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On subjects, objects, and ground: Life as the form of judgment

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Abstract

In this paper, I reply to the critics of my book, *Hegel's Concept of Life*, by taking up the question of how a science of pure thought thinking itself arrives at the conclusion that it must determine itself as life. In particular, I consider how the logical concept of life informs Hegel's understanding of subjects, objects, and ground, and I also take up the relationship between logic and *Realphilosophie* in Hegel's system. Throughout, I aim to clarify and elaborate on one of the central arguments from my book, namely, that for Hegel, life is the primitive or original form of judgment.

In a book rife with obscure philosophical puzzles, one of the most difficult puzzles to emerge in reading the *Science of Logic* is the following: why does the science of pure thinking, a science of thought thinking itself, arrive at the conclusion that it must determine itself as life? Why must the self-comprehension of pure thought ultimately comprehend its own essential activity as the activity of life? Immediately, one is struck by the sheer difficulty of bringing together two intuitively distinct modes of engagement: the austerity, formality, and abstraction required by the pursuit of pure thinking and logic on the one hand, and the vitality, dynamism, and concreteness of the phenomenon of life on the other. Although readers of Hegel are no strangers to the bringing together of opposites, this particular case poses special problems, not least because the *Logic* provides the method and central categories (the "thought-determinations") that are operative throughout the remainder of Hegel's philosophical system.

In what follows, I will try to respond to this puzzle by clarifying one of the central lines of argument from my book, namely, that for Hegel, life is the primitive or original form of judgment. I am immensely grateful to my critics for providing an occasion for me to do so, and for the generous, thoughtful engagement that one always hopes for in philosophical debate. Responding to their critical questions concerning how life figures in Hegel's understanding of subjectivity, objectivity, and ground, as well as how we can best understand the relation between logic and *Realphilosophie*, will hopefully help to resolve the problem of how pure thinking and life are connected in Hegel's system.

1 | REPLY TO KHURANA

I begin with Thomas Khurana's comments, whose own work has contributed immensely to understanding the essential connection between life and freedom in Hegel's practical philosophy.[1] Khurana lays out clearly and elegantly some key features of my interpretation that I want to highlight, in part because these begin to speak to the issue of life as the form of judgment, and in part because it will lay the groundwork for addressing some of the questions raised by the other critics in the following sections.

First, and most important, the significance of life for reason and thought is not a problem that arises for thinking, as Khurana states, "from [the] outside," but one that arises as internal to thinking's own ongoing activity of self-comprehension and self-determination. Thinking-activity is living-activity, so arriving at self-knowledge necessarily requires knowledge of life. What this means is that for Hegel, the concept of life is not simply a classificatory concept, or a concept that allows us to grasp nature (unless we are interested in ourselves in relation to and as a part of nature); instead, the concept of life plays an essential role in the elaboration of Hegel's *idealism*, where this philosophical position contends that the possibility of knowledge of objects is inextricably and dialectically bound up with self-knowledge. The concept of life intervenes in the idealist thesis to block worries about idealism becoming merely subjective or psychological, for immediately manifest in life—its shape, its processes, its activity—is an objective, unself-conscious form of unity, self-relation, and causality that provides a model and basis for understanding the relation between concept and object.[2] Put in Hegel's technical terminology, life manifests the immediate form of both concept (*Begriff*, the unity and relation of individuality, particularity, and universality) and idea (*Idee*, the unity of concept and objectivity or concept and reality). Instead of being confined to the purview of self-consciousness and its intentional activity, the problem and possibility of knowledge are extended and recast as the question of how life becomes aware of its own activity and form, transforming unconscious, immediate cognitive forms and processes into self-conscious, self-determined thought and agency. To signal that the concept of life is always understood in relation to the idealist problematic, Hegel, following Schelling, refers to life as a "subject-object": as a subject, life relates to itself, its environment, and its species with a theoretical and practical interest in its own survival and reproduction; as an object, an individual living thing exemplifies and articulates the concrete universal of its species, exhibiting the unity and relation of concept and object, universality and individuality, that is characteristic of knowledge and truth.

Second, Khurana notes a number of logical and normative features in my treatment of Hegel's concept of life, emphasizing its essential connection with the problem of reflective judgment. While all judgment, in Kant's formulation, involves thinking the particular as contained under the universal, life expresses a deeper and distinct sense of individuality in relation to a universal species-concept that expands and transforms the ordinary understanding of judgment. Two aspects of this relation are worth mentioning in particular. First, species-concepts stand in a normative relation to their individual exemplars and enable evaluative judgments to be made about individuals with regard to their conformity or non-conformity with their species-concept, understood broadly as a purpose or end (*Zweck*). This normative dimension of life-form judgments has been treated across the history of philosophy from Aristotle to Kant and Hegel, and has also been taken up by contemporary ethical naturalists such as Phillipa Foot. In the *Science of Logic*, Hegel takes up this normative dimension of judgments involving species-concepts under the headings of judgments of necessity and judgments of the concept, which are key sections for understanding his overarching approach to the form and activity of judgment. Second, and equally important however, individual exemplars are not exhaustively determined by their species-concepts; rather, individuals express, manifest, and articulate their species-concepts such that these concepts are only available and intelligible in relation to an actual individual (this is what makes species-concepts *concrete* universals and why Kant claims that organisms manifest *internal* purposiveness). This is also why judgments of life (for Kant, but also for Hegel on my account) are *reflective* judgments: whereas in determining judgment we can apply a pre-given universal to a particular case, reflective judgments are available only by ascending from a particular to find the universal and are thus inextricably tied to the manifest reality of the living object. Drawing on insights from Kant and Hölderlin (especially Hölderlin's understanding of *Ur-teil* as original division), Hegel comes to understand the living subject-object as a manifestation of the fundamental form and activity of judgment itself, modeling all judgment on what he calls "the original judgment of

life" (*das ursprüngliche Urteil des Lebens*). Although the details of this account require a careful engagement with the progression of the Subjective Logic, the overarching claim is that the problem and possibility of judgment as such is opened up by and inextricably tied to the concept of life. Life in the *Logic* thus revolves around the problem of judgment, which in turn concerns the possibility of intelligibility as such. All of this is presented through the activity and development of pure thinking—of thought thinking itself.

