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Hegel's Naturalism: Teleology, Life, Self-Consciousness and the Depiction of the Human Mind

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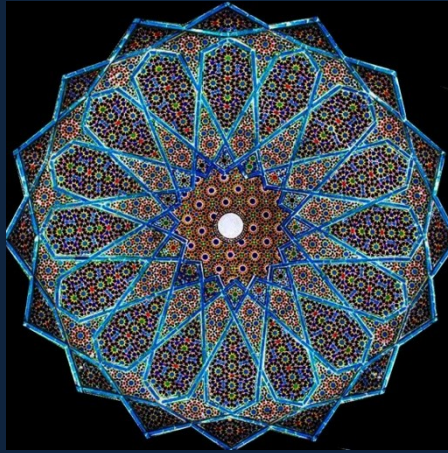
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AL-MUKHATABAT

# المخاطبات



LOGIQUE – EPISTEMOLOGIE – HUMANITES

منطق - إبستمولوجيا - إنسانيات

LOGIC - EPISTEMOLOGY - HUMANITIES

**AL-MUKHATABAT**

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## المخاطبات

مجلة فصلية محكمة وثلاثية اللغات (العربية والإنجليزية والفرنسية) تنشر المقالات الجيدة ذات الصلة بالمنطق والإبستمولوجيا والإنسانيات. وعلى الباحث أن يزود المجلة بنسخة من بحثه على عنوانها الإلكتروني والذي لا يجب أن يتعدى 30 صفحة (باحتراس الهوامش والبibliوغرافيا) مع ملخص له وترجمته إلى الإنجليزية والفرنسية. ويتم عرض البحوث على نحو سري على محكمين اثنين من المختصين المنتمين إلى الهيئة العلمية ويعني إرسال نسخة منه السماح للمجلة بنشره. ويتم ابلاغ صاحب المقالة بقرار الهيئة العلمية للمجلة في أجل لا يتعدى ثلاثة أشهر. وتبقى حقوق البحث محفوظة بصورة كلية لصاحبها، وتهدف المجلة لتعريف قرائها بمميزات التفكير العلمي وتشجيع النهج المنطقي والحجائي والإبستمولوجي في مقارنة مختلف المسائل الأخلاقية والاجتماعية والسياسية والجمالية واللغوية والإبستمولوجية والأنثروبولوجية والتعليمية والدينية والميتافيزيقية الخ كأساس لإقامة حوار حقيقي ومثمر بين الثقافات المتعددة.

## AL-MUKHATABAT

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## Hegel's Naturalism: Teleology, Life, Self-Consciousness and the Depiction of the Human Mind<sup>1</sup>

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### Résumé

Cet article traite de l'intérêt tout récent des études hégéliennes pour ce qui est appelé le naturalisme de Hegel et soutient que l'esprit est possible en vertu de la relation esprit-vie et que la vie et l'esprit sont interdépendants. Dans le but de comprendre la continuité esprit-vie, la contribution étudie à la fois la théorie hégélienne de la conscience de soi et le chapitre sur la vie de la *Science logique*. La particularité de Hegel consiste dans une investigation des enjeux concrets tels que la vie, la nature, les désirs et les penchants (purposiveness) subjectifs par le déploiement d'une analyse logique et formelle dans le but d'aboutir à leur compréhension générale. Le résultat est que Hegel n'explique pas l'esprit comme étant séparé de la nature mais plutôt comme la synthèse (outcome) d'une stratification commune entre la nature et l'esprit (a crossed stratification). La contribution rend compte des aspects interdisciplinaires connectés au naturalisme de Hegel et à sa proposition concernant la continuité vie-nature.

### Mots-clés

Hegel, naturalisme, nature, conscience de soi, vie, esprit, continuité vie-esprit.

### ملخص

يتناول هذا المبحث جنوح الدراسات الهيجلية الحالية لما يسمى بزعة هيغل الطبيعية ويدافع عن الفكرة التي مفادها بأن شرط إمكان الروح يتم بفضل العلاقة بين الروح والحياة وأنها مرتبطتان ببعضهما البعض. ويهدف فهم العلاقة الاتصالية بين الروح والحياة تتناول هذه الورقة في الآن ذاته نظرية هيغل في الوعي بالذات والفصل من كتابه علم المنطق حول الحياة. وتتمثل خصوصية هيغل في كونه يقوم باستكشاف مسائل عينية مثل الحياة والطبيعة والرغبات والأهداف الذاتية وذلك بتوظيف نوع من التحليل المنطقي والصوري بهدف الوصول إلى فهم عام بشأنها. وتتمثل النتيجة في كون هيغل لا

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يفسر الروح ككيان مفارق للطبيعة بل بالأحرى كنتاج لتشابك بين الطبيعة والروح. وتسعى الورقة إلى إعطاء توضيح لمختلف الأبعاد متعددة الاختصاص التي لها علاقة بنزعة هيغل الطبيعانية وبمقترحه حول العلاقة الاتصالية القائمة بين الحياة والروح.

### كلمات مفتاحية

هيغل، طبيعانية، طبيعة، وعي بالذات، حياة، روح، علاقة اتصالية بين الحياة والروح.

### Abstract

This article deals with the recent interest of the Hegelian studies around Hegel's so-called naturalism and maintains that mind is possible by virtue of the relationship mind-life and that life and mind are mutually dependent. In order to understand the continuity mind-life the contribution accounts for both the Hegelian theory of self-consciousness and the chapter on life in the *Science of Logic*. Hegel's peculiarity consists in investigating concrete issues such as life, nature, desires and subjective purposiveness by deploying a logical and formal analysis in order to attain a general comprehension of them. The result is that Hegel does not explain the mind as separate from nature but rather as the outcome of a crossed stratification between nature and spirit. The contribution also accounts for the interdisciplinary aspects connected with Hegel's naturalism and his proposal about the continuity life-mind.

### Keywords

Hegel, nature, naturalism, self-consciousness, life, mind, continuity life-mind.

