It is, by now, a well-established thesis that one major path that runs from Kant, through Fichte and Schelling, up to Hegel is defined by the conception of freedom as autonomy. It is less known and has been less frequently the object of study that from Kant to Hegel a new idea of life takes shape as well. Even less taken into account is the fact that these two paths from Kant to Hegel might be systematically intertwined. If the notion of life in German Idealism is discussed at all, it has been discussed mostly in dealing with the philosophies of nature and biology of Kant and his successors. This framing is, of course, not wrong in itself; yet to my mind we can only fully account for the thought of what is living and the new interest that the idealist philosophies of nature actually deserve if we regard life as a practical notion. For the idealists, life is, as Fichte has it, an “analogue of freedom in nature,” and it describes the one form of object we can encounter in nature that possesses a kind of unity and organization that comes close to the unity and the organization of spirit. In various accounts of German Idealism, life is not only regarded as an analogue of a self-grounded...
order, but figures furthermore as a precondition of the actuality of freedom: It is in being alive that we might become free. 2 How exactly this is so is of course not only a very complicated issue but also a contested one among Kant and his successors. In order to outline at least two basic approaches to relating ‘life’ and ‘autonomy,’ I would like to present a sketch of a reading of Kant, in whose works the analogy of life and autonomy first manifests itself, and of Hegel, who has to my mind most fully developed the potential of this constellation. Starting with Kant is inevitable, for he has provided the decisive formulation of the concept of autonomy (in the *Groundwork* and his second *Critique*) and has introduced a new thinking of the living (in his “Critique of Teleological Judgment”), both of which were in turn taken up and developed by his successors. In the following I would like to point out some of the structural analogies present in Kant’s thought on practical autonomy and living self-constitution (I) in order to briefly address why he himself does not eventually draw on this analogy (II). It seems that Kant thought that in order to be free, we in fact have to abstract from our living nature rather than build on the way in which it already is in a basic sense self-constitutive. In the second half of this paper I want to turn to Hegel in order to show how he deepens the interconnection between the living and the autonomous, life and spirit, without however reducing autonomy to a biological feature. While he stresses the degree to which living beings are indeed, in a basic sense, “autonomous”, and while he indicates that it is from life that spirit emerges (III), he specifies the mode of a self-conscious life of spirit that is to be distinguished from the biological form of the living (IV).

I.

The peculiarity of the concept of autonomy lies in the fact that it articulates a concept of freedom and a notion of order in one and the same stroke. Whereas the conception of freedom as the freedom from external constraint and the idea of freedom as the freedom to act arbitrarily both indicate a notion that seems in a basic fashion to be opposed to order, the concept of autonomy formulates a freedom that expresses itself as an order: an order of laws one has given to oneself or an order of laws of which one can regard oneself as the author. Freedom exists, in Rousseau’s famous expression, as “obedience to the law one has prescribed to oneself” and is in this sense opposed to a “natural freedom” which knows no constraints at all. 3 The concept of autonomy thus contains two connected thoughts: First, that to be free is to obey laws of a peculiar kind. Second, that for a law or an order to be fully normative, it has to be self-prescribed and not given externally. Freedom and normativity are, in this sense, correlative ideas. For an order to be normative it has to be rooted in freedom and for freedom to be real it has to express itself as a normative order. 4

Kant’s concept of autonomy can be regarded as the central formulation encoding this idea of an internal connection between liberty and order, freedom and the law. In Kant’s own

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exposition of this kind of order, it is practical reason or the will that is described as autonomous. Now, the will is free in Kant’s description if it is subjected to a law in such a way that it can also be regarded as self-legislating. That is to say, it is only ‘freely’ and ‘normatively’ bound by laws to the degree that it can itself be regarded as the source of these laws: “Hence the will is not merely subject to the law but subject to it in such a way that it must be viewed as also giving the law to itself and just because of this as first subject to the law (of which it can regard itself as the author).” (GMS 4:431) Freedom in this sense consists in a peculiar mode of subjection: a mode in which the entity subjected to the law can be simultaneously regarded as the source of the law. The free subjection of the will is one in which the subjection is simultaneously an expression of the will.

If we take the language of the will “giving” or “imposing” the law that binds it literally, the concept of autonomy can seem to be endangered by a paradox: If the will is bound by the law only under the condition that it has given the law to itself, it seems that the will is ultimately not bound at all: If the binding quality of the law fully derives from it being instituted by the will itself, what should prevent the will from, in a second act, abandoning the law and instituting a different one? If we then, however, presume that the will therefore must have had reasons for instituting the law in the first place, it was already bound in instituting the law and in this sense not free in giving itself the law, in this sense not the “Urheber” of this law. (The actual Urheber seems to be the law giving the will reasons to give itself the law so that the will is in the last instance under a law it has not given to itself). If the paradox would hold in the strict sense, it would be, of course, fatal to the intelligibility of the idea of autonomy. To argue, on the other hand, that the paradoxical formulation rests on a simple misconstrual or misunderstanding of the idea of autonomy and that, in fact, the conception of autonomy is a simple and unambiguous one, also does not seem right in that it does not account for the way in which Kant and his successors indeed struggled with the complex conjunction of freedom and the law in the concept of autonomy. This struggle seems to indicate that the paradoxical formulation expresses a tension that is indeed vital for the idea of autonomy: Autonomy entails both subjection to order and expression of freedom; these moments are conditions for one other, just as they are also in tension with one another.6

In order to trace this tension without articulating it as a sheer—and thus empty—paradox, it might be helpful to say which basic law it is that the will, on Kant’s view, is subjected to in being at the same time law-giving. The law through which the will just as much binds itself as it expresses itself is, according to Kant, the categorical imperative: to act only according to that maxim that you can at the same time will as a universal law. The will is free in adopting this or that maxim and thereby taking this or that path of action, insofar as it adopts the maxim only on the grounds that it could legislate the maxim as a universal law. To express the thought in a different way, we could say that the will is only restricted by the ability of the maxim to be willed to the fullest degree, which means that the will is restricted only by the will-ability of the maxim and thus by something rooted in itself. This capacity of a maxim to be willed to the fullest degree corresponds to the degree to which it can be willed as a law. The reason for this resides in the nature

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of the rational will: a will exerts causal power, and insofar as causality necessarily implies laws, a lawless will seems incomprehensible to Kant: “ein Unding” (GMS 4:446). As the capacity to cause a state of affairs by means of a representation the rational will thus has to exhibit a specific form of lawfulness. The rational will itself is in this sense lawful; it naturally adopts the form of the law. This is the reason why Kant can use the formulation that the will is a law unto itself (“der Wille ist sich Gesetz”).

I do not want to enter into an investigation of the concept of the will at this point and deal with the question how convincing it is to tie a will to lawfulness in this way; at this point I am rather interested in the form of the account that Kant gives for making plausible that something is autonomous, bound by something to the degree that it expresses itself in that by which it is bound. This can be the case, it seems, in the sense that something is subject to the laws that are its own, laws that derive from its own nature. In its adoption of maxims, the will is not restricted by an external influence; it is restricted only by the categorical imperative—the law of lawfulness—that the rational will by its very nature exposes as the supreme law: The categorical imperative orders the will to be a universal lawgiver which is so much in accordance with the will’s nature that it can regard itself to be ordered by ‘itself’ to do so. The will, by its nature, “is” this law. By subjecting itself to it, it can thus ‘regard’ itself as its author. The freedom of the will is not lawless, but rather a “causality according to immutable laws of a special kind” (GMS 4:446); laws that are prescribed by the will itself, in the sense that the will is bound in this prescription only by its own nature, the law of lawfulness. The will is neither determined to act nor otherwise bound by something external to it, but instead is determined and bound by its own nature. In this sense the actions of the will are explained by laws of autonomy and not laws of heteronomy (laws that specify the way in which something is determined by something external to it).

According to this description, being autonomous is not literally to be under laws that are self-prescribed, self-legislated or self-given—it means to be under laws that are one’s own. They are one’s own in the sense that they spring from one’s own nature,10 pertain to one specifically and concern the effects of events that are relevant according to one’s nature. In order to make plausible what this means precisely—to be bound by one’s own law (to be determined “eigengesetzlich”)—commentators have repeatedly alluded to the nature of laws of the living.11 The will’s law is not “its own” because the will has given it to itself in a lawless act; it is rather its own because this law expresses its nature. The way in which the laws are the will’s own might thus seem parallel to the way in which the laws deter-

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7 Kant writes: “Since the concept of causality brings with it that of laws in accordance with which, by something that we call a cause, something else, namely an effect, must be posited, so freedom, although it is not a property of the will in accordance with natural laws, is not for that reason lawless but must instead be a causality in accordance with immutable laws but of a special kind; for otherwise a free will would be an absurdity [ein Unding].” (GMS 4:446)

8 Cf. Kant’s formulation from the Groundwork that “autonomy of the will is the property of the will by which it is a law to itself” (GMS 4:440; see also: GMS 4:446).

9 In addition, I will not discuss the question of whether the notion of autonomy in Kant is irreducibly tied to the moral law or whether there might also be a Kantian concept of autonomy that is to be understood as morally neutral in order to make room for the possibility of a freely chosen evil. Cf. Henry E. Allison, Kant’s Theory of Freedom, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1990, pp. 94ff.

10 If we put it like this, the thought of autonomy clearly possesses Spinozist resonances compare Spinoza’s definition of a free thing from the Ethics: “That thing is said to be free [liber] which exists solely from the necessity of its own nature, and is determined to action by itself alone. A thing is said to be necessary [necessarius] or rather, constrained [coactus], if it is determined by another thing to exist and to act in a definite and determinate way.” (Baruch Spinoza, Ethics, in: Complete Works, trans. Samuel Shirley, ed. Michael L. Morgan, Indianapolis and Cambridge: Hackett Publishing 2002, Part I, Def. 7, p. 217). Certainly, there is a limit to the parallel insofar as Spinoza holds that only God can be described as such a free cause; for only he exists and acts solely from the necessity of his own nature (Ibid., Part I, Proposition 17, Corollary 2, p. 228).

mining the operations and developments of an organism are its own in expressing its “nature,” the specific life-form that pertains to it. Insofar as the living being is not determined by another being to exist and to act in a particular way, but rather by the necessity of its own nature, it can appear to be autonomously determined.\(^{12}\) Take a migrant bird, for example, and what it does in the spring. That the bird determines itself to fly back north under certain conditions in spring is an act that is to be understood according to the laws proper to the bird’s life-form: in following these laws the bird acts in accordance with its own laws. Certainly, it is prompted to act in this way by circumstances; but these circumstances only possess significance due to the bird’s life-form and do not have the same effect on a non-living mass of matter of the same size and roughly the same components. The circumstances that motivate the act hence are not purely external but effective to the degree that they possess an internal significance for the life-form. In being moved by these circumstances the living being accords with its own nature: it is determined by its own laws to act in the way it does.

Now, if we provisionally grant that the autonomous law of the practical agent might be the agent’s own law in a sense that is formally parallel to the way in which the specific laws of a living being are its own, we certainly need to consider more precisely the way in which they are. Is it really enough for something to realize laws that spring from its own nature—its specific form or essence—to be autonomous? If my computer turns itself off when the battery is low and it thereby follows its (designed) inner nature we will probably not be inclined to say that my computer follows an autonomous law. If there is something to using the analogy of living beings, there must be more involved here in speaking of the living following its “own laws.” I believe that Kant’s account of living beings (and the way they differ from designed machines) can be of help in showing the way in which it might be indeed correct to say that living beings exhibit a basic form of autonomy. This occurs, however, in attaining a more complex account of what one can name “one’s own” laws: not just laws that pertain to the respective entity specifically, but laws of an entity that produces or constitutes itself. In order to explain what this could mean, we have to consider briefly Kant’s account of living beings in the third *Critique*.

