

RENAUD BARBARAS AND THE MULTIPLE MEANING OF “LIFE”¹

JAKUB ČAPEK

PhD in philosophy, Associate Professor.

Charles University, Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Faculty of Arts.
116 38 Prague, Czech Republic.

E-mail: jakub.capek@ff.cuni.cz

The recent philosophy of Renaud Barbaras counts among the most original contributions to the phenomenology of life. My article examines it in the light of some conceptual observations based on the works of Husserl, Heidegger, and Merleau-Ponty. The early phenomenological texts illustrate the complexity of the phenomenological approach to the living inasmuch as “life” can be said in different ways, it is plural in meaning; further, life is also plural in that it can be attributed to a plurality of beings (consciousness, organisms, certain forms of existence, etc.). When developing his own account, Barbaras starts from a profound analysis of the phenomenological idea of correlation and comes to a new notion of life which is no longer attributed to organisms but to the world. The article critically follows this move from the life of organisms to the life of the world and articulates certain questions that this move can raise. The background of these questions is the double plurality of the notion of life. Even though saying that “life” has multiple meanings and attributions is purely formal and general, this multiplicity can serve as a ground for the phenomenological analysis of the way life is indeed experienced in its different meanings.

Key words: Phenomenology, life, organism, consciousness, biology, embodiment, Barbaras.

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ЯКУБ ЧАПЕК

Доктор философии, доцент.

Карлов университет, департамент философии и религиоведения, факультет искусств.
116 38 Прага, Чешская Республика.

E-mail: jakub.capek@ff.cuni.cz

Философия Рено Барбараса последних лет представляет собой исключительно оригинальный вклад в феноменологию жизни. Настоящая статья исследует ее в свете определенных понятийных установок, основанных на работах Гуссерля, Хайдеггера и Мерло-Понти. Ранние феноменологические тексты иллюстрируют всю сложность феноменологического подхода к живому. Следует отметить двойную многозначность понятия «жизнь»: многозначность атрибуции («жизнь» применяется то к сознанию, то к организмам, а иногда отождествляется с экзистенцией) и многозначность смысла (жизнь высказывается разными способами). Разрабатывая собственную концепцию, Рено Барбарас начинает с глубокого анализа феноменологической идеи корреляции и приходит к новому понятию жизни, применяемому уже не к организмам, но к миру. Статья критически прослеживает этот переход от жизни организмов к жизни мира и артикулирует ряд вопросов, порождаемых этим переходом. Горизонтом для этих вопросов служит двойная многозначность понятия жизни. Несмотря на то, что утверждение о множественности значений «жизни» имеет чисто формальный характер, эта множественность может послужить основой для феноменологического анализа того, каким образом жизнь в действительности переживается в своих различных значениях.

Ключевые слова: Феноменология, жизнь, организм, сознание, биология, воплощение, Барбарас.

1. *THE CONCEPT OF LIFE IN PHENOMENOLOGY. INTRODUCTORY OBSERVATIONS*

The term “life” appears frequently in the fundamental works of phenomenological philosophy. And yet, it is by far not clear whether authors such as Husserl, Heidegger, or Merleau-Ponty have in mind one and the same thing. There is even a double plurality to be noted: the plurality of meaning and the plurality of attribution. Not only is life said in different ways, it is said about different entities.

For Husserl, phenomenology was the analysis of the fundamental structures of both consciousness and its objects. Consciousness was characterized as a flow

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of intentional or object-oriented acts in which the subject “experiences” or “lives through” (*erlebt*) its objects. Each perception is a perception of something, each belief is a belief in something, each doubt is a doubt about something, and so forth. Being intentional, the life of consciousness consists in the fact that consciousness lives through (*erlebt*) intentional objects, whether they be things or states of affairs.

Martin Heidegger, in his early works, used the term “factual life” in close relation to “human existence” (*menschliches Dasein*). Life, in the “Natorp-Bericht,” is described as standing in a particular kind of “motion” (*Bewegtsein*), more precisely as Dasein’s “being concerned for its own being” (*um sein Sein besorgt*). In this “concernment,” life may perceive itself as a burden. The *Dasein* can yield to the natural tendency to “make its life easier” (Heidegger, 2003, 10).

In his first book, *The Structure of Behavior*, the French phenomenologist Merleau-Ponty dealt with life partly in its Husserlian meaning (“life of consciousness”). Moreover, he focused on life as the fundamental feature of all organic or living beings. Organisms are structures that tend to maintain their equilibrium differently from physical structures. In physical structures, the equilibrium is a result of a combination of several external conditions, as in the shape adopted by a drop of oil once located in a mass of water (Merleau-Ponty, 1967, 145). By contrast, organic structures are capable of attaining equilibrium—as in positive phototropism—by themselves and under conditions that may continuously change. It is not the combination of the external conditions, but “the organism itself [which] poses the conditions of its equilibrium” (Merleau-Ponty, 1967, 150). The organism itself establishes, for instance, what conditions count as optimal in its orientation towards the light. Consequently, the organism helps to create its own environment (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, 81).