In his *Philosophy of Mind* (PM: § 381, 9)<sup>1</sup> Hegel states that 'mind has for its presupposition the nature, of which it is the truth and for that reason its

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1. Abbreviations used:

PM = Hegel (2007), *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. W. Wallace and A. V. Miller, ed. M. Inwood (Oxford: Oxford University Press)/*Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften, Dritter Teil* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PN = Hegel (1970), *Philosophy of Nature* (part two of the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences*), trans. M. J. Petry. (London: George Allen and Unwin)/*Enzyklopädie der Philosophischen Wissenschaften, Zweiter Teil* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

SL = Hegel (1969), *Science of Logic*, trans. A. V. Miller (Amherst: Humanity Books)/*Wissenschaft der Logik, Zwei Bände* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

PS = Hegel (1977), *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller. (Oxford: Oxford University Press)/*Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

DIF = Hegel (1977), *The Difference between Fichte's and Schelling's System of Philosophy*, trans. H. S. Harris and W. Cerf (Albany: State University of New York Press)/*Jeneare Schriften 1801-1807* /Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986)

CPR = Kant (1998), *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. P. Guyer and A. W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

absolute prius'. This passage highlights the peculiarity of Hegel's naturalism, which does not understand mind as either a mere outcome of nature or emergent from the natural dimension but rather points out their reciprocal dependence and crossed stratification. In other words, spirit and its individual actualization as human mind are not to be explained as merely separated and emerging from nature but rather as shaped by the relation they have with natural prerequisites. They are not, hence, two different moments of a bottom-up development because this would undermine the possibility to understand their interdependence and permanent connection. Hegel's naturalism consists rather in the attempt to clear this mutual dependence, which is supposed to persist once the spirit has emerged because the becoming of spirit lies on material and natural presupposes. The fact that there cannot be a mind outside the body and that it need to be embedded in order to have the functions it has, is one of the most important achievement of the Hegelian thinking in comparison to the previous modern philosophical tradition in which soul, mind and thinking are conceived as distinct from the body because of their divine origin. Following Hegel, it is through the relation with nature that spirit can both exist and be the truth of nature for it represents the living activity by which self-conscious beings think the practical achievement of the human life as something different from mere nature (Pinkard 2012: 98-102). Whereas nature is 'permanence of the otherness' [*Verharren des Andersseins*] (PN: § 247, 205), spirit is a sort of normative and social substance shaped by the reflexive activity and yielding a 'return from otherness' of nature [*Rückkehr aus dem Anderssein*] (PS: 105/138). This coming back represents the characteristic of self-consciousness to reflexively refuse the independence of the external world and to understand it as a framework of normative relations whose focal centre is self-consciousness itself. This kind of reflexion cannot be exerted by pure nature in which otherness persists due to the externality and necessity of the natural law of causality (PN: § 248, 208). It must be exerted by a being having an internal self-regulative system of agency and thinking and a self-sustaining objectivity by which it reproduces autonomously itself. In this paper I will argue that this self-sustaining system of agency and thinking is based on the dynamism of the life because only the biological organism has the fundamental natural patterns for attaining this kind of self-related and autonomous characteristic. I will also claim that Hegel's naturalism, if correctly understood, has several aspects in common with the more recent developments in the philosophy of biology. In fact, the self-determination of the living is also addressed by those biologists and philosophers of biology who decided to go beyond the descriptive approach and tried to explain life through a theoretical and conceptual frame (Maturana and Varela 1980 and E. Thompson 2007). They define the autonomy in the biochemical domain as *autopoiesis* (E. Thompson 2007: 44), notion that has many aspects in common with both

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CJ = Kant (1987), *Critique of Judgement*, trans. W. S. Pluhar. Indianapolis (Hackett Publishing Company).

Kant's and Hegel's conception of teleology and purposiveness since it focuses on the fundamental feature of the living organism of maintaining and producing its own material boundary and internal constituent by means of a given design. This inner design does not merely determine the purposiveness and the behaviour of the biological organism, it also determines how it interacts with the outer organic and inorganic reality by yielding what Varela calls 'surplus of signification' (Varela 1991: 86) of the living towards the other. In other words, the relation between the biological organism and the external world is not established by an equitable compromise because the latter is not self-related like the former.<sup>1</sup> Similarly, Kant pinpoints that the living organism is a natural purpose (*CJ*: 236) because it is the object of its own concept, i.e. its cause is its own concept (*CJ*: 64-65). Hegel evolves Kant's teleology and defines the living subject as a 'self-related negative unity', i.e. as 'its *own end* and the *urge* to realize it' whose 'objectivity is the realization of the end, an objectivity *posited* by the activity of the end, an objectivity which, as *positedness*, poses its subsistence and its form only as permeated by its subject' (*SL*: 758/466-467). The living subject is, hence, determined by means of the internal relation with its own teleological notion [*Begriff*] that defines its objectivity independently from the relation it has with the outer (*SL*: 740-743/445-448). In this contribution I will firstly investigate early Hegel's theory on self-consciousness because it reveals a naturalistic approach towards the question of subjectivity and social dispositions. Subsequently, I will address the continuity life-mind in Hegel and compare it with the recent development of the philosophy of biology in which the empirical results of biology are explained by means of a non-descriptive philosophical analysis.

