

## ***Natural Becoming: From Bad Infinity Towards an Open Dialectic? Contemporary Issues Moving From Hegel's Philosophy of Nature***



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**Abstract:** In Hegel's Philosophy, natural time is the engine of bad infinity, presenting itself through disappearance. Nevertheless, as one proceeds towards the higher levels of the realm of exteriority, this force from abstract becomes increasingly real until it becomes part of vital processes in the organized subjectivity, such as that of the living organism that "knows" and uses this becoming as a force to its advantage, e.g., in the forms of metabolism. This effective meaning of natural becoming seems to us to have been particularly highlighted in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century in the "Philosophical Biology" of Hans Jonas, whereby even the elements of failure (e.g., in the animal's procurement of food) are grasped as expressions of a distinctive trait of the subject, namely its capacity to bear the negative and with this to establish mediation.

Even the mortal limit, which is what leads to the conclusion of the *Naturphilosophie* requiring the elevation to the Philosophy of Spirit in Hegel, according to Jonas, takes on, within the human awareness, a renewed ontological value that allows life to flourish again and with this makes human beings able to ask themselves what kind of world they want to hand over (also with environmental regard) to future generations. If this is the case, then a role for *Naturphilosophie* becomes highly topical about producing an "open dialectic" invoked many times in the philosophical paths of the 20th century.

**Keywords:** Hegel; Jonas; Philosophy of Nature; becoming; open-ended dialectic; metabolism; Hermeneutics.

### **I. Introduction**

This paper aims to verify the possibility of a hermeneutic approach to Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, such that the natural processualism that initially manifests itself only as an externality can also become a chance, given the realization of an open dialectic. In doing so, living subjects can use the limit and the experience of natural negativity and finiteness to unite their becoming. From this perspective, the most stimulating comparison will be that with the "Philosophical Biology" by Hans Jonas, and yet a brief passage through the thoughts of Habermas and Ricoeur will allow access to some hermeneutic tools that are particularly useful here.

Achieving this goal in the way we have just described it is essential for two reasons:

(1) On the one hand, the dialectic of *Naturphilosophie* is not conclusive in itself. For

Hegel, the finiteness and the limit imposed by natural exteriority necessarily entail the passage to a higher level of understanding, that of the *Philosophy of Spirit*. This is precisely the limit of Nature, but if we look at this from a Jonasian point of view, we realize that this is the reason why the Philosophy of Nature does not and cannot lend itself to the criticism of being supposed to be an immanent and “necessary” success story which Jonas instead addresses to the Philosophy of History by Hegel. All this in no way intends to lead to pessimism, much less to nihilism, but instead returns to posing the great ontological question in Leibnizian style on a natural level (Jonas 1984, 47–48).

(2) In this way, it seems to us that a contribution is coming from the outside, that is, from Jonas’s philosophy, to support what, from within research on Hegel, *Hegel-Forschung* has been pointing out over the last 40 or 50 years now: Philosophy of Nature is an essential part of the system and without it one cannot truly understand Hegel’s philosophy as a whole. This should even be obvious when talking about a system of philosophy in general and even more so when dealing with a system that presents itself as a living organism. Yet, we know that, historically, Hegel’s system has not always been read as a whole. Therefore, this paper also wants to contribute from this exegetical point of view in favor of the role of the Philosophy of Nature within Hegel’s system.

## II. The Natural Limit of Time: Exteriority and Unmediated Mediation

It is true that the understanding of time and space in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature is so relational that it allows for interesting points of comparison with the visions of twentieth-century physics; on the other hand, precisely because of this, it is clear that if the temporal dimension remains at the mercy of itself, isolated from the rest and therefore first and foremost isolated from space, it also remains meaningless or precisely relegated to the lack of an actual dimension. Within a mere ideal – in Hegel’s German lexicon, we should say “ideel” (Hegel 1992, § 258, 247) – understanding of time, what is missing is the determining function of time itself. That is the actual effectiveness of that function. As already in the Aristotelian view, the temporal instant had the meaning of determining according to a ‘before’ and an ‘after’, here too: if those before and after are not really there, then time loses its meaning. Hence, it is interesting to reread Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature by looking at the history of philosophy and by using a twentieth-century view of relativity as a hermeneutic criterion. In the latter way, we can examine the valence of time as the fourth dimension of space within the entire natural course (on this: Wandschneider 1982).

