

The Principle of Life in Hegel's Philosophy

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Abstract

Life has a central position in Hegel's philosophy, and its development has gone through the stages from primitive unity to finite life. In this process it appears in two forms: the first is the form of conceptual definitions about life, which mainly involves Hegel's preexisting thoughts, and these definitions are born out of his thinking about how to overcome the subject-object split; the second is the form of the principle of life, which mainly appears in the process of constructing Hegel's philosophical system, and the dialectical kernel of which is reflected in his combining of life with negativity. The study of the principle of life in Hegel's philosophy enables a complete understanding of Hegel's thought. This study deals with three aspects to reveal the principle of life in Hegel's philosophy in terms of vitalization of the self, changes in pre and post thought. The vitalization of the self in Hegel's philosophy is discussed, and the principle of life in Hegel's philosophy is elaborated in two stages: the first and the second.

Keywords

Hegelian Philosophy, Principle of Life, Concept, Subject-Object Split, Dialectic

1. Introduction

Generally speaking, people tend to oppose Hegel's conceptual dialectics system to the principle of living individual life, and even think that it kills the individuality of life with the universality of concept, which is actually a misunderstanding. Looking closely at the texts of Hegel's philosophy, especially his logic texts, we can see that Hegel elevates the concept to a living principle of individual life in his description of its development. In the author's opinion, this upgrading process has gone through two important stages: the first stage is to transcend the traditional "category theory" and place the "concept" on the platform of the "essential self", thus making the concept have the right to be understood by the individual. The first stage is to transcend the traditional "category theory"

and place the “concept” on the platform of the “essential self”, thus giving the concept a dialectical nature of the unity of opposites. This stage can be called the concept’s (essential) self; the second stage is to understand the concept of the “essential self” as an individuality, so that it becomes the “subject” self, and to further elevate the subject self to the individual life on the platform of the object or nature; finally, the completion of life is reached in the life-awareness of the individual life to itself, and this stage can be called the individualization and vitalization of the self.

Reading Hegel’s writings it is not difficult to realize that there has been a central metaphor in his philosophical system i.e. the dynamic activity and development of life to describe the process of the activity of reason and thought (Lumsden, 2021a). Hegel uses the term life in his philosophical writing, and after careful observation and reading, we realize that he does not mean for us to take the word life literally, nor for us to see reason as life in the abstract he means that reason is a dynamic, living movement that is constantly developing (Baumann, 2021). So, when Hegel made a systematic expression of his philosophy, he abandoned rational thinking in the sense of knowledge, abandoned the early idea of love, and made a complete expression of his philosophical concepts in his philosophical writing by using the implicit principle of life, why is the principle of life, which is in line with Hegel’s expression of his philosophical thought, in which he not only pays attention to the reality but also pays attention to the abstraction of philosophical thought. In his philosophical thought, he not only pays attention to reality, but also abstraction, so comprehensively this concept of life which has both concrete content of physical life and abstract expression fits and expresses Hegel’s philosophical thought very well, and in the elaboration of the principle of life, we can also clearly see the thought vein of the establishment of Hegel’s philosophical system. Although this internalization and generalization of life make us a little obscure when we read Hegel, it is helpful for us to understand Hegel’s entire philosophical creation. The study of the principle of life in Hegel’s philosophy allows for a complete understanding of Hegel’s thought. For this reason, we put forward the life principle in Hegel’s philosophy and understand the philosophy of life through the interpretation of the life principle in Hegel’s philosophy.

