

The Germ of Death: Purposive Causality in Hegel

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Abstract: The purposive nature of dialectical process, its teleological orientation, is one of the most problematic aspects of Hegelian philosophy. This article begins by analyzing Spinoza's criticism of final causes in general as well as Althusser's specific criticism of epistemological expressionism. The author argues that such criticism of Hegel's concept of purpose is well founded inasmuch as it is linked to the organic metaphor of the germ as plant-in-itself. However, Hegel himself limited the usefulness of the organic metaphor in matters of spirit. In order to separate the teleology of nature and the teleology of spirit, Hegel employed the metaphor of the 'germ of death.' In the second part, the author argues that Hegel completely agrees with Spinoza's rejection of what Kant called the *external* teleology – e.g. the understanding of lightning as God's punishment. While Hegel does often explain the process of knowledge with reference to the *internal* teleology of organic nature, the proper Hegelian concept of purpose (*telos*) rests in understanding the purposive nature of the dialectical process as following the internal logic, but nevertheless producing a result which is external to it. This concept of teleology bears the same fundamental structure that is characteristic of the signature Hegelian claim that the true must be understood both as (determinate) substance, as well as a (free) subjectivity.

Key Words: Hegel, germ, death, teleology, final causes, purpose, freedom

In contemporary philosophical, political and social discussions, many Hegelian concepts seem extremely problematic, if not even counter-productive. These include the idea of truth as a whole; the principle according to which the sequence of events in historical development should be understood as a logical progression; the general notion that contradictory positions somehow belong to a greater unity; and the scientifically abhorrent concept of the absolute knowledge. But perhaps the most dubious notion of them all is the conceptual nest of purpose (*Zweck*) and purposivity (*Zweckmäßigkeit*), clearly referring to the historical metaphysical problematic of purposive causality, or teleology, such as it is known in Thomas Aquinas and other Aristotelian traditions. It comes as no surprise, then, that contemporary usage of Hegel's philosophy limits the discussion about this concept to a very particular topic contained within the philosophy of nature or avoids this potential minefield altogether.

The idea that the outcome of an action or process could be interpreted as its cause was always met with harsh criticism. The modern concept of causality, especially when explicitly related to the processes in nature, works without any reference to purposes that people or cannon balls might (or might not) have in their view. In the addition to the first part of his *Ethics*, Spinoza states quite matter-of-factly that “all final causes are but figments of the human imagination,” adding that this doctrine “turns Nature completely upside down, for it regards as an effect that which is in fact a cause, and vice versa.”¹ Spinoza’s arguments are valuable because they provide us with more than just a refutation of the concept; they offer us an explanation of why this notion of causality persists even today. According to Spinoza, people have the tendency to attribute to God and Nature the same properties that they think they possess themselves; in this case, the pursuit of ends. This is basically the argument against personification of nature, against the anthropomorphic accounts of God. Spinoza argued that the philosophical problem with understanding Nature or God as pursuing ends is that this implies imperfection or lack. If Nature or God must become something else, if they must get somewhere else, or if they must fulfill certain goal, then it seems we have been considering them as deficient to some degree. Spinoza writes, “This doctrine negates God’s perfection; for if God acts with an end in view, he must necessarily be seeking something that he lacks.”²

But Spinoza goes much further. Even when people describe their own actions, human actions, as effects of the ends they have in view, as effects of final causes, they are wrong! In the introduction to part IV of *Ethics*, Spinoza uses Aristotle’s famous example of building a house in order to inhabit it and explains it strictly as a result of urges and efficient causes: “When we say that being a place of habitation was the final cause of this or that house, we surely mean no more than this, that a man, from thinking of the advantages of domestic life, had an urge to build a house. Therefore, the need for a habitation insofar as it is considered as a final cause is nothing but this particular urge, which is in reality an efficient cause, and is considered as the prime cause because men are commonly ignorant of the causes of their own urges.”³ Explanations which make use of final causes are only possible because people are ignorant of the true causes (which are, for Spinoza, always efficient causes) and confuse them with their desires and imagination. However, ignorance

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1 Spinoza 2002, p. 240.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Spinoza 2002, p. 321.

is only one of the reasons for the success of explanation through final causes. There is one further reason, or perhaps simply another version of the same reason: The mistake is in that people consider themselves *to be free* – that is, they consider themselves to be independent from what produced or caused them.

