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# Life and Negativity. The inner Teleology in Hegel's Philosophy of Nature

## Vida e negatividade. A teleologia interna na filosofia da natureza de Hegel

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**Abstract:** The aim of my paper is to show that the issue of death is central in Hegel's philosophy and it has a strong relationship with the notion of negativity, which is not intended as a "trick" of the system, but as a moment of life, that is a central concept in his meditation. At a later stage, I will shed light on the inner teleology into every organic nature, understanding that this allows Hegel to preserve the notion of negativity through the concept of "lacking" being (*die Tätigkeit des Mangels*). In this sense, the strive to connect Philosophy of Nature and Logic shows that in the Hegelian system there is no place for the "long night of nothingness", but only for the Life that becomes Spirit: the promise of philosophy is the path the lead from the deepest desperation to the strongest Hope.

**Keywords:** Life. Negativity. Teleology. Philosophy of Nature.

**Resumo:** O objetivo do meu artigo é mostrar que a questão da morte é central na filosofia de Hegel e tem uma forte relação com a noção de negatividade, que não pretende ser um "truque" do sistema, mas um momento da vida, que é um conceito central em sua meditação. Em um sentido mais amplo, vou lançar luz sobre a teleologia interna em cada natureza orgânica, entendendo que isso permite que Hegel preserve a noção de negatividade através do conceito do ser que tem "falta" (*die Tätigkeit des Mangels*). Neste sentido, o esforço para ligar a filosofia da natureza e lógica mostra que no sistema hegeliano, não há lugar para a "longa noite do nada", mas apenas para a Vida que se torna Espírito: a promessa da filosofia é o caminho que conduz do desespero mais profundo à Esperança mais forte.

**Palavras-Chave:** Vida. Negatividade. Teleologia. Filosofia da Natureza.

### I. The long Night of Nothingness

From death, it is from the fear of death that all cognition of the All begins. Philosophy has the audacity to cast off the fear of the earthly, to remove from death its poisonous sting, from Hades his pestilential breath. All that is mortal lives in this fear of death; every new birth multiplies the fear for a new reason, for it multiplies that which is mortal. [...] But philosophy refutes these earthly fears. It breaks free above the grave that opens up under our feet before each step. It abandons the body to the power of the abyss, but above it the free soul floats off in the wind. [...] Upon all this misery, philosophy smiles its empty smile and, with its outstretched index finger, shows the creature, whose limbs are trembling in fear for its life in this world, a world beyond, of which it wants to know nothing at all [...]. For man does not at all

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want to escape from some chain; he wants to stay, he wants – to live. Philosophy, which commends death to him as its special little shelter and as the splendid opportunity to escape from the narrowness of life, seems to be only jeering at him<sup>2</sup>.

With these evocative words Franz Rosenzweig describes the “empty promise” of philosophy: against the death, against the fear of the death and against the will to live, to remain in *this* world, philosophy shows to human being a world in which there is no fear, no body, no space, no time, a world in which also life seems to be eliminated: it is the world of knowledge, it is the world of “idealism”. It seems that the promise of philosophy is the promise of nothing: all that is lived is destined to be swallowed up by a long night and a dense fog. This is the long night of nothingness. In this place indicated by philosophy there is no space for any fear, everything is conciliated and no more antagonism between life and negativity takes place.

Rosenzweig writes:

But the man should stay. He should therefore do nothing other than what he already wants: to stay. The fear of the earthly should be removed from him only with the earthly itself. But as long as he lives on earth, he should also remain in fear of the earthly. And philosophy dupes him of this should when around the earthly it weaves the thick blue haze of its idea of the All. For clearly: an All would not die, and in the All, nothing would die. Only that which is singular can die, and everything that is mortal is solitary. This, the fact that philosophy must exclude from the world that which is singular, this ex-clusion of the something is also the reason why it has to be idealistic. For, with its denial of all that separates the single from the All, “idealism” is the tool with which philosophy works the obstinate material until it no longer puts up resistance against the fog that envelops it with the concept of the One and the All. Once all things are enveloped in this fog, death would for certain be swallowed up, if not in eternal victory, then at least in the one and universal night of the nothing<sup>3</sup>.

