the Western tradition, since Plato and Aristotle, political scientists or philosophers have attempted to devise theories and models to explain the origins of conflicts, their nature, and the means to tackle them (McClelland). In more recent history, two of the most significant political philosophers who contributed to the academic conversation about “conflict” were the two Germans Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831). Both philosophers were impacted by the revolutionary atmosphere of the European Enlightenment.[1] Their understandings of conflict were based on observing history and closely examining human nature (Kain; Erol). The uniqueness and boldness of their thinking have made their conflict theories a heated topic of debate in academia. More importantly though, the two philosophers’ focus on observing history and human nature give theories great

applicative purpose and value (Sedgwick 47). One can attempt to utilize their ideas to think about conflicts throughout human history.

Driven by the hope that Kant and Hegel might help navigate the sheer complexity of human conflict, this paper will aim to complete a thorough investigation of their conflict theories. By first examining the definition of conflict and the role it plays in the historical narratives of these philosophers, this paper will demonstrate that both the Kantian and Hegelian views on conflict can help analyze the various causes, processes, and aftermaths of modern warfare. This paper will use World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as pertinent examples.

Kant and Hegel's Definitions of Conflict

The concept of "conflict" is, by its nature, a broad one. In the works of Kant and Hegel, both philosophers attempted to define the term to ensure that their explanations and reasonings were understandable and logical. However, while Kant and Hegel were formatively influenced by their German culture, the defining characteristics of their conflict theories are quite different.

In the Kantian system, conflict is related to social antagonism, which can be attributed to traits of human nature (Kant). This social antagonism is quite like Thomas Hobbes' notion that humans are naturally barbaric and pitted against each other. Kant recognizes Hobbes as a predecessor that seriously influenced his thinking, though he did not agree with many of Hobbes' political theories (Kain). In the introduction to his *Political Writings*, he states decisively that "history can be interpreted only if we fully understand the conflict among men [as] man…is anti-social too" (Kant 37). This sentence suggests that conflict is tied to man's anti-social nature, which prevails in society. Kant additionally argues that "wars, tense and unremitting military preparations, and the resultant distress which every state must eventually feel within itself" stem from the "inevitable antagonism" between large societies and states (Kant 47).

In Kant's essay "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose" ("A Cosmopolitan Purpose"), he expresses nine propositions on the progression of history. In the fourth proposition, Kant writes, "Nature should thus be thanked for fostering social incompatibility, enviously competitive vanity, and insatiable desires for possession or even power" (Kant 45). Here, social incompatibility implies social antagonism and conflict within human society. The "vanity" and "insatiable desires" that are tied to "social incompatibility" are facets of human nature, which dictates social behaviors.

In his conflict discussion, Kant specifically focuses on the phenomenon of "warfare." In his political writings, he appears interested in discussing "warfare" and not other kinds of conflict (Sedgwick 49). Kant does, however, possess an account of conflict beyond warfare. Initially, he

explains the contradictory aspect of human nature as “unsocial sociability.” This trait refers to a person’s “tendency to come together in society, coupled, however, with a continual resistance which constantly threatens to break this society up” (Kant 44). This term allows Kant to establish a discussion of conflict in relation to human nature, which is, by its scope, much broader than a discussion of warfare alone.

However, after explaining the broad relationship between conflicts and human nature, Kant does proceed to examine warfare as a type of conflict more carefully. For example, when Kant discusses the consequences of state expansion, he claims that “the increasing culture of the states, along with their growing tendency to aggrandize themselves by cunning or violence at the expense of the others, must make wars more frequent” (cited in Zammito 207). Kant recognizes that the inevitable outcome of state expansion would be intensifying warfare. In his other work, “The Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch” (“Perpetual Peace”), when he lays out several articles for peace between states, he frequently mentions the phrase “wars of aggression” (Kant 95). In Kant’s system, wars of aggression refer to fighting between individuals along with the use of military force. Some scholars, such as Sharon Byrd and Joachim Hruschka, postulated that wars of aggression can happen when “individuals in a state of nature…use force in order to replace their lawless condition with a juridical state…States in a state of nature may use force for an analogous purpose” (Byrd and Hruschka). This potentially means that wars of aggression happen whenever societies attempt to forcefully establish a more advanced and peaceful state.