2. Vitalization of the Self

The concept develops into individual life, which is not yet the completion and realization of life, and therefore not the highest link of the concept to which Hegel aspires. Because the totality of life is the unity of individual life and life as a class of life, on the one hand, the class represents the universality of life, therefore, life must tend to the class; but on the other hand, the individual is not equal to the class, therefore, the significance of life depends on the contradiction or tension between the individual and the class (Lumsden, 2021b). The way for living organisms to solve this contradiction is reproduction, through which the in-

dividual life always tries to achieve unity with its universality, the class, to realize the meaning of its life. According to Hegel, this way of unifying the individual with the class is inferior and cannot achieve true unity. For no matter how many generations an individual reproduces, it is always the individual that achieves unity with the universality of the class, and therefore reproduction, although it is the manifestation of “ideas” or truths, is a direct manifestation. What, then, enables an individual life to achieve the universality of the class? According to Hegel, cognition and practice are the platforms through which the universality of the class is manifested and realized in the individual (Ventura, 2021). Thus, it can be said that only in cognition and practice can life achieve the realization of its universal nature, and on this basis truly realize the unity of the individual and the class. This kind of life that grasps and realizes its significance in knowledge and practice is a human being and the realization and understanding of life achieved by human beings through knowledge and practice is the highest state of life. Hegel’s entire discursive dialectic (as logic) ends in such a realm of life, which he calls the “Absolute Idea”.

To sum up, in Hegel’s speculative dialectics, there exists a process of the development of a concept from itself through self, entity, subject to individual life, and it ends in the self-realization and awareness of individual life. This shows that Hegel’s discursive dialectic is permeated with a principle of life, and life is the truth of Hegel’s so-called “concepts”. In this respect, Hegel’s discursive dialectic contains a modern (contemporary) meaning in its abstract form.

3. Interpretation of Life in Pre-Existing Thought

3.1. Pure Life vs. Limited Life

Hegel’s definitions of pure life and finite life are in opposition to each other. He sees “pure life” as God, which we can also understand as truth, infinite being (Corti, 2022). Hegel quotes from the Gospel of John when he says “In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the life was in God” “Since the divine is pure life, anything that is said about him or anything that is said about him must contain no opposition in itself”, which means that everything alive is pure life, and that everything alive is pure life, and that everything alive is pure life. “That is to say, everything that is alive is characterized as life only when it partakes of the divine nature (Hristov, 2022). And in God, life is a complete reality, containing no contradictions in itself, and producing no oppositions, and thus no bondage or qualification, and thus is infinite and complete, not divided. The counterpart to this pure, complete, infinite life is then finite life. Hegel sees individual things, finite things, as opposed to life, but these finite beings are in turn a part of the infinite life external to it so that the finite person is opposed to the infinity of life because of its limitations (Kislev, 2021). For John was only a witness to the truth and light of Jesus, he could not in himself be equated with the light and truth, he was only aware of the light and truth in a particular relationship, not purely aware of it. For each of these finite

things has its opposite; the opposite of light is darkness, and John is not light; he is only a witness to the light, and the light he feels is only the light he realizes in a particular relation, but the light he realizes cannot be fully equated with the light itself.

By using the contents of reference 5 as a base study, pure life in Hegel's case is God, an infinite being, but this pure life still has the possibility of being trapped in knowingness if it just stays pure. How to make this knowing return to reason and God, then we have to make this God transcend from infinite opposites, and through the diversity of life combine the whole of life with living things to express the whole of life with a multitude of individuals, so that the infinite whole becomes a compendium of infinite life, and the individual life is the external manifestation of the infinite whole, and the concrete form of the manifestation is the living things (since we are finite), and in turn the infinite life is of course the full realization of the animate (in fact here Hegel's animate is still mainly focused on the finite individual), which is a dialectical process. In other words, the finite individual can only be equated with the divine nature in the sense that it can only be equated with the divine nature, not with the purely infinite life of God. Hegel further demonstrates this antithesis in his exposition of Love.

