

# The Logic of Life: Apriority, Singularity and Death in Ng's Vitalist Hegel

Sebastian Rand

The hope [...] is that animal creation might survive the wrong humanity has done to it, if not humanity itself, and bring forth a better species, one that finally succeeds.

—Adorno, *Minima Moralia* §74

In the 1990s, one prominent line of argument in debates around nonconceptual content made regular appeal to the social practices manifested in and inculcated by human communities of various kinds—especially those practices through which the community's norms themselves become the object of reflection and criticism.<sup>1</sup> Frequently this line of argument referred to the broader set of such practices using an expression found in Wittgenstein: 'form of life'.<sup>2</sup> This way of referring to social practices then dovetailed with increased attention to Aristotelian thinking about action, suggesting to many the idea that such social practices were best understood as the actualization of properly natural, animal powers in the individuals making up the communities in question.<sup>3</sup> One result of this shift visible in Hegel scholarship specifically has been a wave of attention lavished on Hegel's *Anthropology* as the locus of his attempt to think through the link between natural capacities and social norms.<sup>4</sup>

In her ambitious and insightful book,<sup>5</sup> Karen Ng makes a major contribution to expanding that wave beyond the *Anthropology*, presenting a historically founded interpretation of Hegel's *Science of Logic (SL)*<sup>6</sup> aimed at explaining the role of the concept of life in what Hegel calls 'the Idea', his candidate for the deepest and broadest context of any determinacy whatsoever.<sup>7</sup> Ng argues that for Hegel the concept of life is constitutive of that context by being constitutive not only of the subject of thinking but also of its object and of the relation between them, such that the determinacy articulated in the Idea, in all its guises, is most basically a living relation of life to life.<sup>8</sup> The argument comes in two parts. The first is a historical reconstruction of the development of the concept of purposiveness from Kant through Fichte and Schelling into Hegel's Jena period view that speculative identity, the deepest structure unifying thought and being, is life; a more elaborated version of this same concept of life then serves, according to Ng, as the deepest

form of unity in Hegel's mature logic.<sup>9</sup> The second is mostly a systematic reconstruction of that logic, though it touches on Spinoza's and Hölderlin's influence on Hegel and draws throughout on the earlier historical treatment.

Ng's interpretation is rich in historical and systematic insight, and her effort to centre the concept of life from *SL* (rather than from the *Philosophy of Nature* or the *Philosophy of Spirit*) as the key to Hegel's transformative appropriation of Kant and post-Kantian idealism is both provocative and productive.<sup>10</sup> This book deserves every bit of the attention it has received and will continue to receive; even readers unpersuaded by some of Ng's arguments will find much here to make them re-examine long-held assumptions about Hegel's mature system. That said, a critical review essay calls for criticism, and in what follows I focus mine on three topics joined to what I take to be the central claim of Ng's systematic reconstruction of *SL*: that if we grasp properly the function and structure of life as the first moment of the Idea, we must understand the Idea's subsequent moments—cognition and the absolute idea—as alterations *within* a stable unity established by and as life, rather than as alterations or transformations *of* life *into* some further, presumably more adequate unity. In other words, rather than being a mode in which the human surpasses the merely living, cognition is at bottom simply another activity of the living, and is thus subject to the constraints bearing on life itself in all its modes. Alone among the many challenging proposals in Ng's vitalist<sup>11</sup> interpretation of *SL*, this insistence that life is the stable context beyond which the Idea's further developments of cognition and the absolute Idea cannot go serves as both the culmination of the book's main argument and the key result it offers for subsequent work. It therefore deserves our special attention.

Ng begins the case for her interpretation with a historical reconstruction of earlier idealism. According to Ng, the unity within which the earlier elements of *SL*—the categories of being and essence, the conceptual, judgemental and syllogistic forms, and the varieties of objectivity—are bound in the Idea is a living, organic unity with roots in Kant's Critique of Teleological Judgement, where Kant transformed the various unities of the first *Critique*—the transcendental unity of apperception most prominently—through the concept of purposiveness.<sup>12</sup> The third *Critique* is a masterpiece of ambiguity, with Kant wavering between ascribing purposive unity to the object of cognition—in the special cases of the beautiful and the living—and to the subject of cognition—whether in its activity of reflection or in the systematic knowledge produced by that activity. Ng takes the post-Kantians to have raised this ambiguity to a principle, and she lays out a history of their effort to articulate purposive organic form as the most fundamental unity constitutive of subject, object and their relation. By interpreting Kant and the post-Kantians—particularly Fichte, Schelling and Hölderlin—as she does, Ng intends to show that they, too, saw life as the inescapable and

structurally unalterable context setting bounds on cognition and experience, thereby making Hegel's position as Ng understands it continuous with theirs.<sup>13</sup>

This history sets the stage for Ng to distinguish her systematic interpretation of *SL* from its two most prominent post-Kantian neighbours.<sup>14</sup> The first of these is the apperceptive interpretation, which identifies the transcendental unity of apperception as the controlling unity in Kant's system and thus understands Hegel's account of cognition in light of the transcendental deduction in the first *Critique* and the unity demonstrated there in and among the categories and forms of intuition.<sup>15</sup> The second is the intuitionist interpretation, which takes the unity characterizing the intuitive understanding imagined by Kant in the third *Critique* as Hegel's model for speculative identity.<sup>16</sup> Ng's insistence on the restricting and constraining function of life with respect to later moments of the Idea thus goes hand in hand with her criticism of the apperceptive and intuitionist views, which find the sought-for unity not in the Idea of life but in the subsequent development of the Idea into cognition (for the apperceptive view) and the absolute Idea (for the intuitionist view).

The attractions of the vitalist view are easy to discern in our age of impassioned appeals to lived experience, of the management of biological life as a matter of urgent social concern, and of the knowledge of that life (in biology, medicine, and the neurosciences) as a primary domain of authoritative expertise. A Hegel speaking directly to this fleshly humanity, offering us a new way to actualize it and assert its critical, liberatory power, is a Hegel we can readily hear. And for specialists attentive to the evolution of earlier debates about the unboundedness of the conceptual into more recent debates about the transformative function of rationality,<sup>17</sup> a Hegel who keeps cognition contained within a horizon set by the concept of life has much to say. But the challenges facing the view are equally easy to make out. First among them is the simple *prima facie* implausibility of any 'naturalizing' interpretation of idealism, especially Hegel's.<sup>18</sup> For Hegel clearly regards spirit as an advance upon nature, characterizing it as nature's negation; if life is something found in nature and spirit is the agent of cognition, it is hard to see how Hegel could give life the role Ng says he does. Beyond such doubts about whether her interpretation could work, there are grounds for concern if it does work: life, after all, is never life in general but always the life of this or that species of living thing, so that if life as specifically human life forms the horizon of all (our) understanding of the world, and the world itself is not simply human, the world as it truly is threatens to slip out of view.

I will restrict myself here to considering Ng's response to challenges of the first sort, which is to emphasize the specifically *logical* status of the concept of life in *SL*; only as the logical concept of life, she argues, can life have the constitutive, at once enabling and constraining, function Hegel gives it.<sup>19</sup> I will try to put some critical pressure on the vitalist interpretation by focusing in on three narrow

aspects of Ng's characterization of life's logical status. According to Ng, such logical status involves a priori status of some kind; my first set of critical comments will be about the meaning of 'a priori' in this context.<sup>20</sup> Ng further holds that life's logical status allows Hegel to use it to explain how conceptual thinking could be about concrete individuals, whose very individuality can seem to elude the supposed generality of the conceptual.<sup>21</sup> My second set of critical comments will focus on Ng's understanding of this individuality, with special attention to the relation between living individuality and logical singularity. Finally, on Ng's account, despite *SL* detailing a presumably logical transition from the Idea of life to the Idea of cognition, life and cognition share the same logical form.<sup>22</sup> My last set of critical comments will focus on whether such formal homogeneity is compatible with the role Hegel gives to the negating function of (logical) death in that transition.

