



# verifiche

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KAREN NG, *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2020, pp. 319 (ISBN: 9780190947613).

Karen Ng's latest book stands brilliantly within the current Hegelian debate as it places the concept of life at the center of the interpretation of the Stuttgart philosopher's work. More precisely, Ng emphasizes from the very beginning how the relationship between reason and life is not a simple analogy, but a true characterization of thinking as a living and dynamic activity. In this sense, it becomes crucial for the author to demonstrate how the concept of life – understood in its philosophical and, more precisely, logical sense – plays an essential role within the totality of the Hegelian system, going on to characterize its general course and development. Thus, the subtitle of the volume – *Self-consciousness, freedom, logic* – becomes clear, recalling three problems internal to the Hegelian system, which are outlined by the author in light of the philosophical and logical concept of life.

Building on this argument, the author divides her text into three main parts. First, Ng stresses the importance of Kant's notion of inner purposiveness in order to understand the Hegelian Concept (chapter 2). Here the author underlines how, despite the different conceptions of its role in the two philosophers (i.e. regulative or constitutive), the Kantian concept of internal purposiveness could represent for Hegel the «positive counterpart to the negative aims of the Critique of Pure Reason» (p. 23), as well as showing how it is through inner purposiveness that «reason is enabled and empowered» (p. 24). In this way, the author emphasizes how the Kantian relationship between judgment and internal purposiveness allows for a better understanding of the Hegelian relationship between self-consciousness and life: just as the potentiality of judgment lies in the element of internal purposiveness, self-consciousness also finds its elaboration through the logical concept of life. The concept of life thus begins to show its importance in the process of knowledge, going on to open up the possibility of intelligibility, and thus becoming both a subjective and an objective element, for it is only through the logical concept of life that one finds the context in which subjects and objects are intelligible and have meaning.

This brings the author to the second assumption, consisting of a detailed understanding of the relation and opposition between life and self-consciousness, in order to show how the concept of life plays a

fundamental role in the absolute, self-determining and free act of knowing (chapter 3). The main tool for such analysis is the interpretation of the speculative identity thesis. In the author's words, «Hegel, far from severing the connection between self-consciousness and life, inserts their essential relation into his philosophical method, a method that can already be discerned in his first published text, known as the *Differenzschrift* (1801)» (p. 67). In addition, Ng emphasizes how such a method is contained not only in Hegel's early work, but also in his mature writings, and more specifically in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Science of Logic*, through the notions of the Concept and the Idea. Through these considerations, the author aims to show how the concept of life represents an *a priori* function in the process of self-consciousness, enabling immediate knowledge of ourselves, others, and the world.

Proceeding with the text, Ng moves on to the third point she wants to maintain, which is a «reading of the Subjective Logic as Hegel's own version of a critique of judgment, as his own accounting of the limitations and ultimate ground of judgment's powers, concluding that these powers are all grounded in a logical concept of life» (p. 165). To begin with, the author analyses the genesis of the Hegelian Concept, again using the link with Kant (chapter 4). In fact, the author ties the Kantian purposiveness of form to Hegel's essential potentiality of the Concept, as it is through it that the determination of the actuality of objects becomes possible, in the sense of real possibility, and not merely formal or logical. According to the author, in the 'Actuality of the Doctrine of the Essence' Hegel suggests his own determination of the concept as intrinsically characterized by purposiveness of form: «what Hegel calls the genesis of the Concept, or the 'immanent deduction' of the Concept, is his attempt to provide, in the logical context, a series of arguments for the constitutive character of inner purposiveness for any account of self-conscious conceptual activity whereby determinations of thinking have the power to determine actuality» (p. 126). In this way, the author shows how the three moments of the concept (particular, singular, universal) represent for Hegel the self-organized form of Kantian purposiveness.

Ng then aims to show how the sections of Subjective Logic (Subjectivity, Objectivity and Idea) contribute to the thought that life opens up the space of reason – «that self-conscious reasoning activities are actualizations of the immediate form of activity of life» (p. 165). Firstly, the author focuses on the Subjectivity section, showing how Hegel, drawing

on Kant and Hölderlin, considers the activity of judgment to be grounded in the «original judgment of life», suggesting how the possibilities of judgment are founded in the activity of life (chapter 5). Furthermore, she demonstrates how forms of judgment are for Hegel measured by their ability to express the form of life, moved by the unification of an end. In particular, the author shows how the final form of judgment, the judgment of the Concept, grounds the correspondence between subject and predicate in the essential constitution of the subject, that is, in the *Gattung* – which the author interprets as genus, kind, type. Ng therefore interprets Hegelian judgments as teleological, or life-form judgments, «insofar as judgment seeks the unity exemplified in the unity between an individual instance and its *Gattung*» (p. 166). Finally, the author moves on to the section Objectivity (chapter 6). If in the subjective Concept the primary focus consisted in the analysis of thought forms, «the treatment of objectivity concerns the objective reality and existence of the Concept, and the degree to which that objective reality can be understood as part of processes of self-determination» (p. 219). In this sense, the author analyzes the mechanical, chemical and teleological processes to show how only in the latter is the self-determining activity of the Concept totally realized.