This is the crux of the matter. For Spinoza, human beings are nothing but finite modes of the absolute substance and cannot be considered as free causes; only the substance itself (God or Nature) can be considered as a free cause, as it is determined only by and through itself without the mediation of an external cause. This is why German Idealism in general, while it admired Spinoza’s radical and consequential understanding of human nature, nevertheless sought to overcome what it perceived as Spinoza’s utter determinism. Hegel’s programmatic claim that truth should be considered both as ‘substance *and* subject’ should be considered precisely as an attempt to accept all the consequences of philosophy as Spinozism but defend in it the place for freedom of the subject. According to Dieter Henrich, Hegel integrated the principal claim of Kant with Jacobi’s claim, “the claim that freedom is the highest principle (Kant) with the claim that a rational philosophy, to be coherent, has to be Spinozistic (Jacobi).”⁴

The concept of final causes within the Hegelian framework is, in the ultimate analysis, related to the question of freedom. In Kantian terms, the efficient causality at work in scientific explanations of changes in nature should not be considered as *the only* causality; philosophy must set as its goal a concept of specifically human causality, one that accounts for causality of freedom, one that presupposes freedom as cause. The concept of final cause in Hegel – or, to be more precise, the concept of purposivity – should therefore not be taken simply as a backdoor to old metaphysics, but rather as an explicit attempt to conceptualize the somewhat paradoxical idea that substance is one and absolute and guided by a necessity of the logical order, but that this one substance is also, at the same time, self-transforming and self-producing. The concept of teleology is therefore not a peripheral question in Hegel studies, it is not a philological detail that does not necessarily require our attention, but one of Hegel’s central concepts, perhaps precisely the one that is charged with the most acute task of reconciliation between consequential rationalism and the idea of freedom.

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4 Henrich 2003, p. 80.

The Indictment

“If a reason, one single and therefore fundamental reason must be given, here it is: we made a detour *via* Spinoza in order to improve our understanding of Marx’s philosophy.” (Althusser 1976, p. 134)

Hegel’s insistence on what we could call the teleology of spirit in history and logic profoundly irritated French postwar thought, so much so in fact that its prominent thinkers felt they had to explicitly reject Hegel and distance themselves from his dialectic. Jacques Derrida describes the strong aversion to Hegel in several generations of French scholars, including Sartre, Foucault, Deleuze, Lyotard, Bataille and Lacan, as nothing short of an “active and organized allergy.”⁵ Perhaps this move is nowhere more evident than in the philosophy of Louis Althusser, the infamous structuralist Marxist who claimed that Spinoza’s critique of final causes is the foundational work of any theory of ideology: “Spinoza refused to use the notion of the Goal, but explained it as a necessary and therefore well-founded illusion[.] In the Appendix to Book I of the *Ethics*, and in the *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus*, we find in fact what is undoubtedly the first theory of ideology ever thought out.”⁶ Althusser’s project, at least in the texts of *For Marx*, consisted mainly in reading Marx without Hegel, that is, in understanding Marxism not merely as an inverted Hegelianism, not merely as Hegelian dialectic without Hegelian mystical shell, but rather as a complete refusal of dialectic as such, insofar as it relies on simple logical contradictions instead of studying the complex historical conjuncture of each particular situation.⁷

In the context of epistemology, Althusser criticized the concept of teleology in the process of knowledge as nothing but a variation of the theological concept of the End Judgment (Parousia).⁸ He argued that science functioned as a break or rupture or cut that breaks through ideological idling in circle, and heavily criticized Hegel’s idea of science as a teleological progress of knowledge from simple and abstract beginnings to the absolute. He described Hegelian process of knowledge as simple matter of expression, where the whole (Hegel’s *Ganze*) is

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5 Derrida 2005, p. xxvi.

