

Contra Teleology: Hegel on Subjective and Objective Purpose

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Abstract

Hegel's system is not teleological. For a philosophy to be teleological, as I shall use the term, means that it takes the basic nature of the world itself or any foundational account of that world to be defined ultimately by final causality. Such a view has, of course, long stood as the dominant model for interpreting Hegel's system. This essay argues, to the contrary, that the accounts of Teleology and Life in the *Science of Logic*, and more precisely their analyses of what Hegel calls there subjective purpose and objective purpose, actually demonstrate this conception of teleology to be profoundly mistaken.

The conventional reading of these sections is that they argue for two related claims: (1) that the means-ends relationship of extrinsic purposiveness—subjective purpose—is made possible by the intrinsic self-organizing process of intrinsic purposiveness; and (2) that intrinsic purposiveness—objective purpose—takes the basic structure of an organism, a natural purpose (*Naturzweck*), as its model, a model defined by final causality. I show this to be a deeply flawed interpretation. Hegel certainly shows that extrinsic purposiveness entails intrinsic purposiveness, but he does not conceive of intrinsic purposiveness, objective purpose, in terms of the final causality inherent in the model of a natural purpose. Rather, the systematic account of logical life argues that the activity of life must be understood as genus and this as a process of self-differentiation where the immanent and necessary unfolding of determinate negation itself, and itself alone, engenders the development without possessing or relating itself to any antecedent content. Hence, this austere thesis, rather than any form of final causality, is, as Hegel puts it, the truth of teleology, the nature of the absolute idea, and, as a result, Hegel's system is shown, at its very core, not to be teleological.

Hegel's philosophy is not teleological. This admittedly provocative, even polemical, thesis cuts against the grain of the dominant strands of interpretation of Hegel's thought. Nonetheless, it is, I shall argue, true. Of course, much depends on what exactly is meant by teleology and teleological in making such a claim. As I shall use the terms in what follows, a philosophy is teleological just in so far as it takes the basic nature of the world itself or any foundational account of that world to be defined ultimately by final causality. That is to say, the world and its

constituent parts are taken to be moments of a process that unfolds as the actualization of a final cause, a template or form, which is borne potentially, where that form predetermines and guides its own course of development toward its ultimate destiny. In short, the end is always already there in the beginning directing the process towards its consummation.¹ This broadly Aristotelian framework has stood as the dominant model for interpreting Hegel's views about not only metaphysics, of course, but also about history, nature, art, religion, even the nature of self-consciousness and spirit itself.² And it is buttressed, we must quickly acknowledge, by Hegel's own seeming endorsement of final causes in the opening of the account of Teleology in the *Science of Logic* and again in the Remark he introduced to §204 in the second edition of the *Encyclopaedia*, his repeatedly acknowledged indebtedness to Aristotle, as well his widespread usage of organic metaphors and analogies throughout the system and the associated lecture courses. To cite but one of the most famous examples: 'just as the seed bears within itself the whole nature of the tree, even the taste and forms of its fruits, so also do the first traces of spirit contain virtually the whole of history'.³

And yet, despite the allure of this interpretation and its apparent textual basis, I believe it to be profoundly mistaken, and I contend that it is the accounts of Teleology and Life in the *Science of Logic* itself, and more precisely its analyses of what Hegel calls there subjective or extrinsic purpose and objective or intrinsic purpose, that, paradoxically, demonstrate this point.

The basic tenet of the argument that I shall construct in what follows is that the standard teleological interpretation of Hegel's system fails because it is predicated upon an insufficiently systematic concept of teleology. It conceives, as we have noted, the end of a process as already contained, potentially or virtually, in its beginning. And yet, on Hegel's own analysis, this is simply not what teleology, whether in its extrinsic or its intrinsic forms, actually is. Hegel, of course, grapples with this issue at the crucial transition in the *Science of Logic* from the category of Teleology, the final moment of Objectivity, to that of Life, the first moment of the Idea. At its core, this is a logical unfolding of teleology, subjective purpose or extrinsic teleology, into its truth in what Hegel calls logical life, objective purpose, intrinsic teleology. On the conventional reading of this transition, Hegel is taken to be arguing, broadly speaking, for two related claims: (1) that the means-ends relationship of extrinsic purposiveness is made possible by the intrinsic self-organizing process of intrinsic purposiveness; and (2) that intrinsic purposiveness—objective purpose or logical life—takes the basic structure of an organism, a natural purpose (*Naturzweck*), inherited from Aristotle by way of Kant, as its model and this model is defined by the activity of final causality. Hence, in so far as what is at stake in this transition is the fundamental nature of the 'adequate concept, the objectively true, or the true as such' (*GW*: 12, 173),⁴ which is to say the very nature of the absolute idea itself, as Hegel puts it, then

if the idea, in its most rudimentary determination, just is logical life, and logical life is just final causality, then Hegel's philosophy, at its very core, would have to be unquestionably teleological and would be so precisely in the sense in which I have denied that it is.⁵ My claim, accordingly, is that this interpretation of the argument set forth in the transition from subjective to objective purpose is deeply flawed. Hegel certainly does show that extrinsic purposiveness entails intrinsic purposiveness, that the truth of subjective purpose is indeed objective purpose. But he does not, I shall argue, conceive of intrinsic purposiveness, objective purpose, logical life, in terms of the final causality inherent in the Aristotelian cum Kantian model of a self-organizing being. Rather, what the systematic account of logical life demonstrates is that the activity of life, and thus of the concept as idea, must be understood as nothing other than a process of self-differentiation where the immanent and necessary unfolding of determinate negation itself, and itself alone, engenders the development without possessing or relating itself to any antecedent content.⁶ Hence, my contention is that this austere thesis, rather than any form of final causality, is, as Hegel puts it, the truth of teleology, the movement of the concept, the nature of the absolute idea, and that this undermines the claim that Hegel's philosophy is committed to any form of final causality, which is to say that it is, in any way, teleological.

Now, before we turn to the matter at hand, two points need to be emphasized. First, the concern of this essay is to develop textual evidence to reject a specific interpretation of Hegel's philosophy, which I contend remains widespread, the one that, as I noted above, takes the traditional model of final causality as its hermeneutical key. The essay thus does not seek to evaluate the merits of Hegel's interpretations of Aristotle nor of Kant or offer any assessments about his indebtedness to their thought. References to Aristotle and Kant in what follows are thus not to Hegel's speculative appropriations of them but solely to the ways in which the claims traditionally associated with their ideas have been used, wrongly on my view, to interpret and domesticate Hegel's much more radical account of teleology as logical life and thus, I contend, fundamentally as determinate negation.