### I. Life and Apriority

Ng stresses the link between the logical character of the concept of life in *SL* and its a priori status throughout her account. The most direct statement of her position can be found near the start of her detailed engagement with the Subjective Logic: 'Insofar as we are concerned with Hegel's treatment of life in the *Logic*, the determination of life at stake is categorical and a priori' (174).<sup>23</sup> Logic, it would seem, treats of necessary, constitutive elements, structures, and processes, and life, Ng tells us, is 'a necessary condition for reason a priori' (7) due to 'the constitutive import of life for self-consciousness' (8), which import it has 'insofar as it provides the necessary basis governing the actuality of all cognition' (56).<sup>24</sup> Now, in an interpretive context established by a focus on Kant, it is hardly surprising to encounter Kantian terminology, and Ng draws on such terminology—of apriority, but also of constitutivity, conditionedness, transcendentality, and so on—throughout her exposition of Hegel. We might perhaps wonder in a general sense about how suited Hegel's distinct insights are to capture in such terms. But even if we give in to Kantian urges some of the time, we have special reason to be wary of ascribing apriority to anything in *SL*, despite how common such ascription is.<sup>25</sup> For Hegel himself argues, right in the Introduction to *SL*, that the use of the a priori/a posteriori distinction in logic is not only fruitless but actively misleading. He concludes his argument, in both editions, unambiguously:

The objective logic is therefore the true critique of such [pure thought] determinations—a critique that considers them, not according to the abstract form of the a priori as opposed to the a posteriori, but in themselves according to their particular content. (*SL*: 42/5: 62)

Hegel thus warns readers of *SL* from the start to expect a doctrine in which the a priori/a posteriori distinction plays no role<sup>26</sup>—and he meets this expectation, not only in *SL* but across his entire corpus. In his published work from the *Phenomenology* on, Hegel uses ‘a priori’<sup>27</sup> sparingly, even counting passages ventriloquizing Kant,<sup>28</sup> in which passages he consistently minimizes its use relative to closely associated Kantian technical terms<sup>29</sup> while distancing himself from it rhetorically (e.g., through ironizing terms like ‘*sogeannte*’<sup>30</sup>). With a single exception,<sup>31</sup> he uses it directly only to attack opponents’ positions, precisely *for involving a priori claims or commitments*, as he does in targeting certain views in political philosophy,<sup>32</sup> aesthetics,<sup>33</sup> philosophy of history,<sup>34</sup> natural science<sup>35</sup> and Naturphilosophie.<sup>36</sup> We may well have reason in some cases to reject a criterion of fidelity to Hegel’s own understanding and use of technical terms, but his use pattern for this term, in the context of his explicit rejection of it, at least suggests that caution—not only in the use of the word but also in thinking of Hegelian logic as concerned with apriority at all—is in order.<sup>37</sup>

Ng herself has highlighted, in another context, the questionable usefulness of this term for understanding Hegel’s logical doctrine,<sup>38</sup> a fact hinting that something more than Kantian terminological autopilot lurks behind her choice to use it. The question is then about what sense she attaches to it, if not the Kantian one, and what her aim is in using it in that sense. She does not explain directly and in her own terms what she takes apriority to be. But she does appeal in two footnotes to the conception of a ‘material a priori’ developed by Jay Bernstein in his work on Adorno.<sup>39</sup> In the passages to which these footnotes are attached, Ng uses ‘a priori’ in the course of describing the normative force of the concept of life. In the first passage, her focus is on the normative relation Hegel thinks holds between a species concept and individuals of that species; this normative relation is articulated within, and thus makes up part of the content of, the concept of life. For Kant, she says, a living thing’s species concept ‘is something a priori’ just ‘insofar as it has power over what [that living thing] is and ought to be’; in Hegel the apriority operates at a higher level: ‘the logical concept of life is an a priori concept insofar as it provides the necessary basis governing the actuality of all cognition, expressing a normative power to shape both what cognition is and what it ought to be’ (56). In the Hegelian version of the claim, then, the a priori status of the logical concept of life doesn’t distinguish an abstract a priori (species-) concept from an a posteriori existent individual, but distinguishes the unrevisable, constraining vital context for cognition from the actuality of that cognition itself. In order to explain how we are to think of such a constraining power she points us to Bernstein’s claim that ‘is living’ is a material a priori predicate. But then rather than tying this sense of material apriority to Hegel’s claim about life and cognition, she ties it to Kant’s view of species and individual, writing that Bernstein’s material a priori ‘fit[s] Kant’s own description of a natural purpose’, according to which the species concept, as the

‘unity and form’ of the living individual, ‘is only ever materially manifest in actual [individuals], and has no self-sufficient existence independent of the actual lives of [those individuals]’ (56n53). Here, then, the emphasis in ‘material a priori’ is on ‘material:’ the normative force of the species concept with respect to the individual does not depend on that concept’s existing in some special normative realm but is rather operative only in and as the individual itself, and so is entirely material in that normative operation. How this lesson is to be transferred to the Hegelian case is unclear, since working by analogy it would seem to imply there that life (the locus of normative power) is only ever manifest in cognition (that over which it has normative power)—a claim Ng must surely deny unless she wants to recruit Hegel as a theorist of plant-thinking. A closer look at the relevant passage in Bernstein makes things even less clear when we read that “‘is living’ has an experiential content that, qua orientational, underlies but is not exhausted by its explicit conceptual content’ (Bernstein 2001: 303). Here again materiality, now as experiential content, is at the fore in a way that would seem to imply that the content of the logical concept of life is not derived genetically or by immanent deduction<sup>40</sup> but is rather experiential or empirical.<sup>41</sup> But Ng is clearly committed to denying this claim, since in her view ‘[w]hen Hegel writes that self-consciousness is “living”, this should [...] not be taken in a strictly empirical sense’ (117).

In the second passage drawing on Bernstein’s material a priori, Ng’s topic is the immediacy of life in Hegel’s story about infinity, life, desire, and the struggle for recognition.<sup>42</sup> Ng sees Hegel’s account pursuing two distinct argument methods: a transcendental argument yielding a strictly a priori claim about the living status of self-consciousness (105ff.) and a phenomenological argument yielding a weaker, but still a priori, claim about the living status of the not-I (114ff.).<sup>43</sup> Here the demonstration of apriority seems to be equivalent to a demonstration of ‘immediacy’ in Hegel’s technical sense: life is immediate on the subjective side because it is ‘a priori necessary for self-consciousness’s self-positing’, and it is immediate on the objective side ‘because we are affected by living objects such that the distinction between the living and the non-living strikes us immediately, and in a way that is neither exhausted by further conceptual mediation nor fully up to our control’ (113–14). Though distinguishable, these two sides are interdependent: to live is to enjoy, in virtue of ‘a certain passivity’, an affective, vital openness to the world that makes possible a thinking, cognitive openness to that world, but this lived openness can be actualized only when that world affords us ‘an intuition of [life’s] inner principle of activity’ out beyond ourselves (114).

