Preliminary communication UDC 17:573
[1:573]:608.1
Received February 2nd, 2015

Hrvoje Jurić
University of Zagreb, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Department of Philosophy,
Ivana Lučića 3, HR–10000 Zagreb
hjuric@ffzg.hr

From the Notion of Life to an Ethics of Life

Abstract

When discussing the concept of life, there is neither a single concept of life, nor absolute consensus about a conceptual barycentre, so that consideration of the notion of life *is a precondition for establishing and developing an* ethics of life*, i.e. bioethics. This paper tries to sketch the path(s) leading from the notion(s) of life to an ethics of life by recalling some remarkable (proto)bioethical conceptions: Hans Jonas's integrative philosophy of life (philosophical biology and ethics of responsibility), Fritz Jahr's bio-ethics, Albert Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life, and Arne Naess's deep ecology (ecosophy).*

Key words

life, bioethics, Hans Jonas, Fritz Jahr, Albert Schweitzer, Arne Naess

1. The meaning of 'life'

When discussing the concept of life, there is neither a single concept of life, nor absolute consensus about a conceptual barycentre. Despite the apparent implicitness of 'life' and the current inflation in using the word 'life', its Greek version 'bios', and their derivatives – from biology, biomedicine and biotechnology, through bioethics and biopolitics, to biofood and biofuel – the question still remains: *What is 'life'?*

A certain "fogginess" of 'life' in everyday use of the term can probably be tolerated, but if we research such a complex phenomenon scientifically (*life sciences*, e.g., biology), particularly in the age of radical and extreme manipulations of life on both a small and a large scale, and if we deal with the normative aspects of this phenomenon (*ethics of life*, i.e., bioethics), aiming to offer competent and plausible answers to the question of how to relate to life in general and living beings in particular – the notion of life becomes a key issue, just as Hans Werner Ingensiep states in his article "What Is Life?":

"… the notion of life is 'unclear'. But, generally speaking, we can live with that. It is only within bioethics that we are dealing with a particular problem situation (…). Although we are dealing with different issues of life, we need a notion of life as a bridge between the different fields of discussion, as well as its integration and communication power, especially if there is to be a continuous and constructive dialogue about 'life' between scientists from the natural sciences and those from the humanities."[1]

1 Hans Werner Ingensiep, "Was ist Leben? – Grundfragen der Biophilosophie", in: *Jahrbuch Ökologie 2002*, C. H. Beck, Munich 2002, p. 93.

Accordingly, bioethicists have a special mission regarding life and the very notion of life, while, from amongst bioethicists of different backgrounds, the mission of philosophers is most important, because the vocation of philosophers is to find and purify both fundamental and operational notions, both of which are of both theoretical and practical importance.

First of all, bioethicists should keep in mind that there is a terminological difference between 'bios' and 'zoe', both of which express what we usually refer to as 'life'. Especially contemporary biopolitical theorists, such as Giorgio Agamben, insist on this distinction. In his book *Homo sacer*, Agamben states:

"The Greeks had no single term to express what we mean by the word 'life'. They used two terms that, although traceable to a common etymological root, are semantically and morphologically distinct: *zoē*, which expressed the simple fact of living common to all living beings (animals, men, or gods), and *bios*, which indicated the form or way of living proper to an individual or a group. When Plato mentions three kinds of life in the *Philebus*, and when Aristotle distinguishes the contemplative life of the philosopher (*bios theōrētikos*) from the life of pleasure (*bios apolaustikos*) and the political life (*bios politikos*) in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, neither philosopher would ever have used the term *zoē* (…). This follows from the simple fact that what was at issue for both thinkers was not at all simple natural life but rather a qualified life, a particular way of life."[2]

Following Agamben, the word 'zoe' implies life which is common to all living beings ("natural life"), while 'bios' implies specifically the human form and way of living, including, so to speak, both the "basis" and "superstructure" of human life ("social and political life" on the basis of human "natural life"). In this sense, "bio-ethics" would be only an "ethics of human life". The short yet turbulent history of bioethics has been as follows: bioethics has been perceived mostly as dealing with the new ethical issues concerning human life, body, and health (e.g., biomedical research, clinical practice, healthcare, environmental conditions, etc.), although the first and crucial conceptions of bioethics suggested something different. The conceptual confusion was caused by terminological negligence, which resulted in an "ethics of bios" instead of an "ethics of zoe". Had the "founding fathers of bioethics" (such as Europe's Fritz Jahr in the 1920s and America's Van Rensselaer Potter in the 1970s) and their followers used the more appropriate term – 'zoe' – history would have been different and we would today be discussing "zooethical" issues and developing a "zooethical" approach, without there being a need to criticise the reduction of bioethics to "biomedical ethics", nor would there be "anthropocentric aberrations" of bioethics. However, as far as the very term 'bioethics' is concerned, it can no longer be changed, and the respective history of ideas, concepts and theories should be respected.

