
Confronting Natural Death in Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*

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Within Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit* we find two radically opposed versions of the human confrontation with natural death, and while neither is able to counteract death's power to erase us, Hegel's text allows us to evaluate the way each appears ethically. While in Hegel's section on Life he gives us a complete account of what natural death entails for the living, we see in these later sections of the *Phenomenology* that what matters in the human encounter with death, so it seems, is how our confrontations with natural death may or may not constitute our relationship to human life more generally. Death's power to erase us persists, in other words, and yet the power of the self-conscious community in relation to death seems to have ethical significance regardless.

In this essay, I will thus be analyzing Hegel's account of our consignment to oblivion at the hands of natural death, and I will be juxtaposing ways in which Hegel describes human beings grappling with the threat of this oblivion through the tools afforded by the achievement of a self-conscious community. The essay itself will thus consist in an extended analysis of Hegel's section on Life, followed by an analysis of the human engagement with natural death as it occurs in the stages of the Ethical Order and Absolute Freedom and Terror. Having diagnosed both the threat of natural death for the self-conscious individual and having identified two versions of the self-conscious confrontation with this threat, Hegel's *Phenomenology* enables us to evaluate

these multiple versions of the human engagement with natural death in terms of how we might want to understand them ethically. The following essay is thus framed by my contention that the human engagement with natural death, though historically situated in each of its modes, can become a question for us, and further by my suspicion that how we answer this question has important ethical significance for how we treat one another.

Before proceeding to the analysis of the text, it is perhaps worthwhile to at least mention how the issue of the mortal exposure of the individual in the *Phenomenology* has framed certain trajectories of continental philosophy in the 20th century. One of the most significant thinkers in this regard is Theodor Adorno. His critical reorientation to the text is designed to remind us that, throughout the development of Spirit, the frailty of human life never goes away. Understanding “Spirit” as the totality of labour, Adorno writes:

... idealism becomes false when it mistakenly turns the totality of labor into something existing in itself, when it sublimates its principle into a metaphysical one, into the *actus purus* of spirit, and tendentially transfigures something produced by human beings, something fallible and conditioned, along with labor itself, which is the suffering of human beings, into something eternal and right. (23)

For Adorno, the threat of idealism is that it can occlude our ability to see the concrete individual in his or her toil and suffering as standing behind or beneath what emerges as the seemingly effortless self-expression of human society and culture. If the name “idealism” gathers those perspectives that track the trans-individual accomplishments of human creativity and self-awareness, the worry is that the products of this creativity and self-awareness cover over and/or justify the human suffering upon which they may depend. Adorno and others have thus asked whether Hegel’s *Phenomenology* is complicit with a modernity that has sacrificed the ethical relevance of the concrete human individual in his or her exposure to mortality and to suffering.

It is in the spirit of this 20th century tradition of thinking about Hegel that Walter Benjamin stands as the paramount advocate of the ethical relevance of the dead. Benjamin introduces the notion of a “Messianic cessation of happening” or of “Messianic time” (“Theses” 263), according to which historical atrocities can be redeemed through our engagement with them in the present. In spite of death’s power of erasure, Benjamin contends that there exists “a revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past” (“Theses” 263).

Such are the stakes for Benjamin. But as Max Horkheimer writes to Benjamin in 1937 in recognition of death’s power precisely to erase us, “the slain are really slain” (cited in Benjamin, *Arcades* 471).¹ For Horkheimer, it is not possible to redeem the murders of the past, and to claim to be able to do so is theological. If Benjamin thematizes a way in which we might confront death so as to address the crimes inflicted upon the individual by an oppressive history, Horkheimer speaks to the fact that the erasure of the individual by death wins no matter what, and hence that the murders of the past are beyond our reach.

For myself, I would like to hold out the possibility that there may indeed be a revolutionary chance to fight for the oppressed past as Benjamin imagined it, but that this will depend upon the degree to which our engagements with the erasures of death go hand in hand with our treatment of the living. *If* the way we confront death is in some way constitutive of how we treat one another, then even the failed attempt to retrieve the concrete individual from the oblivion of death is ethically significant. Hence, while Horkheimer may be right that the past cannot be redeemed, the lives of those around us may be at stake in the way in which we approach this irredeemability. Through my analysis of Hegel’s account of natural death, and likewise of the two versions of the human confrontation with natural death that Hegel presents, I

hope to introduce the possibility that how we engage with death is ethically relevant, and that this is the case *even if* the slain are really slain.

Life as Self-Repose

In Hegel's account of Life in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, it appears as a whole emerging from out of the dynamism of the living things within it. The very notion of "Life" names certain material processes that comprehend all living things within them and within which living things occur as internal differences. As such, "Life" refers to the apparently infinite or indefinite unity to which living things belong, and this belonging is disclosed by living things in their dynamic coming to be and passing away through one another.²

In describing Life, Hegel makes use of the mathematical image of axial rotation and of time as having the stable shape of space.³ Life is thus an emergent pattern that resolves out of the "restlessness" of its internal differences. These differences are then that which Life as an overall process supersedes and/or reabsorbs. The internal differences of Life are thus in constant motion, while Life itself appears as a stable whole.⁴

The internal differences of Life are nothing other than living things. As a result, the ontological status of living things as discrete, singular beings is complicated by the way in which they are constitutively a part of Life. Hegel describes living things as "differences" [*die Unterschiedenen*], with an "enduring existence" [*Bestehen*] (*Phenomenology* 106/140), but also as "moments of infinity" and as "moments of the pure movement [of Life] itself" [*Momente der Unendlichkeit oder der reinen Bewegung selbst*] (107/140). Living things are "distinct members" [*unterschiedene Glieder*] (106/140) or "independent members" [*selbständigen Glieder*] (107/140), hence their distinctness and independence is qualified by their membership in

something larger than themselves. Living things are “*for themselves*” [*für sich*] (107/140), yet their essence consists in trans-individual Life as “that simple fluid substance of pure movement within itself” [*ihr Sein ist eben jene einfache flüssige Substanz der reinen Bewegung in sich selbst*] (107/140). What we see, therefore, is that living things are self-moving and self-relating without being materially separate from the processes of Life that exceed them. They are differentiated, independent beings that are for-themselves, and yet they are also ephemeral moments of Life’s trans-individual processes,⁵ and it is their self-directed, self-investing activity that distinguishes them from Life, even though they remain internal to Life.⁶

What, then, are the trans-individual processes that constitute Life? From the evidence that Hegel provides we can identify the process of reproduction, on the one hand, and of consumption, on the other. The trans-individual patterns of continuity and flow out of which living things come to be and pass away are thus the processes according to which living things produce each other from out of themselves, and according to which living things consume what is external to them in order to sustain themselves. The opening of living things onto that which exceeds them through the processes of reproduction and consumption gives the lie to each living thing’s assertion of its self-standing separateness and being-for-self. This constitutive opening thus comes to be through the conduit of these two essential life processes.