## I. Genesis of self-consciousness and naturalism

Hegel's investigation on self-consciousness discloses the intersection between individual natural prerequisites and social normative domain and has, hence, important consequences on his own peculiar version of naturalism. Self-consciousness is the premise for having an objective social dimension but it is at the same time originally characterized by drives and dispositions which belong to the realm of life rather than to the dimension of social interaction. The fundamental feature of self-consciousness is self-relatedness, which is deployed as a logical function necessary for identifying its general features among the particular manifestations and is contemporary embedded in the natural dispositions: there is no self-relatedness without desire and no desire without self-relatedness. In the *Phenomenology* we have, therefore, an unique treatise about the logical requisites of thinking and acting like notion, autonomy, self-positedness, self-relatedness, etc. that are placed in a subject supposed to be living and natural. This connected analysis of both logical and

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1. A good example is the nutrition in which the fact that something is a nutrient is not intrinsic to the nutrient itself, but it is intrinsic or related to the metabolism of the fed living being.

natural aspects of subjectivity is a fundamental methodology denoting Hegel's naturalism that we can observe also in mature works like the *Science of Logic*. The definition of spirit is therefore inherently affected by this naturalistic approach. I suggest to conceive the realm of spirit as the normative and objective dimension based on the intentional attitude and dispositions of individual self-conscious agencies (*PS*: 110/144-145)<sup>1</sup>. By introducing the notion of spirit the role of self-consciousness changes: what at the very begin of the chapter is merely regarded as truth of itself and negation of the independence of the otherness, is now defined as 'concept of the spirit' (*PS*: 110/144). This development can be explained by means of the Hegelian naturalistic approach to subjectivity, which defines the social environment by means of the distinctive self-consciousness' attitude towards otherness. The difference between self-consciousness within the natural dimension of desiring and needs and self-consciousness in the social dimension of recognition is the fact that the former faces mere objects of desire whereas the latter engages a social confrontation with an equal autonomous subjectivity. Despite this difference, its fundamental constitution remains the same, that is 'return from otherness' (*PS*: 105/138) and negation of otherness' independence by means of the movement of the conceptual. The origin of this speculative movement is not rational nor belongs to cognitive skills because it lies on the desire (*das Begehren*), i.e. on subjective and natural drives. Before Hegel, Kant already highlighted that the capacity to deploy concepts is a 'power of desire' [*Begehrensvermögen*] (*CJ*: 65, 101), i.e. 'a dynamical attunement of the mind' (*CJ*: 101), which is different from the cognitive power proper of mathematics. Hegel's novelty consists in the fact that he anchors the conceptual to the natural basis of the living since life materially (we can even say biologically) yields the fundamental attributes of self-positedness and self-related negativity. Since Hegel is a convinced reviewer of the transcendental philosophy, he considers the experience as the result of the immanent relation of the subject to the practical context and the universal as developed from the particular. Desiring is not only a mere need requiring to be satisfied, but rather the disposition of the subject to establish an 'objective subject-object relation' (*DIF*: 155-156/94-95), which differs from Fichte's subjective subject-object relation. I do not intend to deal with either the Hegelian critic to Fichte or his theory on negation here; however, it is important to underline how much central is Hegel's early elaboration of the subject-object relation, which he defines as a relation that is objective by virtue of the fact that the subject is able to understand the subject-object opposition as an objective fact. Whereas Fichte's schematic and transcendental philosophy regards this relation as subjective because it conceives of the two elements as

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1. This definition is an attempt to interpret the famous expression that spirit is "I that is We, We that is I" (*PS*: 110/145), by which Hegel addresses the social and interactional basis shaping the spirit. In these very dense passages the author explains what he means with the notion of spirit: it is the absolute substance resulting from the unity of the different, autonomous and free individual Self-consciousnesses (*PS*: 110/145).

separately posited by the subject, Hegel claims that the relation is objective because the subject does not only establish itself and the object as two separate things, but rather it establishes the relation itself and understands the opposition as a positive fact. This is possible because the subject relates everything to itself due to its self-conscious and autonomous character, which sublates the independence of the otherness. In this way it is not only the existence of an object to be objective but also the relation that the subject has with it, i.e. the practical context in which the subject acts. The fact that the subjective relation to an object is objective represents the fundamental relational scheme of self-consciousness and the way through which intersubjective relationships of dependence can be conceived as objective. The originality of Hegel's naturalism consists, in contrast to Fichte's transcendental approach, in understanding normative and cognitive dispositions as not independent and separate from nature but rather as dynamically immanent to it. Self-consciousness' transition from mere desire to 'concept of the spirit' (*PS*: 110/144) through social interaction describes the natural evolution of the conceptual from the mere interaction with objects of desire to the confrontation with another self-conscious being by which the normative dimension of spirit evolves. To be 'concept of the spirit' corresponds to have the reflexive and theoretical means not only to think the social reality, but also to bear it, for social reality is not only the totality of the external material conditions of being together but rather the normative order disciplining the personal interaction.<sup>1</sup> Social reciprocity is, hence, the result of the separation from the subjective drives and the attainment of social and objective acceptance for individual needs (Brandom 2002). It is because of the fact that the particular has to be turned into a universal norm that self-consciousness is acknowledged as recognizing and becomes the counterpart of another self-consciousness. By virtue of the social interaction subjective drives, which are natural dispositions, are negated as individual and accepted as intersubjectively recognized. This process could not be explained by only making recourse to a description of the material condition of the interaction, because this would prevent from addressing the universal pattern of intersubjectivity. In order to achieve that, Hegel deploys again general logical functions, which are connected to the pragmatic and natural dimension of subjectivity (Testa 2010 and 2012). Without the negation to be the lonely determiner of the normative patterns, Hegel attains two very important results: firstly, he connects the normative to the social interaction and goes beyond the methodological solipsism by conferring to the social dimension the role to establish the nature and limits of the self-conscious life. Secondly, he affirms the principle that individual drives do not

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1. The confrontation with another Self-consciousness is not the result of a real encounter with an antagonist but rather the result of the duplication of the self-conscious subject negating the subjective character of its material needs and seeking for their objective recognition. However, this objective recognition cannot be an independent act of the lonely subject because it would remain subjective and only the recognitive confrontation assures the legitimacy of individual attitudes and needs (Brandom 2002).

represent the subject, which aims instead to interpersonal, i.e. universal, recognition. However, the role of the social dimension is possible because self-consciousness has the natural characteristic to negate the condition of dependence preventing from self-determination. What fosters sociality is, hence, the natural disposition of subjectivity to deny the particularity produced by the relations of dependence and to strive for a kind of relation in which autonomy and freedom are sustained. Social recognitive interaction is not conceivable without the natural predisposition to achieve freedom by negating relations of dependence with the otherness and by overcoming the particularity of the natural needs through their social acceptance. This natural characteristic requires a logical explanation because dependence, otherness, return from otherness, etc. are logical functions, whose inferential relation makes the general comprehension of the social dynamic possible. This parallel analysis of natural requisites and general logical functions of thinking and acting characterizes Hegel's naturalism and attains a more complete formulation in the mature works where he more specifically accounts for life-mind continuity.