Secondly, as I indicated above, I will be using the concept of teleology in a broader sense than Hegel does. For him, the concept of teleology is defined solely in terms of extrinsic purposiveness, instrumentality or expediency, what he also calls subjective purpose. And he delineates this from intrinsic or objective purposiveness, which is the minimal determination of the category of logical life. I contend that what is at stake in the transition from Teleology to Life, from subjective purpose to objective purpose, is thus precisely whether or not Hegel's philosophical enterprise is teleological in the broader sense outlined above in that it takes the basic nature of the world itself or any foundational account of that world to be defined ultimately by final causality. My thesis is that, on this conception, Hegel's philosophy is simply not teleological.

The essay is divided into four parts. The first outlines the rudiments of what Hegel means by objectivity and the idea in the *Science of Logic* as these categories set the specific parameters for the accounts of teleology and life. The second part then turns to an analysis of subjective or extrinsic purpose and examines the argumentation that leads from subjective purpose to intrinsic or objective purpose, what Hegel calls logical life. The third part then investigates what Hegel means by intrinsic or objective purpose itself, arguing that the key to Hegel's account is not the 'living individual', as commentators have so often claimed, but the genus-process and that this proves to be a process of determinate negation, rather than any kind of final causality. The conclusion turns explicitly to the implications of Hegel's account for the nature of teleology and the status of Hegel's philosophy with respect to this concept.

I. Objectivity and the Idea

The chapter on teleology is the culmination of the second section in the Doctrine of the Concept, entitled Objectivity in the *Science of Logic* and Object in the *Encyclopaedia*.⁷ Now, as readers of this essay will all no doubt be aware, the *Logic* is divided into three books—Being, Essence, and Concept—with the first two comprising the Objective Logic and the third alone being the Subjective Logic. So, a rather simple, though certainly not simplistic, question naturally arises: What is an account of something called object or objectivity doing in the subjective logic?

Hegel clearly acknowledges the strangeness of this section and its placement in this part of the *Logic*.⁸ The basic line of argument in the Subjective Logic, however, serves to clarify its status here. The outline of the argument can be stated very broadly in the following way. The Subjective Logic shows that the structure of the movement of the concept is fundamentally inferential (syllogistic). And when the complete, determinate structure of this process—evident in the form of the disjunctive syllogism—is laid out, then what is also grasped is nothing other than that the very movement of actuality itself is inferential because that syllogistic form holds that the middle term is what generates its own major and minor terms and thus everything that is. The disjunctive syllogism-form shows that universality, in its most fundamental truth, neither inheres as a particular feature in individuals, nor are individuals subsumed as particular instances of universality. Rather, universality itself differentiates into particular kinds and these are what constitute individuals. The activity of disjunctive inferring is not, then, solely, nor even fundamentally, a process of subjective reflection, it is itself inherently objective, or better, the structure of the disjunctive syllogism just is the structure of actuality itself; dis-juncting, the form of the process of self-differentiation, just is the content that is objectivity.⁹

This takes us to Hegel's core claim about this section: what is at stake in the analysis in Objectivity or Object is nothing less than to show that the movement of the concept is not simply submerged in objectivity—that it is wholly one with objectivity, as it appears at least initially to be—but, precisely in objectivity, through objectivity, to show that the concept gives itself its own end, that it is, as Hegel argues, free not only in its structure or form, but in actuality itself. Hegel writes, speaking of the section on Objectivity, in laying out the plan for the Subjective Logic as a whole:

One with the matter, it [the concept] is *submerged* into it: its differences are objective determinations of existence in which it is itself again the *inner*. As the soul of objective existence, it must *give itself* the form of *subjectivity* that it *immediately* had as *formal* concept; and so, *in the form* of the free, which in objectivity it did not yet have, it opposes itself to objectivity and therein makes identity with it, which *as objective* concept it has *in and for itself*, into a *posited* identity. (GW: 12, 30)

This dense passage provides an essential key for unlocking the basic structure of the argument that is set forth in Objectivity. The deduction is comprised of three distinct moments:

- *Beginning*: As identical with objectivity, the concept is initially submerged, constricted, and thus unfree in it: 'its differences are objective determinations of existence in which it is itself again the *inner*'.
- *Conclusion*: The freedom of the concept, which had been shown to define the concept in Subjectivity, must necessarily be restored to it in Objectivity: 'it must *give itself* the form of *subjectivity* that it *immediately* had as *formal* concept'.
- *Core Argument*: The process of proving the concept is free in and through objectivity is a matter of the concept being shown not just to emerge as distinct from objectivity, but to be that which engenders or posits objectivity: 'and so, *in the form* of the free, which in objectivity it did not yet have, it [the concept] opposes itself to objectivity and therein makes identity with it, which *as objective* concept it has *in and for itself*, into a *posited* identity'.

In basic terms, then, the section on Objectivity seeks to establish that the concept is not just the inner, immediate, submerged soul of objectivity, but rather that it is its generative source, that it posits objectivity as its own, which is to say that the concept is self-differentiating and self-determining not only in and through objectivity, but as objectivity itself. The section does this by employing a distinction to which Hegel alludes in this passage, what he calls, later in the introduction to the section

itself, the ‘double meaning’ of objectivity: ‘standing *opposed* to the self-subsistent *concept* yet of also *existing in and for itself*’ (GW: 12, 131). This is the distinction between objectivity as immediate existence, as the manifold world of objects set over against the concept (‘standing *opposed* to the self-subsistent *concept*’) and objectivity as that which is rational and necessary, as unrestricted and without opposition (‘*existing in and for itself*’). Hegel clearly tells us that objectivity as *in and for itself* is what is fundamentally at play in the first two chapters of the section, in the accounts of Mechanism and Chemism, while objectivity as *immediate existence* is what is operative in its final chapter, Teleology (cf. GW: 12, 131–32). The argument of the section is thus that objectivity as in and for itself is articulated, fundamentally, by the process set forth initially in Mechanism and developed further in Chemism, but that this same process has its truth in Teleology, which takes objectivity as the immediate existence in which extrinsic purpose, the concept, is realized. The argument for the concept being free in and through and as objectivity, as a result, turns on the claim that by virtue of its own immanent and necessary unfolding, the concept is shown to oppose itself to objectivity—rendering objectivity thereby no longer in and for itself, but immediate existence—and, precisely by virtue of that moment, the concept makes identity with objectivity not something immediate, something in which it is simply submerged, but something that the concept itself produces, that it posits.

