

Hegel's Dialectics of Digestion, Excretion and Animal Subjectivity

Jeffrey Reid

There has been marked contemporary interest in Hegelian biology, as attested to by a recent issue of *Hegel Bulletin* devoted to the subject. In this article, I cannot enter into the rich debates on Hegelian biology per se. Rather, I am examining one specific and generally neglected element of organic functionality, animal digestion and its excremental result. Crucially, as we will see, the animal of primary interest to Hegel, in this regard, is the human being, the animal endowed with subjectivity, consciousness and reason but which remains vitally tied to its organic functions.

If discussions on digestion and excretion were confined to the *Philosophy of Nature*, they would be of limited or discrete interest to Hegel scholars. However, these elements resonate to the highest speculative reaches of Hegel's Science. Indeed, the digestive/excretory function of the Idea itself is acknowledged in the culminating chapter of the *Encyclopedia Logic* ([EL] 213 Remark) where the life of the Idea confronts "inorganic nature" through a process of "assimilation" and "reproduction" (EL 218), a process described in the paragraph's Addition in the digestive terms of bilious "irritability" and "reproduction". I write "digestive" because, as we will see, it is as a pre-sexual instance of "formal" reproduction that animal excretion appears in the *Philosophy of Nature*, as distasteful (or Freudian?) as we might find such a notion¹.

The digestive elements of "irritability" and "reproduction", shared by individual animal organisms and the life of the Idea, involve aspects of mediating otherness, which anticipate a culminating reconciliation or "syllogizing unification" (*Zusammenschliessen*). For now, I will restrain my speculative instincts regarding how the elements of digestion and excretion might be

¹ The "Functions of the Organism" consist of "sensibility", "irritability" and "reproduction" (EN 353), the same elements that enliven the "Life" of the absolute Idea in EL 218.

applied to the absolute dimensions of Hegel's philosophical system, and confine my reflections to the individual animal and how its digestive and excretory activity give rise to a natural, inchoate form of subjectivity.

Here is how I will proceed:

1. I will look at how contemporary commentators have understood Hegel's take on animal digestion and excretion, with reference to biological accounts from his time, notably, J. J. Berzelius's work on the chemistry of animal feces, which thoroughly informs Hegel's account.

2. I will examine Hegel's texts, from the *Philosophy of Nature* [PN] to show how digestion and excretion appear within the syllogistically conceived organism. Insofar as the general form of the Hegelian syllogism runs from Universality, through Particularity, to Singularity (U-P-S), digestion takes place within the moment of particularity, where we find: i) an oppositional encounter with non-organic otherness and ii) the opposition's overcoming through a solvent, bilious element. In excretion, these particular moments are posited as superfluous.²

3. Digestive particularity and its excretory outcome give rise to self-organizing elements of subjective individuality and purposiveness. These elements are relevant to animals in general and, to a certain degree, to the human animal. The conclusion briefly addresses the limits of animal subjectivity as it arises from the organic activities of digestion and excretion.

1. *Other Work on Animal Digestion/Excretion in Hegel*

² "EN" refers to the *Encyclopedia's Philosophy of Nature*, followed by the section numbers. "M" refers to the English translation by A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004 (1970)), followed by the page numbers. "W" refers to *Werke in 20 Bänden*, Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel eds., (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1970), followed by the volume and page number. See EN 365 Remark, M 396-7, which I will return to below, where Hegel refers to the syllogistic configuration of the animal organism.

A few timorous Hegel commentators have followed to its excremental conclusion the animal digestive process that Hegel presents in the PN and I will refer to their findings below. What is missing from these rare accounts is the further step that I want to take. Having established what the living, animal organism actually excretes, how is this biological end-product actually involved in animal subjectivity?

One exception to the general reluctance to consider the philosophical dimensions of animal excrement in Hegel is Slavoj Žižek who, in his exuberantly scatological “Hegel and the Object, Or, the Idea’s Constipation”³, reads the Idea’s “sich Entschliessen”, at the culmination of the *Logics*, as a healthy act of ideal defecation. In order to maintain this, Žižek presents the system according to the “third” syllogistic configuration, Spirit-Logic-Nature (Singular-Universal-Particular), where the “act of releasing the other [i.e. Nature] is thoroughly *immanent* to the dialectical process, its conclusive moment, the sign of the conclusion of a dialectical circle”. While the idea is provocative, it is highly problematic since what is “let go” at the end of the *Logics* qua Nature is not released as something expelled *outside* the organism, as we will see is the case with animal feces, but rather the predetermined natural object of the subsequent PN. While there is indubitably something “natural” about the animal organism’s excremental remainder, what is “dis-closed” or “de-syllogized” (*entgeschlossen*) by the Idea at the end of the *Logics* can hardly be likened to the extra-systematic expulsion of excrement as it is discussed by Hegel. Indeed, Žižek’s reading does not refer to the digestive-excremental process as it occurs in the “Animal Organism” section of the PN, which is crucial to understanding both the constitution and the significance that Hegel attributes to animal feces⁴.

³ *Gramma, Journal of Theory and Criticism* - <https://doi.org/10.26262/gramma.v14i0.6510> p. 24.

⁴ A friend doing her medical residency in the urology department of a prominent Parisian hospital told me that the inspirational mantra of those in that particular service was quite simply, “Pisser ou mourir!” More anachronistically, one might liken the proposed examination to the important work carried out by the Groom of the Stool, in

In order to understand the organic significance of animal excrement, we must refer to the Hegelian dialectics of digestion whereby it is produced. There are several important commentaries on animal digestive activity, notably by Mark C.E. Peterson and, more recently, by Douglas Finn, both of whom I will consult further down. However, I would like to begin by referring to an article by Jane Dryden, who clearly introduces the dialectical stakes involved in organic digestion:

The description of digestion in the *Philosophy of Nature* attunes us to our bodies' continual renegotiation with the world. Our relationship with food is not merely one of taking in nutrients—the process of assimilation is a complex interplay of identity and difference in which parts of the body appear external to itself and parts of the external world appear part of oneself. It is an interrelation of differentiated parts that can easily go awry, as gut pain and gut disorders attest. Our gut serves for us as a kind of ambiguous other, one which is sometimes experienced with hostility.⁵

Dryden emphasizes an aspect that is particularly significant in Hegel's dialectics of digestion: the experienced difference between our "selves" and the internal, organic processes by which we confront and assimilate natural otherness qua food. In digestion, we indeed encounter an otherness within ourselves, an otherness that is ambiguous since it is the very condition for our individual organic life, and yet it is not really "us". As in any dialectic, there is difference and even opposition, regardless of the extent of the accomplished reconciliation. The same is true in the dialectics of digestion.

