

Deduction of the Concept of 'Vitality' in Hegel's Philosophy



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Abstract: In Hegel's philosophy, the dialectic of life is based on the expedient course of the concept. This contribution sets itself the task of conducting a hermeneutical and historical-critical reconstruction of the foundation of Hegel's speculative-dialectical method. The aim is to reveal the philosophical genesis of the concept of 'vitality' and its interrelation with spirit. In such a perspective, the idea of the emergence of living matter, which is opposed to the processes of decomposition in the universe, is proposed. The hypothesis here offers a treatment of negative entropy (negentropy) in terms of Hegel's speculative-dialectical methodology and the spiritual force of the concept that resists the decay of matter. Within such a philosophical conceptualisation arises the concept of vitality, which clarifies the relation between the form of consciousness that a subject can achieve and the energy it will expend to build and structure such a form of consciousness. Of interest is the result that the infinite growth of vitality simultaneously achieves absolute spiritualisation.

Keywords: Hegel; speculative-dialectical methodology; self-consciousness; dialectic of life; vitality; Absolute Spirit.

I. Introduction

The problem of life in philosophy was often considered, more thoroughly and extensively, in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century¹. It became an alternative to the hegemony of absolute idealism and the absolute power of reason. The philosophy of life [*Lebensphilosophie*] arose as a reaction to the

¹ In the title of my article, I use 'concept' instead of 'notion', referring to the argumentation of G. di Giovanni and his *Translator's note* before *The Science of Logic* (2010, Cambridge Edition). I have departed from long standing usage and have translated *Begriff* as "concept" rather than as 'notion'. B. C. Burt also used "concept" in his 1896 translation of Erdmann's *Outlines of Logic and Metaphysics*, for the very good reason that "notion" carries the connotation of being a subjective representation. Its meaning is also much too vague. It should be reserved for precisely such contexts as require a term without too precise a meaning. 'Concept' has the further advantage of being patently connected with 'to conceive', just as *Begriff* is connected with *greifen*, and can easily be expanded into 'conceptual' and "conceptually grasped" or replaced, if need be, with 'comprehension' and 'conceptually comprehended' (Hegel 2010, lxvii-lxviii).

general and classical philosophizing that operated with reason, understanding, and experience². It classified itself as irrational, purely subjective, and non-scientific. That is why some scholars have looked for its foundations earlier, with the Romanticists, such as Fr. Schlegel.

According to the ‘philosophers of life’, the inner spiritual life is different from absolute thought. For instance, Schlegel talks about ‘*vollständiges Bewußtseyn*’ (Schlegel 1827, 6, 15) as a complete consciousness in all of its aspects and capabilities that is opposed to Hegel’s ‘abstract’ categories, on the one hand, and to scientific mechanism and mechanistic philosophy, on the other. The contrast between Hegel’s dialectics and Schlegel’s form of ‘romantic irony’ is noteworthy. Schlegel’s perspective is more similar to I. Kant’s, as he acknowledges that man is unable to comprehend the absolute or unconditioned. The nature of God and the nature of man are entirely distinct. By contrast, Hegel explains the *Selbstverwirklichung* of Absolute Spirit as man’s self-consciousness reflection.

In his famous letter to Schelling, dated 2 November 1800, Hegel elucidated the necessity that propelled him towards scientific development. The youthful ideal had to be given a reflective form – it had to become a system (Hegel 1969, 59). His lectures at Jena that addressed logic, metaphysics, and the philosophy of nature constituted an initial formulation of the comprehensive philosophical system. At Jena, Hegel developed and tested the dialectical methodology that was not a product of the system, but a means of ensuring its consistent construction. With the advent of the dialectical method and its effective application, Hegel commenced his critique of the Romantic tendencies prevalent during his era.

This is what distinguishes him, and it is this shift that the present text will seek to elucidate, in order to arrive at a different and heuristic concept of vitality. This concept of vitality is metaphysical in nature, engaging with the vitality of the spirit and the *Begriff* as the result of the development of the *Absolute Idea*. The aim is to deduce vitality from the concept itself, where it is distinguished as a fundamental element in the activity of reason. Vitality is thus conceived as a state of movement, change, and development.

Later in the nineteenth century, Fr. Nietzsche and W. Dilthey considered themselves to be ‘philosophers of life’. Dilthey developed the foundations of the principle of differentiation between natural and spiritual sciences. Nietzsche brilliantly posed the question of science in general, and its principle of reevaluation. In the perspective of the presented paper, my intention is focused on the hermeneutical and historical-critical reconstruction of the genesis of Hegel’s speculative-dialectical methodology, in order to establish a philosophical concept of vitality as a possible basis for the treatment of negative entropy (hereafter negentropy). This would be an extraction of the philosophical concept of vitality and the heuristically-philosophical interpretation of the essence of negentropy.

² In terms of Kantian philosophy and classical German philosophizing, in J. Fichte, Fr. Schelling, and G. W. F. Hegel.

In line with Hegel's categories (which are not 'abstract', as Schlegel thought, but rather a concrete and complete knowledge) and his dialectic of life, I reveal a possibility for a philosophical vitalism that reveals a specific form of consciousness. This consciousness rethinks the usual perception of time and poses the question of its being.