Khurana raises three questions that all challenge the self-sufficiency of logic within the context of Hegel's system, suggesting that the claims of the *Logic* stand in a necessary relation to their development in the *Realphilosophie*. Although my aim in the book was to try to isolate and understand what was distinctive about Hegel's logical treatment of life, I am, to an extent, sympathetic with Khurana's general suggestion that attention to Hegel's encompassing *philosophical* concept of life requires us to go beyond the *Logic*, and more importantly, to treat the three parts of Hegel's system as mutually dependent parts of a greater whole. Moreover, insofar as many of the central arguments of the book focus on the final section of the *Logic* on the "Idea," the difficulty of isolating the logical domain is even more acute, given that the idea attains to a degree of concreteness that is not present in the other thought-determinations, being itself the unity of concept and *reality*. In the chapters on life and cognition, which represent the immediate and self-consciously mediated determinations of the logical idea respectively, Hegel is at pains to distinguish between what belongs properly to the logical domain from what belongs to nature and spirit. Both chapters begin with discussions that attempt to distinguish the logical treatment of life and cognition from the natural and spiritual treatments of the same, which, at the very least, suggest that he was attuned to the difficulty.[3] That the idea is likewise of especial interest as a point of connection between the different parts of Hegel's system also speaks to Khurana's contention that these parts must be grasped as *internally* related. Whereas nature is the idea in the "form of *otherness* [*Form des* Andersseins]" and as "*external to itself* [sich äußerlich]," spirit is the "Idea in its self-actualization [*die Idee in der Verwirklichung ihrer selbst*]," the "development [*Entwicklung*]" of the logical idea, and "the idea that has reached being-for-self [*Fürsichsein*]."[4] Logic, nature, and spirit are thus all various modes or manifestations of the idea, and their internal, systematic connection also turn on being determinations of the idea. Given this connection, one diagnosis of the apparent traversing into the topics of *Realphilosophie* at the conclusion of the *Logic* is to read the idea as a transitional moment[5]: rather than unduly traversing into topics of *Realphilosophie*, the idea as the unity of concept and *reality* enables or opens up the exit from the realm of shadows.[6] This exit is described as an "absolute liberation [*absolute* Befreiung]" in which "the idea *freely releases* itself [*die Idee sich selbst* frei entläßt]," resolving to determine itself as nature and completing its self-liberation as spirit.[7] In the final sentence of the *Logic*, the internal relation between logic, nature, and spirit *qua* determinations of the idea is clearly expressed; nonetheless, I think it is important to consider what is distinctive about the *pure* idea, which "in the science of logic finds the highest concept of itself, the pure concept conceptually comprehending itself."[8]

Khurana's first way of putting pressure on the self-sufficiency of a purely logical concept of life is to ask precisely what we learn about the *subject*, and especially theoretical and practical cognition, when we understand its activity in connection with life. (Khurana assumes that there is indeed much to be gained by treating the *object* as life; Yeomans also contends that there is more to be gained by treating life as a paradigmatic object of judgment and I will return to this issue below). Without denying that treating the subject as living is instructive for understanding agency, Khurana's suggestion is that the *Logic* on its own does not tell us much about the substance of living subjectivity and agency, and that the full significance of life in relation to the subject can only be spelled out by considering the dialectic of nature and spirit in the second and third parts of Hegel's system. More pointedly, Khurana claims that the features of living subjectivity that are discussed in the *Logic*—drive, what I call the form-constraints of life that involve corporeality, relation to an environment, and species-processes—are not fully intelligible as purely logical determinations. However, in line with my emphasis above and throughout the book on the problem of judgment, I want to suggest that the account of logical life provides insights into the activity of judgment and the judging subject that are not presented anywhere else in Hegel's system, and that its location within a science of logic, rather than the philosophy of spirit or mind, is itself instructive, especially in connection with blocking subjective or psychological idealism.

Outside of the *Logic*, Hegel's most sustained treatment of the problem of judgment can be found in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802). In chapter seven of my book, I argued that the advance made by Hegel in developing his theory of judgment in the *Logic* is most apparent in his assigning to life the logical role that he previously attributed to the productive imagination in *Faith and Knowledge*. Arguing against what he took to be Kant's formal and dualistic approach to judgment but also beginning from Kant's question, "*How are synthetic judgments a priori possible*?" Hegel answers that the elements that appear as heterogeneous and divided in judgment "are identical in the *a priori* way."[9] Although Hegel entertains different Kantian concepts as the source of this original, absolute identity, he ultimately claims that

> [t]he productive imagination must rather be recognized as what is primary and original, as that out of which subjective I and objective world first sunder themselves… This power of imagination is the original two-sided identity. The identity becomes subject in general on the one side, and object on the other; but originally it is both. And the imagination is nothing but reason itself, the idea of which was determined above.[10]

Later, he also reiterates that Kant's merit can be found in "his having put the idea of authentic *a priority* in the form of transcendental imagination."[11] While the details of Hegel's treatment of Kant are complex, transcendental imagination is privileged here as a source of original identity because it is the source of figurative synthesis, an a priori synthesis of the manifold of intuition that is at once "the principle of intuition *and* of the understanding."[12] Although Kant and the Hegel of 1802 both take the productive imagination, *qua* spontaneous, to fall within the purview of transcendental or speculative philosophy and not psychology (unlike the reproductive imagination), the mature Hegel takes the association of original identity with a particular cognitive faculty (whether this is productive imagination or, more often discussed, the intuitive understanding) to be inadequate insofar as one is concerned with an objective, non-psychological account of judgment. That Hegel abandons the productive imagination as the privileged source of original, absolute identity is evident from the fact that he discusses both the reproductive and the productive imagination under the heading of psychology in the *Philosophy of Mind*.[13]

What all this entails is that Hegel needs something to fill the distinctly logical role of a priori figurative synthesis *without* attributing this role to a merely subjective or psychological faculty. My argument in the book is that the logical concept of life comes to fill this role.[14] Describing life as the original subject-object of judgment in terms that parallel his earlier description of the productive imagination, now with his own, developed terminology, Hegel writes:

> The original *judgment* of life consists therefore in this, that it separates itself off as individual subject from the objective and, since it constitutes itself as the negative unity of the concept, makes the *presupposition* of an immediate objectivity.[15]