As in the first passage, and despite her clear position elsewhere, here too Ng seems tempted by the idea that the logical concept of life is at least in part empirical: on the one hand, life is immediate because a priori necessary for a self-positing, and thus spontaneous and active, self-consciousness; but on the other that self-consciousness cannot be actual, cannot posit itself, unless it is also passive and

the very same a priori concept of life imposes itself upon it *qua* passive, or ‘strikes’ it. Thus ultimately the free, spontaneous self-positing self-consciousness is dependent on a given, imposed conceptual distinction it has no choice but to take up. Given such a description, we might be forgiven for thinking the term ‘a posteriori’ would fit better than ‘a priori’. But in what Ng calls ‘the best statement of this thesis’ (114n74) about how such imposition works, Bernstein clarifies the sense in which the content so imposed is a priori: ‘[w]hat makes the predicate [‘is living’] a priori is its controlling “all” our reactions’ (Bernstein 2001: 303).<sup>44</sup> Here the apriority has nothing to do with the origin of the distinction, and perhaps not even with its content, but with the scope of its validity: it controls all our vital responses, and so its apriority amounts to exceptionless universality and thus to immunity to revision as well.

With this link between the ‘a priori’ in ‘material a priori’ and unrevisability in place, we seem to be back on familiar Kantian ground—until we note the scare quotes Bernstein puts around ‘all’. They serve to weaken this exceptionlessness in line with life’s materiality, glossed by Bernstein in his own footnote as an ‘experience-dependence’ that renders the distinction between life and non-life ‘fragile’ in the face of distorting social forces (Bernstein 2001: 303n47). Thus in Bernstein’s version of it, the material a priori is not unrevisable but rather in need of protection from all-too-possible distorting and deforming revision.<sup>45</sup> At times, Ng seems to agree that vital normativity in both Kant and Hegel is something less than strictly universal and exceptionless. Of Kant she writes that although ‘the universality of [other] a priori concepts is strict and allows of no exceptions’ (30), purposiveness specifically ‘involves a weaker and different sense of necessity and normativity, one that allows for degrees of nonconformity’ (55).<sup>46</sup> But as in the earlier discussion of Kant’s natural purposiveness, so too in her discussion of Hegel she allows for nonconformity and weakness only in the relation between *this* genus and *this* individual, not in the higher (or deeper) relation between life or vitality itself, on the one hand, and the genus/individual relation as such, on the other. Thus Ng is happy saying that ‘[i]ndividuals are not only *not* exhaustively determined by nor deducible from their species-concept’ but ‘have positive powers of determination with respect to their species concept and can express [it] in unique ways that can transform its substance and boundaries’ (204).<sup>47</sup> Yet this revisability, however radical it may be in a concrete case, is still contained within the framework of the concept of life as establishing the form of all genus-individual relations, even the revisionary ones. It is to that framework that Ng’s own sense of apriority—which thus seems not to be Bernstein’s, despite her citation of and praise for him—applies, ascribing to that framework the very exceptionlessness denied to the determinate species-concept by both Bernstein and Ng herself. The living individual can alter its genus, but not its status as living: all the variation and alteration it is capable of, whether merely vital or cognitive or



otherwise, happens within the bounds, within the normative limits, of the concept of life.

Ng is very clear on this point, writing that '[a]lthough both the distinction between life and death and the concept of the species will undergo subsequent transformations', nonetheless '*qua* transcendental conditions, these terms will also retain their original meanings and content as defined initially in the relation to mere life'. As a result, 'the immediacy of life *qua* a priori condition is retained' in such transformation and its content 'cannot be redefined by fiat' (117). By calling what is ruled out here 'redefin[ition] by fiat', Ng contrasts it with a redefinition she allows, the redefinition of the genus by the individual (211),<sup>48</sup> indicating that what she wishes to rule out is not just a revision in light of life-experience but a nonempirical, non-experiential transformation, which could seemingly only be the dialectical transformation logical life appears to operate on itself in becoming cognition. In this sense, then, it would seem not only that apriority as Ng understands it has a very narrow function in *SL*, but that life itself is the *only* a priori concept in *SL*—a claim Ng comes very close to making when she writes that unlike other forms of immediacy, 'the immediacy of life is not an immediacy that can be finally overcome or ever fully "sublated" in the process and actualization of knowing' because of 'its structural role in Hegel's philosophical method, which makes the immediacy of life different from other guises of immediacy that show up in other contexts of discussion' (79).

It should be clear by this point just how different the apriority Ng attributes to Hegel's concept of life really is from both the Kantian conception of the a priori and from Bernstein's material apriority. This vital apriority has nothing to do with our epistemic access to the concept by way of the proper mode of argument (whether this is transcendental, phenomenological, genetic or immanent-deductive), for only life is a priori in the relevant sense, but by Ng's own lights life is not the only concept arrived at in these ways. And contrary to appearance, life's apriority does not flow from its logical status, since many other terms of *SL* have logical status while remaining open to dialectical transformation and sublation. Life, then, is here the primitively immediate and inalterable, the one Hegelian concept that is immune to dialectical transformation — the one, we might be tempted to say, that itself turns out to be speculatively dead.

Ng has, perhaps, good reasons to want to immunize life in this way. For one thing, if the logical developments to which life is subjected in its transition into cognition turn out to be oppressive, distorting, or otherwise problematic, a life that remains necessarily and forever immune to such developments seems to offer a source of indefeasible critical power against them, whereas a life vulnerable to sublation may ultimately be defenceless against deforming transformations. The aim of drawing upon life as a critical resource against 'rationalized reason' motivates Bernstein's claim that 'is living' is a material a priori predicate, and it may be that



Ng's reading of Hegel is oriented at some level toward giving deeper, more powerful Hegelian grounding to such a resource. Yet it is not clear that a life immune to the depredations of rationalized reason could be such a resource: by constraining and restricting such reason, it denies that that reason could ever pose a threat to it, and it even turns out to have provided all along the very framework within which that reason operates its distortions. Perhaps the choice to name life's immunity to rationalized reason with a term—'a priori'—borrowed from the autodiscourse of that reason itself is a sign that something remains to be worked out here. It seems at least to mark a missed opportunity to develop a new vocabulary for thinking through the questions of normative priority, primitivity and alterability Ng's interpretation provokes and explores.

## II. Individual and Singular

Beyond what she has to say about the apriority of life, Ng offers an engrossing account of the normative relation between the genus or species (*Gattung*) and the living individual.<sup>49</sup> The concept of individuality developed in that account is central to Ng's interpretation, and especially to one of her most innovative interpretive proposals: that Hegel aims to provide, within the Idea of life, an analogue to the Kantian schematism.<sup>50</sup> In Kant the schematism allows concepts of the understanding, possessed of the logical form of universality, to be brought to unity with the deliverances of sensibility, possessed of the form of singularity.<sup>51</sup> But Hegel, Ng tells us, does not accept the Kantian picture of a sheerly given sensible array of spatiotemporally ordered singulars, and so does not need to solve that problem. Rather, '[r]ejecting Kant's view in which judgment involves the problem of enjoining [*sic*] two heterogeneous elements (concepts and intuitions, universals and particulars, mediated generality and immediate singularity)', Hegel proposes a different model, according to which cognition is the unity of two distinct 'modes of judgment: one that is immediate and primitive... and one that is mediated and self-conscious' (257).<sup>52</sup> The primitive, immediate mode—life as 'a form of activity present in all living things' (257)—is presupposed by and provides the given content for the developed, mediated mode—cognition.<sup>53</sup> Since the concept of life governs this presupposed content, life functions as an 'a priori schema' that 'enables objects to be immediately given and present to subjects, not only as a purely uncategorized *this*'—that is: not merely as a bare singular representation in Kant's sense—'but always already as a concrete individual' (258). Thus 'the relevant immediacy for cognition' or 'what is immediately 'given' in cognition' is not a bare this but 'a synthetic unity that is the product of a primitive activity of judging', the activity of life 'manifest in all living things' (259).