Now, in doing this, Hegel claims, the concept proves itself to be the idea, the ‘unity of subjective concept and objectivity’, the ‘*subject-object*’ (GW: 12, 176), which is to say it is the full integration of the structure of the concept, its subjectivity, and its content, its objectivity. Hegel’s contention is that the concept qua idea is most properly defined as the process, the movement, whereby everything that is, first, exists (being), and secondly, exists as it concretely and determinately does (essence). His proof for this thesis is, of course, the entirety of the set of analyses and inferences that comprise the *Logic* up to this point, but its proximate demonstration lies in the account of extrinsic teleology. As we have noted, in extrinsic teleology, the concept stands, at least initially, *over against* objectivity and it makes use of mechanical and chemical objects and processes as means for the fulfilment of itself. But, Hegel shows that, in so far as the concept just is its differentiation in these specific kinds of processes and objects, then the appropriation of them as means is *at the same time* their completion as movements, and thus the extrinsic purpose is properly their intrinsic end. Mechanical and chemical objects and processes are thus not simply products or artefacts for the use of the concept, but the concept is what animates their very being. It is in this sense, then, that Hegel speaks of the idea here: it is the concept as the ‘*self-directed purpose and impulse* [Selbstzweck und Trieb]’ (GW: 12, 176) and objectivity proves to be nothing more than positedness in that it is what it is only as it is ‘*posited* by virtue of the activity of the purpose’ (GW: 12, 176). And thus, the concept qua idea is nothing less than:

the process of dirempting (*dirimieren*) itself into individuality and into the latter's inorganic nature, and of then bringing this inorganic nature again under the controlling power of the subject and back to the first simple universality. (*GW*: 12, 177)¹⁰

The concept as idea is therefore, it would seem, intrinsic purposiveness and logical life, thus, appears here to be a form of final causality, and, given the undeniable centrality of the idea to Hegel's work, this would seem to provide a quite firm foundation for a teleological reading of Hegel's thought in general. My task, then, will be to show that this inference about the nature of Hegel's thought is profoundly mistaken and that it is so precisely because of what Hegel shows intrinsic purpose, logical life, necessarily to be. Accordingly, with this overview of the relationship between objectivity and the idea now in place, I want to focus on the transitional moment, the pivot point, from objectivity to the idea: the transition from extrinsic-subjective purpose to intrinsic-objective purpose or, as Hegel puts it, from teleology to life.

II. Subjective purpose

Hegel's treatment of the subjective or extrinsic form of purposiveness is a subtle and intricate analysis of what is perhaps best called expediency, instrumentality, functionality, the usage of one thing, immediate existence, for the sake of another, the concept. In the end, though, it establishes one singular claim: extrinsic purposiveness is spuriously infinite—a relationship that Hegel characterizes as one of violence (*Gewalt*)—because subjective purpose, the concept, always stands separate from the means for its realization, immediate existence, and, as such, it must impose itself upon it. This relationship of subjective purpose to its means is a relationship of individuality to particularity that always requires a further intermediary and this relation, because particularity is the mediating term of the relation, requires yet another intermediary as well, and so on and so forth. Hegel thus concludes:

The result now is that external purposiveness, which only has at first the form of teleology, only goes so far as to be a means, not to be an objective purpose, because subjective purpose remains as an external, subjective determination; or in so far as purpose is active and attains completion, albeit only in a means, it is still bound up *immediately* with objectivity; it is sunk into it. Purpose is itself an object and, as one may say, it does not attain to or reach the means because its realization is required before that realization could be brought about through a means. (*GW*: 12, 169; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §160; *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §211)¹¹

In this passage, Hegel clearly identifies exactly what generates the spurious infinity of extrinsic purposiveness: extrinsic purpose must always already be complete, it must itself be determinate, in order to determine the specific means that will be capable of bringing it into being, and yet, precisely as such, subjective purpose never attains its own completion because its realization is required as a condition of reaching or determining its means and thereby its realization, which it can thus never do.

Yet, having isolated this contradiction that lies at the very core of extrinsic teleology, Hegel immediately and paradoxically claims that this same result—that the extrinsicity of subjective purpose condemns it to being a form of spurious infinity—‘is in fact not only an external purpose-relation, but rather the truth of such a relation, inner purpose-relation and an objective purpose’ (*GW*: 12, 169; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §161, *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §212). But how exactly does objective purpose follow immanently and necessarily from the spurious nature of extrinsic purpose as its truth, that is, as what subjective purpose truly is?

Hegel identifies the nerve of the argument in question in the subsequent passage:

The self-subsistent externality of the object over against the concept, which purpose presupposes, is *posited* in this presupposition as an unessential shine [*Schein*] and also as already sublated in and for itself; the activity of the purpose is, therefore, properly only the presentation of this shine and the sublation of it. (*GW*: 12, 169; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §161, *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §212)

Now, to say that the object or objectivity in its self-subsistence, that is, in its being immediate over against the concept, is a reflective shine is just to say that it is posited by purpose itself as its product. As a result, immediate existence does not actually stand over against, distinct from, the purpose. Rather, it is itself, *always already*, the realization of the purpose. The purpose is thus inherently objective, rather than merely subjective. The key to the argument is thus to show that the immediate existence upon which subjective purpose must, at least apparently, violently impose itself is actually not extrinsic to purpose at all, but its very own product or, put otherwise, that objective purpose is but the sublation of objectivity itself by itself.

Hegel proceeds to lay out an analysis that establishes this very point. He begins by recalling that objectivity, now as immediate existence standing over against extrinsic purpose, had already been shown, when it was objective in the sense of being in and for itself, to be susceptible to being a means, what Hegel called its being ‘entirely penetrable [*schlechthin durchdringlich*]’ by purpose (*GW*: 12, 164). But it is susceptible or available to extrinsic purpose in this way precisely because it proved to be—in the accounts of Mechanism and, most especially, in Chemism—the product of the process that ultimately showed itself to be purpose. Stated

formally, Hegel's argument is that the relation of individual purpose to universal realization in objectivity that, through its imposition on the particular means, defines extrinsic teleology is made possible by the objective universality of the concept that differentiates itself into these two extremes. Hegel thus notes: 'As a result, [the] determination of the object as a means is an entirely immediate one' (*GW*: 12, 170). And if objectivity is itself already generated by the movement of the concept, then purpose does not need to be imposed extrinsically (instrumentally, violently) upon it because the purpose forms objectivity itself, and it follows from this that purpose is not merely subjective or formal or extrinsic at all, but is, in fact, objective, intrinsic. Hegel thus concludes:

There is no need, therefore, for the subjective purpose to exercise any violence or reinforcement against it [immediate existence], other than reinforcement of itself, to make the object into a means; the *resolution*, the resolve, this determination of itself, is the *only posited* externality of the object, which is therein immediately subjected to purpose, and has no other determination as against it than that of the nothingness of the being-in-and-for-itself. (*GW*: 12, 170)¹²

The conceptual unfolding of teleology therefore shows that the truth of subjective purpose is the differentiated unity of purpose and objectivity wherein the purpose produces objectivity immanently and as its own shine. Which is to say, the truth of subjective purpose is objective purpose, and the concept therein now conditions itself, determines itself, and thereby is genuinely free:

thus the concept is essentially this: to be differentiated as identity existing for itself from its *being-in-itself* objectivity, and thereby to have externality, but in this external totality to be the totality's self-determining identity. Thus is the concept now *the idea*. (*GW*: 12, 172)

Here then, we reach what is clearly the pivotal moment for the reading I am proposing. For if the truth of extrinsic purpose just is intrinsic purpose, as Hegel has shown, and if intrinsic purpose as logical life just is a form of final causality, little more than an inheritance of the Kantian rehabilitation or resuscitation of Aristotle's conception of the self-organizing form of an organism or natural purpose (*Naturzweck*), then Hegel's philosophy, indeed, would actually demand the teleological interpretation that I am seeking to contest. The task of the next section is thus to show that though Hegel is, as we have seen, committed to the first inference—that objective purpose is indeed the truth of subjective purpose—his account denies the second—that objective purpose is a form of final causality.

III. Objective purpose

Hegel famously acknowledges that the idea of life, objective or intrinsic purpose, appears, on its face at least, to overstep the boundaries of what he calls ‘the common representation of logic’ (*GW*: 12, 179), an intrusion of natural life in the pure domain of thought. Nonetheless, his claim is that a distinctly logical determination of life has emerged in the immanent and necessary unfolding of the concept back into its ground, that is, into the idea. Such a conception of life is, he insists, neither natural nor spiritual. It is neither an organism exposed to the externality of natural existence, nor is it merely the means for the fulfilment of the ends set and pursued by subjectivity. As he puts it, logical life ‘is free from both the conditioning objectivity presupposed in the first case [Nature], and the reference to subjectivity of the second case [Spirit]’ (*GW*: 12, 181). Of course, this delineation of logical from natural and spiritual life raises a host of questions and issues about whether it is a tenable or even a minimally coherent concept.¹³ For our concerns here, though, I want to set those problems aside, as important as they are, and focus instead on the logical determination of life itself and whether or not intrinsic teleology is a form of final causality or something altogether different.

What then is the distinctly logical concept of life? Hegel is clear that the logical concept of intrinsic purposiveness that flows from the demonstration laid out in Teleology (and all that precedes it, of course) is minimally defined by two basic determinations: (a) ‘absolute *universality*’ and (b) *Trieb* (drive or urge) (cf. *GW*: 12, 181). He is also clear that these features are what define the fundamental nature of logical life, rather than the more developed determinations of what he calls the ‘living individual’, to which commentators typically appeal in their accounts of logical life. Let me thus review each of these determinations briefly before turning to the line of argument that Hegel develops from this point.

First, logical life is absolute universality. The account of Objectivity/Object showed that objectivity is necessarily suffused with purpose, that purpose is not simply over and against immediate existence, as in extrinsic purposiveness, but rather that it is that which engenders or posits objectivity as such. Thus, purpose is the processional soul, the life, that ‘flows omnipresently [*allegenwärtig*]’ (*GW*: 12, 181) throughout the manifoldness, the multiplicity, of objectivity. Objective purpose is therefore, at once, the multiple forms of differentiation—mechanical, chemical and instrumental—that objectivity has proven to be and it is also the concrete oneness, the ‘simple self-reference’, that bears and sustains the various objects of objectivity together. In a word, then, intrinsic purpose has shown itself to be nothing other than the very substance of objectivity itself. It is, hence, in this precise sense that we are entitled to speak of intrinsic purpose as absolute universality for its scope is unrestricted. Yet the analysis of Objectivity/Object also established that intrinsic purpose

is that which accounts for all that is. It is not that which is simply possessed in common by all objects, nor is it an abstraction that subsumes them all. Rather, life names that universality that is also the process that produces or engenders all things. And this conception of generative or concrete universality takes us to the second determination of logical life.

Logical life is drive or urge. To say that objective purpose suffuses objectivity, that it is universal, captures the scope of life, but it is not itself sufficient to capture the generative process that this concept also names. Accordingly, life is also the drive or urge to differentiate and, most fundamentally, to differentiate itself, to other itself. Logical life as the urge to differentiate names, then, a process of determinate negation that, first and foremost, negates itself, rather than some pre-existing entity or concept. Logical life is thus, for Hegel, the process of self-referential negation that, by its own operation of differentiation, engenders objectivity and all that it comprises as such. Hegel makes this decisive point about logical life in the following passage:

But this simple life is not only omnipresent; it is the one and only *subsistence* and *immanent substance* of its objectivity; but as subjective substance it is *drive/urge* [Trieb], more precisely the *specific drive/urge of particular* difference, and no less essentially the one and universal drive/urge of the specific that leads its particularization back to unity and holds it therein. Life is self-relating only as this *negative unity* of its objectivity and particularization, life existing for itself, a soul. (*GW*: 12, 181)

It is clearly worth noting here that neither of the minimal determinations of logical life include or are dependent upon any kind of appeal to final causation. Nowhere does life stand as an abstract template guiding, from its inception, its own development. In fact, what Hegel claims is true of logical life is that it is a distinctly concrete universal. And this means, as Hegel demonstrates most especially in the treatment of judgment and syllogisms in Subjectivity but elsewhere as well, that universality must be understood as a concept that generates its own specifications, its own differentiations. In a word, this means that life as universality and as drive/urge demands to be thought as and actually is, as we shall see, genus (*Gattung*) precisely in so far as genus, as Hegel argues, is not a class concept, but a generative principle that particularizes or determines itself into species, specifications, its differences from itself that define itself.