For Hegel, the nature of reproduction as trans-individual is to be a process by which living things come to be passively and from out of material continuity with other living things, but likewise, in coming to be living things immediately take over their being actively. As Hegel writes, “Life in the universal fluid medium, a *passive* separating-out of shapes becomes, just by so doing, a movement of those shapes” (*Phenomenology* 107/141). This is to say that while

living things are not the cause of their own coming to be, they are nevertheless beings that are actively self-moving and self-relating.

To survive as the being that it is, the living thing must oppose its immediate and undifferentiated absorption into Life, and this must take place even though the living thing remains in any case internal to Life as one of Life's moments. According to Hegel, then, the living thing "comes forward in antithesis to the *universal* substance, disowns this fluent continuity with it and asserts that it is not dissolved in this universal element" (*Phenomenology* 107/141). What Miller translates as "fluent continuity" is "*Flüssigkeit und Kontinuität*" (107/141), hence it is the fluidity and continuity of Life that the independent shape must "disown." Within this context, the fluidity at stake is nothing other than the flow between one generation and the next, and hence the flow that makes possible the continuation of Life despite the finitude of individual living things.⁷ The living thing asserts that it is not dissolved [*aufgelöst*] in the universal element, even though it emerges from of this universal element through the fluent process of reproduction.

The self-assertion of the living thing against its continuity with Life is performed for Hegel through the act of consumption, or, as Hegel states, the living thing "preserves itself by separating itself [*durch die Absonderung*] from its inorganic nature,⁸ and by consuming it [*durch das Aufzehren*]" (107/141).⁹ The living thing consumes, and by consuming it asserts that it is *itself* and that existence belongs to *it*. Through the act of consumption, the living thing "gives itself the feeling of unity with itself" (108/141-142).

In this regard, the procurement of the "feeling of unity" is achieved paradoxically through the performance of continuity insofar as the living thing consumes the bodies of other living things. The living thing gives itself the feeling of unity with itself, but as a result the

Absonderung [separation], according to which the living thing comes forward in antithesis to fluid Life, is compromised. This is the case even though this *Absonderung* or “antithesis to the other” is that through which the living thing establishes itself so as to “exist for itself [*sie für sich ist*]” or to be being-for-self.¹⁰ The *Aufzehren* [consumption] compromises the *Absonderung* even as it also confirms and maintains *Absonderung*, since *Aufzehren* compromises and yet also confirms and maintains the living thing’s differentiation and distinction from fluid Life.

In the constant cycling of Life’s fluidity into different organic shapes through the flows of consumption, and in the constant replacement and renewal of these organic shapes through the flows of reproduction, Life is given the look of nothing less than graceful self-repose as a moving image of eternity, or as the “pure movement of axial rotation” (*Phenomenology* 106/140). Life appears as if to be dynamically self-renewing and self-replacing, or as Heidegger reads Hegel, “[l]ife means the *being* which produces *itself from out of itself* and maintains *itself* in its movement” (*Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* 143). And, insofar as the phenomenon of Life is entirely dependent upon the activity of living things within it, the movement of the whole is the result of the self-directed activity of the living things, or as Claus-Autur Schleier explains, the “*Prozeß der Gestalten*” [process of the shapes] produces the “*Gattung*” [genus] (100).¹¹ Hence through activity on the part of beings that have in the first instance their own survival as their objective, Life emerges as a phenomenon with a dynamic but stable shape. As self-directing and self-relating “differences” internal to Life living things inadvertently engage with one another through the processes of reproduction and consumption so as to produce the image of Life’s self-repose.

By drawing an analogy between the classical idea of the “moving image of eternity” and the structure of the emergent image of Life as a whole, Hegel determines a position for living

things within Life according to which the individual events of their coming to be and passing away do not register as changes to the shape of Life as self-repose. Just as time appears as the stable shape of space through the eternal patterned motion of the solar system, Life is a stillness for which the events that constitute the reality of living things are not *eventful*.¹² In this way, the cycling of mortal generations through the process of reproduction, and the cycling of matter through the process of consumption appear within the image of Life like the regular motions of the heavens—temporal events that in their regularity achieve the stable shape of the non-event. Another way of putting this would be to say that Life appears as something that essentially does not change, even though it consists in internal differences that are themselves finite and mortal.¹³ For this reason, Gadamer writes that Life for Hegel “*als Gattung in achtloser Verschwendung und Opferung des Individuums erhält*” (52) [Life is “conserved as genus in the careless wastefulness and immolation of the individual”—author’s trans.], or that the “axial rotation” at work consists in nothing other than the vanishing and sacrifice of each individual living thing.¹⁴

In this regard, Hyppolite makes the claim that Life has no history because it does not develop. As Hyppolite writes, organic nature “*n’a pas d’histoire parce qu’en elle l’universalité n’est qu’un intérieur sans développement effectif*” (35) [Organic nature “has no history, because within it universality is only an interiority without actual (real) development”—author’s trans.]. Since living things are directly exchangeable and replaceable in relation to one another, the shape of Life as compared with any future or past version of itself is essentially the difference that makes no difference. From the perspective of Life as self-repose, no individual shape is of consequence as such, and the living thing is of no consequence apart from its momentary participation in Life’s self-maintenance. Life as dynamic self-repose is thus antithetical to the individual living thing insofar as the living thing would be uniquely relevant. To the contrary,

when we view the living thing in terms of its immersion in Life, that living thing is disclosed as a semi-stabilized moment in the flow of mortal generations and in the flow of the exchange through consumption of organic matter, rather than as a uniquely determinate and irreplaceable being in its own right. Life's self-repose is predicated in this regard upon the living thing's coming to be and persisting, but also upon the living thing's ultimate exchangeability and replaceability, and hence upon the erasure of the living thing as a unique event of being.