Anyway, the terms 'bios' and 'bio-ethics', including all possible derivations, actually connote 'zoe' and "zoo-ethics" in the sense given above. What has been and continues to be the question of bioethics is the *human zoe*, which has become, like never before, an object of technoscientific, economic and political manipulations, in the same way as the *zoe* of non-human beings and *zoe* as such. Accordingly, we should use the terms 'bios' and 'bio-ethics' to imply both Agambenian "simple natural life" and "qualified life", especially because the central question of bioethics could be: "how is life itself or natural life politicised?",[3] in the broader sense of 'politicisation' as manipulation of "bare life"[4] by the contemporary systems of (political, economic, and technoscientific) power. If there is anything to properly describe the "bioethical situation", i.e., the context of the emergence and development of bioethics as opposed to classical ethics (and the worldviews, cultures, societies, and

politics it has co-created), then it is Agamben's description of the main characteristics of modern democracy as opposed to classical democracy: it is the "vindication and liberation of *zoē*, and (…) it is constantly trying to transform its own bare life into a way of life and to find, so to speak, *bios* of *zoē*".[5]

2. The 'ethics of life'

The biopolitical "transformation of *zoe* into *bios*" is probably the most serious and dangerous trend of modernity,[6] which means that bioethical investigation of this trend should be thorough and cautious so as to avoid any reductionism in terms of concept and content, including both the "de-ethicisation" and "over-ethicisation" of the issues of life.

We believe that the pluriperspective approach of *integrative bioethics*[7] can safeguard us against the perils of reductionism. Some authors who could be considered to be the precursors of the idea of integrative bioethics can also help in our attempt to comprehend the phenomenon of life in its entirety and to emphasise its ethical aspects, because they have shown how the different approaches to the phenomenon of life (such as natural-scientific, philosophical, and theological) can be transformed into a strong *ethical* attitude towards life with more or less clear social-political implications.

2.1. Hans Jonas's integrative philosophy of life[8]

Hans Jonas's contribution to bioethical discussions and the very foundation of bioethics is usually pointed out by looking at his *ethics of responsibility*,

2
Giorgio Agamben, *Homo sacer. Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998, p. 9.

3
Catherine Mills, "Giorgio Agamben", in: *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: A Peer-Reviewed Academic Resource*, 2005, http://www.iep.utm.edu/agamben/.

4
Mills notices that the Agambenian notorious figure of "bare life is not natural life *per se* – though it is often confused with it in critical readings of Agamben, partly as a consequence of Agamben's own inconsistency – but rather, it is the politicized form of natural life. Being neither *bios* nor *zoe*, then, bare life emerges from within this distinction and can be defined as 'life exposed to death', especially in the form of sovereign violence" (ibid.). See also: Catherine Mills, *The Philosophy of Giorgio Agamben*, Acumen, Stocksfield 2008, pp. 64, 69–71.

5
G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 13.

6
In Agamben's words, "the entry of *zoē* into the sphere of *the polis* – the politicisation of *bare life* as such – constitutes the decisive event of modernity and signals a radical transformation of the political-philosophical categories of classical thought" (G. Agamben, *Homo sacer*, p. 10), while Michel Foucault precisely states: "For millennia man remained what he was for Aristotle: a living animal with the additional capacity for a political existence; modern man is an animal whose politics places his existence as a living being in question" (Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality. Volume 1: An Introduction*, Pantheon Books, New York 1978, p. 143).

7
For the idea of integrative bioethics see, for example, the following books: Ante Čović – Thomas Sören Hoffmann (eds.), *Integrative Bioethik / Integrative Bioethics*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2007; Ante Čović (ed.), *Integrative Bioethik und Pluriperspektivismus / Integrative Bioethics and Pluri-perspectivism*, Academia Verlag, Sankt Augustin 2011; Amir Muzur – Hans-Martin Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics. The Future of Integrative Bioethics*, LIT Verlag, Münster et al. 2012.

8
More extensive reflections on Hans Jonas's contributions to the "ethics of life" can be found in my paper "Hans Jonas' Integrative Philosophy of Life as a Foothold for Integrative Bioethics", in: A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of*

developed in the late stage of his life.[9] Nevertheless, Jonas's contribution to bioethics should be explored in other stages of his work as well, especially in his attempt to establish "philosophical biology" as an *integrative philosophy of life*, in whose centre an ethically connoted philosophy of nature stands, based both on the results of the contemporary natural sciences and theological speculations.[10]

Jonas's intention was to establish a *philosophical biology* by abolishing the "artificial split between the spheres of the external and the internal, body and mind, nature and the human".[11] Such dualisms seem to be unsustainable, first and foremost, in the case of *organism*, because an organism "is a whole not only in the sense of functioning (…), but also in the sense of a body-mind unity", which means that "the inner aspect or the subjectivity of organism is as inevitable for biological understanding as the objectivity of organism".[12] He developed his anti-dualistic enterprise in order "to break through the anthropocentric confines of idealist and existentialist philosophy as well as through materialist confines of natural science".[13] Therefore, a new philosophy of life should embrace in its subject-field both a "philosophy of organism" (which starts with the thesis that "the organic even in its lowest forms prefigures mind") and a "philosophy of mind" (which starts with the thesis that "mind even on its highest reaches remains part of the organic").[14] Jonas thinks that everything we find in humans has its "rudimentary traces in even the most primitive forms of life",[15] including *freedom* which, according to Jonas, exists already on the basic level of organic existence, i.e., in primal metabolism.[16] Jonas corroborates comprehensive elaborations of these theses not only by scientific (e.g., Darwinian evolutionary) and philosophical (e.g., Aristotelian teleological) theories, but also by "metaphysical assumptions", when scientific and philosophical evidence "loses its breath".