For Kant, warfare or conflict is resolved through establishing universal principles and a “federation of peoples” (Linden). He clarifies this point in the seventh proposition in his essay “The Idea,” where he writes that “these are the means by which nature drives nations to…[enter] a federation of peoples in which every state, even the smallest, could expect to derive its security and rights…solely from this great federation” (Kant 47). The end goal of this global federalism is to make people citizens of the world. Universal hospitality is the defining characteristic of a citizen of the world. Kant clarifies, “in this context, hospitality means the right of a stranger not to be treated with hostility when arriv[ing] on someone else’s territory” (Kant 105). Kant believes that nature only requires humankind to “approximate” this proposition of a federation. This does not mean that such an aim is chimerical. The term “approximate” only implies that since a global federation is an ideal, it is unlikely to be fully realized. However, it is an ideal that can be increasingly aspired to by continuously improving the existing systems of law.

Kant busies himself with creating a plan for conflict management. With his concepts of a federation and universal peacekeeping principles, he hopes that the frequency and severeness of conflict could be eventually minimized. Thus, to an extent, Kant does demonstrate a worry

about nation states warring against each other. Such warring activities are not only evil, but also impede the realization of Kant's vision of a peaceful future.

Hegel's definition of conflict is broader and more fundamental than Kant's. In his book *The Science of Logic*, Hegel defines conflict as "the root of all movement and life" (cited in Evans). While Kant concentrates his study on the conflict between individuals and states, Hegel expands the sites upon which he could examine conflict. He holds that conflict can be applied to all aspects of human life, including communities, social classes, or even cultural and historical traditions. In other words, one can find conflict at all levels of social and political organizations (Erol). Since Hegel has a broader perspective, his discussions appear more abstract at times. Thus, his arguments possess a greater range of applicability.

For Hegel, conflict resolution appears to be a more general process, when compared to Kant. Hegel believes that conflict resolution entails a spiraling, dialectical process in which opposing ideas and interests are synthesized (Erol). In the end, conflict resolution will push humankind increasingly closer to realizing the Idea, the essential nature of which is the Spirit. Quite differently from Kant, Hegel does not seem bothered by the reality of nation-states engaging in warfare with each other. His decision to tie conflict analysis into his dialectics hints at the notion that he categorizes conflict as an inevitable occurrence throughout history.

Hegel's framework of conflict, in contrast to Kant's, requires the concept of "freedom." For Hegel, the core of the Spirit is freedom. As he writes in *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, "As the essence of Matter is Gravity, so, on the other hand, we may affirm that the substance, the essence of Spirit is Freedom" (Hegel 20). Unlike Kant, Hegel definitively argues for freedom in a social setting. Hegel was inspired by Aristotle, as both argued that freedom can only be realized in a collective society. Individual freedom does not make sense for Hegel, as freedom is not something that can be achieved in isolation but is intertwined with one's relationships and role within society (Erol). True freedom can be quite positive and is only realized in a state setting where an individual obeys the laws of that state. As he writes in Chapter Three of *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, "on the contrary, such limitation [of the impulses, desires, and passions of an individual] is simply the condition from which emancipation proceeds; and society and the State are the conditions wherein freedom is actualized" (Hegel 44). If the actualization of freedom is the end goal of history, then the violence and conflicts caused by the passions of human nature would push states to enact laws and set up juridical institutions, eventually approaching freedom.

The above explanations display some of the differing elements in Kant and Hegel's definitions of conflict. Nevertheless, the two philosophers do share some ideas. First, both philosophers view the result of conflict as a form of progression. For Kant, antagonism becomes, in the long run, the cause of a law-governed social order, deeming the development

of civilization as a result of conflict (Kant 38). Hegel identifies human passions as a source of violence, yet he expresses, “th[at] human passions satisfy themselves; they fulfill their goals according to their natural determination, and they bring to force the edifice of human society, in which they have provided for law and order as forces against themselves” (Hegel 30). Hegel believes that the “law[s] and order” restraining human passions are born from the conflicts brought about by those passions.