3.2. The Life of the Process

In Hegel life is a process which unfolds from the primordial unity of life and returns to itself again and again (Kislev, 2021). Love is nothing but a subjective emotion, and love wants to achieve meaning in life only by objectifying itself. In the dynamic process of development of life, the individual life contains both opposing and connected sides in itself, and it reaches infinity by abandoning its finitude or overcoming its division (Ikäheimo, 2021). By using the contents of reference 8 as a foundation study, an individual life can be both relative to an infinite number of individual lives and an element of an infinite number of individual lives, which is a prerequisite for the diversity and infinity of what constitutes life. The antithesis set up by individual life is an infinite life with infinite diversity, infinite antithesis, and infinite connection; for individual life, Hegel uses nature as an example, and he sees infinite life as both a diversity and a unity, and this unity is both a separate and a combined organism, and nature is set up as a life (Hegel et al., 2021) that is not true life, and true life is the infinite and complete life that is transcended from this relation of opposites, so that in looking at life we should not identify the connection only and ignore the opposition, but should unite the two as a higher union. But something like dead matter should not be included in infinite life.

From the above Hegel's expression of life, we can see that whether it is a "living thing" or a life as a process, they play only one role, that is, to overcome the division of subject and object and maintain integrity and unity. After the above discussion, especially the criticism of Christianity, Hegel realized that religion cannot bridge the gap between reality and thought, but can only make an ab-

stract connection between them and that if it wants to make the two seamless, it has to be accomplished with the help of life, because the subjectivity of love and the opposition of the individual life cannot achieve the infinity, completeness and unity of thought. The subjectivity of “love” and the opposition of individual life cannot achieve the infinity, completeness, and unity of thought. Whether it is the living thing or the life of the process later on, Hegel’s greatest concern during this period is still the problem of division. He overcomes this division through the exposition of life, starting from the original unity of life (God), and finally goes back to the process of the whole life and overcomes this subject-object division, and his thought is maturing continuously.

To quote from literature 10, only when death, opposition, is set up in the totality of life, is true life realized (Ayala, 2021). This proves that what is dead is equated with “inorganic nature” in late Hegelian thought, and that inorganic nature is a prerequisite for the development of natural life. Hegel realized at this time that the existence of life is not opposed to the existence of inanimate objects, and the individual with limited life is a part of all infinite life. Moreover, in the investigation, we found that Hegel believed that in religion, we can combine the individual life and the dead. In fact, this combination has surpassed the intellectual unity of subject and object in the sense of Kant and Fichte. We know that in Kant, the subject can never grasp the thing itself as an object, and grasping it beyond the boundaries of categories will lead to antinomy, so intellectuality can only recognize experience, and Fichte feels that self and self-set non-self can never really achieve unity. The limitations of the two have truly realized the unity of subjectivity and objectivity through the life of Hegel’s process.

From the above Hegel’s expression of life, we can see that whether it is “living things” or life as a process, they play only one role, that is, to overcome the division between subject and object and maintain integrity and unity. After the above discussion, especially the criticism of Christianity, Hegel realized that religion can’t bridge the gap between reality and thought, but can only make an abstract connection with them. If we want to make the two fit together, we must do it with the help of life, because the subjectivity of “love” and the opposition of individual life can’t achieve infinite, perfect and unified thought. No matter what is living or the life in the later process, Hegel is most concerned about the problem of division during this period. He tries to overcome this division through the discussion of life, starting from the original unity of life (God) and finally returning to the whole process of life to overcome this state of division between subject and object, and his thoughts are constantly maturing.

To sum up, we can see that the origin and production of the life principle in Hegel’s philosophy is actually to overcome the division of subject and object and achieve the unity of thought. This life is a living and evolving process, and the life here does not yet have the status of a philosophical principle but only exists as a basis for overcoming division to reach unity, and as to how the principle of life functions in Hegel’s philosophical thought, we will explain it further.

4. Understanding of the Life Principle in Latter-Day Thought

4.1. Ideological Connotations of the Principle of Life

Hegel argues that “what is a negation of self-consciousness is equally a negation of itself, just as, on the one hand, consciousness is a return to itself. Through this return to itself, the object becomes life. That which the self-consciousness takes to exist apart from itself, in so far as it is set up as existing, has not only the form of sensible certainty and perception in it, but it is also a return to its being, and the object of that present desire is life.” (Kabeshkin, 2021) By using the contents of reference 11 as a basis for his study, he expresses two ideas here, one that sees that object to which consciousness returns to itself as life, and one that sees the object of desire as life. The return of consciousness to itself is the process of the subject returning to itself through negation, and this life is more focused on a process of movement. So what is the role of life in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*, is it just a concept? And how does it play a role in the establishment of his philosophical system?

