

The Supreme and Ultimate Purpose of Science

On the Teleology and Immanency of Hegel's Logic

This paper investigates the subject of teleology in Hegel's Logic in a continuation of the scholarly reception of Karen Ng's 2020 monograph *Hegel's Concept of Life*, in particular the critical response by Stephen Houlgate. We argue that the dichotomy resulting from this debate, where the Logic's development is either teleological or strictly immanent, skips over some minor, but crucial nuances in both author's conceptualisation of teleology, as well as Hegel's. As such, what is under discussion is not Ng's investigation of the logical determinations of Teleology (as a category) (e.g. Ng, 2020, chapter 6) but a potentially underdeveloped analysis of how the development of any or all categories could or could not be seen as teleological. Currently, Ng's book features, according to Houlgate, 'problematic passages' which would reintroduce the age-old argument for the need for an aim, purpose, or otherwise external referent in Hegel's logical transitions (Houlgate 2022, 228) – despite Ng's own repetition of the crucial of immanent nature of the Logic itself (Ng 2020, 96). From this fundamental critique flow others by Houlgate, such as the potential 'subjectification' of the Logic by reading the Concept as self-consciousness. This paper reframes the debate by putting the emphasis on the distinction between internal and external teleology. First, we argue that Houlgate reads Ng's perspective as potentially introducing *external* elements into the logic, not because of its particularly teleological reading, but because he attributes an *external* teleological reading to it. This is not entirely inaccurate, but misses a potentially bridging moment, which our methodology explores. When Houlgate rejects the external teleological reading of the Logic by stressing the immanent, non-teleological development of determinations (Houlgate 2022, 229), he not only seems to reject an *external* teleological reading, but any teleological reading in general. Second, we show how Ng both explicitly disavows this position (the Logic as externally teleologically determined), while also inhabiting some of its language and features throughout – for example in her discussion of the section on Judgement. There, Ng argues that the development of the various forms of judgements should be measured / read against the category of Life, the Gattung-concept. Ng argues further that each preceding judgment fails or is inadequate in relation to the objectivity of life (e.g. Ng 2020, 187, 199). This resembles a teleological reading potentially undermining the immanence of the Logic. Third, we show how this (internal/external) disjunction is also present in two other crucial discussions between Houlgate and Ng: (a) on the primacy (or not) of internal (over external) purposiveness in Kant (Houlgate 2022, 227; Ng 2020, 50), and (b) on the introduction of concepts at a moment in the Logic at which these concepts have not yet been developed (Teleology/ Actuality) (e.g. Ng, 2020, 126). Fourth, we develop a 'teleological' reading which differs from, but is in our view fully compatible with Houlgate and Ng. For this we return to Hegel's own discussion of Teleology as logical category in relation to the crucial distinctions between purposiveness and teleology, in order to further develop the internal/external tension. This is done by on the one hand an analysis of the 'teleological sentences' (v.a.v. *spekulative Sätze*; EL §88) in the Logic, meaning references by Hegel to the end or purpose of the Logic or philosophy as a whole (e.g. EL §6, §9, §17; GL 18, 508, 556, 738), which we argue Houlgate and Ng have not fully explored. On the other hand, we explore the relation between teleology and Hegel's conception of need and drive in the Logic (e.g. EL §4, §11-12, §204; GL 14, 23), which we again show to be insufficiently addressed by both authors.¹

¹ Citations from: Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *Logic, with the Zusätze*; trans. Théodore F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, and H. S. Harris, *The Encyclopaedia*, I (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1991); Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, trans. George Di Giovanni (Cambridge University Press, 2010); Stephen Houlgate, 'Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic', *The Philosophical Review* 131, no. 2 (1 April 2022): 226–30; Karen Ng, *Hegel's Concept of Life: Self-Consciousness, Freedom, Logic* (Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).