Second, Kant and Hegel admit that conflict entails negative consequences. In his work “Perpetual Peace,” Kant explains, “If the consent of the citizens is required in order to decide that war should be declared, nothing is more natural that they would be very cautious in commencing such a poor game, decreeing for themselves all the calamities of war” (Kant 95). Kant warns governments of the unavoidable costs of war, including the costs of harnessing resources to repair “the devastation war leaves behind” (Smith). Similarly, for Hegel, conflict inadvertently brings violence and bloodshed. As he writes in *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, “when we see arising from [those human passions] all the evil, the wickedness, the decline of the most flourishing nations mankind has produced, we can only be filled with grief for all that has come to nothing” (Hegel 23-24). This quote suggests that the violence stemming from human passions inevitably destroys elements of human civilization.

Now that Kant and Hegel’s definitions of conflict have been laid out, it is necessary to examine the importance of this concept in the historical frameworks of the two philosophers. What roles does conflict play in Kant and Hegel’s historical narratives?

The Role of Conflict in the Historical Narratives of Kant and Hegel

In Kant and Hegel’s narrations of history, conflict is not just a simple bypassing phenomenon that lends no meaning to the changes in cultures and civilizations. For both philosophers, conflict deserves great attention exactly because it has been one of the most pivotal factors in the unfolding of history.

In Kant’s philosophy of history, conflict should be perceived as an instrument employed by nature to push humankind to its ideal end (Pitman). To break down this proposal, one must first understand the “end” that humankind is on a path to. In his political writings, Kant highlights a “perfect civil union” and “federalism of free states” as the ultimate forms of international order (Kant). In Kant’s schema of political development that leads to the “perfect civil union,” conflict occupies a key role. The fourth proposition in his essay “The Idea of a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” gives a general overview of this argument: “The means which nature employs to bring about the development of innate capacities is that of antagonism within society, in so far as this antagonism becomes in the long run the cause of a law-governed social order” (Kant 44). From this quote, Kant demonstrates his belief that a “law-governed social order”

might eventually be achieved with the significant aid of the “antagonism within society,” the intrinsic cause of conflicts. Kant creates the term the “cunning of nature,” which refers to how conflict and social antagonism help individuals and states learn how and how not to treat one another, assisting their progress toward an ultimate end, although they are oblivious to this. In 1776, Kant claims, “The useful aim of philosophical history [in which conflict is indispensable and inevitable] consists of the preservation of good models and the display of instructive mistakes” (cited in Thomson). Over time, conflict gradually spurs societies to progress toward an international juridical condition in which the innate capacities of people (for example, the use of reason) can be realized, though many failures must happen in the process.

Two elements of Kant’s argument require further breakdown. First, how exactly does nature utilize war to progress the human social order? The answer to this question lies in human nature itself. For Kant, human nature’s design can be attributed to the work of a greater natural force at play throughout history. Nature implants the “unsocial sociability” characteristic into every man (Kant 44). With this characteristic, nature can initiate a cycle of conflict and peace. While the unsocial aspect of human nature tears people apart, triggering various kinds of conflict, eventually, people tend to come together socially. It prompts people to initiate discussions to end conflicts and rebuild a better-functioning social order (Armstrong). For Kant, wars appear to become more rational because they are waged after a more thorough consideration and with a more direct purpose (Smith). The trend of wars becoming more rational indicates that after many cycles of conflict and peace driven by people’s “unsocial sociability,” nature gradually shows humankind the costs of senseless warfare, making societies gradually more cautious about engaging in it.

A second element of Kant’s argument that should be examined more thoroughly is whether he possessed a “just war theory.” A “just war theory” sets up criteria to potentially justify war through a moral perspective. Such a theory additionally tries to politically justify war in certain circumstances. Some scholars, such as Brian Orend, have suggested that Kant does have a just war theory. They base their arguments on aspects of Kant’s argumentation. For example, he recognizes the need for civilians to arm themselves in special situations. However, this paper sides with the opposing cohort of scholars, including Howard Williams, in suggesting that Kant does not have such a theory. In Kant’s writings, as Williams interprets, “justice and war are in conflict with one another” (Linden). Kant does not justify war but merely argues that it is an inevitable and necessary step towards “a perpetual peace.” Furthermore, while he advocates for the right to self-defense, Kant stresses that this right is not unlimited – the use of force should be subject to legal and moral constraints.