At first glance, however, Hegel so interpreted does not bypass, eliminate, or solve the problem the schematism is designed to address: in so far as what appears in cognition as the immediately given is the product of the primitive vital activity of judging, it is mediated by that activity, and we are therefore faced with the question of the nature of that activity, its starting point, and its starting materials. In other words, Ng's Hegel seems simply to have pushed the unity-of-heterogeneous-elements problem down the line, from cognition to life, so that now Hegelian life, rather than Kantian apperceptive cognition, transforms the manifold of singulars into a spatiotemporally ordered, conceptually articulated totality. Ng is quick to deny this apparent implication of her interpretation, arguing that 'even at the level of mere life'—that is, at the level of the primitive, vital activity—'objects are not given to subjects as entirely uncategorized *thises*' (259). Rather, the *thises* encountered by the living individual are always-already categorized not in 'objective' terms but by being 'shaped minimally and immediately by the *Gattung*-concept of the judging subject' (258–59). On this picture, in the primitive vital mode of judging, a '*this* is always already a *this* to be avoided or pursued, a *this* to be eaten' (259) and so on—in other words a *this* categorized by being brought into relation with the vital ends and functions of the living thing. And since the life-processes treated by Hegel in *SL* articulate the form of these ends, they also articulate in very general terms the ways such categorization can occur.<sup>54</sup>

Yet as Ng herself characterizes Hegel's account of the vital mode of judgement, Hegel conceives here of a 'manifold [...] presented by the a priori form of the activity of life' and of 'the unity that logical life brings to the manifold' (259), again suggesting that the activity of life begins with an array of undetermined singulars not themselves already unified—and thus also suggesting that Hegel's proposal here does not abandon the Kantian problem after all. The difference between the unity brought to the manifold by Hegelian life and that brought to it by Kantian apperception (or Hegelian cognition) may be significant, in that the latter involves complex and fine-grained concepts while the former involves mere vital ends and their associated processes. But pointing to that difference does not alter the underlying conception of a manifold of singulars in need of unity, and that conception is what brings in the basic Kantian problem. Ng seems to recognize the structural analogy here when she characterizes the life-processes Hegel articulates in *SL* as 'the source of an immediate, unconscious, synthetic unity of the manifold, an immediate unity of the Concept and objectivity' (261), a unity through which 'even the most immediate and singular representation of an object is always already given as minimally shaped by *the* Concept' (259), precisely because the 'three processes [of life] reflect the three moments of the Concept as individual, particular, and universal' (261). That is, with the characterization of the primitive activity of life in terms of such a *logical* synthesis, Ng seems explicitly to bring the Kantian problem of heterogeneity of form back into the vitalist picture.

But if that is how Ng is interpreting Hegel here, then a number of questions arise; I will focus here as in the previous section on an apparently terminological problem. Ng's account of the systematic function of the immediate judgement of life as delivering content to cognition is consistently expressed in a way that runs together two items carefully kept separate by Hegel: singularity (*Einzelheit*) or the singular (*Einzelne*) and individuality (*Individualität*) or the individual (*Individuum*).<sup>55</sup> In Kant, singularity is the form of the deliverances of sensibility, of intuitions, and so sharply distinguished from the forms of conceptual representation, which are varieties of universality.<sup>56</sup> But on this point Hegel departs sharply from Kant's doctrine, regarding singularity as a logical, conceptual form no more mysterious or inaccessible to discursive thought than any other; hence singularity appears alongside universality and particularity in his discussion of conceptual form and as an element of judgemental and syllogistic form as well.<sup>57</sup> In fact, Hegel argues in his discussion of conceptual forms that each universal has, just in virtue of being whatever universal it is and not some other, not only universal form but singular form as well.<sup>58</sup> For Hegel, in other words, far from requiring a vital synthesis for their unity, universal and singular are always-already united: universality is unintelligible without singularity and vice-versa. For someone committed to such dialectical unity there could be no such thing as a manifold of singulars requiring, but lacking, unity with the universal. If the dialectical unity of the singular, particular, and universal is always-already in place, we do not require the life-process of the formation and maintenance of a living individual (or a mysterious process of schematization, or a self-conscious process of apperception) to bring such unity about.

The conflation of singularity and individuality not only obscures the way in which singularity has already been dialectically united with universality and particularity in the treatment of conceptual form, but also obscures the independent significance of Hegel's logical development of living individuality (the only sort of individuality he discusses in *SL*). As Ng recognizes,<sup>59</sup> individuality properly so called is concrete unity: the individual is not merely the singular but a unity of universal, particular and singular, a this with particular features united in the universality of its genus-form. What Hegel's discussion of the life processes show us is, first, his conception of what such a unity looks like and, second, his conception of how, when realized, that conceptual unity of universality, particularity and singularity transforms itself into another unity of universality, particularity and singularity. The task in such a discussion is not to explain how universality, particularity and singularity get together in the first place, which has already been covered earlier in *SL*. It rather assumes their dialectical unity and discusses the forms this takes when the concept and its realization are unified in the Idea.

Eventually, the living individual's unity of universality, particularity and singularity, when elaborated in the Idea as a realization of the concept of life, transforms itself, yielding the transition to cognition. I summarize this process in more detail in

the next section, but for now it is enough to see that the individual that characterizes the unity of the Idea in cognition is not the living individuality that realizes the concept of life in immediate singularity, but the individuality that emerges as the realization of the genus, and who thus counts as an existent universal, or self-consciousness as the ‘we that is I and I that is we’ (*PbG*: ¶177/127). This transformation of the inner logical structure of individuality falls out of view if we cannot appeal to the distinction between singularity and individuality to articulate that transformation; without that distinction, a phrase like ‘singular individuals’ (*SL*: 688/6: 486), for instance, shows up as a simple pleonasm, rather than as a carefully deployed combination of technical terms with highly determinate function in their place.

Ng is surely correct to emphasize life’s status as the first moment of the Idea and what that means for the relation between cognition and the sorts of inner and outer sense made available to the cognizing subject through its body and the body’s processes. But if we want to avoid a Hegel who simply pushes the problem of the Kantian schematism down to the level of the body, we have to see how his development of singularity early in the Subjective Logic blocks Kant’s problem from arising in the first place. We can see this, for instance, in theoretical cognition’s dependence on the vital process of assimilation: cognition here does not invent a new, non-bodily mode of engagement with the world but imbues the body’s assimilative capacities with a different logical form.<sup>60</sup> If we keep the logical structures here clearly in view, we are freed to see life not as the locus of a first but nonetheless unrevisable unity of universality, particularity and singularity, but as just one way their dialectical unity transforms itself through the mismatch between concept and its realization at each stage of the Idea.

In the case of life, Hegel names the realization of one of the mismatches driving the Idea’s self-transformation ‘death’, and it is to the role of death—or its absence—in Ng’s account of that transformation to which I now turn for my last set of comments.

### III. Cognition and Death

Although Ng understands the development of *SL* up to the Idea as one in which the deficiencies of earlier moments ‘drive the Logic toward a subsequent thought determination that is meant to overcome the limitation of the previous determination’ (182), she also argues, as we have seen, that once the unity of the Idea of life has been attained, later developments—the Idea of cognition and the absolute Idea—are not driven by deficiencies in the unity of life but are rather constrained and limited by that unity, so that in the case of cognition, there is no advance in logical form beyond life but only a modification within it.<sup>61</sup> One way Ng articulates the

authority of life for cognition is by affirming that life and cognition have the same logical form;<sup>62</sup> another way she does it is by denying apparently opposed claims. She writes, for instance, that ‘life is not [...] ultimately overcome or fully sublated by self-conscious cognition’ (9), that ‘the immediacy of life is not an immediacy that can be finally overcome or even fully “sublated” in the process and actualization of knowing’ (79), that life cannot ‘simply be redefined by fiat’ (117), and that cognition does not entail ‘an overcoming, an erasure, or even a complete transformation of the form of life’ (274).