Hegel was a critic of both Romantic tendencies and formalism, countering the purely naturalistic formulations that were prevalent during his lifetime. He sought to affirm the role of philosophical science that proceeds from its own method. In a sense, the approach taken in this paper is entirely speculative, in line with the methodology demonstrated by Hegel. This paper aims to present an alternative interpretation that, while differing from the conventional wisdom, is nevertheless grounded in philosophical reasoning and asserts the conceptual foundations of philosophy. The opposing thesis is purely naturalistic, positing that spirit in Hegel is the inevitable outcome of evolutionary processes in nature, representing the pinnacle of organic organisation and development (Beiser 1993, 9; Beiser 2005, 80–87). Indeed, when posed in this manner, the issue in question serves to reinforce a naturalistic interpretation that is in opposition to both the specificity of Hegel's thought and his genuine and earnest aspiration – namely, to establish philosophy as a distinct science with its own unique methodology. It is accurate to conclude that Hegel's engagement with natural philosophy and natural science facilitated the advent of the speculative-dialectical approach. However, this does not substantiate the assertion that his absolute idealism is rooted in organicism.

Consequently, my research focuses on the derivation of the philosophical concept of vitality that is subsequently self-produced and self-projected as the phenomenon of negentropy in contemporary theoretical physics and cosmology. This concept precedes and sets a horizon for the natural sciences. It can be argued that the results of natural science also provide philosophy with material for further analysis. However, my position is that the initial – the philosophical, the metaphysical – is of greater value as the absolute foundation: the self-development and self-disclosure of the Absolute Idea, the Absolute Spirit. Hegel's critique of formalism, romanticism, and naturalistic views is evident in his late Jena lectures. Thus, my historical and critical analysis will focus on their development and further influence on the construction of his speculative method and system.

II. Hermeneutical and Historical-critical Reconstruction of the Genesis of Hegel's System and Speculative-dialectical Methodology

The hermeneutic reconstruction of the emergence of Hegel's speculative-dialectical method requires historical and critical analysis and meticulous examination. It is commonly recognised that there are a few noteworthy and consequential periods in Hegel's philosophical evolution that are connected to the composition of his major works. The rigorous critical and historical analysis of the formation of Hegel's complete system and method, including the emergence of the concepts of self-consciousness (*Phenomenology*

of Spirit) and life (*The Science of Logic*), develops into a sort of hermeneutic reconstruction of them, aiming to show the derivation of the philosophical concept of vitality that subsequently influenced some modern ideas in theoretical physics.

A fundamental issue for historians of Classical German idealism has always been the specific links between the great philosophers. They are intricate, distinctive, and crucial to the development of their philosophical ideas. The association between Schelling and Hegel is no exception. It presents the most vivid example of the necessity that drives the concept's inevitable development, including the enrichment of philosophy in general. Hegel would not have been feasible without Schelling, Fichte, or Kant. What is more essential, however, is that each subsequent representative, in addition to following in the footsteps of his immediate predecessor, must also contradict and therefore supersede him. All of this is a legitimate consequence of philosophical thought's growth. As the zenith of Classical German idealism, Hegel's systematics has an underlying potential for philosophizing the concept of vitality. Accordingly, it is 'vital' to begin with the distinctive relationships and influences between Schelling and Hegel, which also delineate the unique intellectual atmosphere of that time.

Unlike Schelling, who advanced quickly and became a professor at the age of 23, Hegel evolved gradually and slowly towards deep and true philosophical thinking. Philosophically speaking, and in terms of the two great German idealists, I would say that with Schelling everything appears to occur immediately, completely in sync with his late philosophizing, whereas with Hegel everything is the result of strong negation, of heavy mediation, which, it appears, is the most typical expression of his overall philosophizing. Hegel is frequently accused of employing abstract logic and relying on imprecise, vague, and ambiguous categories. The truth is rather the opposite: Hegel was always concerned with natural³ and historical reality. Schelling, for his part, sets himself the duty of directing philosophy to reality in order to explain the objective dialectic of natural processes.

The most essential thing Hegel takes away from Schelling's philosophical work is the awareness that there is reason in nature, that there is a single creative beginning that projects and unfolds. The revelation of this self-realisation of genesis is the task of both Schelling and, later, Hegel's dialectical thought; however, it should be noted that this begins with Schelling's natural philosophy, which, unlike transcendental philosophy, seeks to explain the ideal by beginning with the real. With Schelling's two pathways – transcendental philosophy and natural philosophy – the concept of identity pervades

3 Some scholars have advanced the argument for a naturalistic interpretation of Hegel's entire philosophical system, or at the very least, his epistemology, which is said to contain 'naturalistic elements' (Westphal 2003, quoted by Bar 2016, 197–198); moreover, a distinguished researcher and biographer of Hegel, comments that in 1802–1803 Hegel studied natural sciences and mathematics (Pinkard 2000, 186). Such perspectives uphold the assertion that Hegel remains within the confines of Schelling's paradigm and his natural philosophy. This, in turn, is in direct opposition to the ideas presented here regarding the essential transcendence of any preceding philosophical system – a point that Hegel himself repeatedly emphasised. If Hegel is considered 'a lover of nature' (Bar 2016, 198), this does not necessarily align him with the naturalist perspective. The notion of reason's intrinsic disposition might seem a naturalistic intention, but also, it is a self-mediation of the spirit, characterised by a process of self-denial and, consequently, self-knowledge.

the entire system, penetrating all of its individual elements and conclusions. This idea is emphasised even more by Hegel. However, it is worth noting that he was still developing his philosophical system during the Jena period, when he and Schelling were still on good terms.