Now, Hegel certainly builds on this basic twofold determination of intrinsic purpose as absolute universality and a drive/urge to differentiate by noting that the first and most elementary differentiation that logical life performs upon itself is to produce itself, life, as what Hegel terms a 'living individual', that is, as a singular form of intrinsic purpose:

As such [that is, as a soul], it is essentially a *singular* that refers to objectivity as to an other, an inanimate nature. The originary *judgment/division* of life [*ursprüngliche Urteil des Lebens*] consists therefore in this, that it separates itself off as individual subject from the objective and, since it constitutes itself as the negative unity of the concept, [it] makes the *presupposition* of an immediate objectivity. (*GW*: 12, 181)

At this stage, now, logical life does bear the same structure as natural life. It is conditioned by, and thus is dependent on, objectivity as immediate existence and it is in this sense that this existence stands, as Hegel puts it here, as logical life's presupposition. But whereas natural life is wholly conditioned by the externality of the natural world, logical life, precisely by virtue of its own determinate negation, its 'originary *judgment/division*', has itself posited this externality, its own presupposition, and accordingly thereby conditions itself.

Hegel's account of the living organism in the *Logic* is therefore not the description of a biological organism. But we should also note that neither is it setting out what our subjective capacities to know and determine, that is our capacities to judge, require of the natural world such that this world is capable of being rendered intelligible, as Kant's account of transcendental reflection would demand.

Rather logical life is, as is the rest of the *Logic*, a conceptual realist account of what life is at its most fundamental level, a level more basic than either its natural or spiritual determinations. As originally differing from itself, logical life posits a basic distinction and elementary relation between itself qua intrinsic purpose, that is, as soul, and as the most immediate form of external nature, namely such life's necessary embodiment, its corporeality (*Leiblichkeit*).¹⁴ As such, Hegel tells us, the logical living individual is properly deemed an 'organism' (*GW*: 12, 184), not, we should note, because it is any kind of exemplary natural purpose (*Naturzweck*) driven by final causality, but because it is continually in the process, what Hegel will call the 'life-process' itself, of forging itself as the 'negative unity of the concept within itself' (*GW*: 12, 184).¹⁵ Now, by this he means that logical life as an individual entity strives to produce itself, that is, it is compelled by the urge/drive to differentiate itself to forge and sustain itself as the particular being that it is. But, by virtue of this very same drive/urge, logical life qua organism is also compelled to raise its own specificity, its own particularity, to universality. The originary judgment of logical life proves, in the end and because of its own intrinsic makeup, to be a syllogism relating its individuality, its particularity, and its universality (cf. *GW*: 12, 182; *Enz*: [1817]: §165, *Enz*: [1827, 1830]: §217). Hegel formulates the twofold directedness of logical life qua organism in the following way:

it is the *urge/drive of each singular, specific moment* to produce itself and likewise to raise its particularity to universality, to sublimate

the other moments external to it, and to bring itself forth at their cost, but just as much [it is the urge/drive] to sublimate itself and make itself a means for the other. (*GW*: 12, 184)

Hegel's analysis proceeds to follow out this essential twofold path of the syllogistic structure of logical life. On the one hand, logical life is compelled to produce and sustain its own existence by imposing itself qua individual, violently if need be, as an extrinsic end on the particularities of the environment in which it is emersed, deriving therefrom the sustenance necessary for its survival as an individual; the 'life-process' of the organism is thus a relationship of individuality to itself mediated by particularity, sheer instrumentality, sheer expediency, extrinsic purposiveness (cf. *GW*: 12, 187–89; *Enz.* [1817]: §§166–167; *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §§218–19).

On the other hand, though, Hegel claims that this same life-process does not just posit and sustain the organism as individual, it also and at the same time sublimes the particularity of the organism and raises life itself thereby to universality; here the drive/urge that animates the organism produces it 'as a means for the other', that is, for life as concrete, generative universality, life as genus:

In this coming back together of the individual with what it initially presupposed as indifferent objectivity, the individual has constituted itself, on one side, as an actual singularity, but it has, on the other side, sublated *its particularity* and raised itself to *universality*. Its particularity consisted in the diremption whereby life posited the individual life and its external objectivity as life's species. Through the external life-process, life has thereby posited itself as real universal life, as *genus*. (*GW*: 12, 189; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §168; *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §220)

This passage, of course, raises a number of related questions that are decisive for the reading that we are undertaking here: How is this possible? How does the life-process of an organism sublimate its particularity and raise life itself to universality? And is life not serving here, despite what we have claimed above, as the template directing the process that sustains the organism and uses it as a means to produce itself? That is to say, is the life-process, the process that defines the basic nature of the idea here, not teleological on Hegel's own account?

To address these crucial questions, it will be useful to begin by first considering the traditional conception of a genus (*Gattung*). Among its many senses, the one most important for our purposes here is the classical one that to be a genus is to be a classification of entities that is divided into subclasses by virtue of a distinguishing mark or feature, a specific difference. These subclasses are then the species (*Arten*) of the more general concept, the genus. On the conventional account, then, a

genus is nothing other than a class-concept in which the species subordinate to it are subsumed, and it, in turn, is itself a species in relation to the wider class to which it too belongs.

Hegel, as we noted above, rejects this conception of genus as a mere abstract universality, devoid of any specification, any defining, determining particularity. He argues, instead, that the universality that genuinely defines a genus must be concrete, which means it must be a universality that engenders its own species, its own particularization, into individuality, here understood not as a bare this, but as the integrating culmination of universality fully and completely particularized.

Hegel's claim is that intrinsic purpose, the basic determination of the idea, is the genus where the genus denotes not a class-concept, but a process of determinate negation.¹⁶ More precisely, he shows, in a stunning demonstration to which we shall briefly turn, that genus is nothing other than, nothing over and above, the process of the reproduction or propagation of the species: *Gattung* is *Begattung*; *Gattung* is *Fortpflanzung* (cf. *GW*: 12, 191).

To demonstrate this extraordinary and rather outlandish thesis, Hegel argues that a singular organism, a living individual, is alive and thus, on the traditional interpretation of the concept, a member of the class of living beings. Accordingly, every individual organism is *in itself* genus in the sense that it belongs to the living but is not yet *for itself* genus in that it remains only a specific, particular, being. How then does a living organism become genus not only in itself but for itself?