## II. Life and the Idea

The continuity between the dimension of the life and the dimension of the Idea is addressed in the final section of the *Science of Logic*, whose first chapter is entitled *Life*. The primary consequence of this approach is understanding spirit not in opposition to the nature but as the most thorough moment of the life in which it is embedded and from which it obtains vitality. Following Hegel, both the dynamic character of the speculative activity, i.e. of the notion (*Begriff*), and the restless becoming of the historic and intersubjective context originate from the dynamism of the living, which is fundamentally autonomous striving towards self-determination. The strict relation between the self-determining character of the living and the autonomous nature of the self-consciousness determines what can be called continuity between life and mind. Hegel so coherently accounts for this continuity that in his thought mind cannot be understood as separate from life, but rather as an activity permanently related to the biological dimension. Hence, in order to understand his naturalism, we have to elaborate the arduous terminology and concepts he deploys to explain this continuity, which will make us able to conceive of the theoretical activity as both natural and different from mere nature and to regard biological organisms as originating of the speculative activity of the concept. Hegel does not regard speculative activity as the mere logical and analytical dispositions that are necessary to carry out mathematical reasoning, because these are related to mechanically inferring logical consequences. On the contrary, the notion is, following Hegel, related to the dimension of the life as 'life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature at which the concept emerges, but as blind, as unaware of itself and unthinking' (SL: 586/257). The reason why 'with the Notion ... we have entered the realm of *freedom*' (SL: 582/251) is because notion belongs to the sphere of self-positingness of natural subjectivity, which establishes a special

relation with the outer based on the self-relation that subjectivity has with itself. The fact that also biological organisms have this kind of self-relatedness is for Hegel a good reason for saying that the notion is present even in very elementary forms of life although in an unaware form. From this point onwards the stages of logical inferring in the *Science of Logic* are determined in order to clarify how notion and life reach the dimension of self-awareness, thinking and freedom. But the origin of notion has to be found in the self-relatedness of the living organism engaging a peculiar relation with the otherness.

Recently the novelty of the Hegelian conception of life in his book on the logic has been underlined, because logic relates to the form of thought and language, whereas there is nothing more concrete and less formal than the notion of life (M. Thompson: 25-27). I believe there is no bigger mistake to maintain that Hegel was not aware that his logic differently from the traditional schematic one aims to explain the inferential articulation of the categories by which we concretely and not merely formally think the reality. It is properly because the Hegelian logic is concrete that it addresses the question concerning life. In fact, life is the ‘immediacy’ of the Idea and this means the Idea must be firstly ‘apprehended and cognized in the determinedness in which it is life’ (*SL*: 762/470) before being investigated as adequate notion:<sup>1</sup> in other words, the comprehension of the living is the premise for having a complete understanding of the Idea. There is, hence, so a strict affinity between the concepts of subject, life, notion, Idea and freedom that a treatise about life results fundamental for achieving an exhaustive explanation of the subjective logic. This is the reason why I do not agree with the viewpoint that the naturalism outlined in the *Science of Logic* is formal because it aims to coherently carry out a formal deduction of the Idea (Karen NG 2016a: 2). In fact, a formal argumentation of naturalism could not overcome the contradiction between mechanism and teleology and would leave the third antinomy explained by Kant in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*CPR*: 484-489) unsolved. On the contrary, Hegel intends to solve this antinomy by deploying a systematic methodology able to contain the oppositions of thinking in which the principles of mechanism and end are considered as both systematically objective and not in opposition (*SL*: 737-738/440-442). Consequently, also the deduction of the Idea cannot be considered as formal, because it is the result of the inferential explication of the thinking, which is concrete properly because it goes beyond the formal oppositions of the schematic thinking.

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1. *SL* 761-762/470: “To this extent the necessity of treating of the Idea of life in logic would be based on the necessity, otherwise recognized too, of treating here of the concrete Notion of cognition. But this Idea has come upon the scene through the Notion’s own necessity; the *Idea*, that which is *true* in and for itself, is essentially the subject matter of logic; since it is at first to be considered in its immediacy, it must be apprehended and cognized in this determinateness in which it is *life*, in order that its treatment shall not be an empty affair devoid of determinate content”.



Eventually, it is not merely unconventional that there is a chapter about life in the *Science of Logic*, it is rather quite compelling to investigate why life is necessary for attaining a complete explanation of the Idea and why it results inferentially necessary to introduce this very concrete object in a treatise about the logic. This issue is very relevant for understanding the peculiarity of Hegel's naturalism because life is not only the element marking a difference with mechanism and causal world, it is rather strictly related to the Idea, i.e. the truth of the notion, which is achieved by means of the living subject. In order to understand this integrated system of nature, life and truth I intend to deal with two central aspects of the Hegelian treatise: firstly, the distinction between teleology and life, and secondly, the role of the self-related negation in the chapter on life. What I will show is that mind is not an artefact (Searle 1998: 50-52) but rather the outcome of specific requisites of the biological dimension of life turning into the truth of the notion or Idea. However, since the notion is already present in teleology, that is in the organism, there is a very strict continuity between what we generically call organism and what we call rational being and consequently between life and truth. This continuity can be well understood if one investigates the role of the chapter about life and connects it to the previous one about teleology and the followings about the Idea.