It is well known that Rosenzweig has been one of the most representative critics of idealism, and of Hegel’s philosophy. Rosenzweig polemicizes against the systems of German Idealism in which he finds the “old thinking” to be most fully realized; he insists that the perennial philosophical quest for “knowledge of the All” put the human being in serious contemplation of death and nothingness in a particular immediate fashion. In the fear of death, the human being is set “face-to-face with the Nothing”: death shows its “unthinkable annihilation” and let human

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<sup>2</sup> F. Rosenzweig, *The star of Redemption*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison 2005, p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> Idem, p. 9.

being experience its own nothingness, the particular “something” that threatens every individuality alone with itself.

In this sense, it could seem that in German Idealism, and in particular in Hegel’s philosophy, death is just a matter of thought, something “functional” to the realization of the system, a kind of “trick” to make the dialectic work without taking care of the real life. In other words, it could seem that Hegel is disinterested in what is involved in ordinary life: about finitude, about life, about the existential and concrete existence.

The aim of my paper is to show that the issue of death is central in Hegel’s philosophy and it has a strong relationship with the notion of negativity, which is not intended as a “trick” of the system but as a moment of life, a central concept in his meditation. At a later stage, I will show the inner teleology into every organic nature, and I will explain how this understanding allows Hegel to preserve the notion of negativity through the concept of “lacking” being. In this sense, I will show that the promise of philosophy is not the “long night of nothingness”, but the path the lead from the deepest desperation to the strongest Hope.

## II. Death, Negativity in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

The issue of death in Hegel’s philosophy is just a part of a broader interest that is negativity, and that constitutes the center of Hegelian epistemology. Hegel was the first epistemologist to realize that a socially and historically based epistemology is consistent with realism<sup>4</sup>. Rejecting any commitment to metaphysical realism, emphasizing his historicism as the center of his philosophical enterprise, Hegel accepts that naturalist elements appear in his theses that biological needs (one root of consciousness) involve elementary classification of objects, that the contents of conscious awareness derive from a public world, and that classificatory thought presupposes natural structures in the world, as I will show for the concept of organic being as “lacking” being (*der Mangel*).

Since the years in Tübingen and then in Jena<sup>5</sup> the interest towards the negative is felt by Hegel as a theme that links together existential and logical – dialectical instances<sup>6</sup>: this is the reason why several scholars insist on the fact that

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. K.R. Westphal, *Hegel’s Epistemology. A philosophical Introduction to Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hackette, Cambridge 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See F. Rosenzkrantz, *Hegel’s Leben*, Duncker und Humblot, Berlin 1844.

<sup>6</sup> See J.B. Baillie, *The Origin and Significance of Hegels Logic*, McMillan, London 1901.

negativity is the genuine theme that runs through Hegel's whole philosophy as an Ariane's threat. In the youth years, these themes recall to a profound imbalance which characterizes all mankind and of which the philosopher becomes aware: in this sense, negativity suggests an authentic laceration of the soul and, lately, it becomes the term of mediation through which this laceration is healed. As he writes in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the path to the most profound doubt (*Verzweiflung*) and to the most radical laceration as the real negation of the existent, are the fundamental moments for the comprehension of the Spirit. The journey of the Spirit in the negativity is death: the absolute must be able to consume finitude (*die Endlichkeit aufzuzehren*) in order to reach its Becoming. In polemic with "the starry sky above me and the moral law within me", Hegel brings thought to cross the street of desperation (*Verzweiflung*), to cross the Calvary of the Spirit to become able to "look the negative in the face, and to tarry with it"; in other words he brings the finitude in front of death.

In this sense, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic* represent the two privileged steps to understand the relationship between death and life. Hegel writes in the *Phenomenology*: "However, the life of spirit is not a life that is fearing death and austere saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet within its absolute disruption"<sup>7</sup>. In this kind of "fall to hell" of reason, the negativity is the substantial element that feeds the reality<sup>8</sup>.

The negativity assumes the guise of the determined negation, the negation of all the figures and of all the forms that consciously are known not to be the truth. Hegel manages to make thoughts fluent through the power of the dissolution of their forms. In order to achieve his purpose, he starts from the logical assumption that the negative is at the same time also positive, thus what contradicts itself does not turn into zero ("into the abstract nothing"), but essentially only into the negation of its particular content, the negation of that determined thing, which preserves in itself the content of what it has been previously denied<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by T. Pinkard, § 27, p. 32 (available at the following link: [http://web.mac.com/titpaul/Site/About\\_Me\\_files/Phenomenology%20of%20Spirit%20-%28entire%20text%29.pdf](http://web.mac.com/titpaul/Site/About_Me_files/Phenomenology%20of%20Spirit%20-%28entire%20text%29.pdf)).

