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# Life and Death in Hegelian Judgements

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## Abstract

Hegel contends that judgements are contradictory, finite and untrue. Prominent scholars argue that Hegel's issue with judgements is resolved in the later stages of his *Logic*. Specifically, Ng suggests that this solution is found in Hegel's discussion of life. In this article, I argue that not only does life fail to resolve Hegel's problem with judgement—death highlights its insolubility. To support this claim, I examine Hegel's discussion of judgements in the *Logic*, showing that judgements are inherently contradictory because they both unite and separate individuals and universals. Instead of being resolved retrospectively, I demonstrate that contradiction, finitude and untruth are intrinsic to judgements. Moreover, since judgements play a constitutive and determinative role in Hegel's metaphysics, they pass their contradictions, finitude and untruth onto the objects they constitute. Specifically, I argue that for living beings, judgement is literally a matter of life and death, because the contradiction of judgements implies the finitude of the objects they constitute—namely, the perishability of things and the mortality of organisms.

Concepts, judgements and syllogisms are the three basic forms of traditional logic. They are also the basic categories of Hegel's metaphysics. However, Hegel contends that one of them, the judgement, is contradictory, finite and untrue. The judgement, he writes, is 'unsuitable to express that which is concrete and speculative—and the true is concrete' (*EL*: 71/*GW* 20: 72).<sup>1</sup> Hegel reiterates this verdict on multiple occasions, never retracting it.<sup>2</sup>

In her *Hegel's Concept of Life* (2020), however, Karen Ng addresses Hegel's problem with judgements, arguing that the limitations Hegel sees in judgements 'all point to life' as their solution (Ng 2020: 180). Ng's argument follows a well-established approach to Hegel scholarship, assuming that problems that arise in various stages of Hegel's *Logic* are resolved by appealing to principles revealed in later stages. Robert Pippin (2018) advances similar positions,<sup>3</sup> specifically with reference to the problem with judgements. In their interpretation, like-minded scholars follow a dominant interpretive framework outlined by Michael

Theunissen, who suggested that for Hegel properly understanding amounts to restoring some sort of harmony (Theunissen 1980: 59ff.).

Whereas Ng argues that life resolves Hegel's problem with judgements, I contend that death underscores its insolubility. To make this case, I will examine Hegel's discussion of judgements in the *Logic*, arguing that judgements are inherently contradictory because they both unite and separate individuals and universals. I will demonstrate that the problem with judgements is not resolved retrospectively; rather, contradiction, finitude and untruth are intrinsic to the judgement form. Moreover, since judgements play a constitutive and determinative role in Hegel's metaphysics, they pass their contradiction, finitude and untruth onto the objects they constitute. Specifically, I will argue that, for living beings, judgement is literally a matter of life and death. In other words, that Hegel viewed the contradiction, finitude and untruth of judgements as implying the finitude of the objects they constitute, namely the perishability of things and the mortality of organisms.

I will begin (I) with a short discussion of idealist accounts of death, noting that idealist philosophers tend to view death primarily as the result of material or efficient causes. By contrast, I will argue that Hegel views death as stemming from the contradictions of ideality. With this intent, I will focus (II) on the problem with judgements, namely their contradictory form which both unites and separates, stressing (III) that this contradiction persists across all types of judgement, including what Hegel refers to as the judgement of the concept. This analysis of the judgement form will allow me to examine (IV) the metaphysical role Hegel assigns to judgements, arguing that their role in constituting relatively independent individuals is based on their contradiction which is reproduced rather than resolved in objectivity. Considering the metaphysical role of judgements will lead me to contend (V) that while life is premised on the unity of individuals and their universals, death is premised on their separation. Addressing points of agreement and disagreement with Ng (2020), I will argue that judgements separate individuals from the universals that serve as their final causes, breaking the teleological relationships on which life depends.

All in all, this article suggests that given its ideal cause, the inexorability of death lends credence to a solution-sceptic interpretation to Hegel's problem with judgements. In other words, it draws attention to an instance where, for Hegel, true understanding does not restore harmony but instead grasps disparity.<sup>4</sup>

## I. Idealist accounts of death

In idealist philosophy, death is widely understood as the separation of body and soul. While perspectives differ regarding the mortality or immortality of the latter,

idealist philosophers tend to view death as resulting primarily from bodily failure. This implies that causes of death are believed to be efficient or material rather than formal or final. While delving into the intricacies of more than two millennia of idealist views on death is far beyond the scope of this section, I aim to briefly touch on this trend by referencing three influential philosophers: Plato, Aristotle and Aquinas.<sup>5</sup>

(1) In the *Phaedo*, Plato lays the groundwork for the entire idealist approach to death, when he declares that the body is mortal, while the soul is immortal. Since the mortal body—source of all trouble, disease and evil—is nothing but ‘a disturbing element’ that hinders the soul from acquiring knowledge, Plato sees death as ‘the release of the soul from the chains of the body’ (Plato 1931 II: 206/67c–d).