6 Althusser 1976, p. 135.

7 See especially: Althusser 2005, pp. 103–105.

8 Althusser 1970a, p. 16.

present in its beginning as a *germ* which only needs to manifest itself in the process of development, just as the oak tree is a manifestation or expression of what already lies in the acorn.

[T]he history of reason is neither a linear history of continuous development, nor, in its continuity, a history of the progressive manifestation or emergence into consciousness of a Reason which is completely present in germ in its origins and which its history merely reveals to the light of day. [...] The real history of the development of knowledge appears to us today to be subject to laws quite different from this teleological hope for the religious triumph of reason. We are beginning to conceive this history as a history punctuated by radical discontinuities [...] We are thereby obliged to renounce every teleology of reason, and to conceive the historical relation between a result and its conditions of existence as a relation of production, and not of expression[.]⁹

This is the indictment: teleology implies a coincidence of beginning and end, a closed circle, a vicious circle of ideology; and for Hegel, this circle involves the entire history as a development of what was already implied in the germ and is manifested or expressed in its result. Even though these are specific Althusserian formulations, they nevertheless address all the issues that lay at the heart of the criticism of Hegel and of his dialectic.

In what follows, we shall loosely adopt the form of a court trial and take a close look at Hegel’s own usage of the concept throughout the body of his work in order to determine its usefulness in contemporary debates on Hegel. What strikes us even at the outset is the multiplicity of terms and variation of the usage. Firstly, (1) there is rhetorical or idiomatic usage, such as in phrases like ‘... in order to ...’ While it is interesting to note that our languages can scarcely function without the assumption of final causes, we are not primarily interested in such implicit concepts of teleology, but rather in its explicit formulations. Secondly, (2) we can find in almost every major work by Hegel a section devoted to teleology (*Teleologie*), but those sections are limited to a very specific problematic of the philosophy of nature, in fact, precisely to the problematic of biological teleology, such as may be said to be at work in acorns and oak trees. And finally, (3) there are passages where terms like purpose, goal, end or aim are used specifically as concepts that must explain a central theme of Hegel’s philosophy. These passages will be of our primary

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9 Althusser 1970a, p. 44–45.

interest, and we will see how they relate to the question of teleology in nature (2). Let us first examine two famous citations from *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

[The True] is the process of its own becoming, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal [Zweck], having its end also as its beginning; and only by being worked out to its end, is it actual.¹⁰

These words sound exactly like the typical metaphysical mix-up of the cause and the effect. The idea of the True as a kind of *circle* which is set in motion by its *end* which is understood as its *purpose* and retroactively moved to its *beginning*: This is exactly what the final cause was always criticized for in Spinoza's century as well as in Althusser's. Now let us take a look at the second quote:

What has just been said can also be expressed by saying that Reason is *purposive activity* [zweckmässige Tun]. The exaltation of a supposed Nature over a misconceived thinking, and especially the rejection of external teleology, has brought the form of purpose in general, into discredit. Still, in the sense in which Aristotle, too, defines Nature as purposive activity, purpose is what is immediate and *at rest*, the unmoved which is also *self-moving*, and as such is Subject. Its power to move, taken abstractly, is *being* for-itself or pure negativity. The result is the same as the beginning, only because the *beginning* is the *purpose*; in other words, the actual is the same as its Notion only because the immediate, as purpose, contains the self or pure actuality within itself. The realized purpose, or the existent actuality, is movement and unfolded becoming [entfaltetes Werden].¹¹

The result is the same as beginning because the beginning is purpose. The beginning is understood in the Aristotelian sense here, as the unmoved mover. Such beginning is called by Hegel telos or purpose of the whole movement because it stands at the beginning of the movement, it is the beginning, while at the same time it can only be realized as the outcome of the movement. It is apparent that Hegel understands both Reason and Nature as purposive activities. The process of Reason is analogous to the process of Nature.

But the formulation that seems to confirm all the suspicions of

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10 Hegel 1977, p. 10.

