

## **ABOUT LIFE: THREE ESSAYS**

### ***Sur la vie: Trois essais***

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**Abstract:** This article presents three essays about life. The first essay solves an antinomy about the meaning of life, referring to Deleuze's notion of repetition. The second essay addresses altruism by mentioning Derrida's notion of deconstruction. The third essay proposes a naturalistic solution to Meillassoux's spectral dilemma.

**Keywords:** Lineage; Bios; Zoe; Arche-life; God.

**Abstract in a second language:** Cet article présente trois essais sur la vie. Le premier essai résout une antinomie sur le sens de la vie, en se référant à la notion de répétition chez Deleuze. Le deuxième essai aborde l'altruisme en mentionnant la notion de déconstruction chez Derrida. Le troisième essai propose une solution naturaliste au dilemme spectral de Meillassoux.

**Keywords in a second language:** Lignée; Bios; Zoé; Archi-vie; Dieu.

### **1.0. Repetition and the Meaning of Life**

Previously, I argued that the meaning of life is survival and reproduction (Kiritani, 2012)<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, Wittgenstein ([1922] 1998) suggested that life has no meaning since even if we survive forever, this eternal life is as enigmatic as our present life. I have recently proposed a solution to this antinomy in the following way:

Let us distinguish between *types* (abstract concepts) and *tokens* (individual instances). From the point of view of type, there is no meaning of life. We eat or have sex for survival or reproduction. But for what do we survive or reproduce? Life has no meaning from the viewpoint of type. However, from the point of view of token, there is a meaning of life. We survive now for our survival in the future. We reproduce for our children's reproduction. Life has a meaning from the viewpoint of token. The former is *type nihilism*, while the latter is *token realism* about the meaning of life (Kiritani, 2024a).

This solution seems to have arisen through a *traumatic structure* in Gunji's terminology (see Kiritani, 2024b). Gunji (2023) has proposed the notion of traumatic structure to capture human creativity (see also Gunji and Nakamura, 2022). The traumatic structure is defined as a pair of binary oppositions. People with trauma often feel like perpetrators even though they are victims, which can sometimes lead to their healing. Gunji suggests that this healing experience arises through a pair of binary oppositions: feelings of victims/perpetrators and positions of selves/others. The term "traumatic structure" is named after this healing experience. My solution to the antinomy about the meaning of life seems to have arisen through the traumatic structure of the type/token distinction and being meaningful/meaningless.

Gunji's notion of traumatic structure can be thought to generalize his earlier notion of a pair of *particularity/generality* and *singularity/universality* (Gunji 2004), which he adopted from Karatani's (1994, see also [2001] 2003) literary theory. Karatani himself cited this notion from Deleuze's *Difference and Repetition*. According to Deleuze ([1968] 1994, p. 2), "repetition ... expresses at once a singularity opposed to the general, a universality opposed to the particular...." The general corresponds to the type, whereas the particular corresponds to the token. The notion of repetition is opposed to the type/token distinction.

Even if the type/token distinction is not adopted, we can solve the antinomy about the meaning of life above, appealing to the notion of "lineage" in evolutionary biology.

[L]ineage [is] an entity that changes indefinitely through time as a result of replication and interaction. Neither genes nor organisms can function as lineages because neither can change indefinitely without becoming numerically distinct individuals. However, both form lineages that can and do evolve (Hull, 1980, p. 327; see also Hull, 1988).

The notion of lineage is not opposed to that of repetition, since Deleuze conceptualizes repetition not as mere duplication but as a creative process that generates difference and new variations. Let us refuse to think of ourselves as individuals and instead view ourselves merely as life cycles in lineages. I have previously explained what the meaning of life cycles in lineages is in the following way:

The round of a life cycle [in lineages] contributed to the production of a new stage of the cycle, which contributed to the next round of the cycle. Thus, life cycles are supposed to turn round. In other words, the meaning of life cycles is to cycle (Kiritani, 2012, p. 100).

This explanation can be regarded as another solution to the antinomy about the meaning of life above, while it neither adopts the type/token distinction nor is opposed to the notion of repetition. From the point of view of lineage, life cannot but have a meaning. The meaning of life cycles is to cycle. I do not claim that this solution is superior to the one based on the type/token distinction. Rather, I suggest that the antinomy about the meaning of life can be solved differently, depending on what ontology we adopt.

## 2.0. Deconstructing the Meaning of Life

In evolutionary biology, the gene-centric view has been dominant, as it can address altruism (Williams, 1966; Dawkins, 1976). Altruism is beneficial for individuals if it is reciprocal. If we do something that decreases our own fitness but increases one another's fitness, our own fitness will increase. However, altruism is not beneficial for individuals if it is not reciprocal. Non-reciprocal altruism can be addressed by adopting the gene-centric view. If we do something that decreases our own fitness but increases the fitness of our relatives, the genes that we and our relatives share will benefit. Altruism is beneficial for genes. In the gene-centric view, the meaning of life is to contribute to the replication of genes.

