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How it Feels to Be Alive

Moods, Background Orientations, and Existential Feelings

JOERG FINGERHUT & SABINE MARIENBERG

That singular feeling, woven of pleasure and displeasure, stunned my senses
– overwhelmed me – cannot possibly resist – I ate the herring!
(Opinions of Murr the Cat, E.T.A. Hoffmann)

1. Introduction

Within the literary tradition the longings of the subject – the movements of the soul, the predicaments of the heart, and the joys of the flesh – have long been a topos explored in all its depths and ramifications. This even extends to the 'sense of sensing', something that we maybe find ourselves in "before or beyond consciousness", thus constituting that most fundamental way of experiencing represented by the experience of the cat Murr in E.T.A. Hoffmann's famous novel (Heller-Roazen 2007, 19). Murr surrenders to all the enticing and thrilling events he encounters on his nightlong strolls along the rooftops and through the back alleys. He is able to do so and to experience life (and the herring) to its fullest. And he can't help but wonder if his two-legged contemporaries, who are so engaged in higher forms of consciousness and thought, still have the same ability, share the same feelings of existence?

Dedicating a book to *Feelings of Being Alive*, we find ourselves in the position of this existential cat, asking questions about what makes our experience of the world a lively one – or even an experience of life – and what might be the experience of 'being alive'. It could be that these feelings are something we only experience in passing, as an ability to carry out an ongoing experiential process of registering changes in one's mind, body or the world we engage in. Kant, in his Anthropology, famously characterized the experience of life this way, as a move-

ment of the mind (*Bewegungshandlung des Gemüts*): “To feel life, to feel pleasure is nothing else than to constantly feel that one is being driven on to leave one’s current state for another one”.¹ Like pleasure, the feeling of being alive might be a state that cannot rest in itself, that would cease to be if consciousness just remained focused on one object. On this characterization it might not be a state in the narrow sense at all.

2. The contemporary interest in the phenomenon

What are feelings of being alive? No current phenomenological description comes to mind. The topic seems to be one that has to be grown and developed anew and addresses a phenomenon that is not yet covered by any standard characterization. This is also why we decided to employ the plural ‘feelings’ in the title of this volume in order to encourage the contributors to address the potential variety of feelings instead of trying to pre-structure the debate by focusing on a purportedly singular feeling under which all kinds of phenomena are to be subsumed. It is also because of this lack of a standard description that interdisciplinarity is especially called for and constitutes a useful heuristic. All the more so since a theory that deals with novel concepts – or at least relatively uncommon ones – should draw from the wealth of phenomena provided by the discoveries of different disciplinary approaches in order to grasp its subject matter. We pursue this desideratum by accompanying the main body of the texts in this volume – written by philosophers by training and focusing on the philosophy of mind, emotions and life – with perspectives from psychology, psychotherapy, and art history.

To get an initial grasp of our subject: feelings of being alive seem to address something basic in a living being, something that pertains to us as physical, sentient organisms. Whether it is experienced by every form of life or whether it is experienceable only by beings that are able to contrast it with other kinds of felt experiences is already an initial question worth attending to, along with further questions relating to its object: is it the aliveness of the organism, the different aspects of vividness of its mental states, or rather the experience of changes in the general background state an organism finds itself in? As a feeling it does not pri-

1 “Sein Leben fühlen, sich vergnügen, ist also nichts anders als: sich kontinuierlich getrieben fühlen, aus dem gegenwärtigen Zustand herauszugehen [...]” (Kant 1798, 554). Translation into English by the authors.