(2) Although Aristotle argues for the mortality of both body and soul, his account remains similar to Plato’s in perceiving death as the outcome of a bodily breakdown. In *On the Soul*, Aristotle exemplifies this conception by stressing that the infirmities of old age are ‘due to an affection not of the soul but of its vehicle’, that is the body. ‘That is why’, he continues, ‘when this vehicle decays, memory and love cease; they were activities not of mind, but of the composite which has perished; mind is, no doubt, something more divine and impassible’ (Aristotle 1908: 408b 18–29). In later texts, Aristotle identifies cooling and drying as the bodily changes that bring about death.<sup>6</sup>

(3) Eager to demonstrate the perfection and immortality of the soul, Aquinas is straightforward in attributing the cause of death to the body. In the *Questions on the Soul*, he writes: ‘Although the soul, which is the cause of life, is incorruptible, still the body which receives its life from the soul is subject to change; and because of this the body loses that disposition by which it is suited to receive life. It is in this way that the corruption of a human being takes place’ (Aquinas 1984: 180/§14, ad. 20). Like Aristotle, Aquinas explains that drying and cooling are the material processes that render the body inanimate.<sup>7</sup>

In the next sections, I will show that for Hegel, in stark contrast to his idealist predecessors,<sup>8</sup> the cause of death is not merely material or efficient but primarily formal or final. In clearer terms, causes of death are not merely objects or states of affairs within or between objects, but primarily concepts or states of affairs within concepts. More specifically, death is caused by contradictions, flaws and failures inscribed in the structure of what Hegel labelled ‘the concept’.<sup>9</sup> In arguing this point, I will follow the once standard line of interpretation according to which Hegel’s dialectic traces contradiction to the very essences of things.<sup>10</sup>

## II. The problem with judgements

For Hegel, tracing contradiction to the essences of things requires a discussion of judgements, since the latter are the logical forms that introduce contradiction into essences. Hegel defines the judgement as a combination of subject and predicate which also serves as an answer to the question: What is this? (*SL*: 551/*GW* 12: 54). This definition implies that judgements are not just combinations but, as Martin rightly notes, combinations that explain something, namely relate an individual or a particular with a universal (Martin 2012: 264). In other words, judgements connect individuals, properties and kinds with their properties and kinds.<sup>11</sup>

Comparing Hegel's notion of judgement to the Kantian notion highlights two important features. In §19 of the B edition of the transcendental deduction, Kant defines the judgement as 'nothing other than the way to bring given cognitions to the objective unity of apperception' (Kant 1998: 251/B141).<sup>12</sup> By this, Kant means two things: first, that the judgement unifies two representations, specifically a subject and a predicate; second, that it is an act of cognition. For Kant, accordingly, all judgements are acts of thinking in which various representations are unified.<sup>13</sup> I will address the first feature now and return to the second in the fourth section.

In contrast to the first feature of Kantian judgements, Hegel sees judgements as both a unification and a separation of subject and predicate. The judgement is a unification in so far as the copula 'expresses that the subject is the predicate' (*SL*: 555/*GW* 12: 58). For example, an individual is united with one of its properties ('this rose is red', 'this man is mortal', 'this painting is beautiful'). However, the judgement is also a separation in so far as subject and predicate appear in the judgement as 'two self-subsistents' (*SL*: 550/*GW* 12: 53). For instance, 'this rose' appears independent of its redness, since 'this rose' is not its 'redness'—it could just as easily have been white. For this reason, Hegel argues that in judgements the subject 'conveys the reflective semblance of an independent subsistence' (*SL*: 744–55/*GW* 12: 245).<sup>14</sup>

In the judgement, accordingly, the subject is both united with and separated from the predicate. 'This rose' is and is not 'red'. Although this does not violate the law of excluded middle—since 'is' and 'is not' are said of the same thing but not in the same sense—Hegel refers to this ambiguity or tension as a contradiction. This is not the place to explore Hegel's notion of contradiction in any sufficient detail, but it should be observed that far from confusing the 'is' of identity with the 'is' of predication, Hegel's point is that the two are not clearly distinguishable. This is the case since the identity of a subject can only be constituted by its predicates.<sup>15</sup> Longuenesse stresses this point, when she

argues that Hegel's discussion of contradiction in the *Logic* dissolves the 'illusory independence' of things by expressing 'the fact that the identity of a thing is determined only to the extent that this thing is constituted as other to itself, having its identity not in itself but in the system of relations that opposes it to the other things' (Longuenesse 2007: 6, 69). In other words, the contradiction Hegel identifies in judgements lies in the fact that they establish identity by means of difference—unity by means of separation.

In a play on the German word for judgement (*Urteil*), Hegel labels the separation in judgements 'the original division of the concept' (*Ur-teilung des Begriffs*). Hegel borrows this term from Hölderlin, who uses it to define the judgement as 'that separation through which alone object and subject become possible' (Hölderlin 1988: 37/*SW* 4: 226).<sup>16</sup> Exploring the image behind *Ur-teilung*, namely that of a concept breaking up into judgements, will help ascertain another important point. If the concept of a subject contains the latter's essential predicates, dismembering concepts allows these predicates to connect with subjects. The concept 'gold', for instance, which contains predicates such as 'lustrous', 'malleable', 'metallic', breaks up into judgements like 'gold is lustrous', 'gold is malleable', 'gold is metallic'. However, judgements not only relate subjects to essential predicates but also to accidental ones. They connect 'gold' with 'metallic' just as they connect 'this rose' with 'red'. The ambiguous function of the copula is further complicated in so far as the 'is' of identity-in-predication remains the same even though 'metallic' is an essential property of gold whereas 'red' is an accidental property of roses. In other words, it stays the same even though its function changes to express different relations between subject and predicate. For this reason, Hegel believes that judgements cannot unequivocally express the metaphysical dependence of subjects on their natures or essences. In Hegel's words, the judgement 'is incapable of holding within its grasp the speculative content and the truth' (*SL*: 744–55/*GW* 12: 245).