<sup>8</sup> See O. Pöggeler, *Hegels Idee einer "Phänomenologie des Geistes"*, Albert Verlag, Freiburg-München 1973.

<sup>9</sup> "As subject, it is pure, simple negativity, and precisely by virtue of that, it is the estrangement of what is simple, that is, it is the doubling which posits oppositions and which is once again the negation of this indifferent diversity and its opposition. That is, it is only this self-restoring sameness, the reflective turn into itself in its otherness – What is the truth is not an originary unity as such, that is, not an

In the double movement of Being, negativity knows its development as determined negativity and as its overcoming within determinateness. Therefore, the negative assumes the first guise of difference between the Ego and its own substance; but it is also the difference between the substance and itself, both as differentiation and determination of the content, since it is essentially negative itself, and as a simple act of differentiating. Only in this sense, the proceeding of the Spirit reaches the truth and it can include the negative in itself, as the more proper determination of the dialectic movement and as the sequence of moments that find their truth in it<sup>10</sup>.

The negative comes out as dissolution, as a necessary moment in which this existence goes through. The concrete existence of the figure must assume the form of the logical existence, of the speculative. The negative plays a pivotal role both in natural conscience and in the concept. On the one hand, the negativity of the negative appears, therefore, only under the aspect of the one-sidedness unilateralism of the natural conscience and not from the point of view of the concept, which is the own content of the conscience itself. On the other hand, only in the guise of concept thought manages to formulate an adequate comprehension of the negative for which it belongs to the content itself and it is also the positive<sup>11</sup>.

### III. Negativity and Contradiction in the *Science of Logic*

The *Science of Logic* conceives of every pure concept as the unity of its contrary determinations. Hegel considers the opposition in each of these concepts only when they are used to determine reality as such. He conceives of this opposition as a necessary moment of the movement in which these concepts establish the synthesis of their contrary determinations. This allows Hegel to “testify to the principle of absolute negativity which Hegel considers to enact itself in the realms of pure thought, nature and spirit alike”<sup>12</sup>.

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immediate unity as such. It is the coming-to be of itself, the circle that presupposes its end as its goal and has its end for its beginning, and which is actual only through this accomplishment and its end” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of the Spirit*, transl. By T. Pinkard, § 27, p. 15).

<sup>10</sup> See Th. W. Adorno, *Drei Studien zu Hegel*, Suhrkamp Verlag, Frankfurt a. M. 1963.

<sup>11</sup> On the broad issue of negativity both in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and in the *Science of Logic*, I refer the reader to K. De Boer, *The Sway of the Negative*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, New York 2010; A.F. Koch, *Die Selbstbeziehung der Negation in Hegels Logik*, in “Zeitschrift für philosophische Forschung”, 53, 1999, pp. 1-29.

<sup>12</sup> K. De Boer, *The Sway of the Negative*, p. 54.

In the *Science of Logic* Hegel claims that positivity and negativity are the same. His famous sentence – “pure being and pure nothing are, therefore, the same”<sup>13</sup> – finds its reason in the passage towards Becoming, i.e. in the passing of pure Being into nothingness. He writes:

The concept of the unity of being and non-being – or, in a more reflected form, the unity of difference and non-difference [...] could be regarded as the first, purest, that is most abstract definition of the absolute – as it would in fact be the case if we were at all concerned with the form of definitions and with the name of the absolute. In this sense, that abstract concept would be the first definition of this absolute and all further determinations and developments only more specific and richer definitions of it<sup>14</sup>.

However, it is in the *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that he recognizes that being and non-being are “merely abstractions, devoid of truth, and that the first truth lies in becoming [...]. According to Heraclitus, the moment of negativity is immanent; and that is what the concept of philosophy as such is concerned with”<sup>15</sup>. ‘Being’ and ‘nothing’ are two moments of the concept of Becoming, and this lead us to the role played by Parmenides in Hegel’s account of history of philosophy.

In a note drawn up by Hegel and then excerpted by the editorial office of Berlin of the *Science of Logic*, he refers to Parmenides as the one who announced in advance the beginning of the speculative logic with the simple thought of the pure Being. By elevating thought “to pure thought, to Being as such” Parmenides created the very element of science. Hegel conceives of the concept ‘Being’ on the one hand as the most general condition of empirical knowledge and, on the other hand, as a first determination of the principle of reality as such. Parmenides gave birth to the history of pure thought:

The Eleatics, above all Parmenides, first enunciated the simple thought of pure Being as the absolute and as the sole truth [...]. Against that simple and one-sided abstraction the profound Heraclitus brought forward the higher, total concept of Becoming and said: [...] all is Becoming<sup>16</sup>.