Further, Kant openly advocates for the prevention of war in his essay “Perpetual Peace” (Starke). The third preliminary article of perpetual peace between states is: “Standing armies will gradually be abolished together” (Kant 94). Kant emphasizes this article because the existence

of a standing army means that states can threaten others with war. He points this out in the essay by writing, “the armies are themselves the cause of wars of aggression which set out to end burdensome military expenditure” (Kant 95). Hence, Kant views wars as destructive and something that should ultimately be prevented.

To complement the third article, the sixth preliminary article requires that “no state at war shall permit such acts of hostility as would make mutual confidence impossible during a future time of peace” (Kant 96). This again indicates that Kant views peace as crucial. Additionally, in his work *Conjectures on the Beginnings of Human History*, war is regarded as “the greatest evil” (cited in Smith). Kant believes war was only ever a necessary step towards peace, not a choice to be actively favored by states.

In Hegel’s philosophy, history is a series of constant conflicts moving human societies to the actualization of the Idea, the realization of the Spirit and freedom. Hegel points out clearly in *Introduction to the Philosophy of History* that human history can be regarded as totally rational, as it embodies Reason and aims to actualize the Spirit (Hegel 12). Each conflict pushes societies closer to freedom. To better analyze the mechanisms of historical progression and the crucial role of conflict, Hegel creates a dialectical system to model his conflict theory. In *his lectures on history*, Hegel shows that dialectics, at its core, is an unfolding of thesis-antithesis-synthesis (Hegel).[2] Every situation, or the thesis, intrinsically possesses its negation, or the antithesis. The clash of the thesis and antithesis brings forth a synthesis of the two forces as a temporary resolution. However, this synthesis will face its own antithesis as an objection (Bisong). A synthesis (which becomes a new thesis) is a level higher than the previous thesis as it births itself from the merging of two opposing elements. This spiraling cycle goes on endlessly.

In Chapter Four of *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*, Hegel highlights the historical phenomenon of the Spirit self-perpetuating itself, then moving onto a higher level (Hegel 83). In a similar sense, a conflict will unfold in a dialectical pattern. When B negates A, this means that these two sides are in conflict. If A is assumed to be the status quo, then B is its resistance; if A is the thesis, then B is its antithesis. Their clash would eventually result in a synthesis, which is a new status quo (Bisong). This status quo advances from the previous one, though it will eventually face its own antithesis. Conflict, in a dialectical way, thus gradually elevates societies closer to the actualization of the Spirit (Erol).

A minor point to examine in Hegel’s conflict theory is the specific role of “world-historical individuals,” who appear to be of particular interest when considering the role of conflict throughout history. Hegel defines these individuals as “historical men…whose aims embody a universal concept of this kind” (Hegel 32). Some of the most notable world-historical individuals include Julius Caesar and Napoleon Bonaparte. These individuals often utilized conflicts, such

as wars of conquest, to accomplish their personal desires. Hegel finds these individuals intriguing as their "own particular aims contain the substantial will that is the will of the World Spirit" (Hegel 33). In other words, while their actions might be intended purely to fulfill their own practical political purposes, they also simultaneously push forward the realization of the Spirit.

This account of a world-historical individual seems to be slightly self-contradictory, yet Hegel attempts to reconcile the contradiction in Chapter Three of *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*. He notes, "Yet at the same time [these world-historical individuals] were thoughtful men, with insight into what was needed and what was timely: their insight was the very truth of their time and their world…" (Hegel 33). The world-historical individuals possessed practical and personal political goals, from building an empire to the initiation of revolutions. At the same time, though, they were quite sensitive to changes in the larger atmosphere. For instance, two of Caesar's personal political goals were to consolidate power (by establishing a more centralized government) and expand Roman territory. Simultaneously, he was well aware of the broader historical landscape of Rome: The Republic was in decline; the authority of the Senate was gradually diminishing and unrest was fermenting. As he waged conflict against other Roman politicians and external states to achieve his personal goals, he inadvertently gave rise to what Roman politics and history needed – a total revolution after which republicanism would be replaced by centralized rule (Hegel 33). As a result, his personal actions eventually led to the creation of the Roman Empire, a significant advancement in European history.

One should not judge the contribution of conflict to historical development and the work of world-historical individuals from a moral perspective. People tend to seriously criticize and disapprove of historically heroic figures based on the rhetoric that these figures took unjustified, bloodstained paths to achieve their purposes. As a response, Hegel responds to these claims by asserting that world-historical individuals operate in a different context than ordinary men. Plus, they belong to a more extensive, more meaningful dialectical process in the long run (Evans).