Life's Bacchanalian Revel

To say that the coming to be and the passing away of living things are non-events in Life is not to say that these singular events are irrelevant. They are necessary, but only as essentially repeatable. In this regard, no particular birth or death is significant as such or in its uniqueness, but each appears as if it is indistinguishable from every other and as if it is capable of seamlessly taking another's place. Cumulatively, then, these indistinguishable events add up to the self-repose of Life, such that Life appears as a dynamically self-perpetuating process through their effects.

In the Preface of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel presents us with a similar figure of "simple repose" constituted by the coming to be and passing away of its internal differences. This is the figure of the Bacchanalian revel—Hegel's image for truth, for reality, and for the basic narrative structure of the *Phenomenology*. Hegel's account of the revel is as follows:

The True is thus the Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk; yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out, the revel is just as much transparent and simple repose. Judged in the court of this movement, the single shapes of Spirit do not persist any more than determinate thoughts do, but they are as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent. (27-28/46-47)

Where Miller translates, “yet because each member collapses as soon as he drops out,” Hegel writes “*und weil jedes, indem es sich absondert, ebenso unmittelbar [sich] auflöst*” (107/141). Hegel thus uses the terms *Absonderung* [here, “collapse”] and *Auflösung* [here, “dropping out”] in his description of the Bacchanalian revel—terms that he also uses in his description of living things in their separating from and dissolving back into the fluidity and continuity of Life. This line could alternatively be read as saying “and because each, as it separates itself, likewise immediately dissolves itself,” or, more loosely, “and because each, as it detaches, is likewise immediately reabsorbed,” or again “and because each, as it comes into being as itself, likewise immediately becomes fluid with the general movement.” Insofar as any particular shape of truth separates out or establishes itself as a distinct and determinate formulation, it is just as easily dissolved back into the movement of truth as a moving, transforming process. The overall motion achieves self-repose despite its internal differences through the resolution, the *Auflösung*, of the internal differences—an *Auflösung*, or dissolution, that occurs following the moment in which each *sich absondert*, or in which each separates into its own self-standing autonomy.

Thus the Bacchanalian revel is a self-repose that, like Life, emerges out of the restless movement and perpetual coming to be and passing away of its internal differences. Gerhard Bolte refers to the revel as an image of “*Die wahre Substanz*,” and writes that “*Die wahre Substanz ist die absolute Bewegung selber, ruhendes Zentrum im wechselnden Reichtum ihrer Erscheinungen, den sie als einfache Totale frei in sich trägt*” (14) [“The true substance is the absolute movement itself, the calm center within the alternating richness of its manifestations that it as a simple totality carries freely inside itself”—author’s trans.]. According to Bolte, the differences are unified through their very movement. The revel refers to *Substanz*, and Substance

is precisely the absolute movement consisting in the unity of two seemingly incompatible aspects—a calm center that takes shape through constant restlessness.

The consequence for the internal differences within this movement is that they are able to maintain their determinacy only provisionally. In this regard, Heinz Röttges describes the revel as a matter of the dissolution of identity—what in terms of Life would entail the dissolution of the being-for-self and self-standing of the living thing, and hence that of its being-alive. Röttges makes this claim in relation to the revel's reference to Bacchus as the Wine-god—the god of intoxication. According to Röttges:

Die Klarheit und Ruhe des Weingottes ist nichts anderes als der genossene Wein, der für sich betrachtet die besondere Individuen ihrer Positivität beraubt so, daß das Verschwinden ihrer Identität und die durchsichtige Ruhe des Weingottes ein und die selben Reflexion in sich ist (427). ["The clarity and the calmness of the Wine-god is nothing other than the savoured wine that, considered for itself, dispossesses particular individuals of their positivity [their existence]. Hence the disappearance of their [the individuals'] identity and the transparent calmness of the Wine-god are one and the same reflection in itself."—author's trans.]

For Röttges, then, the vanishing of the specific individual is itself the stillness of the Wine-god. The disappearance of the individual's identity and the transparent stillness of the god are one and the same *Reflexion in sich*.

It is in this regard that the movements of Spirit and of Life are structurally alike. Robert Brandom makes this connection in his discussion of the revel when he writes:

The integrity of the ongoing affair is maintained, however, for as soon as one participant has fallen exhausted and immobile beneath the table, beyond further participation—a concept showing itself inadequate and unsustainable, the commitments it incorporates accordingly dissolving—its place is taken by another, fresher reveler bringing renewed (although still temporary) vigor to the fête ... The Concept, like the organism, is not to be identified with its constituents at some time-slice of its career,

but with the process by which those elements fall away and are replaced.
(151)

According to Brandom, the falling away of the exhausted participants of the revel, or likewise the dissolving of the commitments of the concept revealed in its insufficiency, are homologues to the passing away of living things. Similarly, the emergence of another series of revelers who refresh and renew the revel is homologous to the renewal of the shape of the genus in the birth of a fresh generation. Brandom's use of the notion of "organism" is thus not simply metaphorical. While truth is a "Bacchanalian revel in which no member is not drunk" and within which there is "just as much transparent and simple repose" (Hegel, *Phenomenology* 27-28/46-47), Life in its "self-repose" is "an absolutely restless infinite" in which "the differences of the movement are resolved [*aufgelöst*]" (106/140). Revelers are reabsorbed as quickly as they drop out because they collapse from drunkenness, finite ideas are reabsorbed as soon as they come forward because their grounding epistemologies "collapse," or are surpassed, by other ideas, and individual living things "collapse" as soon as they separate because they are intrinsically fated to death and transformation via consumption and to death and replacement via reproduction. In each case, and hence with regard to the revel, to truth, and to Life, the relative infinity of the whole is not opposed to but rather predicated upon the finitude of the individual shapes within it.

The status of the ephemeral, internal differences vis-à-vis these processes is thus ambiguous in its own right. Hegel writes with respect to the revel that they are "as much positive and necessary moments, as they are negative and evanescent" (*Phenomenology* 27-28/46-47). Such negativity and evanescence indicates that the moments are lost, and yet their positivity and necessity entails that these moments have a claim to being in any case. If, as Rainer Schäfer argues, the traditional interpretation of Plato holds that what appears sensuously has "*einen*

geringeren ontologischen Rang gegenüber dem eigentlich Seienden (Ideen) [a lower ontological standing if compared to what actually exists (i.e., ideas)—author’s trans.],” then for Hegel, again according to Schäfer, “[d]as Erscheinen ist selbst eine Tätigkeit des Absoluten [appearance is itself an act of the Absolute—author’s trans.]” (265).¹⁵ The true infinite (*wahrhafte Unendliche*) is one in which the finite and ephemeral shapes are nevertheless positive and necessary constituents of the overarching process.