This brief and rather limited list shows that life—in the reflections of phenomenological authors—is said in different ways. But, moreover, life is said about different entities. In the first case, life is attributed to the consciousness that relates to objects (that is, “lives through” its objects). In the second case, life is a fundamental feature of the being of an individual who has his or her own life as something that he or she has taken over and is to be carried further by him or her (the “factual life”). And in the third case, life is attributed to organisms. It is the distinctive feature thanks to which the behavior of an organism does not simply result from its external conditions, but can be characterized as homeostatic.

Consequently, two pluralities of the notion “life,” not just one, need to be noted: apart from the plurality of meaning (life is said in different senses), there is the

plurality of attribution (life being attributed once to the consciousness, at other times to organisms, and at other times identified with existence). This double plurality makes it difficult, or maybe even impossible, to search for a unifying concept of life and to establish a phenomenology of life or a phenomenology of the living. And yet, as early as in 1920s attempts were made to give a comprehensive phenomenological account of different forms of life, to show their mutual relation, and to specify the meaning of the phenomenological concept of life. Max Scheler (Scheler, 1998) and Martin Heidegger (Heidegger, 2004, §§42-64) hold a prominent place among these early phenomenological accounts of life. They were followed, for instance, by Hans Jonas (2001). In our day, an important attempt to give a unifying phenomenology of life has been made in the recent works of Renaud Barbaras (2008; 2011a; 2013; 2018).

Before looking more closely at this attempt, it should be stated more precisely what is particular about the phenomenological approach to the problem of life. We can roughly say that phenomenology—understood as the analysis of different ways entities appear—investigates life from the standpoint of the subject to which these entities appear and which is of course itself a living being. To put it differently, phenomenology investigates life from the viewpoint of the living being itself: it focuses, for instance, on the way other living beings appear to it or on the way its own life becomes manifest in the different modes that this living being directs itself towards its objects. Nevertheless, if we take as our starting point the experience of the living being, to which the life belongs or which is itself the bearer of that life, we expose ourselves to a double criticism. First, it can be objected that we can arrive only at a sum of subjective remarks on life, but not at a binding and universally valid understanding of life. And second, it can be pointed out that the life of which we have experience is only human life. The phenomenology of life is thus subject to the objections of subjectivism and of anthropocentrism.

As a reply to the first objection, phenomenology points out that each experience has certain recurrent, typical structures. An individual is capable of recognizing these structures in the life of other individuals. As living beings, we understand ourselves, for instance, as each seeing our environment from a particular point of view. Or, to give another example, we understand that we may be exposed to a danger, which implies that we always grasp events that happen to us as something that concerns ourselves. The fact that we each live our *own* life according to these structures—our perspectival character or our perception, the practical or vital relevance of events in our surroundings—does not deny the general character of these structures. This classical phenomenological claim—our subjective experience

is articulated according to certain essential structures (e.g. Husserl, 1992, §§1-8)—has been recently recalled by Etienne Bimbenet as a first move of a possible phenomenology of life (Bimbenet, 2011, 29-30, 45-46). In the similar vein, we read, for instance, already in Merleau-Ponty's *The Structure of Behavior* the remarkable statement: "The science of life can be constructed only with notions tailored to it and taken from our experience of the living being" (Merleau-Ponty, 1967, 149). By stating this, Merleau-Ponty is not reducing the science of life to a sum of subjective observations. He insists that the source of these trans-subjective meanings or structures is to be found in the experience that is always somebody's experience (Merleau-Ponty, 2014, 78).

Even if we concede that our own experience does not confine us to our private subjective sphere, that it comprises typical or essential structures that enable us to grasp what it means "to see something from certain viewpoint" or "to be in danger," the second objection remains: can these structures be extended and transposed beyond merely human experience? To put it differently: is phenomenology capable of grasping the difference between human and non-human forms of life (the anthropological difference)? Heidegger famously suggested in *Being and Time* that we can understand the non-human forms of life by describing human existence or Dasein, and by taking away certain features that cannot be found in non-human or non-Dasein-like forms of life. He declared the program of this "privative zoology" in the short but influential remark in §10 of *Being and Time*:

Life has its own kind of being, but it is essentially accessible only in Da-sein. The ontology of life takes place by way of a privative interpretation. It determines what must be the case if there can be anything like just-being-alive [*was sein muß, daß so etwas wie Nur-noch-leben sein kann*]. (Heidegger, 1996, 46; 1993, 49-50)

In order to illuminate the contrast between the human and the non-human way of being, different authors, such as Heidegger and Portman, have elaborated on the distinction between the 'environment' or 'envirning world' (*Umwelt*) and the 'world' (*Welt*). Whereas the animal is—in different ways of its behavior—always tied to its environment, the human being is open to the world. Contrasted to the animal, the human being is characterized by his or her "world openness." For instance, social organization amongst humans does not have a pre-given form. Indeed, human beings have to reinvent it and confirm it constantly (Portman, 1995, 97). Heidegger presents one variant of this man–animal delimitation, which makes use of the environment—world distinction. In a 1929-30 lecture, he famously claims: the

stone is worldless (*weltlos*), the animal is poor in world (*weltarm*), the man is world-forming (*weltbildend*) (Heidegger, 2004, §§42-63).