The process whereby an organism is posited not just as the 'foundation of itself', but as the existing, determinate actuality of the genus must be a process *not* of assimilation or appropriation in which the individual takes up the inorganic elements in which it subsists, the activity of mere consumption by which it sustains its own existence, for the relationship of extrinsic purposiveness that exists between the organism and its environment is, as we saw in our discussion of subjective purpose, a spuriously infinite relation that serves only to ensure the organism's continued existence as a singular, discrete entity. To be sure, to exist as singular, an organism must assimilate or consume external existence as a tool or instrument by which it produces itself precisely as an individual. But for an organism to exist as a truly *living* being, that is as a member of the class of organic entities, it must exist in relation to another one of its kind, that is, another living being of any specific sort, that is, as long as that sort is, minimally, a living being.¹⁷ Every organism is thus, Hegel tells us, a 'contradiction' (*GW*: 12, 190): it is able to be itself, an individual organism, a living being, only in so far as it is other than itself, that is, in so far as it is another living being, another organism. But organisms do not exist as members of the genus of life simply by standing in relation to such another living organism, for then the genus that they share would be abstract. Rather, Hegel

contends, an organism is a member of the genus life only in so far as it produces this other being, that is, it is itself by propagating the living species.

As a result of this contradiction—that each organism’s own integrity as a living being is dependent upon its relation to another living being—a ‘longing to posit this and realize itself as a universal’ is set up within each organism, which is to say, the contradiction inherent within what it is to be an organism produces the drive/urge that defines life at its most elementary, the drive/urge to reproduce: ‘But this drive/urge [*Trieb*] of the genus can realize itself only through the sublation [*Aufheben*] of the singular individualities that are still particular to each other’ (*GW*: 12, 190).

Out of this drive/urge to reproduce themselves, organisms must necessarily lose themselves in reproduction—they each ‘die away’, as Hegel puts it (*GW*: 12, 191)—and out of this process engender another individuality: ‘the propagation of the living species [*Geschlechter*’] (*GW*: 12, 191). On Hegel’s account, then, logical life proves to be nothing other than the process of reproduction and, as such, this process is the objective expression of the movement of the concept, the movement of disjunction, the universal qua genus particularizing itself and thereby becoming individual:

The process of the genus, namely, in which the singular individuals sublimate in one another their indifferent, immediate, concrete existence and in this negative unity expire/die away (*erstehen*), has furthermore the *realized genus*, which has posited itself identically with the concept, for the other side of its product. (*GW*: 12, 191; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §169, *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §221)

In other words, reproduction within the context of the determination of logical life is a unitary process that accomplishes two tasks at once: it produces another organism, another living individual (offspring), and it also produces the actuality of the genus itself, the becoming for itself of the genus that was in itself, the idea in relation with itself specifically as idea:

In copulation [*Begattung*], the immediacy of living individuality perishes [*erstirbt*]; the death of this life is the emergence of spirit. The idea, which as genus is in itself, becomes for itself in that it has sublated its particularity, which constituted the living species, and thereby has given itself a *reality* that is *itself simple universality*. . . (*GW*: 12, 191; cf. *Enz.* [1817]: §169; *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §222)

What Hegel has shown then through this admittedly extraordinary deduction is that the bare logical determinations of life—universality and urge/drive—initially must be thought as a living individual, an organism, but the very process of being a living being, and more precisely, the process of producing and sustaining a living being’s own existence, compels the organism to negate its own particularity in and through the process of reproducing itself. As a result, logical life proves not to be the

individual organism, but the generative concrete universality that particularizes itself into individuality, the life-process that is the objective purpose: logical life is the genus and the genus is the process of determinate negation that is reproduction.

Now, precisely at this juncture, it is important to ask whether the universal does not function in this process as a template borne within the organism that guides and directs its own actualization, its own realization, in and through the propagation of the species. That is to say, is the process of reproduction, the most elementary determination of the idea, on Hegel's own account, not an instance of final causality?

Hegel acknowledges this issue. As we have seen, in so far as the organism is a contradiction that is driven thereby to sublimate its own singular individuality in order to realize the genus of which it is but a moment, then, at this stage, within the immediacy of the organism, where the genus is still in itself, the concept that is actual at that moment is, Hegel says, '*the germ [Keim] of a living individual*' (*GW*: 12, 190). And he goes on to state that, as such:

the germ of the living being is the complete concretion of individuality in which all its various sides, its properties and articulated differences [are] contained in their entire determinateness; where the at first immaterial, subjective totality is present undeveloped, simple and non-sensuous. Thus, the germ is the whole living being in the inner form of the concept. (*GW*: 12, 191)

Clearly, this passage would seem to affirm the core tenet of a teleological interpretation of the genus life and, as such, of the concept as idea. The genus is the 'immaterial, subjective totality' within the living individual that guides the development of the organism as it grows into maturity where it fulfils the template, the set of life functions (e.g., assimilation and reproduction), prescribed by the genus itself. But Hegel provides this formulation as an example of what the concept is, at this stage, for, as he puts it, '*ordinary perception [gemeine Wahrnehmung]*', not as the concept qua idea is to be grasped in the speculative science that is the subject matter of the *Science of Logic*. Ordinary perception, Hegel is saying, quite literally sees the concept as an inner template that, from the birth of the organism, directs its maturation into a full-fledged, self-sustaining being where its determinations as a living being are all always already 'contained in their entire determinateness' in the germ of the organism itself: the acorn is the oak tree in itself, not yet become actual for itself.

But the systematic account of life as genus, as we have seen, demonstrates that this is precisely *not* how the genus functions. The genus is not a blueprint or a template. It is not an immaterial, subjective totality that contains its entire determinateness in its undeveloped form. Rather, it is what it is only in and through and by virtue of the propagation of the species, which Hegel has shown is the concept's own differing from itself, its own self-differentiation. Accordingly, objective

purpose, the concept as idea, and that is, the concept as genus, is logical life, absolute universality and drive/urge to differentiate, and that means it is nothing other than, but nothing less than, the generative process of determinate negation: the genus just is the propagation of the species.

With this explication of Hegel's systematic accounts of subjective and objective purpose in hand, I want to return to our broader question about the teleological nature of Hegel's philosophy and consider briefly the import of these categories and the argumentation underlying them for this pivotal issue.

IV. Conclusion

What, then, does Hegel's systematic treatment of teleology show about the pervasive view that his philosophy is teleological?

Let me begin by noting what I take to be some fairly non-controversial points: First, whether subjective or objective, purpose, for Hegel, is *not*, at least at this most fundamental level, an end or goal set by or being pursued by a will or any form of consciousness or thought; purpose is non-intentional. Second, purpose, again whether subjective or objective, is *not* a potentiality that is actualized; purpose is not antecedent, in any sense, to objectivity. And third, purpose is *not* a cause of an effect; it is not, again at the most fundamental level, a causal power that stands in reciprocal relation with objectivity.