Still, let’s think of the ideality of time in itself, returning to Hegel. At the beginning of the *Naturphilosophie*, it constitutes something one-dimensional, the infinite repetition of the identical. And it is an infinity incapable of being a whole; in the phenomenological sense, it is, therefore, incapable of being ‘true.’ It’s a bad infinity. “Boredom” (Hegel 1986, 189): not only in an existential sense but also in the lack of diversification of determining.

As in many other cases in Hegel's thought, here, too, immediacy is a lack of truth because it is incapable of understanding diversity. We seem to be dealing with an identity, that of a being that also is not, and vice versa (Hegel 2004, § 258), but this does not constitute a true identity at all because it does not comprise a processualism. It is not a whole. That is why this leads to non-dimensionality: what was already a determining element par excellence in Aristotelian Physics, the instant, the temporal point-time, if it only repeats itself always identically and continuously, does not determine anything at all (Hegel 1986, 189; Höhle 1988, 306–312) and then time is a negative indistinct, a quality without real quality; meanwhile, space remains a positive indistinct, quantity without actual quantity. Without relating, both remain, so to say, 'dimensionless dimensions'. Simple and repeated lack of interiority, mere exteriority: time as subjectivity without subject (because still incapable of relating to the object), space as objectivity without object (because still incapable of relating to the subject). In its remaining empty ideal, natural exteriority mediates without mediating.

On the other hand, already in Aristotelian Physics, the instant could perform its decisive function insofar as, together with another instant, it made it possible to measure the beginning and end of a period, of an interval, of a temporal quantity. Processualism, the flow of diversity, allowed the genuine otherness of the second "point-hour" of the second instant. Without this "being-between," there is no true otherness. The "being-between" mediates and likewise differentiates. More precisely, while it differentiates, it mediates.

### **III. Difference and Dialectical Process**

Thus, the transition from ideality to reality in nature can also be read as a progressive path of concretization of mediation. The overcoming of mere natural exteriority takes place through effective mediation, that which knows how to bring the forms of difference back to a unitary process without eliminating them, on the contrary, making them strong. For Hegel, this is the typical capacity of the individual. He defines the earth in this way already in the physical sphere (Hegel 2004 § 285, 113), the archetypal element that brings together and enables its relationship with the other elements (fire, air, and water) to unfold in a unitary and processual form; but this does not remove the difference from mediation at all. Fire continues to burn; air continues to consume; without this, any dialectics between the elements would not be possible. Without this consuming action, the earth itself remains initially indeterminate. And yet, that this negativity can become effective and real is guaranteed by an effective mediation, such that it makes the relationship between elements a physically actual process (Hegel 2004, §§ 281–285, 105–113). And if, very succinctly, we look at the successive and higher stages of natural development, a similar processual unity passing through negativity is also to be found in aspects of individual physics, as we can grasp from a couple of examples of what Hegel calls the "Physics of the Particular Individuality": what the phenomenon of elasticity

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and that of sound have in common is the constitution of a unity that passes through the negation of spatial indifference (Hegel 2004, §§ 297, 299–301, 133–134; 136–147). The role of individuality emerges in giving a dialectical unity that is here declined according to particularity. This type of reading would also be interesting for what we today call the alternating electric current; however, this reference would also find its initial foundation in that difference of potential, in that opposition between positive and negative that Hegel himself already emphasized in the electrical phenomenon (Hegel 2004, §§ 323–325, 220–232).