The ethical implications of Jonas's philosophy of life are clearly indicated. His *philosophical biology* is a prelude of sorts to his *ethics of responsibility*, because it is the affirmation of the inherent self-purpose and value of being, life and all living beings, which makes them the objects of our moral duties. Life itself delivers purposes and values, which should only be recognised and respected in terms of *responsibility* by humans, because the human is "the executor of a trust which only he can see, but did not create".[17]

However, "no previous ethics", says Jonas, "has prepared us for such a role of stewardship".[18] Which is why we need a new ethics as an "ethics of (entire) life", which should be aware of the traditional ethical categories, principles, and norms, but will attempt to step over the anthropocentric boundaries of traditional ethics.

2.2. Fritz Jahr's bio-ethics

A far-reaching "ethicisation of the question of life" can also be found in texts by Fritz Jahr, who was, as far as we know, the first author who coined the term 'bio-ethics' and attempted to develop an original bioethical concept. He did so primarily in two articles from 1926 and 1927, but this term and this idea also appear in some of his later articles.[19] The key text in this sense is his article "Bio-ethics: Reviewing the Ethical Relations of Humans towards Animals and Plants".[20]

Starting from the fact that most part of history, as well as of science, philosophy and religion, was marked by anthropocentrism – Jahr thinks that a chance to change this state of affairs appeared when new insights in the natu-

ral sciences appeared (from Charles Darwin onwards), showing us that the gulf between humans and other living beings is not so huge as it had usually been presented. He mentions Wilhelm Wundt and his research in the field of experimental physiology (the nervous system of plants, animals and humans), which was a link of sorts between physiology and psychology, then Gustav Fechner and his research of the "psychic life of plants" and, later on, his conception of "psycho-physics", as well as Rudolf Eisler and his "bio-psychology", which takes psychic facts as biological factors seriously. All these authors raised to the same level of psychological research humans, animals and plants. Jahr regards this research and its results with much hope. Focusing on animals, he says:

"The strict distinction between animal and human being, dominant in our European culture up to the end of 18th century, cannot be supported anymore."[21]

He states that there is only one step from "bio-psychology" to "bio-ethics" or, in other words: regarding the findings of biology and psychology of the time, we should take up responsibility not only for fellow human beings, but also for other living beings, because, basically – we are all the same.

Jahr says that this "bio-ethics" should not be seen as something absolutely original, but rather as a kind of widening the traditional ethical framework. Also, it is not a discovery of modernity, i.e., his times. As a devoted Christian, he, of course, mentions Saint Francis of Assisi, but also philosophers whom he regards as his fellow biocentrists, such as Rousseau, Herder, Schleiermacher, Schopenhauer, Eduard von Hartmann and others. Schopenhauer's name should be highlighted, because he is closely associated with the so-called "European discovery of Indian thought", which is very important to Jahr because of the concept of compassion with everything living and not only with humans.

Global Bioethics, pp. 139–148, as well as in my book, published in Croatian, *Etika odgovornosti Hansa Jonasa* (*Hans Jonas's Ethics of Responsibility*), Pergamena, Zagreb 2010.

9
See Hans Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility. In Search of an Ethics for the Technological Age*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1984.

10
See Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life. Toward a Philosophical Biology*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 2001.

11
Hans Jonas, *Erkenntnis und Verantwortung. Gespräch mit Ingo Hermann in der Reihe "Zeugen des Jahrhunderts"*, Lamuv Verlag, Göttingen 1991, p. 105.

12
Ibid., pp. 105–106.

13
H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, p. xxiii.

14
See ibid., p. 1.

15
Ibid., p. xxiii.

16
Jonas says that metabolism itself is the "first form of freedom", which means that the principle of freedom can be found already in the "dark stirrings of primeval organic substance" (ibid., p. 3).

17
Ibid., p. 283.

18
H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p. 8.

19
See A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics*, as well as the book, published in Croatian, Iva Rinčić – Amir Muzur, *Fritz Jahr i rađanje europske bioetike* (*Fritz Jahr and the Emergence of European Bioethics*), Pergamena, Zagreb 2012.

20
Fritz Jahr, "Bio-ethics: Reviewing the Ethical Relations of Humans towards Animals and Plants", in: A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics*, pp. 1–4.