The fact that Kant’s “Critique of Teleological Judgment” and the characterization of living beings contained therein might be relevant to the question of autonomy is very generally suggested by the fact that living beings seem to require a different form of judgment or explanation than is usually employed in order to account for effects described by laws of heteronomy: They exhibit a type of organization “not analogous with any causality that we know” (KU 5:375) and if we only take recourse to mechanical causality, we cannot explain the specific necessity of living beings, the lawfulness that these beings display.

For if one adduces, e.g., the structure of a bird […] one says that given the mere *nexus effectivus* […] this is all in the highest degree contingent: i.e., that nature, considered as a mere mechanism, could have formed itself in a thousand different ways without hitting precisely upon the *unity in accordance with such a rule*, and that it is therefore only outside the con-

\(^{12}\) Sebastian Rödl, who advances an interpretation of autonomy as being under one’s own law (instead of autonomy as “giving oneself the law”), tries to explain further in what sense “laws of the living” might be “laws of autonomy” (Rödl, *Self-Consciousness*, p. 118). Inanimate nature is subject to laws of heteronomy of the form “An N does A, if an M does B to it”; N’s act in this sense is solicited by an act of M which did not itself accord with a law of N but happens independently of N and its laws. Living nature instead is subject to laws of autonomy, that possess the form “An N does A, when (the time comes and) an M does B to it,” in which the “when” indicates a systematic relation between M’s act and the laws of N. Laws of a life-form “place its instances in circumstances that solicit the dispositions and powers characteristic of the life-form” (Ibid., p. 119). From this basic form of autonomy to be found in all living beings, Rödl distinguishes a stronger sense of autonomy pertaining to laws of reason: “Being under laws of reason, I am subject to nothing other than myself in the sense that these laws spring from and constitute the nature of that to which I refer first personally.” (Ibid., p. 120)
cept of nature, not within it, that one could have even the least ground a priori for hoping to find such a principle. (KU 5:360; emphasis added)

In order to account for the specific ‘unity in accordance with a rule’ of the living being—the laws that are the living’s “own” in a peculiar sense—we have to take recourse to the principle of purposiveness (which is characterized in the introduction to the Critique of Judgment as the mediating term (“vermittelnde Begriﬀ”) between conceptions of nature and the concept of freedom). In order to account for the way in which living entities expose an inner unity and necessity that on the other hand cannot be made sense of in terms of a merely mechanical natural necessity, the power of judgment (Urteilskraft) grasps living beings as if they were purposively produced.

Now, what characterizes this specific “lawful unity” that pertains to the living being (and moves us to impute to it a certain purposiveness)? Kant describes this sort of lawful unity in two stages:13

(1) Living beings are organized beings in the sense that their “parts (as far as their existence and their form are concerned) are possible only through their relation to the whole” (KU 5:373). Their parts are suited to one another and to the whole in such a manner as to form a functional unity. Organisms share this property with designed artifacts. In the case of artifacts, this is explicable however by the plan or design that antedates the artifact and that has governed the selection, formation, or arrangement of the parts in this functional array. The natural being exposes a comparable inner structure—a comparable “lawfulness” of the inner arrangement—while we however are not able to point at a preceding design or a creator existing independently of this being. (2) Secondly, living beings are self-organizing beings. As I pointed out, they are not—in any way known to us—the effect of a concept given in an understanding external to them (as in the analogous case, the plan or the purpose of the artisan); they are rather cause and effect of themselves: they produce themselves. Its parts are “combined into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form” (KU 5:373). This self-organizing character has two consequences that distinguish living beings from artifacts. First, the way in which the moments or organs of an organism depend on the framework of the whole seems stronger than the way in which the parts of an artifact are related to its whole. The moments of the self-organizing being not only depend on the whole in the sense that they are defined as functional elements that can only be specified and identified as functional elements with reference to the whole, but in the stronger sense that they can only come into existence and subsist within and due to the whole: Through their interrelation the moments reciprocally produce and sustain themselves.14 Whereas the wheels of the watch are only suited to one another and do not produce each other, the organs of a living being cause one another reciprocally and are only there “because of” and “through” each other (KU 5:374). Second, in a self-organizing being the whole is not external or transcendent, but immanent to the complex being in question. Whereas in the watch the producing cause of the watch and its form is not contained in nature but in the mind of its creator, in the living being the parts are reciprocally the cause and effect of each other and in this way bring about a whole that is immanent to them. “In this way alone is it possible in turn for the idea of the whole conversely (reciprocally) to determine the form and combination of all the parts”—not as a whole

13 On the distinction between these two stages that concern two levels of living things’ mechanical inexplicability—that which they share with artifacts and the other which distinguishes them from artifacts—cf. Hannah Ginsborg, “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability in Kant and Aristotle,” Journal of the History of Philosophy 42 (2004), pp. 33–65.

14 The moments, thus, are not parts that can subsist independently of the interrelation of the parts within a whole. An organ detached from the body does not subsist as this organ but as an aggregate of matter, merely resembling this former organ.
given ahead or situated above the actual happenings, but as a whole present in the co-production of the parts.\textsuperscript{15}

For Kant, this immanence of the idea of the whole generates our difficulties in understanding living organisms: We do not possess the capacity for an intuitive understanding that would be able to intuit the whole as such (i.e. a concrete and actual whole) and that could go “from the synthetically universal (of the intuition of a whole as such) to the particular, i.e., from the whole to the parts” (KU 5:407). As we have only a discursive understanding, our understanding has to start out from an analytical universal (a concept) so that we cannot begin from a concrete and immanent whole but only from the representation of the whole (an abstract and merely possible whole, so to speak). Thus, we have to conceive of living beings on the model of the production of artifacts: in order to grasp their wholeness at all we have to treat them as if they began from an abstract representation of the whole under which then—in a process of technical construction—particular elements were subsumed so as to form the whole being. In other words, we have to treat them as if they were purposively designed, although this seems to fail to grasp the actual way in which this purposiveness manifests itself.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{15} That implies that the parts are not only more dependent on the whole than the parts of an artifact; they are simultaneously more autonomous: Insofar as they participate in producing a whole they are not just a mere part but also co-author of the whole that in turn determines them. The parts thereby turn out to be autonomous by way of depending on a whole of a peculiar type. — Kant parallelizes this type of immanent organization with forms of organization in the political field (KU 5:373)—cf. on this point Sally Sedgwick, “The State as Organism: The Metaphysical Basis of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right,” The Southern Journal of Philosophy 39 (2001), pp. 171–188. For the way in which Hegel deepens the Kantian idea and understands the form of social self-determination in terms of an organic structure that gives autonomy also to its parts, see Frederick Neuhouser, The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory: Actualizing Freedom, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2000, especially pp. 41–49, 121–144; 204ff.

\textsuperscript{16} Instead of locating the whole in an idea which is really present in some other understanding, one could also try to locate it in an immanent, formative force that defines the dynamic inner unity of the organized entity and its capacity to organize further matter. Such a force, which Kant in fact mentions (KU 5:374 “formative power”; KU 5:422ff.: “formative drive”), can however not be determined independently of the

Yet no matter how problematic our mode of knowing the self-organizing structure of the living being may be, the structure in itself—which Kant describes quite clearly, despite the restrictions of our discursive understanding—is highly relevant to the problem with which we began: how to imagine an autonomous order, an order that would be under its “own” laws. It is precisely as a self-organizing being that immanently produces its governing purposive unity—and that does not receive its lawfulness from without—that we might say that the living being is autonomous and possesses its own laws. Not only are the actions or features of the living being to be explained by laws of autonomy in the sense that these laws “refer to nothing not contained in its own nature.”\textsuperscript{17} That is to say, the actions and features of the living being are not only to be explained by laws that are its own in the sense that these laws derive from its own organization. These laws are the living beings’ own in the deeper sense that they are brought about by this very being: Insofar as a living being constitutes and organizes itself, it can be regarded as the very source of its form. While we will explain the shape and the behavior of an artifact, e.g., a watch, with reference to its specific purposive form—the purposive nature of this object—it however does not seem felicitous to speak of the autonomy of a watch, as this purposive nature is implanted into

\textsuperscript{166} This is Rödl’s formula for autonomy in the fundamental sense: “A law of autonomy is the subject’s own law in that it refers to nothing not contained in its own nature.” (Rödl, Self-Consciousness, p. 120)
Insofar as living beings, in contradistinction to artifacts, produce themselves, we can indeed say that their laws are in a deeper sense their own: living beings produce and maintain their own laws, laws which they do not receive from a plan or design given from without. In thinking the concept of autonomy, it is an essential problem to find a way of imagining how the subject can give itself its own law without thereby implying an unbound legislator or creator imposing this law. The idea of a self-organizing living being can be brought to bear on this question by giving us a model of a type of organization that is self-constituting.

Now, one might argue that this self-organization is not really pertinent to the question of autonomy as we are here dealing with a de facto order: The living being might be self-produced, but it does not give itself a law. Kant, however, emphasizes (especially in the first introduction to the Critique of Judgment) that the self-organization of living things does not merely generate a de facto order, but rather exhibits an order of normative necessity. A living being does not merely exist in this or that manner; rather, it tends to suggest “that there is something that it ought to be” (EE 20:240). Insofar as the living being appears as a “natural purpose,” it relates to something it ought to be and makes room for judgments as to whether the actual creature adequately lives up to itself (viz. its species) and hence can be called ‘healthy’ or ‘defective.’ Living beings, when considered in terms of their inner purposiveness, manifest a sort of oughtness that involves a unique form of “necessity,” to be distinguished from the “physical-mechanical necessity”: the living creature exhibits a normative “necessity of being formed in a certain way” (EE 20:240; translation modified). The living creature manifests a norm, in the form of its species’ inner purposiveness, to which it specifically is subject. Living beings thus not only bring themselves forth, but are thereby also laws unto themselves.

If we put it in this way, an analogy to an autonomous order might become more suggestive than it perhaps seemed at the outset. It is however important to note that this analogy only holds under a peculiar understanding of the living as self-organizing. It is not enough to have an organized being—a complex functional unity—or a merely self-maintaining process in order to have an analogue of an autonomous order. Autonomy is not just being under one’s own law, but being under a law that is one’s own in the sense that one is bringing it forth.

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This distinction of a determination from within and a determination from without should not be taken to concern merely the location of the source of the organizing principle, but as pointing to a difference in certain modes of organization: The determination from within—the unity of the living being—is peculiar in that it is not really adequately represented in an expression detached from it (a plan or an idea in an understanding external to it); it is a unity that manifests itself only in the articulated living being itself. Kant himself describes this normativity by referring to two forms of purposiveness that allow for normative evaluation: first, the relation of the organic being to the concept of this organic being which we treat, hypothetically, as its cause (i.e. the organic being as a purpose of nature); second, the suitability of an organ to its function (the way in which e.g. the eye fulfills its purpose of seeing). Kant does not elaborate on the precise relation of these two instances of purposiveness and, what is more, he does not really investigate the specific openness of the normativity of the living that is caused by the fact that we cannot identify the purpose of nature independently from the organism, the function of the organ independently from the actual doings of the organ since we cannot point to any preceding plan or concept in an understanding independent from the organic being. There is no separate standard, but only the way in which the moments of the living being are means and end to each other, reciprocally cause and effect of each other, which suggests that there is something that they ought to have been. It is this immanence and openness of the normative standard that in fact makes the normativity of living beings so interesting with regard to the question of autonomy.


