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The Philosophical Concept of Life and Its Role in the Foundation of an Integrative Bioethics

Abstract

The essay demonstrates how bioethics can find an ethical dimension of its own and an original source of normativity by taking a fresh look at the concept of life. This requires a concept of life which is more than empirical, the logic of which is developed, in the first instance, from the insights arrived at by the philosophers of German idealism, but also from those of the more recent phenomenology of life. The basic problem of an integrative bioethics consists then in thinking through the development of an ethics with a fundamental attachment to the actuality of life, where the latter always precedes the former. Depending on the side that the emphasis is placed, bioethics acquires either a more 'Apollonian' rational or a 'Dionysian' vitalistic character, although integrating the two into a synthesis is what is essential.

Keywords

life, totality, source of normativity, German idealism

The concept of *life* is obviously of central importance not only for *bio*-ethics in general, but also for the idea of an *integrative bioethics* in particular. We shall see somewhat later exactly what is meant by this idea when we consider it with respect to both a dialectical understanding of life and some current questions that bioethics is faced with. Whatever the result of these discussions may be, we can start with *two theses*, which I think are not especially difficult; they concern the central problems of any bioethics that aims to be more than merely so-called applied ethics.

(I) The first thesis is that *a bioethics which is a really new approach to ethical questions and not just an applied ethics requires a concept of life that is more than empirical*. The reason for this is that bioethics as a new approach to ethical questions must postulate life as a principle of its own and even as a normative principle independent of other sources of normativity, such as the idea of the good, the idea of liberty and so on.

I think that both components of this thesis are clear: (1) that bioethics has to refer to a concept of life which is more than empirical, for life as a mere empirical instance could never be taken as a *principle*, and (2) that this concept of life has to be a *source of normativity*, for otherwise it would not be an *ethical* principle. It should also be clear that a non-empirical concept of life still needs to be connected to the empirical aspect of life; otherwise, it would not be of much use to bioethics. But, even if this first

thesis is accepted, some questions do remain, which take us directly to the main issues of a bioethics in the new sense, which I think are addressed in the *second thesis*:

(II) *The central problem of bioethics is how the presupposed concept of 'life' and the concept of philosophical 'ethics' can really be combined in a systematically acceptable way. This problem becomes acute when confronted with the following facts*: (1) while all ethics is a creation of reason, life, of course, is not, and (2) while rationality is normative in itself, the sense in which life as such is normative at all awaits determination (for Nietzsche, the real 'value' of life lies in the fact that it can never be imprisoned by our norms, but remains their everlasting critical counterpart).

It may be that the division into two main schools of bioethics historically is one of the consequences of the problem here indicated. One school of thought in bioethics is primarily devoted to *rationality* and its inner clarity, while the other starts from something like *sensibility* or indeterminate feelings about what life, as something more than rationality, may teach us. The first may perhaps try to answer bioethical questions without too much or even any reference to a normativity of life, thus constantly running the risk of falling back into a mere applied ethics. The other may try to arrive at all bioethical decisions from the idea of life as such, running the risk of becoming a mere 'vitalism', which forgets that more or less all our moral questions, even those of bioethics, are reactions to the manifest injustices of life and are not to be answered simply by affirming that life is normative. One can speak of a split between an 'Apollonian' and a 'Dionysian' type of bioethics – a distinction made intentionally to highlight the question of a truly *integrative* bioethics that would combine both aspects into *one* perspective. My concern in this paper will be to discuss some ideas on how this gap might be closed – beginning with an attempt to rethink what the 'normativity of life' might mean.