### III. Teleology and life: the Hegelian distinction

Following the tradition started with Kant, Hegel considers teleology not only a question concerning the opposition freedom-necessity, but rather a question concerning how an internal notion determines subjective self-relatedness and agency. Like Kant, he does not conceive of the end as something external to the agency but rather as purposiveness both determining the agency itself and necessarily introducing the issue of life (SL: 737/440). Hegel claims that it was a mistake of the previous philosophical tradition to link the teleological principle to an extramundane intelligence and that it is necessary to cognize 'the properties of nature not as extraneous, but as *immanent determinateness*' (SL: 735/438). This is an important theoretical attainment because by individuating an immanent determinateness for the teleological principle like an individual subject or a biological entity, one can conceive of this principle not as heterogeneous to nature but rather as concrete and effective. Before this achievement, there was no alternative to accept the primacy of mechanism since the extramundane conception of teleology was not suitable to anchor the end to something immanent and observable. With the introduction of the subjective end the role of the notion changes because it can now be conceived as internal to an independent agency and defined as purposiveness. The subject with internal purposiveness is self-positing and relates itself with the surrounding by means of its own particular notion, which is internally determinate. The objective external world is consequently presupposed as 'indifferent to the determination of the end' (SL: 743/448) since the determination of the end autonomously affects the subject and its purposiveness without any external

interference. Such internality of the end implies what Varela and E. Thompson call 'organizational closure' (Varela 1979: 55-60 and E. Thompson 2007: 44-45), i.e. a self-referential and internal network of relations defining a biological system as an autonomous and self-generating unity. In my opinion, Hegel defines teleology in a similar way when he claims that the subjective end is '*absolute negative unity*' (SL: 743/448) as it represents the '*return-into-self*' (SL: 743/448), i.e. the sublation of the external reality by means of the maintenance of the internal and self-referential network of relations determining the biological unity. The structure of this relation differs from the mechanistic one that we can observe in the cause-effect events where the two parts of the reciprocal relation are consequent but remain separated and one-sided for they are mechanically connected but not really related. In order to have a final relation it is necessary to go beyond such one-sidedness and this is only possible if at least one of the two parts is self-related, for self-relation has the characteristic to relate everything to itself and to subdue the indifference proper of two distinct physical events merely connected by an external principle. In fact, a self-related being determines the relation with the outer world by virtue of its own internal final structure, for it aims to autonomously reproduce it. The compulsion to realize one's own end determines the relation to the external reality, which becomes indifferent and unessential to the teleological subject in comparison to its own internal design (SL: 740/444-445). Teleology highlights that the relation that subjectivity has with otherness is not equivalent because it is for the most part determined by the self-relation the subject has with its own internal end and by the urge to objectively realize it. This subject has what Varela calls 'surplus of signification' in comparison to the mechanical world due to the peculiar function of the internal notion<sup>1</sup>. Both Varela and E. Thompson argue that their conception of biological organism as a self-generating unity with internal design and closure has many aspects in common with Kant's teleology, which states that organisms have an intrinsic purposiveness by which they can be considered as a self-producing and self-organizing beings (CJ: p. 253)<sup>2</sup>. Nevertheless, Varela and E. Thompson disregard the fact that Hegel's treatise of teleology in comparison to Kant's one has the advantage to put it in a system aiming at clarifying the contribution of the life in the emergence of

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1. Varela 1991, 86: "The difference between environment and world is the surplus of signification which haunts the understanding of the living and of cognition, and which is at the root of how a self becomes one. It is quite difficult in practice to keep in view the dialectics of this mutual definition: neither rigid isolation, nor simple continuity with physical chemistry".

2. CJ 253: "... we must think of each part as an organ that produces the other parts (so that each reciprocally produces the other). Something like this cannot be an instrument of art, but can be an instrument only of nature, which supplies all material for instruments (even for those of art). Only if a product meets that condition [as well], and only because of this, will it be both an organized and a self-organizing being, which therefore can be called a natural purpose [...] For a machine has only motive force. But an organized being has within it formative force, and a formative force that this being imparts to the kinds of matter that lack it (thereby organizing them). This force is therefore a formative force that propagates itself-a force that a mere ability [of one thing] to move [another] (i.e., mechanism) cannot explain".

rational dispositions in the biological organism. In contrast to Kant, Hegel believes that the notion does not attain its truth through the mere teleological subject, which is determined by its own end and the need to realize it. In fact, this realization is conditioned by an end with a finite content (*SL*: 747/453-454)<sup>1</sup>, whereas the Idea as edge of the speculative activity is not affected by any limitation. At the end of the chapter on teleology Hegel reveals the limit of the logical category of teleology from which he can infer the category of life. Teleology merely explains ends with a conditioned purpose whose form is limited by an external individuality: 'The limited content makes these ends inadequate to the infinity of the Notion and reduces them to untruth' (*SL*: 750/457). The striving to realize itself renders the end a subjective fact and deprives the notion of concrete totality (*SL*: 753/461). This reduces the teleological subject as being similar to a mechanism with an externally determined and limited purposiveness (like for example a clock) and would not give an account of the dynamic context of relations yielded by the living subject through its self-relatedness. In other words, with teleology we are able to explain an internal end, which is, however, a principle conditioned and limited to its own realization. In order to avoid the limited character of the subjective end reducing the subject to an external individuality, it is necessary to deal with a form of self-relatedness which is not conditioned by the subjectivity itself but rather determined by the universal logical function of the notion. It is thus necessary to sublate teleology, which depicts a lifeless self-relatedness and account for a broader conception of final self-relational structure not bounded to subjective ends. This will be possible by originally linking the truth of the notion, i.e. the Idea, to the life. Understanding the connection life-Idea represents the opportunity to disclose the core of Hegel's naturalism in the *Science of Logic*.