The principle of identity of thought and being penetrates Hegel's entire system, supports it, and connects all of its aspects together. In Hegel's philosophy, the principle is speculative, objective reason, which is the essence of being, as well as of thinking, of nature and spirit. It is the fundamental substance that defines the essence of all things, yet it is not perceptible to the senses. The organic unity of being and thinking in Hegel does not provide sufficient grounds for positing his philosophical system as naturalistic. In fact, Hegel's perspective and purposefulness in relation to nature are projected through his conception of spirit⁴. Spirit is the concept that presupposes to itself nature, and at the same time, is its result and true form. Hegel states this clearly at the end of his second part of the *Encyclopedia*. At first glance he distinguishes nature and spirit, but he later sublates their bifurcation, in order to expose the true direction and purpose of natural philosophy. Hegel distinguishes "logical life as idea from natural life as treated in the philosophy of nature, and from life in so far as it is bound to spirit" (Hegel 2010, 677). But the concept [*der Begriff*] is "the soul of life itself", it further pursues its inner necessity to reveal and expand itself to the "externality of existence" (Ibid.). In this manner, the German philosopher explicates the emergence of nature from the Absolute idea. By marking the transition from logic to nature, Hegel points out how the idea posits itself as the absolute unity of the pure concept and its reality as centered in the immediacy of being (Hegel 2010, 752).

The historical and critical setting is important, as it is linked to the periodisation of Hegel's life and work. In the first work of the Jena period, *Die Differenzschrift* (1801), Hegel's objective was to underline and highlight Schelling's positive route with respect to Kant and Fichte. This was an affirmation of the category of identity⁵. But, in the spirit of his philosophizing, Hegel was forced to reject Schelling's philosophy, which continued to deny difference at the expense of identity. With this maneuver, Hegel positions his key methodological lever – mediation as a moment of reflection – between himself and Schelling, between dialectical (concrete) identity and abstract identity. This is the moment of the constitution of substance as a self-moving subject, characterised by a process of

4 The philosophy of nature treats the 'concept of nature itself' and examines it in its immanent necessity [*immanente Notwendigkeit*], based on the self-determination of the concept [*Selbstbestimmung des Begriffs*] (EN § 246, 15). Generally speaking, this is the main interpretation of Hegel's perspective of nature, as a purely idealistic view of nature, "understood on the model of free human subjectivity, hence as a self-organizing whole" (Stone 2013, 62).

5 The pinnacle of Schelling's philosophical system is the concept of absolute identity. It represents an absolute point of indistinctness and indifference, wherein the subject and object are merged. However, Hegel considers such absolute identity to have no methodological potential, which renders it abstract. Rather, absolute identity must be conceived dialectically, that is to say, as the identity of identity and non-identity – "... die Identität der Identität und der Nichtidentität; Entgegensetzen und Einsseyn ist zugleich in ihm" (GW, IV, 64).

self-negation and sublation. Hegel's dialectical definition of identity as possessing self and difference, and hence the contradiction, is regarded as a dynamic activity and the foundation of the living concept. In fact, one of the objectives of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* is to distinguish between his and Schelling's views on identity. At this juncture, Hegel began to persuade himself that in order to construct a fundamentally speculative philosophizing, it was necessary to posit reason as a self-fulfilling objective ontological principle. The self-realisation of knowledge eliminates the distinction between the object and the knowledge of it. In the *Phenomenology*, knowledge is properly turned towards itself; it is both knowledge and object *in* and *of* itself – a unity of concept and object that is also the nature of self-consciousness.

Hegel and Schelling's ideological convergence during the Jena period, including their joint articles in the *Kritischer Journal für Philosophie* (1802–03), marked the beginning of their distinction and rift. With the various journal articles, Hegel gradually made his way to the foundations of his philosophical system. He writes reviews of individual works, discusses individual philosophical systems, and examines and critiques specific ways and forms of thinking, in order to lay the foundations of his own speculative-dialectical methodology (GW, IV, 117–128; 197–238; 313–414). In *Jenaer Systementwürfe I-II-III* (1803/04 – 1804/05 – 1805/06), Hegel began to form and express his basically speculative viewpoints, which molded and characterised his idealism and distanced it from ordinary reflection and understanding (Pippin 1989, 60–61).

Hegel was aware that the potential for philosophy to become a science is contingent upon the implementation of a specific methodology, which must be applied in a uniform manner. At the outset of the Jena period, the nascent stages of dialectical thinking are already discernible. However, it is challenging to identify a comprehensive and systematic methodology that is entirely distinct from those that preceded it. Conversely, it can be observed that Hegel, in 1803-04, is still under the influence⁶ of Schelling's method, which was developed as a doctrine of the potencies [*Potenzen*]⁷. In his philosophy, the particular (appearance) and the universal (concept) are unified. These elements, however, are not conceived as moments of a dynamic process; rather, they are regarded as fixed, lifeless, schematic, and abstract. This aspect of Schelling's methodology serves to reinforce Hegel's conviction that his approach to philosophical enquiry is unable to fully capture the intrinsic richness of reality. This resulted in a further widening of the rift between the two philosophers. In the development of the Jena works from 1804-06, Hegel's aim is to present his own methodological potential. His goal is to build the paradigm of objective reason (a new form of the speculative) as an alternative to transcendentalism, plain (ultimate) subjectivism, and Schelling's philosophy of identity. In this endeavor, he takes a

6 One of the earliest forms of Hegel's natural philosophy is undoubtedly his dissertation from 1801, *De orbitis planetarum*. This work is a typical example of the use of Schelling's method by Hegel; moreover, to an even greater extent, this influence is clearly evident that use in the so-called *System der Sittlichkeit*, a work from 1802–1803.