Readers comfortable with Hegel’s concept of sublation may wonder who Ng means to push back against here. After all, while many things are sublated (or sublata themselves) in Hegel’s system, their sublation includes, by definition, their preservation, so that for Hegel, anyway, nothing is ever completely transformed or finally overcome, and certainly not ‘simply redefined by fiat’. Seen from that vantage point, what Ng says here is unobjectionable: life is sublated by cognition, but there is no reason to think that such sublation would result in life’s refutation, elimination, or erasure. But it turns out that Ng does not have this sort of bland claim about sublation in mind; her denials are not meant to elucidate Hegel’s concept of sublation. Nor, despite appearances, are they meant to assert that life is immune to complete transformation. They are rather meant to assert that life is completely immune to transformation, ‘due to its structural role in Hegel’s philosophical method, which makes the immediacy of life different from other guises of immediacy that show up in other contexts of discussion’ (79). What matters here, then, is something specific to the Idea, and however things stand with Ng’s views on apriority and the need for a Hegelian analogue to the Kantian schematism, she is entirely right in the general sense that something significant changes in Hegel’s mode of argument when he gets to the Idea. But that significant change involves not the abandonment of dialectical transformation but a transformation of that transformation: whereas in earlier arguments, the deficiency driving the argument was internal to the determination under consideration itself, in the Idea, the deficiency driving things forward is no longer internal to the concept but arises in the gap between the concept and its realization. This gap opens up neither because the concept is internally contradictory nor because the realization is partial or defective, but because the process of realization gives rise to new forms not present in the original concept.<sup>63</sup> The development of the Idea then occurs when the original concept is transformed in response to the shape taken by its realization.

Just this sort of development drives the transformation of life into cognition and makes of that transformation a genuine alteration of life, rather than a modification within it. The concept of life begins, as Ng emphasizes, as immediate, but right away its realization in a living individual active through the life process results in that individual’s positive, productive self-mediation, and this self-mediating

realization drives a transformation of that concept. The second, transformed concept of life is then realized through the living individual's participation in the genus process, which realization is mediated by and with other individuals, including a new individual produced by that process. The concept of life must therefore be transformed once more, to accommodate a living individuality that is at once immediate, self-mediating, and mediated by and with other individuals. This third transformed concept of life is at first realized in the serial production or begetting [*Begattung*] of such individuals. Such a realization 'is only repetition and infinite progression, in which [the Idea] does not emerge from the finitude of its immediacy', and in this sense, this realization is a 'return to [life's] first concept' (*SL*: 688/6: 486) in so far as the series of begotten living individuals is a series of realizations of that first concept. 'But', says Hegel, this return 'also has the higher side, that the Idea has not only undergone the mediation of its processes internally to immediacy'—that is, has not only seen its realization change in a way that brought it back to its original shape, and thus to its original concept—'but precisely thereby has sublated this immediacy and raised itself to a higher form of its existence' (*SL*: 688/6: 486).

In order to explain how this sublation works, Hegel points to a feature so far left out of his account of the realization of the third, transformed concept of life: death, as the death of the individuals through which the new individual is sexually reproduced. In Hegel's initial account of sexual reproduction, he focused on the positive side of the sublation constitutive of sexual reproduction, regarding the offspring, the parents' 'realized identity' (*SL*: 687/6: 485), as the realization of that sublation. But now he points to the negative aspect of sublation, saying that in sexual reproduction 'the singular individuals mutually sublimate their indifferent, immediate existence and perish in this negative unity'. That is, the fully adequate realization of the third, transformed concept of life requires realizing not only the positive side of sublation *qua* the newly begotten individual, but the negative side of sublation as well, *qua* the death of the parents. But in so far as the realization of life as the *Gattungsprozeß* requires such serial production and negation, it has no adequate realization in immediate existence at all: 'in begetting, the immediacy of living individuality dies out [*erstirbt*]', so that the concept of life must now be transformed a final time to accord with this negation and its implications. But this last transformation requires a radical alteration in the logical form of the concept in question: while the Idea of life is 'essentially the singular [*Einzelne*]' (*SL*: 678/6: 473), in the realization of this final transformation of life, the Idea 'has given itself a *reality*, which is *itself simple universality*', and so the Idea has become 'the universal that has universality as its determinacy and existence—the Idea of cognition' (*SL*: 688/6: 486–87).

If this summary of the transition from life to cognition is correct, then we cannot hold, as Ng does, that cognition and life share a single logical form (beyond

their both being forms of the Idea).<sup>64</sup> Cognition develops out of a mismatch between the concept of life and its realization, a mismatch which drives the logical transformation from the living individual as a singular existence governed by a universal *Gattung* to cognition as a universal existence governed by a universal *Begriff*.<sup>65</sup> As Ng says, in this process life is not overcome, erased or redefined by fiat, but her story omits the fact that through its realization life transforms itself in a way that affects each component of its logical structure, up to and including the self-negation of its essentially singular existence in death.

## Conclusion

In these critical comments I have raised what I take to be well-founded concerns about some important commitments Ng takes on in the course of arguing for the culminating claim of her vitalist interpretation of *SL*, namely that in Hegel's logical doctrine, the Idea of life provides a set of constraints on cognition that are fixed, unrevisable in light of experience, and immune to dialectical transformation. In the place of these commitments I would argue instead for an interpretation still oriented toward the distinct unity at work in the Idea, but stripped of reference to the a priori/a posteriori distinction, articulated with careful attention to the singularity/individuality distinction, and centring the self-transformation of life into cognition through the living individual's negative relation to its moment of singularity. Such a picture would aim to show that in the Idea itself the vitalist, apperceptive and intuitionist interpretations of the unity of thought and being are united, and so would show that life constrains cognition not by being a fixed foundation but by being an ineliminable starting point. But no matter how far such a picture diverged from Ng's own, it would also clearly be indebted to it, just as my criticisms above, whatever their merit, should be taken as a confession of how engaging and appealing Ng's interpretation is.

**Sebastian Rand**  
Georgia State University, USA  
[srand@gsu.edu](mailto:srand@gsu.edu)

## Notes

---

<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Pinkard 1994.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., McDowell 1996.

<sup>3</sup> See again McDowell 1996 but also Thompson 2008, among others, for the increasing importance of Aristotelian vitalism.



<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Pinkard 2012 and Khurana 2017.

<sup>5</sup> Ng 2020. Page references in this essay lacking other citation are to Ng's book.

