

Philosophische Theorien des Lebens

Blogseminar | LMU München | SoSe 16 | Dr. Jörg Noller

Michael Thompson: ***Life and Action***

Elementary Structures of Practice and Practical Thought,
Cambridge/MA. 2008.





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Wiederholung der letzten Sitzung **Hans Jonas, *Organismus und Freiheit***

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- Wie die Substanz für die Ontologie, so ist der Organismus für die Philosophie des Lebens der Zentralbegriff.
- Das Wesen des Organismus lässt sich am Leitfaden des Freiheitsbegriffs weiter analysieren.
- Die Freiheit des Organismus besteht in seiner Unabhängigkeit von der Materie und seinem Formcharakter.
- Die Identität der Materie wird von Raum und Zeit gestiftet. Die Identität des Organismus durch den Vollzug.
- Damit knüpft Jonas an Aristoteles' Begriff der Seele und Entelechie an.

Offene Fragen im Ausgang von Hans Jonas

- Worin besteht das Besondere des menschlichen Organismus im Unterschied zum tierischen?
- Ist der Unterschied zwischen Tier und Mensch/Dasein quantitativ oder qualitativ?
- Inwiefern ist der Tod bereits im Organismus angelegt? Wie genau verhalten sich Leben und Tod?

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Leitfragen der Sitzung

- *Wie verhält sich Thompsons Theorie des Lebens zu den bisher behandelten (Aristoteles, Kant, Hegel, Plessner, Heidegger und Jonas)*
- *Wie bestimmt Thompson die „Form“ des Lebens im Unterschied zu Jonas ?*
- *Wie verhalten sich Leben(sform) und Handlung zueinander?*



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“life, we may say, is a categorially distinctive form of substantiality or actuality (*Wirklichkeit*), just as substantiality is a specific form of objecthood.” (LA, 2)

„concepts like *life, life-form, action, practical disposition, social practice*, etc., have something like the status Kant assigned to ‘pure’ or *a priori* concepts.” (LA, 6)



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“cleaving to Aristotelian jargon, my effort in this book might be provisionally characterized as an attempt to show that certain leading concepts in our various spheres—*life-form, action-in-progress, intention, wanting, practical disposition* and *social practice*—are all ‘form concepts’. Anything that falls under any of them will exhibit some of the attributes Aristotle attaches to form/*eidos* in his general metaphysics and natural philosophy. Each concept catches a particular type of ‘unity’, as we might equally say: a unity through which the things united can at the same time in some sense be understood.” (LA, 11)

A close-up photograph of a green praying mantis on a leaf, serving as a background for the title and header text.

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“But concepts like life and life-form inevitably enter even into the properly ethical parts of practical philosophy. Kant’s supreme practical principle is supposed to attach to practical reason somehow generally considered— that is, as something that appears in people, Martians, God and angels alike. But in order to get much of anywhere in ethical thinking, Kant is forced, in the *Metaphysics of Morals*, to consider systematically how this principle ‘applies’ to specifically human beings, that is, to fellow bearers of the terrestrial life-form or species that he himself exhibits. So even here concepts allied to those of life and life-form make themselves felt.” (LA, 28)



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“A species or life-form is just a certain kind of kind—the sort of thing to be the subject of a general judgment or a general statement; it is the sort of thing that is said of something and about which something can be said, in the sense of Aristotle’s *Categories*. Our problem will then be reduced to one of isolating a particular form of general judgment or statement—a *natural-historical judgment*, as I will call it. What is fit to be the subject of such a thing we may call a species concept or a life-form-word. A species or life-form, then, will be whatever can be conceived through *such* a concept or expressed by *such* a word—not a real definition, alas, but not a circular one, I think, and not egregious organicist metaphysics either. It is because in the end we will have to do with a special *form of judgment*, a distinct mode of joining subject and predicate in thought or speech, that I am emboldened to say that the vital categories are logical categories.” (LA, 48)

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“I do believe that our natural-historical judgments are closely related to a range of judgments that one would want to call ‘normative’. I will object rather to the idea that we can give anything to be called an analysis or elucidation in terms of them; the reverse is closer to the truth. As for sentences of the form “A properly constituted S is F,” my own view is that, in them, the words “properly constituted” do not restrict the common noun, S. Rather, the words “A properly constituted ___ is ___” move together and are just another sign that the judgment expressed is a natural-historical judgment.” (LA, 74)

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“Like a practice, a life-form is of course associated with a standard or measure of good and bad—here, typically, of sickness and health, of deformity and defect, of what is missing and what is there in excess, and so forth. The deployment of such concepts is an essential part of the representation of things as alive, but the application of any of them to an individual organism once again presupposes a look to its species or / to the natural form of life it realizes: legs that are perfectly sound in one kind of animal would be grossly deformed in another, body temperatures that are ‘normal’ in one would be feverish in another, and so forth.” (LA, 201f.)