7 In this regard, it may be appropriate to consider Hegel as a naturalist.

historical and systematic approach, challenging Schelling with the power of mediation. At this point, Hegel's works on philosophy of nature [*Jenaer Realphilosophie*] serve a highly valuable function. They do not constitute the philosophical system, but they undoubtedly prepare the ground for it, as evidenced by Hegel's deployment of his novel dialectical method and the substantive aspects of negation within them.

Schelling's understanding of the speculative is characterised by a predominantly analytical approach. Hegel's objective is to demonstrate the synthetic potential of the speculative. The speculative philosophy is a dynamic and vital force, representing the core of his entire philosophical system and the point of greatest intensity in his theoretical framework. Speculative positive rational thinking involves not mere abstraction and simple separation and negation, but rather a double negation. This is manifested as self-mediated movement and activity. It is understood as a sublation of the mediation.

In Hegel's dialectical scheme, each synthesis and new definition constitutes a 'concrete universal'. This concrete universality is not the result of a process of generalisation applied to objects and phenomena; rather, it is a creative, living activity that generates content from itself. The concrete universal, apart from being produced in the process of methodological and systematic construction, is productive, and it derives its content from itself and from there all the diversity of the world. All is the spirit, the negative,

(...) that which constitutes the quality of both the dialectical reason and the understanding: it negates the simple, thereby posits the determinate difference of the understanding; but it equally dissolves this difference, and so it is dialectical. But spirit does not stay at the nothing of this result but is in it rather equally positive, and thereby restores the first simplicity, but as universal, such as it is concrete in itself (Hegel 2010, 10).

The process of the becoming of scientific development works with the method of mediation, which implies both preservation and change, modification. Such a spiritual movement, according to Hegel, is the immanent development of the concept, the soul of the very content as an absolute method of knowledge and dialectical necessary self-unfolding of genesis⁸.

Hegel is not an advocate of a priori conditions and claims. On the contrary, he seeks evidence that is conditioned (mediated) by both experience and reality. His concepts and

⁸ Explaining the essence of Hegel's dialectical method and in the same way trying to eliminate its vagueness, Michael Forster writes: "Beginning from a category A, Hegel seeks to show that upon conceptual analysis, category A proves to contain a contrary category, B, and conversely that category B proves to contain category A, thus showing both categories to be self-contradictory. He then seeks to show that this negative result has a positive outcome, a new category, C (sometimes referred to as the 'negative of the negative' or the 'determinate negation'). This new category unites – as Hegel puts it – the preceding categories A and B. That is to say, when analyzed the new category is found to contain them both. But it unites them in such a way that they are not only preserved but also abolished (to use Hegel's term of art for this paradoxical-sounding process, they are *aufgehoben*). That is to say, they are preserved or contained in the new category only with their original senses modified. This modification of their senses renders them no longer self-contradictory" (Forster 1993, 132). According to the author, this is the one level of dialectics which is now completed. The next level is when the new synthesised category C begins to play the role that was formerly played by category A (Ibid., 133).

categories are initially abstract, but as a result they become tangible. For instance, the concept of life is no exception. Hegel's idea of life is an objective condition of the absolute method. As Karen Ng understands Hegel's concept of life, it is a "living activity in constant development," a central tenet of Hegel's entire system and idealistic views. Finally, it is a necessary presupposition of cognition (Ng 2020, 3, 151 and 256).

The concept is a mediator between life and itself. It teaches us to find life in the concept, and, conversely, the concept in life. The justification of this mediation between concept and life is science itself. Life is the immediate idea, but it is also the concept [*der lebendige Begriff*] (Sell 2013). Hegel explains life dialectically as pure motion. Life is a dialectical process that combines with itself on a physical level. The question, thus, arises as to how such a conception is presupposed by the spirit and, furthermore, how it relates to the structure of self-consciousness. Additionally, it would be beneficial to ascertain whether this absolute method can be applied to the modern treatment of entropy and negentropy.

III. Hegel's Conceptual Treatment of Self-consciousness and Life

Hegel says: "With self-consciousness, then, we have therefore entered the native realm of truth" (Hegel 1977, 104). As a reflection, self-consciousness proceeds from the being of sensibility and nature – it is a return from otherness. Along with this, life and self-consciousness oppose each other, but only in so far as this is indispensable in the sense of the triad and the insubstantial in the original immediate unity. Unity is real only when it is mediated by its own becoming, this is the nature of the concept, of self-consciousness, of reason and spirit. This is an entirely new beginning for Hegel's philosophizing, whereby self-reflexivity problematises itself as its own becoming. A typical example in this regard is his famous thesis about the living substance as a subject:

This Substance is, as Subject, pure, *simple negativity*, and is for this very reason the bifurcation of the simple; it is the doubling which sets up opposition, and then again the negation of this indifferent diversity and of its anti-thesis [the immediate simplicity]. Only this *self-restoring* sameness, or this reflection in otherness within itself – not an *original* or *immediate* unity as such – is the True. It is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal, having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual (Hegel 1977, 10).