11 Hegel 1977, p. 12.

Althusser and other critics is the formulation at the end of the segment, the idea of unfolded becoming, *entfaltetes Werden*. In German as well as in English, the term implies an organic development, like unfolding of leaves or blossoms in spring. Hegel's explicit references to Aristotle and to the purposivity in Nature seem to confirm this: Hegel's concept of purpose does not only imply circularity, but also a motion similar to organic blossoming. The crucial argument of the prosecution is this: Hegel explains the teleological process of Reason not only as analogous to organic teleology, but seems to imply that what is in play at the level of organic nature is one and the same process of unfolding and becoming that is characteristic for logic and spirit. Whenever one thinks of Hegel's purpose, one apparently also thinks of the organic metaphors, and among those, of Hegel's favorite metaphor of the germ or seed (*Keim*) as the plant-in-itself.

In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the metaphor of the germ is only used once, in passing, and the usage is rather untypical – after the famous analysis of Greek antiquity through a reading of the myth of Antigone, the ethical substance is said to have been ruined and that it passed into another state, the legal state, “which simply reveals the contradiction and the germ of destruction inherent in [...] the ethical Spirit itself.”¹² The metaphor of the germ truly blossoms in the *Encyclopedia*; but even there, the usage is quite often similar to the usage in *Phenomenology*. Every proper Spinozist will shiver upon reading the following lines: “The true way to construe the matter, however, is that life as such carries within itself the germ of death and that, generally speaking, the finite contradicts itself in itself and for that reason sublates itself.”¹³ The idea that life carries within itself the germ of death may sound awfully like an assertion of a country priest. And is this idea not precisely that which is the most naïve in the framework of final causes, namely that the natural end of a process – a death of such and such individual – is considered as its fulfillment and perfection, its goal and purpose? However, as I hope to demonstrate, it is precisely this somber formulation of the idea of the germ that will prove to be the most productive one in understanding Hegel's concept of telos.

But let us first take a look at the dominant usage of the metaphor of the germ. Here is a very clear formulation from *Encyclopedia Logic*:

In the same sense the seed can also be regarded as the plant-in-itself. What should be taken from these examples is that

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12 Hegel 1977, p. 289.

13 Hegel 2010, p. 129.

one finds oneself very much in error if one thinks that the in-itself of things or the thing-in-itself in general is something inaccessible for our cognizing. All things are initially in-themselves but they are not thereby left at that, and just as the seed which is the plant in itself is only this, to develop itself, so too the thing in general advances beyond its mere in-itself as the abstract reflection-in-itself, proving itself to be reflection-in-another as well, and thus it has properties.¹⁴

It is evident that Hegel uses the organic metaphor of plants to explain the process of knowledge. And if there was ever any doubt that the concept of telos (*Zweck*) is the very nodal point where all the notorious Hegelian ideas converge – namely, the metaphor of the circle, the development of the concept as a simple expression, and all those flourishing organic metaphors – then the following quote from Encyclopedia's *Philosophy of Nature* could be used as the final piece of evidence against Hegel:

To see purpose as inherent within natural objects is to grasp nature in its simple determinateness, e.g. the seed of a plant, which contains the real potential of everything pertaining to the tree, and which as purposeful activity is therefore orientated solely towards self-preservation.¹⁵

We have here everything thrown together in the same bucket, so to speak: the concept of telos in the realm of nature is nothing but the simple determination of the natural thing. The germ of the plant is the perfect example in nature for Hegel's idea of how concept is developed in the spirit. Even though all of the quoted passages could be painstakingly interpreted to mean something else than what critics of Hegel saw in them, after all this hard work we would still be forced to admit that Hegel, in the final analysis, retained a bit too much of the aspirations of thinkers like Herder.

And yet, things are far more complicated than this for Hegel. There are two indicators of this implied already in the very quotes I selected. Firstly, Hegel is himself very critical of what he calls the 'external teleology', and secondly, there seems to be a very important difference in Hegel between using the metaphor of the germ as a metaphor of the conceptual development and the actual discussion of teleology as a

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14 Hegel 2010, p. 192.

15 Hegel 1970a, p. 196.

process within the realm of nature. I will expand on both of these two counts.