On the other hand, with this type of processualism, according to Hegel, we have, in effect, entered “The Physics of the Total Individuality,” of which the chemical process represents the highest realization and, at the same time, also the limit (Hegel 2004, § 335, 269–270): here the most authentic meaning of the *telos* is not yet achieved either from the point of view of individuality or from that of its realization as an organic unity. The chemical process does not yet realize an internal goal, so the outcome differs from what started the process. The chemical process, taken by itself, comes dialectically close to the individual meaning of life and yet never reaches it: this is why Hegel writes that it is life “in general” [*im Allgemeinen*] (Hegel 1992, § 335, 342): there is no internal individual unity. We can recognize here a limitation that we have already pointed out on other levels, whereby with a contradictory and dialectical formula, we can go so far as to say that the chemical process is life, but still without life. As mentioned earlier, the reason that Hegel provides is decisive and illuminates, by contrast, the link between *telos* and organic life: the lack of identity between beginning and end requires the passage, *der Übergang*, towards the living organism. The latter is, for Hegel, the most accomplished realization of individuality on a natural level precisely because it enacts the internal purpose expressed in the self-maintenance process. The organic process “spontaneously kindles and sustains itself” (Hegel 2004, § 336, 270). This statement is perfectly consistent with an earlier one belonging to the Jena period that made the difference to the chemical process even clearer: organic processualism is whereby “the beginning is the same as the end” (Hegel 1976a, 110). These considerations also allow us to emphasize a particular moment in the organism’s life and its conceptual being, whereby the presence of the logical element can be recognized in the nutritional functions. Here, the conceptual connections are much more evident if we bear in mind both the systematic writings of the Jena period and the *Encyclopaedia*: it is not difficult to realize that in Hegel (Hegel 1975, 217–221), the first part of the living organism’s nutrition, that of the ingestion of food and its mastication is characterized at a mechanical level, but with this it achieves the first step necessary to make possible the transformation of food that occurs during the chemical phase of digestion, because of the availability of the nutrients, to maintain the organism’s life process. The logical structure is prominent: Mechanism-Chemism-Teleology (Hegel 2013, §§ 195–212, 381; on this: Illetterati 1995a, 219–287). These observations will be helpful when we address the metabolism issue in Hans Jonas’s “Philosophical Biology” and try to

find the dialectical aspects appearing in that vision.

There is another meaningful example in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature regarding the productive capacity of dialectical opposition at the organic level for self-maintenance: the relationship between animal organisms and gravity. Animals move freely, not so much despite gravity, but instead and above all, thanks to their opposition to it (Hegel 1976b, 292). They may seem like nuances in the way they are expressed. Still, the concreteness of the difference can be observed, for example, in terms of the effective relationship between movement and traction, in which the gravitational constraint guarantees the effectiveness of the translation movement and originally manifests itself through friction. Not to mention the importance of gravity for the development and maintenance of the skeletal structure, the muscular system, and the functioning of the cardiovascular system: today, it is possible to observe the organic effects of what, in Hegelian style, we might call the 'lack of opposition' for those living in microgravity conditions. The subject is a medical one, and we will not go into it; however, it is sufficient for us to observe that the question "Can We Resist Microgravity?" (Bonanni, Cariati, Marini, Tarantino, & Tancredi 2023, 8–12) also has its relevance and interest in the philosophical perspective we have just mentioned.