If one contemplates a bit the formulation that living beings are laws unto themselves, one will soon become suspicious: It seems questionable to what degree they grasp the norms produced in the living process as norms. Another way of saying this: they might be laws unto themselves only for us. This is precisely Hegel's thought in stating that living beings in a fundamental way already expose the concept of spirit, but only for us, not for themselves. It is only in self-consciousness that this structure comes to exist for itself.
II.

Now, despite the structural parallels between life and autonomy on the Kantian picture that I have tried to trace, Kant himself has not employed this analogy in any way in order to elucidate the autonomy of practical reason. Although Kant does specify the rational will as a “kind of causality of living beings” (GMS 4:446; my emphasis), the rational will is autonomous only insofar as it precisely does not allow itself to be determined by the sensible, living nature of the agent. The subject of an autonomous order is for Kant the rational will as such. Hence, the only determinations that are capable of conditioning the autonomous order are those that are rooted in the nature of the rational will itself (and not, for example, in the nature of human life). The autonomy of human practical reason paradigmatically manifests itself in the fact that it precisely does not allow itself to be guided by its living nature.

It is an interesting question why exactly this is the case: Is it the case because the will, as the will of a rational being as such, is essentially distinct from our living existence in nature so that our living existence becomes a heteronomous force relative to the will? Or is it also the case because a living order is in and of itself a heteronomous order, an order not—or not fully—grounded in itself? At most points Kant doesn’t argue directly or explicitly that life is in itself an order that is necessarily heteronomous in structure; rather, he argues that it is a source of heteronomy with regard to the rational will: The “sensible nature of rational beings” as their existence under empirically conditioned laws is, as Kant writes, “for reason heteronomy” (KpV 5:43; emphasis added). The laws of duty and the laws of life are different and hence cannot be mixed together without giving rise to heteronomy. The “majesty of duty has nothing to do with the enjoyment of life, it has its own law and also its own court and even though one might want to shake both of them thor-oughly together, [...] they soon separate of themselves.” (KpV 5:88) This, however, would not necessarily entail that the living in and of itself could not said to be autonomous in a basic sense.

On the other hand, it is clear that Kant locates autonomy only on one level: the level of practical reason. This suggests that he considers the laws of the living as in and of themselves laws of heteronomy. Kant’s discussion of what he calls the “comparative concept of freedom” (KpV 5:96) might be instructive on this point. Kant argues that a comparative conception of freedom is insufficient, a mere subterfuge, and it seems that Kant is considering here a type of freedom that has some resonances with the idea of freedom as being under “one’s own law.” According to a comparative conception of freedom, Kant says, a free effect is something “the determining natural ground of which lies within the acting being” (KpV 5:96). Comparative freedom is thus attributed to such effects that are not externally imposed on an entity but that spring from its inner state or nature. Kant’s first example is a projectile in free motion, unhindered and unimpelled from without; his second example is the motion of a clock that “moves the hands itself” (KpV 5:96) and thereby seems to be the source of its own movement and thus ‘free.’ Kant’s third example is that of the actions of a human being which, although necessary by their determining grounds, might be regarded as comparatively free, “insofar as the actions are caused from within” (KpV 5:96). It thus suggests itself that Kant would have to say that for an animal, be it rational or not, to be motivated by its living nature would only imply freedom in this comparative sense: The determining grounds can be said to lie within this animal. But it is irrelevant, so Kant wants to suggest, where the source of the determination is to be located: “it does not matter whether the causality determined in accordance with a natural law is necessary through determining grounds lying within the subject or outside him.” Not the site of the source, but the form or mode of determination is decisive.
The form or mode of determination that Kant wants to characterize as unfree at this point is the form of causal determination in time that he calls that of the “mechanism of nature”: “all necessity of events in time in accordance with the natural laws of causality can be called the mechanism of nature” (KpV 5:97). Whatever springs from our nature according to the mechanism of nature in this sense can never be properly called free and could be regarded as “heteronomous” in structure.

If, as Kant explains in the third Critique, living beings are mechanically inexplicable for our discursive understanding, it is difficult to determine if this implies as well that they embody a form of determination that strictly escapes “the mechanism of nature” in the sense that the cited passage from the second Critique indicates. In any event, Kant tries to characterize our

23 It is a much-discussed issue whether Kant thinks—and should think—that practical freedom and autonomy are only possible on the condition of transcendental freedom (as the above passage suggests), or if it might be possible to assume that there is practical freedom even if we are in fact not transcendentally free (but rather determined by a higher mechanism of nature). For the latter see especially the following passage from the Critique of Pure Reason: “Whether reason is not, in the actions through which it prescribes laws, itself again determined by other influences, and whether that which, in relation to sensuous impulses, is entitled freedom, may not, in relation to higher and more remote operating causes be nature again, is a question which in the practical field does not concern us, since we are demanding of reason nothing but the rule of conduct, it is a merely speculative question, which we can leave aside so long as we are considering what ought or ought not to be done.” (KrV A803/B831)

24 It is a difficult question what exactly Kant refers to when he says in the third Critique that organized beings cannot be understood by means of “mechanical explanation.” Candidates that have been discussed are (i) that living beings are mechanically inexplicable in the sense that they do not allow for an explanation of the whole by means of its independent parts (see McLaughlin, Kants Kritik der teleologischen Urteilskraft, Bonn: Bouvier 1989; a corresponding passage in Kant is EE 20:236); (ii) that living beings seem to contradict a mechanistic explanation in the sense that the powers of matter are insufficient to account for the production of organisms (see Ginsborg, “Two Kinds of Mechanical Inexplicability”); (iii) that living beings cannot be explained in terms of efficient causality (Rachel Zuckert, Kant on Beauty and Biology, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007, pp. 101ff.). The third perspective would imply that Kant’s description of living beings’ inner purposiveness indeed is in tension with the structure of causal determination explicated in the “Second Analogy” (see Zuckert, Kant on Beauty and Biology, p. 136). The idea of a reciprocal determination implied by natural purposiveness according to which A is cause and effect of B and thereby in some sense both antecedent and subsequent to B, cannot be understood under the principle of succession. This might be the strongest reason why Kant thinks we have

mode of knowledge of living beings in such a way that it does not directly contradict the mechanism of nature. And, although he describes them as self-organizing, he does not attribute to them a spontaneity that is comparable to the full spontaneity of a being that can make an unconditioned beginning. Under the condition that practical freedom and autonomy are thought to presuppose such a transcendental freedom, the way in which a living being follows laws that are its own seems to remain foreign to the autonomy of the rational will: It lacks the absolute spontaneity of freedom of the intelligible character that is unconditioned by the sensible world and only thereby to be regarded as the source of autonomy. Insofar as Kant thinks that without transcendental freedom “no moral law is possible and no imputation in accordance with it,” (KpV 5:97) the formal ‘autonomy’ of living beings remains useless for him in the effort to understand the autonomy of practical reason.

However, if one does not presuppose transcendental freedom as the condition of practical freedom, one can begin to reconsider the way in which the formal autonomy of living beings might illuminate the autonomy of practical reason. In taking up the distinction that Kant indicates between different sites of the grounds of determination (that are not really decisive in questions of freedom) and different modes of determination (that are of relevance) the question emerges of whether living beings, insofar as they are self-organizing beings (and not only organized beings), do not indeed embody a specific mode of determination characteristic of autonomy as such. Insofar as reason is also to be conceived as a self-organizing entity, as Kant suggests when he speaks of an “epigenesis of reason,” we

to conceive of living beings according to the analogy of intentional purposiveness, as intentional purposiveness seems in harmony with the principle of succession: the whole that is produced by its parts does not as such precede these parts—it is the idea or representation of the whole that precedes them.

24 Kant uses this term of the biology of his time in order to characterize pure reason as self-constituting and self-organizing: In the B-Deduction he speaks of the system
might ask whether the autonomy of practical reason might not be informed in one way or another by the mode of determination found in living beings. In the second half of my paper I want to turn to Hegel who seems to pursue precisely this line of thought.

III.

Hegel is clearly following Kant’s lead in characterizing the formal essence of spirit (Gesp) as “freedom” and in further determining this freedom in terms of self-determination (EPG §382). “Actual freedom,” for Hegel, is “not something that is immediately in spirit, but something to be produced by spirit’s activity” (EPG §382Z; translation modified). Spirit manifests itself as the “producer of its freedom” and its development is to be characterized as a constant activity of “freeing […] itself” (EPG §382Z). Thus, for Hegel, to be free in the sense that one is subject to one’s own laws is neither to be viewed as something given (as something that is just there as a part of the nature of my reason) nor is it bound to any single act of legislation. Being subject to one’s own laws rather means continuing to produce one’s own freedom and constantly becoming what one is. Spirit is ‘autonomous’ in the sense that it is a “product of itself” and that “its actuality” is “merely that it has made itself into what it is.”\(^{25}\) The “concept” (Begriff) for Hegel also gives itself reality in this manner (WL 6:258/587), for it “has actuality […] in such a way that it gives this actuality to itself” (PR §1). Hegel thus explicates the idea of the autonomy of spirit and the concept in terms of the idea of self-production or self-actualization. Autonomy thereby moves even closer to the form of self-constitution which defines the living according to Kant and Hegel. It is thus no accident or slip that Hegel characterizes the living, with reference to animal organisms, exactly as he had characterized spirit: a living creature “only is, in making itself into that which it is” (EN §352; translation modified).\(^{26}\) Life and spirit are both characterized as entities that produce and constitute themselves by making themselves into what they are. Neither exists as a given, but only as its own achievement and result.

The parallel between spirit and life can be seen more clearly if we take a brief look at Hegel’s characterization of animal life in his Encyclopaedia. Hegel describes animal life as the point in nature where subjectivity emerges. That is to say, animals possess a basic form of subjectivity that prefigures the self-productive quality of spirit in decisive respects: The animal exists as self-production in the sense of the production of a self. The animal does that by producing its own shape, by endowing its environment with a specific form impregnated with the animal’s self and by actualizing a general form in its particular being. Hegel articulates these three dimensions of self-production as (1) the process of shape, (2) the process of assimilation, and (3) the genus-process. As the process of shape concerns the self-articulation of the living individual into its parts, which reciprocally condition and produce each other, the process of assimilation concerns the relation of the living being to its (inorganic) environment. The genus-process concerns the interrelation of different individuals of one genus. In this sense the process of shape concerns the self-relation of the living, as the process of assimilation concerns the relation of the living to its other. The genus-process unifies these two relations insofar as it concerns the way in which what is living relates to itself in relating to its


\(^{26}\) See also VPGE 183/109: “Thus, the organic individual produces itself: it makes itself into what it is in itself; spirit, too, is simply that into what it makes itself, and it makes itself into what it is in itself.”
other. These three processes determine the way in which the living can be said to be self-constitutive, to make itself into what it is and to realize a basic form of freedom: a Being-at-one-with-oneself-in-the-other.\(^{27}\)

(1) Hegel’s descriptions of the process of shape are largely indebted to Kant’s concept of the organism as a self-organizing entity in which the parts are cause and effect of one another. The shape of the organism is alive precisely to the extent that it exists as a process: a process of articulation whereby the parts (as moments of the whole) and the whole (as produced by its parts) are brought forth. The parts of the shape are not independent parts, but “moments in a living subjectivity” (EN §356Z).\(^{28}\) Hegel explains this process of organization—slightly different from Kant’s more harmonious picture—as itself already a dialectical and tense process comprised of two moments: the articulating or producing of an inner self (not bound by any single shape) on the one hand and of the concrete, sustained external shape on the other hand. The organism is the “higher repose” as the “unity” of these two moments, the “internal and external” (EN §356Z). The dialectical quality and the negativity involved become evident in Hegel’s characterization of the process of shaping: It is the process “in which the organism converts its own members into a non-organic nature, into means, lives on itself and produces its own self, i.e. this same totality of articulated members, so that each member is reciprocally end and means, maintains itself through the other members and in opposition to them.” (EN §356; emphasis added) Hegel thereby reformulates the very type of organization that Kant characterized as the form of organized living beings.