### III. The various types of judgement

In his discussion of judgements, Hegel is less concerned with valid reasoning and more focused on exploring how a single logical form ('x is y') expresses various relations between subjects and predicates. Hegel presents, analyses and criticizes four main types of judgements, each exhibiting a distinct type of relation between subject and predicate, with each new type drawing nearer to the relation Hegel believes obtains between concepts and objects. This point will be explored later in greater detail. For now, it suffices to specify that each new relation between subject and predicate brings the judgement closer to expressing

a relation between concepts, considered as natures or essences, and the things over which they exert final causality. Beyond their various sub-divisions which cannot be fully explored within the confines of this article, Hegel discusses (1) the judgement of existence; (2) the judgement of reflection; (3) the judgement of necessity; and (4) the judgement of the concept.

(1) In judgements of existence, the subject is posited as ‘*a thing of manifold properties*’ or ‘*a substance of precisely such accidents*’ (*SL*: 559/*GW* 12: 62). In simpler terms, the subject is an individual thing while the predicate is an accidental property. Two of Hegel’s examples of such judgements are ‘this rose is red’ and ‘this wall is not green’. Judgements of existence link an individual with what it happens to be. In them, the property attributed by the predicate appears to be dependent on—and thus subordinate to—the object referred to by the subject. The reason is that an object can persist without one of its accidental properties, but not the other way around. For instance, a rose would still be a rose if it were white rather than red.

(2) In judgements of reflection, predicates ‘express an essentiality’ (*SL*: 569/*GW* 12: 71). In other words, the subject is an individual thing while the predicate is an essential property. Examples of such judgements are ‘this thing is perishable’ and ‘all humans are mortal’. Judgements of reflection link an individual with what it must be. In such judgements, the object referred to by the subject appears to be dependent on—and thus subordinate to—the property attributed by the predicate. This is because an object cannot be what it is without one of its essential properties. For instance, humans would not be humans if they were immortal.

(3) In judgements of necessity, the predicate is an ‘*objective universality*’ (*SL*: 575/*GW* 12: 77). The subject is a kind (or species) while the predicate is a higher kind (or genus). Examples are ‘the rose is a plant’ and ‘gold is a metal’. Judgements of necessity link kinds with their own kinds. In them, like in judgements of reflection, the kind referred to by the subject is dependent on and subordinate to the kind attributed by the predicate, since the former cannot be what it is without the latter. Gold would not be gold if it were not a metal.

(4) In judgements of the concept, finally, the predicate is ‘an *ought* to which reality may or may not conform’ (*SL*: 582/*GW* 12: 84). Subjects are individuals while predicates are normative properties such as good, true, right, beautiful, suitable or fitting. Examples of such judgements are ‘this painting is beautiful’ and ‘this action is good’. Judgements of the concept link individuals with what they should be. In these judgements, the object referred to by the subject is not only dependent on the property attributed by the predicate but relates to the latter as to its purpose.

For Hegel, the judgement of the concept, being the most advanced judgement type, accurately exhibits the metaphysical dependence of objects on

concepts. Moreover, since judgements enjoy a constitutive status in Hegel's philosophy, they determine the relation between objects and concepts as a relation of final causality. To grasp the intricacies of this relation, we need to examine the unique role judgements are assigned in Hegel's metaphysics.

### IV. The metaphysics of the problem with judgements

Noting a second point of divergence between Kant and Hegel allows us to grasp another key characteristic of Hegelian judgements, namely that Hegel does not regard judgements primarily as functions of our cognition. For Kant, as I already mentioned, judgements are mental representations, indistinguishable from acts of judging. For Hegel, by contrast, the objective logical forms discussed in the *Logic* differ from the cognitive acts explored in Hegel's philosophy of subjective spirit. Accordingly, Hegel does not treat judgements as mere representations. In Hegel's words, judgements should not be grasped merely 'in the *subjective* sense as an *operation* and form that surfaces merely in *self-conscious* thinking' (*EL*: 242/*GW* 20: 183/§167).

In Hegel's metaphysics, judgements that dwell 'within the things themselves', as distinct from judgements that are 'merely occurrences in our head', combine with concepts and syllogisms to form the nature or essence of things, by means of which things 'are what they are' (*EL*: 242/*GW* 23.3: 932/§166A). Summarily labelled 'the concept', these basic forms of Hegel's metaphysics align in this way with those of traditional logic, which explains Hegel's emphatic assertion that his *Logic* 'coincides with metaphysics' (*SL*: 58/*GW* 20: 67). In this framework, and owing to their inner contradiction, judgements play a twofold role. On the one hand, judgements separate individuals from universals; on the other hand, they unify individuals with universals.

The first metaphysical role of judgements is to separate individuals from their universals. I noted earlier that concepts break up into judgements. In other words, the concept 'apple' breaks up into judgements that spell out its content with respect to individuals ('this apple is nutritious', 'this apple is a fruit') in such a way that the subject of these judgements ('this apple') appears to be independent. On this basis, the first metaphysical role of judgements is to constitute individuals with relative independence with respect to their properties and kinds. In Hegel's words, judgements 'can therefore be called the first realisation of the concept, for reality denotes in general the entry into existence as determinate being' (*SL*: 550/*GW* 12: 53). In separating individuals from universals, judgements provide a logical structure for the real-world distinction between objects and concepts. In simpler terms, they constitute a world in which objects exist.