1. The philosophical concept of life

Let us start with a set of simple reflections on what exactly we have in mind when we analyse the concept of life in a *philosophical* manner. Some readers might find speaking of life as something non-empirical to be odd, but we should keep in mind the fact that none of us has ever been in contact with life as a whole or a totality, and that 'life', as a *singulare tantum*, as a concept of a whole existing uniquely, could never be an empirical concept, for the principle of the empirical is plurality. Anyhow, speaking *philosophically* about life does not mean referring to a mere external object. The main difference between philosophy and biology when referring to life is that biology refers to objects with the specific *property* of being living things. Life, in this respect, is a mere attribute of an object and has to be described in an objective manner, e.g., by showing that the specific object we are talking about is characterised by some specific functions and, e.g., by acids regulating its functioning. In twentieth century philosophy, the Frenchman Michel Henry (1922–2002) was one of those who pointed out that this idea of an 'objective life' could never keep up with our philosophical intentions with respect to life. Henry belongs to the philosophical school of phenomenology, who from this starting point discovered that 'life' cannot be an object *of* intentionality at all, but is presupposed as existing *with* intentionality as such; it refers to the *horizon* of all possible intentional objects, as well as to the foundations of our consciousness in

the sense that in every sentence such as 'I am conscious of something' a *me* simultaneously referring to itself, i.e. a more than conscious form of personality, is already presupposed. In his discussion of this concept in the philosophy of religion, Henry says that if Christian theology wants to take seriously the statement of Jesus Christ "I am the life" in John 14, 6 ("Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life"), a sentence which is completely incoherent with our normal grammar when we use the word 'life', theology has to *rethink* systematically the concept of life as a *personal* reality which has its centre in something like a preconscious 'I', in this case the absolute I of the son of God. Henry's view is, finally, that when we use the word 'life', we are always on the point of transcending our standard grammars, because it puts us in touch with something similar to the very source of all our grammars. For Henry, the most important point here is that philosophy has to take into account that we know what life is from a very personal perspective; we know what life is not from regarding it from the outside, but from the inside, from our own being as living things ourselves. We cannot speak about life without participating in it – and this *reflexivity* is precisely the point where the philosophical dimension of the idea of life begins.[1]

Awareness of the more than objective meaning of what life is was, of course, not unique to twentieth century philosophy. In the *Phaedo*, for instance, Plato himself tried to demonstrate that life has to be something eternal in itself and that the soul is nothing other than the presence of the idea of life within living things. Aristotle sought to demonstrate that life always refers to an internal principle of self-construction and teleology, i.e. that no living being could be understood without fundamental reference to a moment of self-reflection in asserting itself as its own end. Philosophers such as Plotinus, Thomas Aquinas, Nicholas of Cues and Leibniz all stressed the importance of the idea of life in general, but I do not wish to go into detail about what they had in mind here. I will only point out *three main aspects* of a philosophical approach to the idea of life, aspects that may help us to understand the implicit normative dimension of this idea.

First, life can be considered to be an expression of *infinity*, of the concrete identity of the external and the internal, the universal and the individual, the one and the many. This idea will become clearer somewhat later when we consider Hegel and his dialectical concept of life, but let us start with a number of general reflections. As has already been mentioned, life is not a simple 'object' of our reference. We cannot simply refer to life and forget that this referring is *in itself an act of life*. Life is an end in itself and should not, therefore, be subjected to finite ends or taken as a mere means. Human dignity and its intimate correlation with the individual right to life is stressed, e.g., in Kant's arguments against abortion. Abortion means the destruction of an individual real instance of life or an already living individual (which is, therefore, an infinite interest) normally in the name of mere subjective purposes, i.e. normally in the name of finite ends, and this aspect of abortion remains problematical regardless of the above argument. I stress "normally" here, for it is clear that when the life of the embryo as such threatens the life of the mother the situation is quite different.[2] Life in the sense here discussed

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Michel Henry, *L'essence de la manifestation*, PUF, Paris 1963; Michel Henry, *Phénoménologie matérielle*, PUF, Paris 1990; Michel Henry, *C'est moi la vérité. Pour une philosophie du christianisme*, Seuil, Paris 1996.

2
According to Kant, practical personality, i.e. moral independence from the arbitrary decisions of others, has to be respected from the moment of the conception of a new individual human being; cf. Immanuel Kant, "Metaphys-

is, to put it in Kantian terms, an *a priori* to all our *a posteriori* aims, which means that the right to life is the first instance of right to be recognised in all interpersonal relations.