marily belong to the realm of the reflective – it is supposed to denote an experiential element rather than something cognitive – but it nevertheless is something that, according to many authors of this volume, gives us a sense of reality or even constitutes reality, a reality we bring forth or enact and in which we experience ourselves as actively partaking in. In this sense it is an *existential* feeling – one that defines our very take on the world – but at the same time it is a feeling that eludes us at one time or another in the everyday interactions with the world and others. All this taken together might already tell us something distinctive about the nature of such feelings: apparently they are not graspable in any neat distinction between attitude and content (as are prominent in the philosophy of mind, when e. g. describing the modality and content of a perception such as ‘hearing a knock on the door’ or ‘seeing a tree’) but rather constitute a prerequisite for the occurrence of other mental states, conditioning and accompanying them. One of the paradigms that will be discussed in this volume is the way such feelings can determine the background of what we experience and the way they color other mental states. This puts them in the vicinity of phenomena like *moods* and background feelings. That these feelings can be best studied (and mostly have been studied up to date) in cases where they tend towards extreme or intensified conditions is also due to the point that they are not naturally at the forefront of what we experience. They come into view and can be theoretically captured either when they are severely disturbed or even lacking to some extent, or else when they are intensified and refined as e. g. addressed in aesthetics and theories of art.²

There are pathological cases like Cotard’s Syndrome, where people present severe symptoms ranging all the way to the belief that they are dead or simply non-existent and vigorously come up with confabulations to refute all evidence to the contrary.³ The casuistry of a 42-year-old female patient, reported in a textbook on delusions, might serve as an example of a loss of the feeling of being alive. She “experiences her hometown, a small village in the Alps, as ‘void of people’, ‘houses and the landscape as inanimate’ and literally grayed out. She her-

2 The latter is not part of the present volume, but cf. Menninghaus (2009) in particular on the feeling of life and liveliness in aesthetic theories and on the topos of vivid representations and its redefinition in terms of the autopoietic organism and the experience of life in Kant’s *Critique of Judgment* (1790).

3 See Hirstein (2005) who gives an overview of different kinds of delusions and the abilities of patients to integrate even the most ‘outlandish’ convictions into their normal frame of mind and world. Cf. also Bayne/Fernández (2009).

self experiences being lifeless, powerless and out of this world, thus describing the setting of a depopulated and inanimate world (Wolferdsdorf/Heidrich 2010, 71 f.)⁴. Such losses are a general feature of several disorders related to depression, where subjects seem to be able to understand the affordances of the environment, the opportunities it offers – they also comprehend along with the instrumental means the projects to which those means might contribute to – but they do not experience those projects as related to themselves, or rather: they do not feel the power to engage in them anymore.

But as much as such thorough examinations and descriptions of psychopathologies can help us to demarcate the phenomenon, they are not the main reason why moods, background feelings and – in their wake – feelings of being alive have taken on greater clarity and importance over the last decades. That we are increasingly able to approach these special mental phenomena in a theoretically as well as empirically informed and comprehensive way is largely due to three general developments that took place since the mid 20th century. We are going to sketch them as briefly as possible in the following paragraphs.

First, there have been advances in theories of the emotional or affective brain in the neurosciences that introduced new kinds of studies and shifted the focus to non-cognitivist, motivational, and affective aspects of consciousness.⁵ It is fair to say that perceptual experience and cognitive phenomena had previously occupied a preeminent place in the scientific study of consciousness and to some extent still do today, and the emotional and affective ones still have to be integrated and their central importance acknowledged. In many of the theories concerned with the emotional brain and affective neuroscience, affective experiences are closely connected to survival systems and instinctive behavior (e. g. flight mechanisms) that are realized in more basic structures of the brain and are seen as constituting “the evolutionary bedrock of consciousness” (Panksepp 2007, 127). Yet, the focus here in most cases has been on emotions like fear, anger, disgust, guilt, jealousy, envy, pride and so on. And where moods, background experiences or experiences of vitality have received more than parenthetical discussion, there are still de-

4 Translation by the authors. Pathologies and disturbances of basic feelings or feelings of being also play a central role in Ratcliffe’s analysis of existential feelings (2008, chap. 5–7).