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<sup>13</sup> I would like to stress that pure being and the nothing are the same but also different, as Hegel writes: “But it is equally true that they are not undistinguished from each other, that, on the contrary, they are not the same, that they are absolutely distinct, and yet that they are unseparated and inseparable and that each immediately vanishes in its opposite. Their truth is therefore, this movement of the immediate vanishing of the one into the other: becoming, a movement in which both are distinguished, but by a difference which has equally immediately resolved itself” (G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, transl. by A.V. Miller, Humanity Books 1998, Amherst, NY, vol. I, p. 74).

<sup>14</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol. I, p. 74.

<sup>15</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, transl. by E.S. Haldane and H. Simson, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, NE/London 1995, p. 325.

<sup>16</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 84.

Nevertheless, Hegel remarks that Parmenides' Being does not go beyond itself; any determination from the outside is not admitted. He must then assume a second principle independent from the first one, and this assumption determines an *aporia*. Hegel comes out from this *aporia* in 1812 when he argues that "Being is not equal to itself, but rather unequal to itself" and this inequality represents a second beginning, a new beginning of thought. On the basis of this inequality, pure Being comes out from itself and passes to its contrary, i.e. nothing. In this way, a movement emerges and because of this very movement the negation and the negativity turns out to be the first matter through which the entity emerges.

The *Logic* reveals that

the concepts of being and nothing cannot achieve the synthesis of their contrary determinations without turning into another concept. The concept of becoming, for its part, will equally turn out to be incapable of adequately determining the principle of reality as such. This concept is equally impelled to oppose its contrary determinations and, hence, to give up its purported comprehensiveness<sup>17</sup>.

As Hegel writes:

[T]he determination of the negative, of multiplicity, has been removed from the 'one', from 'being' [...]. The Eleatics [...] proceeded by positing that only the 'one' is and that the negative is not at all – a consequence which, although admirable, remains a huge abstraction<sup>18</sup>.

However, it is in the *Doctrine of the Concept* that we can find the relationship between the negativity – the absolute negativity – and freedom. Precisely, at the end of *Logic* Hegel writes:

The innermost source of all activity, of all animate and spiritual movement, the dialectical soul that everything true possesses and through which alone it is true [...]. [T]he negative of the negative [...] is this sublating of the contradiction. Just as little as contradiction is it an act of external reflection, but rather the innermost, most objective moment of life and spirit, through which a subject, a person, a free being, exists<sup>19</sup>.

It is in this space that emerges the role of contradiction. According to Hegel, the limit of all philosophical thought is to collocate contradiction on the ground of logic where the latter could lose its validity. Contradiction must be referred to "things in themselves", both to the facts and to the logical propositions. The idea of contradiction hence undergoes a radical change: it is no longer a vain metaphysical attempt but an essential attribute of the entire reality, a display of the truth. The

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<sup>17</sup> K. De Boer, *The Sway of the Negative*, p. 58.

<sup>18</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, Vol. 1, p 306.

<sup>19</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, p. 835.

vitality of contradiction is a necessary element for the dialectic progress and for the display of the opposition. Hegel sees the contradiction as the higher expression of reason and the rule of truth: *contradictio regula veri*<sup>20</sup>.

The reason is negative, it has in itself the antinomy of the terms and their re-comprehension on a higher and richer level, in which the separated elements lose and maintain their own characteristics at the same time. The importance of contradiction is double: on the one side, the contradiction has a dissolving effect since the existence is not able to bear it; on the other, the contradiction has a vital effect in the opposite hypothesis<sup>21</sup>. The limit of representative thought is to maintain itself at the one-sided consideration according to which the contradictory is the first step into nothingness. It means that the positive value of contradiction is not recognized as the absolute activity of foundation. The necessary consequence of contradiction is to think about difference: in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, the finite can have an independent existence only under the condition that it enters into contradiction with what is external to itself, and it can gain experience by facing what denies and contradicts it. Through the positivity of the negative, Hegel makes a change in the algebra of spirit, using the dialectic alternation between *Verschiedenheit* and *Unterschied*<sup>22</sup>. Hegel develops difference (*Unterschied*), diversity (*Verschiedenheit*), and then, opposition and contradiction. Opposition is for Hegel the synthetic relation that emerges from absolute identity, i.e. the opposition of the identical – the like (*Gleiche*) that withdraws itself (*sich abhebt*) from the “other” and therein relates itself to itself – and its opposite, i.e. the non-identical as the unlike (*Ungleiche*), which negates this “like” and therein relates itself to itself. These two poles of opposition are, however, the “positive” and the “negative”.