These words of Hegel provide compelling justification for some contemporary scholars of Classical German philosophy to accord particular attention to the impact of B. Spinoza on his thought (Waibel 2022, 46). By introducing the dialectical method of reasoning, Hegel elevates the immobility of substance to the level of the subject. In contrast to Schelling, who concentrates exclusively on the substantiality of reason, Hegel is concerned with the necessity for this reason to become a subject. Dialectical methodology is a form of self-centered thinking, characterised by a focus on self-knowledge and an

"inner criterion" (Waibel 2022). This approach is considered a fundamental basis for both scientific enquiry and the acquisition of knowledge in general. This is the rationale behind Hegel's original designation of *Phenomenology* as the science of the experience of consciousness. In this way, the process of scientific development, and the eventual attainment of absolute knowledge, can be elucidated.

In order for an individual to become a spiritual being, it is necessary for them to gain an understanding of the nature of the concept and to become proficient in the dialectical methodology of self-becoming. It is only through this process that fixed ideas become tangible concepts, capable of self-movement and imbued with spiritual potential. The organisation of both the individual and their scientific pursuits is contingent upon the life of the concept – a concept that is explicitly demonstrated by Hegel in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Determinateness may be considered the animating principle of a fully contented soul. The content does not derive its determination from an external source, but rather endows it with intrinsic value. Accordingly, Hegel presents the concept of determinateness in its general form as a living entity, as the inner life of its existing being. Consequently, the dialectical methodology of enquiry is inextricably linked to the subject matter under investigation and serves to determine its rhythm through its intrinsic being.

Hegel's examination of the development of consciousness focuses on its differentiation from the body, while simultaneously acknowledging the establishment of a profound internal coherence between self-consciousness and the external world. This is manifested in concrete terms as a processual identity between thinking and being. In theoretical terms, Hegel's approach represents a significant advance on that of his predecessors, particularly Schelling. This is the notion of eliminating dichotomies and their corresponding scientific understanding and resolution – not through introspection and contemplation, but through conceptual analysis. The German philosopher's concept of truth as a process, rather than a static, finalised concept of reason, is a key tenet of the work.

This notion posits that truth is not a fixed entity, but rather a historical trajectory of knowledge, progressing from lower to higher forms of understanding. The concrete history of the formation of knowledge provides the evidence. Consequently, there is a direct correlation between self-consciousness and the processes of life and activity, which may be defined as movement. The whole circle is the truth:

(...) not what was expressed at the outset, the immediate continuity and compactness of its essence, nor the enduring form, the discrete moment existing for itself; nor the pure process of these; nor yet the simple taking-together of these moments. Life consists rather in being the self-developing whole which dissolves its development, and in this movement simply preserves itself (Hegel 1977, 108).

Hegel also considers this unfolding of life as a movement within the realm of self-consciousness. This movement reaches the experience of self-awareness regarding the object's independence. In Hegel's view, the concept of life must be considered in logical

terms, given that it is the fundamental premise of any such consideration. The concept of logical life is distinguished from that of natural life:

In *spirit*, however, life appears both as opposed to it and as posited as at one with it, in a unity reborn as the pure product of spirit. For life is here to be taken generally in its proper sense as *natural life*, for what is called the *life of spirit* as spirit, is spirit's own peculiar nature that stands opposed to mere life; just as we speak of the *nature* of spirit, even though spirit is nothing natural but stands rather in opposition to nature. Thus life as such is for spirit in one respect a *means*, and then spirit holds it over against itself; in another respect, spirit is an individual, and then life is its body; in yet another respect, this unity of spirit and its living corporeality is born of spirit into *ideality* (Hegel 2010, 677).

In these reflections, the rationale is set forth for the way in which the present text poses the problem of the influence of Hegel's conceptualisation of life on the view of life according to modern researchers in the field of theoretical physics and biophysics, such as E. Schrödinger. It is evident that the conceptualisation of self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* plays a pivotal role in mediating the relationship between Hegel's conception of life in the *Logic* and the modern treatment of entropy and negentropy.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* represents a mediating interrelationship between Hegel's *Realphilosophie* and the *Logic*. This represents its most powerful heuristic and methodological potential. Phenomenological mediation progresses from the sensory immediacy to the mental, from the singular to the general, and from the phenomenon to the essence. The absolute knowledge that is reached in this way negates (sublates) the necessity for this phenomenological mediation, and as a result the object is revealed in its intrinsic nature. Consequently, the concept of life in its immediacy initiates a new trajectory towards the mediated, which is the essence of logical mediation.

Phenomenological mediation may be defined as the conceptualisation of self-consciousness as a process of movement and life. In contrast, logical mediation may be defined as the conceptualisation of life as a concept, as self-consciousness, and as spirit. This is also the heuristic interpretation of Hegel himself regarding the concept as such. His innovative approach is to conceptualise the *Begriff* as a moment of the object's own movement, of its entry into and absorption within itself. This stands in contrast to the previous understanding of the concept as a product of ultimate subjectivity, as something dead and motionless, in which there is no life or movement.

In light of these considerations, it seems appropriate to propose a deduction and philosophical interpretation of the concept of life as vitality [*Lebendigkeit*], rather than a vitalistic or naturalistic interpretation of Hegel's entire philosophy. From this perspective, the concept of the *Lebendige* is inextricably linked with the concept of the spirit and the evolution of consciousness. The philosophical essence of vitality is a singular result of the nature of the concept [*der Begriff*] in Hegel. It embodies and represents the self-becoming and self-disclosure of the absolute, of speculative objective reason. Vitality represents a distinctive mode of mediation that elucidates and reflects Hegel's genuine comprehension of dialectics. It is presented in order to demonstrate the "self-organisation" of the subject

matter, its "inner necessity" and "inherent movement" (Beiser 2005, 160)⁹. Hegel posits that the emergence of the spirit presupposes the re-emergence of nature. He states: "The aim of nature is to mortify itself and to pierce its crust of the immediate, the sensible, to burn itself like a phoenix in order to emerge from this exterior rejuvenated as spirit" (EN § 376, 538).