Both Mark C. E. Peterson and Douglas Finn provide faithful, enlightening descriptions of Hegel's theory of organic digestion by placing the process within larger frames of reference. Peterson completes his exegesis by rightly placing the digestive process within the logical

monarchical times, diagnosing the health of the kingly organism. When I refer to "excrement", it is feces that I have in mind, and which Hegel is concerned with.

⁵ Jane Dryden "Digestion, Habit, and Being at Home: Hegel and the Gut as Ambiguous Other", *PhenEx*, 11: 2 (fall/winter 2016) pp. 1-22

structure of the Hegelian syllogism, where the form of the Universal (qua animal instinct) and the Particularity of the digestive process itself produce excrement as well as the moment of subjective “singularity” (individuality) as an expression of “formal reproduction,” to use Hegel’s terms. For Peterson,

Formal reproduction is assimilation's moment of singularity. In it, the animal continues to create its own subjectivity - through its interaction with an other to which it finds itself opposed - while at the same time implicitly distinguishing itself from this same process.⁶

While this interpretation is correct, delving deeper into the essential specifics of the excretory result will allow me to bring to light a crucial distinction between animal individuality and syllogistic singularity per se. As we will see, reconciling Singularity, as the conclusion (*Schluss*) of universal and particular animality remains fundamentally deferred in animal digestion. More is required.

Douglas Finn rightly emphasizes the self-disgust⁷ that Hegel associates with animal excretion, whereby what is excreted is the very animality of the digestive processes, while insisting upon the “transcendent” result as one of happy subjective enrichment.

The animal, as the unified organizational activity of life, overpowers not only the external objects it confronts, but also the processes wherein it engages and assimilates those objects. The animal cannot be reduced to any one of its processes. In its disgust at its own struggle with what was essentially untrue, its relation to external things as external, the animal transcends that process and ‘knows’ itself as a universal power greater than its externally oriented activity, as subject, being-for-self.⁸

While Finn is certainly right in highlighting the subjective outcome of excretion, he does not adequately relate this expression of purposive “being-for-self” to *animal* individuality.

⁶ Mark C. E. Peterson, “Animals Eating Empiricists: Assimilation and Subjectivity in Hegel’s Philosophy of Nature”. *The Owl of Minerva*. 23: 1 (1991) p. 62. Hegel’s reference to “formal” reproduction is in EN 365: “The process outwards is thus transformed into the first, formal [*formellen*] process of simple reproduction from its own self, into the uniting of itself with itself.”

⁷ “The organism in thus separating itself from itself is disgusted with itself [*erkelt er sich selbst an*]” (EN 365 Add., M405, W9 492).

⁸ Douglas Finn, “Spiritual Consumption: Eating and the Christian Eucharist in Hegel”, *The Owl of Minerva*, 47:1–2 (2015–16) p. 130. DOI: 10.5840/owl2016121418.

The subjective outcome (being-for-self) of Hegel's discussion of animal excrement is further emphasized by Simon Richter, in his incontestable article on the question. Richter quotes Hegel from the lengthy Addition to EN 365:

"The immediate result of this is simply that when the animal comes to itself and recognizes itself as this power [of transformation], it is angry with itself for getting involved with external powers and it now turns against itself and this false opinion; but in doing so it throws off its outward-turned activity and returns into itself" (M403, W9 490).

Richter adds:

What Hegel is describing in delicate and dialectical terms is the meaning of excretion. Once again, the animal is divided against itself and, by excretion, by "rid[ding] itself of this lack of self-confidence" (ibid.), comes to a sense of itself unmarred by lack and dependency." And further, again citing Hegel's words: "Excrement has no other significance than this, that the organism, recognizing its error, gets rid of its entanglement with outside things, and this is confirmed by the chemical composition of the excrement (M405, W9 492)".⁹

Richter helpfully guides us through the analysis of the chemical composition of feces, in light of Hegel's explicit references to the empirical science of his time, through the work of the renowned Swedish chemist J. J. Berzelius, as well as that of other important participants, for example, Spallanzani and Treviranus. Richter adds references to the thinking of the time that informs Hegel's dialectical grasp of the digestive process and the distinctions or oppositions that are involved there: between mechanical and chemical digestive actions, between immediate and mediate assimilation, between chyme and chyle, between lymph and bile etc. I also find Richter's analysis particularly insightful because of its unapologetically anachronistic reference to Freud. Indeed, it seems clear that any reference to the *spiritual* aspects of excrement, which

⁹ Simon Richter, "Hegel and the Dialectics of Digestion", *Nineteenth Century Prose*, 25: 1 (1998), p. 11. The Free Library. "Hegel and the Dialectics of Digestion", retrieved Aug 02, 2021 from <https://www.thefreelibrary.com/Hegel+and+the+dialectics+of+digestion.-a0188966787>. Richter refers to the page numbers in A. V. Miller's translation of *Hegel's Philosophy of Nature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), which I present as preceded my "M". I have added the page references from *Werke* 9 [W9].

we are undertaking through our tour of Hegelian digestion and its outcome, can hardly ignore a coherent psychological theory that interprets the relation between consciousness and excrement in such a novel and fundamental fashion. More specifically, what Richter acknowledges, through his reference to the Viennese psychoanalyst, is the fact that excrement, in the PN, is a product that participates in the narrative of *self*-production¹⁰. I will return to the important issue of reproduction below.

As a product of animal digestion, excrement is indeed “singular”, as Peterson notes. However, rather than representing the holistic Singular reconciliation of the Universal and the Particular (the one that is all), the singularity of the excremental object itself is thoroughly natural and thus has “no other significance”, as Richter quoted above, than that to be found in its “chemical composition”. Let us take Hegel at his word and begin with the significant end: the chemical composition of the excreted object, feces. It is the analysis of fecal composition that will enable us to grasp the nature of animal subjectivity as it arises through digestion.

2. *Particularity of Poop: Superfluity, Individuality and Purposiveness*

As Jane O’Hara-May points out in her article, “Measuring Man’s Needs”¹¹, the qualitative analysis of human feces was, in Hegel’s time, rather innovative. Previously, the approach had been generally quantitative, through studies motivated by institutional, economic factors: how much food did a soldier, sailor, inmate require in order to survive and carry out their duties? Measuring the quantity of excreted material was an important benchmark in these studies. Against this current, Berzelius was a pioneer in the qualitative approach, the chemical

¹⁰ See also David Farrell Krell, “Genitality/Excrementality from Hegel to Crazy Jane”, *Boundary 2*, 12:2 (1984) issue “On Feminine Writing”, pp. 113-141.