#### IV. Death and Life

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<sup>20</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *Dissertationi philosophicae de orbitis planetarum*, in GW, Bd. V, *Schriften und Entwürfen* (1799-1808), hrsg. von M. Baum e K. R. Meist, Meiner, Hamburg 1998, pp. 223-253, p. 227.

<sup>21</sup> See S. Schick, *Contradictio est regula veri. Die Grundsätze des Denkens in der formalen, transzendentalen und spekulativen Logik*, in “Hegel-Studien”, 53, 2010, p. 14. On the broad issue of contradiction I refer the reader to F. Gregoire, *Études Hégélienne, Les points capitaux du système*, Lovain, Paris 1958; D. Marconi, *Contradiction and the Language of Hegel's Dialectic. A Study of the Science of Logic*, University Microfilms International, Pittsburgh 1980; K. De Boer, *Contradiction in Hegel's Science of Logic reconsidered*, in “Journal of the History of Philosophy”, 48, 2010, pp. 345-373; P. Grim, *What is a Contradiction?*, in G. Priest, G. Beall, Jc. Armour-Garb (eds.), *The Law of Non-contradiction. New philosophical Essays*, Clarendon, Oxford 2004.

<sup>22</sup> See N. Hartmann, *Hegel et le problème de la dialectique du réel*, in “Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale”, 38, 1931, p. 318; D. Brauer, *Die dialektische Natur der Vernunft. Über Hegels Auffassung von Negation und Widerspruch*, in “Hegel-Studien”, 30, 1995, pp. 89-104.



As a part of the broader topic of negativity, the issue of death occupies a central position in Hegel's philosophy in all its development. Lived not merely as a "trick" of the system in order to let the negativity work into the dialectic movement, death appears since the *Life of Jesus* (1795) as a pivotal concept.

One of the most famous paragraphs of Hegel's work dedicated to the issue of death is § 32 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. There we read:

Death, if that is what we wish to call that non-actuality, is the most fearful thing of all, and to keep and hold fast to what is dead requires only the greatest force. Powerless beauty detests the understanding because the understanding expects of her what she cannot do. However, the life of spirit is not a life that is fearing death and austerely saving itself from ruin; rather, it bears death calmly, and in death, it sustains itself. Spirit only wins its truth by finding its feet within its absolute disruption. Spirit is not this power which, as the positive, avoids looking at the negative, as is the case when we say of something that it is nothing, or that it is false, and then, being done with it, go off on our own way on to something else. No, spirit is this power only by looking the negative in the face and lingering with it. This lingering is the magical power that converts it into being<sup>23</sup>.

In this passage, there are precious elements to understand the strict bond between death, freedom and Spirit; these elements also give us an important indication: through the deepest desperation, Hope can be invincible. As Jean Wahl writes: "If it is true that the problem of Nietzsche has been to make Hope utterly invincible through the deepest desperation, we could say that the problem of Nietzsche and the problem of Hegel are the same one"<sup>24</sup>. The *katàbasis* of the Spirit that outwear in the Speculative Good Friday announces the power of death and with it also the absolute nothing.

What kind of death is this?

To find an adequate answer to this question we must go back to the early writings. In *The Spirit of Christianity and Its Fate* (1799), Hegel takes in consideration the issue of death when he introduces the character of Jesus. In this book, Jesus is far from the Kantian imagine appeared in *The Life of Jesus* because he is no longer the prophet of Kantian moral theory, but he is a symbol of Love and Life; he is the only term able to solve the dualism between subject and object, between personal inclination and moral law. Christ is the unification of the opposites, sublating the difference of all differences: idea and reality, human and divine, singularity and

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<sup>23</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, § 27, p. 28.

<sup>24</sup> J. Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1951, p. 16 (my transl).

multiplicity and so on. Christ is the “union of the union and of the non-union”<sup>25</sup>, reconciliation, agreement between Spirit and Nature. It is through the death of Jesus that the conciliation is grasped.