Conflict serves a significant role in both Kant's and Hegel's historical narratives. However, how can these theories regarding conflict's role in history be employed to analyze actual historical conflicts?

The Application of Kant and Hegel's Conflict Theories to Modern Conflicts

The conflict theories of Kant and Hegel possess universal logic that can be used successfully to analyze historically important conflicts. Three conflicts within the last century that impacted the direction of global history were World War I from 1914 to 1918, the Vietnam War from 1955 to 1975, and the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict which started in 1948. These conflicts hold significance first because of their unparalleled scale. World War I was referred to

as “the war to end all wars.” While it only dragged on for four years, it was the most brutal and widespread of its time. The Vietnam War, in effect, spanned over two decades, making it one of the most lingering conflicts of the twentieth century (Britannica). The Vietnam War was also a classic example of proxy warfare where the United States and the Soviet Union backed a different faction in Vietnam. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been often viewed as the most prolonged in history. Its sheer complexity is unmatched (Britannica). These conflicts deserve attention not necessarily due to their value in providing critical lessons, but rather for their representativeness, helping one find patterns regarding human conflicts.

There is merit to the argument that Kant and Hegel might be unsuited to analyze important conflicts. Regarding Kant, some might argue that his ideas about the nature, process, and results of warfare are outdated, making them irrelevant when looking at modern warfare. Modern warfare contains a complexity that could not be foreseen during Kant’s era (Critical Resource). For example, Kant certainly could not foresee the rapid development of machine technology and the invention of automatic weaponry, submarines, guided missiles, and nuclear arsenals. These technologies and inventions have made wars more large-scale and serious, while at the same time introducing previously non-existent determent factors. In particular, the proliferation of nuclear weapons has been supported by certain groups who believe that they deter wars due to the inevitable occurrence of mutual destruction (Critical Resource). According to some, the unprecedented speed of warfare development renders Kant’s conflict theories (in which war is unavoidable and conducive to social advancement) obsolete.

Regarding Hegel, one can similarly criticize the application of his theories to modern conflict. His conflict theories are closely intertwined with his dialectics and his dialectics are prone to be criticized as being overly abstract (Evans). In Hegel’s writings, he does not provide an adequate number of examples to display his dialectics in historical action. As a result, it might be inaccurate to portray specific modern conflicts with Hegel’s theories, as the underlying meanings or purposes can be unclear.

However, while it might be true that the details of both philosophers’ theories do not correspond with modern conflicts, they still are quite relevant as the nature of human conflict has not changed substantially. Beginning with World War I, when one examines the causes, the process, and the results of war, several Kantian theories can help with interpretation. Here, it is appropriate to utilize Kantian theories since, as mentioned before, Kant has a specific focus on warfare. It would be logically relevant to analyze such grand warfare using the thoughts of a philosopher who aims to thoroughly study war in his writings. Additionally, unlike Hegel, Kant holds a clear opinion on the resolution of warfare – he lays out detailed blueprints for institutions that must be established and ideas that must be realized to end warfare (i.e., a federation of free states and a set of universal principles).

One major cause of World War I was the forming of alliances. Many European countries, prior to 1914, sought protection by allying with other powers (Keegan 52-54). For example, Kaiser Wilhelm II of Germany initially created the Dual Alliance of 1879 between Germany and Austria-Hungary. When Italy joined in 1882, the alliance of the three countries became the Triple Alliance (Keegan 52). To counter the Triple Alliance, France, Britain, and Russia formed the Triple Entente. The Triple Entente alarmed Germany, hastening the brewing of large-scale warfare (Keegan 52). If one country in an alliance went to war, the others were obligated to follow. Therefore, when Austria first declared war on Serbia in 1914, the declaration immediately prompted many allies of the two states to participate, culminating in the outbreak of a world war (as countries and colonies from Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas participated) (Fay 290-293).