¹¹ Jane O’Hara-May, “Measuring Man’s Needs.” *Journal of the History of Biology* 4:2 (1971), pp. 249-73. Accessed May 27, 2021. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4330561>

analysis of feces in order to understand the processes involved in digestion and assimilation. One can only suppose that, here again, the practical applications had institutional and economic reach: *what* must be eaten to ensure a person's survival, growth, strength etc. For Berzelius's research was primarily focused on *human* digestion and excretion. This is significant since, in Hegel, we are ultimately interested in the *human* animal, that is, in the development of the animal's subjective relation to its digestive processes and their result, as we see in his reference to children's feces in the remark to EN 365 (M 396), and to Berzelius's experiments on "human feces" in the Addition.

Hegel's repeated references to the work of Berzelius clearly show that Hegel is actually discussing feces here, and not, initially, something more speculative. Hence, he states that "human excrement contains undecomposed bile, albumen, biliary gum, and two peculiar substances, one that looked like glue..." In more detail, "the human body evacuates through the rectum, bile, albumen, two peculiar animal substances, biliary matter, sodium carbonate, sodium chloride and sodium phosphate, phosphate of magnesia, and phosphate of lime. (EN 365 Add., M405, W9 492)."¹² The important conclusion, for Hegel, is that "all of these materials are not merely heterogeneous, inassimilable matter" but, above all, they are elements found in the organism itself. Indeed, "many of the substances [found in feces] also enter into the composition of the hair, others into that of the muscles and brain" (*ibid.*). Consequently, following the empirical research of Berzelius, it is wrong to conclude that the excretory result of digestion is simply surplus ingested but unassimilated material or the fact that "a larger quantity of matter is

¹² Hegel's account is faithful to Berzelius' actual findings. See W. Marcet, "Chemistry, Physiology and Pathology of Human Excrement", *The Medical Times and Gazette* volume 38, July 1858, p. 53, accessed August, 14, 2021 through: https://books.google.ca/books?id=UTFbAAAAcAAJ&pg=PA53&lpg=PA53&dq=berzelius+medical+times+and+gazette&source=bl&ots=KNwzdkOAFj&sig=ACfU3U1hiHW4eHYKxQwJvLqM2ALgMN3Oxw&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwj1_amwbDyAhXTF1kFHQaYAB0Q6AF6BAgOEAM#v=onepage&q=berzelius%20medical%20times%20and%20gazette&f=false

assimilated than the organs to be nourished by it are able to appropriate” (ibid). Again referring to Berzelius, Hegel remarks that “closer inspection reveals disparities between the constituents of food, the assimilated material and the substances excreted [which] render this assumption untenable” (ibid.). The upshot, for Hegel, is that what the animal organism excretes, “the bile, pancreatic juice, etc. is nothing else but *the organism’s own process* which it gets rid of in material shape [my emphasis].” It is this conclusion that will allow Hegel to view animal excretion as superfluous, a “form of abstract, formal repulsion (M404)” where what is excreted is above all the organism’s own particular, mediating digestive process, thus producing, as we will see, the individual animal’s subjective purposiveness.

Let us look more closely at the digestive process, as reflected in its excremental result and specifically in its “principal ingredients”, which are “substances originating from gastric juices”¹³. Understanding how Hegel views this organic process is essential to apprehending the true nature of organic excretion and its relation to animal subjectivity.

In Hegel, it is always helpful to know where we are in the syllogistic unfolding (generally, Universal-Particular-Singular) of the narrative. This is especially important within the economy of the *Encyclopedia*, where the syllogistic structures are more pronounced than in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In the EN, the paragraphs dealing with digestion and excretion are found in the section on the Animal Organism (EN 350-375). Within that tripartite section, we find ourselves in the second, mediating sub-section, entitled Assimilation. The first sub-section is Shape [*Gestalt*]; the third section is on the genus process. Looking closer, within the three sub-moments of Assimilation where we find ourselves, digestion takes place again in a middle, mediating sub-section, entitled the Practical Relation, which follows the Theoretical Relationship

¹³ Hegel recognizes that animal excrement also contains “fibrous residue of the ingested food (ibid. M 405).” However, this material, as we will see, is only philosophically significant in that it represents the “non-organic” Other.

and anticipates the Constructive Instinct. Consequently, the section on digestion and excretion occurs in the most “middle”, internal moment of Hegel’s presentation of the animal organism, in the middle of the middle. In more conceptual terms, we find ourselves in the particular moment of the particular moment, if we again take the general, syllogistic form of the concept’s dialectical movement as passing from the Universal, to the Particular, to the Singular. Digestion takes place in the “guts” of the syllogism.

The Hegelian moment of mediating particularity is essentially characterized by opposition between different binary configurations that present themselves as mutually exclusive: something has a specific particularity because it is simply is what it is (self-identity) but also because is *not* something else. Of course, the dialectical truth (outcome) is that in order to be what it particularly *is*, something must be *both* what it is (self-identical) and what it is *not*. That is, true self-identity must involve difference. This is why the fundamental dialectic of identity and difference, in Hegel, takes place in the middle, “particular”, moment of the *Logics*, in the second book, on Essence, where the quiddity of things is the issue. The *accomplishment* of essential truth (identity of identity and difference) is carried out in the third, reconciling moment of the *Logics*: in the Doctrine of the Concept. For our purposes, it is important to note that the passage to true identity must involve the dialectical overcoming of binary oppositions.

I want to emphasize the *particular* nature of digestion as an oppositional process within the animal organism, along with a bilious, solvent element that overcomes recalcitrant opposition, putting the process into movement. Grasping particularity as informed by both opposition and solvency will help us analyze the significance of the excreted product in relation to the organic whole that constitutes the individual animal. Let us begin with the particular oppositions at play

in digestion. First and foremost, we find the opposition between the organic and the “non-organic”.