21
Ibid., p. 1.

As such, bio-ethics should – because of the (logical) connection between ethics, politics and law – be included in civil and legal systems, and civil and legal cultures. From Jahr's perspective, the main difference between the Indian and European (or Western) approach boils down to this. He says:

"Thus, we start from a totally different point of view than the Indian fanatics, who do not want to hurt any living entity. Also, our regulations by law and police protecting certain plants and flowers in specific areas (…) are based on totally different assumptions. The police state intends to protect those plants from being extinct in those areas, also for people to enjoy them in later times. (…) Also, our concept of animal protection rests on an essentially different foundation than the attitude of the Indians. (…) Our animal protection, thus, has a utilitarian aspect, which is bravely overlooked by the Indians, while we are content with at least avoiding unnecessary suffering."[22]

However, Fritz Jahr's basic ethical assumption can be found in a passage from his text on bio-ethics, where he comments that

"… the requests to respect each and every living being and not to destroy it without reason. Because, they all, plants and animals, also humans, have similar rights, but not Equal Right, depending on the requirements for reaching their specific destiny."[23]

Jahr present his "categorical imperative" as the "bio-ethical imperative", which is a re-formulation of Kant's categorical imperative, namely Kant's "humanity formula":

"Respect every living being in principle as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such!"[24]

or, in another version:

"Respect every living being, including animals, as an end in itself and treat it, if possible, as such!"[25]

Regarding plants Jahr says:

"Thus, in regard to animals such a rule has become evident, at least as far as needless torture is concerned. With plants it is different, so. For some, at the first moment it might sound unreasonable to have certain ethical obligations towards plants. But already (Apostle) Paul directed our compassion towards animals and plants."[26]

Anyway, Jahr tries to reconstruct, although through "shortcuts", Kantian ethics – first of all, by using Schopenhauer's notion of compassion which was associated with Indian thought, but also on the basis of Christianity, finding some bioethical traits not only in the fragments of Francis of Assisi, but also in the Old and New Testaments. His theological background becomes even more obvious in his "Three Studies on the Fifth Commandment", a text in which he re-thinks and re-interprets the Biblical Fifth Commandment "Thou shalt not kill". He says:

"… the term killing always means killing something which is alive. Living entities, however, are not only humans, but animals and plants as well. Because the 5th commandment does not expressively prohibit the killings of humans exclusively, should it not be applied towards animals and plants analogously?"[27]

Jahr says that nobody can consistently follow a bioethically re-interpreted Fifth Commandment; it is a type of utopia. Nevertheless, it should always be upon us as an imperative, guiding our reflections on humans and other living beings, our general relationship towards them, as well as our everyday behaviour towards them.

2.3. Albert Schweitzer's ethics of reverence for life

The third author in the chain of an "ethics of life", which we are trying to outline, is Albert Schweitzer, whose "ethics of reverence for life" shares certain essential features with other authors who we here consider to be "proto-bioethicists".

Schweitzer's very entrance in the domain of an "ethics of life" was specific and unusual. Although a man of diverse and rich education and activity (in philosophy, theology, medicine and music), his bioethical concept appeared to him almost "by accident" and as a "surprise". Namely, during World War I, Schweitzer was in Africa, where he set up a hospital helping people who were very poor and without any medical care. One day, during a trip along the Ogooué River, an interesting and for Schweitzer himself a very important thing happened:

"Late on the third day, at the very moment when, at sunset, we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought, the phrase 'reverence for life'. The iron door had yielded. The path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the principle in which affirmation of the world and ethics are joined together! I was at the root of the problem. I knew that the ethical acceptance of the world and of life, together with the ideals of civilization contained in this concept, has its foundation in thought."[28]

The crucial thought of his ethics, which he later developed, is:

"I am life, which wills to live, in the midst of life, which wills to live."[29]

An explanation of it could be the following quote:

"Ethics consists, therefore, in my experiencing the compulsion to show to all will to live the same reverence as I do to my own. There we have, given us, that basic principle of the moral, which is a necessity of thought. It is good to maintain and to encourage life; it is bad to destroy life or to obstruct it."[30]

What it actually means within the complex network of life and on the level of everyday practice is – if we understand Schweitzer correctly – a secondary question. The primary question is: What ideas guide our thinking, action and living in general? Just like in Jahr's imperative, under Schweitzer's imperatives there is always a seemingly pragmatic "if possible" clause, which is always illuminated by the regulative idea of a "reverence for life"; at the very least, "to destroy life or to obstruct it" keeping in mind that it is basically evil causes

22
Ibid., p. 3.

23
Ibid., p. 2.

24
Ibid., p. 4.

25
Fritz Jahr, "Animal Protection and Ethics", in: A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics*, p. 12.

26
F. Jahr, "Bio-ethics", p. 3.

27
Fritz Jahr, "Three Studies on the Fifth Commandment", in: A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass (eds.), *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics*, p. 33.

28
Albert Schweitzer, *Out of My Life and Thought. An Autobiography*, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore – London 1998, p. 155.

29
Albert Schweitzer, "Reverence for Life", in: *Albert Schweitzer's Ethical Vision. A Sourcebook*, ed. by Predrag Cicovacki, Oxford University Press, New York 2009, p. 137.

30
Ibid., pp. 137–138.

much less evil than thoughtless exploitation, torture, and killing. Anyhow, we should be aware of the fact that we, as humans, live not only in the human world, but also in the natural world, in the world of living nature, which has its own dignity, or at least value, which should be recognised and respected.