As we have seen, purpose, for Hegel, is the concept that is no longer submerged in objectivity in and for itself. Initially, this means that it is the concept standing over against objectivity as immediate existence and, as such, that it is a distinctly extrinsic or *subjective* form of purpose, one that confronts objects—whether in terms of their mechanical or chemical determinations—and determines them, even violently imposing itself on them, so as to accord with itself. In this extrinsic sense, Hegel's account of teleology comes perhaps closest to the rudiments of the conventional model where the core idea is instrumentality or expediency: that some things exist or happen for the sake of other things. But even here Hegel's account shows that purpose, because it is the concept, necessarily is a process, rather than a form or a template, and a process that must particularize, differentiate, disjunct itself and, by that, be self-determining, which is to say, free. Purpose is therefore distinctly self-realizing. It is an end that is *not* predicated on some antecedent conditions; it is *not* moved to realize itself *by* something else, rather, it moves itself and it does so simply and solely because that's what it inherently is: the generative process of self-differentiation that is the realization of itself solely by virtue of itself, genuine and complete self-determination.

The account of *objective* purpose builds on this point by showing that the only way in which objectivity can be susceptible or amenable to determination by

subjective purpose is if objectivity itself just is the product, the ‘shine’, of the self-differentiation of the concept. Since this is precisely what is established in the accounts of mechanism and chemism, then the truth of subjective purpose, the truth of teleology, proves to be objective purpose, logical life. But this means that logical life is, again as we have seen, nothing other than ‘the *specific impulse of particular* difference and no less essentially the one and universal impulse of the specific that leads its particularization back to unity and holds it therein’, which is to say, it is the process of determinate negation whereby self-relation is generated through self-differentiation, that it is genus. This distinctive conception of negation creates solely by negating itself. As such, it too does not admit of being understood as a typical abstract form or template bearing potentially the ultimate destiny towards which it guides its actualization. Rather, it is a structured process that immanently engenders objectivity in and through becoming-other. Yet, and this has proven to be the pivotal point, Hegel’s systematic account of objective purpose shows that this activity or process does not bear within itself the seeds of the destination towards which it is headed. It is only the impulse or drive to self-negation, self-particularization, where that drive or impulse is wholly self-referential and thus contains no antecedents, whether potential or actual. It is thus right to say then that, for Hegel, the concept is a process that is not only not predetermined, but an activity without a destiny, without an end in view, that the for-itself is not necessarily in the in-itself, that, in fact, and contrary to what the auditors’ reports tell us, the seed does not bear within itself the whole nature of the tree, even the taste and forms of its fruits, and neither do the first traces of spirit contain virtually the whole of history. What is necessary about the concept is simply and solely becoming-other, differentiation, where there is no intact identity, universality or essence that precedes this process. The seed is nothing but the immediacy whose very immanent insufficiency is what propels it to become other than itself, to become the determinations that together comprise a tree.

The systematic deduction of subjective purpose and objective purpose thus establishes that the movement of the concept, the activity Hegel calls logical life, is properly a process where the immanent and necessary unfolding of autonomous negation itself, and itself alone, engenders the development. Accordingly, this admittedly rather austere thesis, rather than any form of final causality, is the truth of teleology and, as such, the claim that Hegel’s philosophy is teleological is undermined by that philosophical project’s own genuinely systematic account of teleology.

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Notes

¹ To employ Hegel's technical vocabulary, that which is *an sich* governs its own process of maturation whereby it necessarily becomes *für sich* and, in its ultimate moment of consummation, inevitably reaching its telos, that which is *an sich* come into its own, *anundfürsichsein*.

² For a subtle and rigorous account of the relationship between Hegel and Aristotle, including the heritage of Aristotelian philosophy in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries in Germany, see Ferrarin (2001).

³ G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Weltgeschichte. Band I: Die Vernunft in der Geschichte*, ed. Johannes Hoffmeister (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1994 [1955]), 61. Note that this line is taken from the student notes, rather than Hegel's manuscript, that Georg Lasson included for his 1917 edition of this text. These notes are retained in Hoffmeister's edition.

⁴ All references to Hegel's work are included in the text according to the following scheme of abbreviation:

Enz. [1817] = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1817)*, ed. Wolfgang Bonsiepen & Klaus Grotzsch, GW, vol. 13.

Enz. [1827] = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1827)*, ed. Wolfgang Bonsiepen & Hans-Christian Lucas, GW, vol. 19.

Enz. [1830] = *Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse (1830)*, ed. Wolfgang Bonsiepen & Hans-Christian Lucas, GW, vol. 20.

GW = *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft in collaboration with the Nordrhein-Westfälischen (earlier Rheinisch-Westfälischen, 1968–1995). Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1968-).

Citations refer to the appropriate paragraph, indicated by the § sign, or to the volume and page number. All translations are my own.

⁵ For defences of this type of reading of logical life, see Düsing (1986: 276–89, esp. 280–85), Spahn (2007), Sell (2013) and Ng (2020: chapters 5–7).

⁶ The position outlined here seeks to develop the work done by Dieter Henrich on 'autonomous negation' in ways that challenge, which Henrich never explicitly has, the conventional teleological readings of the concept. For Henrich's rich and controversial account, see 1971, 1974, 1976 and 1978. Brady Bowman (2013): 48–54) provides an excellent account of Henrich's work on this issue.

⁷ Richard Dien Winfield—in his (2006: 138–40), and then again in his (2012: chapter 24)—notes the important distinction that Hegel observes between *Objektivität* and *Gegenständlichkeit*. The latter refers to the nature of the object (*Gegenstand*) of which a conscious subject is aware, while the former denotes the nature of an object (*Objekt*) as such, regardless of its relation to any type of consciousness or not.