Scholars usually hold two attitudes toward Hegel’s life in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. One is the direct use of the concept of life as a kind of material that explains. Koeffler, Inwood, Honneth, and Holgate, among others, generally consider life as difference without difference, while ignoring the aspect of life about self-consciousness and spirituality. In his *Introduction to Hegel*, Kojève often uses phrases such as “human life,” “risking one’s life,” and “one has to preserve one’s life.” This understanding of Hegel’s life only in terms of the concept of life is not enough, because in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* it is also revealed why life is constitutive and objective. The difference between Honneth, Holgate, and others like Koeffler is that they elaborate somewhat on the concept of life and recognize that life has an important place in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* (Ayala, 2021). For example, Holgate considers the concept of life as a turning point, a prerequisite for the chapter on self-consciousness, and he interprets life as a capacity for reflection, he believes that understanding the real in its entirety with the help of knowing as life means not only to attribute a principle of sameness in the form of a “force” to the separate perceptual elements but also, more importantly, to learn how to grasp the relationship with such a principle of sameness and to the “force”. More importantly, it also means learning how to master the synthesis of consciousness about this knowledge, and that life is a reflective activity manifested by the subjects involved in it. But while Honneth and Holgate concentrate on the relation between life and consciousness, they leave behind the relation between life and spirituality. In this perspective, however, their focus is not on life. Holgate only emphasizes from the perspective of life and desire that the object of negation of “desire” must be a living object, that desire does not originate from life, but that the object associated with desire must be life, and that they only see life as the object of desire here. For them, life is only a prerequisite for the activity of desire.

The other considers the role of the concept of life in Hegel’s philosophical

system, and there are three main points of view. First of all, he analyzed the concept of life from a holistic perspective. Forster believed that life is the unity of the differentiated, and he believed that when interpreting life, we should focus on the meaning of life in the historical process of spiritual development, and we should recognize that life is involved in the history of the development of consciousness, the history of the transformation of thought and the history of spiritual form. Secondly, there is the idea of interpreting the concept of life through the lens of Hegel's early religion. In his discussion of life as a variant of love, Bessel argues that the early love of mystical miracles, which could not be expressed in the form of inference, was transformed into the experience of love that could be grasped in the process of life. "This interpretation is essentially a genealogy of the development of ideas about the concept of love or life in Hegel's system (Kabeshkin, 2021). The last is the view that focuses on the conceptualization of life. In his book *Marx and Hegel Studies*, Hippolyte argues that Hegel gradually changes from describing life to conceptualizing life. Life appears as a concept in the dialectic of the finite and the infinite, ultimately expressed in the sense that the infinite is the living principle of the relation, and life is a "Crestless".

The second interpretation is slightly stronger than the first because, in the second interpretation, they at least see Hegel's life as an organism and parse the meaning of life from a holistic perspective, a view that, although it examines life in the context of the system, still ignores Hegel's use of the term life in the sense of philosophical principles. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel, after replacing intuition with consciousness, made a deduction from his philosophical system of the absolute spirit in the form of the subject materialized through its life, this process can also be regarded as the objectification of the dialectic, and the objectification of the dialectic it is life as the content of the content of the fullness of life, life as the flesh and blood of the dialectic appeared, so it is also through the dialectic, then the understanding of life as an organism alone, but still ignored the use of the term life in the sense of the philosophical principles. Then it is not so appropriate to understand life as a concept alone, so in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* it is more important for us to grasp life in a principled way.