Kantian conflict theory can explain the logic behind alliances helping to cause the war. Kant argues that the “unsocial sociability” of man is what essentially brings antagonism and conflict. “Unsocial sociability” points to the coexistence of a belligerent and gregarious side of human nature (Kant 37). This trait was demonstrated directly in the World War I alliances. Within an alliance, the countries were “social” and quite friendly towards each other. For instance, Britain and France shared a close relationship prior to and during World War I. Britain felt obliged to protect France (Greenhalgh 10). However, between alliances, countries were extremely “unsocial” and hostile towards each other. This can be easily proven, as otherwise the war would not have escalated to such a scale (Strachan 343-354). The sociability of man forged strong bonds within allied powers, making them want to mutually protect, yet the unsociability brewed intense conflict between alliances. When combined, one can see the immense forces fueling the nations embroiled in this war.

One product of World War I was the League of Nations, formed in 1919. It aimed to preserve peace and check warmongering action. Though it was short-lived, at its peak the League consisted of 63 countries across the globe (Britannica). The League was arguably the closest the world has come to Kant’s proposal of a global federation. Many of the League’s goals and functions mirror Kant’s federation. The federation, according to Kant, must be based on principles that ensure members are treated equally and possess freedom. There must also be a dispute resolution mechanism that would eventually ensure a collective security, where each individual state depends upon a single and unified force for protection (Kain). Any attempt to break this collective security would be checked by the other members of the federation.

The League of Nations held to comparable principles. Most member states had the right to voice their opinions and vote for decisions on an equal platform (Britannica). The organization emphasized collective security by pushing for disarmament and the settling of disputes via arbitration (History.com Editors). Many smaller nations, such as Czechoslovakia, adhered loyally to the League and relied on it for protection. All these characteristics resemble the vision Kant

has for his federation (Britannica). Kant's conflict theories adequately assist in explaining the underlying logic of alliances causing World War I and the features of the League of Nations.

Another recent war that one can analyze through the lens of Kant's theories is the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War lasted for about 20 years, though the period this paper will delve into is after America's joining in 1965. This war, at its essence, was a clash between the communist regime in North Vietnam backed by the U.S.S.R. and the Southern democratic government backed by the U.S., making it a proxy war (Spector). The communist North wanted to unite Vietnam after a prolonged period of domestic disunity.

The war's outlook changed when the U.S. joined in 1965. America not only increased the intensity of the war by providing money and supplies to the battlegrounds, but it also elevated the war to a clash of political ideology. America feared that the prolonged civil war could cause communism to spread across Vietnam, leading to more severe consequences for the wholeness of the state. It justified its efforts by maintaining that it must stop the civil war and, subsequently, the threat of communism (The CVCE). This attempt to justify an interference in the internal affairs of another state resembles Kant's fifth preliminary article in his essay "Perpetual Peace". Kant points out that "no state shall forcibly interfere in the constitution and government of another state" unless "a state, through internal discord, were to split into two parts" (Kant 96). Kant reasons that "it could not be reckoned as interference in another state's constitution if an external state were to lend support to one of them, because their condition is one of anarchy" (Kant 96). America reasoned along similar lines, trying to justify its efforts in Vietnam by highlighting the dangers brought by its civil war. America's justification (though arguably not morally or politically correct) can thus be understood through considering Kant's fifth preliminary article.

America additionally justified its participation by arguing that ending the conflict in Vietnam would help to maintain regional peace and restore order. However, in the end, America's justification failed (Boyd). Not only did the war cost the lives of more than 50,000 American soldiers, but it also elevated the intensity of the conflict, costing the lives of many more civilians through violence (The National Archives). America's inability to justify its efforts can be explained by Kant's theory of rejection on warfare. Kant refutes the argument that "violence benefits the best interest of the world and brings unity to disunited peoples" (cited in Hurrell 187). In his book *The Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant provides a powerful rebuttal by writing, "But all these supposedly good intentions cannot wash away the stain of injustice from the means which are used to implement them" (cited in Hurrell 188). Kant believes that in the process of realizing these "supposedly good intentions," many states would use violence and brute force to suppress opposing forces. Sometimes, the violence contradicts the preservation of dignity and worth of human life, which for Kant, would be unjust and unacceptable (Armstrong 199).