Second, the philosophical idea of life leads us to a theoretically very interesting point, which is that the idea of life is an argument against modern *nominalism*. The thesis of nominalism as I refer to it here is, in short, the claim that the order of signs has nothing to do with the order of things in themselves, and that there can never be any possibility of closing the gap between signs and objects. From this point of view, we can never overcome the difference between form and content, i.e. we will never attain *real knowledge* defined as the correspondence between words and things, thoughts and objects, form and content. But is it true that form and content are bound to differ eternally? In fact, if, as we have seen, we cannot refer to 'life' as an external object, and every reference to life is in itself an act of life, then we have at least *one* example in which form and content are *not* completely heterogeneous. We know what life is as *participators* in its idea and in its reality. In the idea of life then we find a hint that all our real knowledge has to be understood in the light of a prior and non-nominalistic knowing.

Third, I would like to look at a more *logical* aspect of life, namely the dialectical identity of the universal and the individual in life. The subsumption model cannot make sense of the relation of *life in general* to a single *living being*. Living beings are not only 'cases' of life, but *are* life; what remains when we take life away from living beings is not even a being at all, but a nothing or, at best, an instance of self-dissolution. Life, on the other hand, is not a mere abstract idea of what all living beings have in common; it is the concrete *interrelation* of these beings or, in other words, the perpetual self-disjunction of the 'universal' into its 'instances' and simultaneously not the least bit constant resumption of the universal from its individual instances. The most important point here is that life is in itself a *reflexive* 'entity', which means that it is already a 'normative being'. We are often told that speaking about 'normative beings' means committing the so-called naturalistic fallacy. But the fallacy of this objection lies in its own nominalism, i.e. its attempt to establish an insurmountable dualism between being and what ought to be, between facts and norms. Bioethics must overcome this dualism if it wants to be an ethics that is not merely applied to living beings, but is able to understand itself as a real reflection of life, as a way of thinking, mindful *participation* in the reality it discusses. At this point, let us take a look at what Kant and Hegel, two of the most important modern thinkers of the issue of life, had to say.

2. Kant and the idea of life

Regarding the idea of life, Kant can be considered a somewhat ambiguous thinker. On the one hand, 'life' and 'living' constitute something such as a 'vital thread' running right through all of Kant's philosophy and the development of his system. In his first work from 1747 entitled *Thoughts on the True Estimation of Living Forces*, in which he argues more or less in favour of Leibniz's dynamics, Kant introduces the idea of a *vis activa* or a 'living force' as an at least metaphysically legitimate concept. Then, there is also Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgement*, in which, now from a "critical" level of his thinking, he seeks to provide teleology and the philosophy of the organic with a new significance and importance. Third, in his last writings, the *Opus postumum*, Kant is still trying to improve his genuine intuition of the "moving

forces of perception" as the real link between external objects and the internal world of our concepts of objects – an intuition which, at a certain point, leads him to conceive of the world as an organic whole, even animal-like, a ζῷον – *zoon*, as Plato calls it in the *Timaeus*. It may be surprising in this context to see that Kant's definition of life in his first writings is indeed very close to the Aristotelian idea and definition of nature. Kant says that a substance possessing "living force" is a substance which "grounds its motion in itself, so that it is possible to understand its motion from an internal inclination to continue with this motion freely, for ever and without decrease to infinity".[3] And when Kant, in his *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, writes that "life is the capacity of a substance to determine itself to action by an internal principle, of a finite substance, to determine itself to change, and of a material substance, to determine itself to motion or rest as states of itself",[4] he is more or less literally quoting Aristotle's definition of nature (Met. IV, 4, 1015a13–15). But as I have already said, there remains a fundamental ambiguity in Kant's conception. Kant is and remains a follower of Descartes, and there is no doubt that he regards matter as "dead matter" completely submitting to the Newtonian law of inertia. In Kant's *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science* we also have the following:

"Now we know no other internal principle of a substance to change its state but desire, and no other internal activity whatever but thought, with that which depends upon it, feelings of pleasure or pain, and impulse or will. But these grounds of determination and action in no wise belong to the presentations of external sense, and thus not to the determinations of matter as matter. Thus all matter as such is lifeless. The proposition of inertia says so much and no more. If we seek the cause of any change of matter whatsoever in life, we shall have to seek it at once in another substance, distinct from matter, although bound up with it."[5]

Life is, therefore, something not to be found in real, external and material nature – it belongs to an order of things and concepts transcending nature, and, more particularly, it belongs to the internal world of our intentions and purposes. In the *Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant writes:

"The faculty of desire is the faculty to become the cause of the objects of one's own representations. The faculty of a being to act according to its own representations is called life."[6]

Kant seems here to be very close to Leibniz's basic ideas of representation, particularly as far as his concept of life which leads to the idea that life means the capability of a being to refer to itself by external representations or in a reflexive way. Life is itself an instance of reflexivity, and, according to Kant, it therefore belongs to the realm of subjectivity. Thus, for Kant, we

ical First Principles of the Doctrine of Right" (§28), in: Immanuel Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. by Mary Gregor, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1991, p. 99. In this sense, Kant considers the suicide of a pregnant woman to be *the* murder of *a* second person; cf. Immanuel Kant, "Metaphysical First Principles of the Doctrine of Virtue" (§6), in: I. Kant, *The Metaphysics of Morals*, p. 218.

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"[D]erjenige Körper" verfügt über "lebendige Kraft", "der seine Bewegung in sich selber hinlänglich gründet, so daß aus seiner inneren Bestrebung hinlänglich verstanden werden kann, daß er die Bewegung, die er hat, frei, immerwährend und unvermindert ins unendliche selber in sich erhalten werde"; Immanuel Kant, AA I, p. 143f.

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Immanuel Kant, AA IV, p. 544; cf. Immanuel Kant, *Metaphysical Foundations of Natural Science*, transl. and ed. by Michael Friedman, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 83.

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I. Kant, AA IV, p. 211.

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Immanuel Kant, AA VI, p. 211.

understand what life really means only from our own participation in life, i.e. only subjectively. But, if, on the other hand, the understanding of nature is the understanding of something which we are not and which is essentially in itself an 'object', and not a 'subject', then we have to abandon any idea of a subjective, i.e. living, matter. A crucial point in Kant's philosophy is that "hylozoism" has to be considered to be "the death of natural philosophy",[7] a fact which in itself implies the necessity of expelling life from all natural science. Kant's assertion that there is "no Newton of the leaves of grass" indeed reflects the conception that life is not a physical, but a transcendental attribute – an attribute which reflects the "dynamism" of our concepts, the order of our knowledge, and not any external "fact". When the *Critique of the Power of Judgement* tries to restore teleology in some way, it does so on the level of our concepts, of their systematic form and coherence, of their "functioning", but not on the level of physical objects the way in which the old metaphysics of nature had done, especially in Aristotelianism. The only thing we might add here is the need to stress again that in the above *Opus postumum* Kant tries to explore the modes of convergence between our "living" system of concepts and the system of nature itself. In this sense – and only in this sense – in Kant, life appears as a *terminus medius* between internal and external worlds. I shall now consider how the German idealists were more optimistic with regard to an "ontological" attempt to re-think life.

3. Hegel

Hegel's philosophy fulfilled its destiny by re-thinking the concept of life.[8] A Kantian in his early years, Hegel overcame the standpoint of transcendental philosophy precisely at the moment when he understood that it was *life* that reconciled all the divisions that Kant's philosophy had produced or was not able to resolve. These divisions include that between concept and intuition, the separation of theoretical and practical questions, and the gap between essence and phenomenon. In his Frankfurt *Fragment of a System* from 1800 at the latest, Hegel tried to show that life has to be understood as a dialectical identity of the universal and the individual, the whole and its elements, and that this is precisely what may make the answer to the problems left unresolved by Kant. Starting from this concept of life, Hegel begins with criticism of Kantian ethics. One of the most important points of Hegel's argument is that, if this is not done, a real identity of form and content in morality will never be reached, i.e. we will not escape Cartesian dualism in the field of human practice.