Thus, against Khurana's suggestion, I do in fact think there is a lot to be learned about the activity of the subject and theoretical and practical cognition by considering life at the logical register: not only is the fundamental activity of living subjects—that of judgment—presented in detail in the chapter on "Life," but it is also especially important that this account is presented as separate and distinct from the *Philosophy of Mind* to avoid subjective, psychological idealism. Rather than sourcing the original identity of subject and object to a psychological faculty, Hegel argues that the immediate activity of life expresses fundamental logical processes—of corporeality, in relation to externality, and in relation to the species—that produce subject-object identity, which enable and constrain the activities of self-conscious cognition. Although Khurana suggests that the logical dimension of living subjectivity can only be made fully intelligible through the *Philosophy of Mind* (and its dialectic with the *Philosophy of Nature*), I would argue that the presentation of theoretical and practical mind in the *Realphilosophie* in fact presupposes and depends upon the logical account of judgment provided via the logical concept of life. Most importantly, however, whereas the *Philosophy of Mind* explicitly presents the living subject in psychological terms, the logical concept of life supplies the non-psychological account of judgment and subjectivity that idealism requires if it is to be legitimately deemed *absolute*.

Above, I noted that I am broadly sympathetic with Khurana's suggestion that a philosophical concept of life is not confined to the *Logic* and that there exists an internal relation between the three parts of Hegel's system revolving around determinations of the idea. Although he is also right that the relation between logic and *Realphilosophie* does not involve "a unilinear direction of dependency according to which the logic is the self-standing foundation on which everything else rests," and perhaps more importantly, that the relation of logic to *Realphilosophie* should not be understood as one where the former is "applied" to the latter, logic nonetheless supplies the fundamental method of science (*Wissenschaft*), or as Hegel puts it, logic *is* method.[16] To be sure, logic is not an external method to be applied, but expresses "the structure of the whole in its pure essentiality."[17] In focusing on method as the pure idea, I discuss the logical concept of life as a priori, distinguishing it from an empirical concept of life that is tied to the heterogeneity and contingency of nature. Khurana objects to the terminology of the a priori, and also argues that I introduce an "un-Hegelian division of labor" by separating pure essential forms and structures on the one hand, and contingent, irrational existence on the other.[18] Since I have defended my use of the term a priori elsewhere,[19] here I will focus on Khurana's objection to the division of labor between pure forms and irrational existence.

I begin by noting that the association of logic and method with form is Hegel's. In addition to referring to method as the infinite, absolute form, what logic considers is "thinking *itself as form*," and we seek "satisfaction *with regard to form*" by uncovering the form of "*necessity*."[20] What Hegel objects to, then, is not an investigation of form or the pure form of thinking as such, but an approach to form that treats form as *external*, what we might call "*mere form* [*die* bloße Form]."[21] What is the difference between *pure* form (reine *Form*) and *mere* form (bloße *Form*)? Mere form treats form as external to and separate from its matter or content, an external relationship that Hegel associates with formalism. He describes logic that treats thinking as *mere* form as follows:

> Whenever logic is taken as the science of thinking in general, it is thereby understood that this 'thinking' constitutes *the mere form* of cognition; that logic abstracts from all *content*, and the so-called second *constitutive piece* that belongs to the cognition, namely the *matter*, must be given from elsewhere.... [L]ogic has hitherto rested on a separation, presupposed once and for all in ordinary consciousness, of the *content* of knowledge and its *form*, or of *truth* and *certainty*. Presupposed *from the start* is that the material of knowledge is present in and for itself as a ready-made world outside thinking; that thinking is by itself empty, that it comes to this material as a form from outside, fills itself with it, and only then gains a content, thereby becoming real knowledge.[22]

Despite this criticism of treating logic and thinking as *mere* form, Hegel also insists that logic is the *pure* form of thinking as such. The purity of thought-form, or thought-determinations, consists in their abstraction from feeling, sensation, intuition, imagination, desire, and volition—in short, anything in which thinking has a subjective significance, being associated with representation (*das Vorstellen*).[23] What the pure form of thinking does not abstract from, but rather, coincides with, are the "*essentialities of things* [Wesenheiten der Dinge]."[24] Hegel writes:

> The older metaphysics had in this respect a higher concept of thinking than now passes as the accepted opinion. For it presupposed as its principle that only what is known of things and in things by thought is really true in them, that is, what is known in them not in their immediacy but as first elevated to the form of thinking, as things of thought. This metaphysics held that thinking and the determination of thinking are not something alien to the subject matters, but are rather their essence, or that the *things* and the *thinking* of them agree in and for themselves... that thinking in its immanent determinations, and the true nature of things, are one and the same content.[25]

The pure form of thinking coincides with the essence, immanent determination, and true nature of things, attaining satisfaction with regard to form by grasping that which is necessary in the thing itself. So in saying that the pure, logical thought-determination of life is independent of the relative irrationality and contingency of nature, I am indeed

claiming that the former grasps the essence, structure, immanent determination, or true nature of living form. In other words, I affirm Hegel's logical concept of life as pure form or pure thought-determination *without* claiming that the logical concept of life is *mere* form. I take it that only the latter introduces an "un-Hegelian division of labor," whereas the former is precisely the task of the logic—to develop the pure thought-determinations that are at once the essential form and nature of things, with method expressing "the structure of the whole in its pure essentiality." Here the shadow metaphor is once again instructive: a shadow reveals the essential form of the thing that casts the shadow, while abstracting from all the colorful details, heterogeneity, and contingencies of that same thing. The "impotence of nature," to which Hegel refers, is also nature's colorful, heterogeneous, not fully rational existence, one whose essential form is difficult to discern in the likewise colorful representations of sensation and intuition.[26] That logic or pure thinking dwells and labors in the shadowy realm of "simple essentialities" does not separate it from things, but it does abstract from what is nonessential in the existence of nature and spirit in order to grasp the truth of things. As the essential form of things, the pure, logical concept of life, despite abstracting from certain contingencies,[27] nonetheless remains concrete because it is (like in the case of reflective judgment) tied to the actual thing of which it is the essential form.