The second metaphysical role of judgements is to unify individuals with their universals. Just as they split concepts apart, judgements unite subjects with the predicates contained within their concepts. From the concept of ‘apple’ proceed the judgements ‘this apple is nutritious’, ‘this apple is a fruit’, etc. On this basis, the second metaphysical role of judgements is to determine what individuals are. When an apple is rich in nutrients, to stick with the same example, it has this property by virtue of judgements that spell out the essence or nature of apples and apply it to individuals (‘this apple is nutritious’). For this reason, Hegel declares: ‘*All things are a judgement,—i.e. they are individuals which are a universality or inner nature in themselves, or a universal that is individuated?*’ (*EL*: 243/*GW* 20: 183/§167). In different terms that were already mentioned, things ‘are what they are’ because of judgements (*EL*: 242/*GW* 23.3: 932/§166A). In unifying individuals with universals, judgements provide a logical structure for the causal relationships that are necessary for the real-world existence of determinate objects, namely objects that possess the properties of their kinds.<sup>17</sup> The specific teleological nature of these causal relationships will now be discussed.

## V. Life and death in the power of judgement

Since judgements play a key role in constituting and determining objects, namely since they belong to the concept ‘which constitutes a stage of nature as well as of spirit’ (*SL*: 517/*GW* 12: 20), Hegel references them in his discussions of the three forms of objectivity: mechanism, chemism and teleology. For our purposes, what matters is that by uniting and separating individuals and universals, judgements provide a logical structure for the unification and separation of objects and concepts, which are crucial moments in teleological processes. In the following subsections, we will see that, due to its importance to teleology, the contradictory form of judgements implies the life and death of the objects they constitute.

### *V.i. Judgement of life: teleology*

Hegel contends that living beings possess a ‘self-moving *principle*’ (*SL*: 680/*GW* 12: 183).<sup>18</sup> This means that the cause for certain changes in organisms is found within the organisms themselves, or more precisely within their concepts. In Hegel’s own words, ‘the mutability of the external side of the living being is the manifestation in it of the concept’ (*SL*: 681/*GW* 12: 184). Moreover, Hegel argues that concepts have a power of final causality over individual organisms: ‘to be a ground in a teleological sense is a property of the concept’ (*SL*: 388/*GW* 11: 293). The concept ‘fig’, for instance, contains the latter’s essential properties:



‘fruit-bearing’, ‘deciduous’, ‘adaptable’, etc. For individual fig trees, fruit-bearing is thus not only an essential property but also an intrinsic purpose. To achieve this purpose, fig trees set in motion a series of processes, such as pollination, fertilization and hormone release, which are not random occurrences produced by blind mechanism, but the real-world realization of the purpose of fruit-bearing, namely the reproduction and perpetuation of figs. In more rigorous terms, Hegel believes that these processes are means to the ends inscribed in the concept ‘fig’. The organism is ‘the *means and instrument* of purpose, fully purposive, for the concept constitutes its substance’ (*SL*: 681/*GW* 12: 184).

Ng argues that the final causality of living beings is an act of judgement, since the latter is ‘a self-constituting act of the judging subject whereby it is realised as an individual of a genus’ (Ng 2020: 246).<sup>19</sup> Her interpretation is based on identifying judgement, in this case, with ‘what judgement is in its objectivity and truth’ (Ng 2020: 166), namely with judgements of the concept, which are ‘teleological judgements, or *life-form judgements*’ (Ng 2020: 187).<sup>20</sup> Although Ng speaks here of subjective judgements (‘merely occurrences in our head’) rather than objective judgements (dwelling ‘within the things themselves’), her suggestion is compatible with the interpretation I advocate, when we apply its rationale to objective judgements as well. With Ng’s insight, we can now observe the following:

(1) Given that judgements separate individuals from their universals, they provide a logical structure for relatively independent objects. In Hegel’s words, the ‘concept of life’ has ‘an objectivity corresponding to it [...] that is to say, *posits* it as corresponding to it’ (*SL*: 679/*GW* 12: 183).

(2) Given that judgements unify individuals with their universals, they provide a logical structure for objects that are determinable by the properties of their kinds. In Hegel’s words, the soul ‘has an objective being’—‘a reality which is subjugated to purpose’ is ‘*predicated* of the subject’ (*SL*: 680/*GW* 12: 183).

(3) Given that judgements of the concept link individuals with what they should be, they provide a logical structure for teleological causality, where objects are determined by the purposes inscribed in their concepts. In Hegel’s words, ‘self-subsisting objectivity’ exists ‘only as the predicate of the judgement of the concept’s self-determination’ (*SL*: 680/*GW* 12: 183).

With Ng, we thus discover the teleology of life within the judgement form, following the meaning of Hegel’s mention of the ‘originative judgement of life’, which both ‘separates itself off as individual subject’ and ‘constitutes itself as the negative unity of the concept’ (*SL*: 678/*GW* 12: 181; Ng 2020).