<sup>6</sup> Abbreviations used from here on:

- A* = Hegel, *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975)/*Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III* (= *TWA* 15).
- BS* = Hegel, *Berliner Schriften* (= *TWA* 11).
- DS* = Hegel, *The Difference Between Fichte's and Schelling's Systems of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1977)/'Differenz des Fichte'schen und Schelling'schen Systems der Philosophie', in Hegel, *Jenaer kritische Schriften* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).
- EL* = Hegel, *The Encyclopedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Gaerets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften I* (= *TWA* 8). References to this work are by section number, followed by 'A' for 'Addition' and 'R' for 'Remark'.
- EPN* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften II* (= *TWA* 9). References to this work are by section number, followed by 'A' for 'Addition' and 'R' for 'Remark'.
- EPS* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971)/*Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften III* (= *TWA* 10). References to this work are by section number, followed by 'A' for 'Addition' and 'R' for 'Remark'.
- GW* = Hegel, *Faith and Knowledge*, trans. W. Cerf and H. S. Harris (Albany NY: SUNY Press, 1977)/'Glauben und Wissen oder die Reflexionsphilosophie der Subjectivität, in der Vollständigkeit ihrer Formen, als Kantische, Jacobische, und Fichtesche Philosophie', in Hegel, *Jenaer kritische Schriften* (Hamburg: Meiner, 2015).
- HW* = Hegel, *Heidelberg Writings: Journal Publications*, trans. B. Bowman and A. Speight (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009)/*Nürnberger und Heidelberger Schriften 1808–1817* (= *TWA* 4).
- IWL* = Fichte, 'First' Introduction to the *Wissenschaftslehre*', in *Introductions to the Wissenschaftslehre and Other Writings*, trans. D. Breazeale (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1994)/'Erste Einleitung in die Wissenschaftslehre', in *Zur theoretischen Philosophie I [Fichtes Werke, Bd. 1]*, ed. I. H. Fichte (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1971).
- KdU* = Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. P. Guyer and E. Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000)/*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, ed. K. Vorländer (Hamburg: Meiner, 1990). References to this work are to the 'Akademie' pagination, followed by the Meiner edition.
- KrV* = Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998)/*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, ed. J. Timmermann (Hamburg: Meiner, 1998). References to this work are to the standard A/B pagination scheme.
- MW* = Hegel, *Miscellaneous Writings*, ed. John Stewart (Evanston IL: Northwestern University Press, 2002).

*PbG* = Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. T. Pinkard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes*, ed. H.-F. Wessels and H. Clairmont (Hamburg: Meiner, 1988). References to the English translation are by paragraph number, while references to the German are by page number.

*PW* = Hegel, *Political Writings*, trans. H.B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

*RPh* = Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991)/*Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (= *TWA* 7). References to this work are by section number, followed by ‘A’ for ‘Addition’ and ‘R’ for ‘Remark’.

*SL* = Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. G. Di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)/*Wissenschaft der Logik* (= *TWA* 5 & 6).

*TWA* = Hegel, *Werke*, ed. E. Moldenhauer and K. Michel (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1986).

*VGP* = Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (London: Kegan Paul, 1894)/*Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie* (= *TWA* 18–20).

*VP* = Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (London: George Bell, 1902)/*Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Geschichte* (= *TWA* 12).

<sup>7</sup> ‘The Idea represents Hegel’s mature and fully developed position with respect to this ‘common root’ [of concept and intuition], becoming the primary term of art and framework for the final presentation of his philosophical system’ (250); the core claim is that this root is not found in the Idea in general, but in the Idea of or as life: ‘The logical form of activity of life... is the *schema* of reality in which Concept and objectivity are in immediate unity’ (253).

<sup>8</sup> ‘The *Gattung* [i.e., the genus, species] or life-form of the judging subject is the objective determinateness [...] providing the context for the realization of these powers [of inner and outer sense] in accordance with the unity of the Concept [...]. In providing the schema of reality in which Concept and objectivity are immediately manifest in their unity and division, the Idea of life replaces Kant’s theory of intuition and offers an alternative account of the ‘two stems’ of knowledge that [...] provid[e] content and constraint for thought’ (254); ‘The logical processes of life first *realize* cognition’s forms, yet they likewise also *restrict* them—that is, limit them to conditions that lie outside cognition (namely, in life)’ (258).

<sup>9</sup> Ng does not extend the historical orientation of the first part to her treatment of Hegel himself in the second part, and so discusses neither the changes to the Doctrine of Being in the second (partial) edition of *SL*, nor those to the Doctrine of Essence and to the Subjective Logic in the various editions of *EL*. Given the direct relevance of those changes to her chosen themes (of life, most centrally, but also of modality), it would be helpful to hear her views about how they relate to her interpretation.

<sup>10</sup> For another recent interpretation that centres the same themes in a very different way, see Kreines 2015.

<sup>11</sup> I use ‘vitalist’ here as a simple name, not meant to link Ng’s interpretation to any other philosophical view, position, or school.

<sup>12</sup> This is the topic of Chapter Two; on the question of the continuity exhibited across the three *Critiques*, see 42. Although exemplarity plays a major role in her understanding of Hegel's concept of life (204–5; 246), Ng forswears discussion of Kant's treatment of exemplarity in the Critique of Aesthetic Judgement; I, for one, would have liked to hear her view on Kant's related claim that the judgement of taste is always singular (*KdU*: 285/135, 289/139).

<sup>13</sup> See pp. 5–6 for a brief summary of Ng's reading of figures between Kant and Hegel; the main argument is found in Chapters 3 and 5.

<sup>14</sup> Although most every interpretation of Hegel recognizes Kant's enormous influence, not all of them take Hegel to be best understood by emphasizing the continuity, in spirit if not in letter, between his project and Kant's; only the latter are 'post-Kantian' interpretations in the sense I am after here.

<sup>15</sup> This view is advanced by, among others, Robert Pippin, who in Pippin 2019 restates the position originally laid out in his Pippin 1989 in a way now focused not on the transcendental but on the metaphysical deduction, and emphasizing Hegel's debt to Aristotle, a figure practically unmentioned in the earlier book. Despite these significant and illuminating changes, his position remains emphatically apperceptive in the relevant sense. See pp. 11 ff. for Ng's take on Pippin; see also note 38 below.

<sup>16</sup> See, e.g., Sedgwick 2012; see Ng 2020: 14 ff. for Ng's summary of this view and further references.

<sup>17</sup> See Boyle 2016 and Boyle 2012; see also Thompson 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Ng claims that Hegel 'naturalizes' the terms of his theory (265). 'Vitalizes' may be a more precise expression in the context of Ng's recognition of the exclusion of nature from *SL*, and of the stark systematic distinction Hegel draws between logical life, natural life, and spiritual life (*SL*: 677/6: 470).

<sup>19</sup> See p. 277 for Ng's response to the second sort of challenge, which she calls the charge of 'species-solipsism'.

<sup>20</sup> See below for a sampling of relevant passages; the index entry under 'a priori' is remarkably complete. Ng's use of the term is not tightly regulated, grammatically: it usually functions as an adjective, most often modifying 'concept' (but also 'schematism' and other nouns), though she uses it adverbially and as a noun as well. I follow her relatively unregulated use here.

<sup>21</sup> See pp. 200–201 for an initial statement of this worry; see Chapter 7 for her discussion of the logical concept of life as the solution to this problem.

<sup>22</sup> 'The Idea of life and the Idea of cognition are indeed *not* heterogeneous' (275), in so far as 'judgments of life and judgments of cognition have the same logical form' (276).

<sup>23</sup> The contrast is between such a logical concept of life and (presumably empirical) others we might find in *EPN* and *EPS*. See note 18 above.

<sup>24</sup> Ng seems to hold that beyond the 'genesis argument' (149) or 'immanent deduction' (160) by which Hegel arrives at the logical, and so a priori, concept of life in *SL*, there are other available paths to a priori status, such as that pursued in *PbG*, which contains a 'transcendental argument, which argues that life is a necessary condition of self-consciousness, not as a matter of empirical, causal, or natural necessity, but as a matter of a priori necessity' (104). This argument goes

beyond the constitution of the self-conscious subject to the constitution of its object: ‘Hegel is thus claiming that as a matter of transcendental, a priori necessity, the appropriate not-I that opposes itself to the I [...] is not an *Anstoß* [as in Fichte] but life’ (107), such that ‘the unity of the objects of experience afforded by the unity of self-consciousness is thus thoroughly underwritten by the concept of life as a matter of a priori necessity’ (111). The lines between such argumentative paths to apriority are blurred by her later claim that in *PbG* itself the concept of life is ‘a logical, non-empirical concept of life, with the status of something a priori’ (120).