To strengthen his rebuttal against the argument that "violence benefits the best interest of the world," Kant definitively crucifies any act of war in his work *Religions within the Bounds of Bare Reason*, as "war creates more evil than it destroys" (cited in Masek 145). In the case of the Vietnam War, this quote was demonstrated not just in the violence and bloodshed, but also in the ensuing refugee crisis. In 1975 and 1976, more than 20,000 people migrated out of Vietnam, constituting a serious humanitarian crisis (Roos).

Hegel's conceptions of conflict differ significantly from that of Kant. Hence, Hegelian conflict theories can be used to analyze conflicts that vary in nature from conflicts that apply to Kantian theories. World War I and the Vietnam War (after America's participation in 1965) were both conflicts that were straightforward relatively speaking (Geldenhuys). For the final example, this paper will examine the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one of the most long-lasting in recent history. In general, Hegel's conflict theories have a greater scope, making them more fit for analyzing conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian one that have a plethora of different influencing factors.

The strife between Israelis and Palestinians can be traced back to the late nineteenth century. However, their conflict became serious and direct starting in 1947. Since then, the conflict has become increasingly vehement and wide-reaching (Katirai). The conflict can be divided into four stages. The first stage spanned from 1948 to 1967, covering the establishment of the state of Israel and the Six-Day War in 1967; the second stage was from 1967 to 1993, covering events including the Six-Day War and the signing of the Oslo Accords in 1993; the third stage spanned from 1993 to 2000, right to the outbreak of the Second Intifada in 2000; the final fourth stage covers the period from 2000 to the present day, in which the conflict gained an international scope (Katirai).

The causes of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be understood with Hegelian conflict theories. One cause was that the Jews who migrated into Palestine wanted recognition and power in the region during the 1940s, pitting them against the Muslim Palestinians in the region (Dossa 297). According to Hegel, the desires for recognition and power are the "springs of human action." The battle between men on both spiritual and concrete levels ultimately leads to the bestowing of leadership to the few and bondage for the vanquished. This division further implies the concept of a "master" who wields visible power and is recognized by the defeated. In other words, mastery is a vital moment in the struggle for recognition (Dossa 299). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Jews were unrecognized and even discriminated against across Europe. Their aim in Palestine was to reclaim their homeland and be in control of the land, the people, and their destiny.

Another cause of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was the will demonstrated by both sides to establish a sovereign political state and consequently obtain freedom. This will can be understood by referencing Hegel's theory about the realization of the Spirit. For Hegel, the state is where Spirit can be objectified and actualized (Hegel 40-45). Hegel introduces this theory by first defining the state as "the union of the universal essential will with the subjective will" (Hegel 41). This union means that the state contains both the interests of the Idea and the personal passions of an individual. Later, Hegel directly identifies that "the State is the realization of freedom, i.e., of the absolute end-goal, and that it exists for its own sake" (Hegel 41). The formation of a state usually entails conflict and many cycles of the dialectical process. Looking from this Hegelian perspective, the Israelis' and the Palestinians' desire to establish a state, which brings them to war, can be interpreted as their larger will to realize freedom under a state setting.

Religion has played a key role in fueling this conflict as well. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict can be classified as a partially religious battle. The Jews believe that Israel is their biblical homeland – they must reclaim it (Mostafa). The Muslims value Palestine because it is the site of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Dome of the Rock. The presence of holy sites makes the region the sacred source of their identity for Palestinians (Mostafa). According to Hegel, religion is one of the principles of the state. The final sections of *The Philosophy of History* stress the eventual unity of religious and political life. In an early writing from 1788 he further argues for the close-knit bond between the church and state (Soldan 413). Hence, religious pursuits are tied with state or political pursuits. This statement explains the interconnectedness of the political and religious aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as mentioned above, can be divided into different stages. This act of division already evokes Hegel's presentation of conflict in a dialectical manner. To prove the link between Hegel's dialectical view of conflict and the actual development of this conflict, one can examine the changes between consecutive stages. The first stage spanned from 1948 to 1967. During this stage, the two opposing powers (thesis and antithesis) were Israel and some local Palestinian forces. There were some initial wars waged by Israel to gain territories around the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The 1967 Six-Day War ended the opposition of these two powers by establishing Israel as the preeminent power in the region (Katirai). This result resembles a first synthesis from the conflict between the thesis and antithesis.