4.2. Moving from Concepts to Systems

Hegel injected the dialectic, richness, and fluidity of life itself into logic, turning his logic into a logic full of life movement. He believes that the idea and logos themselves contain the life force, and it is precisely because of the inner surging of the life force that the idea itself is abundant, full, and self-contained. At the same time, the idea, through the expression of logical categories, presents the logical process of its movement, and this logical process is certainly the logical process that overcomes the knowing, the logical process that is full of life force. Therefore, in Hegel's case logic appears as the dialectical logic of the oneness of the black and the Idea, and is not the logic of knowing in the Kantian sense in the sense that we understand it to connote the principle of life, no matter how

we understand it. But what we need to note is that here Hegel himself overcame the subjectivity of life in the previous thought, continuously objectified it, continuously established himself through the negation of life, continuously materialized himself, and finally presented himself in front of us in the form of the dialectic of life.

Hegelian dialectic, as it draws on the ancient Greek theory of purpose, hopes to put up the structure of dialectic through his efforts. Through the transformation of traditional logic, Hegel put forward his vital dialectical theory to solve his philosophical dilemma, clarify his philosophical system, and seek a reasonable scientific method for the metaphysics of intellectual forms, which is full of the philosopher's humanistic feelings and the pursuit of providing the times and the individual life with a spiritual home by their nature.

Hegel believes that because of the restlessness and impulse of life itself, the meaning of life is displayed, and it is this restlessness and impulse that life will constantly ask to transcend its finiteness and approach eternity and infinity. It can be seen that, in Hegel's view, the dialectic of the meaning of life, this awareness of the meaning of life makes us realize that the spiritual home of life is not outside of life, but in life, and the dialectic of life is the logical expression of our awareness of the meaning of life. Therefore, Hegel takes life as the principle and completes the positive transformation of dialectics by overcoming the negative form of traditional dialectics through the complete expression of life. Purpose theory makes dialectics obtain a theoretical cornerstone of vitalized entity, and reintegrates the theoretical destination of dialectics into the realization of the meaning of life. Through the dialectic of life, Hegel keeps moving from subjectivity to objectivity, and in the process of objectification of the subject, he puts his philosophical concepts in motion and constitutes his scientific philosophical system.

5. Concluding Remarks

By summarizing several definitions of life in Hegel's early period, Chapter 2 reveals that the genesis and emergence of the principle of life in Hegel's philosophy is in fact born in order to overcome the subject-object schism and achieve the unity of thought, and that this life is a living and constantly evolving process, and that the life here does not yet have the status of a philosophical principle but exists only as a basis for overcoming the schism and achieving unity, and that, as to the principle of life how it functions in Hegel's philosophical thought, we will explain it further.

Chapter 3 reveals the three concepts of life in Hegel's thought by summarizing several definitions of life in Hegel's later period. In fact, in the early period, life mainly serves as the foundation for overcoming division, but in the later period, especially after the writing of *Phenomenology of Spirit*, life has not only served as the foundation, but also been generalized or internalized in Hegel's entire philosophical system as a kind of implied principle. The principle of life in He-

gel's later thought is also the principle that Hegel's philosophical system is constructed to adhere to.

In the early stage, Hegel focused on the division of real problems, and in the later stage, he overcame this division in the form of life and thought. Whether in the early or late period, Hegel regards life as a process of continuous movement and development, which always shines with the light of dialectics, and takes it as his responsibility to constantly overcome contradictions and establish a process of self-denial. However, the previous life mainly discussed the concept of life, starting from the actual concrete life and starting from religion, and based on this, discussed how to solve the contradiction of the division between subject and object. In the later period, Hegel internalized life into life principle, revealed life principle for us in the process of establishing his own scientific philosophy system, and revealed the process of constant objectification of life, which turned to objective dialectics of life, and in this process, the concept of life was generalized, and even he felt that the whole universe was alive. After the above discussion, the development of the principle of life in Hegel's early thoughts is presented to us, and it is also of positive significance for us to fully understand Hegel's thoughts.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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