(2) The second dimension in which Hegel describes this self-organizing form is its relation to its environment. This is an aspect of the self-organizing being upon which Kant had not particularly focused and that contributes to an extension of the analogy between life and practical subjectivity in Hegel.\(^{29}\) Hegel conceives of the animal’s relation to its non-organic environment as one of assimilation. Assimilation takes on the form of a theoretical process, a practical process, and a unity of both termed the “ideally real process” (EN §357Z). The theoretical assimilation signifies a process whereby a living being takes up the environment with its senses and in doing so transforms it into something that is formative for itself. Practical assimilation describes the way in which the living being employs non-organic nature in order to get rid of its sensation of lack (either by transforming the outer nature into an instrument for doing so [formal assimilation] or by consuming and destroying parts of the environment to fulfill its needs [real assimilation]). What is important in the idea of assimilation is the way in which the animal literally transforms its environment into a part of itself (by employing or consuming it). It can do so to the extent that it has a self-relation in which the environment is already implied: the sensation of lack. The fact that the living being is in need is a mark of distinction in Hegel’s view. Only a living being can feel lack, and this is the precondition for its having an assimilative relation to its environment (that means: for not being just indifferentily opposed to its environment, but in such

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\(^{27}\) Cf. “Freedom is to will something determinate, yet to be with oneself (bei sich) in this determinacy and to return once more to the universal.” (PR §7Z) See also: “Spirit is here purely at home with itself, and thereby free, for that is just what freedom is: being at home with oneself in one’s other, depending on oneself and being one’s own determinant.” (EL §24Z2) For the thesis that Hegel’s conception of “Being-at-one-with-oneself-in-the-other” is deeply connected to his conception of “life,” see Terry Pinkard, \textit{Hegel’s Naturalism: Mind, Nature, and the Final Ends of Life}, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012.

\(^{28}\) In his \textit{Science of Logic} Hegel expresses this thought by saying that “the organism is a manifold, not of parts but of members” (WL 6:476/766).

\(^{29}\) The point is however not totally absent from Kant. See his description of growth in §64: “This plant first pre-pares the matter that it adds to itself with a quality peculiar to its species, which would not be provided by the mechanism of nature outside of it, and develops itself further by means of material which, as far as its composition is concerned, is its own product.” (KU 5:371)
a relation to the environment that it is potentially transformable into the animal itself). In the concept of lack the lack's overcoming is already present in such a way that this manner of being finite is simultaneously a form of infinitude. The animal, by being in need, is no longer merely subject to external causes, but to “external potencies” and is thus subject to a different mode of being determined: one in which it itself is already implied (EN §359). That is to say, the laws of the living not only specify that living beings of the type N do A, if—accidentally, unforeseeably—an M does B to them, but they specify that N's do A under specific circumstances (“when M's do B”) that N's are adapted to. The laws of the living comprise the specific circumstances of the living, since the animal is actual not only in the shape of its body but also in the peculiar “shape” with which it endows its environment. The basic form in which the living being specifies elements of its environment is according to Hegel “instinct” (which is, of course, a very rudimentary and still limited form of accessing a specific environment).

By means of assimilation, that is, by becoming able to transform its environment into a part of itself, the animal posits itself “as subjectivity, as real being for-self” (EN §365Z). In the forms of practical assimilation the subject, however, does so only in a limited way by satisfying specific needs (e.g. its hunger or thirst). It does not yet “satisfy itself,” (or: its Self) in the sense of gaining a sense of its own selfhood. There is however one form of assimilation—that which unifies theoretical and practical assimilation—in which the animal even accomplishes this in a rudimentary form: in its constructive instinct (“Bildungstrieb,” “Kunsttrieb”) it transforms its environment—e.g. by building nests, constructing weapons—in such a way that the environment reflects the animal self: “In the constructive instinct the creature has produced itself as an outer existence and yet remains the same immediate creature; here, then, it first attains to self-enjoyment, to the specific feeling of self.” (EN §365Z)

(3) The third dimension in which the animal subjectivity is characterized is the genus-process: the relation of the individual animal being to its genus. The genus is the concrete substance of the singular subject, and a living being is inherently related to its genus: it exemplifies, maintains and reproduces its genus. But the way in which it does this attests to a decisive limit of the living. The genus is only in an “implicit” (“ansich-seiender”) unity with the singularity of the subject (EN §367). In manifesting its genus—through reproduction, in the confrontation of different species and in illness and natural death—the particular living being each time perishes (literally: dies). The living being is an outcome and a means or vehicle of genus-process, but we do not find a living individual that is in and for itself the genus. This is the very limit of the living: Its inability to be for itself genus and to maintain itself in this relation. This can only become possible for a being that becomes aware of its life as such and that in this sense becomes capable of transforming this natural mode of subjectivity.

While animal life can indeed be regarded as “autonomous” in the formal sense with regard to the inner organization brought about by the living process itself, and while animals

30 “A being which is capable of containing and enduring its own contradiction is a subject; this constitutes its infinitude.” (EN §359Z)

31 The parallel formulation in the Science of Logic is: “In so far as the object confronts the living being in the first instance as an indifferent externality, it can act upon it mechanically; but in doing so it is not acting on a living being; where it enters into relationship with a living being it does not act on it as a cause, but excites it.” (WL 6:482/771)

32 The animal in this sense already seems to be on the track to the provisional ‘solution’ of the master-slave problem: Arbeit and Bildung.

33 If it is true that Hegel regards this limited right of the individual as a shortcoming of the form of the living, this suggests that he will need to have a different notion of the status of the individual in the sphere of spirit. Hegel’s description of the living thus seems to imply that the realm of a fully actualized freedom of spirit requires a form of individual freedom that goes beyond individuals being a mere “vehicle” of cosmic spirit. For a critique of such a view of the individual’s freedom within Sittlichkeit, see Neuhouser, The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory, pp. 50ff.
can be regarded as expressing, through their assimilative activity, the idealism of the free will that does not take the things “as they are, to be in and for themselves”\textsuperscript{34} but transforms and appropriates them, they do not, in the cycle of reproduction, manifest the identity of producing and produced that Hegel requires of spirit.\textsuperscript{35} The “animal soul is still not free for [...] it is only in the form of individuality that the genus is for the animal. The animal can only sense the genus, it is not aware of it. [...] By the sublation of the particularity of the sexes which occurs in the genus process the animal does not attain to the production of the genus; what is produced by this process is again only an individual.” (EPG §381Z) That which is living in this sense produces a structure that it cannot fully grasp for itself. It is only in a new form of self-conscious vitality that this can be accomplished.

IV.

Hegel not only extends the structural parallels of life and spirit as self-constituting entities marked by processes of articulation, assimilation and reproduction, but also introduces a new form of distinguishing and relating life and spirit: Spirit does not exist alongside or somewhere beyond living nature; it is instead intimately connected to living nature. That however is not to say that it is just an extension or an enhancement of living nature—instead it displays a thoroughly transformed life of its own that is gained from and against natural life. The life of spirit is of such a sort that natural life “appears partly as opposed to it, partly as posited at one with it” (WL 6:471/762).\textsuperscript{36} There are various sites where Hegel deals with the passage from merely animal life to self-conscious life. At this point, I want to direct attention to just two of those sites which in turn imply two related basic characterizations of this transformation: they characterize it as the transformation of a reflective turn (spirit as life knowing itself as such) and that of a redoubling of life (spirit as realizing itself in the mode of a second nature). The first characterization can be articulated with regard to the passage in the Phenomenology of Spirit in which consciousness, facing a living object, grasps itself as self-consciousness; the second one can be elaborated by reference to the Anthropology chapter in the Encyclopaedia where Hegel describes the living nature of the human as the first stage of subjective spirit.\textsuperscript{37} I will not be able to give a full analysis here, but I would like to indicate the type of turn that Hegel is interested in.

In the Phenomenology of Spirit life appears at a famous “turning point”: consciousness attains a new level when it grasps its object as alive—namely the level of self-consciousness. Hegel attempts to show how what is living (as object) lays bare the fundamental structure of spirit in the relationship between the single organ and the overarching organism, between the exemplar and its general species, the separate shape and the universal fluidity of life. However, the living only manifests this structure in itself without yet possessing the structure for itself. In its

\textsuperscript{34} PR §§44: “The free will is consequently that idealism which does not consider things [Dinge], as they are, to be in and for themselves, whereas realism declares them to be absolute, even if they are found only in the form of finitude. Even the animal has gone beyond this realist philosophy, for it consumes things [Dinge] and thereby proves that they are not absolutely self-sufficient.” See on this point also Pinkard, Hegel’s Naturalism, p. 18f.

\textsuperscript{35} EPG §379Z: “For whereas [...] the seed produced is not identical with the seed that produced it, in self-knowing spirit the product is one and the same as that which produces it.”

\textsuperscript{36} For more on the sense in which spirit is aware of itself at once as life and as more than life see Frederick Neuhouser, “Life, Freedom, and Social Pathology,” in: A. Honneth and G. Hindrichs (eds.), Freiheit: Stuttgarter Hegel-Kongress 2011, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 2013.

\textsuperscript{37} Further important sites of transition are to be found in Hegel’s Science of Logic where the idea of life gives way to the idea of cognition (WL 6:487/775); in the Philosophy of Right where Hegel describes a transition from natural to ethical will (PR §§44f.); and in Hegel’s Lectures on Aesthetics in the discussion of natural and artificial beauty (VA 13:157ff./1:116ff.).
result, life points beyond itself “to something other than itself, viz. to consciousness, for which Life exists as this unity, or as genus” (PhG 3:143/109). The structure of spirit (Geist) presents itself to (self-)consciousness in the living, but it does so in a way that escapes the living itself. This does not, however, make (self-)consciousness something altogether different in kind, but rather—as Hegel explicitly formulates it—“this other Life” for which the structure of first life becomes recognizable. (Self-)Consciousness is, so to speak, a reflexive life, a life that knows itself as life. This has a twofold implication: (self-)consciousness continues to manifest itself as something living, but as a something living whose relation to its own life is transformed, because it knows itself to be alive and relates to itself as such. The possibility of this self-relation is ultimately conceived as a social relation among various living beings (in terms of their recognition of one another). This “other Life”—human consciousness—is not then simply an instantiation of its kind, but rather a participant in a form of life, a self-conscious subject of its practices that possesses a relation both to itself and to the manner in which it exemplifies the universal: “this other Life [...] for which the genus as such exists and which is the genus for itself” is “self-consciousness” (PhG 3:143/109; translation modified). Self-consciousness is the reflexively articulated form of a self-grounded order which manifests itself for this self-consciousness in the living in its most elementary form. The actuality of spirit is, in this sense, for Hegel not made possible by rational animals existing in another, intelligible world beyond the sensible world. It is rather made possible by their relating and accommodating themselves to their own nature, which they transform in a social process of experience and enculturation.