By “non-organic ([*Unorganisch*] EN 365 Add.”, Hegel does not mean “inorganic” or mineral but rather, that which the organism “confronts” and “assimilates (cf. EL 219 Add.)”, that is, consumes as food. Indeed, both the vegetable and animal material that the living animal consumes are “in truth organic structures”. However, in terms of the digestive process of assimilation carried out by the living, animal organism, they are of “non-organic” nature because they are determined as food “for this animal” (EN 365 Add., M398, W9 484). The non-organic is determined as something having “no enduring existence of its own”. It is a “nullity as soon as it comes into contact with a living being (ibid)” that eats it. The transformation involved in digestive assimilation is simply the “revelation of this relationship (ibid.)”. The fundamental opposition involved in assimilation and digestion is thus between organic nature and its “non-organic” object, and the “state of tension” that this relation involves (EN 365 Add., M397, W9 483). Furthermore, the “alimentary process” is essentially the “melting of the non-organic into organic fluidity (ibid)” or movement. In other words, at the most fundamental level of digestive opposition, between the organic and the non-organic, the goal is the fluidification and overcoming of that opposition in the production of an animal individual.

Consequently, the mediation that characterizes the particularity of the digestive process involves the fluidification of the fixed, established opposition between organic and its Other. Significantly, the terms of the opposition (organic vs non-organic) do not in themselves have the resources of negativity necessary for its overcoming and fluidification. The second element of particularity is necessary: solvent negativity, which is provided, in digestion, by bile. Bile (*Galle*) is thus “animal fire (EN 364, M395, W9 480)” and the liquid “anger” or “irritability (cf. EL 218

Add.)” required for the overcoming of the fundamental opposition between organic and non-organic, which is brought about in the digestive process.

Other, subsidiary internal oppositions arise within the particularity of the digestive process. This is because the external relation to the non-organic and the “entanglement with outside things (EN 365 Add., M405)” has been brought inside, internalized in the mediating process of digestion, a process whose result is then produced as excrement. For what is excreted is the particularity of the process itself. In the syllogistic terms that Hegel employs,

the syllogism of the organism is, therefore, not the syllogism of external teleology, for it [i.e. the organism] does not stop at directing its activity and form [i.e. negativity] against the outer object but makes this very process... into an object [of excrement] (EN 365 Remark, M 396-7).

Digestive excretion is thus presented in terms of “the second [particular] premise of the universal syllogism of purposive activity”, the activity or “outward process” that brings about the animal’s “uniting of itself with itself” (ibid.), which we will discuss below as its individual purposiveness. Significantly, Hegel refers to the *Encyclopedia Logic* (EL 209), where he deals with “subjective purpose as the power over [mediating] processes”. Whereas initially, the subjective attitude to the object was an “outward-directed activity”, for example, in taking possession of food, now, the outward-directed activity has been internalized as the “second premise”, i.e. the particular moment of the syllogism. Significantly, this incorporation of external opposition brings about, in EL 209, the opposition between the two elements that appeared earlier in the EL’s section on teleology: mechanism and chemism. Returning to the EN, the internal distinction between the mechanical and the chemical now appears as another *particular* opposition within the digestive process. I want to look at how this new opposition, within the particular moments of organic assimilation, is shown to again not have the resources of negativity necessary for its own

overcoming and how its reliance on the solvent element of bile becomes a principal element of excretion.

Before proceeding, I would like to remark briefly on how the articulations of thought (*des Denkens*) or the concept (*des Begriffs*), as grounded in the *Logics*, stand in relation to the particular processes evoked in the *Philosophy of Nature*'s discussion of digestion. Here, I thoroughly subscribe to Richter's view that the relation is metonymic rather than metaphorical¹⁴. What is meant by this is that, according to Hegel, the life of the animal organism, i.e. what constitutes its "purposive activity" (EN 365 Remark, M397)¹⁵, is the actual movement of the concept, which might be conceived as the "soul" of the living thing, its pre-conscious, animal "subjectivity (EN 365)", the breath that animates it (*animus*) as a living whole. Anyone with a better explanation of what animates organic life, of why the mere sum of different parts does not, in itself, constitute a living, purposive, individual animal organism or why and how, in death, life leaves that physical embodiment, is welcome to supply one. For our purposes, we can simply affirm that the metonymy between the *philosophies* of nature and thought happily runs both ways; dialectical thought informs organic processes, which, in turn, express the agency of thought. Consequently, a discussion of natural organics might indeed inform the study of systematic philosophical organicity, a study that I am, however, *not* undertaking here. Let us return to our discussion of digestion's internal, particular oppositions and their bilious overcoming, now, by looking at the opposition between mechanism and chemism. Examining this opposition will allow us to present the crucial notion of immediate assimilation, which, in turn, will help us see how the particular processes of animal digestion may be conceived as superfluous while giving rise to subjective animal purposiveness.

¹⁴ S. Richter, "Hegel and the Dialectics of Digestion", throughout.

¹⁵ "Zwecktätigkeit (W9 482)". The notion of life as purposive activity obviously brings Kant to mind, a reference discussed by Hegel in EN 360 Remark, along with a reference to Aristotle.

As Richter helpfully notes, in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries, theories of animal digestion and assimilation were generally divided between two main ideas: the mechanical notion that nourishment was extracted from food through physical, gastric processes of squeezing, pressing, grinding etc., over against the chemical theories, which explained digestion as the chemical dissolution of food, rendering it organically assimilable. Again demonstrating how his philosophy of nature is really a philosophy of the empirical or positive sciences of nature, Hegel takes each approach into account. He refers, in this context, to the work of Lazzaro Spellanzeni, whose experiments were meant to find out “whether digestion is effected by solvent juices or by trituration performed by the stomach muscles or by both (M401)”. The Hegelian response is that neither unilateral approach per se can explain digestion. By conceiving of digestion in these oppositional terms (mechanical or chemical), one can never capture its truth.

... all chemical and mechanical explanations founder... Neither chemistry nor mechanics can follow empirically the alteration of food to the point where it is changed into blood, no matter what methods they employ (M398, W9 484).

Regarding the controversy between the mechanical and chemical approaches to digestion, Hegel seems to favor the former explanation, but on the condition that it be understood as enacting the *immediate* assimilation that expresses the fundamental truth of the digestive process in animal organisms. Briefly, in the mechanical digestive action, “the violent pressing and pushing of the walls of the stomach” that Spellanzeni had noted, enact proximate contact between the non-organic and the organic, making possible the “triumph over food which has entered the environment (*Dunstkreis*) of the living animal (M404, W9 491)”. The question is how this feature of mechanical immediacy fits into the narrative of digestive particularity that I am putting forward.