5 To get a flavor and an overview of this kind of development cf. the monographs of Damasio (1994; 1999; 2010), LeDoux (1996) and Panksepp (1998).

ficiencies in conceptual clarity and theoretical detail as well as with regard to experimental paradigms for empirical studies.⁶

Second, there is an increased interest in phenomenologically informed and more complex accounts of what we experience and how our experience is structured. This is to a large extent due to the rise of an enactive or embodied theory of the mind that has changed the view of perception and consciousness in the philosophy of mind. Many of the proponents of those views have rediscovered the writings and theories of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty (to name only two) and the phenomenological tradition.⁷ From a phenomenological point of view, consciousness and mental phenomena in general are not only structured by attitude and content but include the subjective experience as *lived*, as a dynamic changing whole realized by an organism embedded in a complex world. Consciousness, emotions, and feelings understood in this way cannot be studied as isolated states or under experimental paradigms focusing on a cognitive task apart from the situatedness in a world or from other mental states that influence them. This already starts at a fundamental level with the intricate temporal structure of consciousness, which sustains the episodes that just elapsed and is influenced in advance by the experiences that are expected to come.⁸ Phenomena like the experiential horizon and the ability to experience vivid change and the like call for a richness of phenomenological description that might prove necessary to get hold of the experience of being alive, as well.

A third development that constitutes an important background for an understanding of feelings of being alive – and that also provides a theoretical framework for a philosophically sound theory of what might be their natural basis – are theories concerned with life and the living organism in general. Especially in the philosophy of mind there has been a vigorous debate as to whether there is an intrinsic connection or a deep continuity between phenomena of life and phenomena of mind. The question under dispute is: can mind be explained by refer-

6 The recent interest in ‘default modes’ and the ‘resting state’ in neuroscience might be hinting towards a way to approach such background phenomena more directly. See Callard/Margulies (2011) for an overview.

7 Cf. Gallagher/Zahavi (2008) for an introduction to a phenomenologically oriented philosophy of mind.

8 For a proper theory of the temporal structure of objects of consciousness in fine detail and complexity, see Husserl’s theory of retention, protention and presence. Cf. for example Husserl (1997).

ence to the same organizational and structural properties as life?⁹ It seems that we are more likely to succeed in giving satisfying naturalistic explanations with regard to our experiential life from this angle than from the rather mechanistic paradigm that still drives most of cognitive neuroscience. Consciousness, despite the fact that it is related to and intertwined with several cognitive functions, seems to outstrip functional descriptions and can be hardly covered by a mechanistic account of the underlying neuronal machinery. What is important here is a twofold insight: firstly, we obviously cannot properly understand mindfulness in nature in its basic mode without relating it to the organism's minimal *concern* to stay in existence, to carry on. Here we are already ascribing concern as such to even the simplest organisms (and sometimes even describing it as implemented in their organization); thus we ascribe something to these organisms that might help us to also explain elements underlying even complex mental engagements with the world. And, secondly, it might only be possible to understand experiential states and feelings in the way that they matter to the organism *as a whole*, and thus they might only be explicable with regard to the foundation of some form of a basic self.¹⁰

3. Emotions, moods, and existential feelings

The three theoretical frameworks introduced in the last paragraphs in one or another way form the background for many of the contributions in this volume. Yet, for the question of how to characterize feelings of being alive – and how to distinguish them from emotions, background feelings, moods and the like – considerations more closely related to mental states and their taxonomies have to be taken into account.

According to a prevalent position in philosophy, moods differ from emotions in that only the latter are states with an intentional object. They can be described in the form of, for example, 'S fears x', or 'S ex-

⁹ See for example the enactive life–mind continuity thesis that is one of the topics of Evan Thompson's (2007) *Mind in Life* and Thompson (2011a, b) and Wheeler (2011).

¹⁰ Beyond and besides biological foundations and phenomenological approaches, cultural elements and language also play an important role in the study of the phenomenon. They are not explicitly mentioned because these areas to our knowledge have seen no comparably general shifts and developments concerning the phenomenon of life and the experience of life.

periences disgust towards y'. Eric Lormand holds that moods therefore constitute a different kind of psychological state whose general form can be captured in sentences like 'S is in a happy mood' or 'S is in a beer-drinking mood'.¹¹ Lormand is thus a representative of the theory that argues for distinct and separated psychological categories of moods and emotions, based on the fact that moods don't have an intentional object. Emotion theorists like Robert Solomon (or more recently Peter Goldie 2000, 57, 143 f.) challenge this view of a lack of intentionality in moods and argue that moods have an object as well, but a more general or indeterminate one as opposed to the determinate objects of emotions:

There are passions which need not even begin with a particular incident or object, which need not be about anything in particular; these are *moods*. The difference between an emotion and a mood is the difference in what they are *about*. Emotions are about particulars, or particulars generalized; moods are about nothing in particular, or sometimes they are about our world as a whole (Solomon 1976, 122; emphases in the original).