Finally, Khurana asks: what motivates the transition to life and why does self-conscious cognition continually return to life in the dialectic of absolute method? Regarding the first question, Khurana objects to my formulation that life is a necessary condition for self-conscious cognition, claiming that this gets the mode of progression in the *Logic* backwards: instead of regressing towards necessary conditions, the *Logic* develops by providing a series of answers to various unresolved problems and contradictions on the path of moving through unsatisfying determinations of the pure form of knowing. Khurana is mostly correct here, and even if necessary conditions are revealed, they are revealed after the fact and as a result of the forward-moving development of progressive thought-determinations that aim to resolve problems from previous, more abstract, or one-sided determinations. The belatedness connoted by *Nachdenken* is also expressed by what is only grasped after the fact, after an active process of thinking the transforms the determination in question.[28] The logic of *presupposition* (*Voraussetzung*) in Hegel also moves in a similar, dialectical fashion: what is presupposed by any particular determination is also that which is posited as the result of its own immanent development. This logic of presupposition describes the relation between life and cognition: the idea of cognition presupposes the idea of life, but the idea of life is posited *as* a presupposition only through the development of the idea of cognition. In saying that life is a necessary condition for cognition, I am elaborating on Hegel's repeated and sustained claim that logical cognition *presupposes* life as an immediate determination of the idea.[29]

Why does self-conscious cognition continually return to life in the dialectic of absolute method? Although Khurana is correct that one way of understanding this return concerns the free release of pure thinking from itself in resolving to determine itself as nature and spirit, my focus on method contends that life as idea continually enables and constrains the activities of self-conscious cognition. It is not only, as Hegel says, that cognition without life would be "an empty affair devoid of determination;"[30] it is also only due to life that there is the drive and negativity that is the motor of dialectical thinking.

2 | REPLY TO PETERS

Julia Peters' critical comments all revolve around the question of life as ground, proposing three different possible interpretations of this thesis. Her account relies on a distinction between three senses or aspects of life: as unconscious, organic, or natural; as self-conscious life, engaged in theoretical and practical cognition dwelling in the space of reasons; and as logical life, which for her is the "fundamental unity that underlies the two other aspects of life." Although these three aspects could potentially be helpful in certain contexts, especially, for example, if one is interested in thinking about the relation between the three parts of Hegel's system, I think it is somewhat misleading to import this threefold distinction onto my interpretation insofar as I am clear throughout the book that I am interested primarily in the *logical* concept of life, which I do not understand in terms of a unity of the first two aspects defined

by Peters. Although I do (following Hegel) refer to life as unconscious and self-conscious, the former does not refer to natural life (this term itself can be confusing, since it is not evident that there can be *unnatural* life; perhaps a better term here is *mere* life, or does Peters mean an empirical concept of life? Or life in the *Philosophy of Nature*?), and the latter does not refer only to theoretical and practical cognition in the space of reasons. Since, as I discussed above and also throughout the book, life for Hegel manifests the immediate form of both concept and idea, I argue that life opens the space of reasons, not self-conscious cognition. My argument is that the possibility and problem of intelligibility as such revolve around the problem of life, such that life for Hegel is an immediate, primitive form of judgment. Life is always treated in at least proto-cognitive, if not already cognitive terms, and unconscious life (e.g., that of certain kinds of animals) also engages in theoretical and practical processes and relationships.[31]

On the basis of her distinction between the three senses or aspects of life, Peters presents three variations of the claim that life is ground, proposing certain advantages of and problems faced by each interpretation. I think the first variation—the correspondence view—bears the least resemblance to the position I defend in the book. Part of the problem is that Peters spells out the correspondence view through distinctions and terms that I do not employ, and moreover, focuses on two senses of life that do not quite track the logical concept of life I am interested in developing. I state explicitly that I am not concerned with an empirical concept of life, or life as it functions in the *Philosophy of Nature*, so the thesis that natural life grounds the objectivity and truthfulness of self-conscious judgments on the basis of correspondence misrepresents my argument. In the passage quoted by Peters from p. 199 that presumably presents the correspondence view, the sentence opens with "life *qua* idea," which is precisely not a "natural" concept of life but a logical one, since life is presented in its capacity *as idea*. Moreover, the passage discusses the correspondence between subject and predicate in judgment, *not* the correspondence between natural life and self-conscious judgments (the term correspondence does not figure much in my account at all except for when I discuss the possible correspondence of subject and predicate in judgments). Although I do suggest (like many others) that there is an instructive analogy to be drawn between features of life and features of self-consciousness in chapter three, my argument there is not about the objectivity or truthfulness of judgment but about the role that life plays in the self-constitution of self-consciousness.

Peters also suggests that the correspondence between natural life and self-conscious judgments is meant to be a contrast to holistic readings of the *Logic*, but this misunderstands the line of argument I was making in that context. Far from trying to demonstrate that "our logical categories and forms of judgment are *non-arbitrary* by showing that they correspond to something outside of themselves, such as the structure of natural life," my argument was that the idea as method serves as the ground of the *Logic* insofar as it is "the structure of the whole in its pure essentiality." The language of correspondence is simply inapt here, and as I noted earlier, the problem and form of life is not a problem that arises for thought "from the outside." Thinking-activity *is* living-activity; the relation here is not to anything external and is not one of correspondence. Any correspondence would be, as Peters later suggests, internal self-correspondence, insofar as life-form and life-activity manifest the form of judgment itself.