First, while one might suppose that Hegel would favor the chemical explanation over digestive assimilation, since it is closer to contemporary, “true” notions on the subject, this is not the case. First, Hegel’s refusal of the chemical explanation is because his notion of chemistry is not molecular but rather, we might say, alchemistic, fundamentally informed by the interplay between acidic and alkaline substances (cf. Schelling). Accordingly, the interaction of different chemical compounds always arrives at states of equilibrium or neutrality: the more acidic substance interacting with the more basic or alkaline substance, producing a third, relatively inert result. Thus, if “the relationship [between the organic and the non-organic] would only be chemical... the effect would be nothing more than a neutralization, where nothing more than, ‘a thick slime [would be] formed’”, states Hegel quoting Treviranus’ *Biologie* (M402, W9 488).

In Hegel’s view, the truth of digestion can only be got at through the speculative recognition of the presupposed and culminating identity between the organic and the non-organic Other, where the former has triumphed over the latter. Only when the truth of this speculative unity is recognized does the mediating process of higher organisms come to make sense. Thus, the immediate relationship involved in digestion is simply the fundamental recognition of the ultimate identity between the organic and the non-organic, the fact that “what is particular and external has no enduring existence of its own, but is a nullity as soon as it comes into contact with a living being; and this [digestive] transformation is merely the revelation of this relationship (EN 365 Add., M398, W9 484).” Rather than presenting this speculative notion of transformation as a theoretical a priori given, Hegel refers to the biology of immediate digestive assimilation as arising from the mechanical nature of digestion.

The immediate assimilative relationship between the organic and the non-organic, where the latter is “transformed directly and at a stroke (M399) is thus “fundamental (ibid)”, a “direct

melting of the non-organic into the organic (M397)”, which takes place throughout the animal realm. This essential relation can also be understood in terms of substance and accident. In that sense, the non-organic is no more than an accidental “shape which it immediately surrenders (ibid.)” to the organic substance. Biologically, this immediate assimilative relation between the organic and the non-organic Other can be found in “lower animals” like “worms and zoophytes (M399)”, as well as in “hydra brachiopoda and vorticella (ibid)”. In all these cases, assimilation takes place directly, through physical contact, where what “has hardly been swallowed is changed, transformed into a homogeneous mass (ibid)”. These primitive organisms are devoid of mediating digestive organs, and one “cannot differentiate between esophagus, stomach and intestines (ibid)”. Importantly, in terms of our investigation into the significance of excretion, what is excreted in these primitive organisms devoid of mediating digestive processes is indistinguishable from what is ingested: “the polyp opens its mouth again and evacuates part of the ingested food along the same way in which it entered the hydra’s stomach (ibid)”. In other words, immediate assimilation is devoid of particularity. To the extent that “immediate assimilation (M400)” is a feature of digestion generally, as the presupposed truth of the determinate relation between the organic and its Other, we can say that it is universally present in living things. However, whereas primitive animal forms excrete nothing other than the nugatory result of immediate assimilation, higher animal forms like humans excrete the particular results of the digestive process itself, which may appear as superfluous with regards to the speculative truth of digestion: the “triumph (M404)” of the organic over the non-organic, as witnessed in immediate assimilation. This “triumph” gives onto the purposive individuality of the living animal, an important finding with regard to the inchoate subjectivity in the human animal.

For Hegel, the speculative truth of immediate assimilation means that it underlies digestion generally, even universally. Consequently, even the particular features of more complex animal organisms rely on some degree of immediate assimilation through the mechanical workings of their surfaces, where, for example, “the stomach and intestinal canal are themselves nothing else but the outer skin, only reversed and developed and shaped into a peculiar form (EN 365 Add., M400)”. The importance of immediate or direct assimilation explains why Hegel details at length cases where thirsty sailors have apparently absorbed water directly through their skin, minus the salt; where opium “rubbed in the shoulder” has been assimilated into the organism. Hegel again cites Treviranus, whose experiments apparently demonstrated that digestion, qua direct assimilation, can take place in animals outside their stomachs, for example, that “bones, flesh and other animal parts [introduced] under the skin of live animals”, were found to be “completely decomposed (M401)”. In all of these cases, the essential action of digestive assimilation takes place: the transformation of the non-organic into “animal lymph”, the “universal element of animality (M402)”.

Given the fundamental, indeed universal importance of immediate assimilation throughout the digestive process and within the animal organism generally, one might indeed wonder whether all the mediating, particular structures of digestion, in higher animal organisms, are not entirely superfluous. It is precisely this superfluity that is expressed in and through animal excretion. However, the introduction of “separate stages” and the “intermediation of several organs” is absolutely essential for the strength, movement and “actuality” of the complex animal organism itself, which must test itself against non-organic otherness, not in “one stroke (M399)” but through the mediating structures of its own digestive processes.

This complex arrangement of digestion through the intermediation of several organs is, for the non-organic, indeed superfluous, but it is not so for the organism

which progresses through these moments within itself for its own sake in order to be movement and consequently actuality (ibid.).

Hegel goes as far, again in the lengthy Addition to EN 365, to associate the vigor of digestive overcoming, “progressing through these [mediating, digestive] moments for its own sake”, to the vitality of spirit, “just as the strength of spirit is measured only by the extent of the opposition it has overcome (M398)”, an outcome that presents itself as the animal’s individual vital purposiveness¹⁶ or subjective self-affirmation.

Before returning to our examination of the particular lineaments at play in the oppositional mediations of the digestive process, it is important to recall that according to Hegel’s reading of animal digestion, what is excreted is “significantly” the particular digestive elements involved in the process of the animal itself. Only in this sense do we grasp why excretion is presented as the “first, formal (EN 365)” reproductive level of the animal organism. Hence, in the Remark to EN 365, Hegel likens the “superfluity [*Überfluss*]” of the “characteristic product” of animal digestion (i.e. feces) to the production of seeds in the plant. The crucial difference is this: while it is the whole plant itself that is demonstrated as superfluous in its purposive production of seeds, for the organically organized animal, it is the mediating processes alone that are presented as superfluous through the production of feces. In any case, the superfluity of excrement is not, as we saw above, based on the animal having eaten more than it could digest but rather, on the animal’s own digestive triumph over the non-organic Other. Let us return to the lineaments of the particular “*Momente* (M399)” of the mediating animal digestive

¹⁶ With reference to the digestive agency of the Idea, Hegel states, “The result of this process is not, as in the case of the chemical process, a neutral product [...] instead, the living being proves itself to be what overgrasps its other, which cannot resist its power (EL219 Add.)”.

process, which will form the material of excretion and allow us to grasp the truth of its superfluity in its relation to animal subjectivity.¹⁷