It is this notion that makes sense of the final lines of Hegel’s *Phenomenology* where Hegel quotes, with an important and I would say intentional modification, Schiller’s 1782 poem *Freundschaft*. According to this poem, the World-master in his loneliness produces all of creation in an effort to have a friend equal to himself. Schiller’s lines read “*Aus dem Kelch des ganzen Seelenreiches /schäumt ihm—die Unendlichkeit,*” which Hegel changes to “*aus dem Kelche dieses Geisterreiches /schäumt ihm seine Unendlichkeit*” (493/591). Following Miller’s translation of Hegel, the English thus reads “from the chalice of this realm of spirits/foams forth for him his own infinitude.” In this regard, the relevant change is from “infinity” to “his own infinitude” such that existence in all its infinite manifestations is internal to the god from which it issues. Hegel also changes “Seelenreiches” to “Geisterreiches,” which Donald Phillip Verene reads as the difference between “this realm of spirits” to “the whole realm of the soul.” As Verene points out, this modification changes the site of the location of creation to *within* the World-master himself. According to Verene:

God’s relation to the forms of his creation is that of fellow sufferer. Although his being is that of the true infinite, he suffers the quest to make actual and determinate all the moments within His infinite. (7)

Speaking in this regard, as Verene does, as though Spirit were an active being in its own right, Spirit’s differences are internal to itself, and they come to be and pass away as a part of Spirit’s

self-development. According to such a reading, Spirit suffers the passing of its internal differences as it labours to complete the exhaustive manifestation of all its dimensions. But even if we were to regard Spirit as a completely dependent phenomenon that never actually acts and consists only in the collective activity of individual living things, Verene's analysis would still hold insofar as it underscores the fact that the constituents of Spirit are necessary despite being ephemeral. The differences internal to Spirit come to be and pass away, but they are also essential dimensions of the absolute, and their timely manifestation is essential for the absolute's development. Spirit's internal shapes are necessary *as* ephemeral, and so they have a claim to being, even though this claim is eventually and necessarily revoked. They are essential not in their specificity or uniqueness, but rather as constituents of the actualization of Spirit.

Determination of the constitutive moments of Spirit as necessary *and* ephemeral is thus instructive for understanding the relationship between the emergent image of Life and living things. Life's internal differences are as much positive and necessary as they are negative and evanescent. A sufficient number of living things must come to be, maintain their being, participate in reproduction, and pass away in order for Life to emerge as a system of trans-individual processes and hence as the figure of benign self-repose. Living things in their existence and their participation in consumption and reproduction are essential to Life's stable shape of self-repose, and hence each living thing has a claim to this essentiality. But even as such, the *Auflösung* [dissolution] of each living thing is as critical to the constitution of Life as is its *Absonderung* [separation].

Nevertheless, a critical difference obtains between the structure of truth described by Hegel as the Bacchanalian revel and the structure of Life. This difference becomes apparent when Hegel writes of the revel:

In the *whole* of the movement, seen as a state of repose, what distinguishes itself therein, and gives itself particular existence, is preserved as something that *recollects* itself, whose existence is self-knowledge, and whose self-knowledge is just as immediately existence. (*Phenomenology* 27-28/46-47)

The individual shapes of truth that come to be and pass away are preserved insofar as they are recollected. The implication, then, is that truth is the memory of what has passed or of what has been negated or refuted. In this regard, truth is a tomb of the different moments constitutive of the whole but which no longer exist as such. Truth is the preservation of the memory of the dead, or it is where the shapes internal to it that have passed away are retained insofar as their having-been must be explicitly recalled and acknowledged for this trans-temporal reality to be transparent to itself.

According to Edith Wyschogrod, then, “[m]emory functions to make that which was mere externality a possession of Spirit” (98).¹⁶ Recollection grants particular existence to the individual shapes of truth of the revel so that these become essential dimensions of the manifest self-knowledge of the process as a whole. In this way, the revel describes the dynamic structure of the *Phenomenology*, since the *Phenomenology* is also a self-developing whole within which determinately negated stages are recalled as essential developmental moments. The *Phenomenology* could thus be read as a narrative through which recollection of determinately negated elements enables the gradual achievement of perfect self-transparency for Spirit as Absolute Knowing.

There is thus a kind of recovery from death in the form of recollection that takes precedence in the *Phenomenology*, since it is through such recovery that Spirit moves in the direction of self-knowledge. In the development of Spirit, the return from death of those shapes of Spirit—return in the sense of remembrance—is what gives Spirit the image of knowing itself,

or it is what generates the image of Spirit as determined again and again as the process of an in-itself becoming for-itself. It is for this reason that we can speak of Spirit as suffering the death of its finite constituents and as trudging forward through the *Phenomenology* on the “way of despair” (49/72) (there is a word-play in Hegel on this point between “doubt” [*Zweifel*] and despair [*Verzweiflung*]). In so doing, Spirit seemingly self-actualizes its way to an ever greater and more comprehensive expression of its coming to self-awareness.

What can we say about Life with regard to this dimension of recollection? Spirit appears as a developing totality, and this means that each subsequent stage thereof *is not* a matter of simple replacement. By contrast, living things *are* simple replacements of one another—not from their individual perspectives as instances of being-for-self, but insofar as they are seen from the perspective of Life as constituents of Life as a whole. Life’s relative eternity is thus explicit and immediate. The image that emerges of Life’s present, past and future is constituted through processes that continually produce and renew sameness.

Insofar as Life casts the figure of an eternal present, is it possible to speak of Life as the tomb in which all the dead are recollected? Yes, insofar as Life only appears as such by virtue of the existence of living things as its constituents. And yet no, insofar as individuals of the past do not need to be recollected as such for the present to understand itself. With regard to the image of Spirit, internal differences that have passed away are made intelligible in the image of Spirit’s apparent self-development, and yet the internal differences of Life are “remembered” only insofar as they are causally related to the future but not in the sense that they could ever be recalled as such. Living things come and go, but Life remains an image of the same processes with the same essential parameters, and hence as identical with itself. The recollection proper to

the image of Life is thus in-itself but not for-itself. Life can be seen in its full shape without citing in specific its moments that have passed.