Before moving on, let me say something briefly about the relation of grounding. It is odd to treat correspondence in terms of a ground relation, and although Peters is interested in how we might understand life as ground, she does not discuss my brief account of ground when I introduce this problem in my book.[32] The thesis that life is the ground of judgment is framed in connection with Hegel's appropriation of Hölderlin's theory of judgment, in which judgment as the original division of subject and object is grounded in an original, undifferentiated unity of "Being." Hegel affirms Hölderlin's understanding of *Ur-teil* as *ursprüngliche Teilung*, but rejects its grounding in "Being," an original unity that is in principle inaccessible to judgment. Instead, and building on insights from Kant's third *Critique* concerning the relation between purposiveness and judgment, Hegel argues that judgment as original division finds its ground in life, which manifests both original division and original unity, and rather than being incommensurate with judgment, is itself the original form and activity of judgment—*das ursprüngliche Urteil des Lebens*. Although this retelling of the argument here is too brief, let me add four points concerning ground that might help to clarify the thesis. First, concerning the very idea of a ground, a determination taken up in the Doctrine of Essence, Hegel anticipates that a *sufficient* ground requires the concept of purpose, and claims that "to be a ground in a *teleological sense* is a property of the *concept*," requiring a shift from the language of ground (*Grund*) to the language of

reason (*Vernunft*).[33] So minimally, life as ground already refers to ground in the teleological sense, constituting (a) reason. Second, Hegel is rightly and generally acknowledged to be anti-foundationalist; unlike some of his contemporaries, he consistently resists the method of setting out from first principles. In positing life as ground, I have in mind Hegel's claim that an absolute foundation is one that makes itself a foundation, and anything that can serve as a foundation in Hegel's system must be a self-grounding ground. Third, to avoid arbitrariness in the relation of grounding, ground and grounded must share a sufficient identity of form, and the relationship between them should be understood in terms of actualization, or less technically, as *development*.[34] As ground, then, life is the first actuality of cognition. Fourth and finally, and borrowing the words of another critic, life is indeed not a calm foundation but a productive ground that stands in a constant dialectical relation to that which it grounds. Far from correspondence, the relation of grounding here is teleological, self-actualizing, and dialectical.

Peters presents two further variations on the thesis of life as ground that both revolve around the concept of purposiveness. In these variations, what she refers to as logical life (the third aspect of life on her threefold distinction) figures as the fundamental structure of inner purposiveness, which grounds natural life and self-conscious life. Although the connection between logical life and the structure of internal purposiveness is correct, I would still contend that the threefold distinction she introduces is misleading, as I do not suggest that logical life serves as the ground to either natural life or self-conscious life. In the first variation of the purposiveness view, life as ground functions perspectivally, insofar as objects of judgment are always considered from the perspective of a particular form of life. In the second variation, life as ground functions as a priori, operating as an underlying structure that shapes any life-form and all judgment.

With some important qualifications, I think certain aspects of these two variations do capture my position. However, rather than choosing between them, I think the relevant aspects of the two variations operate as part of a single account of a logical concept of life. One way of understanding how this works is through Hegel's approach to the necessary and intrinsic relation between universality and individuality: universality as essential form is concrete and manifest through individuals, and individuals are in turn determinable and intelligible as the individuals they are only insofar as they are exemplars of a universal. Within the context of understanding the logical concept of life, the universal, essential form of life-activity is manifest in the activity of living individuals as members of particular species, but the latter activity likewise exemplifies the universal, a priori form of life. This universal, a priori form of life at once enables and constrains the judging activities of *all* living individuals (unconscious and self-conscious). Although species-specific capacities and processes will come into play at the level of experience, the general, logical form of life-activity cuts across all life insofar as life is "original judgment." This a priori form of life operates as a set of processes or form-constraints—corporeality, externality, the genus or species-process—that enable and give shape to the activity of judgment.

In responding to Peters' remaining questions, I think my approach to the logical concept of life avoids both horns of her dilemma, namely: either a crudely "pragmatist" understanding of objectivity and truthfulness that treats logical life as contingent and particular, or an excessively mystifying a priori concept of life in which logical life somehow creates or causes natural and self-conscious life (a rationalist fantasy, or if one likes, a Schellingian nightmare). Although a living being's experiential relation to the external world and its theoretical and practical cognition is driven by species-specific needs, interests, and capacities, the *form of truth itself* is not; *that* form is fundamentally constrained by the *logical idea* and the immediate form of the logical idea is the logical concept of life. So there is no throwing overboard of a robust, objective form of truth, nor is there a rationalist fantasy of logic creating concrete, living acts of judgment. The logical form of life places genuine constraints on judgment but does not cause or create in any mystifying sense. Rather, it is the essential form, shadow, or outline of all possible and actual judging activity, one that has reality only insofar as it is expressed as the *internal purposiveness* of actual living beings.

3 | REPLY TO YEOMANS

Christopher Yeomans' critical comments revolve around the connection between the logical concept of life and structure of the object, arguing that the best way of understanding the significance of life is to view living objects as

the *paradigmatic* objects of judgment. Viewed as the paradigmatic objects of judgment, such objects are nonetheless subject to what he helpfully calls a Goldilocks criterion: we need the right amount of richness in the object to avoid mechanistic reductionism and to lay the groundwork for subject-object identity, but not too much, or such a specific kind of richness that only certain kinds of objects can be judged. Throughout his comments, Yeomans suggests that my interpretation does not successfully strike this balance, generally tending toward an overly inflationary understanding of life tied to the functions of biological organisms, rather than a more deflationary one based on a thin notion of internal teleology. Although I am sympathetic to the idea that life is a paradigmatic object of judgment, and in certain contexts argue in this direction (e.g., in chapter three, where the living object is a kind of Goldilocks object for the reflection of self-consciousness), one reason I do not take this route entirely is to meet the hermeneutic and philosophical demand of understanding Hegel's unwavering commitment to the idea that life is a *subject-object*. If living objects are the paradigmatic objects of judgment, this is not simply due to the fact that they exhibit the right kind of richness, complexity, structure, and internal self-organization, or even because they exhibit an internal end—though all of this is arguably true and of great interest to Hegel and other notable thinkers. Without denying the importance of these features of life, for Hegel, I think the ultimate answer as to why the living object is the paradigmatic object of judgment is that *judgers are living objects*. As I noted earlier, the significance of life for Hegel is always connected with the idealist thesis that knowledge of objects is intrinsically and dialectically bound up with self-knowledge. It is because judging subjects are living objects that the latter are the paradigmatic objects of judgment. The living object is a kind of self-exhibition of judgment, expressing at once the objective form of things and the subjective activity of grasping that form (both unconsciously and self-consciously).

Yeomans argues that the inflationary understanding of life poses a number of problems, but for the sake of simplicity let me reduce these to three: first, the general question concerning inflationary versus deflationary understandings of life, and the relation between the terms *Gattung* and *Begriff*; second; the question concerning whether my life-centered view unduly restricts our knowledge of objects, such that *the number 5* or *the planet mercury*, as non-living objects, cannot be objects of knowledge; third, the question concerning parochialism and incommensurability when we take up an inflationary understanding of life on the side of the subject.