Although Hegel's explanation of animal digestion is far from simple, in spite of his assurance that it is "not very complicated (M403, W9 490)", there are two principal elements that appear throughout: on one hand, an element that is variously presented as "sluggish", "inertia", "neutral", "being-in-itself", and on the other hand: "inflammable", "anger", "active", "attacking", "destructive", "being-for-itself". The first relatively passive element is associated, although ambiguously, with chyme (the product of gastric digestion), as well as with pancreatic juice, the spleen, the liver and the venous system. The second, active element is above all associated with bile. Indeed, "chemical analysis of the bile yields nothing more specific than that its tendency is to inflame (M403)". The bile's inflammatory character even acts on the "passive" organs normally associated with its production, e.g. the spleen, which is initially a "being-in-itself" and "sluggish", but "ignited (*befeuert*, *ibid.*)" through its production of bile. Similarly, pancreatic juice, when associated with bile, "attacks" the chyme. Bile even serves to help bring "the inertia of the venous system to a focus in opposition to the lungs (*ibid.*)", as attested to by the fact that shame and anger both bring about changes in blood flows, e.g. "blushing of the face and bosom (*ibid.*)".

Against the universal certainty of immediate assimilation, which underlies digestion generally, particularized, mediated digestion necessarily appears as a superfluous error, as a "false opinion (M 403)". Consequently, "The main point is that the organism, although exercising a mediating, distinctive activity, none the less remains in its universality... (*ibid.*)" And further on, "Because the animal is involved in a struggle with the outer world, its relation to the latter is untrue, since this outer world has already been transformed, in principle (*an sich*) by

¹⁷ Accordingly, plants have no "animal" subjectivity, because their reproduction does not involve excretion.

the animal lymph (ibid.)” Most decisively, “The animal, in turning against its food, fails to recognize its own self [in it] (ibid.)” Of course, as readers of the *Phenomenology*, we know from the Introduction that error is not something to be feared but rather to be embraced as constitutive of the Truth, and the same logic applies in the “lowly” function of animal digestion. Consequently, we must understand the organism’s digestive struggle with its non-organic Other as a constitutive process of purposive animal individuality itself. Therefore, what the animal is really struggling with is not an outer thing but the animal reality of its own digestive process. “What the organism has to conquer is therefore its own process, this entanglement with the outer thing (M403-4).”

In order to “return into itself”, as a universal self-relating purposiveness, the individualized animal must “repudiate and reject that means” or that “mediation which consists in involving itself with the non-organic (M404).” It is in this rejection and repudiation of its own digestive process, of its own digestive particularity as seemingly superfluous where we discover the reproductive aspect of animal excretion, an aspect that involves the “positing of itself as immediately self-identical”, that is, as the affirmation of its animal wholeness and self-related, living individuality. The living animal is thus “reproducing itself in this self-preservation (M404).” Briefly, in excreting as superfluous “this [erroneous] entanglement with the outer thing”, the individual animal affirms and reproduces itself, albeit in a way that is entirely “formal” or subjective.

The subjective “oneness (EL 217)” or individuality that arises from digestive struggle is not to be confused with what is actually excreted. Although the actual feces can be seen as a reproductive positing of the organism, akin to the seeds of a plant, it is not the truth of the “formal” reproduction that Hegel associates with excretion. Rather, through the excretion of its

particular struggle with non-organic objective otherness, the living animal (re)produces itself as purposive organic life. Consequently, perhaps the best expression of formal, animal reproduction is the Fichtean formula, $I=I$. Indeed, Hegel often borrows the formula to express unmediated, exclusive, and thus formal subjectivity.

The internal entanglement and opposition with the outer non-organic thing is thus an essential element of the particularity that complex animal digestion involves. As such, it falls syllogistically into the mediating moment between universality and singularity, as “the second premise of the universal syllogism of purposive activity [aka life]”, as we saw above, in the Remark to EN 365. What is more difficult to apprehend, and hitherto unnoticed, as far as I can see, is how, as a moment of particularity, the digestive process must involve not one but two distinct moments: oppositional aspects that I discussed above, as well as the bilious action that dissolves the oppositions. In fact, it is the fiery, fluidifying nature of bile that animates the digestive process, “the active destruction, this turning in on itself of the organism (M403)” that characterizes digestion as a mediating process, as distinct from the vital universality of immediate assimilation. That is why, “as soon as animals acquire a developed [i.e. mediated] nature and do not merely have an immediate digestion or remain simply at the lymphatic stage, they have both liver and bile (ibid.)” Bile is the essential solvent element of digestion, ensuring the “organic relation of differences” that are essential to systematic organicity generally.

In other words, the elements of digestion involve the active coordination between solvent “animal water” and bilious “fire” (EN 364, M395) over against “heterogeneous, inassimilable matter (M405, W9 492)”¹⁸. These elements, as discovered by Berzelius, form the substance of

¹⁸ Chemically, what is excreted can be analyzed as “the same ingredients of which the animal organs consist (M405)”, for example, besides bile and albumen, “sodium carbonate, sodium chloride, and sodium phosphate, phosphate of magnesia, and phosphate of lime... (ibid)”.

animal excretion, as the excreted means of digestion or the “repudiation and rejection of that means (M404)”, the excreted moments of particularity.

Animal excrement consists of the expelled remains of digestive particularity: the otherness of non-organic material but more significantly, the trace of solvent negativity (watery albumen and fiery bile). This is the “anger” that characterizes the digestive process, over against its “one-sided” opposition “toward the object (EN 365 Remark, M397, W9 483)”, the “fact that the animal turns in anger against what is external (EN 365 Add., M403, W9 490)”. However, because bilious anger is expressed *within the animal itself* and constitutes its own process, what was digestive anger against the non-organic is, in truth, anger that the animal has turned against itself. In fact, the animal “is angry with itself for getting involved with external potencies and it now turns against itself and its false opinion (ibid).” Ridding itself of this “superfluous” false opinion, its “involvement (*Verwickeltsein*) with the outer thing (M404)” is “repudiated and rejected (ibid.)” as animal excrement. However, the act of excretion, as the negation of a negation or as anger against anger, is necessarily understood as a positing, one which takes the form of a “double determination (M404)”: on one hand, excretion is the organism’s exclusionary “positing of itself as immediately self-identical” but also, excretion represents the organism’s “reproducing itself” through this “preservation of itself [*Erhaltung seiner*]” (ibid.).