#### **IV. Limit as an Expression of Natural Finiteness**

So, in the vision of the Philosophy of Nature, the forms of the negative can be used by individual processes, managing to have productive effectiveness and dialectical continuity. Yet the negative power of time is always maintained. If we want, natural becoming 'uses' it increasingly refined and effectively, up to the organism's self-maintenance capacity, to internal teleology. However, the limit linked to finiteness, to consuming itself, still unites all natural manifestations. The process implemented by the individual is never eternal and could not be; indeed, we can observe that generally, the more it is refined in the manifestation of the individual being, the shorter its temporal duration. Today, we know that in the case of the earth, if thought of as a planet, the scale of understanding the process is in the order of billions of years. This processualism concerning the earth is also very interesting to observe for its transversal values within Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, even intratextual, we might say, because it can be understood at the level of the planet (Hegel 2004, § 280, 103), at the level of archetypal element (Hegel 2004, § 285, 113) and finally at the level of geological organism (Hegel 2004, §§ 338–342, 277–303); in the case of the living organism, on the other hand, the understanding is in the order of hundreds of years, when considering particularly long-lived life forms. We know that, concerning the role of living organisms, Hegel deals with the question philosophically, explaining that the natural individual can't realize that complete universality that is in the genus, except in a singular form (Hegel 2004, § 369, but § 370 in Third Edition of *Encyclopaedia*, 414; on this see Liccioli 2008); which seems to us to make sense both concerning the meaning of the

naturalistic classification of genus, but also from a logical point of view if we understand genera in Aristotelian terms as predicament. Stefania Achella has recently highlighted how important this genus issue is for comparing ethical and biological life within Hegel's thought (Achella 2019, 162–169).

### **V. For a Hermeneutics of the *Naturphilosophie*: The Possibility of a Comparison with Twentieth-century Perspectives**

We now want to look at the Philosophy of Nature from the point of view of a comparison with certain aspects of 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy. In that case, it is crucial to preliminarily grasp elements that seem very relevant from an interpretative point of view:

(1) A first question concerns the quality of subjectivity: the negation operated by the temporal instant is indeed placed on the subjective level and, in this way, can pose and oppose itself in dialectical relation to the objectivity of space. However, according to Hegel, this natural subjectivity never manages to understand itself in the fully conscious, proper form of self-consciousness. Put another way: if one can recognize a processual unity in natural phenomena, the more one proceeds towards their elevation to the organic level; nevertheless, the degree of subjectivity present in them will never be so elevated as to be able to say of themselves 'I.' Hans Jonas will observe that the problem of time understood as a pure a priori form of intuition is precisely that of failing to recognize a privileged role in the relationship between time and self-consciousness (Jonas 2001, 132–133, remark no. 2). The possibility of comparison with Hegel's thought is evident; the definition of "Becoming directly *intuited*" that Hegel had already reserved for natural time means precisely this: the principle of self-consciousness, which even in the subjectivity of time ideally resides, remains totally abstract and external to it (Hegel 2004 § 258 and remark, 34–37).

(2) The previous point implies not only a quantitative but also a qualitative difference, which is why natural becoming according to Hegel cannot achieve the spiritual elevation of the historical process. This is also why he, with an expression that may not seem very poetic indeed (at least from the point of view of a romantic type of Aesthetics), spoke of a "boredom of nature" (Hegel 1982, 128).

(3) Using terminology more typical of 20<sup>th</sup>-century philosophy, we could also translate these concepts in another way: the natural subject appears to be unable to narrate itself. Why do we refer to the telling as narration? In the case of Ricoeur's philosophy, the link between time and narrative is decisive, of course; indeed, the narrative also takes on not only relational but also methodological significance for Habermas when he addresses the question of the renewed task of philosophy: "What follows is an attempt to narrate a story" (Habermas 2015, 4). Above all, what is most important is that the positions of both philosophers about Hegel and a critical reading of his thought converge on one point: the story-telling form becomes fundamental for understanding a narrative unity that does

not remain defeated by limitation, negativity, failure, but rather is capable of making itself a stimulus of all this, a conatus, to go towards understanding reality through a dialectic that is never conclusive, but remains – and cannot but remain – open. Habermas states that in this way, philosophy regains its role as the “guardian of rationality” (Habermas 2015, 16 and 19): “As far as philosophy is concerned, it might do well to refurbish its link with the totality by taking on the role of interpreter on behalf of the lifeworld” (Habermas 2015, 18). Even more explicit is Ricoeur, when after “Having left Hegel behind,” he says that another way must be sought:

(...) another way remains, that of an open-ended, incomplete, imperfect mediation, namely, the network of interweaving perspectives of the expectation of the future, the reception of the past, and the experience of the present, with no *Aufhebung* into a totality where reason in history and its reality would coincide (Ricoeur 2014, 207).