What are the consequences for living things that Life emerges as an apparent totality whose past is effectively identical in shape to its present and hence whose recollection is irrelevant to an understanding of Life's contemporary shape? It means that living things are constituted as essentially exchangeable, consumable matter, on the one hand, and as essentially replaceable instantiations of the genus, on the other. The flow of one generation into the next and the flow of one living thing into the belly of another can take place without Life registering an essential change in its overall shape. We can identify certain significant disruptive events—the events of life and death—when we consider the existential condition of any particular living thing within Life, but these events do not disrupt the overall perpetuation of Life and hence they are essentially irrelevant as such. Life's eternity is sustained, therefore, because reproduction *is* replacement and because consumption *is* the simple exchange of living matter. The living thing, as it appears in the context of the image of Life's eternity, is thus truly finite. When an individual living thing, held strictly within the context of Life, is *aufgelöst* [dissolved], it vanishes with regard to the image of Life as an intelligible shape. For this reason, Life presents the living thing with the real possibility of its erasure. To be a living thing in the context of Life is thus to be threatened with true oblivion.

The Reassertion of Life's Oblivion in the Ethical Order

At the stage of the Ethical Order, to be an individual who has died is to be drawn up helplessly into the processes of nature in the manner of the living thing. Finite self-consciousness as being-for-self and as a self-conscious individual and citizen is thus threatened like any living

thing by the possibility of erasure into the *Kontinuität* [continuity] of Life even at this relatively late stage in the *Phenomenology*. The processes described in Hegel's section on Life culminate here precisely in the triumph of the *allgemeine Flüssigkeit* [general fluidity] over the individual as being-for-self. Hence the "abstract natural process" (271/332), the "work of nature" (271/332) that Hegel describes in the Ethical Order consists in the "destruction" (271/332) of the individual through its explicit reabsorption by Life.

When we are first introduced to the existential condition of the finite, living thing in Hegel's section on Life, there is nothing that any of the independent shapes can do to address their vulnerability to reabsorption into Life so as to positively transform it. Nor would there be any motivation to do so. Dead is dead, so to speak, and recollection at this stage prior to the entry into social formations and prior to the establishment of the "I that is a We" has no place. At the stage of the Ethical Order, it is still the case that there can be no overcoming the power of natural death to kill off the finite individual, and yet the human community of the Ethical Order has a response to natural death that it nevertheless launches on behalf of the dead individual. In order that the ultimate being of the dead individual "*nicht allein der Natur angehöre und etwas Unvernünftiges bleibe*" [that it "not belong solely to Nature and remain something irrational"—Miller's trans.] (270/332), or in order that the individual not "remain" [*bleibe*] (270/332) what death has shown it to be as belonging to nature, being-for-self is reasserted in the individual by the Family through burial. The remains of the corpse are taken over by the Family in order that the individual not remain what nature has made of him (Hegel's individual at this stage is male), and in order that the individual himself, or some dimension of him, might remain despite the absorptive processes of Life.¹⁷ The remains in the earth, or as imagined in the earth by the Family, are the physical correlate to the individual remaining, to a degree, insofar as he is

remembered as a being-for-self and as an individual as such. The individual is re-membered in the face of Life's power of dismemberment (a dismemberment that happens in any case), but also remembered in the sense of being preserved in memory in the form of a modified and more general individuality, which is to say as absorbed into the category of the Family's ancestors.

Hegel describes the Family's act as an assertion, and does so with the same word (a form of "*Behauptung*") that he uses in the stage of Life to describe the living thing's assertion against its continuity with fluid Life in its coming-to-be. If the living thing in the stage of Life "*behauptet sich als nicht in diesem Allgemeinen aufgelöst*" (141), which translates as "asserts that it is not dissolved in this universal element" (107), then the Family's act of burial is performed in order that "*das Recht des Bewußtseins in ihm behauptet sei*" (332) or in order that "the right of consciousness be asserted in it [*i.e.* in the remains of the individual]" (270). As such, burial is a second birth for the dead, at least in the sense that the action of the Family recovers the individual from his dissolution and reabsorption into Life and in the sense that this action concentrates the individual's body into a distinct, unified whole through burial. Hegel claims that to be buried is actually more true to the human individual of the Ethical Order when he writes that "in truth the calm and universality of a self-conscious being do not belong to Nature" (270/332). The individual is not simply a living thing as an essentially exchangeable and replaceable moment in the indifferent cycling of the processes of Life because the individual is self-conscious. Burial acknowledges this, albeit fancifully, by making the individual's death something consciously done, and by reconstituting through the Family's action the individual's physical integrity as a physical symbol of this self-consciousness.¹⁸

The action on the part of the Family thus attempts to counteract the work of death, where death consists in the dissolution of the individual as a living thing and the reabsorption of this

living thing into Life through the post-mortem labour of consumption as decomposition. The Family's action reasserts the individual's being-for-self as a self-referential unity and as self-consciousness through the action of burial. Yet, because this action comes from elsewhere, the being-for-self that results has changed, or "the attained being-for-self is something other than the mere existent which began the movement" (270-271/333). The resultant being-for-self is a "universal individuality" rather than the being-for-self of the individual when alive (271/333). The individual is not brought back to life, and the individual *as distinctly individual* is not recovered from its erasure by natural death. And yet by being buried by the Family, the being-for-self of the individual that was threatened with dismemberment and weathering is recovered to a certain degree. Hence the human confrontation with natural death that produces the ancestor through the work of burial does not actually rescue the individual from this death, but what has become possible at this later stage is the formation of extra-individual being-for-self. The Family uses its power of conscious activity to bury the dead individual and to establish the individual as an ancestor, and in this way the Family essentially fashions a modified version of being-for-self to put in the place of the being-for-self that is lost through the absolute claim over embodied self-consciousness of the power of death, and hence of Life.

Interestingly, the act of the Family not only counteracts the destructive work of the process of consumption, but also of reproduction insofar as reproduction within the context of Life renders the parent generation obsolete through its replacement by its offspring.¹⁹ Reproduction as replacement entails that the living thing's passing into non-being does not have any real consequences for the shape or the continuation of the genus, and hence that this passing has no real significance from the perspective of Life. Yet within the context of the Ethical Order, the Family that buries the dead individual makes themselves into something more and something

other than simply part of the continuation of the mortal chain of offspring that constitutes the genus. As Hegel writes, the Family “is within itself an *ethical* entity only so far as it is not the *natural* relationship of its members, or so far as their connection is an *immediate* connection of separate, actual individuals” (268/330). The ethical act of the Family—their *only* ethical act—is a stand *against* the relationship between the generations defined by Life and as characterized by the supersession of the individual by the genus. By burying family members, the survivors of those who have died make up for the way in which children render the parent generation obsolete through being born.²⁰ In this regard, burial as the self-conscious action of the Family protects the dead individual from the obsolescence and oblivion intrinsic to Life’s process of reproduction, just as it protects the individual from Life’s process of consumption.