Heidegger's claim has met with heavy criticism, both in biology and in philosophy. One of the influential criticisms of this "humanistic teleology," as he calls it, was articulated by Jacques Derrida. He distrusts the very thesis of animality according to which the word 'animal' is supposed to refer to a well-defined region. The division that is constituted by the conceptual man–animal separation is, for Derrida, unjustifiable. It is on the basis of this separation that we attribute our feelings of compassion and pity or hold certain beings responsible or not. By maintaining this division we participate in a violent act that is, according to Derrida, a real "war of species" (Derrida, 2008, 23-35; 1987, 87-90).

For our purposes, it is important to note that Barbaras, who develops one of the most recent versions of the phenomenology of life, shares with Derrida some objections against the Heideggerian anthropocentric approach. According to Barbaras, the starting point of the phenomenology of life is not anthropocentrism, but biocentrism:

We will have to ask what life must be if the human being is what he or she is; what must life be, *if there can be anything like Dasein* [il nous faudra nous demander ce que doit être la vie pour que l'homme soit ce qu'il est, *ce que doit être la vie pour que soit possible quelque chose comme le Dasein*]. (Barbaras, 2008, 63)

Barbaras calls his approach a "privative anthropology," and understands it as an inverted Heideggerian "privative zoology." We are no longer invited to ask what should be taken away from human life in order to arrive at the animal or vegetal form of life. On the contrary, we ask what should be taken away from life as such in order to arrive at human life. This nevertheless presupposes, obviously, that we know first, what "life as such" is. Consequently, the first step of the phenomenology of life as developed by Barbaras consists in making clear what "life as such" or "life for itself" (*la vie pour elle-même*) is.

2. LIFE AND MANIFESTATION

But what does "life" mean? To deal with this question, it is useful to start from the distinction Barbaras makes between life "in the first and immediate sense" (*le sens premier et immédiat*) and life in its "originary sense" (*le sens originaire du vivre*). We take life in its first and immediate (or "naïve") sense, if we define it by the "activity of the living organism that grapples with an environment" (« l'activité de

l'organisme vivant aux prises avec un milieu ») (Barbaras, 2008, 7, 20). Nevertheless, life as such, life in its originary sense, is, according to Barbaras, not to be identified with the life of the living organism.

Before stating more precisely what life in the originary meaning is, Barbaras focuses on the phenomenological question of appearing. Husserlian phenomenology uses the concept “appearing” to describe the correlation between that which appears (transcendent entities), particular appearances (phenomena), and the one to whom entities appear (the dative of manifestation, the subject of appearing, the subject of correlation). Now, according to Barbaras, Husserl wrongly renders this structure of correlation by understanding appearances as mental states that are ‘in’ consciousness, that is, are immanent. To put it differently, in Husserl the subject is a subject to which everything appears, a subject which itself does not make part of that which appears. Barbaras, by contrast, seeks to understand the subject of correlation as a being which constitutes part of the world. Barbaras takes on the task, pursued by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and also Jan Patočka, to analyze the subject as both part of the world and as the entity to which the world appears.

It is as a response to the problem of correlation, articulated thus, that the concept of life intervenes. If we want to understand the subject of manifestation (the dative of manifestation) as belonging to that which becomes manifest, and yet as standing at a distance from it, we have to conceive of it as *life*. This suggestion starts from a fundamental assumption—namely, that life is a unity comprising two aspects. To live means “to be alive” (in Barbaras often in German as „Leben“) on the one hand and to “live through” („erleben“) on the other. In the first sense, living is intransitive, in the second, it is transitive or other-oriented: I live through something (experience something).

The second aspect of “life” is obviously related to the concept of intentionality. Barbaras states unambiguously: we refer to life “in order to account for the being of intentionality.” He says, in other words, that each life “lives something through” (*erlebt etwas*) or makes something manifest. Each living being is a dative of manifestation, each life stands in correlation to something that appears. Living in this transitive sense—“living through” something (*etwas erleben*)—is an indispensable part of each life. Barbaras repeatedly claims that any living organism experiences something; any living being is a subject for which something becomes manifest:

it is beyond doubt that the life of the lowest living being implies a dimension of phenomenalization; this life is not just survival, but is already ‘knowledge’ ” [« la vie du moindre vivant enveloppe sans doute une dimension de phénoménalisation, elle

n'est pas seulement survie, mais déjà "connaissance" »]. (Barbaras, 2008, 8; Barbaras, 2018, 5)

At this stage, at least two objections may be raised. First, not all features of the life of living beings seem to be dependent on this analysis of manifestation. When describing life, we may refer to processes such as growth, evolution, metabolism (the exchange of the matter with the environment, which guarantees the constant renewal of the existence of the organism), reproduction, biological rhythms, and so forth. Barbaras cannot deny that these processes constitute part of organic life. Yet he strives to subordinate them to the fundamental feature of life, which is the participation of the living being in the process of manifestation. We see this, for instance, when Barbaras criticizes Jonas (Barbaras, 2008, 183-230) for having founded the unity of the organic being on metabolism, that is, on the concern of the organism to survive and maintain its being through material exchange with the environment. Conceived in this way, the activity of the living being does not account for the essential openness of the organism to the world. The participation in manifestation (in 'phenomenalization') gets lost. Barbaras would probably respond to our objection that living beings do not just consume the environment, but make it manifest.