The philosopher argues that the concept of spirit is not merely a metaphysical notion pertaining to nature, but rather that it exists in a pre- and post-natural state. Hegel confirms that the spirit liberates nature from the constraints of its immediate, sensorial form, thereby enabling it to act in accordance with its intrinsic necessity. In doing so, spirit is also set free.

The concept of vitality is thus derived from the fundamental principles of the speculative-dialectical method and constituted through a process whereby spirit is presupposed, and subsequently, life is transferred from nature back into spirit. The evolution of spirit is an intrinsic process that is not contingent upon external influences. This dialectical setting expresses the relation between the development of the spirit and the energy expended in bringing about that development as a completed form.

Attaining genuine spirituality necessitates attaining a state of synchronisation between human self-consciousness and the spiritual self/substance. In the context of human self-consciousness, it is understood that spirit manifests in its purest and most powerful form. The capacity for self-conscious observation enables the discernment of the manifestation and becoming of spirit, which in this context is the process of free and autonomous development of the self-conscious form. Accordingly, the objective of this study is to achieve synchronisation between human self-consciousness and concrete spirituality. This would facilitate comprehension of the metaphysical concept of vitality and enable the attainment of new forms of consciousness and perception of the self and the surrounding world.

IV. Hermeneutical Treatment of the Concept of 'Negentropy'

Hegel's dialectic of the concept and life provides an explanation and conceptualisation of the metaphysical concept of vitality. The dialectic of self-consciousness and its outcome – the concept of spirit – illustrates how the determinations of life evolve, resulting in a distinctive level of vitality. The concept of vitality is only fully comprehensible when the specific relationship between nature and spirit is conceptualised in a dialectical unity where everything occurs from within. The attunement of human self-consciousness is in accordance with this dialectical unity. In essence, the overarching perspective is dialectical

⁹ Fr. Beiser shows this unique understanding of Hegel: "The dialectic is what follows from the concept of the thing. It is flatly contrary to Hegel's intention, therefore, to assume that the dialectic is an a priori methodology, or indeed a kind of logic, that one can apply to any subject matter. The dialectic is the very opposite: it is the inner movement of the subject matter, what evolves from it rather than what the philosopher applies to it" (Beiser 2005, 160).

in nature, and the speculative-dialectical method is employed throughout. It is important to reiterate the historical and critical context in which the speculative-dialectical method emerged, as it provides the foundation for the metaphysical concept of vitality presented here.

As we approach and eventually achieve the philosophical underpinnings of vitality, we also inevitably encounter other issues. The metaphysical concept of vitality is frequently linked with a number of disparate ideas, including animal magnetism (or mesmerism), alternative healing practices, energy healing, hypnotism, spiritualism, and a range of parapsychological and pseudoscientific hypotheses. It is important to note that Hegel's speculative-dialectical approach to conceptualizing vitality differs significantly from these other approaches, and thus merits further examination. In contrast to approaches that rely on subjective evaluations, Hegel's methodology could provide a new framework for understanding vitality from a scientific (i.e., metaphysical¹⁰) perspective, which in turn could relate to modern scientific ideas. In this context, the concepts of entropy and negentropy in physics are particularly relevant.

Entropy and negentropy are both interdependent and mutually exclusive. The concept of entropy was initially delineated by scientists through the utilisation of the Greek term denoting 'transformation'. The etymology of this Greek word offers insight into the nature of entropy. The term 'transformation' implies a departure from a preexisting form or structure. It signifies the dissolution of the formative aspects of content, which can be conceptualised as a process of disorder. This is not a formative process, but rather one that is destructive in nature. Entropy is typically conceived as a measure of disorder in a closed (isolated) system. However, it can also serve as a catalyst for the emergence of new phenomena from chaos. Haukedal and Mylonas heuristically "demonstrate that a dialectical understanding of entropy and anti-entropy is able to accommodate the productive dimension of the former" (Haukedal & Mylonas 2023, 2). Some physicists posit that the advent of human consciousness is an inevitable consequence of cerebral evolution¹¹. They propose that the brain's emergent property, known as 'entropy in the brain', strives to optimise information exchange.

Nevertheless, the views of neuroscientists and cognitive scientists offer an alternative perspective. The hypothesis has been put forth that consciousness does not evolve but rather self-creates evolution from the Big Bang to the present day. In order to establish a connection between these two perspectives, it is necessary to employ dialectical thinking for the purpose of philosophical interpretation. In this context, the

¹⁰ It is important to note that I do not view the metaphysical as a counterpoint to the dialectical. Rather, I consider the metaphysical to be the primordial foundation and driving force behind the dialectical, and thus a necessary intersection with the speculative-dialectical. This is the pervasive logos, though insensible and in fact supersensible, yet not esoteric or mystical in nature. Indeed, Hegel himself advances this thesis in the preface to the first edition of *The Science of Logic* (Hegel 2010, 7–8).

¹¹ In fact, the above-mentioned naturalistic interpretation of Hegel's philosophy stays in the same perspective.

concept of vitality can be utilised as a means of achieving this objective.