The background of Schweitzer's ethics is his concept of "world-affirming culture",[31] which is supported by his optimistic view of human nature:

"Once more we dare to appeal to the whole man, to his capacity to think and feel, exhorting him to know himself and to be true to himself. We reaffirm our trust in the profound qualities of his nature. And our living experiences are proving us right."[32]

Founding a "new ethics" (bioethics as a biocentric ethics) on the basis of an "old ethics" (traditional ethics as an anthropocentric ethics), as the latter's reinterpretation and extension, is in Schweitzer a very similar attempt to both Hans Jonas and Fritz Jahr:

"To the old ethics, which lacked this depth and force of conviction, has been added the ethics of reverence for life, and its validity is steadily gaining in recognition. It is convinced that compassion, in which ethics takes root, does not assume its true proportions until it embraces not only man but every living being."[33]

2.4. Arne Naess's ecosophy

Arne Naess's concept of "deep ecology" or "ecosophy" can also be considered to be one of the concepts that could be used in founding an integrative ethics of life, both because of his broader (or broadest) notion of life, i.e., his ecocentric position, and his multidisciplinary and pluriperspectival approach. His founding a non-anthropocentric "macro-ethics" in/for the technoscientific age reminds of Jonas; his respecting Spinoza's philosophy, Buddhism, and Gandhi's theory and practice of non-violence reminds of Schweitzer; while his "ecosophical imperative" – "You shall never use any living being only as a means"[34] – reminds of Jahr's "bioethical imperative".

The basic principle of Naess's philosophy of life could be defined as follows – *equal rights for all living beings and every living being in principle*.[35] This principle is based on further two principles: *self-realisation*[36] and *biospheric egalitarianism* (or *biocentric equality*).[37]

The principle of *self-realisation* implies the equal possibility of self-realisation for anybody who has this kind of ability. As George Sessions and Bill Devall precisely point out:

"In keeping with the spiritual traditions of many of the world's religions, the deep ecology norm of self-realization goes beyond modern Western Self which is defined as an isolated ego striving primarily for hedonistic gratification or for a narrow sense of individual salvation in this life or the next."[38]

It is a kind of *universal Self* (or *ecological Self*), which is far more comprehensive than the notion of self in classical anthropocentric individualism and simple biocentric individualism, given that individuals (humans and non-humans) are seen as part of a bigger whole. We should respect this "big picture" and act accordingly, ascribing a certain moral status to everyone and everything which is part of this whole.

The second principle – *biospheric egalitarianism* (or *biocentric equality*) – implies the following:

"The intuition of biocentric equality is that all things in the biosphere have an equal right to live and blossom and to reach their own individual forms of unfolding and self-realization within the larger Self-realization. This basic intuition is that all organisms and entities in the ecosphere,

as parts of the interrelated whole, are equal in intrinsic worth. (…) The practical implications of this intuition or norm suggest that we should live with minimum rather than maximum impact on other species on the Earth in general."[39]

Arne Naess and George Sessions's eight-point "platform of the deep ecology Movement" can be used as a summary of the entire Naessian and deep-ecological effort in the field of theoretically founding and practically promoting an essentially different and epochal ethical view, which should be based on a new ontology and extended to a new form of societal and political life, as a set of norms of sorts, aiming to be acceptable to a broad spectrum of different worldviews:

"1. The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman Life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent value). These values are independent of the usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.
2. Richness and diversity of life forms contribute to the realizations of these values and are also values in themselves.
3. Humans have no right to reduce this richness and diversity except to satisfy vital human needs.
4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantial decrease of human population. The flourishing of nonhuman life requires such a decrease.
5. Present human interference with the nonhuman world is excessive, and the situation is rapidly worsening.
6. Policies must therefore be changed. These policies affect basic economic, technological, and ideological structures. The resulting state of affairs will be deeply different from the present.
7. The ideological change is mainly that of appreciating life quality (dwelling in situations of inherent value) rather than adhering to an increasingly higher standard of living. There will be a profound awareness of the difference between big and great.
8. Those who subscribe to the foregoing points have an obligation to directly or indirectly try to implement the necessary changes."[40]

3. The 'meaning' of life?

By laying out a brief overview of Jonas, Jahr, Schweitzer and Naess's views, we have already exposed implicitly an answer to the question of what life actually is, and what its 'meaning' or 'purpose' is which should be recognised, valued and eventually respected. Nevertheless, there remains the question of

31
See, for example, Albert Schweitzer, "Western and Indian Thought", in: *Albert Schweitzer's Ethical Vision*, pp. 33–43.

32
Albert Schweitzer, "The Problem of Peace in the World Today", in: *Albert Schweitzer's Ethical Vision*, p. 224.

33
Ibid.

34
Arne Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001, p. 174.

35
"Each living being is understood as a goal in itself, *in principle* on an equal footing with one's own ego" (ibid.).

36
See ibid., pp. 84–85.

37
See ibid., pp. 174–175.

38
Bill Devall – George Sessions, *Deep Ecology. Living as if Nature Mattered*, Peregrine Smith, Salt Lake City 1985, pp. 66–67.