The way in which this program could be unfolded in articulating how a living self-consciousness might come about, can be seen in Hegel’s conception of a “second nature.” Hegel describes the emergence of this “second nature” on its most basic level in the emergence of his Philosophy of Mind, in a section called “Anthropology” (EPG §§388–412) and returns to this concept time and again to specify the mode of being of ethical life. The Anthropology deals with what Hegel calls “soul” and mediates between Hegel’s account of animal life on the one hand and his accounts of developed forms of subjective spirit on the other. Systematically, this section characterizes the slumber and the awakening of spirit in nature and describes the very passage, as Hegel explicitly says, “from necessity to freedom” (EPG §381Z). This passage is accomplished in the soul in some basic respects by means of the “mechanism of habit” that establishes a ‘second’ or an ‘artificial’ nature (EPG §410A). This mechanism of habit is especially interesting to the extent that it has a double aspect: on the one hand, it creates an artificial, self-produced nature and thereby frees the soul from some determinations of its first nature; on the other hand, it does so only by using a mechanism and by establishing a second nature. The soul cannot attain its freedom by means of an arbitrary act

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40 The general form of habit, articulated in the Anthropology, does not remain restricted to primitive forms of spirit’s activity, but on the contrary “is a form that embraces all kind’s and stages of mind’s activity” (EPG §410A), from man’s posture and his perceptual capacities up to the ethical (“the habit of right”) and thought (EPG §410A). For Hegel’s characterization of ethical life in terms of a second nature see especially PR §4 (“the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as second nature”) and PR §551 (“the ethical [...] appears as custom; and the habit of the ethical appears as a second nature which takes the place of the original and purely natural will and is the all pervading soul, significance, and actuality of individual existence”).
of will, by just abstracting from its first nature. It can attain freedom only by transforming its nature, and this means, on the elementary level, repeating or redoubling nature. Habit is the basic form of such a redoubled nature: “Habit has rightly been called a second nature: nature, because it is an immediate being of the soul, a second nature, because it is an immediacy posited by the soul.” (EPG §410A) In this self-posed immediacy, spirit is on the one hand free since it produces the very immediacy it displays; yet at the same time it constrains itself insofar as its ‘legislations’ take on the form of immediate nature for it, manifesting themselves as habits or customs.

But why does this form of second nature become necessary and how does it arise? Hegel describes the situation of the soul in such a way that on its way to freedom it faces the danger of an internal split, described by Hegel as a derangement or madness, which can only be overcome by means of habit. The soul “struggles with the immediacy of its substantial content in order to rise to simple subjectivity relating itself to itself” (EPG §408Z), and in this struggle the second stage it reaches is one of derangement: it is split between the fixed particularity it tries to overcome and its subjectivity which is free for itself (EPG §408A). Its free subjectivity takes the shape of “a purely formal, empty, abstract subjectivity” (EPG §408Z) and thus possesses only abstract freedom. In the stage of derangement the soul tries to unify its particular determinations and its free subjectivity, but succeeds only in the form of a subjective identity of the subjective and the objective. The self identifies itself subjectively with a particular determination and thereby falls short of its own generality and of the task of objectively realizing this unity. The mad person regards “an empty abstraction and mere possibility” as “something concrete and actual” (EPG §408Z). For example, the man who takes himself to be king, without objectively being in a position anywhere near to this, does so only on the basis of an “indeterminate universal possibility” (EPG §408Z): since a man in general can be king, the man in question could be one.

In this sense madness embodies a first, although unsuccessful attempt at a ‘free’ self-determination—the production of a certain unity of the particular determination of the soul and its general being as an I. The failure resides in the fact that madness falls short not only of the objective reality that doesn’t correspond to the mere possibility; it falls short even of the abstract freedom of the I itself, as the mad person, in deploying this indeterminacy, over-identifies with a particular determination: In the attempt to grasp itself in a particular and arbitrary determination, the deranged agent “forfeits the ability […] to remain perfectly present to itself in each of its representations” (EPG §408Z).

Now, habit is supposed to offer a different attempt at attaining self-determination. It offers a way for the soul to determine itself and nevertheless sustain its generality in this determination. It avoids both failures of madness: (i) it does not confine itself to a merely subjective identity of the subjective and the objective, but instead strives to realize such a unity objectively (it trans-

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41 That the self is at all capable of fixing itself to such an abstract possibility finds its basis in the fact that the I as such is a “wholly abstract, completely indeterminate I, an I thus standing open to any content whatever” (EPG §408Z). This abstract I indeed marks a genuine capacity of the mind to make itself indeterminate. Cf. PR §5, in which a certain aspect of the will is defined, namely “this absolute possibility of abstracting from every determination in which I find myself or which I have posited in myself, the flight from every content as a limitation.” The fact that madness draws from this capacity turns it into a "privilege" of man EPG §408Z: “Only man gets as far as grasping himself in this complete abstraction of the I. This is why he has, so to speak, the privilege of folly and madness.”

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forms the objective body).\(^{43}\) (ii) Secondly, it establishes a genuine mediation of the particular and the general, the singular being and its genus. In habit, the soul transforms particular determinations in such a way that they are situated in its general dispositions and capacities, and it articulates its generality in such a way that it takes on a particular shape (in the guise of specific habits). As concrete acts and sensations are transformed by means of repetition and practice into acts instantiating and articulating a general disposition that outlives the mere actualities, the soul realizes itself as a concrete and specifically articulated general being. Habit supersedes the mere collapsing of the general and the particular and enters the work of mediation, which allows one to relate to a “universal mode of action which constitutes one’s individuality” (EPG §410Z).

The prime variants of habit in which this happens are (i) the hardening against external sensations and distress, (ii) a dulling of desires by the habit of their satisfaction and (iii) the establishment of dexterity. In the hardening against sensations and the dulling of desires, the soul gains distance and liberty from particular, external determinations and determinations of its first nature, whereas in the establishing of dexterity it transforms itself (its body) “into an instrument” (EPG §410A) for its own particular actions and determinations: it incorporates purposiveness into the body. The establishment of dexterity is described in a way analogous to the living process of the articulation of shape: the living being turns its parts into means and thereby constitutes them as moments of a purposive whole. The mechanism of habit repeats this type of articulation in a ‘free’ mode. Hegel generally understands this process in such a way that by means of habit the soul “has made itself so at home in the content, that it moves about in it with freedom” (EPG §410Z). By means of repetition and practice a form of concrete generality is engendered over time in such a way that an accidental particular determination becomes essential, whereas the essential is determined as acquired and thus contingent.\(^{44}\) By means of habit the accidental and the essential intersect in order to constitute a certain form of contingent necessity, characteristic of the posited immediacy of second nature: they constitute a ‘necessity’ (EPG §410Z) and ‘naturalness’ (EPG §410A) that is distinct from the type of external necessity characteristic of inanimate nature.

Due to the process of habituation, the particular determinations do not appear as merely contingent individual sensations anymore, but as articulations of one’s own self. Habit in this way becomes a primitive articulation of freedom in the Hegelian sense of “being at one with oneself in the other.” In its habitual activity the subject relates in its acts and sensations to itself, insofar as the determinations that are appropriated by means of habit formation are not merely external but exist as posited by the activities of the subject. Habit is, in this sense, not just a mechanism of determination, but a basic form of self-determination. Habit enables the soul to take possession of its determinations and to be with itself in these determinations. That the soul is with itself in its determinations however does not mean that the soul is just identical to its determinations or completely immersed in them. Habit has the remarkable feature that the soul is with itself in its determinations without being fully absorbed by these determinations. The soul has reduced these determinations to features of its own being; it has reduced them to something that belongs to its very being, without however exhausting it.\(^{45}\) Thus Hegel understands habit as a means

\(^{43}\) Hegel’s concept of habit in this sense is not identical with the notion of custom that he attributes to Hume and criticizes harshly. Habit in Hume, it seems to Hegel, is thought as a merely subjective necessity—see VGP 20:278ff./3:372ff.

\(^{44}\) For more on this “becoming essential of the accident” and a “becoming accidental of essence,” see Malabou, The Future of Hegel, p. 160.

\(^{45}\) “In habit man [...] is free in so far as the natural determinacy of sensation is by habit reduced to his mere being.” (EPG §410)
of possessing one's determinations that implies neither that the soul stands in relationship with them as distinguishing itself from them, nor is absorbed in them, but has them and moves in them: is with itself in the other.

It is precisely the need to take into account this basic form of freedom and the correlative different sense of necessity—a 'free,' a 'self-constituted' necessity—that gives habit such a paradigmatic status for Hegel. In habit the soul not only establishes its second nature and new forms of mechanical necessity, it simultaneously establishes a new relation to this necessity. This is why this repetition or redoubling of nature is relevant to the passage from merely animal to a self-conscious life: An organization instituted and formed by habit opens up the possibility of a reflexive grasp of this form of organization. Remarkably enough, it is precisely the ambiguous mechanical character of habit that allows for the establishment of this self-relation: The habitual necessities establish such an automatic character that the soul is not totally occupied with them, but co-exists with and relates to them. The soul is in a sense detached from or “free” of the particular determinations it is accustomed to because by the very habituation and appropriation of them the soul reaches a state in which it is not “interested in or occupied with them”: “while it exists in these forms as its possessions, it is at the same time open to other activity and occupations.” (EPG §410)

If sensations or activities become habitual, they become a necessity that at the same time does not absorb and put the subject into bondage: in a given habit consciousness is simultaneously “present” and “absent,” “interested” and “indifferent”—it “just as much appropriates the matter-in-hand as, on the contrary, it withdraws from it” (EPG §410Z). In realizing them, the soul detaches itself from these actual expressions, these real possibilities, and keeps something in reserve. This detachment has a peculiar character because it does not occur as an explicit stepping back from an inclination, a process of distancing oneself from a tendency by means of an act of reflective deliberation. As Hegel points out explicitly, the soul does not stand in a relationship with its determinations “as distinguishing itself from them.” The detachment or reserve manifests itself in the soul, not by placing its determinations before and opposite to itself to evaluate them, but rather in the subtle form of the soul's not fully coinciding with these determinations, but instead having or moving in these determinations. As the soul is not dealing with something other—an opposed object—in these determinations but with itself, it thereby establishes and maintains a difference from itself. Only insofar as habit includes this detachment, this self-relation of the soul, can it avoid the failures of the deranged soul that completely identifies itself with a particular determination and thereby manifests its freedom only arbitrarily. Habit is a liberating form insofar as it sets the soul free to detach itself from the necessities it has become. On Hegel's account, this is, however, a precarious achievement that is always in imminent danger of being lost. The ruse of habit—the fact that it manages to establish the realm of spirit by taking on the form of nature and mechanism and turning it against the determinations of first nature—can reveal itself as the curse of habit: To the extent that habit becomes mechanical through and through and absorbs the whole soul, it can end up establishing spirit only at the cost of turning spirit into nature again. Hegel underlines this deep ambiguity of habit explicitly: “[A]lthough, on the one hand, by habit a man becomes free, yet, on the other hand, habit makes him its slave.” (EPG §410Z)