Even if the gene-centric view is not adopted, we can address altruism by appealing to the notion of lineage. Let us refuse to think of ourselves as individuals and instead view ourselves merely as life cycles in lineages. In this view, we can die only when our lineages become extinct. Death, in the usual sense, is only the completion or interruption of one life cycle in lineages. Even when my life cycle is completed or interrupted, we are still alive as lineages, since my relatives still exist.<sup>2</sup> Altruism benefits the life cycles of relatives. In other words, altruism is beneficial for lineages. In this view, the meaning of life is to extend lineages.

Usually, we are said to be dead after our life cycles were completed or interrupted, as we are often concerned with individual lives. According to Kerényi ([1976] 1996), the ancient Greeks used two different words to refer to life. "Bios" refers to the finite life of an individual, whereas "zoe" refers to the indefinite life that extends beyond individuals.<sup>3</sup> We are still alive as lineages in the sense of *zoe* after our lives were lost in the sense of *bios*. Derrida ([1967] 1976) *deconstructed* the hierarchical opposition of speech/writing, pointing out that speech is not one-time but repeatable like writing, as both instantiate word types. He claimed that speech is derived from "arche-writing," without which

neither speech nor writing would exist. Similarly, bios is derived from zoe, without which individual lives would not come into existence. Zoe can be called “arche-life.” Therefore, it would be better to say that the meaning of arche-life is to extend lineages.<sup>4</sup>

### 3.0. A Naturalistic Solution to the Spectral Dilemma

Speculative realism (Brassier et al., 2007) tries to overcome what they call “correlationism” in philosophy after Kant. Correlationism is defined as “the idea according to which we only ever have access to the correlation between thinking and being, and never to either term considered apart from the other” (Meillassoux [2006] 2008a, p. 5). Meillassoux endeavors to overcome correlationism, in part by rejecting the necessity, or immutability, of the laws of nature. In favor of Hume, he claims that “the same cause may actually bring about ‘a hundred different events’ (and even many more)” ([2006] 2008a, p. 90).

By rejecting the necessity of the laws of nature, Meillassoux (2008b) attempts to address a version of the theological problem about the coexistence of God and injustice. His “spectral dilemma” is as follows: Even if God exists and resurrects those who have died due to injustice, such a God cannot be supremely perfect because of having allowed the injustice. On the other hand, if God does not exist, there cannot be any justice for the dead. Meillassoux’s speculative solution to this dilemma is as follows: God does not exist now but may come into existence in the future to resurrect the dead, although such a God would be irreconcilable with the laws of nature as they are now.

Even if the necessity of the laws of nature is not rejected, we can present a solution to the spectral dilemma. A naturalistic solution to the dilemma can be proposed while preserving the laws of nature as they are now. Let us refuse to think of ourselves as individuals and instead view ourselves merely as life cycles in lineages. In this view, we can die only when our lineages become extinct. Even when my life cycle is completed or interrupted, we are still alive as lineages, since my relatives still exist. Therefore, no one has ever died since the birth of humanity. We are still alive as lineages in the sense of zoe after our lives were lost in the sense of bios. According to Kerényi ([1976] 1996), Dionysus is a god concerned with zoe. In contrast, the Meillassouxian God seems to be concerned with bios. The justice of a God like Dionysus would be irreconcilable with the justice of the Meillassouxian God. Such a God does not need to resurrect anyone while preserving the laws of nature as they are now, since no one has ever died due to injustice.

The speculative solution preserves Meillassouxian justice, rejecting the necessity of the laws of nature. In contrast, the naturalistic solution preserves the necessity of the laws of nature, rejecting Meillassouxian justice. I do not claim that the naturalistic solution is superior to the speculative one. Rather, I suggest that the spectral dilemma can be solved differently, depending on what ethics we pursue.

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<sup>1</sup> According to the teleological notion of function in philosophy of biology (cf. Allen and Neal 2020), the function of a thing is what it is supposed to do. *X* is supposed to do *F* if and only if *X*'s doing *F* contributed to *Y*'s existence, which in turn contributed to *X*'s existence. The heart is supposed to pump blood, since its pumping blood contributed to our survival, which in turn contributed to the heart's existence. By appeal to the teleological notion of function, we can explain what we are supposed to do. We are supposed to survive and reproduce, since our survival or reproduction contributed to the replication of a gene, which in turn contributed to our survival or reproduction. Thus, the meaning of life is survival and reproduction. Even if we do not or cannot reproduce, the meaning of life can be survival.

<sup>2</sup> However, my life cycle is supposed to be completed, as the life cycles of my relatives may be completed or interrupted without offspring.

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<sup>3</sup> Agamben ([1995] 1998, [1996] 2000) uses these two words differently. In his terminology, “bios” refers to social, political, and *qualified* life, while “zoe” refers to biological, *bare* life.

<sup>4</sup> I have already argued that the meaning of life is survival and reproduction. It has also been argued that the meaning of life cycles is to cycle. “Life” refers to bios in these views, whereas “arche-life” refers to zoe. There may be a conflict between the meaning of bios and that of zoe as far as altruism is concerned.