The model for this living morality and essential unity of form and content in ethics, according to Hegel, is the ancient Greek *polis*, which for him represents the ideal mediation between the whole and the individual, between objective spirit and personality, between laws and their 'cultural' embedding. In his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel again tries to show that the ancient Greek model is, in some respects, even superior to modern Kantian ethics. It offers us a way of understanding that moral subjectivity is not as "independent" as it thinks it is, and that this subjectivity has "substantial" links to the cultural and historical horizon in which it exists and tries to reach its freedom. Then, in his *Science of Logic*, Hegel declares that 'life' means the pure immediacy of the absolute idea, i.e. the totality of all possible points of view as an immediate unity. However, I cannot go into detail about Hegel's logic of life here. I will only try to give a short overview of the main aspects of life as

Hegel understands it – first in his *Logic*, but also in his other discussions of the idea of life.

1) Life, according to Hegel, is the real *infinitum actu*, the concrete identity of the external and the internal, the universal and the individual, the one and the many. As has already been mentioned, this unity can only be understood dialectically, it is never a simple 'object' of our reference. We cannot simply refer to life while forgetting that this referring is *in itself an act of life*. *Dialectics* is essentially the science of being in relations – and, in this sense, we can also say that, for Hegel, life has to be understood as the actuality of relations, or better yet of 'self-relation' as such. Moreover, this self-relating totality is a 'self-differentiating' one. Life never means an immediate "fact". It means a being-in-relations, and therefore refers to mediations by which in every individual aspect of life the totality is present, and simultaneously in every representation of the totality individuality is present. Hegel, who from his Frankfurt *Fragment of a System* onwards defines life in this sense, is, like Fichte, a revolutionary in ontology. There is, according to him, no possible sense of 'being' besides this sense of a 'self-relating' life.
2) Hegel has another aim in focussing on life as the main model for an absolute ontology. He is trying to escape modern *nominalism*, including the kind of nominalism which underlies transcendental philosophy (Kant's criticism of the ontological argument for the existence of God may be recalled here). The idea of nominalism is, as has already been mentioned, that the order of signs has nothing to do with the order of things in themselves, and that there can never be any possibility of closing the gap between signs and objects. Recalling the arguments given above, we do not acquire our knowledge of life from an external point of view, but from inside it. And we know what life is with the immediate certainty that our knowing life is itself a demonstration of the reality of what we mean by it, i.e. life. This is the sense in which there is "absolute knowing" as in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and philosophers have to determine how to make it clear that all our real knowledge has to be understood in light of this first and non-nominalistic knowing.[9]
3) Finally, I would like to return to a particular point in the discussion of Hegel's concept of life. As I have said above, the most important point in Hegel's concept of life is the coincidence of the universal and the individual, which also makes life a *reflexive* 'entity' and which therefore places it – as in Fichte – very close to the idea of *knowing*. Hegel's claim that the origin of self-consciousness does not lie in conceiving oneself as an object of one's own consciousness, but in conceiving life and understanding immediately that the *de te fabula narratur* – "The story is about you!" – of this concept essentially means that our own being as living things is addressed directly when we speak about life.

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Cf. I. Kant, AA IV, p. 544.

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Cf. Thomas Sören Hoffmann, *Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel. Eine Propädeutik*, Marix, Wiesbaden ^{2}2012, pp. 124–127; Annette Sell, *Der lebendige Begriff. Leben und Logik bei G. W. F. Hegel*, Alber, Freiburg – Munich 2013.

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Cf. Thomas Sören Hoffmann, "Reflexion, Begriff und spekulative Erkenntnis. Über Weisen des Wissens im Blick auf Hegels Logik", in: Rüdiger Bubner, Gunnar Hindrichs (eds.), *Von der Logik zur Sprache*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 2007, pp. 88–108.