Admittedly, this is a remark that Habermas and Ricoeur make about systematic philosophical visions as a whole, and in particular about the entire Hegelian philosophical system; however, this makes it attractive for us to look mainly at the *Naturphilosophie* because if it is true that nature cannot say ‘I’ about itself, it is equally valid that a sort of dialectic that already for Hegel is inconclusive is taking place precisely there. Now, from the Stuttgart philosopher’s point of view, this is the mortal limit of the realm of exteriority, but is it possible that, beyond this, this limit also becomes an opportunity for meaning and understanding?

## VI. Open Dialectics and Philosophical Biology

Let us use the reading criterion we have just presented to compare the meaning of Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature with Hans Jonas’s “Philosophical Biology.” Let us start from the end of the *Naturphilosophie*. If we try to read it with the keys later provided by Jonas, we realize that the characteristics of the entire systematic concept strongly mark it. We know that the inability of the natural individual to adapt entirely to the universality of the genus leads to an *Aufhebung* of decisive importance, which leads to the passage from Nature to Spirit. We have recalled above how the reference to the genus here can be understood in a systematic-classificatory and logical-ontological sense. This corresponds to what Jonas observes about applying a systematic vision to living beings: the first aspect, the classificatory one, leads back to the Linnean system that will be the basis, Jonas argues, of the presence of a genealogical principle introduced into evolutionism.

On the other hand, concerning Hegel, two problems open up here: (1) The first concerns the role of classification, whereby a distinction must be made between systems that have an internal necessity and those that do not (Hegel 2013 § 9 and § 16, 30–31 and 39–41); (2) Furthermore, we know that Hegel clearly expressed his opposition to evolutionism (Hegel 2004, § 249n; as a comment see Harris 1998). One can think of a way

to resolve the limits of the classificatory path by referring indeed to a logical-ontological value of this kind: in this way, as Jonas reminds us, a close link is recognized between the truth of the system and being so that reality does not can only be understood as multiple, but instead as a whole. However, the problem that Jonas points out with this type of solution is guaranteeing the possibility of understanding concerning a life that knows how to open up to novelty (Jonas 2001, 183–187; see also Jonas 2011, 92–101). From this point of view, the question of metabolism is fundamental. We anticipated it. Firstly, because it represents, on a natural level, the realization of that organizational capacity, which is typical of effective systems, and we have seen that as far as Hegel is concerned, this corresponds to a precise organizational capacity of the logical element in making the concept objective. In the eyes of the Stuttgart philosopher, the main fragility of nature regarding the concept is that of externality, which generates a bad infinity in continuing to produce itself.

Nevertheless, thanks to metabolism, externality is brought back to the unity of the living process of the organism. In Jonas's thought, it appears evident how continually measuring oneself with the outside in the form of conversion is the way to reverse the sense of fragility in the strength of the living, and, in doing so, the organism points to a beginning level of freedom and consciousness. However, compared to Hegel's vision, Jonas particularly underlines the role of negativity that opens both to the possibility of its overcoming and to that of failure, whereby the freedom that can already be experienced on a natural level also involves "the burden of need and means precarious being" (Jonas 2001, 4), and "our body exerting itself in action" (Jonas 2001, 33). The strength and superiority of the animal compared to the vegetable show at the same time its fragility and its dependence on otherness, exposing itself to the risk of failure, for example, in getting food, so that "appetite and fear come into play" (Jonas 2001, 102): "It is life itself which brings about this separation: a particular branch of it evolves the capacity and the necessity of relating itself to an environment no longer contiguous with itself and immediately available to its metabolic needs" (Jonas 2001, 102–103). Here the sense of an open dialectic categorically wants to avoid any reference to a "cunning of reason," but instead shows that "that very self-transcendence" of the living body (Jonas 2001, 18) can also occur through paradoxical progress through mischance and accident (Jonas 2001, 51). We, therefore, understand the interest that Jonas, unlike Hegel, shows towards evolutionism, albeit criticizing it for some of its aspects.