The Defense

First, let us take a closer look at the idea of external teleology. It may sound surprising, but Hegel's critique is just as sharp as Spinoza's. While commenting on Francis Bacon, he claims:

But in this connection an important point is that Bacon has turned against the teleological investigation of nature, against the investigation into final causes [...] the hair is on the head on account of warmth; thunder and lightning are the punishment of God, or else they make fruitful the earth; marmots sleep during the winter because they can find nothing to eat; snails have a shell in order that they may be secure against attacks; the bee is provided with a sting. [...] It was right that Bacon should set himself to oppose this investigation into final causes, because it relates to external expediency, just as Kant was right in distinguishing the inward teleology from the outward.¹⁶

The point is this: Hegel's critique of external teleology – here, attributed to and praised in Bacon and Kant – is almost exactly the same as Spinoza's. The mistake is in that we pick a random effect (such as, for instance, death of a soldier in combat), and explain it as a purposive result of an unrelated action (such as, for instance, the law which allows for gays to serve in the military). The ridiculous idea of lightning as God's punishing for whatever, actually – Hegel doesn't even bother to give an example – is truly the paradigmatic example of this procedure.

But Hegel's critique of final causes goes well beyond the dismissal of this elementary form of sophistry. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel writes specifically on human goals, intentions (*Absichten*) and the actions. While one should not consider the terms *Absicht* and *Zweck* as completely synonymous in Hegel, my wager here is that human intentions (*Absichten*) may be considered as the beginning of a purposive activity, and therefore do fall in the general category of *causa finalis*. Hegel writes:

The *actual* crime however, has *its inversion* and *its in-itself* as *possibility*, in *the intention* as such; but not in a good intention; for

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16 Hegel 1896, p. 184–185.

the truth of intention is only the act itself.¹⁷

Hegel's context is very different from that of Althusser and his notorious thesis of the material existence of ideology, but it seems that they completely share the idea that the truth of an intention is only in the act itself. Hegel admits no question about good or bad intentions, there is no contradiction or conflict between good intentions and criminal act, what counts in the end is only the material result, the act itself which is the truth of the intention. Isn't this precisely what Althusser pointed out about Pascal's answer to intelligent and educated atheists, who ask the seemingly obvious question: how can they possibly start believing? Althusser condensed the reply: "Pascal says more or less: 'Kneel down, move your lips in prayer, and you will believe.'"¹⁸The belief is, in the final instance, a function of actions, and the truth of someone's religion is in the actions they perform, just as Hegel claims. This should give us at least some indication that the question of purposivity is a very serious question for Hegel, and that he was well aware of the details of the criticism of the concept.

Let us now take a closer look at the idea of the *internal* teleology. As was already mentioned, Hegel takes up this idea from Aristotle and understands it, primarily, in the context of biology. Telos is the designation of the essence of the natural being itself. For Hegel, Aristotle's concept of internal teleology, entelecheia, was basically an argument that the natural realm can be explained consistently and consequently with mechanical determinism. The germ determines what can grow from it. In fact, it is only when we understand the biological teleology that we can make the distinction between internal and external teleology. The fact that it is raining or that there is a lightning is accidental – namely, it is accidental or external with regard to the inner determinism of an organism. To explain the growth of a plant by relating to the germ as its inner telos is perfectly legitimate. But to explain the extinction of an individual by referring to a stroke of lightning as a consequence of actions of that individual is to commit the fallacy of the external teleology.

Only once the difference between internal and external teleology is established, we can go deeper into the problematic. And it becomes clear very soon that the problem resides in the fact that Hegel consistently argues that the process of the concept could easily be explained as a development of some internal telos; it would seem that dialectic is driven by internal teleology. The process of reason must only express, or render

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17 Hegel 1977, p. 98.

18 Althusser 1971, p. 169.

manifest, what was already present in its germ. This was Althusser's specific criticism: While Hegel is not guilty of the fallacy of external teleology, he nevertheless explains the process of knowledge as following internal teleology. It is therefore quite essential to point out those moments in Hegel where it becomes obvious that the organic metaphor used to explain the process of the concept is only productive up to a certain point.