4. Modern bioethics and the concept of life

Now we all know that bioethics is a rather new, perhaps not always deeply rooted, but nevertheless not unattractive philosophical discipline. Its orientation towards the life sciences as probably the most important and even revolutionary branch of contemporary science suggests that it is in bioethics where the real conflicts of our times are being discussed. And where else but in bioethics do the discussions of philosophers still have the chance of influencing actual decision-making processes in society, thus forcing philosophers to take their own responsibility seriously.

In this concluding part, I would like to suggest that it may indeed be true that bioethics as such enjoys the status of exceptional relevance – but that this can only really be the case if bioethics accomplishes a serious paradigm shift grounded in a concept of life such as the one developed, e.g., by Hegel. Let us do away with a misunderstanding at the very beginning: this shift neither requires nor involves the reintroduction of a new vitalism based on biological or other empirical concepts of life. On the other hand, it is true that in some proposals for a normativity of life, e.g., in that of Hans Jonas, we are indeed confronted with something resembling a new version of natural law, based in this case on an ontology which tries to once again promote the notion that being itself is something immediately good. Jonas's teaching about our obligations to future generations appears, in this sense, to be based on a rather uncritical concept of something resembling "ontological justice", which has, of course, been a core concept of the idea of natural law from its very beginning. The conception of natural law seeks to indicate the naturally given boundaries of human decision-making – and it was Kant who explained that precisely no such limitation on human decision-making can be considered to be given by nature, but that all such boundaries are self-determined by the free and good will. But Jonas is not the only author under consideration here. Even more surprising than Jonas's reintroduction of metaphysics has been, e.g., the reintroduction of a concept of human nature about ten years ago by two prominent liberal thinkers, Jürgen Habermas and Francis Fukuyama. Neither of the two thinkers could clearly avoid reintroducing this concept in their contributions to bioethics, a concept that was for a long time thought to be not only outmoded, but essentially obsolete. In 2001, Habermas published some lectures on bioethical issues under the title *The Future of Human Nature* (*Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur*).[10] Fukuyama, an American economist, published a book in 2002 that soon became very well-known – *Our Posthuman Future: Consequences of the Biotechnology Revolution*.[11] Fukuyama pointed out that, while the new developments in biotechnology tended to destroy all normative sense of what it means to be human, the *classical* ideas of European political thinking necessarily *presupposed* the concept of a more or less unchangeable human nature. In short, if there is no human nature, there is neither human dignity, and so we are also unable to establish unchangeable human rights. Fukuyama therefore stressed that perhaps we should revive the traditional concept of natural law, and that we should do so even though this concept seems to be very unattractive to modern mainstream academics. I would say that it is behind these remarkable positions that the problem we have discussed here lies, the problem of re-establishing at least some normativity of life, and it is due to a defect of the manner in which the problem is raised by these writers that we get the impression that the discussion refers to a normativity of facts and is therefore a natural fallacy.

However, let us return to the field of bioethics and the way we may deal with the 'normativity of life' here. At the beginning of my paper, I have mentioned that there are two bioethical schools or approaches today, one that can, in some sense, be called 'Apollonian', and the other 'Dionysian'. The difference may also be put in this way: at its best, bioethics is, on the one hand, understood to be a means of preserving our autonomy and freedom under the conditions of high-tech medicine and the alienation of the individual produced by the latter; on the other hand, it is regarded as the new, no longer 'anthropocentric' paradigm of understanding what our freedom and autonomy could be. Authors belonging to this second way of defining bioethics, apart from the already mentioned Hans Jonas, include Michael W. Fox, Klaus-Michael Meyer-Abich and, in some sense, Robert Spaemann as well.

Nevertheless, one cannot deny that today's mainstream bioethics understands itself in the first manner. In contrast, what I would like to underline here is the fact that, e.g., Jonas and other bioethicists may well have indicated the right direction when arguing for the rethinking of bioethics and even for the establishing of a new way of ethical reflection in general.