Secondly, we can charge Barbaras with anthropocentrism, for even if it should hold true that life consists essentially in making manifest, it is only life as known to ourselves, to "subjects of correlation." Can this feature be applied to other living beings, plants, and animals? We have already seen that Barbaras resolutely refuses Heidegger and his "anthropocentrism" or "existence centrism" (*l'existentialocentrisme*). We will come back to a possible response to this second objection at a later point. Before that, let us focus on life as the *unity* of "being alive" and "experiencing" (living through). So far, we have considered only the first aspect of this unity. It is time to look at the second.

3. UNITY OF LIFE

"Being alive"—the intransitive aspect of the unity of life—is present in each transitive experience of something, yet not reducible to it. The analysis of *Leben* in Barbaras consists, as far as I understand it, in two steps. First, Barbaras argues that "being alive" (or "being-in-life," as translated in (Barbaras, 2005, 84)) is defined by the capacity for movement; second, he goes on to determine the specific meaning that movement takes when understood as the defining feature of "being alive."

In the first step, Barbaras tries to supplement Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on body proper as the fundamental dimension of perceptual experience. It is not enough to say that perceptual experience is a bodily one. It has to be added that the body in question is a living one: "bodies that perceive are *living* bodies [...] they are distinguished from other corporeal beings [...] by their capacity for *movement*." (Barbaras, 2005, 86). The movement in question is obviously not a simple location change, but a "living movement" (Barbaras, 2005, 86). Before showing what is specific about the "living movement," Barbaras points at the constitutive relation between movement and perception. He draws on observations, developed by Goldstein, that organisms represent a totality irreducible to its parts. Perception (or sensibility) and movement (motility) can be seen as two "expressions of living being." This is corroborated by the "tonic phenomena" in which a visual perception of certain quality (such as a color) implies a certain type of movement and consequently "involves the totality of the organism":

Beyond green as sensible content [...] there is the vital significance of green, the type of encounter that it represents for the organism, and this encounter is going to take indistinctly the form of movement of adduction and of the manifestation of a content. (Barbaras, 2005, 88)

Barbaras substantiates the claim that perception has a constitutive relation to movement by a series of other observations, for instance by pointing at the phenomenological analysis of attention (in E. Minkowski) according to which attention implies both perception and movement. Nevertheless, even if we admit that perception is "strictly motor" (Barbaras, 2005, 92), it still remains to establish what 'movement' is.

Consequently, in the second step of his claim, Barbaras circumscribes the 'specific status' that movement receives here. It is obviously different from an "objective displacement" (Barbaras, 2005, 92). Yet when characterizing the "living movement," he is more interested in the *capacity* for movement than in the movement itself about which he does not say much. Movement is determined only in terms of the realization of a capacity, as an "effective unfolding" of a capacity; the emphasis is on the fact that this capacity does not get exhausted by its particular realizations (by particular movements). Here again, Barbaras invokes observable biological phenomena of the active regeneration of an organism, yet he transposes them into a more general philosophical claims:

Lived movement has the characteristic that the power from whence it proceeds is not exhausted but on the contrary reactivated by its implementation. Living movement

is automovement not only because it proceeds from the self but above all because it is its own source... The true meaning of the subject consists in this autonomy of living movement, this capacity for continually recreating one's self. (Barbaras, 2005, 93)

In sum, being alive (or “being-in-life”) consists in the capacity for movement without which perceptual experience would not have been possible and which—as a capacity—gets constantly renewed in its particular realizations. The characteristic of the lived movement is thus the “excess of capacity beyond action.” Barbaras takes this description of the movement (“both penetration into exteriority and the ability for indefinite renewal”) (Barbaras, 2005, 94) to be valid not only for humans, but for each living subject, or for animals at least (“as the most cursory observation of animal behavior shows”).