Carolyn Price (2006), who reads such passages as evidence for a continuum of moods and emotions in these theories, has pointed out that we can also identify objectless emotions, like panic and rage, and thus the line of demarcation between moods and emotions based on objects gets rather too blurry.

Regarding moods we can conjecture that the problem Price hints at might be an even more basic one, because it is far from clear whether the *object*-talk or *aboutness*-talk with regard to moods is helpful in any way. What moods apparently *do*, rather, is to color or to stain every mental state we are in and as such their defining property is the influence they have on our 'mental household' in general (or the background they constitute for other feelings) *without* having an object.¹² This concept of

¹¹ Cf. the examples given in Lormand (1985, 385 f.): "[M]oods [...] may be described by locutions of the following form: '(A) S is in a ... mood.' One may be said to be in a depressed, elated, anxious, serene, grave, or light mood. Many other adjectives may be used in A-sentences: for example, 'good', 'bad', 'creative', 'inquisitive', 'book-reading', 'beer-drinking', 'friendly', 'lazy', 'energetic', 'capricious', and 'sluggish'."

¹² Even if emotions are not the main topic of this introduction, we would like to point out that Solomon's view of the objects of emotions does not strike us as utterly convincing without further amendments, especially when it comes to distinguishing emotions by the specific kinds of objects they indicate. Other theories will carry us further in this respect. Cf. e.g. Prinz' (2004) theory of

moods can be seen in the passage by Solomon cited above, and even more so in the passage immediately following:

Euphoria, melancholy, and depression are not about anything in particular (though some particular incident might well set them off); they are about the whole of our world, or *indiscriminately about anything that comes our way, casting happy glows or somber shadows on every object and incident of our experience* (Solomon 1976, 122; our emphasis).

Here moods are treated with respect to their function in setting the stage for other feelings and experiences¹³ – a background that in our view might turn out to be multifaceted and that thus should not simply be equated with basic evaluative elements. This needs to be emphasized since the above citation (“happy glows or somber shadows”) suggests that the range of possible moods is restricted to the positive and negative, to pleasure and pain; and it has sometimes even been suggested that this restricted range constitutes the basic phenomenology for emotions as well.¹⁴ This is also why, in our view, William James’ (1884, 202) notion of the “sounding board” – although he uses it to characterize the bodily basis of emotions rather than moods – more nicely captures the complex phenomenology moods have.¹⁵

One central point of reference with regard to the question of how moods possibly influence our engagement with and experiences of the world is Heidegger’s treatment of moods (*Stimmungen*) and attunements (*Befindlichkeiten*) in chapter five and six of the first part of *Being and Time*. Moods, according to Heidegger, are not merely a subjective layer or a distorted view of reality, but rather constitute the basic and uncircumventable mode of disclosure of the world. “*The mood has already disclosed, in every case, Being-in-the-world as a whole, and makes it possible first of all to*

“embodied appraisals”, that considers – following Lazarus (1991) – *core relational themes* as the proper objects of emotions (like ‘making reasonable progress toward to the realization of a goal’ for happiness or ‘facing an immediate, concrete, and overwhelming physical danger’ for fright). With regard to moods even these kinds of objects do not seem to offer a way to determine what moods are about.

- 13 For an approach that argues that moods fulfill such a stage-setting as a function of them being high-order states, see Griffith (1997, chap. 10).
 14 Helm (2001; 2009) suggests this. Solomon himself does not follow such a line of argument and rejects a categorization of emotion along the lines of positive and negative affect (Solomon/Stone 2002).
 15 See also the variety of moods displayed in footnote 11 and the even more comprehensive characterizations in Ratcliffe (2005; 2008) that are partially also cited below (10).

direct oneself towards something” (Heidegger 1962, 177; 1927, 137; emphasis in the original). The attunement to the world in moods is the most fundamental layer of interaction and participation with the things surrounding us. It is also the basic layer on which rational cognition and understanding rest.¹⁶