Who dies? The man of Nazareth or God? Jesus’ death is the death of a man or the death of God? “The death of Christ is therefore the highest expression of this kenotic sacrifice, as it shows that God has indeed withdrawn from his absoluteness and has fully accepted human nature – he has accepted it until death”<sup>26</sup>. With his death, his finitude and his deity must be sublated. With Jesus’ death, the idea of an abstract God dies, because death restores the universality of the Spirit. Jesus’s death is strictly connected to the theme of God’s death and human’s death. In death, the finitude drifts into the infinity and the infinity enter into the finitude, dissolving its limits. It is in the perception of death that human beings create the negativity in its extreme expression: death is the negativity *par excellence*.

In death the finite is sublated, but the negation has a negative function only to his content, to the particular content. Negating the negative, the finite, death affirms the absolute. This absolute appears as pure freedom. Freedom in fact is the realization of negativity, of the act of negation of reality, in other words, of death. This freedom is the negativity that characterizes in a fundamental way human being. If death is negativity, that is expression of the last negation of finitude, and the negativity is essentially the realization of freedom, it means that only what is destined to die can be free. Death becomes the most original demonstration of freedom<sup>27</sup>.

The centrality of the relationship between death and freedom will reach their complete formulation at first in *Faith and Knowledge* (1802). In this work Hegel declares that the original and fundamental task of philosophy is to know the absolute nothing. We are in front of the issue of the *Vernichtung* of the finite that shows to us with the death of God. As Jean Wahl writes:

If one celebrates the speculative Good Friday in all its heartbreak, in all its abandonment, in all of the harshness of the death of God, one will no longer see it as the sacrifice of the sensible existence conceived by the disciples of Kant or Fichte, but one will see the deepest sweetness emerge from this harshness, the highest totality, the loftiest idea in its entire seriousness and in its most serene

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<sup>25</sup> G. W. F. Hegel, *Fragment of a System* (1800), in G. W. F. Hegel, *On Christianity. Early Theological Writings*, transl. by T. M. Knox, Harper Torchbooks Edition, NY 1961, p. 312.

<sup>26</sup> P. D. Bubbio, *God, Incarnation, and Metaphysics in Hegel's Philosophy of Religion*, in “Sophia”, 2014, p. 10.

<sup>27</sup> See A. Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, transl. by J. Nichols, Cornell University Press, NY 1980.

freedom. Happiness is a bird of storms; it is born from unhappiness; it lives in unhappiness; it is the anti-halcyon; it is the storm itself, becoming conscious of itself at the most violent center and likewise in all the twists of its whirlwind<sup>28</sup>.

In the guise of death, negativity permeates the relationship between the human being with itself and with its existence.

### III. Life and Teleology

Hegel's Philosophy of Nature is the most difficult part of his mature system and he himself attributes this difficulty to nature's contingency, caprice and lack of order. He has never omitted the inner problematic with whom the Philosophy of Nature is tied together with the Logic, as it has also testified by the letter of 1812 to Friedrich Niethammer<sup>29</sup>. Hegel wants to show the relationship between the Philosophy of Nature and the Logic in terms of relationship between nature and concept, underling that nature, if compared to the idea, is full exteriority and otherness. The aim of the Philosophy of Nature is to show how Nature becomes the idea in itself and how this becoming has the guise of Life.

The word "Life" is not unusual in Hegel's philosophy; to use a phrase from the *Systemfragment* of 1800, life is not just unity, but rather the "union of union and non-union". Hegel employs the concept of life as a crucial transitory concept; as the concept of death, the notion of life plays a central role in all three parts<sup>30</sup> of Hegel's mature system. In his logic life is the immediate idea and hence the first form of true unity of concept and reality, of subject and object. In his philosophy of nature life represents the highest point of nature, a point at which nature itself becomes "practical". In the third part of the system, spirit is characterized as both opposed to and one with life. Hegel approaches life as a specific type of unity:

In distinction from an entity that is opposed to or separated from its concept and in opposition to an object unrelated to itself, life is the name of a unity of concept and reality and, more specifically,

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<sup>28</sup> J. Wahl, *Mediation, Negativity, and Separation*, in D. K. Keenan (eds.), *Hegel and Contemporary continental Philosophy*, SUNY, NY 2004, p. 14.