The first way that Yeomans puts pressure on what he views as an overly inflationary account of life in my reading is to ask about the relation between the terms *Gattung* and *Begriff*.[35] He argues that the semantic substitution in which we read *Begriff* as *Gattung* only works on a deflationary reading (*Gattung* and other life-related terms are connected to *kinds* or *types*), but not on an inflationary one (*Gattung* and other life-related terms involve processes like sensibility, irritability, reproduction, and death). However, the deflationary reading is hardly novel, and more importantly, it cannot not do the complex epistemological work of connecting knowledge of objects with self-knowledge.

I think the idea of "semantic substitution" is too strong for understanding the connection between *Gattung* and *Begriff*: this implies that there is no semantic difference between the terms and no remainder in substituting one term for another, but this is not my claim in the book, despite the fact that I do think the terms are importantly connected. In the context of the *Phenomenology*, the self-conscious awareness of one's own *Gattung*-concept, which also implies the ability to grasp and employ *Gattung*-concepts more generally, is the basis for Hegel's concept of *Geist*: the I that is We and the We that is I. Insofar as the grasp of one's *Gattung*-concept is a self-constituting act of self-consciousness, it is clear that *Gattung*-concepts are connected with *the* concept or *der Begriff*, which is likewise associated with self-consciousness.[36] In other places, Hegel also associates the moment of universality in *der Begriff* with the concrete universality of genus- and species-concepts as kinds or types.[37] However, although *Gattung*-concepts serve as a general model for the unity of *der Begriff*, Hegel also frequently notes the inadequacy of *empirical Gattung*-concepts, which only attain to a weak or relative universality and necessity. One way of thinking about the relation then, is to say that *der Begriff* is an "ideal type" of *Gattung*-concepts as kinds. So while we cannot go as far as semantic substitution, *Gattung*-concepts remain essential for explicating *der Begriff* and grasping its distinct form of concrete unity.

I think that even on the deflationary reading that takes *Gattung* as kind, more epistemological work is being done to establish the basis for idealism than Yeomans suggests, given that Hegel understands self-consciousness and *Geist*

as the *Gattung* for-itself. The self-conscious awareness of one's own *Gattung*-concept on the part of self-consciousness implies the general ability to grasp the concrete *Gattung*-concepts of other *objects*, and in fact, this grasp of the *Gattung*-concept of another object (most notably, an object that belongs to the same *Gattung* as self-consciousness) is the process through which the "I" is first established. This is just to say that even on the deflationary reading, Hegel *is* doing novel epistemological work with the idea of kinds or types in his argument for idealism.

What then, of the inflationary reading in which life involves processes such as sensibility, irritability, and reproduction? As Yeomans points out, the issue cannot simply be that of choosing between a deflationary versus inflationary reading, since there is ample textual evidence to support both. The hermeneutic and philosophical question, then, should be to consider in what ways the two treatments of life are related or distinct, and what Hegel means to demonstrate when focusing on one treatment versus the other. In clarifying this issue, I will not employ the language of deflationary versus inflationary, which I often find to be unhelpful. What Yeomans is drawing attention to are two different dimensions of the concept of life, both of which are essential for Hegel's account. The first concerns the specific unity and relation between universality, particularity, and individuality that is exhibited in the living thing. This unity and relation forms the basis of Hegel's understanding of the unity of the concept, one that involves explicating universality in connection with *Gattung*-concepts as kinds, a distinctive notion of individuality as an exemplar of a concrete universal, and also what Yeomans calls the "thin" notion of internal teleology in which the unity and form of the concept involve the relation of an internal end. The second concerns the kinds of living capacities, activities, and processes that realize the moments and unity of the concept in an organism, which involve sensibility, irritability, and reproduction.[38] Whereas it is more obvious how the former is instructive with respect to thinking about logic and concepts, the latter brings us into territory that appears extra-logical, and involves features of biological functionality that are simply inapplicable and excessive when considering concepts of nonliving things. Rather than associating them with deflationary and inflationary understandings of life, I think the former primarily concerns the determination of *the concept* (*der Begriff*), whereas the latter primarily concerns the determination of *the idea* (*die Idee*) as the *adequate concept*.[39] The unity of the concept allows us to grasp the general form of judgment and the general form of objects (discussed in the first two sections of the Subjective Logic: developing the concept produces the forms of judgment and syllogism, along with the forms of mechanism, chemism, and teleology),[40] and the unity of the idea allows us to grasp the realization or activity of judgment as the activity of the judging subject (discussed in the final section of the Subjective Logic, where this activity is immediately realized in life and self-consciously realized in cognition). This helps to answer Yeomans' concern about the difficulty of finding analogs of sensibility, irritability, and reproduction with regard to nonliving objects: we simply do not need to do this, and doing this would be animism or anthropomorphism, because these are only features of objects who are also judging subjects, not features of objects in general.

This brings me to the second question concerning whether or not my life-centered view unduly restricts our knowledge of objects, such that things like *the number 5* or *the planet mercury*, as non-living, cannot become objects of knowledge. Of course, my answer here is no, but I think the problem concerns balancing two claims: on the one hand, that method is *absolute*, that "nothing is conceived and known in its truth unless *completely subjugated to the method*," in other words, the domain of intelligibility is *unbounded* and knowing as such is subject to method[41]; on the other hand, that the possibility of intelligibility as such is opened up by life. That these two claims do not work against each other, but are fully compatible, is what I mean to argue in claiming that absolute method is best understood as a dialectic of life and cognition.