Even though Barbaras in some of his texts gives a separate account of what “being alive” (*Leben*) means, he insists on the duality of being alive and experiencing something. What is more, he takes these two dimensions to be rooted in a more fundamental unity of life. In his 1999 book, *Le désir et la distance*, he names this most fundamental structure of the life “desire.” Again, phenomenological agenda stands in the foreground, i.e. the question how to account for the relation between things that appear and the subject to which they appear. Barbaras re-interprets the Husserlian terminological couple of “empty intention” and “fulfillment” in a more affective and vitalist terms. Intentionality is understood as an affective tending towards the world, as a feeling of un-satisfaction, and the “fulfillment” is coined precisely in terms of partial satisfaction. “Desire”—in the sense of an insatiable affective propensity, of a fundamental openness onto the world—stands for the unifying feature of the life as such. Life “is desire,” but not a desire in the sense of a particular need that can be satisfied, it is a “desire for the world.” (Barbaras, 2005; 1999; 2016, 20-23).

In his remarkable analysis of the dual character of life, Barbaras often invokes observations related to organic beings (tonic phenomena, active regeneration of an organism). Yet in the concluding parts of his argument, he tends to blankly generalize certain observations or even to change the *type* of philosophical analysis he develops. This can be shown on the way he re-unites the duality of experiencing (*Erleben*) and being alive (*Leben*) in his 2008 work *Introduction à une phénoménologie de la vie*. Here he epitomizes, in a somewhat abridged form, this duality as one of consciousness and life. Now, it is highly interesting to see how Barbaras describes this duality. He explicitly embraces the idea that consciousness and life are “absolutely co-extensive and co-originary.” Nevertheless, he expounds his idea as follows:

This co-originaryity is in reality a sign of a unique element or of a unique manner of existence [« l'indice d'un élément ou d'un mode d'exister unique »]: consciousness and life are born together [« conscience et vie naissent ensemble »], since they proceed from one and the same manner of being, which we provisionally call living [« car elles procèdent d'un même mode d'être, que nous nommons provisoirement vivre »], and their distinction always already makes part of an abstraction [« de sorte que leur distinction relève toujours déjà de l'abstraction »]. (Barbaras 2008, 21)

Consequently, reflections on the “originary unity of consciousness and life” invite us to abandon the strict conceptual distinction. Indeed, we are invited by Barbaras himself to accept the idea of “blurring [...] the difference between consciousness and being alive.” [« brouillage [...] de la distinction entre la conscience et l'être en vie »] (Barbaras, 2008, 22). The distinction *Leben — Erleben* is to be seen as deriving from a more primordial unity: “consciousness and life are born together, since they proceed from one and the same manner of being.” This betrays that a certain methodological shift has taken place: the multiplicity of different aspects of life is to be traced back to their origin. The phenomenology of life is replaced by something I would call a speculative genealogy of life.

We can see this, for instance, in the way Barbaras deals with the anthropological difference. The difference between the human and the non-human form of life is explained in terms of a differentiation from a common origin or—as Barbaras puts it—« au sein de la vie, » that is, a differentiation within life (Barbaras, 2008, 234). As we have seen, every form of life stands in correlation to the world; life as such is intentional (in the affective sense of “desire”). Human consciousness proceeds from this common and undifferentiated life by way of a gradual limitation. Whereas life as such is opened to the world, human consciousness is object directed. The infinitely rich and original relation of life to the world gets replaced, when it comes to human beings, by the limited and narrow relation of consciousness to its object. This is how Barbaras introduces his idea of privative anthropology: “human being is life *less* something” [« la vie *moins* quelque chose »] (Barbaras, 2011a, 121). This view is the opposite of Heidegger's privative zoology in two respects. First, we arrive at the human being by taking away certain features of life as such, and, second, the anthropological difference is stated not as a part of a descriptive or comparative phenomenology which compares man, animal, vegetable, and mineral, but as a part of the dynamic idea of life as a process of differentiation from a single common ground (or within one common ground).

Consequently, Barbaras's philosophy turns out to be a philosophy of becoming. The obvious question is what kind of becoming does Barbaras have in mind. Does

he focus on an ontogenetic study (on the development of an individual across its life) or on a phylogenetic study (some kind of evolutionary history)? Or is this some other kind of becoming?

4. *LIFE AND THE WORLD*

The most fundamental becoming is understood by Barbaras again as a movement of appearing. Nevertheless, this time it is an appearing in a more radical sense, not becoming manifest for somebody, but the very process of individuation. Barbaras—inspired by Patočka and by Eugen Fink—distinguishes two concepts of “appearing” or “phenomenon.” Appearing to somebody, which he calls “dévoilement,” and “individuation through separation,” which he calls “délimitation.” Whereas the first concept of manifestation presupposes somebody, a dative of manifestation, and refers to a kind of epistemological movement, the second concept refers to an ontological movement that is prior to any appearing to somebody. What is more, it is this second concept of manifestation that is associated with the most fundamental concept of “life.” This set of assumptions is developed by Barbaras in a systematic and lengthy way especially in the 2013 book *Dynamique de la manifestation* (and transformed into a “poetic” account of human finitude in his 2016 book). It is impossible to cover here all aspects of this original and rich work. My exposition is limited to three philosophical moves: (a) the re-interpretation of the Husserlian concept of “adumbration,” (b) the understanding of manifestation as an ontological movement and (c) the charge of animism and the reply based on the distinction between the life of living beings and the archi-life (« l’achi-vie ») of the world.