39
Ibid., 67–68.

40
Ibid., p. 70. See also Naess and Sessions's comments on pp. 70–73.

the philosophical-ethical concepts which have traditionally been connected with ethical respect, values and recognition: the concepts of *autonomy* and *dignity*.

If the concept of 'autonomy' means 'self-legislation' and if, additionally, it is necessarily connected with rationality, there cannot be 'autonomy' outside of the human world, because what we call 'rationality' is an exclusively human trait and, additionally, "the law of life", which regulates the life of non-human beings, is given to non-human beings only by nature and not by their own activities, efforts, creativity, etc. However, Jonas (with 'freedom') and Naess (with 'self-realisation') make us rethink the concept of autonomy as necessarily human/rational self-legislation. The question is: Could the concept of autonomy be derived from *life itself* (e.g., along the line of the intrinsic "normativity of life"[41]) and not from a *certain feature, form, or way of life*?

Furthermore, if the concept of 'dignity' is necessarily connected with the concept of 'autonomy' as an exclusively human kind of autonomy (which is, more or less, a traditional view, e.g., in Kantian ethics), 'dignity of life' implies only 'dignity of human life'. Could, according to the abovementioned relativisation of the anthropocentric-rational concept of autonomy, the concept of dignity be thought of and applied differently – from the very fact of life?

Let us imagine a different ethical geometry and place on the left side of the scheme the traditional concept of human dignity, which includes the traditional concepts of freedom and autonomy, as well as the ability and the right to self-determination, and which implies certain rights and duties. (As has already been suggested, this type of "excellence" of human beings is based on their rationality, rather than on their mere genetic belonging to the human race.) In contrast to traditional views, which rest upon the presented scheme, let us place on the right side of the scheme something that we could call "dignity of the living" (or the "dignity of life"), because we can empirically, phenomenologically and speculatively find that non-human beings also have a certain ability to realise themselves and their potentials in different ways. This kind of ability is inherent to any form of life, and it could lead us to the conclusion that any form of life has a certain purpose, which implies a certain value which should be respected by humans as specific and "excellent" thinking and moral agents. If this is so, we have a certain responsibility not only to fellow human beings, but also to other living entities; we ought to care for them in general and when their existence directly collides with our (human) actions in particular. Such a two-sided scheme allows us not only to include non-human beings in the horizon of human ethical duties, but also to resolve the issues which are usually suppressed in (bio)ethical theory and practice when faced with the problem of treating human beings deprived of "rationality", regardless of whether by birth or during the course of life, regardless of whether persistently or temporarily.

These two sides of the proposed scheme are not mutually exclusive. They should be seen as two sources of dignity rather than as two types of dignity which would need two separate ethical conceptions. Human dignity is, fundamentally, based on the fact of life, not on the fact of reason. (It could even be said that rationalistic arguments in favour of *human dignity* – instead of the *dignity of life* – is only a kind of rationalisation of irrational anthropocentric biases.) Nevertheless, these two types of 'dignity' demand a new ethical conception, which is different from traditional ethical conceptions – an *asymmetric ethics*, which would also be a *biocentric ethics*.

It should primarily be different in respect of the duties–rights balance. The quantity and the quality of rights should not depend on the quantity and the quality of duties one can take up. In this regard, an asymmetric ethics should make more explicit the difference between the subject and the object of ethical duties, although it would have to emphasise exactly the basic equality between all ethically relevant entities (Naessian 'biocentric equality'). Of course, there is no other way of recognising non-human beings but from the perspective of *anthropos*. According to it, anthropomorphism is *epistemically* inevitable.[42] However, it does not imply the claim that anthropocentrism is inevitable and necessary in an *ethical* sense. Even though we can state, with certainty, that only a "rational nature", a "person" or "human" can be an ethical *subject*, we should not conclude that non-rational, non-personal, non-human entities cannot be perceived as *ethical objects*. The fact that we cannot ascertain that some animal or plant or any other living being possesses some characteristic which we usually consider to be ethically relevant (by analogy with human beings) does not mean that we should dismiss it as an ethically irrelevant entity; quite the contrary, we should treat all living beings as ethically relevant – in general, in principle – be it by analogy with human beings or by teleological research of life and its different manifestations. If the fact of life is highly valued (or even "sacred") in the case of human beings, then it should have at least some kind of value in the case of non-human entities which are also living beings. Therefore, we could simultaneously claim that morals and ethics are eminent human enterprises, and that morals and ethics should include non-human beings as objects of our morally relevant reflections and actions. Nevertheless, we should be aware of great problems that are inherent to any kind of a biocentric position, such as the inevitable conflicts of interests, but, as Schweitzer says,

"True reverence for morality is shown by readiness to face the difficulties contained in it."[43]

Finally, the "asymmetry" of an asymmetric ethics also relates to the traditional "symmetry" of ethics and rationality. New ethical issues articulated by bioethics urge us to rethink the role of "non-rational elements" of moral and ethical reflection, primarily in respect of the motivation to action. The rationality of a moral and ethical agent is, of course, the *conditio sine qua non* not only of ethics as a theory, but also of moral reflection. However, rationality is not the only source of our moral-ethical reflection and action. Taking this line of thought, many authors emphasise the issue of compassion and feelings, and affectivity and sensibility in general. Jonas dedicated an important part of his *Imperative of Responsibility* to this issue,[44] as well as Naess in *Ecology, Com-*

41
See Thomas Sören Hoffmann's paper in this issue of *Synthesis philosophica*.

42
See Jonas's criticism of the modern "ban of anthropomorphism" in: H. Jonas, *The Phenomenon of Life*, especially pp. 33–37.