This goes well with Heidegger’s insight that the objects we encounter first and foremost *matter* to us – they are ‘zuhanden’ – and only derivatively do we perceive them as objects with physical properties. We are in states of concern with them and our whole existence is based on this affective background – our attunement – which is also the sense of our relationship with the world. Without it we could not understand and explain Dasein’s openness to the world. Yet we should not forget that the starting point of the existential analysis in *Being and Time* is something beyond that: the fact that humans can become problematic to themselves, that Dasein understands itself in its being. The care and concern humans have extends to themselves and to being in general and thereby they are not just beings among other beings (*Sein unter Seiendem*). Humans are able to question their status; their being and all being can be *for* them, as it is captured in the famous quotation: “*Understanding of Being is itself a definite characteristic of Dasein’s being*. Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it *is* ontological” (Heidegger 1962, 32; emphasis in the original).¹⁷

This specific understanding of being, as it is constituted in attunement and moods, has been one of the starting points for Matthew Ratcliffe’s treatment of what he calls “existential feelings” or “feelings of being”. It has been to a large extent due to Ratcliffe’s work (2005, 2008) that these topics have regained a broader interest and are treated in a larger context. This is also reflected in the fact that he is the most cited author in this volume. Ratcliffe’s thesis is that every experience takes place against a background of a more general sense of one’s relationship to the world. In these feelings of being, we find ourselves in a presupposed space of experiential possibility. What especially comes to

16 There are other layers of disclosure in *Being and Time* – understanding and discourse – that are seen as more active modes, but that are not independent of the primary mode of attunements realized in moods.

17 “*Seinsverständnis ist selbst eine Seinsbestimmtheit des Daseins*. Die ontische Auszeichnung des Daseins liegt darin, dass es ontologisch *ist*” (Heidegger 1927, 12). See also Slaby (2008; *this volume*) for the unity of world-disclosure, awareness of self, and the qualitative modification of existence in Heidegger.

the fore in his account is the role of bodily feelings, which adds an aspect that is not covered in the Heideggerian treatment of the topic.

To include this bodily element, Ratcliffe picks up on the feeling theory of emotions that goes back to James (1884) and Lange (1885) who claim that emotions are basically bodily sensations or perceptions of bodily changes. The reference to the body is used to explain the specific phenomenality of emotions; without bodily arousal there is no emotion:

But [the feeling] cannot exist without its bodily attributes. If from one terrified the accompanying bodily symptoms are removed, the pulse permitted to beat quietly, the glance to become firm, the color natural, the movements rapid and secure, the speech strong, the thoughts clear, – what is there left of his terror? (Lange 1912, 675).

Ratcliffe extends this analysis beyond the known catalogue of emotions and introduces a distinct kind of affective experiences that are not covered by existing categories but that are bodily based as well: existential feelings. These include ‘feeling alive’ and feelings of reality, which are very nicely depicted in an often cited list of the phenomena under scrutiny:

People sometimes talk of feeling alive, dead, distant, detached, dislodged, estranged, isolated, otherworldly, indifferent to everything, overwhelmed, suffocated, cut off, lost, disconnected, out of sorts, not oneself, out of touch with things, out of it, not quite with it, separate, in harmony with things, at peace with things or part of things. There are references to feelings of unreality, heightened existence, surreality, familiarity, unfamiliarity, strangeness, isolation, emptiness, belonging, being at home in the world, being at one with things, significance, insignificance, and the list goes on. People also sometimes report that “things just don’t feel right”, “I’m not with it today”, “I just feel a bit removed from it all at the moment”, “I feel out of it” or “it feels strange” (Ratcliffe 2008, 68).

After what has been said so far, it should be clear that feelings of being alive, understood as feelings of being, have a peculiar double structure in being felt bodily states and providing us with a general form of access to the world. Thus the contemporary extensions of a feeling theory of emotions take these feelings to constitute a specific relation between the organism and the environment, defining thereby a field of study in its own right. Yet, within this field they address a phenomenon whose traits and functions, whose biological and cognitive constraints and whose interlacings with action and thought are still to be clarified

and will be a center of theoretical effort in the philosophy of mind and emotions in the years to come.