#### IV. Life and Idea: Hegel's speculative naturalism

At the stage of teleology, the notion or end remains an inward characteristic determining the subject by means of its own end. This has relevant aspects in comparison to mere mechanism because it introduces the logical notion of self-relatedness, which is fundamental for defining a subject with an internal design like an organism and its peculiar relation with the environment. However, in this stage the notion or end is a mere '*inner externality*' (*SL*: 752/460), namely an internal disposition explained through an external perspective and not connected to the internal dynamism of the subject striving to objectivity. We can explain this with an example from the empirical science: teleology describes

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<sup>1</sup> *SL* 747/453-454: "The end as *content* is the *determinateness* that exists in and for itself, which appears in the object as indifferent and external; but the activity of the end is, on the one hand, the *truth* of the process and as negative unity the *sublating of the illusory show of externality*. From the *abstract* point of view, it is the indifferent determinateness of the object that equally externally is replaced by another".

the internal biological patterns of an organism like nutrition or motor skills as something given and limited but it does not explain them as part of a living unity. Teleology lacks the description of the living subject because it regards the end as a purposiveness merely attributed to a subject like functions can be attributed to a mechanism like a clock, which “acts” following an internal design but lifeless. This explanatory deficiency derives from the fact that at this stage the concept of purposiveness is treated separately from that of life. The reason why Hegel introduces the living element depends on the fact that only the living subject with its dynamic self-relation can potentially aim at the objective notion or Idea, whereas the subject teleologically considered expresses a mere conditioned purposiveness.

Hegel’s treatise leads, hence, to an advancement in comparison to Kant’s teleology because it aims at sublating the condition of ‘inner externality’ (SL: 752/460) in which the notion is relegated due to the exposition of the individual end. Following Hegel, the notion in order to become Idea has to attain objectivity and truth and this cannot be possible by means of individual patterns of agency. The adequate notion is attained by ‘the unity of *subjective Notion* and *objectivity* ... the identity of itself and reality’ (SL: 758/466). Here Hegel does not only resume the objective subject-object relation that he tackled in the early works like the *Differenzschrift*. He also ties the living dimension of subjectivity to the rational and logical dimension of the Idea and truth. In fact, without the self-relatedness of the living subject one could not obtain the rational and speculative dispositions necessary for deducing the objective and adequate notion. Whereas the teleological subject is a mere object with internal purposiveness, the living subject can be described as establishing a self-relation by differentiating itself from the surrounding because of its living characteristic. This self-related subjectivity is also negative because it negates to be determined by external causes and strives to render objective its own notion. The living being is, hence, a ‘self-related negative unity’ (SL: 758/466), conception that explains the dynamic and autonomous relation the subject has with its own internal notion. By introducing the element of life the self-relatedness can be explained dynamically making possible to see how the living subject establishes its own notion as objective by negating the objectivity of the external reality and affirming its own (SL: 764/473)<sup>1</sup>. The living organism has, hence, a self-maintaining and self-producing design that determines its own domain of actions and problems (Varela 1991: 103)<sup>2</sup>, which is not determined by an

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1. SL 764/473: “It is only as this *negative unity* of its objectivity and particularization that life is a self-related life that is for itself, a soul. As such it is essentially an individual, which relates itself to objectivity as to an *other*, to a non-living nature. Consequently the original *judgement* of life consists in this, that it detaches itself as an individual subject from objectivity, and in constituting itself the negative unity of the Notion, makes the presupposition of an immediate objectivity”.

2. Varela 1991: 103: “The key point, then, is that the organism brings forth and specifies its own domain of problems and actions to be ‘solved’; this cognitive domain does not exist “out there” in an environment that acts as a landing pad for organisms that somehow drops or is parachuted into the world. Instead, living beings and their worlds of meaning stand in relation to each other

external attribution but rather by an organizational closure called by Hegel self-related negative unity. I maintain that Varela's notion of operational closure has many aspects in common with Hegel's idea of self-related negativity because both pinpoint the fundamental characteristic of the living being to operate on the basis of its own biological patterns, rejecting to be determined by external and different causes. Similarly, Hegel claims that life is self-preservation and self-generation because it establishes a self-relation through the omnipresent notion, which maintains its unity despite the multiplicity of the external reality (SL: 763/472-473)<sup>1</sup>. With this notion, individual life sets up its own objectivity and negates the objectivity of otherness, creating an operational closure. Both Varela and Hegel claim that this closure has not to be intended as separateness, in fact the living being feeds and couples itself. However, feeding and coupling are both self-generation because they consent to reproduce the biological pattern already given as internal design. This operational closure explains rather that the internal notion results essential for the living being, whereas the external world becomes instrumental and inessential<sup>2</sup>.

Through the treatise about life Hegel does not only explain the role of self-relatedness in determining the living organism, he also addresses those biological prerequisites necessary for attaining the adequate notion, which is the legitimate conclusion of a book about the logic. The chapter on life not only represents a bridge between teleology and the Idea, it is rather the explanation of the fundamental requirement for logically achieving the Idea and to complete this treatise about pure thinking. Without life, one could not have the fundamental substance nor the biological requisites in order that the Idea can be explained. Therefore, the great Hegelian contribution consists in the thought that theoretical and speculative capacities are related to biological and living prerequisites and for this reason I would regard his naturalism as speculative. Hegel does not account for the interaction of the living with the environment as Varela, Maturana and E. Thompson do because he is certain to have individuated life's fundamental feature in the negative self-relatedness, though the negative characteristic of the self-related unity implies a relational attitude

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through *mutual specification* or *co-determination*. Thus what we describe as significant environmental regularities are not external features that have been internalized, as the dominant representationalist tradition in cognitive science - and adaptationism in evolutionary biology - assumes. Environmental regularities are the result of a conjoint history, a congruence which unfolds from a long history of co-determination".

1. The notion is defined in this passages (SL: 763/472) as "the *omnipresent* soul in it, which remains simple self-relation and remains a one in the multiplicity belonging to objective being ... thus the soul is an omnipresent outpouring of itself into this multiplicity and at the same remains absolutely the simple oneness of the concrete Notion with itself".

2. This same structure has been observed in the cells whose metabolic process shows cell's characteristic to maintain itself overtime by means of operative patterns and schemes that are contained within the cell itself. This is the reason why Thompson maintains that a cell and consequently all biological organism have an *autopoietic* organization and an operational closure (E. Thompson 2007: 97-107).

by virtue of the specific Hegelian use of the category of negation. Nevertheless, his contribution is fundamental for explaining the continuity between mind and life since the Idea, the highest attainment for rationality, is only possible by virtue of the living subject.