Yeomans' way of articulating the point is ask about access to knowledge of nonliving objects in the absence of space and time as the a priori forms of intuition. Since I attribute the powers of inner and outer sense to processes discussed in the "Life" chapter and argue that logical life can be understood as a schema, Yeomans worries that we have no access to knowledge of nonliving objects. But this to read the idea of schema and processes of life as a strange kind of "screen" that only registers other living things, rather than as logical processes and capacities that enable *any object*—mechanical, chemical, or teleological—to be given for a subject at all. Moreover, space and time *do* figure in the picture here, but not yet as forms of intuition. For Hegel, space and time are, first and foremost,

determinations of nature as self-externality, or "self-externality in its complete abstraction."[42] Eventually, in his Psychology, Hegel presents space and time as the forms in which intelligence is intuitive, the first stage of theoretical mind, but the *Logic* deals only with the immediate, primitive processes of inner and outer sense without reference to the intuition of space and time. An addition in the *Philosophy of Mind* helpfully discusses the intuiting mind in relation to space and time as follows:

> But when we said that what is sensed receives from the *intuiting mind* the form of the spatial and temporal, this statement must not be understood to mean that space and time are *only subjective* forms. This is what *Kant* wanted to make space and time. However, things are in truth *themselves* spatial and temporal.... When, therefore, our intuitive mind does the determinations of sensation the honor of giving them the abstract form of space and time, thereby making them into proper objects as well as assimilating them to itself, what happens here is by no means what happens in the opinion of subjective idealism, namely, that we receive only the *subjective* manner of our determining and not the determinations belonging to the object itself... [however] space and time are extremely meagre and superficial determinations, therefore things get very little from these forms, and by the loss of them, were this in fact possible, they would thus lose very little.[43]

So the fact that space and time do not yet figure in Hegel's discussion of the logical processes of life as idea does not imply that judging subjects have no access to objects *qua* spatiotemporal. For Hegel, all objects are in and of themselves spatiotemporal, so that form is available independent of any subjective activity. He is also clear, however, that even when a subject intuits in spatiotemporal form, what that form provides in terms of the determination of the object is very little, almost nothing. I take this to mean that even the most primitive apprehension and comprehension of objects always involves more than just determining that object as spatiotemporal, that living subjects always have a richer sense of the object (even nonliving objects) as shaped by the powers of sensibility and irritability enabled by their life-form. That life opens up intelligibility does not mean that *only* living things are intelligible; rather, it means that the very question of the conditions of rendering intelligible *itself* only becomes intelligible once there are beings *for whom* things can be intelligible. For those beings—living, judging subjects—things become intelligible on the basis of the logical form and processes of life, which, as Hegel makes clear, also involve mechanical and chemical self-, world-, and other-relations, as much as teleological ones. Nowhere do I suggest that only things that can be eaten or mated with can become objects of knowledge (which is surely absurd). Rather, sensibility and irritability—which afford a wide variety of theoretical and practical powers for non-self-conscious and self-conscious judgers alike—enable the inwardly and outwardly directed processes and activities of judging subjects, who exhibit "the drive to posit this *other* world *for itself*, similar to itself, to sublate it and to objectify *itself*."[44] Nowhere is there a restriction on the kinds of objects that are subject to this drive, and any limitations involved would not pertain to our ability to know or engage with living versus nonliving objects, but to limitations and powers of the species. For Hegel, *self-conscious* life knows no such limitations, which is what makes its method absolute.[45]

Finally, the third issue raised by Yeomans concerns worries about parochialism and incommensurability when we take up an inflationary understanding of life on the side of the subject. Worries about parochialism are commonplace, but I think they are sometimes overstated or based on a misunderstanding. Parochial suggests that something is limited or overly narrow in its scope, that it is unduly restricted to a very particular point of view (literally: restricted to a specific parish or ecclesiastical district). In the case of unduly restricting intelligibility to the context of living judgers, parochialism loses its meaning: there is no other relevant or meaningful parish to which we can refer, which is why far from being parochial, Hegel takes life as the immediate idea to be the basis for absolute method. The idea of life does not restrict the capacities of judgment to "the body plans, nutritional needs, and reproductive strategies of finite human beings"; if the idea "restricts" the domain of the activity of judgment, it is "restricted" to the activities of life and self-conscious life, rather than the activities of human beings or of any particular species. I thus disagree with Yeomans' claim that "only humans and not other animals judge"; the whole point of the original judgment of life

is to suggest that all living things judge, that the activity of life as such can be understood as judgment. As I noted in my reply to Peters, while species-specific capacities bring great variability at the level of experience, the *form of truth* as the logical idea is invariable and a priori (my critics' objections to this term notwithstanding). Far from incommensurability between life-forms, life as idea is what makes truth and knowledge commensurable across different forms of life.[46] Instead of eradicating the possibility of a common public world across life-forms, life as the immediate idea is what enables this common public world—a "common sense" (*Gemeinsinn*), if you will, a presupposition of the universal communicability of truth as such.

ENDNOTES

[1] See Khurana (2017).

[2] This is the crucial insight from Kant's third *Critique* that Hegel (and Schelling) develops. See Clinton Tolley's helpful reconstruction of this point in his review of my book, Tolley (forthcoming) in *Mind*.

[3] In the chapter on life: "The idea of life has to do with a subject matter so concrete, and if you will so real, that in dealing with it one may seem according to the common notion of logic to have overstepped its boundaries… A comment may be in order here to differentiate the logical view of life from any other scientific view of it… to differentiate logical life as idea from natural life as treated in the *philosophy of nature*, and from life insofar as it is bound to *spirit*" (WL 676–677/6: 469–471). In the chapter on cognition: "… [S]pirit here is considered in the form that pertains to this idea as logical. For the idea also has other shapes which we may now mention in passing; in these it falls to the concrete sciences of spirit to consider it, namely as *soul*, *consciousness*, *and spirit as such*" (WL 694/6: 494).

[4] PN § 247; PG, §377Z, 381Z, 381.

[5] A *transitional moment*, though as Hegel claims, it "is not a *transition*" in the sense of the transitions that have been presented between thought-determinations throughout the *Logic* (WL 752/6:573).

[6] As I have suggested elsewhere (Ng, 2019), Hegel's shadow metaphor implies that logic as pure thought is not self-sufficient insofar as shadows must be cast by *something*.

[7] WL 752–753/6:573.

[8] WL 753/6:573.

[9] GW 69/2:304.

[10] GW 73/2:308.

[11] GW 79/2:316.

[12] GW 70/2:305 (my emphasis). On figurative synthesis, see §24 of the first *Critique*.

[13] PG §455–456.

[14] In the book, I discuss the logical concept of life and its processes in terms of an a priori schema.

[15] WL 678/6:473.

[16] "It might seem necessary to state at the outset the principal points concerning the *method* of this movement, that is, the method of science. However, its concept lies in what has already been said, and its genuine exposition belongs to logic, or is to a greater degree even logic itself, for the method is nothing but the structure of the whole in its pure essentiality" (PhG ¶48/3:47).