Briefly, the animal’s self-production or purposiveness, its “oness”, is the speculative truth of the excremental rejection of its entanglement with otherness. The *moments* of particularity appear as superfluous to the triumphant self-affirmation of the organism in its enduring, purposive individuality, “the formal process of simple reproduction of its own self, into the uniting of itself with itself [*in das Zusammenschliessen seiner mit sich*] (EN 365)”. To further grasp how animal excretion stands with regards to the animal organism, I will now turn to the

aspects of individuality and purposiveness that arise through the reproductive aspect associated with excretion.

3. *Animal Individuality and Purposiveness*

Individuality. In the Addition to EN 365, Hegel refers repeatedly to the animal organism as an individual. First, in its bilious behavior to the non-organic individual object (*zu Individuellem*, W 9 491, M404), “it has proven itself to be as an animal individual (*als animalisches Individuum*, *ibid.*)”. Thus, the animal has now become, through the carried out process of digestion and its excremental conclusion, “in a real way, for itself, i.e. individual (*ibid.*)”. While one might argue that the *Encyclopedia’s* Additions should not provide the basis for precise textual analysis, the insistence here on individuality (*Individuum*, *Individuelle*, *individuell*) makes it unlikely that those transcribing Hegel’s lectures, constituting Michelet’s *Zusätze*, could have missed Hegel’s point: digestion and its reproductive excrement constitute the organism as an animal *individual*. This is significant given Hegel’s take on individuality generally, which must be distinguished from what he means by singularity (e.g. *das Einzelne*), an admittedly ambiguous distinction that is not always made in the translations and commentaries. In general, Hegel uses the latter term when referring to the syllogistic destiny of the immediate, unmediated “singular”, in its inevitable collapse into universality, when it does not have the privilege of being “saved” by particularity. In that case, the finite (natural) singular thing is taken up into the generalizing particularity of genus or species, allowing the singular thing to participate, in a humble way, in the conclusive Singularity of the fulfilled concept (the Singular universal “filled” with particularized, generalized content). The unmediated singular per se can do nothing but vanish into the indeterminate universal, as we witness in the *Phenomenology’s*

chapter on Sense-certainty, where singular sensations collapse into the empty indeterminacy of the “here” and the “now”. On the other hand, *Individualität*, in Hegel, presents the immediate singular insofar as it resists its conceptual destiny, holding onto its “for-itselfness”, which it seeks to anchor by assigning itself particular properties. Continuing the reference to the *Phenomenology*, we can say that the object of perception, with its properties, is “individual”, as opposed to the singularity of raw sense data. In the Addition to EN 365, Hegel refers to the “animal individual” as having posited itself (*sich gesetzt*) as “real being-for-self (*Fürsichsein*) (M 404, W9 491)”.

We must remind ourselves that the level of subjectivity involved in digestion and excretion is specifically *animal* and only as such is it applicable to the human, that is, to the extent that human beings are always also individual *animals*. Animal subjectivity does indeed manifest itself, in digestion, through the overcoming of its non-organic Other, within itself, as a “self-relation” that involves self “diremption and division” (M 404). However, the essential outcome here is the constitution of subjectivity as an *animal* individual, which only happens through the animal’s “repelling of itself from itself (EN 365 Add., M404, W9 491)”¹⁹. This action is excretion: “The differentiation does not take place only within the organism itself; on the contrary, the nature of the organism is to produce itself as something external to it”, i.e. as excrement, the necessary moment of self-differencing within formal “reproduction (EN 365).”²⁰

¹⁹ Douglas Finn writes, “that excretion is the animal’s repulsion of the animal’s own process of digestion from itself and a return of the animal into itself as a nascent subject.” Or again, “the animal transcends that process and ‘knows’ itself as a universal power greater than its externally oriented activity, as subject, being-for-self.” I would simply add “individual” before “subject” in these sentences. *The Owl of Minerva* 47:1–2 (2015–16) p. 130.

²⁰ Regarding the genesis of specifically human subjectivity, we have to refer to the “Anthropology” section of the *Philosophy of Subjective Spirit* (ESS), and to a discussion of human reproduction. See ES §405, “Initially, feeling individuality is certainly a monadic individual, but it is so immediately, not yet as it is itself as an into-reflected subject...” And in the Remark: “In its immediate existence this is the relationship of the child in its mother’s womb.” *Hegel’s Philosophy of Subjective Spirit*, vol. 2, edited, translated and notes by M.J. Petry (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1979) p. 221. Perhaps we might say that the subjectivity of the animal individual persists in the human animal as a form of unconscious mind.

Individuality, for Hegel, generally involves exclusivity, the exclusion of what is “not-I”, leaving the formal I=I. In the present context, the animal organism, in order to constitute and, above all, maintain and conserve itself (“*in dieser Erhaltung seiner*”, W 9, p. 491, M 404) as a self-relating *individuality*, must expel its internal differentiation, its “entanglement (*Verwicklung*)” with otherness in the form of “superfluous” excrement. Through the expulsion of its entanglement with otherness, what is formally reproduced is the *self-produced* (formal) reality of individual wholeness that characterizes animal life.

Purposiveness. The third organic element that arises through the acknowledgment of the excretory function of the individual animal organism is purposiveness. Of course, the question of “purposiveness” cannot help but evoke its elaboration in Kant’s third *Critique*, in his discussion of that regulative idea as ideally active within nature, underlying both its holistic beauty and its scientific comprehensibility. Karen Ng’s recent book strikes me as exemplary in its investigation of the notion of life, in Hegel, as tangential to the Kantian notion of purposiveness, and indeed Hegel himself recognizes the Kantian notion as simply subjective idealism’s approach to what is, in fact, the agency of the Concept.²¹ Here, I am concerned with how organic purposiveness arises through animal excretion, and further, how the biological concept is related to animal subjectivity.