In his seminal work *What is Life?* (1944), Erwin Schrödinger sets forth his philosophical and scientific approach to understanding the essence of life, with a reference to Theorem 67 in Part IV of B. Spinoza's *Ethics*: "There is nothing a free man ponders less than death; his wisdom is to meditate not on death but on life" (Schrödinger 1967, 2). One should engage with life and endeavor to unravel its mysteries. The pinnacle of human wisdom is to contemplate life rather than death. Spinoza's perspective is somewhat limited in scope. The individual who is prepared to engage in reflection on the subject of death and confront it directly is not daunted by it; rather, they attempt to provide an explanation. Furthermore, from a Hegelian perspective, the enigmas of life can be elucidated through the lens of an understanding of death (EN § 374, 534; EN § 375, 536). It is possible that Schrödinger was drawn to Spinoza's theorem due to the nature of its proof. The impulse to act, live, and preserve one's existence represents a fundamental human instinct. In Chapter VI of his treatise, the Austrian physicist addresses the issues of order, disorder, and entropy, and introduces the concept of negentropy. Chapter VI begins again with a quote from Spinoza and his *Ethics*, which is probably not coincidental:

(...) Nec corpus mentem ad cogitandum, nec mens corpus ad motum, neque ad quietem, nec ad aliquid (si quid est) aliud determinare potest. SPINOZA, *Ethics*, Pt III, Prop. 2 (Neither can the body determine the mind to think, nor the mind determine the body to motion or rest or anything else (if such there be) (Schrödinger 1967, 67).

Schrödinger wrote this book to address the problem of living matter, which involves the emergence of "other laws of physics" that were previously unknown (Ibid., 68). He posits that the genuine laws of physics are, in fact, "statistical laws" that are intimately connected to the natural tendency of matter to move towards disorder (Ibid.). The advent of quantum theory has led to a significant modification of the classical laws of physics. Schrödinger identifies order as a significant aspect of life. The laws of physics that govern the non-organic world, including the Second Law of Thermodynamics¹² (the entropy principle), do not apply to living organisms.

The concept is based on the principle of self-preservation, which involves the avoidance of rapid decay into an inert state of equilibrium and, ultimately, death. Even living organisms exhibit a tendency towards maximum entropy, which is a natural process (Ibid., 70).

(...) Thus, a living organism continually increases its entropy, or produces positive entropy, and tends to approach the dangerous state of maximum entropy, which is death. It can only remain alive by continually drawing negative entropy from its environment, which is a very positive thing as we shall see. An organism feeds on negative entropy (Ibid., 71).

12 "The principles of thermodynamics, especially the second law, apply only to inert objects. Life is an exception to the second law, and a new principle of life will have to explain conditions contrary to the second law" (Otsuka 2018, 2157).

As posited by Schrödinger, the organism's capacity to liberate itself from the entropy it generates during its lifetime is a pivotal factor in metabolic processes (Ibid).

Engaging with Schrödinger's paradoxical and controversial thought is essential, as it is pivotal for establishing a connection with Hegel's speculative-dialectical method. All systems, including living organisms, exhibit a tendency to accumulate opposing properties and characteristics, which ultimately transform them into their antithesis. The very nature of living organisms is paradoxical and controversial. From a natural perspective, it is to be expected that living organisms (simply creatures with lower forms of consciousness) will gradually increase their entropy and follow the 'order-disorder' direction. Conversely, living (spiritual) organisms tend to self-produce maximum negative entropy in order to maintain their own survival, resist disorder, and preserve themselves, following the opposite direction of 'disorder-order'.

This concept is closely aligned with Hegel's speculative-dialectical understanding of the nature of reality. The capacity for self-preservation and self-organisation is a defining feature of all living organisms, manifesting in both material and conscious forms, but with different intensity, and consequently, in different directions. Accordingly, the philosophical interpretation of negentropy is inclined to focus on self-consciousness (and more specifically, the spirit) rather than on information. In the field of philosophical science, the primary subject matter is self-consciousness, which is not to be confused with the physicists' comprehension of information.

In philosophical science as understood through speculative Hegelian dialectics, the examination of the subject matter is undertaken for its intrinsic value (Beiser 2005, 160). The tendency of life to gravitate towards maximum entropy is counterbalanced by its inherent capacity to resist this process through the consumption of negentropy. In its universal spiritual form, natural life is capable of both halting and transforming the negative aspects of the entropy process, which ultimately gives rise to concrete life in its individual form.

This is not merely a recuperation of the original abstract form of the unity of spiritual and natural life; rather, it is a novel and concrete universality that is mediated by the active (i.e., speculative-dialectical) and constructive aspect of the spirit. This process represents a speculative-dialectical synchronisation of the natural and the spiritual realms. The concepts of entropy and negentropy, and their interaction, illustrate the self-organisation of systems and the vital force inherent in living organisms. This vital force is spiritual in nature and serves as the driving force behind the speculative-dialectical process. The philosophical treatment of negentropy adheres to the stages of the speculative-dialectical method: "The dialectic through which the object itself as nothing in itself, is the activity of the self-conscious living being, which in this process against an inorganic nature hereby preserves itself, develops and objectifies itself" (EN, § 219, 375).