The danger that habit might absorb the whole soul and thus eliminate the peculiar detached self-relation it enabled in the first place is especially highlighted by the way in which habit can become deadening. Pointing to this danger, Hegel says that the habit of living “brings on death,” or to be more precise: that the habit of living if it becomes totally abstract “is death itself”
(EPG §410A; emphasis added).\(^{46}\) Hegel adds in further remarks that by means of the “completed cultivation of [an] activity, the \textit{vitality} of the activity expires” and man becomes old man (EPG §396Z), and that one only remains active in so far as one “has not yet attained something,” so that all activity can become blunt if one totally “habituates to life” (PR §151Z). Against this backdrop, it seems that we are facing the task of a constant process of acquiring and challenging, learning and unlearning our habits in order to maintain a self-relation through this mechanism of habit. It is in this self-relation, that of forming and actualizing a determination and the withdrawal from the actuality of the activity enabled by habit, that spirit is liberated. It is liberated by constraining itself and at the same time gaining distance towards its own constraints. This is the case not only for the soul and the basic habits it develops, but also on a different level for our ethical life that realizes itself in the mode of a second nature: “the realm of actualized freedom, the world of spirit produced from within itself as a second nature,” the practices, customs, and forms of life that are the embodiment of our self-determination.\(^{47}\)

Without entering the discussion of this more developed level of habituation at this point, it is already obvious that Hegel tries to develop a peculiar and original concept of second nature that gives us an idea of the extent to which nature and spirit are both continuous and discontinuous and that makes intelligible that spirit opposes itself to life and yet poses itself as at one with it. In contemporary discussions, the category of “second nature” typically comes up as an idea that is supposed to explain how normative orders might become effective and that shall help to dissolve the appearance that normative orders are constantly vulnerable to challenge. And indeed, in Hegel too the notions of habit and custom come up as remedies against a form of abstract and arbitrary freedom that fails to transform nature consistently (be it the freedom of derangement in the self-feeling soul or the abstract freedom of the will that might lead to a “fury of destruction”). However, the capacity to re-naturalize the artificial order we establish in transforming our first nature is only one side of the coin. The other side is the detachment that the subject gains and maintains towards its nature if it is a self-possited and second nature.

The way the reference to second nature is employed in contemporary discussions not only runs the risk that the qualification (second nature) may be underestimated, it also faces the danger that the naturalness of this nature may be reduced to immediate givenness and unquestionability.\(^{48}\) However, against the background of the self-groundedness of the vital order that I have tried to stress in my reading of Kant and Hegel, both (i) the naturalness and (ii) the secondariness of this form of nature can take on a deeper meaning. Second nature is (i) \textit{natural} not to develop a peculiar and original concept of second nature that gives us an idea of the extent to which nature and spirit are both continuous and discontinuous and that makes intelligible that spirit opposes itself to life and yet poses itself as at one with it. In contemporary discussions, the category of “second nature” typically comes up as an idea that is supposed to explain how normative orders might become effective and that shall help to dissolve the appearance that normative orders are constantly vulnerable to challenge. And indeed, in Hegel too the notions of habit and custom come up as remedies against a form of abstract and arbitrary freedom that fails to transform nature consistently (be it the freedom of derangement in the self-feeling soul or the abstract freedom of the will that might lead to a “fury of destruction”). However, the capacity to re-naturalize the artificial order we establish in transforming our first nature is only one side of the coin. The other side is the detachment that the subject gains and maintains towards its nature if it is a self-possited and second nature.

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\(^{46}\) The German text reads: “[E]s ist die Gewohnheit des Lebens, welche den Tod herbeiführt oder, wenn ganz abstrakt, der Tod selbst ist.” (EPG §410) See also VPG 46f./160f.

\(^{47}\) A full account of Hegel’s theory of freedom as self-determination would need to turn to the complex structure of this ethical life—this “realm of actualized freedom.” The articulation of the complex inner structure of this realm is, however, beyond the scope of this paper. Such an articulation would require: (i) an account of the systematic relation of Hegel’s descriptions of the subject as living individual, person, moral subject and participant of ethical life; (ii) an account of the inner complexity of the institutions of ethical life (family, civil society and the state) and (iii) the interrelations between individual and social freedom realized in these institutions and their interrelations. For far-reaching elaborations on these points see Axel Honneth, \textit{Das Recht der Freiheit: Grundriß einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit}, Berlin: Suhrkamp 2011; Neuhouser, \textit{The Foundations of Hegel’s Social Theory}; Pippin, \textit{Hegel’s Practical Philosophy}, Part III. The special task for my own account of the structure of ethical life concerns the way in which the mode of self-production and self-organization of the living can be illuminating with regard to the different levels of the actualized realm of freedom.

only in the sense of its immediate givenness, but also in virtue of its open productivity: the inner purposiveness produced in second nature is not the consequence of some antecedent given idea, but is rather a vital formative process. Second nature is a variant of living nature, not a variant of non-living nature. (ii) Second nature is a second nature not only because it represents a posited immediacy, but in the deeper sense that those who are subject to this second nature stand in a detached relation to it. A minded creature does not merely fall under its respective form of life; it has a relationship to its form of life and to its membership in that form of life. It is only this relation, this difference between a form of life and its participant members, that prevents second nature from becoming merely mechanical. A second nature only remains ‘lively’ as long as it can be held open in the process of formation and reformation.

Against the background of the structural parallels between autonomy and life, it thus becomes clear that Hegel’s concept of second nature implies a form of productivity (comparable to self-organizing living beings) and a socially articulated reflexivity (not reducible to the model of living beings). Only when we understand second nature in this manner does it become clear why Hegel tends towards the view that there is simultaneously a continuity and a discontinuity between life and spirit, naturalness and mindedness: they are continuous insofar as spirit must also bring itself forth without being able to simply receive its form and laws as antecedently given or given from the outside; they are discontinuous insofar as spirit develops a relation to itself, which it can generate only as a complex social struc-

ture. It is precisely this self-relation which preserves a quality of the vital order that tends to be utterly forgotten in usual concepts of second nature: the specific liveliness of this order.

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The book series “Freiheit und Gesetz” is dedicated to an idea that lies at the foundation of modern practical philosophy: the notion that being free and being obligated by norms (“the law”) do not stand in opposition to one another but instead bear on each other in an essential relation. This is the very idea of autonomy: laws are binding only to the extent that we have given them to ourselves. The series is devoted to the critical examination of this concept. It investigates the complexities and tensions presented by the idea of autonomy, the conditions upon which it is based, and the possible consequences of its political, juridical, and social realization.

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WORKS BY HEGEL

All references to Hegel's writings in this volume will use the abbreviations listed below. The abbreviations will be followed first by the page or section number of a German edition (in most cases the Theorie-Werkausgabe edited by Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel) and secondly, if it differs, by the page or section number of an English translation. The authors in this volume have sometimes altered the cited English translations where they regarded it necessary. The referenced texts and editions are the following:


Abbreviations


Works by Aristotle


Works by Kant


KrV: Kritik der reinen Vernunft, in: vol. 3 of Kant’s Gesammelte Schriften / Critique of Pure Reason, trans., ed. P. Guyer and A. Wood, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998 (cited according to the pagination of the first two editions, A (1781) and B (1787)).

THE FREEDOM OF LIFE:
AN INTRODUCTION
Thomas Khurana

For post-Kantian philosophy, “life” is a transitional concept that relates the realm of nature to the realm of freedom. From this vantage point, what is living seems to have the double character of being both already and not yet free: Compared with the external necessity of dead nature, living beings already seem to exhibit a basic type of spontaneity and normativity that on the other hand still has to be superseded on the path to the freedom and normativity of spirit. The origin of this constellation is to be found in Kant’s discussion of natural purposes in the third Critique; its most articulated shape, however, is developed in Hegel’s conception of life. To introduce the questions that this volume discusses, I will briefly characterize the way in which Kant opens up this conception of the living (I) and outline the way in which Hegel develops this approach (II, III). I will close with a brief outlook on the contributions collected in this volume (IV).

I.

After two critiques that have developed accounts of understanding and of reason, that is, of our theoretical and practical capacities for cognition, and of the correlative concepts of nature and freedom, Kant goes on to write a third Critique, devoted to the faculty of judgment, understood as an “intermediary” between reason and understanding. The way the first two critiques have developed understanding and reason, there seems to be a deep rift between the two realms that each of
them governs and between the correlative concepts of nature and the concept of freedom. The faculty of judgment is characterized by Kant as being productive of a concept—the concept of the “purposiveness of nature” (KU 5:196)—that is able to mediate between these concepts of nature and freedom. Generally speaking, this concept mediates between nature and freedom by making it possible to conceive of nature in such a way that it can be thought how freedom might realize itself in nature. It helps us see how nature can be understood by us to expose a form of order that goes beyond the order of causal necessities. It is in grasping what Kant calls “organized beings” or “natural purposes,” which are exemplified in living beings, that we so conceive of nature. Living beings seem striking to us because their structure would appear as contingent to the highest degree if we were only to judge them according to the “mechanism of nature.” The inherent order and necessity that they exhibit goes beyond what we are able to explain by means of laws of mechanical causality alone. Kant argues that we can only get to know these entities (KU 5:383; 370; 389f.; 400) and begin accounting for the “surplus of form” they exhibit if we consider them under the concept of purposiveness: if we treat them as if there were an underlying concept which is the cause of the reality of this being. We make use of an analogy with our own intentional purposiveness to conceive of the inherent necessity of living beings.

This analogous conception is, however, only partly adequate as we understand natural purposes not only as organized, but, more precisely, as self-organizing beings. We cannot point to a representation of the concept of the being external to and preceding this being, as we can in the case of an artifact, which is produced according to a design in the mind of its creator. We do not know the living being to be organized from without; it rather appears to us as organizing itself in the sense that its parts “combine themselves into a whole by being reciprocally the cause and effect of their form” (KU 5:373; translation modified). If there is a concept that is the cause of the reality of this being, it is not present as an external representation of this concept, but rather immanently present in the way in which the parts of the organized being condition and constitute one another.

This leads us to a conception of the living being in which it is the source of its own order: it is cause and effect of itself and in this sense subject to a form of organization that it itself brings forth. On Kant’s description the living being thereby constitutes itself in such a way that it is already susceptible to a normative description. Due to its inner purposiveness the living being suggests “that there is something that it ought to be” (EE 20:240).³ In bringing forth their own order, living beings not only exhibit a de facto order, but manifest a sort of oughtness: it seems to us that the living beings’ parts and operations do not just happen to be instrumental, but “ought to have been suitable” for something (EE 20:240). The living being thereby seems to be subject to evaluations qualifying to what degree its moments actually are suitable in this way and grasping to what extent an actual creature adequately lives up to itself, that is to say: to its species,

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¹ The concept of purposiveness thus answers to the task that Kant describes in the introduction of the Critique of Judgment: “Now although there is an incalculable gulf fixed between the domain of the concept of nature, as the sensible, and the domain of the concept of freedom, as the supersensible, so that from the former to the latter (thus by means of the theoretical use of reason) no transition is possible, just as if there were so many different worlds, the first of which has no influence on the second; yet the latter should have an influence on the former, namely the concept of freedom should make the end that is imposed by its laws real in the sensible world; and nature must consequently also be able to be conceived in such a way that the lawfulness of its form is at least in agreement with the possibility of the ends that are to be realized in it in accordance with the laws of freedom.” (KU 5:175f.)


or, in a more abstract expression: to the concept that is the cause of its existence. In this manner, the living creature manifests a norm to which it is specifically subject.