Now the question is, why is life the fundamental prerequisites of the Idea? The answer is quite easy: the Idea is the true and unconditioned notion, i.e. the absolute and objective conception of the reality, and the living subject is also not conditioned by external causes and is potentially infinite. Following the German classical philosophy from Kant onwards, rationality consists in autonomy and law-self-giving and contains the presupposition of infinity and absolute freedom from external conditioning. Hegel does not deal with rationality in a transcendental way, but rather as a practical and immanent characteristic of the human agency; however, he also maintains that self-consciousness is the premise for freedom and absolute knowledge. His immanent approach leads him to investigate the natural requisites of the Idea and to link them to practical and concrete issues like life, history and social interaction. This is the reason why he states in the *Science of Logic* (SL: 780/493-494):

In the content of this logical exposition it is from the *Idea of life* that the Idea of spirit has issued, or what is the same thing, that the Idea of spirit has proved itself to be the truth of the Idea of life. As this result, the Idea possess its truth in and for itself, with which one may then also compare the empirical side or the manifestation of spirit to see how far the latter accords with the former. We have seen that *life* is the Idea, but at the same time it has shown itself not to be as yet the true representation of the Idea's existence. For in life, the reality of the Idea exists as *individuality*; *universality* or genus is the *inwardness*; the truth of life as absolute negative unity is therefore to sublate the abstract, or what is the same, the immediate, individuality, and as *identical*, to be self-identical, as genus, to be self-similar. Now this Idea is *spirit*.

This passage clarifies that the limit of life is to be restricted to individualities, while the Idea strives to universality. However, life has the significance to furnish the premise of the speculative methodology necessary for attaining the Idea, namely the self-maintaining and self-reproducing closure struggling to be objective and not conditioned by external conditions. Hegel's conception of life in the *Science of Logic* has the merit to have underlined the life-mind continuity by simply deducing the role the notion has in explaining the reciprocity of the real events. It is quite surprising to notice how the analysis of the notion leads from mechanism to life through teleology accentuating the differences between casual relations, teleological relations and dimension of life. This makes it possible to explain the peculiarities of the living organisms and the role life has in developing self-awareness and spiritual life. It has been a great merit of Kant and Fichte of having claimed the infinite and absolute nature of the rational and

normative subjectivity by considering rationality as a spontaneous norm-self-giving disposition. Hegel, however, does not investigate rational dispositions as separate from the contest but as concretely embedded and practically involved in the evolution of the whole. It is therefore cardinal for him to address the life-mind continuity by highlighting that the central features of the mind are already present in life. In fact, the living organism behaves as it unawarely regards its own internal notion as absolute and unconditioned before the otherness in such a way that is as much theoretical and speculative as the more self-conscious activity of the mind. This unconditioned and absolute unaware attitude, as we have already seen, has also been observed by Varela and Maturana who call it operational closure of the living organism. This principle, they claim, can be deployed to define every form of living individuality from the less to the most evolved. The mind-life continuity is based on the fact that the living subject has the same theoretical and logical shape of the cognitive act since they are both based on self-referentiality and negation to be conditioned by external causes.

The way Hegel tackles the element of life in the *Science of Logic* is distinctive because life is a concrete matter whereas logic has as objects of investigation the formal condition of thinking. Life, on the contrary, seems to be an empirical topic that can be investigated after a concrete observation of it. Hegel, despite that, considers it as a category of pure thinking and he is probably right because without life it would be impossible to logically understand the mind. In contrast to M. Thompson (2008), I think that Hegel's treatise about the life is nearly an infraction of the rules of the inferential logic because life is an attribute that we can observe and not a category that we can purely deduce by means of the foundation of thinking. However, this infraction accounts for the oddity of life in the real world in comparison with inanimate nature. In fact, life is not properly a category of thinking like cause or individual end, nevertheless, it results necessary for the attainment of pure *inwardness* [*das Innere*] of the notion and cannot be affected by exteriority (*SL*: 780/494). This chapter about life is strictly connected to the necessity of giving an account of this pure inwardness, which is the fundamental characteristic for attaining the adequate notion or Idea. The only entity able to bear the inwardness is the living being because it has a self-maintaining and self-generating bio-chemical organization as biologists like Varela and Maturana claim. In fact, biological beings, even the less evolved like bacteria and single-celled organisms (Varela 1979 and E. Thompson 2007), manifest this inwardness or attention to their own internal design, which can be assimilated with the speculative disposition because their operational closure indicates a speculative self-consideration and independence from the surrounding<sup>1</sup>. This does not mean that living organisms

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1. E. Thompson 2007: 149: "Living beings affirm their own identities by differentiating themselves from their surroundings and thus demand to be seen from an autonomy perspective. Autopoiesis is basic autonomy in its minimal cellular form: a living cell stands out from a chemical background as a closed network of self-producing processes that actively regulates its encounters with its environment ... A cell, not merely a persisting material aggregate, is a self-

do not interact with the environment, but rather that they interact for the only goal to preserve and reproduce themselves, like for example in the nutrition in which the nutrient comes from the external reality but is transformed for their own maintenance<sup>1</sup>. When Hegel wrote modern cellular theories has been not yet developed and modern biology was making the first steps into the investigation of the life. Despite that, Hegel tackles the element of life in a very successful way because he is able to underline its dynamism and urges by putting the asserting that the living being establishes and autonomous interaction with the environment by virtue of the inwardness of its internal notion. He is also very successful in dealing with life-mind continuity as he deploys the same logical apparatus for explaining both although he also underlines their difference when he correctly maintains that 'life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature at which the concept emerges, but as blind, as unaware of itself and unthinking' (SL: 586/257).

### V. Notion, the Idea and the Mind

So far, I explained the continuity between life and mind by Hegel and the relative interdisciplinary aspects without addressing the central role of the notion, which is the chief argument of the second book of *Science of Logic* entitled *Subjective Logic* or *Logic of the Concept*. Concerning this point, Hegel states (SL: 578/246):

The progressive determination of substance necessitated by its own nature, is the *positing* [*das Setzen*] of what is *in and for itself*. Now the Notion is that absolute unity of being and reflection in which being is *in and for itself* only in so far as it is no less *reflection* or *positedness* [*Gesetzsein*], and *positedness* [*Gesetzsein*] is no less being that is *in and for itself*.