At the end of the substantial Addition to EN 365 that I have been referring to throughout, Hegel states, “In truth, the activity of the organism is purposive (*zweckmässige*, W9 493, M406).” This “truth” is arrived at because, as is usual in Hegel, its certitude has been there from the start. What is rejected or expelled in animal life, relative to the pre-conceived and realized end or purpose (*Zweck*), is therefore the *means* to that end: the “repudiating and rejecting [of the means]” of the digestive process, as “superfluous” with regards to the general certainty of

²¹ Karen Ng, *Hegel’s Concept of Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020)

immediate assimilation “in itself”, which we visited above. That is why Hegel, somewhat surprisingly, talks about “Reason” in the Remark to EN 365. The “satisfaction” that the animal experiences in excreting the elements involved in its digestive means to an end “conforms to Reason” because, as the *Phenomenology* has taught us, Reason is the “certainty of [individual] consciousness of being all reality (MPh 233, W3 179)²²”. Here, the certainty is that of immediate digestive assimilation: “the immediate action of life as the power over its non-organic object (EN 363 Add, M 394)”. This power over the non-organic Other “presupposes” that this Other is “in itself identical with it”, a certainty appearing as “ideality and being-for-self (*Fürsichsein*)”. In syllogistic terms, which Hegel employs in the Remark to EN 365, the expulsion of the elements of particularity (solvent bile and the stuff that it was opposed to) as excrement, leaves behind pure ideality (thought’s power over otherness) in the form of subjective animal individuality. It is this “purposive activity”, in digestion and excretion, that realizes its end or “purpose (EN 365 Remark, W 9 483, M397)” in the “union [*Zusammenschliessen*] of the organism with itself. (ibid.)” The culminating *self*-uniting that constitutes the purposiveness attained through digestion and its outcome is one of *individual* ideality. It is a *Schluss* (conclusion, syllogism) de-void of its own particularity, which the animal organism has expulsed, voided as the superfluous entanglement with non-organic otherness.

The purposiveness attained through animal excretion is presented by Hegel as a self-affirmation or “self-confidence [*Zuversicht*] (M405, W9 492)” on the part of the animal organism, which has not only triumphed over the outer non-organic object but, more importantly, has triumphed over its own digestive entanglement with that object. Purposiveness, in this light, is certainly an affirmation of animal life but only if we take this affirmation as, “the subjective [...] identity of its concept and its reality” (EN 365 Remark, M 397, W9 483)”. The formally

²² MPh = A.V. Miller’s translation of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, followed by the paragraph number.

subjective nature of the resultant self-identity means that one must not expect too much from the digestive “Schluss” or syllogism. It only attains the formal “Zusammenschliessen” devoid of mediating particularity, which it has expelled as “a false opinion (M403, W9 490)”, rather than as a constitutive error. That is what I believe Hegel means when he writes, “The syllogism of the organism is, therefore, not the syllogism of external teleology (EN 365 Remark, M 396).” As opposed to the “universal syllogism of purposive activity (ibid)”, which takes the form of U-P-S, where the particular moment constitutes the essential, mediating content of the whole, the behavior of digestion is only “expounded in the second premise”, that is, in the moments of particularity, which, when excreted, present the organism solely as a “uniting of itself with itself [Zusammenschliessen]”, which I presented above using the Fichtean formula, I=I.

Nonetheless, in excreting its involvement with non-organic otherness as a means to an end, the animal organism affirms itself as that end qua pure ideality, which is the essence of its purposiveness. If, through digestion, the organism “takes and wins nothing but chyle (M397)”, it is because chyle is the same as “animal lymph” and blood, and the biological essence of each is to circulate. Briefly, we may surmise that the result of mediated digestion is circulatory fluidity within the organism. The power that drives the inner circulatory movement essential to the animal organism, that which animates it and constitutes its *anima*, is the purposiveness of pure ideality expressed as formal subjectivity.

However, we can also say that the end of the digestive process, as ideality, as the self-confident self-affirmation of the organism, is the immediate feeling of its individual life as a truth that is more than the sum of its internal, animal processes, which it has excreted as superfluous. From this point of view, the upshot of the process, as a pure *Zusammenschliessen*, is therefore characterized by a feeling of “satiation, the self-feeling which feels completeness in

place of the previous lack” (EN 365 Add., M406, W9 493). Douglas Finn’s reading of purposiveness (although he does not refer to it as such) as “the unified organizational activity of life” which refuses to “be reduced to any one of its processes”, captures the general idea of the feeling of organic satisfaction that Hegel describes, as arising from the process of excretion. In excretion, purposiveness is thus presented as a feeling of self-confidence, one resulting from the expulsion of its self-doubt, the false opinion that arose through the organism’s entanglement with the non-organic. In excretion (defecation), the animal is affirming: “That’s not me! I am more than that! I am more than the functioning of my digestive organs!” However, as pure ideality, exclusive of particular process, the feeling of self-confidence, of jubilant, self-organizational power or vitality must also be one of emptiness, of renewed hunger. While this is not apparent to the satisfied animal, as philosophers of nature we know that the truth of the animal’s feeling of completeness is really an immediate form of self-certainty, which, as *natural* feeling can be nothing other than fleeting. For hunger is, like excretion, a fundamental element of animal life: “Only what is living feels a lack,” as Hegel succinctly puts it, in the Remark to EN 359 (M385).

Conclusion

It is clear that Hegel’s idea of animal excretion as a form of reproduction presents the organism as an individuality, one which is for-itself and hence subjective. It is a living *Individualität* and as such should be seen as an organic, self-preserving identity that maintains and affirms itself through the triumphant expulsion of inner differentiation and entanglement with otherness. Assigning the characteristic of excremental self-preserving or maintaining to the human animal does not immediately imply that it is self-conscious in actively seeking its own preservation. The human individuality arising from

organic excretion may be conceived as self-preserving simply because that is what it means to be an individual animal organism.

Digestion and excretion can never provide *substantial* satisfaction. The formal aspect of the subjective “reproduction” (I = I), the fact that it is syllogistically void of mediating particularity, which it has excreted, leaves a form of subjectivity that is chronically empty, always hungry, never achieving the syllogistic Singular that is the ontological aim of the self-identical, self-differentiated concept: Singularity that has carried out pre-supposed universality through sublated (*aufgehoben*) mediating particularity. In other words, animal digestion can never attain more than a bad infinity of hunger and satisfaction. Indeed, the ultimate lesson of the PN, which we discover at the book’s end, is this: only in “the death of the natural being” is “the sublation of the formal opposition between the immediate singularity of the individuality and its universality achieved” EN 376. Then, in death, “nature has been [conclusively] sublated and the concept [...] has become for-itself”. Put differently, the syllogistic completion of the animal organism is only achieved through its necessary self-overcoming, whereby its subjectivity “has coalesced with itself” to rise as human “Geist [spirit/mind]” (ibid.), the subject of subsequent book of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia of Philosophical Sciences*.

Thus, the Hegelian narrative of the human being moves beyond purely animal organicity and recognizes that its “Life (EL 216)” is supplemented with “Cognition (EL 223)”. Only then may we begin to speak of the individual animal form that Hegel is finally interested in: that of a rational, conscious human being, capable of dynamic, reciprocal relations with otherness, which reach far beyond relations of digestive

assimilation and excretion. Nonetheless, the exploration of digestion and excretion reminds us that the human being is always also a living animal and as such, mortal.