<sup>25</sup> Pippin is entirely (and unfortunately!) correct in claiming that in contemporary Anglophone scholarship, ‘[t]hat the *Logic* is a work of a priori philosophy is hardly controversial’ (Pippin 2019: 5). See note 37 below for a divergent, more historically grounded view.

<sup>26</sup> Technically the quoted passage banishes the a priori/a posteriori distinction only from the Objective Logic, leaving it valid for the Subjective Logic, home of the concept of life. But Hegel makes no appeal to the distinction anywhere in *SL*, and in any case our concern here is with Ng’s claim that the apriority of the concept of life is part and parcel of its logical status *simpliciter*.

<sup>27</sup> I include here ‘a priori’ and its cognates, but not ‘a posteriori’, which appears much less frequently.

<sup>28</sup> *SL*: 40ff./5: 59ff., 72ff./5: 100ff.; *EL*: §41.

<sup>29</sup> For a relative indication we can count the occurrences in those works of ‘a priori’ (total: 45) and of ‘synthetic’ (total: 164), the second being a Kantian term of art frequently found alongside ‘a priori’ but one which, unlike ‘a priori’, Hegel transformatively appropriates for his own systematic use. Pippin (2019: 5n4) argues that we should not hesitate to ascribe apriority to Hegel’s claims, in part because ‘he is not shy in his praise of Kant for correctly formulating the problem of pure thinking as the problem of synthetic a priori judgments’. But what goes unnoticed here is that while Hegel transformatively appropriates the Kantian terminology of ‘synthesis’ and ‘judgement’ by means of a dialectical critique of the relevant Kantian doctrines in the *SL*, he provides no such critique of the Kantian doctrine of apriority in his mature works (and only suggests one early in the Jena period; see note 37 below).—The above count was produced searching the electronic edition of *TWA* for “\*priori\*” and “\*synthe\*”, excluding false positives and hits from texts outside the published works from *PbG* on.

<sup>30</sup> For the ironizing strategy, see *EL*: §41; *EPS*: §552R; the Jacobi review (*HW*: 15/441); *PbG*: ¶102/73; and a similar use at *VPG*: 67/87. For a similar strategy in which ‘a priori’ is paired with a term lacking its subjectivist, transcendental connotations, see *SL*: 71/5: 100: ‘The immanent synthesis, synthesis a priori’ and *EL*: §40: ‘Synthetic a priori judgments (i.e. original relations of opposed terms)’.

<sup>31</sup> This exception is found in an *Anmerkung* in the Introduction to *EL*, where he asserts that ‘the in-itself reflected and therefore in-itself mediated *immediacy* of thinking (the *aprioristic*) is *universal-ity*’, and then later that philosophy gives the content of empirical science ‘the most essential shape of the *freedom* (of the aprioristic) of thought’ (§12R). Both of these parenthetical (and adjectival) occurrences of ‘a priori’ seem to be appositives, whose function is to explain Hegel’s point by

drawing on imperfect but more familiar Kantian vocabulary Hegel otherwise eschews, and so they provide only shaky grounds for attributing any robust commitment to apriority to him.

<sup>32</sup> *RPB*: §274R; *EPS*: §552R; the Reform Bill Essay (*PW*: 235/BS 84); see similar use at *VPG*: 383/444.

<sup>33</sup> No published uses but see *A*: 1018/297, 1119/426 for instances in the compiled lectures.

<sup>34</sup> The Solger review (*MW*: 365/BS 221); the Görres review (*BS*: 494); see similar uses in *VPG*: (11/22–23 (but note the English here translates an older reading of the MS which has ‘Autoritäten’ rather than the correct ‘Aprioritäten’), 557 (this passage is not included in the translation)).

<sup>35</sup> *PbG*: ¶274/185; see similar use at *VGP*: 296–97/19: 319.

<sup>36</sup> *EPN*: §278R, §350R; see similar use at *VGP*: 59/ 18: 79.

<sup>37</sup> There is also a historical argument for avoiding this distinction, at least in its familiar Kantian sense, since it undergoes a radical, if seldom discussed, alteration in the hands of Fichte, before being further radicalized by Schelling. According to Fichte in the ‘First Introduction’, in ‘a full-blown idealism, *a priori* and *a posteriori* are not two different things, but are one and the same thing [...] distinguished from each other only in terms of the different means one employs in order to arrive at each’ (*IWL*: 32/447). Yet Hegel’s own view tends more toward dissolution than such dialectical critique; see, e.g., *GW*: 78/333: ‘Reason has to be *a priori* and *a posteriori*, identical and non-identical, in absolute unity’, and *GW*: 80/335: ‘For the root judgment, or duality, is in it as well, and hence the very possibility of *aposteriority*, which in this way ceases to be absolutely opposed to the *a priori*, while the *a priori*, for this reason, also seems to be fundamentally identical. We will touch later on the still purer idea of an intellect that is at the same time a *posteriori*, the idea of an intuitive intellect as the absolute middle’. Compare *DS*: 24/106, 36/121–22. Adorno seems to have this history in mind when he writes that ‘[t]he idea that the *a priori* is also the *a posteriori*, an idea that was programmatic in Fichte and was then fully elaborated by Hegel, is not an audacious piece of bombast; it is the mainspring of Hegel’s thought: it inspires both his criticism of a grim empirical reality and his critique of a static apriorism’ (Adorno 1993: 3; compare Adorno 2017: 66–67, 75). It is just such a static apriorism that Ng seems to attribute to Hegel here.

<sup>38</sup> See her comments on Pippin’s claim that Hegel’s logic is *a priori*, Ng 2019: 1056–57.

<sup>39</sup> See 56n53 and 114n74. In the former Ng writes that ‘Bernstein discusses life as a “material *a priori*”’, but Bernstein’s own way of putting it is to say more precisely that ‘is living’ is a material *a priori* predicate (citing Bernstein 2001: 301 [ff.]).

<sup>40</sup> See note 24 above.

<sup>41</sup> Kant allows for *a priori* judgements whose predicate terms are empirical concepts, namely analytic judgements with empirical subject terms. But for Ng ‘what Hegel is interested in is not empirical nature [...] but, instead, the *essential form and structure* of life-activity [...]. Nature remains contingent, but what is not contingent is that the life/non-life distinction and the specific kind of activity and form that is ascribed to life in this distinction, is necessary *a priori* for the constitution of self-conscious experience’ (116). The sense of ‘*a priori*’ Ng attaches to ‘life’ and ‘[is] living’ thus seems quite removed in key ways from Bernstein’s material *a priori*.

<sup>42</sup> Roughly, she examines *PbG*: ¶¶162–89/115–32.

<sup>43</sup> But see note 24 above, as well as Ng’s related claim that ultimately ‘the transcendental argument is also quite explicitly a phenomenological one’ (114).

<sup>44</sup> Ng accidentally omits this sentence when quoting the relevant passage from Bernstein at 114n74.

<sup>45</sup> Indeed Bernstein’s argument here is, broadly, that we can and should rely on the phenomenologically available and not entirely conceptually mediated experience of life (in particular, the experience of pain) as a resource for combatting a rationalized reason that threatens to eliminate just this very experience.

<sup>46</sup> See also p. 34.

<sup>47</sup> See also p. 211: ‘Cleopatra is the “contradiction” between the genus that inevitably shapes and defines her, and her indifferent, immediate individuality with a specific constitution that resists the deductive powers of the genus, being a unique manifestation of individuality that may even transform and redefine the genus “human” by means of her activity’. See also p. 232: ‘Individuality is therefore the power to oppose, contradict, and transform the genus by means of the genus’s own power as manifest in the determinateness of an individual’.