4. The contributions to this volume

This volume strives to give a more detailed understanding of the aforementioned aspects. The articles are grouped around three major themes. The first section discusses the relation just mentioned between the feeling element and the possible objects and the general disclosedness of the world through feelings of being alive. It does so with a strong focus on the concept of existential feelings. Part two is more closely concerned with discussing the functions of feeling alive for the sentient organism, examining its biological, experiential and conceptual prerequisites. The third group of texts focuses on the relation between the lived experience of being alive and its symbolic representability.

It has been the intention of the editors of this volume and of the series to allow for the authors to express their thoughts and develop their theories in a language of their choice. Therefore some of the papers are in German, while most of them are in English. To give non-German-speaking readers a grasp of what is discussed in the German texts, all papers are accompanied by an English abstract.

4.1 Feelings of being

In line with his earlier seminal works on the topic, MATTHEW RATCLIFFE characterizes existential feelings as bodily felt possibilities of action and perception providing for our sense of reality and belonging in general. Our becoming aware of them seems to depend upon their dubiety – as when e. g. all of a sudden we feel unfamiliar with whatever comes towards us, excluded from interacting with others or unable to perceive our environment as real and inviting us to engage with it. Such impairments do not just have an impact on isolated possibilities of acting and perceiving but influence the whole realm of ways of finding ourselves in the world. The present article goes beyond Ratcliffe’s earlier treatments by introducing a further classification of existential feelings and by discussing their relations to conceptual thought. Instead of categorizing distinctive existential feelings with respect to their affective depth, he sets out for a scale of more or less profound disturbances of felt possibilities.

An analysis of different grades of alterations is used to shed more light on how possibility spaces are internally structured. Concerning the interrelation of existential feelings and conceptual thought, the author states a significant asymmetry in their impact: while the former are highly influential for the form of conceptual thought as well as for the accessibility of narrative self-constructs (limiting their repertory along with the range of possible actions), the prospects for conceptually affecting and shaping existential feelings seem to be minimal.

JAN SLABY supplements the phenomenological notion of background feelings with Bennett Helm's theory of felt evaluations. Felt evaluations are affectively swayed ways of dealing with things that, as mental states of their own right, constitute a distinctive, i. e. emotional rationality. These non-inferential, *felt* forms of appraisal, which are inextricably linked to the notion of either pleasure or pain, can be seen as intentional affective states whose objects are constituted by certain values (like 'danger'). As Slaby points out, however, felt evaluations are only comprehensible if we also consider the underlying existential feelings as an individual perspective from which they are carried out. Concurrently, in being linked to felt evaluations, existential feelings can be integrated in an overall structure of intelligible contents and thus might be conceivable as both intentionally focused and motivationally relevant.

From a clear-cut externalist perspective, RICCARDO MANZOTTI holds that existential feelings are not to be regarded as undirected background orientations that do not have any intentional object at all, but rather as entailing a particular object. Perceptions, feelings and moods differ from one another only with respect to the representational contents involved. In a critical examination of Ratcliffe's interpretation of existential feelings as felt bodily states, he notes that the concepts of both 'body' and 'state' are relative to epistemic standpoints and not as clearly defined as common understandings suggest: if, instead of subjective states, we speak of occurrences or events that take place between the subject and its surroundings, feelings can be seen as bodily ways of referring to a certain object in which feeling and object form a kind of dynamic unity. In the case of existential feelings, this unity affects the processes between the subject and its world altogether. Given that here we are dealing with the incessant unfolding of self- and world-determination in its entirety, it is hardly surprising that spotting the objects of existential feelings seems to be a complex and demanding task.