But Ng also argues that life resolves the problem with judgements. For her, the only determination sufficient for grounding the truth-aptness contained in judgements ‘is the unity of form displayed by the activity of life’ (Ng 2020: 177).<sup>21</sup> This is the way judgements ‘point to life’ as their solution (Ng 2020: 180). In her

interpretation, as I already mentioned, Ng follows a well-known approach to Hegel's *Logic*, assuming that problems arising in its earlier stages are resolved in its later stages. She expresses this clearly when she states that 'every thought-determination of the *Logic* has revealed itself to be insufficient in some way [...] as the *Logic* progresses, subsequent thought-determinations are enlisted to resolve the insufficiencies of earlier ones' (Ng 2020: 248). Here, I disagree with Ng's interpretation since neither life nor even the absolute make judgements any less problem laden. In other words, they neither resolve their contradiction nor make them 'agree with themselves'.

Textual evidence that directly supports this point, that specifies the inherent nature of the problem with judgements, can be found throughout Hegel's *Logic*. Hegel asserts that the judgement is 'unsuitable to express that which is concrete and speculative—and the true is concrete' (*EL*: 71/*GW* 20: 72/§31R). He explains that 'the judgement lacks what is required by the definition of truth, namely the agreement of the concept with its subject matter' (*SL*: 525/*GW* 12: 28). He reiterates that in 'connection with judgement it was shown that its form in general [...] is incapable of holding within its grasp the speculative content and the truth' (*SL*: 744–55/*GW* 12: 245). Hegel even affirms that, 'in its truth', even the most advanced form of the judgement, the judgement of the concept, 'has not arrived at the truth' (*SL*: 698/*GW* 12: 200).<sup>22</sup> But nowhere is the insolubility of the problem of judgement more visible than in Hegel's theory of objectivity, where in addition to its life-giving role, the contradiction inherent in judgements is explicated as the logical form of death.

#### V.ii. *Judgement of death: broken teleology*

In so far as life is premised on relationships of final causality between individuals and universals, death is premised on the dissolution of these relationships. When hearts beat, they beat with the force of teleology. When they stop beating, they do so in its absence.

For this reason, the separability of individuals and universals is the mark of finitude. This is also evident in its definition: 'It is the *definition of finite things* that in them concept and being are different; that the concept and reality, soul and body, are separable; that they are therefore perishable and mortal' (*SL*: 66/*GW* 21: 77). For this reason, finite 'means *contradictory*' or '*internally fractured*' (*SL*: 384–85/*GW* 21: 289). Since being contradictory is the opposite of being in 'agreement with self', finite is also antonymous with true: 'finite [...] unfit to hold the truth' (*SL*: 18/*GW* 21: 16). Linking untruth, contradiction and finitude,<sup>23</sup> Hegel claims that individuals are finite and untrue because they contradict, differ and are hence separable from their universals.

This predicament is most easily observed in living beings, where finitude means mortality. In living beings, Hegel writes, finitude ‘has the determination that soul and body are *separable*’. This ‘constitutes the mortality of the living’ (EL: 288/GW 20: 219/§216). This same point, well known from other idealist accounts of mortality, is then repeated with an emphasis on the power of concepts: ‘What is alive dies because it is the contradiction of being *in itself* the universal, the genus, and yet existing concretely and immediately only as individual. In death, the genus demonstrates itself to be the power over the immediately individual’ (EL: 290/GW 23.3: 954/§221A). In Hegel’s terms, the fact that untruth, contradiction and finitude are essential properties of living beings means that life is inherently deficient. ‘The deficiency of life’, he writes, ‘consists in the fact that here concept and reality do not truly correspond to one another’ (EL: 288/GW 23.3: 653/§216A). This deficiency qualifies Hegel’s statements that life, as idea, is the correspondence of concept and reality. Life is only a partial correspondence, which may readily be broken.<sup>24</sup>

Whatever allows the partial correspondence of life creates the conditions of finitude. Since they enable the dissociation of individuals and concepts, judgements play this crucial role. In clearer terms, the separation of individuals and universals in judgements provides a logical structure for the separation of objects and concepts—and hence body and soul. For this reason, judgements provide a logical structure and are hence the formal cause of death. Specifically, Hegel assigns this role to judgements of the concept:

In the concrete things, together with the diversity of the properties among themselves, there also enters the difference between the *concept* and its *realization*. The concept has an external presentation in nature and spirit wherein its determinateness manifests itself as dependence on the external, as transitoriness and inadequacy. Therefore, although an actual thing will indeed manifest in itself what it *ought* to be, yet, in accordance with the negative judgement of the concept, it may equally also show that its actuality only imperfectly corresponds with this concept, that it is *bad*. (SL: 712/GW 12: 213–14)

In this passage, Hegel makes two points. First, he reiterates that objects fall short of their concepts. But then he argues that the logical structure of this inadequacy is found in judgements, namely in ideality rather than in the shortcomings of matter. Another aspect of these shortcomings is that living things are dependent on external nature. But this dependence is only possible because judgements imperfectly unite individuals with universals.

Ng contends, as I already mentioned, that positive judgements of the concept are ‘teleological judgements, or *life-form judgements*’ (2020: 187), because they unite individuals with their essences as final causes. This is the case, for instance, of the judgement ‘this fig tree is good’, or in greater detail ‘this fig tree, bearing fruit, is good’. Nonetheless, we may now see that Hegel also argues that negative judgements of the concept play the opposite role. In determining deficient or broken teleological relationships, they are—to reverse Ng’s terms—death-form judgements. This is the case, for instance, in the judgement ‘this fig tree is bad’, or in greater detail ‘this fig tree, not bearing fruit, is bad’.