In this passage the author maintains that the notion is the absolute unity of being and reflection, namely the subject, and that this unity is reflection and positedness. Positedness can be interpreted as a living deed and previously indicates the necessity for the notion to be embodied in a living subject. Here Hegel probably exploits the semantic affinity in German between *das Setzen* [to establish or to posit], *das Gesetzsein* [to be posited] and *Gesetz* [law], pointing out the normative implications connected to the emergence of the subjectivity. He successively differentiates between a passive substance or simple inwardness and an active substance or 'self-related negativity which as such has posited itself in the form of another and relates itself to this other' (SL: 578/247). Evidently, in this passage he tackles the fundamental binomials nature-spirit, mind-body and mind-life and pinpoints the self-conscious character of the active

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sustaining unity, a unity that dynamically produces and maintains its own identity in the face of what is other."

1. As we have already seen this phenomena is called by Varela surplus of signification. Varela 1991: 86.



substance, which relates to itself as another. This another is the passive substance, i.e. nature or the body, regarded by the active substance as its own condition. The active substance is self-related negativity by virtue of its aware nature and, hence, it bears the notion as a living and self-conscious principle. The notion, and in particular the adequate notion or Idea, represents both the truth of the fundamental relationship nature-spirit and the speculative identity of the spirit with itself. The characteristic itself of the spiritual life to be absolute identity implies the negation of the otherness and clarifies the development of the notion from the unaware condition of nature to the aware condition of the mind.

However, since mind is only possible as embodied and spirit has as its premise and condition the nature, the otherness of nature cannot be completely eliminated. Nature represents, hence, the permanent counterpart and otherness of spirit. How is this possible? This fact derives from the Hegelian immanent approach to spirit and mind, which leads him to state that they are based on nature and to recognize that they can only achieve a conditioned freedom. Consequently, spirit represents a speculative identity based on the adequate notion or Idea but it has as premise the otherness of nature, a dimension in which the notion is unaware. This apparently unsolvable contradiction can be straightened by the spirit itself, which is the speculative effort conceiving of the contradictions as truth or positive expressions of the entire. In fact, spirit undertakes a permanent relation with the otherness of nature and its effort consists in attaining the speculative identity by contemporary handling the conditioned dimension of nature.<sup>1</sup> The Idea represents the achievement of the speculative identity and discloses that spirit is the truth of the nature, i.e. the truth of the otherness. We are not speaking about a tautological identity like  $A=A$ , which is rigid and schematic, and would not account for dynamical and dialectical ambit of the concrete relations proper of the Hegelian logic, but rather of a speculative identity in which the oppositions and conflicts can be understood as positive and true. The speculative identity characterizes the identity of two opposites facts by means of the systematic exposition of their relation, i.e. by understanding them within a logic system of concepts inferentially articulated (Berto 2005). Eventually, spirit cannot achieve the Idea without life because life represents the organic and natural requisites of self-relatedness, which are necessary for rendering the notion aware by means of biological patterns. The pairs nature-spirit and life-mind are determined by the relation spirit and mind have with the otherness of nature and for this reason they both imply a perpetual competition between identity and otherness, the central point of the Hegelian conception of absolute relation. I perfectly agree with Karen Ng (2016b), who states that the speculative identity in Hegel refers to the identity and non-identity of life and self-consciousness and that this is fundamental for understanding the importance of life for the conceptual

activity. The speculative identity makes the rational subject able to maintain a self-related relation with the outside environment in spite of the otherness of nature, eluding the principles of self-relatedness and self-awareness. In fact, the Idea represents the identity of the notion with the objective reality and discloses the possibility for the self-consciousness to attain freedom within the dimension of natural necessity by sublating the opposition nature-spirit. However, this speculative identity is not regarded as formal, but rather as concrete evolution of the notion and consequently of the living self-consciousness, which bears the former. The *Science of Logic* is a work about thinking and its categories because it inferentially deduces the orders of the concepts with whom reason is able to think reality. Nonetheless, we have seen that the immanent Hegelian approach leads to investigate concrete aspects of reality like subjective end, life, subject, freedom, etc. The speculative identity proper of the Idea is without doubt a formal category of thinking but it cannot be explained out of the concrete issue represented by the living self-consciousness and its self-relatedness (Haase 2013). The fact that mind would be not understandable out of the concrete domain of life depends on the relationship itself that self-consciousness has with nature. Since it is determined by a self-relation, the subjective notion is potentially infinite and absolutely free and therefore strives to attain the identity of this self-relation with the external objective world. This is a speculative effort because it requires to acknowledge the necessity of the real. However, it is not only a question of acceptance or acknowledging, it is rather the aware integration of the subject within the realm of life by acknowledging it. The speculative identity is, hence, not attained by the mere separation from the otherness of nature, but rather by its acquisition or sublation [*Aufhebung*] by which otherness can be enclosed in a rational system as part of it. Because of the perpetual clash spirit-nature and mind-life, where spirit and mind likely mirror nature and understand it as their necessary other, the speculative identity does not represent the separation of the mind from the life, but rather the deepest integration with it.

### Conclusion

In this article I have maintained that only life can bear speculative identity and self-consciousness because it is supplied with self-relatedness and autonomous organization. I claimed that Hegel's naturalism particularly in the *Science of Logic* and in his theory of self-consciousness is speculative because it lies on the analysis of logic categories by which we can think mind and its activity. Despite this logical approach, Hegel accounts for very concrete issues such as the realm of life, the individual purposiveness, the living organism, the rational being and freedom. This happens because he does not regard mind out of the life and the concrete and practical dimension in which it is embedded. His conception is very concrete and has even interdisciplinary consequences as I have highlighted. Eventually, I claimed that the speculative identity represents the definitive integration of the mind into the domain of life and not the separation from it.

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