4a) *Husserlian concept of “adumbration” and the pre-given world*

By developing the above mentioned distinction of two concepts of manifestation, Barbaras moves away and beyond Husserlian phenomenology. Yet he substantiates this move by his own reading of some decisive Husserlian passages, especially the ones on the perceptual appearing of things. Individual things that we perceive are given to us in a series of perspectival aspects of “adumbrations” („Abschattungen“). They are never fully given to us in particular appearances, yet there is no sense to posit them as existing independently from these appearances: things exist as appearing. Our experience of this or that thing can continue, because a new appearance of the same thing—i.e. our new experience of this thing—is

always possible, stands always “on the horizon” of our actual experience. Barbaras epitomizes this Husserlian description of the process of appearing as follows:

the givenness by adumbrations [« la donation par esquisses »], the capacity that I have to continue the course of perception in the light of the actual aspects of the object presupposes that the possibility to continue my experience is, so to say, warranted [« garantie »]. This warranty cannot be based on the givenness of the object, because it is precisely the continuation of experience that, on the contrary, will constitute the object. In other words, if the scene or the prerequisite framework, within which the experience can take place, were not given in advance, I could have never moved forward in the course of adumbrations: the continuation of the experience, which is itself a condition of the object, presupposes the pre-givenness of the continuability of this experience. (Barbaras, 2011a, 94)³

The warranty which makes sure that my experience can continue is localized—by Barbaras—on the side of the world, the latter being defined as “the prerequisite and non-objective ground of the constitution of the object,” as the “pre-given framework of every intuitive givenness, especially of the perceptual givenness” (Barbaras, 2011a, 95). Barbaras seems to restate the idea elaborated by Husserl, i.e. that every experience has to be accompanied by a horizon (Husserl, 1992, §27; Husserl, 1985, §8). Nevertheless, at a closer look, he *de facto* abandons the Husserlian concept of the horizon (even though the relevant passage is entitled « L’horizon de monde »; see (Barbaras, 2013, 40-52)). In Husserl, we cannot localize the structure of the horizon simply and exclusively on the side of the world. It is always the structure of an individual thing as it appears *to somebody*, to a perceiving subject. On the one hand, there is the internal horizon of other possible experiences in which the same thing can be given to me, and, on the other hand, there is the external horizon of my exploration of the surroundings of the same thing. It is thanks to this double horizon that my experience can carry on and continuously reveal what is real (see also Merleau-Ponty, 2014, 69-71). The experience is inconceivable without its counterpart (the object and its horizons), but it is no less true that the horizon prefigures the possibilities of the subject of experience. The horizon suggests what “I can” see, what “I can” explore and experience. This is a decisive point. By localizing the “warranty” of the continuity of my experience exclusively on the side of the world (by understanding it as a “pre-given framework”), Barbaras abandons not only the Husserlian concept of the “horizon,” but also the idea of correlation, i.e. the idea that we cannot go beyond the fundamental relation in which something appears to

³ A longer version of this argument, see (Barbaras, 2013, 42-44, 52-54).

somebody. Barbaras explicitly assumes this consequence: if we accept that the world is to be understood as the pre-given framework of every intuitive givenness, we have to admit also that there is such an “appearing that is not appearing to somebody” (« un apparaître qui n’est encore apparaître à personne ») (Barbaras, 2011a, 106).

Barbaras himself would not qualify this step as an abandon of the idea of correlation (and of phenomenology as such). According to him, the phenomenology is not abandoned, but supplemented by a cosmology, the latter being able to account for the “anonymous manifestation”, the appearing that is not appearing to somebody (Barbaras, 2016, 25-26). Barbaras articulates the objection as follows: “It might seem that we describe cosmic processes that have not much to do with the dimension of phenomenality [...] that we have sacrificed phenomenology to cosmology” (Barbaras, 2016, 34). His reply to this charge consists in pointing out at the “cosmic” processes (at the anonymous manifestation) as the *presupposition* of the appearing to somebody. He repeatedly calls his analysis a “regressive” one, as an inquiry into that which precedes the appearing to a subject (Barbaras, 2018, 11). Moreover, when replying to the objection, Barbaras suggests that it presupposes a mistaken concept of appearing. The objection assumes, according to Barbaras, “that appearing has to rest on the activity of the subject, that appearances are but results of subjectification” (Barbaras, 2011a, 153) (« qu’il n’y a d’apparition que comme subjectivation »). This is an interesting point: when trying to prove his point, Barbaras makes the phenomenological concept of appearing even more subjective than it has to be. As I suggested in the first section of this article, the fact, that *we* experience something (e.g. from a certain standpoint), does not imply that we are confined to a private and a merely subjective world. The need for another concept of manifestation might be but a result of a mistaken over-subjectification of the phenomenological concept of manifestation.