In separating individuals from their universals, negative judgements of the concept undermine the teleological relationships of life and provide the logical structure that allows for finitude and death. In so doing, they reaffirm the metaphysical implications inherent in judgements on the order of ‘the individual is universal’, which convey—according to Hegel—‘both the perishableness of individual things and their positive subsistence in the concept in general. The concept itself is imperishable, but that which emerges from it in its division is subjected to alteration’ (*SL*: 559/*GW* 12: 61). The crucial point to recall is that even though the concept is imperishable, the mutability and perishability of the individual ‘which emerges from it’ are determined by those contradictory judgements that combine with concepts and syllogisms to form what Hegel summarily labels ‘the concept’, namely the nature or essence of things.

### *V.iii. The causality of fatal disease*

In providing the logical structure that allows for finitude and death, the contradiction in those judgements that make up the essences of individual organisms is the ground or formal cause of death.<sup>25</sup> In the *Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel makes this point when he argues that life culminates ‘in the death of the creature’ because its ‘universal is disjunction or judgement’ (*PN*: 410/*GW* 20: 366/§367). Several paragraphs later, Hegel provides an equally valuable account of the causality of fatal disease, which helps reinforce this point. Hegel’s argument advances in two stages: first, he argues that disease is caused by external objects; then, he notes that these externalities are not the cause of death. Instead, Hegel attributes this cause to a contradiction inscribed in the concept of the organism.

In his account of disease, Hegel argues that disease arises from contact with an external object. He explains that the organism falls ill when one of its systems or organs is ‘stimulated into conflict with the inorganic power’ (*PN*: 428/*GW* 20: 371/§371). This point was highlighted by Von Engelhardt (1984), who discussed the ‘empirical’ or ‘concrete causation’ at work in Hegel’s understanding of disease. According to this understanding, disease is largely caused by ‘particular,

external harmful influences with which the organism comes into contact' (PN: 432/GW 24.3: 1560/§371A), such as 'air and moisture' (PN: 430/GW 24.3: 1598/§371A).

In his discussion of fatal disease, however, Hegel introduces another type of causality. He observes that the 'animal suffers violence and perishes' but locates the source of this violence in 'inner universality' (PN: 440/GW 20: 374/§374). In a key passage, Hegel distinguishes between two distinct levels of causality:

The necessity of death does not consist in particular causes [*Ursachen*], for it lies in the organism itself that the cause [*Ursache*] is external. There is always a remedy for a particular disease; for the latter as such is weak and cannot be the cause [*Grund*] of death. This cause is the necessity of the transition of the individuality into universality. (PN: 441/GW 24.3: 1608/§374A)

At the beginning of the passage, Hegel discusses the necessity of death, locating it within rather than outside the individual. Then he speaks of the cause of death, arguing that external objects, like 'air and moisture' for instance, cannot serve this function.<sup>26</sup> Hegel ends with a general conclusion: the cause of death is found in the necessary transition to universality. Later in the same passage, Hegel continues this line of argument when he notes that in death the universal sublates or cancels the individual (PN: 441/GW 24.3: 1608/§374A).

This passage demonstrates that while acknowledging the role of material or efficient causes in disease, Hegel did not consider them as primarily responsible for death. This conclusion is further supported by Hegel's choice of words, which indicates that causes of death are not efficient (*Ursache*) but formal (*Grund*). The key takeaway here is that, for Hegel, causes of death are not external objects, nor the organism's vulnerability to them or its inability to resist their effects, but rather the inner universality of organisms. In other words, the cause of death is found within the concept or universal of the dying individual. In the subsequent paragraph, Hegel explains this point with reference to the contradiction between the individual and the universal, which he explored in his discussion of judgement. This disparity, rather than any exterior influence, is the 'original disease' of the organism and 'the inborn *germ of death*' (PN: 441/GW 20: 375/§375).<sup>27</sup> It must persist—and may not be resolved—if life is to run its natural course, culminating in death.

## VI. Conclusion

This article focused on Hegel's discussion of judgements in the *Logic*, arguing that the contradiction he identified in these logical forms remains necessarily

unresolved. Hegel's account of death was examined to highlight how the inevitability of death demonstrates the insolubility of the problem of judgements. Hegelian judgements were thus revealed to be inherently contradictory. Hinging on the unresolved tension between unification and separation, they function as a double-edged sword—giving life just as they cause death.

Bringing this article to a close, I can only reiterate how unique and captivating is Hegel's stance that the source of the flaws and failures of finitude is not to be found in matter but in form, namely in the categories of logic, nature and spirit—a position which stands out in the history of philosophy, diverging from the conceptions of other idealists who regard forms as pure and essences as perfect. In this way, Hegel's 'idealism of the finite' (*JL*: 124/*GW* 21: 142; see also Stern 2015) may be grasped as a philosophy which explains how contradictory or finite categories determine the contradiction or finitude of the things they constitute. In other terms, it explains how the truth value of the categories determines the truth value of the things they constitute.<sup>28</sup> Beyond the uniqueness of Hegel's account of the causality of death, the role that inherently problem-laden judgements play in determining the inexorable problem par excellence—death—lends credence to this solution-sceptic approach of Hegel's philosophy. Though the problem with judgements and the causality of death are merely instances of this broader interpretative framework, which grasps the task of Hegel's philosophy as explaining contradictions rather than resolving them, I believe they serve as fine examples, setting the stage for more accounts to follow.<sup>29</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used:

*AK* = Kant, *Werke*, Akademie Textausgabe (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1968ff).