That is, we find, through another path and other themes and lemmas, the question of an open dialectic. And it is interesting to see in Jonas a reference to the theme of effort, of *conatus*, which we have already highlighted previously. For Jonas, this means, from the point of view of the living subject, being able to meet the possibility of the opportunity and yet without losing one's identity, which consists not of the impossible task of keeping together all the elements in the lived temporal sequence and make them equivalent to one's identity, but instead in managing to keep one's multiplicity together. Now, it is not



among our objectives to focus on the differences between the English (*The Phenomenon of Life*) and German editions (*Organismus und Freiheit*) of the work dedicated by Jonas to “Philosophical Biology” (on this see the contributions and notes of the Editors in Jonas 2010); nevertheless, we point out that on the specific topic we have just addressed it appears more effective to refer to the German Edition (see Jonas 2011, 100–101). Compared to the proposals of Habermas and Ricoeur that we mentioned before, we should observe that in Jonas’s proposal, this open dialectic is placed on a natural level. Therefore, the natural subject still needs to learn how to narrate this dialectic as a story. Nonetheless, as we expected, this may not only be a limitation but also reveal itself as a possibility or at least the beginning of a chance. Jonas is evident in this: the transcendence of the natural as the self-transcendence of the subject starts from nature itself because that is where freedom begins and because this is life “by its nature” (Jonas 2001, 100).

But if this is the case, once we have observed these decisive differences, can we still affirm that Jonas’s “Philosophical Biology” is also a proposal of open dialectics, proper for us in a hermeneutic perspective towards Hegel’s thought?

## VII. Biological Multiplicity and Responsibility as a Principle

To return to using an interpretation key that we have used several times in this paper, we can say that the transition from the Philosophy of Nature to the Philosophy of Spirit represents not only the completion of the second part but also the opening towards the third and final part of Hegel’s system: this observation, evident in itself, allows us to think in the exact terms of the role of the living organism, in the sense that its illness and its death are not only a closure but also a return to an essential opening to which already in 1978 M. Greene, in participating with his contribution to the publication for Jonas’s 75th birthday, assigned a metaphysical value: this metaphysical value appears in both Hegel’s and Jonas’s thoughts regarding nature (Greene 1978). And that Hegel’s *Naturphilosophie* returns as a whole to propose a metaphysical question with renewed force has been supported by Stone (Stone 2005).

Now, it must be recognized that this opening – to which, concerning Jonas, it can be discussed whether it is more appropriate to assign the qualification of “ontological” when that of “metaphysics” seemed too traditional – in the philosopher of *The Imperative of Responsibility*, however, is also aimed towards biological multiplicity again, whereby the sense of the individual’s limit is also that of an openness to life which is renewed, to the flowering of youth, to a role of otherness which is by no means simple repetition like that of temporal instants in their abstractness, but instead originality and enthusiasm:

But this perhaps is precisely the wisdom in the harsh dispensation of our mortality: that it grants us the eternally renewed promise of the freshness, immediacy, and eagerness of youth, together with the supply of otherness as such (Jonas 1985, 19).

All this could not happen without recognizing some spiritual value already inherent in the biological and natural element, especially with ethical reference to the meaning of responsibility and the awareness that comes from it: “Perhaps a nonnegotiable limit to our expected time is necessary for each of us as the incentive to number our days and make them count” (Jonas 1985, 19).