⁸ In the transition into this section in the *WdL* [1816], which is found in the final paragraphs of the discussion of the disjunctive syllogism form, Hegel writes: ‘Therein the concept in general has been realized; more determinately, it has gained a kind of reality that is *objectivity*’ (*GW*: 12, 125). And in the first edition of the *Enz.* [1817]: ‘By this, the concept is completely realized and is, as this unity of its differences with itself, the *object*’ (*Enz.* [1817]: §140; cf. *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §193). In explicit acknowledgement of the oddity of this claim, Hegel proceeds to elaborate on this transition and the nature of objectivity and its rightful placement at this juncture of the conceptual development (cf. the even more extensive treatment of this issue in the Remark to §193 that was expanded for the second edition [1827] of the *Encyclopaedia* and retained in its third edition [1830]). He begins by drawing a comparison between objectivity and a prior moment in the Subjective Logic, the ‘first reality’, as he calls it, that of individuality, the ‘determinate determinate’, the ‘this’ (see *GW*: 12, 49–52), that marks the moment in which the unity of the concept is, at once, both completed as the fulfilment of the particularization of universality and lost in so far as individuality can be abstracted from this process and stand, seemingly, on its own. Hegel contends that what the unfolding of judgment-forms into syllogism-forms has now shown is that individuality (‘this externality’) cannot actually stand over against these forms, but instead, in the case finally of the disjunctive syllogism, that individuality just is nothing other than this form because the moments of the extremes (whether the major or the minor term), that is, of particularity and individuality, have been proved to be generated as the immanent differentiation of the objective universal, the middle. As such, the externality of the first reality, of the singular this, has thus been shown to be nothing other than a ‘*positedness*’, that is, it is a product of, and is thus dependent upon, the immanent particularization of the objective universal: ‘an *immediacy* that has emerged through the *sublation of the mediation*’ (*GW*: 12, 126). The syllogistic form then just is objectivity. Objectivity is, therefore, reality that has been shown to be what is posited in and through and out of the form of the immanent differentiation of the concept. On the issues that this raises, see Mure (1950: chapter 14); Fleischmann (1968: 281–88); Düsing (1976: 289–90); Biard et al. (1987: 239–54); Burbidge (2002: 225–31); Pippin (2019: 277–82) and Ng (2020: 220–29).

⁹ Two implications can be drawn from this line of argument, both of which importantly set the context for the analysis of teleology that brings this section to its culmination.

First, objectivity denotes one universe of objects and one process with three progressively more determinate layers or strata. Though we may often find ourselves speaking of mechanical objects, chemical objects, and teleological objects, and similarly of mechanical processes, chemical processes, and teleological processes, as though these objects and processes were distinct domains separate from one another, Hegel actually treats them, as he did with the subjective forms of concept, judgment and syllogism, as various ways in which the same set of objects and processes are related to one another and themselves and hence how they are determined or defined. Accordingly, it is more precise to speak of objects *in so far as* they are mechanical, chemical, and teleological and the process that produces them *in so far as* it is mechanical, chemical and teleological.

Second, as the objectivity of the concept, this set of objects and this process are all governed by the determinations of the concept: universality, particularity and individuality. That is to

say, each form of objectivity is a specific way in which universality, particularity and individuality define these objects and this process by virtue of the way in which they are related to one another. As a result, the set of objects and the process do not just incorporate syllogistic configurations (structures); they actually are nothing other than syllogisms.

¹⁰ Hegel warns us that the idea, as the ultimate truth and as the ultimate ground of actuality, must *not* be portrayed as ‘dead repose, as a mere *picture*, lifeless without impulse and movement, as a genius or number, or as an abstract thought’ (*GW*: 12, 177). What then is the idea’s proper determination?:

The *identity* of the idea itself with itself is one with the *process*; the thought that liberates actuality from the shine [*Scheine*] of purposeless alterability [*der zwecklosen Veränderlichkeit*] and transfigures it into *idea* must not represent this truth of actuality as a dead repose [*Ruhe*], as a mere *picture* [*Bild*], lifeless without impulse or movement, as a genius or number, or as an abstract thought; the idea, because of the freedom that the concept has attained in it, also has the most stubborn opposition within it; its repose consists in the assurance and certainty with which it eternally generates that opposition and eternally overcomes it, and in it itself comes together with itself [*in ihm mit sich selbst zusammengeht*]. (*GW*: 12, 177)

¹¹ In this sense, then, subjective purpose is ultimately nothing more than a ‘contingent determination’ that itself becomes, in turn, a means for the realization of other purposes and, as Hegel aptly puts it, ‘so on to *infinity*’ (*Enz*: [1827, 1830]: §211; cf. *Enz*: [1817]: §160).

¹² Hegel notes this same moment with two further formulations of the point:

In the completed purpose the means disappears because it would be simply and solely the objectivity immediately subsumed under that purpose, an objectivity that in the realized purpose is the turning back of the purpose into itself; further there also disappears with it mediation itself, as the relating of an external; it disappears into both the concrete identity of objective purpose, and into the same identity as abstract identity and immediacy of existence. (*GW*: 12, 170)

The movement of purpose has now attained this much, namely that the moment of externality is not just posited in the concept, the concept is not just an *ought* and a *striving*, but as a concrete totality is identical with immediate actuality. (*GW*: 12, 172)

¹³ For a useful guide to these issues, see Sell (2013). See also Stekeler-Weithofer (2004), Spahn (2007) and Englert (2017).

¹⁴ Hegel elaborates this corporeality of the living individual in terms of its *sensibility*, its capacity to sense or feel its entire corporeal structure, its *irritability*, its receptiveness and responsiveness to external stimuli, and finally, its *reproduction*, its self-maintenance by the physical regeneration of its organs (cf. *GW*: 12, 185–86; *Enz*: [1817]: §§165–67; *Enz*: [1827, 1830]: §§218–19).

¹⁵ Hegel develops the life-process in terms of the organism's needs, pains and feelings that it bears in relation to its extrinsic milieu (cf. *GW*: 12, 187–89).

¹⁶ I diverge here and in what follows from the recent natural kind essentialist interpretations of Hegel's account of genus. Broadly speaking, these readings hold that genera, for Hegel, are mind-independent universals that provide an objective, though non-hierarchical, ordering or structuring of reality or, at least, for several levels or groupings of beings in reality that, in turn, serves as the basis for genuine explanations of this reality. While I agree with the conceptual realist framework of such readings, they ultimately fail, on the view I will defend here, because they treat the concept as a static structure shared by various individuals, that is, as a class, rather than as itself a process of self-differentiation, an interpretation that I believe is better supported by the very textual evidence that proponents of this view so often cite.

For excellent representatives of this way of reading genus in Hegel, see Kreines (2008) and the revised version of the essay in his (2015: chapter 3) and Knappik (2016).

¹⁷ In the *Encyclopaedia*, Hegel identifies this essential relation of living beings to other living beings with *Geschlechtsdifferenz*; 'the difference of the sexes' (*Enz.* [1817]: §168; *Enz.* [1827, 1830]: §220).

It is worth noting, of course, that the term *Geschlecht* had and continues to have a wide spectrum of meanings and uses in German—sex, race, nation, class, species, family, lineage, branch, generation, stock, genre, type—but, given Hegel's discussion of reproduction through copulation that we explore in the following, it is certainly reasonable to take the sense here as designating sexual dimorphism. I do believe, however, that it remains an open question as to whether or not Hegel's analyses themselves actually commit him *exclusively* to sexual as opposed to asexual forms of reproduction. For an invaluable discussion of this issue, see Lindquist (2020).

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