In the first stage, Ng presents the transition from internal purpose to the concept of life – and the section comprising it, the Idea – by analyzing the third section of Subjective Logic (chapter 7). In particular, the author shows how the Idea «completes an argument that Hegel began in outline in the *Differenzschrift*, thereby providing his system with an absolute, scientific method» (p. 244), in that it brings back again and in a definitive mode the relation between self-consciousness and life. Later, the author emphasizes how Hegel presents the relationship between subject and object in the Idea in terms of purposive activity, that is, through the action of the subject positing and structuring objective reality according to its purposiveness – and this reciprocity will be the condition for the realization of the True and the Good. Finally, in this section the author focuses on how Hegel defines the self-determined form of the Concept «the absolute judgment», tying it to the «original judgment of life», which has a dual manifestation, interpretable in light of the constant dialectic between life and cognition. Finally, the author concludes her «discussion of the Idea by offering an analysis of theoretical and practical cognition, which grow out of Hegel's account of logical life as an a priori

schema» (p. 279). Indeed, for the author «the logical form of life enables and constrains the activities of theoretical and practical cognition», where «cognition is understood by Hegel to be the result of life's self-division from itself, a result of the Idea 'doubled'» (p. 21).

Overall, Ng's text represents a decidedly successful attempt to bring to attention the centrality of the theme of life within the totality of Hegelian work. With her text, in fact, the author has succeeded in emphasizing how life is not for Hegel a theme whose relevance is restricted to the Philosophy of Nature but rather represents an essential element in structuring the entire realization of the system. In particular, the author pays special attention to the Hegelian treatment of the logical concept of life, bringing the focus of her research on the presence of this concept within the *Science of Logic*. Such a treatment is moved by a very strong thesis, which is the beating heart of Ng's proposal: the concept of life plays a fundamental role in the structure of Hegelian philosophy, not only in the *Science of Logic*, but in the whole system in general. Focusing on the concept of life allows the elaboration of a totally innovative idea of thought, in that one is not positing a simple analogy between two elements, but is precisely asserting that the nature of thought consists in its vital force, in the dynamism of the dialectical-speculative movement and in the organicist structure of its parts.

In this way, Ng succeeds in breaking away from the American strand (whose main representative is Robert Pippin) that posits a sharp distinction between nature and spirit, seeing in the second element the conceptual heart of Hegelian work. On the contrary, showing that thought is structured in a mode relative to life leads to a structuring of the terms reason, spirit, freedom, as not opposed and divided with respect to the natural concept of life, but, on the contrary, as intimately related to it. The overcoming of such dualism may also be very useful for allowing more attention to be paid to Hegel's Philosophy of Nature, which should no longer be regarded as less significant than the Philosophy of Spirit and its major themes, but rather of equal importance and fundamental for the characterization and understanding of the characteristic elements of human experience.

In this sense, one element that might point to a later development of Ng's work can be found in the analysis of the relationship between Hegel and the scientific field – in particular, in relation to the biological sciences of his time. This might help to understand the profound

influence played by the natural sciences of the time for the Hegelian elaboration of thought through the philosophical, logical, but also scientific concept of life. Indeed, it is well known that Hegel's knowledge of the sciences of his time was very thorough, and an analysis of how the scientific field influenced and shaped the Hegelian (logical, philosophical) idea of life could be very interesting. This is a topic which other authors (e.g., Achella, Illetterati) have addressed. But when accompanied with such a careful and thoughtful analysis of Hegelian logical terms as Ng's, returning to the scientific context that influenced such Hegelian concepts might prove even more interesting and appealing.

(Silvia Locatelli)

ANDREA STAITI, *Etica naturalistica e fenomenologia*, Bologna, il Mulino, 2020, pp. 160 (ISBN: 9788815287502).

L'oggetto di analisi dell'ultimo lavoro di Andrea Staiti è sicuramente da annoverare fra i meno frequentati in Italia (e non solo negli ambienti fenomenologici). A dispetto della rilevanza della cosiddetta *metaetica* nel dibattito filosofico di tradizione analitica, infatti, sembra che in Italia essa sia passata quasi inosservata. Da questo punto di vista, il libro di Staiti rappresenta uno dei primi seri tentativi – da parte del pensiero fenomenologico – di invertire questa tendenza e di fare i conti teoricamente con alcune sfide concettuali poste dalla metaetica analitica.

In uno stile agevole e asciutto e con un'argomentazione sempre controllata e ricca di esempi, Staiti seleziona alcune questioni della metaetica facendo interagire con essa la fenomenologia (e segnatamente quella di ispirazione husserliana). Le finalità che si pone Staiti con questa operazione non sono storiografiche ma prettamente teoriche: lo scopo generale è infatti quello di mostrare come l'introduzione di una «sensibilità filosofica» diversa come quella fenomenologica permetta di «chiarire» molti «aspetti dei fenomeni assiologici» ed etici «non adeguatamente tematizzati dal dibattito contemporaneo» (pp. 30-31) e di superare alcune contrapposizioni irrisolte fra naturalisti e intuizionisti (non-naturalisti). Al contempo, il testo si presenta come un interessante tentativo di saggiare le potenzialità teoriche della fenomenologia, e il risultato sembra