43
Albert Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, Peter Smith, Gloucester 1977, p. 84. – In this sense, very instructive is Naess's text "Self-realization in Mixed Communities of Humans, Bears, Sheep, and Wolves", *The Trumpeter*, Vol. 22 (2006), No. 1, pp. 89–99.

44
See, for example, the chapter "The 'Second Duty': Summoning Up a Feeling Appropriate to What Has Been Visualized", where Jonas call upon "a new kind of *éducation sentimentale*", which is "the second, preliminary duty of the ethic we are seeking, subsequent to the first duty to bring about that mere thought itself" (H. Jonas, *The Imperative of Responsibility*, p. 28).

munity, and Lifestyle.[45] Jahr was trying to develop his bio-ethics by recalling, amongst others, Schopenhauer's concept of compassion as a basis of ethics.[46] Similarly to Jahr, Schweitzer thinks that "ethics is complete only when it exacts compassion toward every living thing"[47] and that:

"The principle of not-killing and not-harming must not aim at being independent, but must be the servant of, and subordinate itself to, compassion. It must therefore enter into practical discussion with reality."[48]

According to all the authors referred to, unifying rationality and sensibility is, one way or another, related to unifying the theoretical and practical dimensions of (bio)ethics, which is particularly visible in the concepts of *responsibility* and *care*. Leonardo Boff uses the term 'essential care' to address this issue and the corresponding request:

"To care is more than a mere *act*; it is rather an *attitude*. Therefore, it encompasses more than a *moment* of awareness, of zeal and of devotion. It represents an *attitude* of activity, of concern, of responsibility and of an affective involvement with the other. An attitude is like a fountain; it serves as the source for acts which express the attitude in the background."[49]

The question of which element precedes which is less important; more important is the question of whether we admit their roles in ethical thought and action, and how they are balanced. It is exactly bioethical issues and approaches that show us that the classical sharp distinction between rationality and sensibility, just like the classical opposition between theory and practice, cannot be justified anymore. Neither should be denied or overemphasised; the real question is: How should we dimension them so as to think, act and live as comprehensively as possible?[50]

4. The 'exhibition' of life

By recalling Jonas, Jahr, Schweitzer and Naess, we can at least conclude that the path from a *notion of life* (theoretical reflection on life) to an *ethics of life* (practical reflection on life and action in regard to it) is a direct path which could lead us further towards a "bioethical highway" which must be built.

In his poem "In paths untrodden", Walt Whitman, a great American poet and thinker, says:

> "In paths untrodden,
> In the growths by margins of pond-waters,
> Escaped from the life that exhibits itself,
> From all the standards hitherto publish'd, from the pleasures,
> profits, conformities,
> Which too long I was offering to feed my soul,
> Clear to me now standards not yet publish'd, clear to me
> that my soul,
> That the soul of the man I speak for rejoices in comrades,
> Here by myself away from the clank of the world, (…)
> Strong upon me the life that does not exhibit itself,
> yet contains all the rest (…)."[51]

A differently set approach to life – which can also be found in Jonas, Jahr, Schweitzer and Naess – could start with a Whitmanian "phenomenological reduction" of life to "life that does not exhibit itself" through the matrices fixed by traditional anthropocentric ethics and modern forms of science, economy and politics. Such a new and fresh notion of life, which exhibits itself primarily by itself, "containing all the rest", could be taken as a starting

point of a bio-logical, bio-philosophical, bio-philic and bio-ethical approach to the phenomenon of life. In Hans Jonas's words:

"The meaning of existence, of matter itself, performs itself by itself, because we come from it and we are part of it. Primarily, then, to attain being and to intuit it; then to fathom it and to love it; finally, to reflect it and to testify it: this is the whole of wisdom – 'everything else is commentary'. Undoubtedly, this is not an ability shared by all people; only a few are able to do it fully. This is an ideal – an anthropological imperative. However, the first part can be fulfilled by virtually anybody, because it belongs to the generic equipment of Homo sapiens. The second part could be fulfilled by more people only if they were to try to do it (…). The third part is only for a chosen few, the witnesses of humankind, who indulge themselves even in the most difficult of things."[52]

Such a notion of life could also reveal us in a new and fresh light, what is actually at stake today, what and whose life should be embraced both by human rationality and sensibility, as well as by human responsibility and care, both of which depend on the rational and the sensible. In other words, such a notion of life could point us to life which should be protected from the encroachment of the technoscientific-economic-political manipulative power by an *ethics of life*, regardless of whether it is called *zoo-ethics* or *bio-ethics*.