What we find at the stage of the Ethical Order, therefore, is a confrontation with natural death that is in part a matter of the degree of consequence afforded to the passing of the individual. That the individual as a living thing in Life could nevertheless be regarded in its passing as loss and that the individual could be sufficiently differentiated from other living things so as not to be simply replaceable are proof of the accomplishment of a self-conscious community. Importantly, then, the reassertion on the part of the Family of the being-for-self of the dead individual does not reverse the individual’s inevitable dissolution in death. What it does do is assert that the individual’s disintegration in the face of death counts as eventful passing and as loss *for the Family*, and hence for those who remain alive.

In this regard, reassertion of the individual in opposition to the disintegrating and absorptive forces of Life becomes available and relevant only at the stage of the Ethical Order because of the high degree of sociality that characterizes this moment of Spirit. This stage of sociality is marked by the ability to have the death of another, and this means to constitute death

as marked passing *to* another by marking the event of passing as an event of real loss. Something is being granted to the dead, in other words, or as Hegel states:

... individuality passes over into this *abstract* negativity which, being *in its own self* without consolation and reconciliation, must receive them essentially through a *real* and *external* act. (271/333)

Trost und Versöhnung. Consolation and reconciliation. These can only be granted in the face of death through an actual (*wirkliche*) and external (*äußerliche*) act of the Family. Sociality enables the reclamation of the individual from reabsorption not because it grants to living things an escape from passing away or from the threat of reabsorption, but because it represents the organization of a multiplicity of mortally vulnerable-yet-self-conscious living things whose individual deaths do not implicate one another, and whose deaths do not all occur (hopefully) at the same time. To be able to be granted death, therefore, one *must* have survivors, which is to say, one must be a part of a community of individuals who will grant this death and who do not all perish together. When we grant one another this death, we are expressing to one another and ourselves that each of us counts as essentially unique, irreplaceable, and grievable.

Absolute Freedom and Terror

In the Ethical Order, the threat to the self-conscious individual that his death will be of no more significance than the death of any living thing is counteracted by the self-conscious action of the Family, and hence by possibilities opened up by sociality. At the stage of Absolute Freedom and Terror we find a very different version of the human confrontation with natural death as enabled by sociality. At this latter stage of Spirit, the threatening of the concrete individual by his or her erasure at the hands of natural death is self-consciously taken over and utilized by members of a self-conscious community *against* specific human targets. In a section

of the *Phenomenology* that occurs after the Ethical Order; and hence *after* the staging of the self-conscious assertion against the anonymity of natural death, the mere death of the living thing has become a weapon. The self-conscious community exposes the individual to the unmediated death of nature intentionally.

Hegel thus describes the death at the scaffold in Absolute Freedom and Terror as “the coldest and meanest of all deaths” (360/436), and as a death “with no more significance than cutting off a head of cabbage or swallowing a mouthful of water” (360/436). According to Rebecca Comay in her engagement with this section of the *Phenomenology*, the guillotine “strips even death itself of its singularity and intensity” (385). It is thus relevant that the target of the Terror for Hegel is none other than the self-conscious individual, and that the proliferation of executions is interpreted by Hegel as a symptom of the effort to cleanse from the universal will the specificity and situatedness that are necessary consequences of embodiment. As H. S. Harris explains in his account of Absolute Freedom and Terror, the individual is problematic from the standpoint of the universal will because he or she is essentially a “thinking point” unto him or herself, and hence because embodied self-consciousness carries within it an inextricable dimension of privacy (395). The individuality and privacy that go along with finite self-consciousness cast the concrete individual under suspicion in relation to any idealized general will, and as a result, according to Harris, “only the death of the embodied singular self-consciousness can secure the triumph of Absolute Freedom” (398). Absolute Freedom appears as such through the labour of wielding death against the concrete living bodies of self-conscious individuals—a labour performed by concrete living bodies, but for whom the site of the concrete living body of self-consciousness has been projected outward onto their victims. The acts of

violence undertaken in the name of Absolute Freedom are thus futile gestures that seek to disavow concrete individuality.

What, then, does this action of negating specificity and particularity accomplish? Nothing other than the “modern banalization of death,” as Rebecca Comay writes, and “its reduction to the anonymous numericity of the production line” (385). For Comay, the death of the Terror constitutes the individual’s death as a matter of “nonrecognition, nonproductivity, noncommemoration, nonredemption” (391)—terms that could easily describe the passing away of the living thing abandoned to the work of Nature. In this regard, what Comay calls “the banal death of Louis Capet” (389) is essentially the reinsertion of Louis VI the King, not simply into a social world without monarchy, but also into Life such that he is condemned thereby to the meaningless death of living things. Both the King as an individual and also the monarchy through the body of the King can be symbolically destroyed by the exposure of the King to the unaddressed, unmediated, unmourned anonymity of the death of nature in the form of the anonymity of the death of the guillotine—an anonymity proper to the death that we first encountered at the stage of Life. We see here the resurgence of passing without loss, but within the context of sociality, and as mobilized in and through what is made possible and relevant by sociality and with conscious intent. What we find described in Hegel’s account of the Terror, and what Adorno will identify as descriptively appropriate to the Holocaust, is the social wielding of natural death so as to constitute individual deaths as insignificant. The guillotine as the “modern banalization of death” is nothing other than natural death and its power of erasure put to work in order to theatrically communicate that the victims’ deaths are meaningless.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of the erasure of living things by death is thus not restricted to the section on Life as a relatively early chapter in the *Phenomenology*, but recurs as a problem for human beings and human communities in even very late stages in the text's development. Despite all the advances in self-consciousness and in sociality that Hegel describes, human beings are still claimed by natural death and threatened by the condemnation to oblivion that natural death entails. The *Phenomenology* indeed takes us through many changes that establish ever greater distance for Hegel between human beings as self-conscious, historical beings, and our status as merely living things of nature, and yet the individual regardless is ultimately liquefied by death. Human life thus remains at *every* point in Spirit's self-development exposed to reabsorption into Life as proof of our ultimate irrelevance as unique beings. Nature in a critical respect stands unvanquished, and as self-conscious individuality remains tethered to Life as a result of its necessary emergence in finite living things.