However, the problem that remains is that they do not possess the conceptual means to meet their demands. They are right in trying to convince us that any ethics that considers life, living beings and actions on them according to the technical model of an intervention in external objects necessarily misses the scope of a bioethics that is aware of the fact that life in all its manifestations is never a merely external (Cartesian) object to which external principles can simply be applied. Life is not "matter" that doesn't "matter" – and Jonas, Potter and the others would have been completely right had they wanted to stress only *this* point. But they tried something else; they tried to make life the real "substance" of the world, so that living beings – including man – are not only "accidents" of this substance.

I am reasonably certain that the fundamental intuition of the "second" kind of bioethics can be explained in this way, and even that calling its advocates – from Schweitzer to Jonas – bioethical Spinozists would not be taking matters too far. It is clear that, from this point of view, the principle of autonomy – especially in its original, Kantian meaning – appears to be unacceptable, just waiting to be denounced as a typical outcome of anthropocentric hubris. But is this view the right one? Can we – logically speaking – ever make ourselves just accidents of a substance that we ourselves define as such? Can we really think that we, the subjects of our thoughts, are mere objects of a merely substantial object that we define as the real 'subject' of the world? The answer to these questions is not as simple as it perhaps might seem. The answer has to be a dialectical *sic et non*, a yes and a no.

We can indeed *truly* think that it is not our thinking and (formal) subjectivity that frees us from all dependences, including the dependence on life as a more than individual totality. At the same time, we can also *truly* think that our knowing, our freedom is in itself the only *subjectivity*, the only form of free existence that *life itself* attains. The very fact that life is not a mere object of our relation to the world makes us *subjects* of life – life's own reflexivity, and in this sense the real 'living life'. We do recall that Hegel said that in the case of life we cannot separate the universal from the individual and that both

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Jürgen Habermas, *The Future of Human Nature*, Polity Press, Cambridge 2003; Jürgen Habermas, *Die Zukunft der menschlichen Natur*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt/Main 2001.

perpetually refer to one other. In this sense, the living individual can never simply be absorbed by life in general whose real existence it is. We have not discussed Fichte here, who showed that life and knowing are not heterogeneous, but functions of the same totality. In this sense, the real and *living identity of life and knowing in subjective knowledge* has to be considered as *the ontologically highest form of life* – which in itself might be called an argument for anthropocentrism, but with the qualification that it is also an argument for "biocentrism", both of which are dialectically saying the same thing. It is a speculative concept of life which forbids us from creating an opposition between man and life, and which also teaches us that there is no real opposition between freedom (as the most concrete form of a living continuity to itself) and life in general (as the "place" where freedom has to become real).

Of course, conflicts will still remain, conflicts regarding the difference between freedoms and the different ways that freedoms seek to become real. But these conflicts are not unfamiliar to life, which is itself a rather conflicted totality, and is therefore not *immediately* normative. Moreover, we have a criterion of how to deal with this perpetual *polemos* of all living beings. The criterion lies in the idea of mediation between *actual freedom* on the one hand and other forms of life (as reflections of a freedom striving to become real) on the other. The ideal of a bioethics which has in this way learnt its lesson from Kant and his successors could be called a *Lebenswelt*, a 'life-world' of a reflective, self-knowing life, which also manages its means in terms of its goal of fostering and finally becoming a 'realm of ends', a realm of the highest possible degree of realised freedom. I would personally not hesitate over calling a bioethics that is capable of understanding its own mission in this way one that has successfully performed a paradigm shift in ethics. But, I would also stress that it is a bioethics whose deepest paradigm is much older than the term 'bioethics' itself. I hope that I have already shown how both can be understood.[12]

Thomas Sören Hoffmann

Filozofski pojam života i njegova uloga u zasnivanju jedne integrativne bioetike

Sažetak

U članku se pokazuje kako bioetika može pronaći vlastitu etičku dimenziju i originalan izvor normativnosti bacajući iznova pogled na pojam života. Za to je potreban pojam života koji nije samo empirijski, a čija je logika izvedena u prvom redu iz uvida do kojih su došli filozofi njemačkog idealizma, ali i iz uvida novije fenomenologije života. Stoga se osnovni problem jedne integrativne bioetike sastoji u promišljanju razvoja etike u temeljnoj povezanosti s aktualnošću života, gdje ovo drugo prethodi onome prvom. Ovisno o tome na koju se stranu stavlja naglasak, bioetika zadobiva ili više »apolonijski« racionalni ili više »dionizijski« vitalistički karakter, premda je bitna zadaća integriranje ovih dviju dimenzija u sintezu.