Thus, we might say that organized living beings constitute themselves and are in doing so, in a certain sense, laws unto themselves. Understood in these terms, living beings seem to exemplify a basic form of autonomy or normative self-determination and hence seem akin to the type of freedom that Kant has famously made the centerpiece of his practical philosophy. Of course, this does not mean that we can directly ascribe practical freedom to living beings. But, insofar as the order of the living gives us an idea of a natural form of self-determination and normativity, it seems possible that it might thereby at least allow for the mediation between concepts of nature and the concept of freedom. Schelling has made this possible role of the concept of the living explicit by defining life as “autonomy in appearance”: “the schema of freedom insofar as it reveals itself in nature.” The living being appears as a natural presentation of freedom, thereby suggesting that freedom might be realized in nature and hence answers to a major desideratum in Kant’s account: “If I am to rule in the world of appearance and to govern nature according to moral laws, the causality of freedom has to reveal itself through physical causality.” On Schelling’s account the causality of life is exactly such a physical causality revelatory of freedom.

There are, however, severe limitations with regard to the extent to which living beings can actually be considered as autonomous in Kant’s own account: Firstly, the self-determination and normativity they manifest still falls short of the autonomy of practical reason that is founded in transcendental freedom and that is understood by Kant to abstract from any material determination whatsoever. Secondly, the self-determination and normativity that we attribute to living beings is of such a sort that we cannot attribute it to them determinately, but only in an indirect and problematic manner. On Kant’s account, we are not equipped to directly grasp the form of self-organization peculiar to living beings: as we only have a discursive intellect we are forced to model living beings according to the inadequate analogy of practical purposiveness. Our teleological judgments of natural processes hence fail to fully grasp their peculiar form of self-organization and natural teleology and attribute purposiveness to them only per analogiam and indirectly. Kant adumbrates the form of an intuitive understanding for which the mechanism and purposiveness of nature would converge and that would seem to be able to positively know the organization of the living, yet at the same time he denies that we are capable of possessing or attaining such an intuitive understanding.

As is well known, this was a source of deep frustration for Kant’s successors who argued that Kant here denied us a type of knowledge the shape of which he had already outlined. Hegel expresses this sense of frustration when he points out that although Kant had rightly conceived of nature as subject-object in his understanding of living beings, he has unfortunately qualified this insight as a merely subjective conception. Kant has formed the idea of an intuitive intellect that would seem to be able to objectively conceive of nature as subject-object, but had failed to raise this idea to reality (D 2:103f./163). Although Kant concedes that this idea is “absolutely necessary,” it remains “problematic” for us (GW 2:325/89). The attempt to overcome this view of natural teleology and of the forms of

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understanding adequate to it as merely problematic has been a chief motivation for German Idealism.\(^7\)

II.

Kant has marked the problem of overcoming the mere opposition between our concepts of nature and the concept of freedom and has indicated that the natural purposiveness exemplified in living beings can play a decisive role in this task. Their mediation, however, seems to remain incomplete and problematic: As the actual concept of practical freedom goes beyond the basic autonomy presented by living beings, there seems to remain a gap; and as even the basic autonomy attributed to living beings is ascribed to them only problematically, the true foundations for this mediation seem inaccessible. Kant points to the precarious status of this mediation by suggesting that the “unifying point” can only reside in “the supersensible” (KU 5:341) and hence in something we cannot have positive knowledge of.\(^8\)

Now, Hegel accepts the task of thinking the passage from nature to freedom and he agrees with Kant that our conception of the living is central to understanding this very passage “from necessity to freedom” (EPG §381Z). However, he criticizes Kant (1) for the way in which he withholds from us any adequate form of knowledge of the living and (2) for the way in which he characterizes the remaining gap between living self-organization and practical autonomy. (1) Concerning the knowability of the living, Hegel rearticulates the concept of inner purposiveness and the living in such a way that it loses its merely problematic character.\(^9\) “Natural” or “inner” purposiveness is not an incomprehensible structure, dependent on an analogical use of a notion of intentional purposiveness. On the contrary, “inner purposiveness” designates the more fundamental concept and the most complete form of purposiveness, required in order to make sense of relations of finite purposiveness. Thus, we do not understand natural purposiveness by modeling it according to forms of intentional purposiveness, but on the contrary understand intentional purposiveness against the background of inner purposiveness. Intentional purposiveness appears as a finite form of purposiveness in so far as the end in this case remains external to the objects or sites in which it realizes itself, so that these objects can always be regarded as mere means to the realization of the end, and not themselves as its realization. Inner purposiveness, however, defines an end which “does not pass over into something else, but preserves itself, in its operation” (EL §204A; translation modified; cf. also WL 6:454/747f.). As aiming for an end means aiming for a concrete universal, for the objective realization of a concept, the concept of an end comes to itself only in the concept of inner purposiveness.

(2) But Hegel not only takes issue with Kant’s qualification of natural purposiveness as a merely problematic concept. He also questions the way in which Kant conceives of the gap between living self-constitution and practical self-determina-

\(^7\) See Eckart Förster, *The Twenty-Five Years of Philosophy: A Systematic Reconstruction*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2012, pp. 230ff. Förster describes the different ways in which Fichte, Schelling, Goethe and Hegel have launched attempts to develop further Kant’s ideas of intellectual intuition and intuitive intellect and have tried to “raise them to reality.” For an overview of the course of the reconstruction see ibid., pp. 373ff.

\(^8\) See KU 5:422: “Our reason does not comprehend the possibility of a unification of two entirely different kinds of causality, that of nature in its universal lawfulness and that of an idea that limits the latter to a particular form for which nature does not contain any ground at all; it lies in the supersensible substrate of nature, about which we can determine nothing affirmative except that it is the being in itself of which we know merely the appearance.” Cf. KU 5:428: “We have also seen that even the unifiability of the two ways of representing the possibility of nature may well lie in the supersensible principle of nature (outside of as well as inside us), since the representation of it according to final causes is only a subjective condition of the use of our reason.”

\(^9\) For more on this point see James Kreines’ essay in this volume, pp. 111ff.
Against this background, it does not come as a surprise that the concept of life plays an important role throughout Hegel's works. Historically, it is striking that although the concept of life seems to lose its prominence in the course of Hegel's development from the earliest writings to the *Phenomenology* and to make room for the concept of spirit as the foundational concept of his system, Hegel continues to employ the concept of life as a crucial transitory concept and, what is more, speaks of the “life of spirit” and hence characterizes spirit itself as alive in a peculiar sense. Systematically speaking, it is noteworthy that the notion of life plays a central role in all three parts of Hegel’s mature system: in his logic, where he describes life as the immediate idea and hence as the first form of true unity of concept and reality, subject and object (WL 6:464ff./756ff.); in his philosophy of nature, where he describes life as the highest point of nature (EN §§248, 350Z, 376Z), a point at which it becomes “practical” (D:2:109/168); and in his philosophy of spirit, which characterizes spirit as both opposed to and at one with life (WL 6:471/762; PhG 3:139ff./106ff.; 199ff./157ff.; EPG §§379Z, 381Z).¹⁵


Against this background the contributions in this volume are not confined to a certain stage in Hegel’s development or a certain part of his system. They rather take recourse to the whole span of Hegel’s development and address all forms in which the conception of life is developed—as logical life, natural life and spiritual life. In revisiting these conceptions of life, the specific question they unfold is how to relate logical, natural and spiritual life to self-determination and freedom. For this question the passage from nature to freedom, from natural life to the life of spirit is of special importance. But in order to understand this passage, it is of course equally important to understand the logics of life and the structure of natural life in its own right.

Throughout the different phases of Hegel’s works and across the different stages of its articulation, 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 (WL 6:464ff./756ff.) and, more specifically, of subject and object (WL 6:466ff./758ff.)—or, to put it in terms more common to the field of the living: a unity of soul and body. If life is that which vanishes when soul and body, concept and reality separate of themselves (WL 6:464/756), it seems that the living consists in the attaining and sustaining of such a unity and in realizing a “concept in its existence.” This living unity of concept and reality, subject and object includes a specific “organic unity” of the particular and the general (GW 2:326/90).  

The peculiar character of this living unity in all its different aspects is marked by two crucial features: Firstly, the fact that it is not arrived at by the mere subjection of one side to the other or the mere elimination of the respective difference (of concept and reality, subject and object, general and particular). It is rather a unity that contains and depends on the difference of the two sides unified in it. To use a phrase from the System-fragment 1800, life is not just unity, but rather the “union of union and nonunion” (SF 1:422/312).  

Secondly, this type of negative unity has a processual and self-constitutive character: it is not simply given as a unity or indifference of the respective sides; it rather only exists as an activity or process whereby the sides are differentiated and unified, unified in their difference and differentiated in their unity.

Hegel specifies three processes that articulate this living unity: the process of shape, the process of assimilation and the process of genus. These processes are outlined in the Science of Logic and are described in a more detailed and concrete way with regard to natural life in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature. While the process of shape concerns the living individual and the way in which its parts reciprocally condition and produce one another, the process of assimilation describes the relation of the living being to its (inorganic) other and the way the living being assimilates it. The process of genus finally concerns the way in which the living being relates to itself in its other: the way in which a living being relates to other living beings and reproduces its genus. These three processes can generally be under-

Hegel-Kongress 2011, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 2013; see also the recent special issue of Critical Horizons 13 (2012) on “Nature in Spirit”; with regard to the general idea that forms the background of this double character—the idea that “spirit has for us nature for its presupposition” and is at the same time “the truth of nature” and itself “its absolute praxis” (EPG §381)—see Michael Quante, “Die Natur: Setzung und Voraussetzung des Geistes,” in: B. Merker, G. Mohr, and M. Quante, Subjektivität und Anerkennung, Paderborn: mentis 2004, pp. 81–101.

* This unity of the particular and the general is manifest in the reciprocal determination of particular part and overarching whole, in the relation of living being and life process, individual and genus. For more on the concept of “organic unity” see Sally Sedgwick’s contribution in this volume, pp. 212ff.; see also her Hegel’s Critique of

Kant: From Dichotomy to Identity, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2012, ch. 2. Certainly, one could add further pairs to the ones named above that, according to Hegel, are brought into a new form of unity in life: cause and effect, means and ends, inner and outer are obvious further candidates of opposites that are unified in a specific way in the sphere of the living.

17 Cf. also the Phenomenology where Hegel characterizes life as an “absolutely negative or infinite unity” (PhG 3140/107).

18 For more on these processes see the contributions in this volume by Haase, pp. 104ff., Khurana, pp. 174ff., and Kreines, pp. 136ff.
stood as processes of self-constitution whereby the living being constitutes, preserves and reproduces itself and ‘unifies’ its concept and reality, subject and object, particular and general.

If freedom can be understood as a way of “being at one with oneself in the other,” as Hegel repeatedly proposes, it suggests itself to consider the living being as a possible candidate for a basic model of freedom. Insofar as the living animal constitutes, sustains and reproduces its unity by way of assimilating its environment and by reproducing itself (its species) in relating to an other, it seems suggestive to understand it as a being that is at one with itself in the other. However, although Hegel points out that in animal life nature in fact reaches the level of subjectivity, he does not go so far as to qualify natural life as free in the full sense. It seems crucial to Hegel that what is living manifests a higher form of necessity than the lifeless (EPG §381Z), but he explicitly insists that the “animal soul is still not free.” If we attend more closely to the processes of organic, animal self-relation, it becomes apparent that the way in which what is living is at one with itself in the other remains insufficient compared to the way the human will manages to be at one with itself in its other. In interesting ways, life does not have the fundamental structure of freedom for itself, but only for us—“this other life,” as Hegel says in the Phenomenology, that knows itself as life.