First of all, this regards a genuinely natural and biological aspect that concerns the environment in which life will develop in the future; but – as in other cases – here, too, it happens that starting from the natural, we find ourselves faced with a spiritual value, because, through a biological and environmental inheritance, we also hand over to posterity a cultural image that expresses what type of relationship we have had with planet earth and what kind of consideration of life we have had (on this topic see Hösle 1994; Franzini Tibaldeo 2009; Morris 2013). Here, the spiritual manifests itself by the passage through the natural. Thus, the sense of responsibility and sacred respect converge towards something we have received and have the duty to transmit, a human nature that, for Jonas, is the subject of evolution. So yes, we will soon be able to conclude that it is an open dialectic, endowed with an ethical value that passes through the natural, in the form of the gift, a received inheritance which is in turn transmitted as “(...) gratitude, piety, and respect as ingredients of an ethic called upon to stand guard over the future in the technological tempest of the present, and which cannot do so without the past” (Jonas 1985, 33).

## VIII. Conclusion

The essential point to draw some conclusions from our path is to remember the qualitative difference between Nature and Spirit according to Hegel: nature lacks that awareness of self-consciousness that allows an ego and a community to gather the meaning of their path in the form of objective history (see Bonito Oliva 2016) or in the more subjective, but still relational way, of the narration, of the story-telling. It should be remembered that for the Stuttgart philosopher, the difference between Nature and Spirit just mentioned is and remains unbridgeable (see Chiereghin 2000, 43–105; Kervégan 2018). Nonetheless, this must not lead to underestimating the fact that the problem of the subject’s freedom begins from the comparison with natural exteriority, precisely because the latter is incapable of assigning itself a spiritual meaning to the extent in which it expresses itself through a becoming which is bad infinite; yet right there begins a first path of emancipation of the Spirit, not against Nature, but through the life that is given first of all in Nature, because – as Christian Spahn wrote – “spirit exists first and foremost essentially [*wesentlich*] as a living spirit” (Spahn 2007, 202–203) and we understand that the adverb “essentially” is a Hegelian lemma which means objectification of the relationship between the universal and the singular. The essence comes to life. This

aspect can be highlighted more or less, just as it can be observed, from the point of view of the interpretation of Hegel's thought, that the writings of *Naturphilosophie* of the Jena period are partly more consonant or at least comparable with a cultural climate that characterized in particular the understanding of nature between the end of the 18<sup>th</sup>–and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup>–century, a climate to which it may be helpful to refer in any case to better understand the meaning of this part of the system also in the *Encyclopaedia* (Vieweg 1998; Wandschneider 1987; Illetterati 1995b; Battistoni 2024).

On the other hand, it seemed interesting to pose a hermeneutic question with this: comparing aspects of Hegel's Philosophy of Nature with others of Jonas's late 20<sup>th</sup>-century "Philosophical Biology" achieves a specific productive effect concerning the meaning that those writings can have for us today. This is why we also briefly referred to Habermas and Ricoeur. The hermeneutic theme is, in fact, the one for which it is necessary to ask ourselves whether a need for open dialectics should not also be recognized in *Naturphilosophie*, indeed above all in it, because in that place the transition from mere exteriority to essence occurs when the living subject learns to take charge of contradiction and even to use, as far as possible, negativity for one's own advantage and for one's development: of course, in many ways, this confirms the bad infinity of externality, because, as we have often repeated, the natural subject lacks full awareness of the spiritual subject; yet, through the mediation of the living, contradiction gives natural becoming a chance to open up to the infinity of the possible in which the unfinished, the imperfect and even failure becomes the impulse and motivation for that effort, that *conatus* by the subject to understand even negativity to elevate oneself and to give unity to one's path.

If this hermeneutic hypothesis is reliable, then the Philosophy of Nature becomes an even more essential part of the system of philosophy, both interpretively to understand Hegel and from the point of view of "Dasein" due to that effort that requires the animal organism to be able to face "the keen edge of want" (Jonas 2001, 103), and finally for the ethical reasons that Jonas would remind us again, regarding the responsibility that every human being has towards life.

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