Ključne riječi

život, totalnost, izvor normativnosti, njemački idealizam

Thomas Sören Hoffmann

Der philosophische Begriff des Lebens und seine Rolle für die Begründung einer integrativen Bioethik

Zusammenfassung

Der Beitrag zeigt auf, dass ein neuer Blick auf den Begriff des Lebens und seine Logik der Bioethik eine genuine ethische Dimension jenseits nur angewandter Ethik zu geben sowie eine eigene Quelle von Normativität zu erschließen vermag. Erforderlich ist dafür der Rückgang auf einen mehr als empirisch-objektiven Lebensbegriff, weshalb zunächst auf Einsichten zurückgegangen wird, die Kant und die Denker des deutschen Idealismus vorgetragen haben, die aber auch in der neueren Phänomenologie wiederkehren. Das Grundproblem einer integrativen Bioethik besteht dann darin, die Spannung zwischen einer sich rational entfaltenden Ethik, die auf die Vollzugsgröße „Leben" bezogen sein will, und dieser letzteren selbst, die aller Entfaltung einer „Ethik" vorausliegt, in angemessener Weise theoretisch einzuholen. Man kann je nach Schwerpunkt und Ausrichtung eine „apollinische" (eher rationalistische) von einer „dionysischen" (eher lebensphilosophischen) Form von Bioethik unterscheiden, wobei das philosophisch zentrale Integrationsproblem die Synthese beider Seiten ist.

Schlüsselwörter

Leben, Totalität, Normativitätsquelle, deutscher Idealismus

Thomas Sören Hoffmann

Le concept philosophique de vie et ses enjeux dans l'établissement d'une bioéthique intégrative

Résumé

Cet article montre comment la bioéthique peut trouver sa propre dimension éthique et une source de normativité originale en jetant un nouveau regard sur le concept de vie. Pour cela, il est nécessaire d'avoir un concept de vie qui n'est pas seulement empirique et dont la logique est amenée au premier plan à partir de l'examen des philosophes de l'idéalisme allemand, mais également à partir de l'examen de la nouvelle phénoménologie de la vie. C'est pourquoi, le problème principal d'une bioéthique intégrative consiste en une réflexion sur le développement éthique en lien fondamental avec l'actualité de la vie, où celle-ci précède celui-là. En fonction du point sur lequel est mis l'accent, la bioéthique acquiert un caractère rationnel « apollonien » ou plus vitaliste « dionysiaque », bien que la tâche essentielle soit d'intégrer ces deux dimensions en une synthèse.

Mots-clés

vie, totalité, source de normativité, idéalisme allemand

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Further reflections on the topic of this paper can be found in my articles: "Bioethik als Reflexion des Lebens. Prolegomena zu einer nichtreduktionistischen Bioethik", in: Ante Čović (ed.), *Integrative Bioethik und Pluriperspektivismus. Beiträge des 4. Südosteuropäischen Bioethik-Forums, Opatija 2008 / Integrative Bioethics and Pluri-Perspectivism. Proceedings of the 4th Southeast European Bioethics Forum, Opatija 2008*, Academia, Sankt Augustin 2011, pp. 25–34; "'Leben' als Chiffre der Totalität. Der Lebensbegriff des transzendentalen und dialektischen Idealismus und seine Relevanz im 'Jahrhundert der Lebenswissenschaften'", in: Carl Friedrich Gethmann (ed.), *Lebenswelt und Wissenschaft. XXI. Deutscher Kongreß für Philosophie, 15.–19. September 2008, an der Universität Duisburg–Essen*, *Deutsches Jahrbuch für Philosophie* 2 (2011), pp. 909–923.