45
See, for example, the chapter "Emotion, Value, and Reality" bringing the following passage: "In a discussion of value thinking, it is essential to clarify the relationship between spontaneous feelings, their expression through our vibrant voices, and statements of value or announcement of norms *motivated* by strong feelings but having a clear cognitive function. (…) In these statements, feelings are closely tied to intention. (…) In short, value statements are normally made with positive or negative feeling, and it would be nonsensical to ask for neutrality. (…) It is thus unwarranted to require that feeling be eliminated in an impartial discussion. If the debate is to proceed in depth, these feelings should be clarified, and made explicit as the need arises. Specific personal, idiosyncratic components must be sorted out if the debate is concerned with more or less general norms." (A. Naess, *Ecology, Community, and Lifestyle*, pp. 64–65.)

46
Talking about compassion as "the central motive of the idea of animal protection", Jahr says that "compassion with animals shows up as an empirically given phenomenon of the human soul" (Fritz Jahr, "Animal Protection and Ethics", in: A. Muzur – H.-M. Sass, *Fritz Jahr and the Foundations of Global Bioethics*, p. 9).

47
Albert Schweitzer, "The Problem of Ethics in the Evolution of Human Thought", in: *Albert Schweitzer's Ethical Vision*, p. 173.

48
A. Schweitzer, *Indian Thought and Its Development*, p. 84.

49
Leonardo Boff, *Essential Care. An Ethics of Human Nature*, Baylor University Press, Waco 2008, p. 14.

50
Schweitzer dimensions these two aspects of ethics as follows: "Compassion is too narrow to rank as the total essence of the ethical. (…) But ethics includes also feeling as one's own, all the circumstances and all the aspirations of the will to live, its pleasure, too, and its longing to live itself out to the full, as well as its urge to self-perfecting." (A. Schweitzer, "Reverence for Life", p. 139.)

51
Walt Whitman, "In Paths Untrodden", in: *The Works of Walt Whitman*, Wordsworth Editions, Ware 1995, p. 106.

52
Hans Jonas, *Erinnerungen*, Insel, Frankfurt/M – Leipzig 2003, p. 370.

Hrvoje Jurić

Od pojma života do etike života

Sažetak

Nema jednog i jedinstvenog pojma života, a nema ni apsolutnog konsenzusa oko konceptualnog težišta u raspravama o pojmu života, tako da je razmatranje pojma života *preduvjet utemeljenja i razvijanja* etike života*, tj. bioetike. U ovom radu nastojimo ocrtati put koji vodi od pojma života do etike života, uzimajući u obzir nekoliko upečatljivih (proto)bioetičkih koncepcija: integrativnu filozofiju života (filozofijsku biologiju i etiku odgovornosti) Hansa Jonasa, bio-etiku Fritza Jahra, etiku strahopoštovanja prema životu Alberta Schweitzera te dubinsku ekologiju (ekozofiju) Arnea Naessa.*

Ključne riječi

život, bioetika, Hans Jonas, Fritz Jahr, Albert Schweitzer, Arne Naess

Hrvoje Jurić

Vom Lebensbegriff bis zu einer Ethik des Lebens

Zusammenfassung

Es gibt keinen einen und einzigartigen Lebensbegriff, und es gibt keinen absoluten Konsens über den konzeptuellen Schwerpunkt in den Abhandlungen über den Lebensbegriff, sodass die Betrachtung des Lebensbegriffs *eine Vorbedingung zur Grundlegung und Entwicklung einer* Ethik des Lebens *bzw. Bioethik ist. In dieser Arbeit streben wir an, den Weg vom Lebensbegriff bis zu einer Lebensethik auszumalen, indem wir etliche einprägsame (proto)bioethische Konzeptionen berücksichtigen: integrative Philosophie des Lebens (philosophische Biologie und Verantwortungsethik) Hans Jonas', Bio-Ethik Fritz Jahrs, Ethik der Ehrfurcht vor dem Leben Albert Schweitzers sowie Tiefenökologie (Ökosophie) Arne Naess'.*

Schlüsselwörter

Leben, Bioethik, Hans Jonas, Fritz Jahr, Albert Schweitzer, Arne Naess

Hrvoje Jurić

Du concept de vie à l'éthique de vie

Résumé

Il n'y a pas un seul et unique concept de vie, et il n'y a pas non plus de consensus absolu autour du noyau conceptuel dans les débats sur le concept de vie*, de telle manière que l'examen de ce concept est une précondition pour fonder et développer une* éthique de vie*, à savoir une bioéthique. Nous nous appliquons dans ce travail à tracer le chemin qui mène du concept de vie au concept éthique de vie, en prenant en considération quelques conceptions sensibles de (proto)bioéthique: la philosophie intégrative de la vie (la biologie philosophique et l'éthique de responsabilité) de Hans Jonas, la bioéthique de Fritz Jahr, l'éthique du respect de la vie d'Albert Schweitzer et l'écologie profonde (l'écosophie) d'Arne Naess.*

Mots-clés

vie, bioéthique, Hans Jonas, Fritz Jahr, Albert Schweitzer, Arne Naess