Also ACHIM STEPHAN sees existential feelings not as lacking directedness, but as comprising a special kind of intentionality insofar as they inform the totality of our experiences in a specific way. Unlike Ratcliffe, he does not classify feelings with regard to different levels of situation dependency and different degrees of impairment. Rather, starting out from the assumption of various grades and intensities of the feelings themselves, he develops a rich taxonomy of fore- and background feelings with variable durations that facilitates a discrimination of moods, characteristic traits and atmospheric i. e. situational feelings. While all of the above can be theoretically distinguished, in practice they are highly interdependent. For existential feelings in particular he proposes distinguishing elementary from non-elementary ones, both of which texture the relations with the world and ourselves in different degrees: while changes in elementary existential feelings (as for example in the Capgras syndrome) affect our lives radically, non-elementary ones are still effective as background orientations but do not have such overarching consequences. Taking up what Ratcliffe formulated as an open question, namely to what extent existential feelings could be susceptible to manipulation and regulation, Stephan deems the regulation of attention to be the most promising strategy.

ALICE HOLZHEY-KUNZ draws attention to the fact that it might be misleading to understand feelings of being alive as a primitive form of self-experience underlying and preceding all of an organism's autoreferential relations. By doing this, we are missing exactly what makes these feelings uniquely human – and we forget that our human way of feeling alive is the only one accessible to us. In a therefore decidedly anthropological framework she questions the idea of feeling alive as something naturally given. Feelings of being alive can't be taken for granted in the sense of a default mode: in contrast to Husserl's natural attitude, our way of being in the world has to be seen with Heidegger as fundamentally fragile and ambiguous. Moreover, if we only see this ambiguity in negative terms – i. e. as a lack or loss of an allegedly normal and stable relation to the world – we deprive ourselves of the possibility to grasp the hermeneutical dimension of ever different forms of radically experienced unsettledness. Using the example of two clinical cases Holzhey-Kunz shows how such an hermeneutic approach to ways of 'feeling precluded from life' can be made therapeutically fruitful.

4.2 The sentient organism

In contrast to eliminative–materialistic theories, THOMAS FUCHS specifies two elementary forms of experience, namely vitality and conation, as the constituents of the feeling of being alive. On the one hand vitality and conation are rooted in self-regulatory and adaptive processes concerning the *living* body in relation to its environment as a whole. On the other hand they are involved in the mental occurrences that accompany the organism's interactions with the world – the *lived* body – which points to a relational structure of self-awareness. Feelings of being alive are in a way situated along a line between the system-theoretical and the phenomenological side of one and the same process, they inseparably link the life processes we undergo with our experience of what we feel and do. To feel consciously alive, he concludes, is therefore not something detached from organismic processes of self-preservation, but rather the unfolding of the organism's relations to itself and to its surroundings on higher levels.

JOERG FINGERHUT dedicates his contribution to vividness or *gradual presence* in experience, a phenomenon that makes objects of experience more or less forcefully available to an organism. It is a basic feature of our consciousness as well as a part of our feeling of being alive. After introducing this sometimes underappreciated aspect, he discusses theories that attribute an essential role to the body in enabling and mediating such experiences. Specifically, he contrasts the notion of bodily interactions in sensorimotor theories (Noë, O'Regan) with the role of the self-maintaining body in enactivism (Varela, Thompson). While the latter theory is based on a concept of the *living* body, the former focuses almost exclusively on the *moving* body. With these different concepts come different explanatory agendas. Sensorimotor theory explains the role of bodily interactions in constituting perceptual presence. Enactivism anchors experience in the value-laden processes of the organism. Since the latter concept also reveals structures that determine our conscious life, or so he argues, it should amend the sensorimotor explanation of presence.

FIGURELLA BATTAGLIA investigates existential feelings within the framework of a possible reconciliation of first-person and third-person perspectives. Her contribution aims at elucidating the relation between the feeling of being alive and the self by interpreting the former as a specific form of phenomenal experience. As the phenomenal consciousness of a living organism is intentional as well as motivationally effective

through its hedonic character, it is both related to the world and to the embodied self – and could thus figure as a missing link between subjective experience and its scientific description. Battaglia counters dualistic restrictions by emphasizing that the self is always a *feeling* self which is functionally related to the organism and provides for survival and adaptation. Complementarily, the body has to be understood as the body of a phenomenally conscious subject, and the world as the space where (shared) subjective experience unfolds.