4b) *Manifestation understood as an ontological movement (Jan Patočka)*

Even though the distinction between the two concepts of manifestation was introduced by Eugen Fink (the „Anschein“ und „Vorschein,“ see Fink, 1958, esp. chap. VIII and IX; Fink, 1976, esp. 148; Fink 1957), Barbaras draws on the way Jan Patočka adopted and developed this distinction in his own philosophy (Patočka, 1972). In his reading of Aristotle’s *Physics*, Patočka suggests a radical interpretation of the Aristotelian concept of movement. It is precisely this part of Patočka’s work that, in the eyes of Barbaras, constitutes the most promising phenomenological account of manifestation.

If we understand movement as an actualization of a potentiality, movement refers to an ontological process, to a process that constitutes the very being of a given entity (and not only the fact that this entity appears to somebody). Yet, according to Patočka, the Aristotelian conception of movement is too static, since it presupposes something that changes, a substrate which itself does not change (a leaf turns red and dries out). Patočka suggests to radicalize this concept by understanding the movement not as something that happens with a pre-given substrate, but as something by which this very substrate comes into being (Patočka, 1998, XVII). The prominent example of such a movement is the human existence: a human being does not pre-exist to its possible actualizations, moreover, it exists in the way it grasps and carries out its possibilities. Patočka refers obviously to the Heideggerian concept of *Dasein* and its relation to its possibilities. Yet, as Barbaras justly remarks, the human existence is for Patočka not the only instantiation of a “movement which produces its own subject” (Barbaras, 2011b, 250). In some of his texts, Patočka inclines to take all existing entities in terms of an ontological movement which brings about and stabilizes its own substrate. Everything which exists is in movement: there is not an apple that ripens (i.e. an apple as a substrate and being gradually more and more ripe as a movement), but a movement of becoming ripe which brings about both the identity of the substrate and its determination (Barbaras, 2011b, 246). Patočka himself is willing to call this movement a “life.” In his own rendering or the Aristotelian *Physics*, Patočka takes movement to be “a life of things, in a way” (Patočka, 1964, 88). Patočka’s appropriation of the Aristotelian concept of movement cannot be exposed in more detail here (Duicu, 2014). Suffice it to say that Patočka adopts certain ontology of movement in which the appearing of things coincides with their very coming into being qua individual entities. Barbaras incorporates this into his own philosophical project by stating:

after we have taken into account the special mode of being which is our own existence, we are led to recognize that it makes part of a more general process of manifestation, of an ontogenetic movement, in relation to which the movement of our own existence is but a privileged attestation. (« un mouvement ontogénétique, dont celui de notre existence n’est qu’une attestation privilégiée ») (Barbaras, 2011b, 250)

When adopting the idea of appearing (manifestation) as a process of individuation, Barbaras unambiguously adopts Patočka’s—rare and rather restrained—suggestion in calling this very process “life.” This is a different meaning of the term “life” than the ones we discussed in previous sections, yet is it not the

only conceptual invention. Since the individuation represents the most fundamental feature of the world, it is ultimately to the world that the life should be attributed. Barbaras explores this idea that life—in the most fundamental sense—is life of the world, both in *La dynamique de la manifestation* (Barbaras, 2013), and, earlier in the article « Vie de la conscience et vie du monde » (Barbaras, 2011a, 127–137) which is basically a brief sketch of what would become the 2013 book. It is here that the shift from the life of consciousness and of organisms to the life of the world gets accomplished:

the life which is attested by our own movements is never a life of one particular living being; it is always already the life of the world itself. Consequently, we belong to the world not because we are living beings; on the contrary, we are alive because we belong to the world, as far as it holds true that—phenomenologically understood—the being of the world is the being of the process in which the original meaning of life becomes manifest. (Barbaras, 2011a, 136; 2018, 10)

Let us emphasize again that our brief survey does not intend to spell out in detail all the steps that led Barbaras from the phenomenology based on the idea of correlation to a more speculative type of philosophy which takes “appearing” to be primarily an ontological process of individuation. The question that is pertinent for us is: why should we call the process of individuation “life”? The main reason, I believe, is how Barbaras reads Patočka on *physis* in Aristotle (Barbaras, 2011a, 134–137). The *physei onta* are defined by the capacity of spontaneous movement. And since the world is here understood as the spontaneous individuation of entities, as their spontaneous production (“auto-production”) (Barbaras, 2013, 186; 2018, 18) it is possible to say, at least according to Barbaras, that the world is alive, to take life as its essential feature.

Again, certain objections can reasonably be summoned. Let us mention but two of them. First, it is a different concept of life than the concepts Barbaras has referred to thus far. Now, life refers neither to the “activity of the living organism” nor to the duality of “being alive” and “living through” something (*Leben* and *Erleben*). At this stage, life is—conceptually—identified with the spontaneity of movement. And second, if we take life as a feature of the world than the concept of life loses its discriminative capacity to set apart what is living from what is not. In this dynamic ontology, in which life means more or less the “coming to being” of any individual entity, every individual entity is a living entity. Life is the life of things, « la vie des choses » (Barbaras, 2011a, 134), be they animate or inanimate.