Let us take a look at one of the examples where Hegel points out a difference between internal teleology of nature and teleology of the concept. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he explains the difference by claiming that the fruit of the plant does seek a return to the germ, but that it produces it in another germ, in another seed, which is different from the first. Hegel says that this is very different from what happens in Spirit:

As with the germ in nature, Spirit indeed resolves itself back into unity after constituting itself another. But what is in itself becomes for Spirit and thus arrives at being for itself. The fruit and seed newly contained within it on the other hand, do not become for the original germ, but for us alone; in the case of Spirit both factors not only are implicitly the same in character, but there is a being for the other and at the same time a being for self. That for which the "other" is, is the same as that "other;" and thus alone Spirit is at home with itself in its "other." The development of Spirit lies in the fact that its going forth and separation constitutes its coming to itself.¹⁹

The difference is that in organic Nature, the return of the germ to itself is only a return of another, whereas for Spirit, the returning Spirit is *for that same Spirit* which was in itself at the beginning. Almost the same point, but with an important addition, is raised in *Encyclopedia* in the framework of the discussion about intelligence: The germ returns to itself only in another, in the germ of the fruit, whereas the intelligence "as such is the free *existence* of the *being-in-itself* that recollects itself into itself in its development."²⁰Teleology in organic nature is therefore not the same thing as teleology in Spirit. Moreover, the metaphor of the organic teleology fails precisely at the point where Hegel wants to introduce the idea of 'free existence;' this is to say, it fails precisely at the point where we have to think the true not only as substance, but also as subject.

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19 Hegel 1802, p. 22–23. Translation modified.

20 Hegel 2007, p. 187.

But one may object that Hegel's argument here actually brings us into even greater difficulty. In biology, the fact that the germ at the origin is not at all the same as the germ of the produce guarantees that change is possible. Evolution is only possible because there is a factor of chance, coincidence, contingency, which allows for mutations of the genome. Hegel's Spirit, however, seems to be, just as Deleuze argued, an instance of sameness, an instance where all the process of negation is nothing but a detour or a backdoor to affirm the original sameness.

The point for Hegel is, however, that the Spirit that undergoes development is not the same as the Spirit that was at the beginning. The point is rather that not only did the transformation occur, but that it occurred to the spirit itself. What we are dealing with is the idea of the self-transformation of the Spirit. This is where Hegel is profoundly anti-Aristotelian: the substance *itself* is transformed by the accident. And this is what Hegel resents in Spinoza, this is why he insists on the formula that the concept of substance itself is not enough, that truth must be thought of as substance and as subject.

Interestingly enough – and here we come to the very core of the matter – we can detect this even on the level of the metaphor of the germ itself. While the organic unfolding, the Aristotelian inner teleology, is indeed used by Hegel quite often as a metaphor of the self-development of the Spirit, there is another phrase that is at least as prominent in Hegel's writing, a phrase that should warn us immediately that there is something other than organicism at work here; something that excludes the teleology of nature. The phrase is precisely the previously mentioned 'germ of death,' *der Keim des Todes*.

The Verdict: Death

At the very end of Encyclopedia's Philosophy of Nature, there is a section which is charged with one of the most important tasks in Hegel's philosophy, the task of transition from nature to spirit. The final section (encompassing two paragraphs) bears a very interesting title indeed: *The death of the individual of its own accord*, (*Der Tod des Individuums von sich selbst*). This sounds gruesome enough, but what exactly does this mean for Hegel? To be more specific, what exactly does death signify here? Because we know that death can certainly be understood as an organic process – a process of decay, destruction, degradation, decomposition. And it may seem that Hegel is referring precisely to the organic process of decay, to death as a part of life itself: "In fact, however, it is part of the concept of existence to alter itself, and alteration is merely the manifestation of what existence is in itself. Living things die, and they do

so simply because they carry the germ of death in themselves."²¹

But anyone who has ever read anything from Hegel will know that death is not simply an organic process for him. That is the concept of death in Spinoza – simply the decomposition or destruction of individual's specific disposition. Spinoza would argue and in fact did argue that such destruction always comes from outside of the individual, it can never be understood as an internal drive of the individual itself. But in truth, Hegel and Spinoza aren't even in contradiction on this point, because for Hegel, the death of natural things has a completely different meaning.