Hegel, thus, neither remains content with merely opposing life and spirit, nor does he aim to simply reduce human freedom to the self-constitution of natural life. Becoming a spiritual being for which life exposes a first form of the structure of freedom does not just mean continuously unfolding a potential that living beings already possess, it requires a turn or step that implies an essential transformation. In this transformation, detachment or abstraction from the determinations of life regain their place. But neither that which performs this transformation nor that which it results in can be described as simply foreign or indifferent to life. Spirit still has (or rather: leads) a “life,” even if the sense in which it does is deeply different from the way a plant or an animal has (or rather: is) a life.

The contributions in this volume thus do not aim to reduce the freedom of spirit to living self-organization or to identify life and spirit, they rather aim to investigate Hegel’s multifaceted concept of life in its logical, natural and spiritual articulation and determine its complex relation to the problem of free self-determination.

IV.

The Freedom of Life

The first two contributions by Karen Ng and Matthias Haase both start from the logical concept of life and touch on the notorious question in what sense the concept of “life” might have a rightful place in the science of logic as Hegel has famously argued. Both address this question indirectly by first clarifying the relation of life and self-consciousness, life and spirit. Karen Ng starts out from Hegel’s Jena writings in order to show that the structure of speculative unity that underlies Hegel’s conception of knowledge and truth is first defined as a relation of life and self-consciousness: as the unity of object and subject (or, more precisely: as the unity of the objective and the subjective subject-object). What is living is understood by Hegel as an objective subject-object and hence as a figure that Hegel accuses Kant and Fichte of failing to account for. Ng then proceeds to the *Phenomenology of Spirit* to investigate further the way in which life serves as the first object of self-consciousness. She develops the way in which self-conscious spirit depends on this first object and manifests itself as both different from and at one with the living. On her account, it is precisely this double character of self-consciousness that constitutes its very negativity. In closing Ng returns to the *Logic* and develops the way in which thought itself can be said to be dependent on the form of life.

Matthias Haase retraces why, in order to articulate the structure of mind, Hegel feels driven to start from the concept of life. According to Haase’s reconstruction, to start with the concept of life seems necessary to avoid a rationalist or empiricist theory of the mind. Where the first is unable to account for the actuality of mind, the latter is unable to account for its unity. Haase argues that by Hegel’s lights we have to depart from the concept of life in order to think both the actuality and unity, i.e.: the living unity of mind. The relation of life and mind is usually thought in terms of an additive model: subjective spirit is taken to be based on life, but defined by adding another layer to the more basic vital capacities (e.g. an additional ability of stepping back from our natural impulses and strivings). Haase criticizes this additive model and takes Hegel to outline a transformative model in which the step from animal to self-conscious life completely transforms the sense in which it is alive and also reorganizes the capacities self-conscious life seems to share with plant and animal life. This transformative model brings us back to the problem of logic as it requires a conception of concepts that allows for one and the same concept—the concept of life—to transform its sense through the different stages of its realization.

As the first two contributions give us an idea about the fundamental role of the notion of life in Hegel’s account of self-consciousness, spirit, and thought as such, the following contributions focus on the way in which the concept of life is thereby related to the problem of freedom and self-determination. The contributions by James Kreines and myself start out from certain parallels between figures of life and freedom. While Kreines argues that it is methodologically helpful to attend to formal features of the debate on free will in order to understand the debate on natural teleology and life in Kant and Hegel, my own contribution suggests that it might be useful to attend to the self-constitutive structure of the living in order to...

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23 For another formulation and different understanding of the thesis that “the first object of self-consciousness is life” see Pippin, *Hegel on Self-Consciousness*, pp. 32ff.; for the general thesis that on Hegel’s account life—and not dead matter—is the paradigmatic object of cognition see Dina Emundts, *Erkennen und Erfahren: Hegels Theorie der Wirklichkeit*, Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann 2012, pp. 323ff.; on the related notion that what is to be grasped by thought and thereby to be transformed into something known is the “factum of physical or spiritual [...] vitality” see Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Restlessness of the Negative*, trans. J. Smith and S. Miller, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 2002, p. 33.

make progress in understanding the structure of freedom as autonomy.

By analyzing debates on free will James Kreines gains a two-dimensional matrix of positions. In contradistinction to the common tendency to perceive these debates only according to one dimension differentiating between inflationary and deflationary accounts concerning the nature of free will, Kreines argues that it is important to acknowledge a second, orthogonal dimension: optimism or pessimism concerning the question whether we have free will. Where an inflationary optimist in fact ascribes to us the challenging type of freedom he has specified, the inflationary pessimist who shares this challenging account of the nature of freedom holds that we do not have such freedom (or: can never know we do). In this sense, Kant is characterized by Kreines as an inflationary pessimist about freedom. Kreines transposes this formal structure to Kant’s conception of natural teleology, in order to show that Kant is an inflationary pessimist in this regard, too. Kant argues for a strong concept of natural purpose, and at the same time doubts that we can ever positively know something to be a natural purpose. The main reason is this: “anything knowable by us can be a teleological system only if it is the product of a prior representation,”35 and it distinguishes natural purposes from artifacts that they do not depend on such a prior representation of the whole. This reconstruction allows Kreines to clarify Hegel’s critical response to Kant’s conception of natural teleology. Hegel gives up on Kant’s pessimism, but not by formulating a totally deflationary account, but rather by modifying his inflationary account. Describing the way in which living beings reproduce themselves, Hegel tries to show how we can objectively know of a concept that is the cause of that which it conceives without their having to be a representation of the concept external to and prior to the process of its realization.

My own contribution starts from the diagnosis of a widespread problem in the conception of freedom as autonomy—the threat of a paradox of autonomy—and considers the tendency to turn to laws of the living as a possible remedy, which gives us the right basic idea of an autonomous law. In order to investigate the merits of this strategy I turn to Kant and sketch a structural analogy between living self-organization and practical self-determination that in fact seems helpful to grasp the structure of autonomy. In a second step I consider Kant’s reasons for not drawing on this analogy and turn to Hegel who has deepened the analogy in terms of a systematic interrelation of life and spirit. In order to outline the way in which life and spirit are conceived of as both continuous and discontinuous by Hegel, I investigate his concept of habit as “second nature.”

The last pair of contributions—those of Catherine Malabou and Sally Sedgwick—both discuss the becoming of freedom and hence concern the passage from natural life to spirit. Malabou addresses this question by revisiting three interpretations of the master-slave dialectic in the Phenomenology of Spirit and by developing a critical perspective on them. This dialectic concerns a process of liberation that essentially depends on the way in which self-consciousness detaches itself from or attaches to bodily life. The three readings Malabou considers—Kojève’s interpretation, Bataille’s reading as presented by Derrida, and Foucault’s understanding as reconstructed by Butler—all reveal that the operations of attachment and detachment are intertwined or complicit with each other. The attachment to bodily life that characterizes the slave is at the same time related to a subtle form of detachment that the slave is subject to in the process of labor and formation. The detachment on the other hand that is characteristic of the master and, in a different way, of his double, Bataille’s sovereign, can be character-
ized as implying an attachment to detachment. In this dialectic of attachment and detachment neither a complete separation from bodily life nor a reduction to it seems sustainable. What Malabou finds problematic in all these readings is their diagnosis that within Hegel’s system it remains impossible to think a form of absolute detachment. Malabou closes by pointing to a form of absolute detachment that is not to be found in the context of the master-slave dialectic, but emerges later in the characterization of the absolute and its “giving up.” This form of absolute detachment is connected to a freedom beyond self-subjugation and related to a fundamental feature of the spiritual that Malabou characterizes as its plasticity.26

Finally, Sally Sedgwick examines the process of “Becoming Ethical” as described in Hegel’s Philosophy of Right. Even though Hegel on the one hand explicitly denies non-human animals the capacity of becoming ethical and suggests the necessity of a certain abstraction from the determinations of our living nature on our path to freedom, the ethical will can on the other hand only be explicated by recourse to the idea of unity of the particular and the general that Hegel had introduced as “organic.” By going through the tree parts of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right, Sedgwick traces how our will becomes ethical by coming to be exercised in such a way that it wills the universal in the right way. At the level of abstract right, the particular will already wills on the basis of a feature it shares with other particular wills, but takes no interest in the universal aspect of its willing. It understands the idea of right that it takes recourse to as implying an indifference to particularity and hence as being abstract. At the level of morality, the external relation of particular will and abstract right is superseded, but only by inter-

26 “Plasticity” designates the capacity of both giving and receiving form and further implies a radical negative capacity to annihilate form. For more on the role of this concept in Hegel see Catherine Malabou, The Future of Hegel: Plasticity, Temporality, and Dialectic, trans. L. During, London and New York: Routledge 2005.

nalizing this split and by reproducing the coerciveness of abstract right in a new form. It is only at the level of ethical life that a form of the will is established that overcomes the dualistic model of the will and that overcomes a structure in which one side of the subject assumes the role of self-sufficient lord as the origin of law and the other side is restricted to mere obedience. In order to think the inner form of this ethical will, Sedgwick points out, we have to think of an inner unity of particular and general that formally corresponds to the unity of an organism.

The series of these contributions highlights a remarkable double feature in Hegel’s thinking of the passage from life to spirit: On the one hand, the passage from natural life to free self-consciousness, from natural to ethical will, from first to second nature seem to imply a detachment from and a transformation of natural life. However, the capacities actualized in this transformation and the structure we arrive at are at the same time characterized as indebted to the form of life. It is only in and from life that free spirit emerges, and it is only by in turn gaining its very own form of spiritual life that it can maintain itself. Thus, the passage from life to spirit cannot be properly understood as a mere subjection or overcoming of life. For spirit to exceed life means at the same time to return to a form of life in a different guise. If this characterizes the genesis of spirit in general, it becomes clear why Hegel thinks that in spirit life appears both “as opposed to it” and “as posited as at one with it, this unity being reborn as the pure off-spring of spirit” (WL 6.471/762). Understanding this double relation defines the vanishing point of this volume in its attempt to overcome the alternative of either opposing life and spirit or of reducing one to the other. The task that Hegel defines for us is to articulate the way in which spirit might be both indebted to and excessive of, both opposed to and at one with natural life. How exactly to characterize the form of life and how precisely
to describe the opposition and the unity of natural life and spirit, is, of course, a contested matter between the contributors. As the different contributions emphasize both the unitary and the negative character of life, they raise the question how exactly to relate unity and negativity, completion and diremption in the concept of life. And as the contributions point to different figures for describing the passage from life to spirit—union of union and nonunion, a step up the ladder, a reflective turn, a relative or absolute detachment, a completion of organic unity—they pose the question how best to characterize the relation of life and spirit: is spirit best grasped as the “highest form of life,” as “an overcoming of natural life,” as “both alive and more than alive”? The purpose of this volume was not to defend a unanimous answer to these questions, but to establish their relevance and to re-open the debate upon them.\footnote{This collection has arisen from a workshop on “Life and Autonomy in Hegel,” hosted at the Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main in December 2010. I would like to thank the Exzellenzcluster “The Formation of Normative Orders” for making this workshop possible and its participants for their comments and critique. I should also like to thank Erick Jiménez for his excellent editorial assistance in completing this collection.}