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„I represent this life-form as potentially instanced in / other individual organisms, and as a measure of good and bad in whatever does bear it and as containing a special kind of cause of whatever is reckoned good according to that measure. Our Rawlsian reflections have led us to the thought that in describing what is happening before me as *promising*, my thought moves in certain parallel categories. Among other things, I think of the agent as the bearer of a *practice*, a ‘form’ of a different sort, but nevertheless something that is potentially present in other agents, something that acts as a measure of good and bad in what bears it, and something that can account for what is reckoned good according to that measure. One turn of the categorical framework gives us the concept of a life-form or a living nature; the other gives us the concept of ‘form of life’ or a ‘second nature’. Of course the concepts of *good* and *bad* and of *account* will shift together with the associated conception of ‘form’ or ‘nature’ and the associated type of generality and general judgment; in *this* deployment, they are specifically practical.“ (207)



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“a life form is like a language that physical matter can speak. It is in the light of judgments about the life form that I assign meaning and significance and point and position to the parts and operations of individual organisms that present themselves to me. As *French* or *English* are to the people and brains of which they take possession, so are things like *umbrella jelly* and *cross jelly* to the physical particles of which *they* take possession. And just as there is no speech—no discourse, no telling and believing people, no knowledge by testimony—without a language that is spoken, which is to say, without a framework for interpreting what is going on between the speakers, so there is no life without a life form, which is to say, without a framework for interpreting the goings-on in the individual organism.” (AHF, 54)



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„The concept *life form* is a pure or a priori, perhaps a logical, concept. The concept *human*, as we human beings have it, is an a priori concept attaching to a particular life form. A mature human being is typically in possession of a non-empirical singular representation of one individual organism. Individual human beings are sometimes in possession of nonobservational knowledge of contingent facts about one individual organism. Human beings are characteristically in possession of some general substantive knowledge of the human life form which is not / founded empirically on observation of members of their kind, and thus not 'biological'.“ (AHF, 57f.)



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“The concept of a life form, or the specific form of generality associated with it—or the apprehension of the concomitant form of unity of *things happening here* with *things happening there*—are everywhere at work in any materials of experience from which it might be abstracted. We arrive at an explicit conception of it by reflection on certain of the forms of thought of which we are capable—as we arrive, for example, at the general concept *relation*. The opposition of *individual organism* and *life form* is, as we might say, a more determinate form of the opposition of *individual* and *universal* in general, and shares the a priori character the latter.” (AHF, 65)



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“Let us piece together these two facts—the apriority of the idea of a life form and that of the first person concept. It is then easy to see that each of us can readily come into possession of an a priori representation of what is in fact the human life form, thus defeating the second empiricist proposition. This holds despite the fact that this life form is one with a natural history like any other, characterized by a certain number of teeth and bones and an unusually large brain. Each of us can lay hold of this item in thought under the title 'my life form' or 'the life form I bear', descriptions which contain no empirical content at all. Just as I can think the empirical thought, *I have a wounded knee*, using a non empirical representation as subject, so I can think the empirical thought, *the life form I bear has several other bearers in this room*, with this non-empirical subject term.” (AHF, 67)



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„the characterization of an individual organism here and now as thinking or speaking, like the characterization of it as eating or breathing or leafing out, is a life form-dependent description: take it away the life form and we have a pile of electrochemical connections; put it back in and we have hunger and pain and breathing and walking, indeed, but, in suitable cases, self-conscious thought and discourse as well. The life form *underwrites* the applicability of these diverse state- and process-types in individual cases.” (AHF, 67)



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“Individual states and episodes coming under the general types *pain, hunger, conceptual thought* and *intentional action* must always be realizations of a *capacity* that is characteristic of the life form of the pained or hungering or thinking or intentionally acting individual organism. These are not things that could break out in a rogue individual where they have no place in the description of the life form it bears; no more than a case of long division could break out in a person unacquainted with any methods of calculation, whatever it may be that he is doing with his pencil. Of many kinds of organism I recognize by observation that they possess capacities for pain or hunger, that these phenomena are a part of how they live and get on—that there is, as Ludwig Wittgenstein would say, a 'place' for pain and hunger in such life.”
(AHF, 71)

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Bis nächste Woche!