But then what does the death of the individual of its own accord mean at the threshold from philosophy of nature to philosophy of spirit? Clearly, it is precisely the question of death that separates nature from spirit and what facilitates the transition from nature to spirit. Surprisingly or not, at this crucial point we come back to the question of 'purpose:'

Spirit has therefore issued forth from nature. The purpose [Ziel] of nature is to extinguish itself [sich selbst zu töten, to kill itself], and to break through its rind of immediate and sensuous being, to consume itself like a Phoenix [sich als Phönix zu verbrennen, to burn itself down] in order to emerge from this externality rejuvenated as spirit.²²

Now, the term Hegel uses is not *Zweck* (purpose), but *Ziel* (goal, end); we are still in the framework of the concept of telos, but the term used is not the same. The answer to this is perhaps very simple. It could be argued that Hegel uses this term in order to clearly separate the concept of telos at play here from the biological telos, from the telos of 'inner teleology.' The death of nature by itself and through itself is not anything like an organic decomposition; Hegel has to use a completely new metaphor here, and compares the death of nature to the burning of Phoenix. Telos, here, does not imply an organic unfolding, but a rejuvenation through death.

This is far from being an exceptional instance in Hegel of explaining subject with the reference to something dead. In *Phenomenology of Spirit*, we find the example of the infinite judgment 'Spirit is a bone.' Hegel directly designates the skull-bone of man as *caput mortuum*, as a "dead being."²³ As Jure Simoniti points out in a recent publication, it is precisely the deadness of the skull that constitutes the condition of the self-

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²¹ Hegel 2010, p. 148.

²² Hegel 1970b, p. 212.

²³ Hegel 1977, p. 198.

determining Spirit: “The function of the bone is still most necessary and non-trivial. First, Spirit exists nowhere else but in the matter inside the bone. Second, with its inert subsistence, the bone signifies that Spirit is not a given, but an emergent, self-reflexive, ideal entity.”²⁴ Spirit emerges through death.

And if we follow *Encyclopedia* and the explanation of the death of individual through itself, we quickly come to the same conclusion. Hegel is not talking about organic death at all! Rather, what he means by death, by death that the individual is born with, by death that is his original disease (his *ursprungliche Krankheit*), is the fact that an individual is a limited being in the first place and that it is therefore “inadequate to universality.”²⁵ In order to overcome this condition, the individual can only attain an abstract universality of habit (*Gewohnheit*). It is precisely the habit that is called by Hegel the death of the individual through itself; the habit is the deathly circulation of life without any transformation; habit is the repetitive, ossified life itself (*verknochert*). It is through habit that individual becomes like a bone, it is through habit that nature kills itself (*sich tötet*): “the activity of the individual has blunted and ossified itself, and life has become a habitude devoid of process, the individual having therefore put an end to itself of its own accord [*es sich aus sich selbst tötet*].”²⁶

The difficult task for the concept of purposivity is that it should reconcile between freedom of the subject and determinism of the substance but neither by implying the *external teleology* of divine intervention nor be reduced to the *internal teleology* of urges and drives, of germs and actualizations. Can there even be such reconciliation? The task of the metaphor of Phoenix which replaces the metaphor of the germ is precisely to procure a solution to this knot: the idea of limiting the process only to its internal logic, but nevertheless producing as a result something radically other, something external to the process itself. Spirit as radically alien to nature is therefore not something superimposed on it from the outside but is rather produced as nature’s own inner purpose. This idea has immense consequences for Hegelian system and dialectic in their entirety; it is nothing short of a notion of following perfectly logical and consequential steps and ending in surprising results.

The concept of telos in Hegel must therefore be considered as the concept of transformation, of the capability of the substance to radically transform itself. It is of the utmost importance for Hegel because it is one

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24 Simoniti 2016, p. 165.

25 Hegel 1970b, p. 209.

26 Ibid.

of the ways through which he develops the idea of the self-transformative character of Spirit. While it may seem as that which is the worst in Hegel, that which is pre-critical in Hegel, that which is arch-metaphysical in Hegel, it should in fact be understood as precisely that which is worth defending in Hegel.

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Volume 4 /
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Volume 4 /
Issue 1