Nevertheless, there are relevant differences between the various moments in the *Phenomenology* that I have analyzed. Something becomes both possible and meaningful in the Ethical Order that was not available at the stage of Life, and the situation changes again once we are at the stage of the Terror. With regard to the Ethical Order and Absolute Freedom and Terror, the assertion through burial against the anonymity of death is very different from the deployment of death as a way to self-consciously assert the individual's insignificance, even though both are self-conscious, human confrontations with natural death as that which was first described in the section on Life. While the natural, existential conditions of Life persist throughout the *Phenomenology*, the meaning we ascribed to these conditions and our behaviour in relation to

them can vary greatly, and with very different ethical implications for the living insofar as it is the status of the living human being that is at stake.

Let us return, then, to the question raised in the introduction, namely, the question of the ethical significance, if any, of our comportment towards the dead. With this idea in mind, how would we reread Hegel's account of the human confrontation with natural death in the Ethical Order and in the Terror? In the Ethical Order, burial is a relevant action in the face of the individual's passing because the identity of the individual and the identity of the community are mutually informing. When the Family counteracts the work of nature by burying the dead, they assert that the dead individual was not *merely* a living thing but also a self-conscious individual, and likewise that the individual is significant to the identity of the Family and hence not simply replaceable by the next generation. While a certain anonymity persists even here insofar as the individual becomes an undifferentiated ancestor, the individual as ancestor is nevertheless retained in memory in a way that far exceeds that which faces the dead living things of nature who end up as repeatable and hence forgettable moments of the genus. The dead *matter* to the living insofar as ancestors matter to the Family, and hence we might ask whether the mattering of the dead to the living affirms in an important way that the living matter to one another.

The situation is very different at the stage of Absolute Freedom and Terror. In this moment of Spirit it has become politically efficacious to mobilize the *lack* of significance accorded in nature to the passing of mere living things. As with burial in the Ethical Order, what we are witnessing here is the work of a self-conscious community in its confrontation with the intractable problem of natural death. Yet if, in the Ethical Order, the effort is to affirm the dead individual in the face of his erasure at the hands of nature, in Absolute Freedom and Terror the objective is to appropriate self-consciously and to put to work precisely the way in which natural

death threatens the dead individual with his or her irrelevance. *Natural* death, in its power of erasure, becomes a political tool that is exercised against certain human groups. Through exposing certain individuals to the unmediated work of natural death, the insignificance of certain humans is communicated to the living.

What Hegel's text enables us to see, therefore, is that there is a meaningful difference in the stand we take in relation to natural death, and that this is the case even though there is no confrontation with natural death that would allow us ever to overcome it. By treating the dead with respect, and by asserting thereby the value of the lives that have been lost, we affirm the human status of the living, just as by exposing the dead to unmediated nature we dehumanize the living. While death erases us in any case regardless of how we confront it, our confrontations have implications for those human beings whose status as human hangs in the balance with the status of those who have died. In this regard, Benjamin is indeed correct that the dead stand before us as the bearers of an ongoing ethical summons and as the occasion for an ongoing ethical negotiation. The confrontation with natural death is an ethical issue, because it tells us a story about who is or is not accorded the status of being fully human, and about whom amongst the living are meant to understand themselves as worthy of grief and remembrance.

Notes

¹ For further discussion of the debate between Benjamin and Horkheimer, see Löwy, *Fire Alarm: Reading Walter Benjamin's On the Concept of History* and also eds. Benhabib, Bonß and McCole, *On Max Horkheimer: New Perspectives*.

² Living things never interact with Life as such, or with the phenomenon of the genus that their activity produces. The trans-individual processes of Life and the phenomenon of the genus emerge from out of the very local and particularized interactions of individual living things with

one another. As Hegel states with regard to the genus in his nature lectures, “[t]he genus, which produces itself through negation of its differences, does not, however, exist in and for itself but only in a series of single living beings...” (*Philosophy of Nature* 414).. Similarly, in Hegel’s *Philosophy of Spirit*, he writes “[t]he soul universal, described, it may be, as an *anima mundi*, a world-soul, must not be fixed on that account as a single subject; it is rather the universal substance which has its actual truth only in individuals and single subjects” (9).

³ As Hegel states, “[the] *Essence* [of Life] is infinity as the *supersession* of all distinctions, the pure movement of axial rotation, its self-repose being an absolutely restless infinite; *independence* itself, in which the differences of the movement are resolved, the simple essence of Time which, in this equality with itself, has the stable shape of Space” (*Phenomenology* 106/140).

⁴ Robert Pippin has a different interpretation of this image. Following Aristotle’s notion that to be alive is to be imbued with the principle of self-motion, Pippin argues that the eternity of Life, compared by Hegel to the “pure movement of axial rotation” (106/140), indicates that Hegel is attributing to Life this dimension of self-motion. Pippin then connects this notion of self-determination with subjectivity, and hence reads Life as describing the subject of desire in its most basic form as a living thing and its desire. See Pippin (150).

⁵ As Hegel explains in his nature lectures, it is the strength of the unity of the living thing that distinguishes it as an organism. According to Hegel, “[c]hemistry in its effort to reach what is simple thus destroys individuality. If the individual thing is neutral like a salt, then chemistry succeeds in exhibiting its sides separately, since the unity of the differences is only a formal unity which alone is destroyed. If, however, the thing to be decomposed is an organic being, then not only do we destroy the unity but also the organic nature we wanted to know” (*Philosophy of Nature* 107). Hegel makes a similar point in his discussion of Life in his lectures on aesthetics when he writes “a hand, if severed, loses its independent subsistence; it does not remain what it was in the organism; its mobility, agility, shape, colour, etc., are changed; indeed it decomposes and perishes altogether. It was sustained in existence only as a member of an organism, and had reality only as continually brought back into the ideal unity” (*Aesthetics* 121).

⁶ According to Stewart, “this continuity in the object sphere [i.e., Life] is broken by activity of objects [i.e. living things] in the external sphere that set them apart from the continuity” (118). The third stage, according to Stewart, is the reassertion of Life’s continuity with itself through the recognition that the activity of these internal shapes is likewise simply the activity of Life, since it is all activity that takes place within and through Life as a universal medium (see 119-120).