4c) *Animate and inanimate beings. Life and “archi-life”*

The life which is attributed to the world (« la vie du monde »; Barbaras, 2018, 11) is related to, yet not identical with the life of living organisms. In order to grasp this difference, Barbaras introduces the terminological distinction between the archi-life (« l’archi-vie », the new designation of the “life as such”) and the life of the living beings. It is on the basis of this distinction that Barbaras addresses the animism objection: “the fact that the life of the living being is immersed in the archi-life does not imply that each being produced by the archi-life is a living being” (Barbaras, 2018, 11). The animate and the inanimate beings differ in the way they relate to the originating archi-life: the inanimate beings are completely dependent on the archi-life, while the animate beings are capable to separate themselves. When describing the difference of the inanimate and animate beings, Barbaras refers to the traditional distinction between beings that are exposed to the “laws of nature” and the ones who “escape the laws of the world,” who possess “spontaneity or autonomy.” While inanimate beings are moved, the animate beings move themselves (Barbaras, 2018, 12). This brings Barbaras to a paradoxical formulation, according to which the living beings are separated from the “life as such” and—consequently—have lost this life: “being alive does not mean to have the life but to have lost it” (« être en vie, ce n’est pas avoir la vie mais l’avoir perdue »; Barbaras, 2018, 12). More precisely: “The living being is literally a life that has lost the life as such, or the archi-life” (Barbaras, 2018, 15). Barbaras is not afraid to draw radical conclusions which comprise also the re-definition of the concept of death. The “empirical birth of a living being is a counterpart of a metaphysical death,” and the “empirical death, the dissolution of the singularity of the living being and the extinction of its own movement, the de-differentiation, is synonymous to the return to the life.” (Barbaras, 2018, 16). From these highly original observations, there is one conclusion we may draw for the purpose of our article: when responding to the charge of animism, Barbaras introduces a separation of two distinct concepts of life, the archi-life (the life of the world) and the organic life (being alive). Moreover, he radicalizes the distinction by articulating it in terms as life and death, i.e. in terms that are mutually exclusive.

5. CONCLUSION

In my article, I tried to offer a critical reading of the way major works of Renaud Barbaras deal with the concept of life. There are many aspects of his work that had to be left aside, for instance the recent account of the specifically

human form of life in its separation from the more general life of the world (addressed by Barbaras in his “metaphysics of the subject” in terms of « archi-événement ») (Barbaras, 2016, 101-118). In my understanding, the two objections to any phenomenology of life that I mentioned in section one—the objection of subjectivism and of anthropocentrism—constitute an important background of Renaud Barbaras’ preoccupations. His phenomenological and cosmological account avoids the charge of subjectivism (by claiming the subjective concept of phenomenon to be a derivative one). I cannot deal in detail with the charge of anthropocentrism, but one thing seems to be clear: it is weakened, or at least modified by the fact that Barbaras has introduced a negative anthropology. All in all, Barbaras develops an impressive philosophy of life that is less vulnerable to the charge of subjectivism and anthropocentrism than the phenomenology of life which can be drawn from Husserl, Heidegger or even Merleau-Ponty.

Nevertheless, there are questions that remain and that can be articulated by means of the double plurality that I described at the beginning of this article. In the works of Renaud Barbaras, we find the plurality of attribution: life is attributed to organisms, consciousness (the subject that stands in correlation to something), and, lastly, the world. And there is also the plurality of meaning. When Barbaras attributes life to organisms, it is understood as the “activity of the living organism that grapples with an environment.” When he attributes life to the experiencing subject, life receives the meaning of the unity of “being alive” and “experiencing something.” And, lastly, when attributed to the world, life has nothing to do with “experiencing,” but instead concerns the fact that the world contains the beginning of all motion within itself. The ambition of Barbaras is to show the unity of these levels and meanings of life.

If I hesitate to follow Barbaras in his attempt, it is for two reasons. First, Barbaras himself is at certain points compelled to acknowledge that there is a discontinuity between a certain concept of life (e.g. the life of the world) and another concept of life (e.g. being alive, see section 4c). Secondly, I believe that phenomenology does not need to be supplemented by a cosmology. Phenomenology is not bound to be a way to a unifying theory of the different forms and meanings of life. On the contrary, it can help to cultivate a sense for the different kinds of plurality of the word “life.” This cultivation still can make a good use of the idea of experience as a correlation. Certainly, there is life—our own life—in our perceiving of things in our surroundings. And there is life—our own life—when we understand our own existence as a task. And of course there is life in our experience of different,

non-human forms of life, such as in the experience of the animal's gaze upon myself, in which we somehow understand both the animal's, and our own life. Possibly in this gaze of an animal, to which we can be exposed, the boundary between man and animal starts to tremble, as Derrida suggests. These are diverse experiences of life in a different sense. To say that "life" has multiple meanings and attributions is very formal and broad. Still such a statement can be developed into a phenomenological analysis of the way life is indeed experienced in different meanings.

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