*EL* = Hegel, *Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline Part I: Science of Logic*, trans. K. Brinkmann and D. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

*GW* = Hegel, *Gesammelte Werke*, ed. Rheinisch-Westfälische Akademie der Wissenschaften (Hamburg: Meiner, 1968ff).

*LL* = Hegel, *Lectures on Logic. Berlin, 1831*, trans. C. Butler (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

*PN* = Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon, 2004).

*PS* = Leibniz, *Die Philosophischen Schriften*, ed. K. I. Gerhardt (Hildesheim: Olms, 1978).

SL = Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. G. di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

SW = Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, ed. D. E. Sattler (Frankfurt: Roter Stern, 1975ff.).

<sup>2</sup> Just a few examples from the *Logic*: ‘the judgement lacks what is required by the definition of truth, namely the agreement of the concept with its subject matter’ (SL: 525/GW 12: 28); ‘in its truth’, even the judgement of the concept ‘has not arrived at the truth’ (SL: 697/GW 12: 200); ‘in connection with judgement it was shown that its form in general [...] is incapable of holding within its grasp the speculative content and the truth’ (SL: 744–55/GW 12: 245).

<sup>3</sup> Pippin argues that, for Hegel, the problems of judgement, wherever they may originate from, are resolved retrospectively by appeal to principles exposed in Hegel’s discussion’s riper moments. The various domains of possible knowledge are ‘adequately accounted for’ by appeal to principles assumed but not explicit in the constitution of the natural domain. These implicit principles validate judgements about nature and assure us that they do count as full knowledge (Pippin 2018: 34, n.57). This is the sense in which Pippin understands Hegel’s claim that philosophy provides the content of the empirical sciences with ‘the *corroboration of being necessary*’ (SL: 40/GW 20: 54).

<sup>4</sup> The strength of this solution-sceptic approach is most apparent in Hegel’s *Realphilosophie*. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel presents crime, poverty and war as problems with no solution. In these ills and evils, we witness ‘ethicality lost in its extremes’ (Kervégan 2018: 182ff.). Similarly, in Hegel’s natural philosophy, limitations such as the impossibility to fully systemize natural laws are not problems ‘to be solved’ but rather ‘inherent features’ (Bowman 2013: 125–28). Such unsolvable problems also appear in Hegel’s *Logic*, though they are less conspicuous in this realm of shadows. Once illuminated, Hegel’s argument in the *Logic* is shown to involve, as Bowman suggested, ‘a *clarification* of why there are finite thought-determinations, *not a vindication* of the objective validity of finite thought-determinations’ (Bowman 2013: 59).

<sup>5</sup> Due to his unique theory of causation, Leibniz would have provided a fascinating comparison in the context of this article, had he not rejected death entirely, for both body and soul, by contending that something of the body persists in all cases and remains inhabited by the soul. Since body and soul are inseparable, death for Leibniz is only apparent: ‘what we call deaths are enfoldings and diminutions’ (Leibniz 1989: 222/PS 6: 619).

<sup>6</sup> For instance: ‘For the occurrence of a long illness is like premature old age, since in both the body is dry and cold,—in the one case owing to the time of life, in the other from disease. Now winter and frosts constitute an excess of coldness and dryness; therefore to those who are in a condition where a very little will turn the scale, winter is like “fire added to fire” and so causes death’ (Aristotle 1908: 861a 25–29).

<sup>7</sup> ‘Just as a form does not accrue to matter unless the matter is made to be proper to this form through the requisite dispositions, so also, if the proper dispositions cease to exist, a form cannot remain in the matter. And this is the way in which the union of a soul to its body is dissolved; that is, when the natural heat and moisture and other factors of this kind, through which a body is made ready to acquire a soul, are destroyed’ (Aquinas 1984: 134/§9, ad. 16). Compare likewise *Summa Theologiae* II, Q85, Art. 5–6.

<sup>8</sup> Focusing on this contrast does not imply a denial of other points of convergence, such as Hegel's adoption of the Platonic position according to which the separability of body and soul hinges on the individual incapacity to fully incarnate the idea. This topic, however, warrants a more in-depth discussion than this article can provide.

<sup>9</sup> Wolff made a similar point, in general, when he argued that contradiction is the reason things 'cannot consist in that which they are, but, to use Hegel's words, must "perish"' (1999: 19). Beyond this general assertion, this article is intended to explain in what sense contradiction is the cause of death.

<sup>10</sup> Keeping my distance from the general framework of Lenin's reading of Hegel, the following still obtains: 'Dialectics in the proper sense is the study of contradiction in the very essences of objects: not only are appearances transitory, mobile, fluid, demarcated only by conventional boundaries, but the essences of things as well' (Lenin 1960ff. 38: 251–52).

<sup>11</sup> Combinations that connect two individuals, for instance 'Aristotle died at the age of 73' or 'my uncle was born in 1946' are not judgements in the Hegelian sense, since their predicates do not ascribe universal properties but solely describe individual happenings. Hegel calls them mere sentences (*Sätze*). It should be noted that sentences may be reformulated to create judgements. For instance, in saying 'my uncle was born in 1946', I connect two individuals ('my uncle' and '1946'). But if I say, 'my uncle is a baby boomer', I connect an individual ('my uncle') with a universal property ('baby boomer'). For this reason, Hegel would argue that the latter is a judgement, while the former is merely a sentence.