A historical account is offered by ARBOGAST SCHMITT, who investigates the Aristotelian equation of life and the performance of acts of distinguishing in thought. According to Aristotle, even sensations, rather than being passive states, consist in drawing distinctions between external objects and are thereby a kind of preconscious thinking. In thought or imagination we cannot create but only reflect upon these intuitive differentiations and gain insight in their criteria. However, the feelings of pleasure and pain that come along with all our sensations become even more intense when linked to intellectual activity. It is the *act* of distinguishing that induces pleasure and makes us feel alive, and this feeling is strongest during the most characteristic human activity, which is conceptualizing. Thus in contrast to e.g. the Kantian view of pleasure as the consequence of a vanquished pain – and of the feeling of being alive as caused by the impulse to change an unpleasant state – for Aristotle to feel alive represents an immediate quality that accompanies, in various measure, every act of discriminating and conceptualizing.

The Aristotelian emphasis on the power of discernment is also at the center of EVA-MARIA ENGELEN's considerations about the necessary constraints for developing any kind of rudimentary self-awareness of ourselves as living beings. What preconditions, she asks, do we have to assume for not only being alive but also feeling so? Besides an elementary sense of possibility, movement and time, the ability to draw distinctions (and to relate the thusly found opposites to one another) plus a certain reflexivity appear to be indispensable. It is the sensation of mobility in relation to immobility or hindrance, the sensation of myself in relation to the environment, which constitutes the capacity to attribute our sensations to ourselves as a mutable but nonetheless persisting living unity.

4.3 Pragmatics and semiotics

To what extent Christian images in former times were perceived quite differently from a contemporary representational understanding is shown by the historically rich study of TANJA KLEMM. Using the example of the ritual acts performed around an Annunciation fresco in the Florentine church of SS. Annunziata since the late 14th century, she demonstrates how the thaumaturgic image of Mary receiving divine life was anything but a mere pictorial account of the Biblical scene: what we find here is not a clearly definable opposition of an image and its beholder, but a lived participation in the act of conception (to be understood both physically and spiritually), and an involvement in embodied religious experience that reaches far into everyday life. If we analyze this pre-Cartesian relational experience in terms of contemporary phenomenological and enactive accounts, it seems to be the interactive or so-called second-person perspective that allows us to understand the shared moment of the becoming of life – experienced as animation no less than incarnation – as pervading the fresco and the devotees alike.

Like Alice Holzhey-Kunz in the first section, but with a different focus, MATTHIAS JUNG raises the issue of uniquely human existential feelings. On the basis of an insightful overview of the developments in the field of emotion research he characterizes them as informed by both qualitative experience and our condition as symbolic beings: we can integrate the plethora of affective experiences we undergo because we are able to attribute them through linguistic self-referential acts to ourselves. And we further express and articulate them by means of body-based world-disclosing metaphors and by linguistically picking out certain aspects of an unarticulated manifold. In this complex interplay of feeling and semiosis, existential feelings are accessible and evaluable only in light of symbolic articulations. Comprising intersubjectivity as a specifically human background orientation, they exert power upon shared world views as well – an aspect apparently overlooked so far. However, this does not imply that comprehensive world views (including religion) reveal themselves as either fundamentally irrational or fully explicable in linguistic terms: while existential feelings are about possibilities in the most broad and undetermined sense, language is what relates them in an always partial and transitory way to the totality of our ways of finding ourselves in the world.

SABINE MARIENBERG points out that the impact feelings of being alive have on world views and convictions is not a matter of one-directional influence. Ways in which we explicitly deal with questions of life (inseparably bound to questions of death) do also affect how and in how far we construe feelings of the body and abilities to engage with the world as symptoms of vitality or liveliness. However, rather than being determined by biological accounts of life, our notion of what it means to be alive is informed by what at any one time is considered to be e. g. a good, successful, just, or fulfilled life – and under which descriptions, narrations and figures life and death come along. As underlying, preintentional feelings that mostly go unnoticed, feelings of being alive can be seen as the becoming aware of the capacity to act *while acting*, a kind of intuitive assuredness in the moment of performance. In this perspective they can be understood rather as something we do than as something we feel. As feelings explicitly directed towards one's own life (and as feelings we can refer to as feelings of *being alive*) though, they cannot be experienced without being symbolically articulated.

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