The organic¹³ and the inorganic are in a state of dynamic equilibrium, with the

13 It would be remiss not to mention the study of Annette Sell, entitled *Der lebendige Begriff. Leben*

former exerting a dominant influence over the latter. In Hegel's terminology, inorganic nature is 'in itself' [*an sich*] what the living is 'for itself' [*für sich*]. Life is in a constant state of conflict with inorganic forces, and the genus ultimately prevails:

(...) The living entity perishes due to the contradiction inherent in its nature. It is both the common, the genus, and yet exists immediately only as the singular. In death, the genus demonstrates its capacity to exert control over the immediately singular (EN, § 221, 376). (...) The death of the immediate single vitality is the genesis of the spirit (Ibid., § 222).

The degree of negentropy is understood as systematisation, according to Otsuka (Otsuka 2018, 2158). It is the key concept in understanding the influence of Hegel's speculative-dialectical methodology projected in the realm of theoretical physics. Negentropy as a process is understood as evidence of self-consciousness's (spiritual) impact on the living organism and its survival. The philosophical perspective is of paramount importance in this context. It is a fallacious assumption to believe that these processes occur exclusively at the organic, purely natural and physical level. Conversely, it is the spiritual substance that instigates a process of negentropy, which occurs, certainly, within the natural tendency of the entropy process itself. The phenomenon of negentropy is a consequence of the spiritual-natural (i.e., in terms of speculative-dialectical, not strictly physical) process of entropy; the two are inextricably linked. For instance, the universe develops in accordance with the Second Law of Thermodynamics. In the universe, matter is created and subsequently degraded, ultimately succumbing to thermal degradation due to the Second Law of Thermodynamics. However, living matter resists this process of degradation and instead experiences a phenomenon known as negentropy. It can therefore be concluded that life in the universe serves to retard this process of decay, thus giving rise to the metaphysical and spiritual concept of vitality.

The phenomenon in physics illustrates the relationship between the information that a system is capable of producing and the energy that it expends in order to structure that information. In Hegel's philosophy, vitality emerges through the speculative dialectic of life, as outlined and characterised by the interaction between nature and spirit, both in *Phenomenology* and the advent of self-consciousness to the form of spirit, and in the *Logic*, where the concept of life is under examination, from its abstract to its concrete form. Vitality is observed to increase at the core of this logical mediation, which is conceptualised as a degree of consciousness that takes into account the synchronisation of organic and spiritual elements. Accordingly, the concepts of entropy and negentropy were subjected to hermeneutic analysis with a view to developing a heuristic metaphysical conceptualisation of vitality and potential new interpretations.

und Logik bei Hegel (Sell 2013), which is worthy of further investigation. In this work the author considers the concept of life as a methodological concept, from which modern theories of self-organisation, constructivist philosophy, and the philosophy of biology, among others, are derived.

V. Conclusion

Contemporary scholars of Hegel's philosophy and the speculative-dialectical method share his concerns about the mediating relationship between the German thinker's logical categories and empirical reality. In this context, the explication of the concept of life, of vitality, as a result of speculative dialectics and its conceptualisation as a phenomenon in biophysics and neuroscience also presents difficulties. Nevertheless, the same authors still acknowledge a possible application of the dialectical method to empirical reality, at least as a dialectical apposition of this empirical reality (Williamson 2016, 7–8). Hegel presents the dialectical aspect of empirical reality as a transition between the sciences. The aforementioned example is particularly evident in the field of philosophy of nature, as well as in the transitions between the physical sciences and the biological sciences, including the transitions between mechanics and physics, physics and organics, and hence to anthropology: "The dialectical method can thus be productively employed in examining the transition from e.g. chemistry to biology, that is, in examining the metaphysical emergence of the category of life in physical reality" (Williamson 2016, 8).

This conceptual and historical-critical analysis explores Hegel's understanding of life and its relationship to the philosophical concept of vitality. The analysis also presents some examples and comparisons with contemporary theoretical physics, with the objective of demonstrating the relevance of Hegel's speculative-dialectical methodology and its applicability to such natural-scientific problems. This ultimately gave rise to a re-evaluation of the nature of time, the dynamics of matter, and their relationship to self-consciousness. The conventional interpretation of time is founded upon the notion of causality, which serves to elucidate the distinctive facets of time, namely the past, the present, and the future. The evolution of the universe, as postulated by the Second Law of Thermodynamics, illustrates the 'arrow of time' – the linear progression of time through the development and transformation of material particles.

In accordance with contemporary theoretical physics, the universe is posited to have originated with 10–11 dimensions, which subsequently underwent a process of cooling and contraction to attain its current state of four dimensions (three spatial and one temporal). In contrast, at the macroscopic level, time is understood to be a function of the dynamics of matter. This leads to the question of whether time exists independently of material particles. In other words, is it possible that time and consciousness (spirit) exist in parallel and in an interdependent relationship? In the material world, time progresses in a linear fashion – from the past to the future. However, in the spiritual realm, the concept of time is not applicable, and the boundaries between time and space are transcended. It is also pertinent to draw a parallel with physics: A. Einstein's theory of relativity describes the structure of the material world, whereas quantum mechanics has been proposed as a framework for describing the spiritual world, including consciousness, due to the absence

of time in the quantum vacuum.

Hegel posits that the concept exists free from temporal domination, and it is the power of time and matter: the natural and finite are subject to time, whereas spirit is eternal (EN § 258, 49–50). Within this philosophical framework, it is important to note that the deduction presented here – regarding the growth of vitality and the possibility of achieving new forms of consciousness – suggests a perspective from which the nature of time perception may be questioned. This is also the case in reverse, as the process is two-way: a different perception of time would promote an increase in vitality and, consequently, the regeneration of living organisms.

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