[17] PhG ¶48/3:47.

[18] Peters and Yeomans also object to my designation of life as a priori. Sebastian Rand (2021) has provided a detailed account and critique of my use of the term a priori in relation to Hegel.

[19] See my reply to Rand in Ng (2021).

[20] EL §2, 9. Uncovering the form of necessity turns out also to uncover the form of freedom: "*freedom* reveals itself to the be *truth of necessity* and *the relational mode of the concept*" (WL 509/6:246). In reference to logical form, Hegel also uses the term *Formtätigkeit*.

[21] WL 24/5:36.

[22] WL 24/5:36–37.

[23] EL §19, 20.

[24] EL §24.

[25] WL 25/5:38.

[26] PN §250; WL 536/6:282. I should also note that the relative irrationality and contingency of nature's existence is not enough to challenge the rationalism of Hegel's *Doppelsatz*; afterall, not everything that *exists* is *actual* (EL §6, 142Z).

[27] I say certain contingencies because Hegel acknowledges the necessity of contingency in both empirical existence and the activity of pure thinking, so the logical concept of life does not require the elimination of *all* contingency in order to discern essential form. Unlike the case in Kant, the contingency of empirical nature for Hegel is not a threat to the operation of judgment.

[28] See EL §21–22.

[29] WL 676/6:470. Khurana is also correct that another motivation for the transition to life concerns unresolved problems in our conception of objectivity (the transition from teleology to the idea of life). I would also add that what first motivates the transition to life in the *Logic* can also be found in the transition from the Objective to Subjective Logic, which resolves problems in our understanding of substance and causality to arrive at the form of self-determination. In the phenomenological context, what motivates the transition to life concerns finding the right kind of object to reflect the activity of self-consciousness.

[30] WL 677/6:470.

[31] PN §357–359.

[32] See the discussion from pp. 168 to 178, and especially the discussion of ground at p. 177.

[33] WL 388/6:83.

[34] I track this complex logic of actualization from grounds to grounded in chapter four.

[35] On the way to presenting this problem, Yeomans asks why, if the living object is a condition for self-consciousness, it is not the case that it is also the *last* object considered in the progression of the *Phenomenology*, nor that the progression of objects moving forward involves an increase in living quality or vitality. One way of answering this is to argue that chapter IV on self-consciousness marks an important break in the text, a place in the text where we have caught up with the method outlined in the introduction (in the book, I argue that we can read the transition from consciousness to self-consciousness as an exhibition of Hegel's general method). Insofar as this section exhibits the general method of progression, there is a sense in which life *is* the last object, such that there are no further objects "richer" than life (Hegel himself recounts the objects that have come before in opening the chapter on self-consciousness, that of sense-certainty, perception, and force, claiming that we have now reached a turning point where certainty is identical with truth). Beyond this, rather than continuing to develop further concepts of objects, the *Phenomenology* begins to follow *self-conscious self-conceptions* (both individual and spiritual) in relation to a manifold of spiritual objects (including other subjects, forms of reason and theories, social institutions and roles, historical events, etc.). Spiritual objects, however, are not different in kind from living objects; they are just *self-conscious* living objects.

[36] WL 515/6:254.

[37] See for example WL 16–17, 533, 575/5:26, 6:278, 335.

[38] Although the genus or species process is determined as the universal (WL 687/6:484), Yeomans is right that reproduction is associated with individuality (PN §353). I take it that in reproduction, the genus (universal) obtains actuality in producing individuality.

[39] See my discussion of the difference between concept and idea at p. 182 and also Ng (2021). Hegel writes regarding this difference: "But the *adequate* concept is something higher; it properly denotes the agreement of the concept with reality, and this is not the concept as such but the *idea*" (WL 542/6:290).

[40] This is why there is no problem of how we can have a concept of mechanism and mechanical objects.

[41] WL 737/6:551–552.

[42] PN §253.

[43] PG §448Z.

[44] WL 684/6:481.

[45] Yeomans' examples of non-living objects are also somewhat odd: numbers, planets, and tax policies. They are odd as examples not because of their non-living status, but because I take these to be abstract objects in the sense that they are only available as objects of knowledge to self-conscious forms of cognition with highly developed theoretical and practical powers (even planets, the most concrete of these objects, are only known in relation to complex theoretical constructs and instruments). So the problem of our knowledge of these kinds of objects does not entirely track Yeomans' worries about space and time, since the forms of space and time will not help much with regard to making possible knowledge of *these* objects (even in the case of planets!).

[46] Yeomans' worry about ethical naturalism in connection with the normativity of species-concepts—that same-sex sexual relations could be viewed as natural defect—was answered above in my account of reflective judgment. As Khurana also noted, living individuals are not only not exhaustively determined by their species-concepts, but actively articulate their species-concept. Self-conscious life has this power to such a degree that it can become *alienated* from its species-concept, a condition that it seeks to overcome by transforming its species-concept, not by fiat, but within the constraints set by life-activity as such (most notably, its bodily needs, its relation to and dependence on its environment, and its relation to and dependence on other members of its species).

ABBREVIATIONS

EL: The *Encyclopaedia Logic*, *Part I of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze* (1991), H.S. Harris and Walter Cerf (trans.). Albany: SUNY Press/*Werke in zwanzig Bänden* (1969–1970), Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (eds.), vol. 8. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag. (cited by section number)
GW: *Faith and Knowledge* (1977), Walter Cerf and H.S. Harris (trans.). Albany: SUNY Press/*Werke*, vol. 2.
PG: *Hegel's Philosophy of Mind: Translated from the 1830 Edition, together with the Zusätze* (2007), W. Wallace and A.V. Miller (trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press/*Werke*, vol. 10. (cited by section number)
PhG: *Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018), Terry Pinkard (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/*Werke*, vol. 3. (cited by paragraph number in English)
PN: *Philosophy of Nature: Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences (1830)* (1970), A.V. Miller (trans.). Oxford: Oxford University Press/*Werke*, vol. 9. (cited by section number)
WL: *Science of Logic* (2010), George di Giovanni (trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press/*Werke*, vols. 5–6.

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