<sup>48</sup> See note 47 above.

<sup>49</sup> Although there are places in his system where it matters (e.g., *EPN*: §368), Hegel is generally not very attentive to the distinction between genus and species, and Ng follows him in this, using ‘genus’, ‘species’, and ‘form of life’ (and also the German ‘*Gattung*’) more or less interchangeably. Hegel’s casual approach here can perhaps be traced to the fact that for his logic, as for Kant’s, the form of universality is shared by both universals (*Allgemeine*, corresponding to *Gattungen* as genera) and particulars (*Besondere*, corresponding to *Arten* or species), because a particular is simply a universal conceived as standing under a higher universal, as a species stands under a genus. Since in his treatment of life Hegel is usually focused not on the hierarchy of species and genera but in the relation between the individual and its life-form, he uses ‘*Gattung*’ promiscuously.—Note that nothing in this situation supports the error, especially common in Anglophone scholarship and translation, of conflating the particular with the singular, an error grounded not in logical structure but at least partly in the ambiguity of ‘particular’ in English. Hegel distinguishes consistently and strictly between these, as does Kant, in a way not sufficiently captured by the idea that the particular is just the singular considered as a token of a type.

<sup>50</sup> Life ‘provides an a priori schema that [...] enables and constrains the activities of self-conscious cognition’ by its three processes, which are ‘three a priori form-constraints [...] without which cognition would be “empty” or without actuality’ (20). For a brief but more detailed summary statement, see p. 199; the full argument is found in Chapter 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ng develops (260ff.) the Hegelian schemata out of the three moments of the Idea of life (see *SL*: 679ff./6: 474ff.), and so they do not match up with the Kantian schemata developed with respect to the Table of Categories (see *KrV*: A142–45/B182–84). She does not provide a summary list but her Hegelian schemata seem to be the schema of immediate synthetic unity (265) rooted in the living individual’s corporeality, the schema of a conformable externality (268)

rooted in the life-process, and a schema of the unity of Concept and objectivity (277) rooted in the genus.

<sup>52</sup> Such a model does not seem to sit well with Hegel's claim—also cited by Ng—that '*There is nothing, nothing in heaven or in nature or mind or anywhere else which does not equally contain both immediacy and mediation, so that these two determinations reveal themselves to be unseparated and inseparable and the opposition between them to be a nullity*' (*SL*: 46/5: 66, quoted at 79). Ng is entirely correct that this passage destroys the Sellarsian picture of Hegel as a simple opponent of immediacy, but it is not clear that she sees what it implies for the account of life as an a priori schema uniting *per se* immediate and *per se* mediated modes of judgement—to say nothing of life as immune to revision or dialectical alteration. See here also the passage from *EL*, quoted in note 31 above, according to which there is an 'in-itself reflected and therefore in-itself mediated immediacy of thinking' (*EL*: §12R), which seems to suggest that for cognition, the immediate mode of judgement turns out to be mediated after all.

<sup>53</sup> According to Ng, Hegel claims 'unequivocally that the consideration of logical cognition alone is not sufficient for avoiding emptiness and the lack of determination' (257), where 'logical' here presumably has a narrower connotation than in the phrase 'the logical concept of life'.

<sup>54</sup> See note 51 above on the Hegelian schemata.

<sup>55</sup> Instances of this conflation occur throughout the book; for a clear and typical example, see p. 200 (about 'Hegel's concern, in the chapters on the subjective Concept, with the determination of individuality or singularity', despite the fact that *Individualität* is only discussed in the Idea); see also p. 226n8, where precisely in translating a passage whose logic depends on the contrast between singularity and individuality, Ng explicitly takes 'individuality' as an adequate translation of both 'Einzelheit' and 'Individualität', or p. 162 (and p. 225), where she uses both 'singularity' and 'individuality' to translate 'Einzelheit'.

<sup>56</sup> 257: 'For Kant, famously, [...] intuitions are representations that are both immediate and singular'.

<sup>57</sup> See *SL*: 546ff./6: 296ff. on singulars.

<sup>58</sup> See *SL*: 532/6: 277, 547/6: 297–98. Although I have omitted mention of particularity here, each time I speak of the unity of singular and universal, this should be understood to include the particular as well. I omit such mention in part for simplicity's sake, but in part because here, too, Ng seems to conflate distinct terms, 'singular' or 'individual' on the one side, and 'particular' on the other; see note 49 above.

<sup>59</sup> See, e.g., p. 258.

<sup>60</sup> Hegel discusses organic assimilation at *SL*: 685–86/6: 482–83 (compare *EL*: §§ 219–20), where it forms a key aspect of the living individual's self-production. He links organic assimilation to theoretical cognition at *EL*: §226 (but not in the parallel passage from *SL*: 697–700/6: 498–502) where, because of the distinct logical form of cognition, 'the assimilation of the matter [of sensibility] as something given thus appears as its *uptake* in conceptual determinations that at the same time remain *external* to it'.

<sup>61</sup> The key point to make here is that in earlier arguments, the deficiency was, as it were, internal to the concept under consideration itself. In the Idea, there is still a deficiency driving things



forward, but that deficiency isn't directly available in the concept, but only in the failed correspondence of the concept and its actualization. This failure comes about not because the concept is internally contradictory, but because the actualization turns out to involve elements that could not have been present in the concept itself. They are then incorporated into the new concept.

<sup>62</sup> See note 22 above.

<sup>63</sup> In this sense, the development in the Idea shares its form with all the developments of the *Realphilosophie*.

<sup>64</sup> See note 22 above for Ng's claim of formal homogeneity here.

<sup>65</sup> 'The elevation of the concept over life consists in the concept's reality being the form of the concept liberated into universality' (*SL*: 689/6: 487).

## Bibliography

Adorno, T. W. (1993), 'Aspects of Hegel's Philosophy', in *Hegel: Three Studies*, trans. S. Weber-Nicholsen. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press.

Adorno, T. W. (2017), *An Introduction to Dialectics*, trans. N. Walker. Cambridge: Polity.

Bernstein, J. M. (2001), *Adorno: Disenchantment and Ethics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Boyle, M. (2012), 'Essentially Rational Animals', in G. Abel and J. Conant, eds., *Berlin Studies in Knowledge Research*, vol. 2. Berlin: De Gruyter.

Boyle, M. (2016), 'Additive Theories of Rationality: A Critique', *European Journal of Philosophy* 24:3: 527–55.

Khurana, T. (2017), *Das Leben der Freiheit: Form und Wirklichkeit der Autonomie*. Berlin: Suhrkamp.

Kreines, J. (2015), *Reason in the World: Hegel's Metaphysics and Its Philosophical Appeal*. New York: Oxford University Press.

McDowell, J. (1996), *Mind and World*. With a new introduction. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Ng, K. (2019), 'Science of Logic as Critique of Judgment? Reconsidering Pippin's Hegel', *European Journal of Philosophy* 27: 1055–64.

Ng, K. (2020), *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pinkard, T. (1994), *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pinkard, T. (2012), *Hegel's Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Pippin, R. B. (1989), *Hegel's Idealism: The Satisfactions of Self-Consciousness*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Pippin, R. B. (2019), *Hegel's Realm of Shadows: Logic as Metaphysics in The Science of Logic*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

Sedgwick, S. (2012), *Hegel's Critique of Kant: From Dichotomy to Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Thompson, M. (2008), *Life and Action: Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought*. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Thompson, M. (2013), 'Forms of Nature: "First", "Second", "Living", "Rational", and "Phronetic"', in G. Hindrichs and A. Honneth (eds.), *Freiheit: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2011*. Frankfurt: Klostermann.