⁷ Hegel refers to the conflict between the individual living thing and the emergent phenomenon of the genus in his nature lectures when he writes, “[a]s an individual, the living creature is a manifestation (*Erscheinung*) of the genus, but it is also in conflict with the genus which manifests itself through the destruction of the individual” (*Philosophy of Nature* 279).

⁸ Hegel's use of "inorganic" is different from the modern usage. It refers to "Life" as the environment from which the living thing draws its life, and this includes other living things.

⁹ All living things consume, just as all living things are consumed whole or in part by other living things. Certain living things consume at the boundary between the living and the non-living. Called autotrophs, these organisms turn inorganic matter such as sunlight, water, or sulfur into the organic matter of their own bodies. They are then consumed by other living bodies, and hence they provide an inorganic foundation for our ecosystems. In many cases, their inorganic diets are supplemented with matter derived from living things.

¹⁰ As Hegel explains in his nature lectures, "[t]hrough this process of assimilation, therefore, the animal becomes in a real way *for itself*; for by particularizing itself into the main differences of animal lymph and bile in its behaviour towards the individual thing itself it has proved itself to be an animal individual; and by the negation of its other, it has posited itself as subjectivity, as real being-for-self" (*Philosophy of Nature* 404).

¹¹ According to Claus-Autur Schleier, there are four levels according to which to view the phenomena of Life and the living thing: "1) *einfache Kontinuität*, 2) *bestehende Gestalt*, 3) *Prozeß der Gestalten* und 4) *Gattung*," although Schleier also states that only numbers 2 and 3 are spoken about explicitly. It is the process of the shapes (i.e. 3)—or of living things—that produces the genus (i.e. 4), and hence that reconciles the opposition between the simple continuity of Life (i.e. 1) and the distinct separateness of living things (i.e. 2) (Schleier 100). The story of Life for Schleier is thus the story of the emergence of the genus out of the movement of the shapes. The only significant limitation of this view is the exclusive mention in Schleier of the process of reproduction. As we shall see in what follows, the benign self-repose of Life is also a function of the trans-individual process of consumption.

¹² Life's eternity need not be static. What matters at this level are not the differences between particular forms of living things, but rather the existential conditions out of which all living things emerge. Regardless of the genus, living things are produced through the perpetual flows of reproduction and consumption, and they all share in being conatively self-relating and yet finite and ephemeral beings.

¹³ Hegel's statement that Life is "the simple essence of Time which, in this equality with itself, has the stable shape of Space" (106/140) has been misread as stating that "being is time," which would indicate that Heidegger took from this moment in Hegel his central thesis for *Being and Time*. But in Heidegger's study of Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Heidegger makes clear that Hegel's thesis is exactly the opposite of his own. For Heidegger, being is time, but for Hegel, time is being, or time is being as infinity—a thesis, as Heidegger notes, that Hegel developed as a part of his *Naturphilosophie* during the Jena period. Hegel's understanding of time, as Heidegger explains, is as "one appearance of the *simple* essence of being qua infinity" (145) but only insofar as time has the shape of space, i.e., that it is understood in terms of "[m]otion within the thematic of the solar system" (144). Hegel's thesis is that celestial time is a mode of a certain sort of timelessness, and hence no matter what actually occurs *in* time, these occurrences are

instances of a constant repetition such that, with regard to the *shape* of time, everything just *is* and nothing ever happens.

¹⁴ In Hegel's nature lectures, he describes reproduction as intrinsically related to the phenomenon of death. According to Hegel, "what the genus brings forth is the procreation of individuals through the death of other individuals of the same genus; the individual, after reproducing itself as another individual, perishes" (*Philosophy of Nature* 411). Further on, Hegel lists another way in which the genus supersedes the individual, this time in terms that can easily refer to the process of consumption. As Hegel writes, "the genus particularizes itself, divides itself into its species; and these species, behaving as mutually opposed individuals, are, at the same time, non-organic nature as the genus against individuality—death by violence" (*Philosophy of Nature* 411).

¹⁵ English translation: [If for Plato, what appears sensuously has] "a lower ontological standing if compared to what actually exists (i.e., ideas), [then for Hegel] "appearance is itself an act of the Absolute." There are some schools of reading Plato that disagree with this interpretation. See, for example, John Sallis's *Being and Logos*.

¹⁶ For Wyschogrod, memory enables the moment of perception to outlast its ephemeral quality and, in so doing, to become inward to consciousness (see 99ff.). Wyschogrod characterizes the movement from the perception to the recollected image such that "what is lost in freshness is gained in perdurance through time as a conquest of ephemerality" (99). This inwardness, we might argue, is then expressed outwardly in intelligent action in the world, where the relationship to this world that originally began in the fleeting moments of perception becomes one of world-transformation.

¹⁷ This play between memory, dismemberment, remain, and remains works in English but not in German. In German the relevant terms are *Andenken/Erinnerung/Gedächtnis*, *Zerstückelung*, *bleiben*, and *Gebeine/sterbliche Überreste*.

¹⁸ Žižek describes this moment as follows: "... the passage into pure being, death, natural disintegration, is something that happens anyway, with inevitable natural necessity; by means of the funeral rite the subject takes upon himself this process of natural disintegration, he symbolically repeats it, he pretends that this process resulted from his own free decision" (219). Žižek points out that Hegel speaks in a similar way when he describes the becoming-evil of our natural inclinations—inclinations that "just happen" to us in the sense that they are materially given, and hence that are part of our natural innocence, but that become retroactively evil once we enter culture. The movement into culture is thus in part a matter of becoming-responsible for one's own nature, and this is the case even though this nature is itself not a matter of choice. See in this regard Hegel's *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion*, and specifically Hegel's discussion of the Fall of Man in Christianity on pages 446 and following.

¹⁹ This notion is echoed in Hegel's 1804 *Philosophy of Spirit* in which Hegel writes that as parents educate their children they "generate their own death" (327).

²⁰ On the one hand, we should understand Hegel's account of the establishment of the family-substance as entailing that it is the duty of any surviving member of the family to bury any family member that has passed. (This is the case even though this section of the *Phenomenology* should be read in conjunction with Sophocles' *Antigone* wherein it is important that we have a sister burying a brother). On the other hand, the burial of parents by children is particularly significant for our purposes because of the way in which the parent/offspring relationship is defined from within the context of the living thing in Life, since children are in this way restoring to parents the individuality that the trans-individual process of reproduction has revoked.

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