<sup>12</sup> Compare also to his definition from the *Bloomberg* and *Jäsche Logic*, where the judgement is said to be a 'representation of the unity of the consciousness of various representations' (Kant 1992: 221, 597/*AK* 24: 275; 9, 101).

<sup>13</sup> 'All judgements are accordingly functions of unity among our representations' (Kant 1998: 205/B94). Compare with Longuenesse (2001: 73). I note that this characterization equally applies to the Kantian Kiesewetter, who was Hegel's contemporary (Kiesewetter 1791). Lenk's comments on this subject are also very useful (Lenk 1968: 62ff.).

<sup>14</sup> Compare: 'The act of judgement accordingly brings with it the further reflection whether this or that predicate which is in someone's head can and should be attached to the subject matter that exists outside it on its own; the judgement itself is simply the act that combines the predicate with the subject, so that, if this combination did not occur, the subject and predicate would still each remain what it is, the one concretely existing as thing in itself, the other as a representation in someone's head' (*SL*: 552/*GW* 12: 55).

<sup>15</sup> Compare with Pippin (1978: 309).

<sup>16</sup> '*Judgement*. in the highest and strictest sense, is the original separation of object and subject which are most deeply united in intellectual intuition, that separation through which alone object and subject become possible, the arche-separation [*Ur-teilung*]. In the concept of separation, there lies already the concept of the reciprocity of object and subject and the necessary presupposition of a whole of which object and subject form the parts' (Hölderlin 1988: 37/*SW* 4: 226).



<sup>17</sup> My position stands in opposition to Iber: ‘Nicht die Dinge sind Urteile, sondern, das Nachdenken über Dinge besteht aus Urteilen’ (Iber 2006: 121).

<sup>18</sup> Hegel refers here to Aristotle’s *Physics*: each thing existing by nature ‘has within itself a principle of motion’ (Aristotle 1908: 192b). Generally, Hegel’s conception of inner teleology is heavily influenced by Aristotle: ‘Aristotle’s determination of life already contains the inner purposiveness and thus stands infinitely far beyond the concept of modern teleology which has only the *finite*, the *external* purposiveness in view’ (EL: 277/GW 20: 209/§204).

<sup>19</sup> In this article, I will only touch on the role judgements play in the constitution of life. It is nonetheless important to stress that syllogisms also play an equally crucial role. In Hegel’s words: ‘The living is the syllogism, whose moments are systems and syllogisms in themselves’ (EL: 288/GW 20: 219/§217).

<sup>20</sup> Compare: in the judgement of the concept ‘internal purposiveness is the activity that enables the relation of realisation between subject and predicate in which an objective existence constitutes itself as a subject by means of its essential Gattung-predicate’ (Ng 2020: 235). In making these points, Ng likewise explores interesting affinities between Hegelian judgements of the concept and Thompson’s notion of natural historical judgements. For more on this point, see Ng (2020: 193) as well as Thompson (2008: 63ff.).

<sup>21</sup> Compare likewise: ‘life as the ground of judgement is also the source of all actual unity and correspondence between subjective Concept and reality’ (Ng 2020: 218).

<sup>22</sup> Further evidence may also be found in Hegel’s discussion of syllogisms, where he notes that the contradiction in judgements is reproduced in syllogisms. Like judgements, syllogisms are ‘the posited oneness of both the subject and the predicate [...]. Yet both are at once different in form from each other’ (LL: 191/GW 23.2: 783). Hegel notes that this contradiction is a ‘defect’ that belongs ‘to the very nature of the syllogism’ (LL: 191/GW 23.2: 783). The rationale behind Hegel’s point also seems quite plausible. The problem with judgements cannot be solved simply by combining defective judgements in syllogistic inferences. Rainer Schäfer noticed this point in his discussion of the judgement: ‘Aber auch damit [mit der Bereitstellung weiterer Sätze] läßt sich dialektische Bewegung nicht wirklich aussagen, denn auch in weiteren Sätze sind immer noch Sätze und damit jeweils ein starres Gefüge’ (Schäfer 2001: 188). Bowman recently reaffirmed Schäfer’s observation (Bowman 2013: 253).

<sup>23</sup> Compare likewise: ‘All finite things have an untruth: they possess a concept and a concrete existence that is, however, inadequate to the concept. For this reason, they must perish, and by this means the inadequacy of their concept and their concrete existence is manifested. As an individual thing, the animal possesses its concept in its genus, and the genus frees itself from the individuality by means of death’ (EL: 61/GW 23.3: 821/§24A).

<sup>24</sup> Moreover, since separating from universals means death, the latter demonstrates the animating power of concepts. In Hegel’s own words, ‘the product of the process [of life] breaks down into two sides [...] the living *individuality* that, on account of its initial *immediacy*, behaves *negatively* towards the universality, *perishes* in this as the power’ (EL: 290/GW 20: 221/§221).

<sup>25</sup> On *Grund* as *causa formalis*, compare with Rohs (2016). Compare likewise with Beiser (2005: 67).

<sup>26</sup> Von Engelhardt was thus right to point out that ‘the significance of illness is not exhausted within the perspective of concrete causation’ (von Engelhardt 1984: 130).

<sup>27</sup> Compare: ‘The inner universality therefore remains opposed to the natural singularity of the living being as the negative power from which the animal suffers violence and perishes, because natural existence as such does not itself contain this universality and is not therefore the reality which corresponds to it’ (PN: 440/GW 20: 374/§374).

<sup>28</sup> For a discussion of the issue from this perspective, see Giladi (2022).

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