<sup>29</sup> See G.W.F. Hegel, *The Letters*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington 1985, p. 393

<sup>30</sup> On the broad issue on the notion life in Hegel's philosophy, I refer to reader to A. Sell, "Leben," in P. Cobben, P. Cruysberghs, P. Jonkers, and L. De Vos (eds.), *Hegel-Lexikon*, Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, Darmstadt 2006; S. Hahn, *Contradiction in Motion: Hegel's Organic Conception of Life and Value*, Cornell University Press, NY 2007; C. Spahn, *Lebendiger Begriff – Begriffenes Leben. Zur Grundlegung der Philosophie des Organischen bei G.W.F. Hegel*, Königshausen & Neumann, Würzburg 2007.

of subject and object or, to put it in terms more common to the field of the living: a unity of soul and body<sup>31</sup>.

It seems that the living consists in the attaining and sustaining of such a unity and in realizing the “concept in its existence.”

However, the issue of negativity is present also in the logical idea of Life, that constitutes the first determination of the last section of the subjective logic. According to Hegel, Life is the concept that penetrates its objectivity (*in sich seine Objektivität durchdringt*) and that has its own aim, its own means: “Life, or organic nature, is the stage of nature where the concept comes on the scene, but as a blind concept that does not comprehend itself, that is, is not thought”<sup>32</sup>. Life is the immediate idea, without mediation; in the logical idea of life the contradiction shows itself as *real* contradiction inner to living being. Living being can experience negativity and the consequential contradiction when it enters in relation with external environment and when it experiences the “need of something”. “Need” allows living being to experience two kinds of negativity: the negativity that comes from the relationship with the other, and the one that comes from the relationship with itself. Hegel claims that this negativity comes from the “unity of need”.

According to Hegel, to be in need of something is not a defective condition, a passive status, but it is an active condition; this kind of lack that characterizes every living being is an activity because it requires to be satisfied. The recognition of this need and of its positive function is defined by Hegel as the activity of lack (*die Tätigkeit des Mangels*) and it underlines that the pivotal term is not the lack, but the activity. Hegel writes:

The real process of inorganic nature begins equally with feeling, namely, the feeling of real externality, and with this feeling the negation of the subject, which is at the same time the positive relation to itself and its certainty in contrast to its negation. It begins with the feeling of a lack, and the drive to suspend the lack, which is the condition of being stimulated externally. *Only what is living feels a lack*, for it alone in nature is the concept, the unity of itself and of its specific opposite; in this relation it is a subject...It is lack, however, insofar as in one sense the overcoming of the lack is also at hand, and the contradiction is *posited* as such. A being which is capable of having and enduring the contradiction of itself in itself is the subject; this constitutes its finitude. — Reason proves its infinity precisely at that point when reference is made to finite reason, since it determines itself as finite. For

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<sup>31</sup> T. Kurana, *Freedom of Life: An Introduction*, in T. Khurana (eds.), *The Freedom of Life: Hegelian Perspectives*, August Verlag, Berlin 2013, p. 20.

<sup>32</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, vol. II, p. 865.

negation is finitude and a lack only for that which is the suspended being of itself the infinite relation to itself. Thoughtlessness, however, stops short at the abstraction of the limitation, and in life, too, where the concept itself enters into existence, it fails to grasp the concept, but remains fixed on the determinations of representation: *drives, instincts, and needs*<sup>33</sup>.

Every living being is an activity of lack because its need is the negative in itself. The lacking, i.e. the needs show how the living being is the same and also different from itself.

Through the notion of *Tätigkeit des Mangels* Hegel regains the lesson of Aristotle on living beings in order to achieve an inner teleology. In fact, Hegel reclaims the Aristotelian concept of *entelechia* and complete it with the original condition of the lack of living being. In this sense, every living being *has* its inner aim or, in other words, every living being *is* an autonomous aim. In this way, Hegel's position sways between the inner teleology of Aristotle and the moral autonomy of Kant.

The strive to connect Philosophy of Nature and Logic shows that in the Hegelian system there is no place for the "long night of nothingness", but only for the Life that becomes Spirit.

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<sup>33</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Outline*, Bloomsbury Academic, NY 1991, § 282 (my emphasis).

On the issue of the activity of lack, I refer the reader to L. Illetterati, *Figure del limite. Esperienze e forme della finitezza*, Verifiche, Trento 1996; F. Michelini, *Il vivente e la mancanza. Scritti sulla teleologia*, Mimesis, Milano 2011; K. De Boer, *The sway of the Negative*, p. 137.

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