During the beginning of the second stage, this first synthesis began to face its own antithesis at a higher level. In 1968, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) emerged, representing an officially organized Palestinian resistance against Israel. The PLO launched many counterattacks against Israel (Britannica). This series of minor conflicts ended in 1993 with the signing of the Oslo Accord. The Oslo Accord essentially created a new synthesis in

which countries would recognize the right of the Palestinians to self-determination and the war would ideally end (The Office of the Historian).

However, as the conflict progressed to the third stage (1993 to 2000), the synthesis introduced by the Oslo Accords immediately faced its antithesis. This antithesis consisted of the Palestinians themselves and the Israelis. Some Palestinians were unsatisfied that there was still no formal Palestinian state and refused to accept the Accords (The Office of the Historian). Additionally, the failure at the 2000 Camp David Summit allowed Israel to resume its fighting against Palestinians at a higher level.[3] The Second Intifada from 2000 to 2002 brought Israeli and Palestinian civilians into the scene, increasing the impacts of this conflict (Mostafa).

Overall, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict generally followed Hegel's dialectical pattern. He claims that dialectics would progress when quantitative buildups or qualitative shifts occurred (Hegel 78-82). In the case of this conflict, quantitative buildups did occur at multiple stages, especially with the introduction of the PLO in the second stage, which increased the number of forces involved. Qualitative shifts also happened during the third stage. Previously, the conflict was largely a political one over state sovereignty. The Second Intifada, starting from 2000, introduced religion as an increasingly important element at play. This third stage marked a qualitative shift as the nature of the conflict changed.

World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict illustrate that human conflicts have only grown more complex, requiring the establishment of increasingly multi-faceted international principles of peace. For instance, the main solution to World War I, the League of Nations, was eventually unsuccessful because it did not factor in the sheer complexity of the war and the interests of all participating parties. To put an end to the ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, one needs not only to settle political disputes, but also cultural and religious ones.

Conclusion

By investigating the definitions of conflict and the role that it plays in the historical narratives of Kant and Hegel, this paper showed that the conflict theories of both philosophers can be utilized to analyze modern warfare, namely World War I, the Vietnam War, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This paper displayed not only the relevance of the philosophers' theories, but also the relevance of the concept of "conflict" itself, as all three wars demonstrate the still extant conflictual nature of the modern world.

This essay acknowledges the continued relevance of Kant and Hegel. Both, as two of the most groundbreaking thinkers of their age, left profound marks on international politics through their conflict theories. For example, Kant's hope for international federalism has found partial

realization in the United Nations. Hegel's dialectics not only apply to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, but also to other wars around the world, including Afghanistan and Yemen (Erol).

This paper's application of Kantian and Hegelian conflict theories to modern conflicts leaves some room for future research. Future researchers can attempt to apply the philosophers' theories to a greater range of conflicts. This paper only focused on recent international wars. One can potentially look at tribal conflicts, economic conflicts, religious conflicts, and other types of human conflict to examine the flexibility and universality of Kantian and Hegelian theories, as has already been done many times.

Essentially, what Kant and Hegel proposed in their works resembles a utopia. For Kant, this utopia takes the forms of a federation of the peoples and a globe that is ridden by warfare. For Hegel, this utopia manifests itself in the ultimate realization of Spirit and freedom. The utopic nature of their thinking indicates the intrinsic values of studying their thoughts. As with any other conception of utopia, their thoughts cause one to reflect and find the extant problems in modern states (Partyka). Based on the perfect model, countries in real life can fix internal issues and implement increasingly more fitting models to sustain development and peace.

Kant and Hegel provide a directional blueprint for civilizational progress. The constant process of trying to envision an ideal future can be the driving force behind the advancements of human society. Countries have already attempted to prove the value of Kant and Hegel. Seeing the failure of the League of Nations, the global society created the United Nations – a far better institution than its predecessor. With the establishment of increasingly advanced conflict-prevention mechanisms, the world can potentially progress towards a more peaceful future.

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[1] The French Revolution greatly impacted Kant and Hegel.

[2] In the preface of *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel actually criticized this thesis-antithesis approach. Yet in *The Philosophy of History*, he seemed to be more open to this schema.

[3] The 2000 Camp David Summit was a meeting between U.S. president Bill Clinton, Israeli prime minister Ehud Barak and Palestinian Authority chairman Yasser Arafat. The summit was an effort to end the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through peaceful means.

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